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# The Rebellious Novel: A Study in Conformity, Repression, and Resistance in Philip Roth and Selected Other Novelists

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THE REBELLIOUS NOVEL: A STUDY IN CONFORMITY, REPRESSION, AND  
RESISTANCE IN PHILIP ROTH AND SELECTED OTHER NOVELISTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2015

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I argue that a number of novels are not appreciated for their radical critiques of Western ideologies. I critique the way that society often compels individuals into conformity. Conformity, these novels show, represses the more authentic and organic feelings, desires, and behaviors that could allow for individuals to experience greater self-fulfillment. The rebellious canon—represented here particularly in novels by Roth, Lawrence, Hardy, Ellison, and Emily Brontë and (more briefly) a few other authors—encourages readers to develop their own ideological proprioceptors. To that end, these novels dramatize various trajectories. One way of looking at these trajectories lies in the conceptual model of a spectrum.

The spectrum of rebellious novels, for example, may be described by the success of their characters to reject the reigning, repressive ideologies. Thus, on one side of the spectrum, there lie the unsuccessful characters who fall victim to the dangerous ideological forces; such characters end in death, madness, or misery. Moving along that spectrum, there are those characters who experience some form of unhappiness or relative discontent. Moving a bit further along, there are characters who feel the bliss of ignorant conformity, but who are merely repressed without recognizing it. Then, at the other end, there are those characters who are able to reject the systems of thought that inhibit their organic development. Such characters may find deeply satisfying, organic, authentic identities that allow them to achieve greater fulfillment.

Therefore, I argue that authentic, organic identity is possible through the Lawrentian-based concept of a naked self. Those characters who succumb to the conformity complex are described as repressed selves. Characters who reject the pressures of conformity are described as transgressive selves. Those who find that, in order to fully reject the oppressiveness of conformity, they must hide their transgressions while outwardly feigning conformity are described as invisible selves. Finally, *readers* who come to recognize the significance for their own lives of these avenues of resistance and undergo their own “revaluation of all values,” as Nietzsche terms it, may be deemed rebellious selves. Rebellious novels, I argue, encourage readers to reject the compulsions of conventional ideologies and seek out their own, authentic identities.

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Finally, I want to thank those who have come before me in applying panzaic criticism to literature: Wayne Burns, Art Efron, William K. Buckley, Evelyn Butler, and, last but certainly not least, Gerald “Joe” Butler. I met Joe while I was earning my undergraduate degree at San Diego State University. He went on to serve as the director of my master’s thesis, and without his fostering a young scholar I may never have entered into academia. I hope this study does credit to the continued relevance of panzaic criticism.

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION:

## AN EXAMINATION OF CONFORMITY IN THE REBELLIOUS NOVEL

The rebellious novel, as I define it, is a work of fiction in which at least one of two literary tropes appears. The first consists of a story in which a character suffers, often disastrously, even fatally, through the influence of any of a host of socially endorsed ideologies, particularly if those ideologies are economically repressive, patriarchal, racist, or misogynistic. However, the tragic influence of socially endorsed ideologies also includes those ideologies that are supposed to liberate oppressed people, such as the ideologies of social justice that—when imposed with fanatic fervor, moral righteousness, or an indifference for the individual people they propose to liberate—can be as stifling and destructive as those ideologies filled with avarice, cruelty, and domination. Even beyond the works examined in this dissertation, such novels in U. S. fiction include, naming but a few, Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*, and Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. Each of the main characters, by the end of their respective novel, is either dead or has attempted suicide.<sup>1</sup>

A second literary trope in the rebellious novel is framed as a story in which a character suffers due to a socially endorsed ideology but, instead of succumbing to death or madness, enacts a seditious disavowal of the sacred ideals embedded in the ideologies that caused his or her suffering.<sup>2</sup> To illustrate again the wide range of these tropes even beyond the novels on

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<sup>1</sup> The pedagogical insights of Paulo Freire may help to clarify. For example, Freire argues that “banking” even liberating ideologies can be an oppressive act. As such, rebellious novels depict the ways in which ideals and ideologies that may be held sacred by a given culture, as a whole, can be repressive to the individual.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout my argument, I distinguish between values—which are integral parts of an individual’s ideology—and ideals—which, as I conceive of them, are values that have become so abstracted from material existence as to become repressive and therefore ideologically oppressive and painful. I admit, therefore, that while ideas and values such as self-fulfillment, individual autonomy, and the naked self all have liberating potential can, when they become too abstracted, become ideals and therefore repressive.

which I will focus, two examples in U. S. fiction are Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. The novels that include both of these tropes, through the experiences of many characters, thereby tend to have a powerful and compelling effect on the reader. By dramatizing the repressive effects of social ideologies on sympathetic characters and through the aesthetic power of these tropes, the rebellious novel encourages readers to resist conformity and submission to such ideologies and to make similar disavowals in their own lives.

Therefore, while I argue that there are numerous rebellious novels in the Western canon, my examination will include only a few novelists and novels from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as examples *par excellence*. My thematically comparative approach will concentrate on a few types of characters and their relationships with their social and ideological environments. Thus, I will begin with an exploration of D. H. Lawrence's philosophy of life, his critical literary insights, and how variations of some of his central tenets were common among other British modernist novelists. From Lawrence, I develop the idea of a naked self, a character who recognizes organic and authentic feelings, ideas, and self-concepts that are often at odds with traditional, social ideologies. Thus, the naked self ultimately rejects much of the repressive aspects of social ideologies that threaten his or her organic self-concept, which is informed by Lawrence's ideas about human "organic connection." I then concentrate on how novelists who share Lawrence's social milieu—British culture at the beginning of the twentieth century—develop similar critiques of that society's repressive conditions, before I move on in subsequent chapters to show how other rebellious novels critique the conformity complex in their respective cultures. This way, I use a focused comparative approach in order to show how repressive the conformity complex is in one culture—with consideration of analytical depth of argument—

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before proceeding to a broader comparative approach, aiming for critical breadth, in which I show how those repressive forces exist within other cultures and times.

In each of the three body chapters that follow my chapter on British modernist novelists, I concentrate on a novel by Philip Roth, primarily because his novels include, in a consistent way, a number of aspects of rebellious novels, so that his work, as with Lawrence, is central to this dissertation. I have chosen to include three of Philip Roth's novels—for two reasons. First, in order to showcase the continued relevance of rebellious novels and their critique of conformity, I wanted to focus on an author whose works were published relatively recently—*The Human Stain*, for instance, was published in 2000. Therefore, his works are especially relevant to our own time and place. Secondly, I chose to center on Roth's fiction because, perhaps better than any other living American novelist, he takes up the themes that, as I describe them, epitomize rebellious novels.

Therefore, in Chapters 2 through 4, I pair one of Roth's novels in each case with another novel that helps to develop the theme of each chapter. And while these novels are selected from the Western canon, the themes that I explore cross traditional cultural boundaries, particularly regarding British and U. S. societies of the last century and a half, as the attention I devote to those cultures is relatively balanced throughout the dissertation. As Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek maintains in *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application*, "Comparative Literature has intrinsically a content and form which facilitate the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study of literature" (13). More importantly, he writes that Comparative Literature "produces that meaningful dialogue between cultures and literatures that is its mark theoretically, in application, and in basic as well as higher level education" by virtue of its "objective as well as ability to

translate one culture into another by the exercise and love of dialogue between cultures” (15).<sup>3</sup> While my study is not a work of comparative literature, *per se*, it borrows some of the apparatuses employed in that discipline in order to showcase ways in which a range of different national cultures and the ideologies therein can be repressive. Though I center on U. S. and British cultures, my argument about rebellious novels critiquing repressive societies could also apply to novels from other cultures. For example, I could have chosen Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*—about Rhodesian/Zimbabwean culture in the 1960s—or Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s *Journey to the End of the Night*, a novel primarily about French culture in the first half of the twentieth-century.

Each of my chapters builds upon the theme of the previous one. In establishing cross-cultural interactions between the self and society, I begin with an exploration of the naked self, proceed to an examination of the repressed self, discuss the transgressive self, underscore the necessities of the invisible self, and conclude with some comments on the rebellious self. Thus, in Chapter 3, I explore, in Thomas Hardy’s late Victorian masterpiece *Jude the Obscure* and Philip Roth’s sex-fueled American classic *Portnoy’s Complaint*, what I call the repressed self: a character who recognizes aspects of his or her naked self but, because of ideological repressions, cannot enact those more authentic identities. In Chapter 4, I examine, in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and Roth’s *Sabbath’s Theater*, the transgressive self, characters who are able to fully reject moral codes and repressive cultural ideologies in order to lead more authentic lives

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<sup>3</sup> Tötösy de Zepetnek also includes in his list of “General Principles of Comparative Literature” the importance of the discipline’s “focus on literature within the context of culture” (17). My argument about rebellious novels in general is specifically an argument about culture itself, at least as it has existed in the West over the last century and a half. One more general principle regards the discipline’s “approach of inclusion.” I argue that while critics tend to acknowledge the kinds of subversive aspects that I discuss within the context of rebellious novels in general—indeed, such subversion is often part of what endears us to those novels—the subversive power of such works is too often explained away, as Susan Sontag once noted in a seminal essay entitled “Against Interpretation,” because such works make us uncomfortable and disrupt our cherished beliefs. In this dissertation, I mean to take the “approach of inclusion” past the point where critics sometimes do not and discuss the extent to which rebellious novels encourage a fuller rejection of socially endorsed ideologies.

according to their naked selves. However, because of their open transgressive behaviors, they often fall victim to social repercussions. Therefore, in Chapter 5 I take a close look, in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, at the invisible self: a character who is able not only to reject social ideologies that threaten to repress his or her authentic self but who is also able to keep enough of their transgressive behaviors hidden from social view by engaging in strategies of Ellisonian invisibility.<sup>4</sup> In my conclusion, I remark on future possibilities of organic selves, those fully realized characters who reject the repressive aspects of social ideologies in order to fulfill their authentic selves, which include behaviors and beliefs that often transgress traditional social morals and values, by any range of strategies of invisibility. In the rest of this introductory chapter, I explain in greater detail what I argue in each chapter and discuss further the basic structure of the dissertation. I then lay out some of the philosophical and critical foundations that inform my reading of rebellious novels, including those of the Frankfurt School—especially Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm—to Steven Pinker and sociobiology, and from Wayne Burns's *panzaic* theory to D. H. Lawrence's important literary insights, though I continue to do this, also, in my next chapter. In doing so, I address relevant points within the nature-versus-nurture debate in order to underscore some of the problems on both sides of the dispute. I attempt to conceptualize human nature, as it bears upon my argument concerning the naked self, in a way that transforms it from its sometimes repressive applications to one that is inclusive and variegated.

### The Rebellious Novel and My Thematically Comparative Approach

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<sup>4</sup> Here I attribute the concept of invisibility to Ralph Ellison because, I would argue, he develops the concept to its fullest realization in his seminal work. However, as I discuss in Chapter 5, he is not the originator of the idea of social invisibility as a means of resistance to conformity, as he draws, for instance, much of his inspiration from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, whose Huck is constantly engaging in forms of invisibility, though mostly as a form of play rather than life saving engagement as Ellison explores it.

Rebellious novels bring the individual's quarrel with culture onto center stage. The novel, as Terry Eagleton contends, "is an anarchic genre" (2).<sup>5</sup> In order to demonstrate that there exists a relatively consistent and anarchic vision of that struggle that is shared by a number of novelists throughout rebellious fiction, I have organized subsequent chapters in a somewhat unorthodox way—but not without critical precedent.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, I am not the only one to recognize this relatively consistent vision, specifically in relation to the two central authors of my study. Lawrence and Roth. Philip Roth's friend Bernard Avishai wrote in 2012 that Alexander Portnoy, in *Portnoy's Complaint*, "had seemed to come around to something like D. H. Lawrence's rebellion against the confinements latent in this curiously Ben Franklinish culture." Thus, rather than organizing these chapters by influence or chronology, I have assembled my chapters according to specific themes, as briefly introduced above, that describe in each case a key element of the interaction between main characters and their social milieus. For

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<sup>5</sup> Eagleton goes on to argue that the novel "is a maverick form, skeptical of all authoritarian claims to truth" (6). He goes on to make an assertion similar to what I argue regarding the way in which rebellious fiction tends not to offer a hope for large-scale social reform: "You cannot, as a novelist, argue that the world should be changed in certain respects unless you dramatize what is wrong with it as compellingly as possible. But the more effectively you do this, the less changeable the world may seem to come" (12-13). In works of rebellious novelists such as George Orwell, Philip Roth, D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Hardy, Emily Brontë, Ralph Ellison, and numerous others, the world is compellingly depicted as so intensely, almost innately, oppressive that they do not really offer hope for social amelioration.

<sup>6</sup> Though the relative structure of my study may be unorthodox, it is not without precedent. For example, César Augusto Salgado's comparative study of the works of James Joyce and Lezama Lima considers both influence as well as some thematic relationships, and it does not take a chronological approach. For instance, Salgado writes: "Each chapter discusses a different issue in Hispanic cultural history that influences Lezama's reading of Joyce" (9). One way in which Salgado does not organize his book chronologically is how in one chapter he devotes half of his attention to *Ulysses*, in the next on *Finnegans Wake*, and in his last chapter returns to *Ulysses*. This approach, Salgado argues, allows him to show how "Lezama Lima's principal works ponder and reformulate in a new light some Joycean themes" (10). Similarly, in my study, the focus is less on influence and chronology and more on important themes related to cross-cultural aspects of rebellious novels. Another, more recent, comparative study that also does not proceed chronologically is J. Peder Zane's *Off the Books: On Literature and Culture*. This work of literary criticism bares some chronological considerations, but they become secondary to thematic ones. For example, while the first section, entitled "Between the Covers: Classic Fiction," appears before the section entitled "Beyond the Covers: Contemporary Fiction," both precede a third section, entitled "Southern Writing Lives." Fairly obviously, chronology is less important than the theme of each section. Moreover, within each section, brief essays discuss specific writers in order to develop the themes of the section. For instance, the essay on John Fante (1909 - 1983), which deals primarily with *Ask the Dust* (1939), precedes the essay on Knut Hamsun (1859 - 1952), which considers his Nobel Prize winning novel, *Hunger* (1890).

example, in my first chapter, “The Naked Self,” I explore the idea of organic, authentic identity, concentrating first on D. H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow*. Moreover, while I argue that the idea of the naked self, an organic and authentic sense of self, is also central in British modernist novels, that concept is most clearly expressed and most fully developed by Lawrence. I consequently focus much of Chapter 2 on presenting development of his ideas on “organic connection” in his fiction and non-fiction. Comparatively, I also explore its many variations as expressed in a number of British modernist novels, such as Ford Maddox Ford’s *The Good Soldier* and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. However, in exploring the concept of the naked self—a concept that goes beyond British modernist novels into many rebellious novels—I do not discuss influence or chronology at great length.<sup>7</sup> Chapter 2, then, concerns one set of variations of the naked self in order to highlight the idea that, despite variations on a theme, there exists a similar vision shared by novelists that I describe as *rebellious* that maintains the importance of individual’s authentic identity. Also, while my study of the conformity complex often centers on examples of heterosexual repression depicted in rebellious fiction, they are intended to illustrate larger cycles of social oppression that follow from submitting to ideological conformity.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise, in the chapters that follow, I explore themes that appear in numerous rebellious novels that build on the concept of the naked self. In Chapter 3, “The Repressed Self,” I examine how rebellious novels show how conformity complexes have oppressed the naked self

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<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that influence does not factor into these works. Indeed, Roth makes a reference to Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* in his *The Professor of Desire*. Roth also includes a reference to D. H. Lawrence’s controversial (for his time) ideas about sexuality, in Portnoy’s rant about how American society is still censorious forty years after *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Yet, for the problematic nature of the mother-son relationship in the novel, *Portnoy’s Complaint* has more in common with Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* than it does with the former novel.

<sup>8</sup> There are other rebellious novels, such as Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982), for example, whose female characters achieve a certain amount of autonomy, both sexual and spiritual, in their relationships with each other rather than with (or even in spite of) men. And there are other rebellious novels that address various forms of non-normative sexuality. Same-sex rebellious novels would require—and they deserve—a whole study unto themselves. As I later stress in my conclusion, there are many other rebellious novels deserving of study, beyond the already large scope of this dissertation.

and authentic identity. In order to show that such ideological oppression exists across cultures, I explore two novels from different social contexts that share similar visions of social oppression: Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. Thus, in that chapter, I often shift back and forth between the two novels, highlighting how they both present critiques of the conformity complex's repressive nature.

After presenting my case about authentic identity, in Chapter 2, and then making my argument about social repression, in Chapter 3, I proceed to explore two modes of resistance against social conformity that are common to many rebellious novels, in the following two chapters. In Chapter 4, "The Transgressive Self," after a brief comparative introduction, I examine one novel, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, before moving on to another novel, Roth's *Sabbath's Theater*. Despite what may appear as a chronological arrangement, I organized that chapter as I did because the earlier novel offers a way to segue from the preceding chapter's argument, while the later novel helps to proceed to my next chapter's argument. Specifically, while Catherine and Heathcliff exist on a spectrum—a conceptual model that I discuss in greater detail in that chapter—Catherine functions primarily as a *repressed character* with some *transgressive aspects*; Heathcliff functions primarily as a *transgressive character* with some *repressed aspects*. I then shift to *Sabbath's Theater*, exploring Mickey Sabbath and Drenka, both of whom are more fully realized *transgressive* characters.

Thus, the ordering of these novels in this way helps to move from the argument that I make in Chapter 3 about the repressed self to the argument that I make in Chapter 4 about the transgressive self. Moreover, placing *Sabbath's Theater* last also helps to introduce the topic of Chapter 5, "The Invisible Self," because that novel brings up the idea that in order to successfully resist conformity and the repressive forces of the conformity complex, characters

must find means of hiding their meaningful and fulfilling transgressions. Therefore, I discuss two themes that connect Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* to Roth's *The Human Stain*. There is, indeed, an influence of *Invisible Man* on *The Human Stain*. However, Timothy Parrish has already amply made that point.<sup>9</sup> More relevant to my overall argument are the ideas, common to both novels, that conformity often causes a great deal of human misery, and that invisibility, or hiding one's fulfillment of transgressively authentic desires, beliefs, and identity, can be a powerful mode of resistance against conformity and consequent misery. Therefore, I shift frequently between these two novels in order to compare how they develop those themes.

One final note about the structure and choice of novels should be made. As I indicate briefly in the introductions to each chapter, a number of rebellious novels could have been chosen in order to exemplify ways that they offer scathing critiques of conformity that sometimes goes overlooked. However, in order to make my argument, the simplest and most straightforward means of accomplishing that goal is to spotlight a particular subversive theme that crosses cultural and temporal boundaries and then, in each body chapter, to develop an argument regarding two novels in order to emphasize that similar visions are expressed in different cultural contexts.

#### An Overview of Relevant Critical Theory on Conformity and Resistance

Rebellious novels show readers that resistance to conformity is often a necessary step towards self-fulfillment. While conformity to many aspects of one's culture is not only necessary but potentially liberating—for example, increased safety on the roads as a result of conforming to traffic laws—blind conformity to conventions, self-conceptions that contradict authentic feeling, and idealism, rebellious novels show, often have disastrous effects. For

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the influence of Ellison on Roth, see Parrish's two essays "Ralph Ellison: *The Invisible Man* in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*" and "Roth and Ethnic Identity." I discuss Parrish's arguments in some detail in Chapter 5.

example, D. H. Lawrence spent much of his life struggling with the modes of organic connection, which he saw as a resistance to the traditional mind/body dichotomy that so often represses the body in favor of the mind through an oppressive hierarchical conceptual model. Likewise, in describing the oppressive power of conformity and social ideology, Herbert Marcuse wrote in *One Dimensional Man* that “the surrender of thought, hope, and fear to the decisions of the powers that be” is a constitutive aspect of advanced industrial society. “The fact that the vast majority of the population accepts, and is made to accept, this society does not render it less irrational and less reprehensible” (xiii). Lawrence’s and Marcuse’s distinct but kindred concepts of freedom in the life of the individual are in direct conflict with the interests of what I call the conformity complex,<sup>10</sup> the set of social institutions—akin to Althusser’s ideological state apparatuses—that compel conformity and submission to social belief systems. Moreover, what aligns both Lawrence and Marcuse as social critics is that they were interested in the possibilities for actualized individual autonomy. They attempted to depict alternatives to traditional forms of social integration. Marcuse insisted that freedom must be seen in *negative* terms because it is the only way to negate dominant ways of thinking and living. Marcuse described his conception of freedom in terms of *freedom from* the forces that coerce individuals into conformity:

[E]conomic freedom would mean freedom *from* the economy. . . . Political freedom would mean liberation of the individuals *from* politics over which they have no effective

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<sup>10</sup> The “conformity complex” is my term, by which I mean the interrelated set of institutions, following Althusser’s conception of Ideological State Apparatuses, which attempt to indoctrinate individuals into uniform and one-dimensional ways of thinking. For one instance of this kind of indoctrination, see Nancy Welch’s “Resisting the Faith: Conversion, Resistance, and the Training of Teachers.” Welch describes the time that she was a doctoral student in an English department at a particular university. She describes that the education she was receiving invoked “the religious metaphors of testimony, confession, baptism, and conversion” (387). Through her critique, she also implies that the supposedly liberating ideology espoused by the faculty in that doctoral program lay out a “simple two-way pull between power and freedom,” that is to say either join up unquestioningly or quit and “abandon” the “aim of earning a graduate degree” (400). Whether it is her intention or not, Welch challenges the way we see even those ideologies that profess to free us from our ideological prejudices.

control. Similarly, intellectual freedom would mean the restoration of individual thought now absorbed by mass communication and indoctrination, abolition of “public opinion” together with its makers. The unrealistic sound of these propositions is indicative, not of their utopian character, but of the strength of the forces that prevent their realization. (4)

The restoration of individual thought in Marcuse’s philosophy ties into Lawrence’s ideas about an individual’s “organic connection.”

Also fundamental to my argument are the ideas about art and literature developed by Wayne Burns, whose *panzaic* theory elaborates on many of Lawrence’s ideas, within both his fiction and non-fiction. Burns weaves an eclectic fabric of philosophy, theory, and literature in order to articulate his theory.<sup>11</sup> It blends concepts from a range of disciplines and is illustrated primarily through a close reading of numerous works that contain powerfully subversive characters, such as Miguel de Cervantes’s Sancho Panza and Shakespeare’s Sir John Falstaff. Perhaps the most essential tenet of Burns’s theory is the notion “that significant literature by definition must transcend all ready-made systems, ideologies and ideals, to express the author’s own ‘difference,’ his own ‘vision’” (*Panzaic Theory* xxxviii). What Burns describes as “significant literature” coincides with my argument about rebellious novels. Another relevant concept—particularly in my argument about invisibility in Chapter 5—that Burns develops is the practice of parasitic anarchism: “to latch on to anything appealing that the System offers whenever it [is] possible to do so without sacrificing [one’s] integrity” (*Vanishing* 32).<sup>12</sup> A concrete image of a parasitic anarchist can be found in the prologue to Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible*

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<sup>11</sup> *Panzaic* theory borrows from Freudian psychoanalysis, Marxist ideology theory, the literary philosophy of Jose Ortega y Gasset, the aesthetic theory of Stephen C. Pepper, and a host of novelists and their works.

<sup>12</sup> Another influence on Burns’s theory, specifically on his form of anarchism, is the philosophy of Max Stirner, particularly as elucidated in *The Ego and Its Own*.

*Man* as the titular character steals electricity from Monopolated Light & Power in order to provide energy for the 1,369 bulbs lighting his basement apartment and to operate his phonograph as it plays Louis Armstrong at maximum volume. The electric company has no idea of the invisible man's identity or location; thus, he is a parasite "on the body social and the body politic" (*Vanishing* 17).<sup>13</sup>

In the rest of this introduction, I survey some of the relevant problems within the nature-versus-nurture debate, especially its relevance to my ideas about the relationship between society and the self. Many of the central questions regarding that debate are discussed at length in Stephen Pinker's *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. His assessment of contemporary reactions to sociobiology helps me develop the groundwork underlying my arguments throughout the rest of this dissertation. Additionally, I consider the contributions to the conversation about human nature proffered by some key figures of the Frankfurt School, including Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer. Importantly, throughout the introductions, I attempt to contextualize the arguments of these thinkers within my own argument regarding rebellious novels and the naked self.

Generally, rebellious novels tend to negate popular social beliefs that exist antithetically to an individual's sense of life. George Orwell's powerfully rebellious novel, *1984*, addresses this issue directly. Toward the end of the novel, O'Brien, the repressive representative of the conformity complex, tries to convince Winston Smith that the Party can "control matter" because it can "control the mind. Reality is inside the skull" (218). However, Orwell, Winston, and the novel all insist that such a belief is repressively false: Winston "knew, he *knew*, that he was in the right" (219) and exclaims, "Life will defeat you." O'Brien responds, "You are imagining

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<sup>13</sup> Additionally, there have been at least two scholarly journals devoted to *panzaic* criticism: Gerald J. Butler and Evelyn A. Butler were editors of *Recovering Literature: A Journal of Contextualist Criticism* and Arthur Efron was editor of *Paunch*.

that there is something called human nature which will be outraged by what we do and will turn against [the Party]. But we create human nature. Men are infinitely malleable” (222). The idea that human beings are infinitely malleable is a persistently common belief today. Indeed, both the concept of an essential human nature and its opposite—that humans are infinitely malleable—can and have been used repressively. But the fact that something can be used repressively does not take away from its veracity. Rebellious novels help readers to navigate the troubled waters of social ideologies against their own organic sense of life, like a skiff in the ocean.

Therefore, rebellious novels can help readers develop their own organic sense of self and identity. Marcuse condemned the conformity complex’s irrational and reprehensible attempts to convince us that we have no innate structures. He viewed art as a defense against ideological assaults, in the vein of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. However, he also observed the complex ways in which dominant ideologies assimilate “art” in order to negate their rebellious effects. Marcuse wrote that the subversive forces of art have become commercialized: “they sell, comfort, or excite” (64). He noted that

neo-conservative critics of leftist critics of mass culture ridicule the protest against Bach as background music in the kitchen, against Plato and Hegel, Shelley and Baudelaire, Marx and Freud in the drugstore. Instead, they insist on recognition of the fact that the classics have left the mausoleum and come to life again, that people are just so much more educated. True, but coming to life as classics . . . they are deprived of their antagonistic force, of the estrangement which was the very dimension of their truth. (64)

In this manner, Marcuse insisted that we “teach what the contemporary world really is behind the ideological and material veil” by causing “distance and reflection” (67). The conformity

complex works diligently to minimize distance and reflection, to encourage comfort and excitement, which supports its ends only to the detriment of the individual's autonomy and humankind's innate structures.

Moreover, as I shall show in subsequent chapters, novelists such as D. H. Lawrence and Philip Roth were passionately devoted in their works to defending the autonomy of the individual through the rejection of systems of thought. An integral conception of human nature rises out of their works. They show that the forces that attempt to sever the individual's organic connection—the connection between the mind and the body—are the same forces that abolish individual thought. Public opinion imposes itself upon individuals via mass communication, indoctrination, and interpellation by virtue of ideological state apparatuses. Resistance to public opinion and social ideologies, therefore, becomes of vital importance in their novels. Lawrence's conception of the organic connection, for example, implies that the individual is capable of having an opinion that differs radically from mainstream thinking and that the difference comes out of an experience of one's own body, by which he also includes the mental faculties. Consistent with rebellious novels as I define them, Roth often includes the two rebellious tropes in his greatest fiction: some characters perish at the hands of repressive forces while others achieve certain victories in their attempts to resist conformity by rejecting social ideologies. Thus, such novels encourage a personal, aesthetic experience that often leads readers to feel and think in ways that conflict with feelings and thoughts that they are socially permitted to have.

An experience that is personal means, therefore, that there exist certain innate structures in the physical and mental constitution of human beings as we see in the findings of

sociobiology.<sup>14</sup> Recognizing the importance of innate structures need not lead to essentializing, universalizing, or forming a standard by which we measure aspects of humanity, as in health, for example. To the contrary, these novelists, corroborated in many ways by sociobiology, suggest that innate structures are widespread and occur, perhaps, like a bell curve where certain “instincts,” to use a word employed both by Lawrence and John Dewey, are *common* to a significant number of human beings. Though a given instinct *may* be common does not negate the possibility that innate structures in other human beings may be organized quite differently and express themselves in alternative ways. Not inconsistent with much of what the LGBTQ community believes about their own bodies, for example, the ways that innate structures affect the expression of human sexuality are highly variable and complex. So if heterosexuality is common, it is at the same time irrefutable that many people feel heterosexual desire only mildly and others not at all. Similarly, intensity of sexual desire may also be influenced by innate structures so that there are those who feel very little desire throughout their lives, while there are also those who feel desire as one of the most intense drives in their lives. It is reasonable and vital, then, to recognize that this same pattern—that of a bell curve—is helpful in explaining the phenomena of instincts.

Furthermore, this conception of human nature, understood as traits in human beings that are expressed as on a bell curve, can liberate individuals from ivory tower thinking and, possibly, help to reconcile differences between some structuralist and post-structuralist views. Steven Pinker has argued that the “refusal to acknowledge human nature . . . distorts our science and scholarship, our public discourse, and our day-to-day lives. . . . The dogma that human nature does not exist, in the face of evidence from science and common sense that it does, is . . . a

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<sup>14</sup> For more on relatively recent arguments from a sociobiology perspective, see Steven Pinker’s *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (2001) and E. O. Wilson’s *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (1998).

corrupting influence” (ix). Pinker advocates what he calls a “realistic, biologically informed humanism” (xi). Similar to the arguments made by Lawrence, Pinker asserts in *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* that his arguments “expose the psychological unity of our species. . . . They promise a naturalness in human relationships, *encouraging us to treat people in terms of how they do feel rather than how some theory says they ought to feel*. . . . They give us a way to see through the designs of self-appointed social reformers who would liberate us from our pleasures” (xi, my emphasis). In our post-modern era, it may be necessary to clarify one of Pinker’s most important points before continuing. By saying that our species has a psychological unity, he does not mean what many of his critics deliberately mistake him for saying: that the existence of human nature implies biological determinism. A belief in human nature does not imply that “genes are everything and culture is nothing—no one believes that—but,” he insists, we ought to “explore why the extreme position (that culture is everything) is so often seen as moderate, and the moderate position is seen as extreme” (ix). The non-essentialist argument can stifle some of the insights that emerge in works by Lawrence and in other rebellious novels. The bell curve approach to human nature helps to explain the great variety in the expression of human traits across cultures without abandoning the powerful notion of nature, on the one hand, while creating a space for people(s) who differ from what has been called, in archaic, essentialist arguments, the norm.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Rebellious novels, then, tend to bring these complex, seemingly irreconcilable, views into frame. While theories that chiefly denied a human nature, such as behaviorism, for example, have been around since the early twentieth century, in the 1990s scholars such as Judith Butler were re-emboldened to develop and advance a way of conceiving of society and people without appealing to human nature in order to further some important movements, including feminism, critical-race theory, queer theory, and the postmodern project. Butler and other “self-appointed social reformers,” as Pinker calls them, seemed to believe that conceptions of human nature harmed their efforts to combat social injustice. I have no intention of criticizing the goals of these social reformers, only their means for achieving what they consider to be social justice. Vincent Leitch and his fellow editors of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* wrote, “for Butler . . . nothing is natural, not even sexual identity, . . . [and] that even anatomical differences can be experienced only through the categories and expectations set out by the culture’s

An interesting belief emerges from a panzaic reading of rebellious novels: that human nature is vital to our understanding of ourselves. Lawrence, for example, argued that following a “passional [*sic*] impulse” brings greater satisfaction than adhering to rational motives. His critique of motivation includes causes and theories that reduce human nature either to mere biology or to explain away those impulses by refusing to admit their existence (*Studies* 24).<sup>16</sup> So while such professed goals are praiseworthy, these goals are not mutually exclusive with a conception of human nature. It is with her refusal to deal rigorously with what Pinker observes as the evidence from science and common sense that I take issue. Arguments like hers align themselves with a political ideal rather than accord with a commonsensical, scientifically informed view of human beings.<sup>17</sup>

A bit of historical explanation about the development of social constructionism may be beneficial here. The historian Carl Degler noted that social constructionism is based on an “ideology or philosophical belief that the world could be a freer and more just place” and that *the*

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signifying order” (2536). By denying the possibility of anything natural, Butler and theorists like her have denied the powerful role that biology plays in the behavior of the human animal. Rebellious novels dramatize that struggle.

<sup>16</sup> In contrast, in the preface to *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler argued for a “genealogical critique.” This kind of critique, she wrote, “refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view” (viii-ix, my emphasis). In the same preface, Butler goes on to discuss “female trouble.” Yet she then dismisses biological facts with a laugh: “Serious as the medicalization of women’s bodies is, the term is also laughable, and laughter in the face of serious categories is indispensable for feminism” (viii). Even if readers are to presume from her argument that the medicalization of women’s bodies is indeed serious in her view, she *dismisses* its relevance to her subject because it interferes with her version of feminism. That is the kind of ideological insistence that rebellious novels expose as inherent in the conformity complex’s efforts to compel conformity. Moreover, her genealogical critique is, by her own admission, marked by a *refusal* to search for the origins of gender, desire, and authentic sexual identity in the body.

<sup>17</sup> For a further refutation of the chief claims throughout Butler’s work, see Martha Nussbaum’s “Professor of Parody.”, Nussbaum argues that “*Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* contain no detailed argument against biological claims of ‘natural’ difference” (6). Moreover, in contrast to Butler’s ideas about our inability to understand our bodies in terms other than our society’s signifying order, Nussbaum further insists that “Culture can shape and reshape some aspects of our bodily existence, but it does not shape all the aspects of it.” Nussbaum suggests, “what feminism needs, and sometimes gets, is a subtle study of the interplay of bodily difference and cultural construction. And Butler’s abstract pronouncements, floating high above all matter, give us none of what we need” (8).

wish for a freer world thus “played a large part in the shift from biology to culture. . . . The main impetus came from the will to establish a social order in which innate and immutable forces of biology played no role in accounting for the behavior of social groups” (qtd. in *Blank* 17). The progressive ideology, social constructionism, according to Degler, is based not so much on a search for truth, but rather on the will to reform society, to make the world a better place. However, it seems prudent to question a movement that refuses and dismisses something as powerful as the role of biology in human behavior.

One of the primary fears of those in favor of social constructionism is that any concept of human nature implicitly supports fascism, racism, bigotry, war, violence, sexism, eugenics, and the status quo. Steve Rosenthal, a professor of sociology, begins his review of a book by E. O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*—a book that supports sociobiology and a concept of human nature—by stating, “For twenty-five years Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson has put forward the idea that it is human nature to be fascist.” Rosenthal creates a straw man argument, constantly exaggerating Wilson’s claims in order to make them less defensible and sound more totalitarian. For example, Rosenthal writes, “Wilson today poses as a reasonable advocate of genetic and cultural ‘co-evolution’ and as a proponent of genetic/environmental interaction.” Rosenthal’s rhetoric is weak, and his accusation is simply untrue. While it may be true that, as Rosenthal asserts, “the ruling class has extolled *Consilience* as the crowning achievement of a visionary elder statesman of capitalist science,” it does not make Wilson’s ideas or arguments any less factual and pertinent to our understanding of ourselves because they can be co-opted by the ruling class. The fact that a truth can be used oppressively does not make it any less true.

Human nature and social progress are such controversial and hotly debated topics that faulty reasoning seems pervasive within the discourse. Take Noam Chomsky, for example. Chomsky proffers a line of reasoning as flawed as Rosenthal's, though they stand on opposite sides of the debate: "If, in fact, man is an indefinitely malleable, completely plastic being, with no innate structures of mind and no intrinsic needs of a culture or social character, then he is a fit subject for the 'shaping of behavior' by the State authority, the corporate manager, the technocrat, or the central committee." He goes on to assert that "[t]hose with some confidence in the human species will hope this is not so and will try to determine the intrinsic characteristics that provide the framework for intellectual development, the growth of moral consciousness, cultural achievement, and participation in a free community" (qtd. in Pinker 300). Critics on both sides of the nature/nurture debate, apparently, resort to an illogical appeal to morality against State authoritative oppression—though even Pinker fails to mention the hypocrisy. Those who would deny the idea of a human nature do so, at least partially, on the grounds that such a nature, informed by human history, thus explains, indeed defends, the violence of imperialism, colonial practices, and patriarchy, along with a slew of other atrocities. Those who would support the idea of a human nature, at least partially, do so because they see it as a hope that can resist State oppression and indoctrination. Both lines of reasoning are equally fallacious because they are built on the wishful thinking inherent in their own versions of moral idealism.

My contention is that rebellious novels do not further a given socially sanctioned ideology as truth, but rather they encourage readers' development of "negative," contemplative reflection.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, this critical approach asserts that readers ought always to corroborate their ideas with science and empirical evidence, but where science has not provided answers, or

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<sup>18</sup> As I mentioned earlier, Terry Eagleton argues not only that the novel, as a genre, is subversive, but also that "it has only a negative identity" (6).

even warrantable assertions, they can use what Antonio Gramsci described as “good sense,” or “an intellectual unity and an ethic in conformity with a conception of reality that has gone beyond common sense and has become, if only within narrow limits, a critical conception” (54). Gramsci’s conception of *good* sense is in direct opposition to what he refers to as “common sense,” those ideas, beliefs, and practices that are in complete conformity with reigning ideologies, specifically with religion. While Pinker and Gramsci use the term “common sense” in diametrically opposed ways, their points are concerted. The tools that Gramsci suggests to use in developing good sense include philosophy, coherence, science, and a somewhat vague conception that he calls “life” (52). Employing the element that Gramsci calls critical coherence, an individual must reflect deliberately on his or her own circumstances in order to develop an understanding of life by explaining his or her personal thoughts, feelings, and desires. This development is at the heart of what rebellious novels do. Thus, readers are moved to keep in mind the role of ideology, as it is imposed from without, and to compare their own experiences with those of fellow men and women, both actual and fictional, in a circumspective way. Through such a circumspective and aesthetic process, individuals can develop a critical sense of life, themselves, and their own authentic identities.

Therefore, rebellious novels bring awareness of the never-ending ideological impositions of religion, politics, media, education, and the other ideological state apparatuses. They support readers in developing “good sense,” which can aid them in resisting being manipulated by the conformity complex. For example, Lawrence urges us to reflect on our feelings, ideas, and needs, compare them with those of our fellows, and to develop, organically and empirically, our own understanding. In line with Pinker’s intent to advance a theory of human behavior that is not, at least primarily, ideologically motivated—one that is practical, based on relevant evidence,

and insists upon good sense in preference to the ideals of any ideology, however progressive it might be—I argue for an attempt to reconcile human nature with an understanding of how it might be best for individuals to interact so that respect for each individual can be optimized. Likewise, the philosopher William James, writes Pinker, “was inspired by Darwin’s argument that perception, cognition, and emotion, like physical organs, had evolved as biological adaptations. James invoked the notion of instincts to explain the preferences of humans” (19). Lawrence also invokes the notion of instincts. As Pinker’s and James’s arguments imply, the evolutionary explanation of perception, cognition, and emotions explains too much to be discarded. Finally, as Pinker observed, “To acknowledge human nature, many think, is to endorse racism, sexism, war, greed, genocide, nihilism, reactionary politics, and neglect of children and the disadvantaged. Any claim that the mind has an innate organization strikes people not as a hypothesis that may be incorrect but as a thought immoral to think” (viii). Moral idealism, as part of the conformity complex, functions as yet another impediment to the individual coming to a greater understanding of him or herself.

Like the authors of rebellious novels, the Frankfurt School critiqued many of the ways that the conformity complex works to coerce conformity. Horkheimer and Adorno describes how mass culture, mass media, and the entertainment industry exploit the pleasure principle in order to keep individuals in a state of intellectual suppression and emotional repression. Like Marcuse, they argue that pleasure “is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality” (116). They contend that the “culture industry does not sublimate; it suppresses” (111).<sup>19</sup> Therefore, in opposition to what I call *the naked*

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<sup>19</sup> John Cumming translates this passage as “The culture industry does not sublimate: it *represses*” (Leitch 1117, my emphasis). Indeed, the conformity complex and the culture industry both *suppress* and *repress* our instinctual desires. Those that it cannot fully repress, it suppresses.

*self's* impulse toward resistance and nonconformity, the culture industry compels individuals to believe that

everyone can be happy if only they hand themselves over to [society] body and soul and relinquish their claim to happiness. In their weakness society recognizes its own strength and passes some of it back to them. Their lack of resistance certifies them as reliable customers. Thus is tragedy abolished. Once, the antithesis between individual and society made up its [tragedy's] substance. . . . Today tragedy has been dissipated in the void of the false identity of society and subject. . . . The liquidation of tragedy confirms the abolition of the individual. (124)

They argue that it “is not only the standardized mode of production of the culture industry which makes the individual illusory in its products. Individuals are tolerated only as far as their wholehearted identity with the universal is beyond question . . . . [A]s such, pseudoindividuality reigns” (124-25). Horkheimer and Adorno explicate in philosophical terms what many rebellious novels dramatize.

Moreover, as rebellious novels demonstrate, the Frankfurt School also argue that conformity turns individuality into a mechanical pattern. Through the concept of “Automaton Conformity,” Fromm argues, “the individual ceases to be himself; he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns; and he therefore becomes exactly as all others are and as they expect him to be” (185-86). The person who conforms, he continues, “need not feel alone and anxious any more. But the price he pays, however, is high; it is the loss of the self” (186). A man, for example, may believe that he is unique, and that “his thoughts, feelings, wishes, are ‘his’. . . . [T]his belief is an illusion in most cases and a dangerous one for that

matter, as it blocks the removal of those conditions that are responsible for this state of affairs” (186).

What the aforementioned novelists and theorists reveal to readers is how individuals’ naked selves are under constant and relentless attack by the pressures of social conformity.

Adorno and Horkheimer assert that

[w]hat is decisive today . . . is the necessity, inherent in the system, of never releasing its grip on the consumer, of not for a moment allowing him or her to suspect that resistance is possible. This principle requires that while all needs should be presented to individuals as capable of fulfillment by the culture industry, they should be so set up in advance that individuals experience themselves through their needs only as eternal customers, as the culture industry’s object. (113)

While their concern is with the culture industry specifically, their observations are applicable to the power dynamics that constantly and continually compel individuals to submit to the conformity complex in order to maintain economic, political, and social dominance. Fromm argues against “the conventional belief that by freeing the individual from all external restraints modern democracy has achieved true individualism. . . . *The right to express our own thoughts, however, means something only if we are able to have our own thoughts*” (240-41). He continues, “[i]n our culture, however, education too often results in the elimination of spontaneity and in the substitution of original psychic acts by superimposed feelings, thoughts, and wishes” (242).

The Frankfurt School and rebellious novels not only present readers with the processes of compulsory conformity, but they also demonstrate how original thought and spontaneity are stamped out. Fromm maintains that emotions are inseparably linked to spontaneity and are

fundamental to all creative thinking and creative activity; through the suppression of emotion, “the individual has become greatly weakened; his thinking is impoverished and flattened,” but because emotions cannot be completely suppressed, “the result is the cheap and insincere sentimentality with which movies and popular songs feed millions of emotion-starved customers” (244-45). Another “way of discouraging original thinking,” Fromm maintains, “is to regard all truth as relative, . . . almost a matter of taste” (248). Such a view coincides with rebellious novels: the belief that truth is relative leads individuals to regard the “basic issues of individual and social life” as too complicated “when in fact,” according to Fromm, “they are very simple” (250). The result is twofold: “one is a skepticism and cynicism towards everything that is said or printed, while the other is a childish belief in anything that a person is told with authority” (250). A loss of identity follows that reinforces the need to conform (254). Fromm’s theory of automaton conformity illuminates any reading of rebellious novels as his ideas reinforce my argument about the organic development of one’s naked self. His vision augments the visions depicted in rebellious novels. “Positive freedom,” he writes, “implies the principle that there is no higher power than this unique individual self, that man is the center and purpose of his life; that the growth and realization of man’s individuality is an end that can never be subordinated to purposes that are supposed to have greater dignity” (265).

In fact, Fromm’s theory of automaton conformity and its relation to the rebellious novel connects so deeply that he even wrote on this topic in an “Afterword” to Orwell’s *1984*. In it, he writes that there are a few novelists who do not accept the idea of psychological relativism, a belief held by many contemporary social scientists—in 1961—that “there is no such thing as human nature; that there is no such thing as qualities essential to man.” Therefore, he contends, such novelists “affirm the strength and intensity” (261) of authentic and organic identities that I

call the naked self. Thus, Fromm writes, “Orwell’s picture is exceedingly depressing, especially if one recognizes that as Orwell himself points out, it is not a picture of an enemy [or a single culture] but of the whole human race at the end of the twentieth century” (266). In these ways, rebellious novels may range from the exceedingly depressing to the hilariously life-affirming, but they all offer readers warnings against the insidious power of the conformity complex. Indeed, Fromm observes that Orwell’s “hope is a desperate one. The hope can be realized only by recognizing, so *1984* teaches us, the danger with which all men are confronted today: the danger of a society of automatons who will have lost every trace of individuality, of love, of critical thought, and yet who will not be aware of it because of ‘doublethink.’” Fromm argues that novels like Orwell’s—that is, novels I regard as rebellious—serve as “powerful warnings” against the repressive aspects of the conformity complex, and that “it would be most unfortunate if the reader smugly interpreted *1984* as another description of Stalinist barbarism, and if he does not see that it means us, too” (267). Therefore, the importance of the rebellious novel is to help readers see that they do indeed have authentic, naked selves, to understand how the conformity complex compels conformity, to depict the often-disastrous consequences that follow conformity, and finally to offer some modes of resistance against those social forces that repress the naked self.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE NAKED SELF IN D. H. LAWRENCE AND BRITISH MODERNISM

In this chapter, I will introduce the concept that, borrowing D. H. Lawrence's language, I call the *naked self*. My contention is that though the naked self appears in various forms throughout rebellious fiction, there is a commonality between these various forms that is, perhaps, most clearly expressed by Lawrence, both in his fiction as well as his non-fiction. While I will focus predominantly on Lawrence's conception of the naked self, I plan to show how this way of identifying one's self is developed by other novelists associated with British Modernism including E. M. Forster, Ford Maddox Ford, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. In their own various ways, these novelists all develop depictions of the naked self in their most powerful novels. These novelists associated with British Modernism are just one cadre of disparate novelists that I intend to use as an example of how the rebellious spirit is developed in their visions despite their different genders, backgrounds, classes, and political, social, religious, and philosophical ideologies. Though my view is that rebellious novelists span time and culture, in this chapter I look at how what critics often discuss as British Modernism was, on a fundamental level, a rebellious movement.

Also, I will discuss the concept that I call the *conformity complex* as it functions to coerce and compel individuals toward conformity and a relatively unified way of interpreting the world. As part of my analysis of the conformity complex—that fluctuating admixture of semi-heterogeneous, semi-homogenous values, ideas, beliefs, and behaviors within any given social ideology—I argue that by definition and in its very nature, the conformity complex is oppressive and repressive. A number of ideologies are often considered irrefutably repressive: Russian totalitarianism, anti-Semitism, patriarchal misogyny, mainstream Christian views of sexuality—

often described as Puritanical—imperialism, colonialism, compulsory heterosexuality, and a host of other social, political, and philosophical worldviews that set one group against another.

However, one important distinction I make is that culture itself, sometimes overtly and at other times subtly, always has an oppressive element. Included in this analysis is how even ideologies with liberatory or egalitarian missions can act, perhaps even inevitably so, as agents of repression. The argument I make regarding the naked self is that rebellious novelists show, in various ways, how personal, organic, and empirical experiences can act as resistances to the oppressive, uniformizing compulsions of the conformity complex.

#### The Naked Self: Lawrence's View of Human Nature and the Conformity Complex

In the opening lines of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1929), D. H. Lawrence writes of a tragic age: “The cataclysm has happened,” he tells us, “we are among the ruins” (5). Lawrence was determinedly hopeful despite the desolation he felt after the First World War and the distress from the torment of tuberculosis—the illness that would end his life just a few years after the publication of what many consider his most important novel. Despite the desolation of the Great War, Lawrence nevertheless maintained that we have reason to hope, though he admitted that “there is no smooth road into the future: . . . We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen” (5). We are quite a ways into that future, over one hundred years after the publication of his first novel, *The White Peacock* (1911). Still, the era Lawrence described bears resemblance to our contemporary age, despite the social and technological progress that has taken place. One might wonder what he would think of the current state of the world. It is plausible that Lawrence would likely make a similar critique: the problem with which he was concerned his entire career persists. Despite the supposed sexual freedom gained through the American sexual revolution of the 1960s, there remains the ideological problem that Lawrence once referred to as “the

nauseating and repulsive history of the crucifixion of the procreative body for the glorification of the spirit, the mental consciousness” (qtd. in Burns, *Vanishing* 67).

The ideological problem is not exclusively a sexual one, but it is a physical one, the way that the west conceives of the human body. Lawrence often contextualized the ideological problem in terms of sexuality because he saw the “procreative body” as providing a defense against the pervasive pressure to conform to reigning ideologies. In the face of the persistent impression made upon critics that Lawrence was obsessed with sexuality, his writings such as *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and “Pornography and Obscenity” should have cleared up the matter. In his critique of Freud, he makes the assumption that, through the lens of psychoanalysis, a “sexual motive is to be attributed to all human activity. Now this is going too far,” he writes (*Fantasia* 1).<sup>2021</sup> He later qualifies his criticism of the psychoanalytical theory of human behavior as he saw it: “What Freud says is always *partly* true. And half a loaf is better than no bread. But really, there is the other half of the loaf” (1). The other half of the loaf, Lawrence explains, is the desire in the individual to “build up out of *his own self* and *his own belief* and *his own effort* something wonderful. Not merely something useful. Something wonderful” (2, my emphasis). Lawrence emphatically argues that what is “wonderful” is that which develops out of *one’s own self*. Therefore, in contrast to a *wholly* social constructionist

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<sup>20</sup> For a fairly moderate example of reactions to Lawrence’s ideas about sexuality, see Janice H. Harris’s “D. H. Lawrence and Kate Millet.”

<sup>21</sup> It is also interesting to note the difficulty that critics, and feminist critics in particular, have had in understanding Lawrence’s cultural impact. For example, the renowned feminist Sandra Gilbert writes, “both his popular and his critical reputation have fluctuated so dramatically since his death. To be sure, the embattled author of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is not alone among High Modernists in having been labeled a proto-fascist reactionary, a racist, a misogynist, an élitist and (no doubt in a range of other formulations I’m not remembering at the moment) a paradigmatic Bad Boy. And that Lawrence was at one time or another, in one way or another, most of these things, besides being in some sense a wife-batterer, is not irrelevant to any discussion of what may perhaps be a long-term decline in his literary standing. Yet . . . we are bemused, even bewitched, by the ways he *doesn’t* fit into our current systems of thought” (“Leave”).

view, Lawrence locates the problem of physical and sexual repression, as did Freud,<sup>22</sup> in the antagonism between the individual's *physical* self and social constraints.

The larger imminent issue in Lawrence's critique of social constraints is ideological. On the one hand, ideology can be understood as the way in which an individual makes sense of the world, personally, individually, and organically, by testing imposed ideologies against the experience of the body. On the other hand, ideology is often viewed as a socialized system of thought that is imposed upon individuals to the point that they make sense of the world chiefly, if not solely, through compulsory, prescriptive schemata. The problem with the second definition of ideology is the exclusion or marginalization of individual autonomy—one's own empirical experience in a pragmatic or even Deweyan sense. Because Lawrence felt that the critical capacity in men and women had been largely crushed out of them by the industrial revolution and an attendant ideology, a note of mourning runs through his *oeuvre* about the devastating effects that the industrial revolution has had on human life and on ways of perceiving oneself: the hero of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Mellors, strikingly says, "it's a shame, what's been done to people these last hundred years: men turned into nothing but labour-insects, and all their manhood taken away, and their real life" (220).<sup>23</sup> Reiterating this sentiment, Lawrence implies in one of his most anthologized essays that the industrial revolution turned men and women into "masticating corpses" ("Why" 197).

Thus, Lawrence's critical and creative works attempt—in the spirit of rebellious novels in general—to offer resistance against those forces that syphon off the individual's thoughts and

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<sup>22</sup> For Freud's most notable critique of this antagonism, see *Civilization and its Discontents*.

<sup>23</sup> Lawrence's criticism here is consistent with Romanticism that values individualism over technological "progress." However, while Lawrence holds some values in common with the Romantic Movement, he is not merely a modernized Romantic. His importance to the Romantic Movement is only amplified by the ways in which he modifies certain romantic tenants such as his disavowal of absolutes and his modification of the Romantic belief in transcendental values about the self rather than external phenomena.

feelings that cause them to become “masticating corpses.” In Lawrence’s view, Christianity, in particular, and religion, in general, works cooperatively with industrializing forces to induce people to “crucify the procreative body.” Together, in the West—certainly in Britain and the U. S.—socio-political systems of thought, technology, industry, family, and religion comprise what I call the *conformity complex*. There is not one single, isolated web of values, beliefs, norms, mores that encompasses all people in any given society; the conformity complex in the West is a shifting, dynamic, and even dialogic entity. The chief aim of the conformity complex, in any given, is to compel uniformity of thought and behavior. Such descriptive analysis of this uniformity in terms of western thinking is perhaps best discussed in the works of the members of the Frankfurt School, most particularly in Hebert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*.

Moreover, one of the most powerful effects of such uniformity of thought is that the conformity complex in the West tends to turn human individuals into automatons, or “labour-insects,” making them easy to exploit, not only for economic and capitalistic reasons but for power and social manipulation, as well. In opposition to the goals of the conformity complex, Lawrence declared: “To be alive, to be man alive, to be whole man alive: that is the point” (“Why” 197). In his sense, being *alive* results from spontaneity and organic harmony with one’s social and physical environment. The conformity complex, for its own purposes, disrupts and destroys spontaneity and the relationships that organically spring from it. Interestingly, the sociobiologist E. O. Wilson wrote in *On Human Nature*, “Religion constitutes the greatest challenge to human sociobiology,” because “religion is above all the process by which individuals are persuaded to subordinate their immediate self-interest to the interests of the group. . . . Self-deception by shamans and priests perfects their own performance and enhances

the deception practiced on their constituents” (175-76).<sup>24</sup> Despite his insight into the way that religion subordinates an individual to her society, Wilson views the individual’s subordination as a positive value within the context of the evolution of the species. Therefore it is important to note that even a scientific ideology, as he expresses here, based on evolutionary biology, can be detrimental to the individual when imposed in the way that Wilson employs it. Moreover, the conformity complex is at work to convince people that they are not “alive,” in Lawrence’s sense of the word, but that they are, or should see themselves primarily as the social roles that they play, as laborers, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, democratic citizens, employees, and so forth. In this view, people are reduced to the roles they play, to their social functions. While there are practical benefits to assuming these roles in certain contexts, even to the point that they offer some degree of happiness, the conformity complex operates in such a manner that it tends either to deny those paths that it cannot co-opt for its own ends or to condemn them as impractical, immoral, and anti-social. I will explore these paths more extensively in later chapters.

However, though some degree of happiness may result from fulfilling social roles, there is often a mechanical aspect to such roles, bound up in ideas such as duty, obligation, and responsibility that vitally constrict the spontaneity of human beings. Lawrence proclaimed, in contrast to the conformity complex, “Nothing is important but life,” and that in order to be alive one cannot simply fill certain social roles; or, if one must sacrifice parts of themselves to those roles, the choice must be organically the individual’s own rather than socially imposed.

Lawrence put it this way: “For out of the full play of all things emerges the only thing that is

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<sup>24</sup> Wilson was, interestingly enough, a proponent of the role of religion in social life. It is ironic, perhaps even self-contradictory, that he could observe the suffocating effects of religion on the individual and still be its proponent. And he is able to advocate for the subordination of the individual only because, as is true in essentially all such ideologies, he advances a cause as greater than a human life; in this case it is evolution and preservation of the species.

anything, the wholeness of a man, the wholeness of a woman, man alive, and live woman” (“Why” 198).

Lawrence declared that the organic process by which individuals distinguish their own feelings from those that are socially imposed centers on *the body* of the individual. In a key scene from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Connie Chatterley is speaking with her husband, Clifford, about the body/mind dichotomy and a theory that posits that evolution is working to bring the spirit or mind into “ascendancy,” while the body will barely be distinguishable from “nonentity” (233). Clifford, who blatantly favors the mind, describes the body as “an encumbrance” and adds, “But then I suppose a woman doesn’t take a supreme pleasure in the life of the mind” (234). Connie responds, “Is that sort of idiocy the supreme pleasure of the life of the mind? No thank you! Give me the body. I believe the life of the body is a greater reality than the life of the mind: when the body is really wakened to life. But so many people . . . have only got heads tacked on to their physical corpses” (234). She continues to praise the body and give an account of its history: “The human body is only now coming to real life. With the Greeks it gave a lovely flicker, then Plato and Aristotle killed it, and Jesus finished it off” (234-35). The scene ends with the following interchange between Clifford and Connie:

“Believe me, whatever God there is is slowly eliminating the guts and the alimentary system from the human being, to evolve a higher, more spiritual being.”

“Why should I believe you, Clifford, when I feel that whatever God there is has at last wakened up in my guts, as you call them, and is rippling so happily there, like dawn.

Why should I believe you, when I feel so very much the contrary?” (235).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Connie’s response here to Clifford is a possible response Lawrence would make to social constructionists who maintain that individuals cannot understand their own body outside of their culture’s signifying order.

The “whole” of an individual is the essential concept in Lawrence’s ideas. Even Tommy Dukes, the army Brigadier-General who participates in the philosophical discussions with Clifford and his cohort, avows this belief: “Real knowledge comes out of the whole corpus of consciousness, out of your belly and your penis as much as out of your brain or mind” (37). Dukes recognizes that the critical importance in being alive is to preserve what he calls the “organic connection” with life, that which exists between the mind and the body (37). The organic connection that he describes, then, suggests that there is no actual separation between mind and body; they are one entity, or rather they form the whole corpus of consciousness. Dukes is able to make this recognition despite Lawrence having characterized him as someone who cannot live the life he professes because he has himself severed the organic connection—Dukes is a minor character who exhibits the characteristics of a repressed self that I discuss in Chapter 3. Therefore, as I stated previously, Lawrence’s vision is not to privilege the body *over* the mind—which would simply be an inverse of traditional western ways of thinking—but rather to insist that body and mind are one and that one’s ideology must rise out of their organic connection.

The conformity complex, however, tends to operate to sever the organic connection between mind and body. Once individuals are convinced that their mind is what matters most, the body becomes mechanical and “an encumbrance.” Because of the structure of western society, I argue, the organic connection between mind and body cannot be maintained while subscribing to the prevailing, socially sanctioned ideologies because current systems of thought, and more emphatically those that are socially sanctioned, reduce the body to machinery and elevate the mind in such a way as to abstract materiality and sever the body’s involvement with the physical world. Western ideologies tend to create a denigrating view of the body, even when

they promote sexuality or free love, by emphasizing the value of mere pleasure, as in Epicureanism, through what Horkheimer and Adorno call “the culture industry.” Much of the thought within the American sexual revolution stands as a famous example of ways in which the body can be viewed as a pleasure machine, and Lawrence’s character Mellors was misguidedly appropriated in the 1960s to advance a fundamentally different view from his own, despite any similarities.

Lawrence suggests that the best way to preserve one’s organic connection is to guard it with the practice of individual autonomy. This idea is perhaps best expressed in *Studies in Classic American Literature*, when Lawrence mocks the list of virtues from Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography and further develops his own philosophy.<sup>26</sup> One of Lawrence’s virtues reads: “Lose no time with ideals; serve the Holy Ghost; never serve mankind” (23). Lawrence often appropriated Christian language and inverted its original meaning. Lawrence’s version of “the Holy Ghost” is an individual’s organic self, what he elsewhere described as the whole corpus of a person, “man alive” and “live woman.” He goes on to declare: “*I will never let mankind put anything over me, but that I will try to recognize and submit to the gods in me and the gods in other men and women*” (22, italics in the original). By “gods” Lawrence implies the presence of powerful, organic feelings and emotions within one’s body that come about through one’s interaction with the environment. By using this metaphor of “gods,” Lawrence implies an emphasis on human vitality as essential to self-fulfillment. Serving the Holy Ghost, or these “gods,” and never serving mankind is to be ideologically autonomous and critically reflective by privileging one’s own sense of life over culturally inherited views. That is not to say that one can

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<sup>26</sup> In the chapter “Benjamin Franklin,” Lawrence, with a hint of subtle seriousness, satirically appropriates Franklin’s list of twelve virtues, defining them in a way that he sees as offering readers a way to understand individual autonomy as an alternative to their submission to social values that Franklin’s definitions simply reinforce.

step *outside* of cultural ideologies, per se, but it means that an individual can be critical of the conformity complex by shifting her thought processes in order to develop a personal, empirical, and organic worldview. To be outside ideology is in one sense impossible, but to resist those reductive explanations that contradict, condemn, or explain away one's organic feelings helps to preserve the organic connection. Indeed, Clifford Chatterley symbolizes the result of mind/body *severance*, not only in his professed value hierarchy of mind over body but also by the very fact that he has only intellectual means of connecting since having been paralyzed during the Great War.

Moreover, Lawrence shows that self-fulfillment is achieved most fully through individual autonomy. For him, a worldview is more fulfilling to the degree that it is personal, empirical, organic, and when it is developed out of an individual's unique sense of life rather than mediated by those ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that are imposed by society and the conformity complex. It is not to be mistaken that socially offered ideas, thoughts, and feelings are at all times harmful and therefore to be rejected out of hand. Social interaction is the primary means by which the exchange of ideas takes place.<sup>27</sup> However, the more compulsively ideas are imposed, and the more compulsory they become, the more they function as agents of conformity and repression. Lawrence implies throughout his works that uncritical acceptance of moral, political, and scientific explanations leads to the suppression of organic development. Moreover, he suggests that the ready-made explanations and imposition of moral credos through the workings of the conformity complex tend to replace the critical activity that is necessary to maintain the organic connection. Indeed, he encourages social interaction quite passionately but warns that in the exchange of ideas, personal experience ought to trump mere tradition and

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<sup>27</sup> E. M. Forster, for example, writes that Mr. Fielding, in *A Passage to India*, "used ideas by that most potent method—interchange" and that "he was happiest in the give-and-take of a private conversation" (80).

authority. While this may sound commonplace in theory, his works indicate that such practice is far from common. Gertrude Morel, for instance, believes devoutly, perhaps unquestioningly, in values espoused by the English middle class of the turn-of-the-century, and the catastrophe of *Sons and Lovers* ensues from the clash between genuine (or organic) feelings and their suppression based on ideological considerations.

Furthermore, Lawrence's works present a complex relationship between his views concerning sexual freedom and the ways in which his works are aimed to attack the brutish ways that conformity is thrust upon individuals. Lawrence was not chiefly interested in imposing his own, Lawrentian brand of morality on society. His works prompt individuals to discover their own morality in place of accepting moral codes and social systems of thought. His hope was for individuals to develop their own moral views and empirical ideologies by embracing their instincts, or what Noam Chomsky calls "innate structures" (qtd. in Pinker 300). Moreover, Lawrence, like Freud, made many attempts to delineate where the individual has innate or instinctual feelings, emotions, and drives and wherein society either helps or inhibits the expression of those instincts. To that end, Lawrence observed that people have odd ideas of themselves and that they fail to grasp the significance of the mind/body connection. "We think of ourselves as a body with a spirit in it, or a body with a soul in it, or a body with a mind in it" ("Why" 193). He goes on to argue that, for those interested in seeking self-fulfillment, they must underscore being "alive," in the romantic sense. "Whatever is me alive is me. . . . And that's what you learn," he insisted, "when you're a novelist. And that's what you are very liable *not* to know, if you're a parson, or a philosopher, or a scientist, or a stupid person" (193). Equating various disciplines of knowledge with (a kind of) stupidity may be off-putting, but his intention was to indicate the necessarily reductive nature of systematized ways of understanding; the

conformity complex is a net of interconnected *systems of thought*. In contrast to such systematized ways of thinking, Lawrence argued that “as for knowing, if I put my finger in the fire, I know that fire burns, with a knowledge so emphatic and vital, it leaves Nirvana merely a conjecture. Oh yes, my body, me alive, *knows*, and knows intensely.” Most importantly, Lawrence insisted, “as for the sum of all knowledge, it can’t be anything more than an accumulation of all the things I know in the body, and you, dear reader, know in the body” (194). Lawrence denied that an individual is simply a consciousness or merely a body; “The whole is greater than the part. And therefore I, who am man alive, am greater than my soul, or spirit, or body, or mind, or consciousness, or something that is merely a part of me. I am a man, and alive” (195).

Lawrence also maintained that authentic identity comes out of an experience of the body. This view, however, should not be understood as the mechanical side to the philosophical concept of “the ghost in the machine.” In his philosophy, the body is a whole, composed of a brain, nervous system, mind, soul, consciousness, hands, torso, sexual organs, and so forth. In the face of the pervasive mechanization of the human body, however, Lawrence repudiated the idea that society can be reformed through progressive amelioration. At the end of *The Rainbow*, Lawrence’s vision for a redemptive future, to end the decay of the human spirit and decimation of vitality by industrial reification, manifests itself as Ursula Brangwen comes to a realization of what she needs to do in order to achieve individual autonomy.

Ursula struggles with the misery imposed upon her by social demands that threaten to repress her deepest emotional desires. Initially, she decides to accept Anton Skrebensky as her husband, mate, and lover. As the novel progresses, she comes to realize that he cannot ultimately satisfy her, leading her to reject him as a mate. Subsequently, through the voice of

English society, she condemns her first rejection of him as selfish. Following the example of her mother who had “taken the life that was given,” Ursula finds a “bondaged sort of peace” (449). Thus, regretting her initial rejection, she sends a letter to Skrebensky promising servility and submission; she embraces (if only momentarily) the socially imposed ideal of *woman*: “For what had a woman but to submit? What was her flesh but for childbearing, her strength for her children and her husband, the giver of life? At last she was a woman” (450). Yet she comes to feel the disingenuousness accepting this position. “She had an idea that she must walk for the rest of her life, wearily, wearily. . . . Step after step, step after step, the monotony produced a deep, cold sense of nausea in her” (454). Wearing by her acceptance of the social roles she is forced to play, she becomes very ill. She questions, once again, her relationship with Skrebensky. “Must she belong to him, must she adhere to him? Something compelled her, and yet it was not real” (455). Lawrence’s use of a mystical language, such as his employment of the phrase “not real,” is part of his mythology: passionate and strong but dense and many-layered. While the language of mysticism seems to support any number of interpretations, his meaning, in spite of any apparent symbolism, is made explicit: social imposition wars with individual autonomy, and in Ursula Brangwen, autonomy triumphs.<sup>28</sup>

Serving as a mouthpiece for Lawrence, as Birkin in *Women in Love* and Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* do, the narrator of *The Rainbow* explicates Lawrence’s theory of individual autonomy. Ursula realizes that her unborn child is all that binds her to Skrebensky. And so she

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<sup>28</sup> In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence’s interest in resisting conformity as an autonomous act reaches important heights. As a literary figure, then, as Sandra Gilbert readily admits, he does not fit neatly into a feminist lens. While he can be criticized, for example, for his depiction of Connie Chatterley as a merely male fantasy ultimately submitting to Mellors, Ursula, in *The Rainbow*, is autonomous *in spite of* Anton Skrebensky’s attempts to marry her. Through Lawrence’s philosophical complexity and recurrent push toward human vitality, he, more often than not, offers depictions of men and women rebelling against the conformity complex. Therefore, it is easy to understand Gilbert’s apparent cognitive dissonance when she asks herself, “How can you be a feminist *and* a Lawrentian?” (*Acts*, ix). In answering that question, and in keeping with Lawrence’s spirit, she admits, “I found Lawrence’s writing so compelling,” and that “[f]ar from being a decorous project, then, my work on Lawrence seemed to be a kind of exercise in rebellion” (xi). She then goes on to assert that Lawrence does not fit into the “patriarchal mode” (xii).

fights to be free of this social imposition, the indoctrinated roles compelling the submission of women. “If she could but extricate herself,” she thinks, “from all the vast encumbrance of the world that was in contact with her, from her father, and her mother, and her lover, and all her acquaintance,” she could find her freedom: “I have no allocated place in the world of things,” she concludes (456). She understands that she has a self apart from social roles and cultural prescriptions. In her mind, social roles have no concrete existence apart from the social forces that impose them. Her physical and emotional lives, in contrast, do; they are, at least, *more real*.

Ursula’s freedom is constrained by forces impinging upon the free growth of her uniqueness, blossoming out of her individualized sense of her own body. In this sense, she discovers the “unreality” of her social self. “I must break out of it,” she says to herself, “like a nut from its shell that is an unreality” (456). The power and force of Lawrence’s language, as in his tendency for repetition, have been building up throughout the entire chapter and reach their climax here.<sup>29</sup> Ursula reaches an epiphany: “And again, to her feverish brain, came the vivid reality of acorns in February lying on the floor of a wood with their shells burst and discarded and the kernel issued *naked*, to put itself forth” (456, emphasis added). Ursula realizes that, like the acorn, she possesses a naked kernel beneath the social and ideological shell. Putting itself forth, in Lawrence’s vision, means to discover oneself through the body rather than through imposed ideology. He continues, “She was the naked, clear kernel thrusting forth the clear, powerful shoot, and the world was a bygone winter, discarded, her mother and father and Anton, and the college and all her friends, all cast off like a year that has gone by” (456). Ursula jettisons the idea that friends and family, as the social vehicle through which individuals are most

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<sup>29</sup> Lawrence explicated his crescendo effect in the preface to *Women in Love*, writing, “every natural crisis in emotion or passion or understanding comes from this pulsing, frictional to-and-fro that works up to culmination” (486).

often indoctrinated, offer her substantial knowledge of the self. Family and friends may help in some discovery but are more often forces of social imposition, while she, the kernel, “was free and naked and striving to take new root, to create a new knowledge of Eternity in the flux of Time. And the kernel was the only reality: the rest was cast off into oblivion” (456).

The naked kernel is not to be confounded with common conceptualizations of the soul or the ghost haunting the machine.<sup>30</sup> The nakedness of the kernel, after having discarded its shell, is what Lawrence referred to, in an oft-quoted letter to Edward Garnett, as “carbon.” Gerald Butler explores Lawrence’s idea in *This Is Carbon: A Defense of D. H. Lawrence Against His Admirers*. Lawrence writes, “diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond—but I say, ‘Diamond, what! This is carbon.’ And my diamond might be coal or soot, [but] my theme is carbon” (qtd. in Butler 117). Lawrence tells Garnett that this understanding of “carbon” necessitates a “different attitude” (117). Butler argues that in order to appreciate Lawrence’s view we must see that “the primeval Brangwens, with their brains ‘inert,’ may represent a *high* point of human development; what looks like ‘progress’ since may be, in spite of *and by means of* our universal education, urbanization, [and] technology, a return to more primitive human times” (118). Lawrence’s metaphors of “carbon” and the “naked kernel”—that which is part of human nature—are synonymous with what I refer to as the *naked self*.

#### Organic Connection Within and Between Individuals

Lawrence’s prophetic vision concerns the fulfillment of the individual’s deepest desires, and according to this vision, many of the most profound desires are sexual ones. Gerald Butler

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<sup>30</sup> In fact, my conception of the naked self has its analogue in Blake’s contentions that first, “Man has no distinct Body from his Soul for that call’d Body is a portion of the Soul discern’d by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age,” that second, “Energy is the only life and is from the Body,” and that third, “Energy is Eternal Delight.”

argues that Ursula's rejection of Skrebensky's proposed union, at the close of *The Rainbow*, frees her to seek satisfaction of her sexual desires. "In reality," Butler remarks, Skrebensky "could never be the mate of an alive woman like Ursula." Therefore, "[t]o 'lose' Skrebensky is thus for Ursula really a move toward sexual fulfillment—as is her disillusionment with job and college. Now she knows it 'was not for her to create, but to recognize a man created by God,' i.e., to give up fantasy and wait for someone external to touch her" (113-14). To have accepted Skrebensky would have been to accept the forced submission of her own self to the social ideal.<sup>31</sup> However, giving up such a fantasy is only one of the aspects of the naked self's discarding of its shell. The naked kernel must create as it grows. After realizing her deepest feelings, Ursula looked before her and saw "the unknown, the unexplored, the undiscovered upon whose shore she landed, alone" (457). But as an individual who insists on the rightness of her own feelings, in contrast to the dictates of the conformity complex and the conventions of civilization, Ursula resists the conformity that is what Marcuse called "euphoria in unhappiness" (5). He wrote that a "false need" is that which is "superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs that perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice" (5). Marcuse identified "the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate" as belonging to this category of false needs (5).

Among these false needs, there exists not only the desire to love what others love but also, as Lawrence implies in the character of Skrebensky, there exists the desire to love *how* others love. Ursula almost falls victim to this need, to accept the life given to her. But she resists. Conformity gives confidence. The confidence, according to Lawrence, however, is a

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<sup>31</sup> As I shall show in Chapter 4, Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights*, by marrying Edgar Linton and denying Heathcliff, does indeed sacrifice her own self to the social ideal, and from that act brings about her ultimate demise.

“false hard confidence,” and it’s “brittle” (458). Even she, the woman who comes to the realization of her inherent opposition to social norms and ideals, is possessed by terror: “Sometimes she lost touch, she lost her feeling, she could only know the old horror of the husk that bound in her and all mankind. They were all in prison, they were all going mad” (458). The madness she sees in people is the “corruption triumphant and unopposed” of their naked selves. Novels that reflect such madness include characters such as Gerald Critch in *Women in Love* and the male Wilcoxes in Forster’s *Howards End*. To Lawrence, nothing is more important than life, the life of the individual maintained organically. Marcuse’s “*redefinition of needs*” (245) maintains a hope similar to Lawrence’s vision of Ursula choosing “life” over “corruption,” at the close of *The Rainbow*. As she looks out of her window during her convalescence, Ursula sees the “stiffened bodies of the colliers, that seemed already enclosed in a coffin” and their eyes as if they were already “buried alive” (458). But despite the decayed state of Ursula’s world and the “terrible corruption spreading over the face of the land,” Ursula persists in her hope: “she knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate in the face of the world’s corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit” (458-59). But Lawrence’s vision implies that “quivering to life” cannot occur while an individual accepts socially imposed ideologies.

In *Women in Love*, for example, we see the fear that many people likely feel regarding the rejection of moral obligations often associated with civilization. Birkin argues against social conformity when he tells Gerald Critch that he ought to “live.” Gerald says:

“I’m afraid I can’t come up to your expectations here, at any rate.—You think people should just do as they like.”

“I think they always do. But I should like them to like the purely individual thing in themselves, that makes them act in singleness. And they only like to do the collective thing.”

“And I,” said Gerald grimly, “shouldn’t like to be in a world of people who acted individually and spontaneously, as you call it.—We should have everybody cutting everybody else’s throat in five minutes.”

“That means *you* would like to be cutting everybody else’s throat,” said Birkin.

(33)

Gerald’s fear is quite likely many people’s fear. His argument, at the very least, is a familiar argument: choosing to live by our deepest desires would result in a socially and politically chaotic and anarchical world. Moreover, Lawrence points to the key issue of people’s fear: their own secret desires toward violence and aggression, toward sado-masochism. But, he implies, the desire toward sadomasochism results from the repressing forces of the industrial revolution and the conformity complex, not from the naked self.

One of the subtle and psychological manifestations of these fears and desires for sadomasochism is the desire for mechanization of the human body. Technology increasingly imposes itself upon the human mind, forcing the individual to see him or herself as a machine. Later in the novel, when Gerald succeeds his father and takes over management of the coal mine, Lawrence shows technology’s and social ideology’s effects on the workers. As “expert engineers” and “new machinery” were brought into the mine, and as “educated and expert men” controlled administration of the mine with “the most accurate and delicate scientific method,” the miners

submitted to it all. The joy went out of their lives, the hope seemed to perish as they became more and more mechanized. . . . At first they hated Gerald Critch, they swore to do something to him, to murder him. But as time went on they accepted everything with some fatal satisfaction. . . . There was a new world, a new order, strict, terrible, inhuman, but satisfying in its very destructiveness. The men were satisfied to belong to the great and wonderful machine [and to participate] in a great and *perfect system* that *subjected life* to pure mathematical *principles*, . . . the mechanical principle for the organic, the destruction of the organic purpose. . . . It was pure organic disintegration and pure mechanical organization. (304-05, my emphasis)

In this scene, Lawrence depicts how rigid systems subject life to abstract principles, implying a necessity to reject such systems and principles as necessarily destructive. The vice-grip of the principle of self-destruction, as depicted in *Women in Love*, and the acceptance of the process of mechanization as inevitable, prevents the miners from effectively resisting mechanical implementation into the practice of their labor. They ultimately come to concede to the sheer mechanical processes as “progress.”

While capitalistic ideologies tend slowly, gradually, and sinisterly to grind out from the individual the impulse to resist, the same is also true of other reigning western ideologies. The goal in capitalist ideologies of grinding out resistance is often accomplished by the conformity complex through economic pressures and the social imposition of the values of *profit* (the system of meritocracy, social mobility, social currency, prestige, and ownership) above *human* values. In other so-called liberating ideologies, from anarchism to socialism, each ideology too often imposes strict codes of morality upon adherents. The naked self’s disposition to prefer self-discovered morality to submission to social codes of behavior (or at least to avoid social

condemnation) is ruthlessly stamped out. Capitalism itself, for example, as an economically-based ideology, could not achieve the surmounting of the naked self's dispositions toward resistance on its own, at least not to the extent it now has, without the aid of technological development that capitalism itself has ushered in. Erich Fromm, in *Escape from Freedom*, saw in people dueling desires: a "longing for submission" and a "lust for power" (6). Fromm's diagnosis affirms Lawrence's depiction in the aforementioned scene in *Women in Love*. The conformity complex perverts people's freedom and their choice of action in at least two ways. People come to feel a longing to submit, to crumble beneath the titanic pressures of social conformity. At the same time, there develops within individuals a pressure to break free that, in turn, is suppressed so deeply that it eventually explodes into a destructive force, as the miners not only wish to murder Gerald Critch but also aim their *need for destruction* at themselves.

The process that Gerald initiates in the mine, with the electricity and "cutting machines" along with the miners' acceptance, have their parallels today: Administration and management whose bottom line is efficiency and profit have spread from the business world to other institutions. Changes in the administration of universities, the privatization of education, and the operation of the highway systems could serve as contemporary examples of Gerald Critch's "great reform" (304). Examples of the miners' acceptance of their own mechanization is so pervasive today that one need not go far to see its analog. A mild example might be a grocery store cashier (particularly one who works for a company such as Wal-Mart or telemarketing companies in which employee actions are scripted). A cashier, for instance, might be heard asking a customer how his or her day is going. The cashier speaks these words in nearly the exact same way to all of the customers who go through that checkout line. When asked how his or her day is going, the cashier often replies in stock and mechanical ways made to emulate

actual, though severely limited conversation. If one actually tries to interact meaningfully with the cashier, it is a rare event when the cashier does something other than stumble verbally or respond with a nervous laugh, so used to routinized and mechanical interaction and unused to meaningful connection in such a setting. Jobs are mechanized under the pressure of efficiency and profit, and individuals become mechanized not only in the performance of their mechanical labors, but also in the psychological and emotional aspects of their relationships with other individuals through this process.

Lawrence drew attention to the pervasiveness with which the stamp of fun, as Adorno and Horkheimer termed it, and mechanical cheerfulness, as Forster described it, had spread. The character Lou Witt observes, in the concise and elegant *St. Mawr*: “People, all the people she knew, seemed so entirely contained within their cardboard let’s-be-happy world. Their wills were fixed on happiness, or fun, or the-best-ever. This ghastly cheery-o! touch, that made all her blood go numb” (27). Lou suffers from a spiritual despair because of the lack of meaningful connection with other men and women. Lou feels this lack of meaningful connection primarily on an emotional level. Lawrence dramatizes the problem regarding meaningful connection; he shows the significant role played by the social conventions of the age that deplete spontaneity and genuine sympathy. However, the solution to the dilemma of social alienation, indeed a complex one, lies in the emotional, spiritual, and physical connection between two human beings. If such a connection cannot last enduringly, it could be made, perhaps, repeatedly when tenderness and sympathy combine with physical touch.

In *St. Mawr*, characters tend to be represented either as mechanical, empty, and conventional or as cold, mean, and socially obedient. Lou recognizes that society breeds conformity and a sickening optimism, which is merely an obedience to a way of thinking that

sees life as good, fulfilling, and affirming. However, her observation belies the assumption in this way of thinking that “being positive” leads to happiness. Such a false and quixotic belief made her spiritually sick. In actuality, because this blind optimism was so pervasive in English society, social life, for Lou, was socially unfulfilling. And the Aristotelian idea that man is a social animal is important here. A number of modernist novels share the assertion that the human search for meaning lies in individuals’ ability to making meaningful connections with other people. If social life is unfulfilling, people cannot live fulfilling lives. The naked self is an essential component of Lawrence’s idea that before genuine sympathy and spontaneity can develop between people, one must be genuine about oneself.

To clarify, unlike a soul or ghost in the machine, the way that I conceptualize the naked self is what is often considered mind as inseparable from the body. Therefore, the form of one’s naked self—to borrow Lawrence’s phrasing—whether diamond, coal, soot, or whatever else it might become, is the result of a relatively indefinite admixture of genetics and social interactions undergone during one’s lifetime. Lawrence’s chief interest concerned the interaction between genes, or biology (the body, the phallus, the guts), and experience (relations made between people in the “whole circumambient universe”)—culminating in his conception of a “pure relatedness,” which is his mythological terminology for harmony between oneself and one’s environmental and cultural milieu (“Morality” 172). A “pure relatedness” requires the autonomous self to reject, or at the very least to question, much of what society imposes upon the individual: questioning and/or rejection of the compulsions made by the conformity complex. Elsewhere, Lawrence explained what he meant by conceiving of an “allotropic” self. Through the course of an individual’s life, he or she undergoes change:

In all this change, I maintain a certain integrity. But woe betide me if I try to put my finger on it. If I say of myself: I am this, I am that!—then, if I stick to it, I turn into a stupid fixed thing, like a lamppost. I shall never know wherein lies my integrity, my individuality, my me. I can never know it. It is useless to talk about my ego. That only means that I have made up an idea of myself, and I am trying to cut myself out to pattern. (“Why” 197)

Lawrence’s suggestion that he cannot quite put his finger on his individuality implies that it is not an entity separate from his physiological body, from cultural influences, or from his own personal sense of life; indeed, it is a combination of these forces. And yet, it is not simply “a soul, or a body,” nor “a mind . . . or a nervous system. . . . The whole is greater than the part” (“Why” 195). Neither is the naked self a mathematical summation of the various parts. Such an approach, to separate even theoretically “the soul” from “the body,” is not only impossible but also an act of the most dangerous kind of reductionism leading to mechanization and reification of the body.

Conversely, it is not to be inferred that Lawrence is attempting to encourage readers to resist *all* social influences. It must also be cautioned that Lawrence is not proposing a kind of biological determinism. He is critical only of the ways in which the conformity complex endeavors to convince us of our *blank-slatedness*, as beings without *any* innate structures. Lawrence opposed the popular views, central to many “progressive” philosophies, of the blank slate and the ghost in the machine.<sup>32</sup> And so Lawrence’s implicit call is that one go on trying to discover one’s naked self, to discover that individuality (that indefinite admixture of genes and

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<sup>32</sup> Lawrence may have had some sympathy with progressive ideas related to the noble savage (against which even Pinker argues), but Lawrence’s application of ideas related to the noble savage were quite distinct from modern progressive movements and, as in Gerald Butler’s view, represented a “high point” in human development.

social influences) that makes identity authentically meaningful, as Ursula and similar characters do.

The older Lawrence got, the more emphatically he believed in the necessity to reject authority in the form of what I call the conformity complex. In *The Man Who Died* (1929), also published as *The Escaped Cock*, Lawrence created a parable of a man, a thinly veiled Jesus Christ, known throughout the novella as the man who died, who shortly after dying rises from the dead. Lawrence explicitly states that this resurrection is specifically of the *procreative body*. Through his death, the risen man came to understand sexual freedom, literally the freeing of his phallus (as implied by the lewdly ironic, alternative title), as the most vital aspect of a person's life; this freedom is also hinted at when a peasant whose rooster flies over the "dry stone wall of an olive orchard" calls out, "O stop him, Master! . . . My escaped cock!" (167). Metaphorically speaking, the stone walls represent the limits of socially accepted behavior; outside the walls are those desires, practices, and taboos that the naked self may feel as more fulfilling, as the cock does in its attempt to escape. When freed from repression, individuals seek sexual fulfillment in practices considered taboo, and Lawrence shows a way not to be afraid to go beyond socially accepted standards of sexual behavior. The peasant represents those who fear sexual freedom. While the peasant may deserve respect from man who died, since the peasant is kind to him, the peasant is not a person with whom the man can connect. Moreover, the peasant and his wife lack "splendor" and "courage"; in the risen man's view, they "had no nobility," but he acknowledges that it was only "fear [that] made them compassionate" (169). Fear is a primary tool of the conformity complex.

*St. Mawr* depicts how moral codes, such as those propagated by the conformity complex, inhibit vital and spontaneous feelings that generate meaningful connection between individuals.

In order to allow such connections to develop, individuals must reject moral codes, no matter their source. The Christ-figure's rebirth implies that he has come back to life unencumbered by the moral restrictions of religious and social ideologies. He says to the peasant, "Don't be afraid. . . . I am not dead. They took me down too soon. So I have risen up. Yet if they discover me, they will do it all over again. . . ." He spoke in a voice of old disgust. Humanity! Especially humanity in authority! There was only one thing it could do," destroy; and the man who died refuses to be killed again (168). In order to show that his resurrection is *specifically* of the procreative body and not of the spirit, he declares: "The teacher and the saviour are dead in me; now I can go about my business, into my own single life" (174). Thus, Lawrence suggests that teachers and saviors, *per se*, are aligned with the reformation of society and merely disseminate new (and sometimes old) moral systems.

Though Lawrence only dabbled in ideas about large-scale social reformation (in novels like *The Plumed Serpent* and *Aaron's Rod*), he gave up such hopes as quixotic, preferring the pragmatism of individual realizations. The man who died freed himself from his previous moral obligations to help other people and allowed himself to seek the fulfillment found in achieving sexual connection, where and when it arose. One might be tempted to object to Lawrence here, that helping other people and achieving sexual connection are not mutually exclusive. However, the novella implies that living one's life *for* others, as Jesus did, may lead not only to social punishment, but just as important to the repression of the naked self.<sup>33</sup> Being resurrected, he recognizes that "he was alone, utterly alone . . . , and all that remained now was the great void

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<sup>33</sup> Lawrence implies that people who live for others do so through an imprudent sacrifice of their own selves. The more popular examples of martyrdom include Jesus of Nazareth, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Socrates, historical figures who were killed, in part, because they followed moral obligations to "save" people. Though MLK is obviously anachronistic, Lawrence implies that any such sacrifices of the naked self are imprudent and destructive, including even, for example, mother or father "martyrs" who continually forgo development of certain aspects of their naked selves in order to conform to their social roles, such as provider or nurturer.

nausea of utter disillusion” (168). The man’s disillusion with the disastrous effects of devotion to social creeds is what frees him to pursue sexual connection, qualified in the following description:

Risen from the dead, he had realised at last that the body, too, has its little life, and beyond that, the greater life. He was virgin, in recoil from the little, greedy life of the body. But now he knew that virginity is a form of greed; and that the body rises again to give and to take, to take and to give, ungreedily. Now he knew that he had risen for the woman, or women, who knew the greater life of the body, not greedy to give, not greedy to take, and with whom he could mingle his body. (178)

So-called *free love*, however, is not Lawrence’s vision. The kind of sexual connection that results from free love is not meaningful in Lawrence’s view. Desire arises for the man who died only when there is an organic connection between himself and another person. This comes out of Lawrence’s insistence that for fulfillment, an organic connection between what is often considered as mind and body must guide an individual. However, the peasant’s wife wants the man who died to desire her, and “he would have desired her if he could. But he could not want her, though he felt gently towards her soft, crouching, humble body. But it was her thoughts, her consciousness, he could not mingle with” (177). He could have “mingled” his *body* with her, but it would have been without desire. Promiscuity is often characterized as sex without a *whole* (or organic) connection. Moreover, this critique of promiscuity also applies to sexual politics that necessarily incorporates a power dynamic, which is not about sexual connection but domination. Lawrence has the man who died reject the idea that domination, and its associated sexual politics, is a necessary component of a sexual relationship. Implied here is the idea that conventional notions of free love merely constitute another version of the mechanization of the

body for pleasure. By rejecting the merely *sexual* act with the peasant's wife, the man who died maintains the integrity of his sexual freedom as well as his individual autonomy.

In place of free love on the one hand and monogamy on the other, Lawrence depicts a relationship characterized rather by loyalty and sexual freedom. The symbol representing the principle of this path is Isis, "but not Isis, Mother of Horus. It was Isis Bereaved, Isis in Search" (188). In Lawrence's mythology, resurrection figures prominently. His personal symbol, for example, the phoenix, maintains the idea of resurrection, along with the man who died and the use of Osiris in this story.<sup>34</sup> While Osiris's body has been dismembered and scattered across the earth, Isis, as "Isis in Search," represents a woman who understands an individual's need for wholeness, for the organic connection within a person *and* between people: "She must find his hands and his feet, his heart, his thighs, his head, his belly, she must gather him together and fold her arms round the re-assembled body till it became warm again, and roused to life, and could embrace her, and could fecundate her womb" (188). While the narrator says that "rare women wait for the reborn man" (189), it would be reductionist to assume that the male principle is the active figure in Lawrence's mythology. As in the passage in which Isis warms Osiris's body to life again, the woman or female principle, Isis, gathers together the male principle, Osiris. In this configuration, she is primary and essential to the male's regeneration and resurrection.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, in Lawrence's conception of resurrection, readers encounter the idea of the self in opposition to culture and conformity. Resurrection comprises the process of self-

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<sup>34</sup> Osiris is the Egyptian god of rebirth, among other things. Lawrence's redeployment of religious symbols, as with the Holy Ghost in *Studies in Classic American Literature*, maintains a coherence of interrelated themes across his reappropriations through his eclectic borrowing from a variety of different religions and mythologies.

<sup>35</sup> Also, Ursula, the female protagonist of the last third of *The Rainbow*, is shown to be more active and stronger in character than Anton Skrebensky, or any other male character, because she undergoes the same process of rejection of social ideologies that the man who died and Osiris represent in *The Man Who Died*. These important characteristics are in no way solely aspects of male characters.

recognition as an autonomous agent; being “reborn” is the process of sloughing off socially imposed ideologies. The resurrection of Osiris and the man who died is synonymous with the important climax in *The Rainbow* in which Ursula discards the “shell” of social ideology and shoots forth the kernel of her individuality. Rebirth is characterized in Lawrence’s works as the wholesome valuation of the self through the body over social or religious teachings; these scenes depict the rebirth of the naked self.

Through this concept of resurrection (rejection of socially imposed value systems) and through the naked self’s recognition of the repressive domination of society over individuals (as in the man’s crucifixion), the man who died discovers the power of sex and the need to maintain independence from social prescriptions. He meets a woman with whom he does mingle body and mind. Or rather, he is able to mingle his *wholeness* with the *wholeness* of another person. Two emotions rise up, that of self-fulfillment from their sexual union and fear against the threat of domination by society: “She is like the sunshine upon me . . . . I have never before stretched my limbs in the sunshine as her desire for me. The greatest of all gods granted me this” (202). But while he feels the powerful fulfillment of sexual union with a whole woman, he comprehends the danger of potential violence: “If they can, they will kill us” (202) and later says to himself, “Not twice!”; he will not let them kill him again: “My wits against theirs” (210).

Some critics have attacked Lawrence as a propagator of patriarchal authority, but, as I have already indicated, he was interested in the liberation of both men and women, particularly in regards to sexuality.<sup>36</sup> In contrast to certain tenets of sociobiology—such as the idea that men,

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<sup>36</sup> Among some of the female critics who condemn Lawrence for his portrayals of women include, most notably, Kate Millet who argues in *Sexual Politics* (1970) that Lawrence disguises patriarchal domination through human nature. Similarly, John R. Henderson argues in *The Reactionaries: Yeats, Lewis, Pound, Eliot, Lawrence: A Study of the Anti-Democratic Intelligentsia* (1966) that Lawrence and some of his contemporaries portrayed women as submissive to the sadism of their male counterparts. On the other hand, certain female critics defend Lawrence. Notwithstanding Camille Paglia’s reputation as somewhat anti-feminist, in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article,

more than women, possess strong sexual desires—Lawrence acknowledged that women are equally capable of possessing a powerful libido. Ursula Brangwen and Connie Chatterley are examples of women who are aware of their own intense sexual impulses. And yet, it is important to remember that “to explain [a] behavior is not to exonerate the behavior” (Pinker 179). The fact that Connie and Mellors have an affair that is quite probably the most fulfilling experience of their lives does not necessarily excuse the fact that they deceived Clifford Chatterley. Moreover, a belief in human nature does not imply that all people undergo the drives of their *nature* equally. There may be men or women who feel intense urges toward sexual intimacy, while there are indeed other people who barely feel any sexual desire whatsoever. It is not implied here that either experience is abnormal but rather that individuals possess various human traits whose intensity exists as on a bell curve, as I mentioned in my introductory chapter. Those who feel more intense desires and impulses, sexual or otherwise, are not necessarily exonerated from any betrayals they may have enacted in the course of fulfilling their desires. Even if what might be considered *human nature* is no more than a kind of incongruous, conflicting summation of drives and tendencies, we do better to acknowledge them rather than to suppress their existence.

The point is to raise the question: What are we to do with our desires, sexual or otherwise? Lawrence believed that it would be unwise to pretend that such innate desires do not exist and that it would be fatuous to presume that they are only malleable social constructs. It may be telling why Ford Maddox Ford took such a keen interest in Lawrence. Ford, like Lawrence, was deeply interested in sexual mores and the powerful impulses that attempt to break out of social constraints regarding sexuality. *The Good Soldier* (1915) is, in Ford’s own words,

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“Academic Feminists Must Begin to Fulfill their Noble, Animating Ideal” (1997), she defends Lawrence against Millet by arguing that such feminist critiques reduce works of art to merely to certain aspects of their *political* content.

“a ‘serious . . . analysis of the polygamous desires that underlie all men’” (qtd. in Stannard xi). Whether or not *all* men have polygamous desires, it is important to recognize his insistence that those men (and women) who do feel them do so naturally, organically. Moreover, it is a serious analysis, indeed, when readers come to recognize that all of Edward Ashburnham’s attempts to satisfy his polygamous desires end disastrously. Ford’s narrator in *The Good Soldier*, John Dowell, however, ironically disavows all impingement of conventional morality: “Mind, I am not preaching anything contrary to accepted morality. I am not advocating free love in this or any other case. Society must go on, I suppose” (160). However, acknowledging natural tendencies, as Ford does, leads us to question common ways of thinking about desire that are tied up with common practices that cross cultural boundaries and their specific social institutions, such as marriage. As I will explore in the next few chapters, monogamy itself may be a social institution that represses natural tendencies in order to maintain the stability of society.

In line with the implications of Lawrence’s *The Escaped Cock*, Ford’s *The Good Soldier* shows readers how disaster may stem from the ways individuals are trapped by fixed social constructs, trapped between sexual and emotional stifling by the repressively and seemingly impassable barriers of social morality in their search for freedom. The catastrophes surrounding the Dowells and the Ashburnhams have one value, Dowell writes: “I dare say it worked out for the greatest good of *the body politic*” (152, my emphasis). He continues: “Conventions and traditions I suppose work blindly but surely for the preservation of the normal type; for the extinction of proud, resolute and unusual individuals” (152). If we believe that Leonora is a paradigmatic model of Ford’s “normal type,” then we recognize that society is necessarily destructive. In Dowell’s words, “It was as if Leonora and Nancy banded themselves together to do execution, for the sake of humanity, upon the body of a man who was at their disposal. . . . I

tell you there was no end to the tortures they inflicted upon him . . . [because Leonora's] desires were those of the woman who is needed by society" (152). According to the novel, society is certainly destructive to those Dowell refers to as "unusual individuals," the non-conformists who feel, think, and act other than ways society prescribes. "Society must go on, I suppose," Edward writes, "and society can only exist if the normal, if the virtuous, and the slightly-deceitful flourish, and if the passionate, the headstrong, and the too-truthful, are condemned to suicide and madness" (160-61). Therefore, in line with much of Lawrence's fiction, Ford's novel suggests that moral codes, not the "natural" and organic sexual desires, are responsible for much of human suffering, and that (despite Dowell's disavowal of "immoral" ideas) it is more ethical to encourage men and women to act on their passionate yearnings rather than to prohibit them on so-called "moral" grounds, which, as seen in *The Good Soldier*, leads to the destruction of "unusual individuals."

The moral outlook presented in these works exposes the wasted efforts of grand social and political reform, even on the local and personal levels; they qualify what kinds of social amelioration can occur. In an essay on Walt Whitman, Lawrence declared that "[t]he essential function of art is moral. Not aesthetic, not decorative, not pastime and recreation. But moral, . . . a passionate implicit morality, not didactic. A morality that changes the blood, rather than the mind" (*Studies* 180). An important characteristic of rebellious novels is the idea that morality ought to be based on sympathy, not codified principles. Thus, Lawrence criticized Whitman's moral urge toward "merging and self-sacrifice" (184). Merging and self-sacrifice are not sympathy, Lawrence contended. Sympathy, as Lawrence described it, was much more contextual: "That negro slave suffers from slavery. He wants to free himself. . . . If I can help him I will: I will not take over his wounds and his slavery to myself. But I will help him fight

the power that enslaves him” (184). And of another situation, Lawrence compared two women who have syphilis: ““Look! She wants to infect all men with syphilis. We ought to kill her,”” and of the other, ““Look! She has a horror of syphilis. If she looks my way I will help her to get cured.’ *This is sympathy*. The soul judging for herself, and preserving her own integrity” (184-85, my emphasis). Lawrence personally abolished all morality based on codes and absolutes, moral doctrines that eliminate the context and the specific situation from the moral feeling. Elsewhere he wrote: “It’s no good inventing Thou Shalt Nots!” (“Why” 197). In his Whitman essay, Lawrence connected how we imagine “the soul” with his conception of “integrity,” which is what I have described as the organic connection between the mind and the body. For Lawrence, then, it is the living moment that plays a vital role in life and morality. The moment is always alive and changing; by insisting upon this critical aspect, “the soul judging for herself,” we understand how essential to Lawrence’s philosophy the naked self is in terms of life and morality. Therefore, Lawrence’s conception of sympathy is similar to Forster’s simple but profound creed: “Only connect. . . .” (*Howards End* 21).

#### E. M. Forster and Paths for Meaningful Human Connection

In *Howards End*, E. M. Forster shows how even cheerfulness could become mechanical. Forster dramatized the individual’s conflict with society and authority, the deep desire for spiritual fulfillment in the face of human reification, and the ethical crisis in the responsibility of the individual faced with human poverty and suffering. Through *Howards End*, he also revealed to readers the deep spiritual necessity to recognize the importance of the humanistic principle that people ought to cherish personal relations as the flame of social existence above God, State, and even, somewhat ironically, the idea of “humanity.” In his famous essay entitled “What I Believe,” Forster writes, “I hate the idea of causes; and if I had to choose between betraying my

country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.” Relatedly, *Howards End* exposes the paradoxical dilemma of the near impossibility of people connecting enduringly to each other as individuals, while maintaining at the same time the human necessity to endeavor to connect meaningfully as a redemptive effort against the reifying and mechanizing forces that propel civilization toward so-called “progress.”

The opening scenes of the novel suggest that the primary theme of *Howards End* is the seeming impossibility of creating enduring personal connections in the modern world. Forster tells readers that Helen Schlegel has fallen in love with Paul Wilcox and has come to admire his family dearly (37). However, almost immediately their love dissolves; their connection is severed by the world of “telegrams and anger” (40), or what is later shown to be bureaucracy and aggression. The connection itself, however, begins in “romance” and sexuality (38). Forster described it as passionate: “[T]he heave of her bosom flattered him. Passion was possible and he became passionate. Deep down in him something whispered: ‘This girl would let you kiss her; you might not have such a chance again’” (38). Anticipating readers’ possible dismissal of Helen’s romantic attitude or Paul’s momentary feeling simply as flights of fancy, Forster writes: “the poetry of that kiss, the wonder of it, the magic that there was in life for hours after it—who can describe that?” (38). Lawrence endeavored to describe poetically such moments of passionate intimacy, but Forster could not; it seems to have been beyond his artistic temperament. The furthest Forster could go was to appreciate the sexual yearning in people. Aziz, in *A Passage to India*, for instance, “was repelled by the pedantry and fuss with which Europe tabulates the facts of sex. Science,” Aziz thinks, “didn’t interpret his [sexual] experiences when he found them in a German manual, because by being there they ceased to be *his* experiences” (116, my emphasis). Forster suggests that science, when utilized by the

conformity complex, abstracts sexuality, removing it from the realm of the individual and personal and moving it to the generalized “laws” of nature.

Forster did appreciate passion and desire, however, and he linked them to the naked self. Again, as if anticipating his readers’ possible inclination to reject Helen’s feelings as merely romantic, he insisted that readers ought to appreciate the fact that “by collisions of this trivial sort the doors of heaven may be shaken open. To Helen, at all events, her life was to bring nothing more intense than the embrace of this boy” (38-39). The passage demonstrates that “the poetry” of a kiss and the intensity of a moment when an individual emotionally and physically connects to another human being may bring the deepest and most profound fulfillment in human life. However, for Helen, the morning after their passionate connection brings dissolution and disillusionment. Paul betrays his terror of maintaining this connection and “for a moment,” she tells Margaret, “the whole Wilcox family was a fraud, just a wall of newspapers and motor-cars and golf clubs, and that if it fell I should find nothing behind it but panic and emptiness” (39). The Wilcoxes are a family of appearances. This was not caricature by Forster. They are more than appearances, but their thoughts about and interactions with the world and with one another have a fundamentally superficial and mechanical character.

The phrase “panic and emptiness,” repeated throughout the novel, describing the life of the Wilcoxes, implies that the Wilcox family is acutely anxious of human connection. They so completely accept the values of the business world—profit and efficiency, order and scientific precision—that they develop a phobia toward human connection. While the Schlegels symbolically represent the *human instincts* toward poetry, emotion, and the expression of human desire for connection, the Wilcoxes represent the *social instincts* for order, civility, and humanity’s domination over the chaos of the world. The use of the word “panic” implies the

Wilcoxes' fear of the chaotic and irrational nature of human emotion; if they were to explore and express their emotions, it would likely undermine their cold dominance over the world and their selves. The dominance that they seek over their own selves is akin to the dominance Gerald Critch seeks over the mine and the colliers.

Moreover, the word "emptiness" makes explicit the lack of fulfillment in which their fears leave them. However, they have become so cold and mechanical, so hard and insensitive—in a word, repressed—that they are unaware of their lack of fulfillment. Forster implies that attempts to keep order, civility, and control over one's self by repressing one's human instincts leaves the individual empty. Margaret Schlegel observes the difference between her own worldview and that of the Wilcoxes, the *human* in contrast to the *social* instincts: "[T]here is a great outer life," she says to Helen, "that you and I have never touched—a life in which telegrams and anger count. Personal relations, which you and I think supreme are not supreme there. There[,] love means marriage settlements; death, death duties. . . . This outer life, though obviously horrid, often *seems* the real one" (40, my emphasis). Margaret recognizes that the socio-economic forces to which the Wilcoxes willingly submit, and to which they sacrifice themselves, prevail in the modern western world, in the context of which human instincts and personal connections have virtually no value. But Margaret acknowledges that the outer world only *seems* the real one.

To that end, Forster shows a key aspect in the mechanizing process in people's attempts for social reform. In Forster's view, even causes, or fighting the good fight (as it is often described), lead to emptiness, turning the one who fights into a *machine* for reform. Forster contrasted Margaret's ideas with the quixotic beliefs of her political activist friends who were concerned with ameliorating the entirety of society:

Others attacked the fabric of society—property, interest, etc.; she [Margaret] only fixed her eyes on a few human beings, to see how, under present conditions, they could be made happier. Doing good to humanity was useless: the many coloured efforts thereto spreading over the vast area like films and resulting in a universal gray. To do good to one, or, as in this case, to a few, was the utmost she dare hope for. (121)

Margaret is consequently ridiculed for her pragmatic (as opposed to their quixotic) ideas because, Forster tells us, people “cannot bear to hear their ideals belittled” (121). However, her point is sensible and practical in terms of the novel. Leonard Bast receives no help from social reforms, and the money and energy expended in national reform, which brought about no significant change to the population, would have made a world of difference in his life. The Schlegels “cared deeply about politics, though not as the politicians would have us care. . . . [T]he world would be a gray, bloodless place were it entirely composed of Schlegels. But, the world being what it is, perhaps they shine out in it like stars” (41). Forster renounces causes and the idea of social reform as inherently useless and wasteful. That energy, he maintains, would better be employed through localized and personal relationships rather than expended on the national and heroic scales.

In *A Passage to India*, Forster reiterates this view. Mr. Fielding believes in education. However, he neither believes in the institution of education nor in a particular methodology. In a scene in which Aziz is scared to challenge authority—which if he did, he would “get into trouble”—Mr. Fielding replies that he, on the other hand, has “nothing to lose” because he is not worried about losing his job after siding against the English authorities. He declares, “I believe in teaching people to be individuals, and to understand other individuals. It’s the only thing I do believe in” (132-33). The idea that a meaningful experience results when individuals connect to

one another on a personal level may be a commonplace assumption. However, most ideals, including that of education, tend to discard the importance of understanding individuals. Forster asserts that the idealizing or universalizing tendency found within the great reforming projects, such as the political movements (communism, for example) or religions (Christianity, in particular) sound good in theory but tend to fail in practice due to their grand scales.

Emphasizing his critique, Forster describes the following interchange: Miss Quested announces that there “will have to be something universal in [India]—I don’t say religion for I’m not religious, but something, or how else are barriers to be broken down?” Aziz realizes that Miss Quested “was only recommending the universal brotherhood he sometimes dreamed of, but as soon as it was put into prose it became untrue” (156). The theme of universal brotherhood is an all too common theme in Western ideologies—and eastern ideologies, as well, according to Aziz. And it is the theme of universal brotherhood that becomes “untrue,” idealistic, and impracticable “in prose.”<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, according to Forster, the theme of universal brotherhood is not only impracticable, but, as *Passage* shows, it functions as propaganda. Not unlike the “trial” and crucifixion of the man who died, the trial of Aziz, both in the legal and the social courts, was full of judgment and punishment. Lawrence’s man who died asserted that people would kill him if they could. He does not necessarily give specific reasons as to why, but the implication, beyond the fact that they had already killed him once, is that societies will do what they must in order to preserve their idealism; sacrifice and martyrdom are part of that idealism. Similar to Josef K. in Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* and Lawrence’s the man who died, both Aziz and Mr. Fielding suffer at the social trial that seems perennially being conducted. Anything can and will be used against

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<sup>37</sup> I will discuss the critique of universal brotherhood within other rebellious novels in later chapters, particularly in Chapter 5 in my discussion of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*.

those brought to the attention of social judiciary action, much like what happens in Meursault's trial in Albert Camus's *The Stranger*. Society places itself in opposition in regards to unusual individuals. Thus social authority, these novels show, tends to be dangerous, repressive, and destructive to individuals. The reader is then prompted to become highly suspicious of authority in all its manifestations. At the same time, readers are encouraged to seek out their own naked selves, which may be the most profound and liberating experience of their lives.

Forster rendered representations of the naked self, as did many of his counterparts who are often associated with British modernism. In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster acknowledges the conflict between the discovery of the naked self and the interests of the conformity complex: "Every institution and vested interest is against such a search: organized religion, the state, the family in its economic aspect, have nothing to gain, and it is only when outward prohibitions weaken that it can proceed: history conditions it to that extent" (172-73). While outward prohibitions seem only to have become stronger since 1927, Lawrence and Forster—in their novels, criticism, and correspondences—have brought to the forefront, and consequently thrust forth a new offshoot in the development of the novel that was only implied by earlier novelists: *the naked self exists*.

Whereas Lawrence depicted Ursula's search for sexual fulfillment as part of her path toward self-discovery, Forster comparably depicts Leonard Bast on his own, philosophic path. Margaret says to Bast: "You tried to get away from the frogs that are stifling us all—away past books and houses[,] to the truth. You were looking for a real home" (133). The Schlegel sisters are drawn to his venture, to confront the terms of social life, to deny that the social and economic forces that crush their spirits are the "real" life, or at least the whole of life. Margaret continues:

We did not have you here out of charity—that bores us—but because we hoped there would be a connection between last Sunday and other days. What is the good of your stars and trees, your sunrise and the wind, if they do not enter into our daily lives? They have never entered into mine, but into yours, we thought—haven't we all to struggle against life's daily grayness, against pettiness, against *mechanical cheerfulness*, against suspicion? I struggle by remembering my friends; others I have known by remembering some place—some beloved place or tree—we thought you one of these. (133-34, my emphasis)

Mechanical cheerfulness is the mark of contemporary society, the stamp of the culture industry, against which individuals must struggle if they are to find fulfillment of the kind that Lawrence and Forster describe.

Moreover, throughout *Howards End*, Forster makes observations about the intense conformity imposed upon individuals by the conformity complex. Forster's observations are in line with the arguments of Horkheimer and Adorno put forth in their *Dialectic of the Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*: "Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Films, radio and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together" (94). The degree to which each branch is unanimous with each other branch is arguable. However, the notion that they compel individuals toward sameness and conformity is less disputable. Such systematization brings about a way of regarding the human body as a machine, or mechanical system, that severs the organic connection that is so essential to human vitality as asserted by the modernist project. The culture industry is only one of the indoctrinating aspects of the conformity complex that dominates the individual from conception until death; other ideological and repressive aspects, as Louis Althusser pointed out in

“Ideological State Apparatuses,” include “the agents of exploitation (capitalists, managers), the agents of repression (soldiers, policemen, politicians, administrators, etc.), and the professional ideologists (priests of all sorts . . .)” (104). The culture industry, through its emphasis on entertainment, keeps people working in a loop of labor and recreation: “Entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism. It is sought by those who want to escape the mechanized labor process so they can cope with it again” (Horkheimer and Adorno 109). “Fun,” they argue, “is a medicinal bath which the entertainment industry never ceases to prescribe” (112). Akin to Marcuse’s concept of “euphoria in unhappiness,” Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the culture industry “makes laughter the instrument for cheating happiness” (112).

Against culture’s mechanical cheerfulness and in conflict with the social compulsion to be optimistic, to see life as “so wonderful,” Margaret Schlegel says, “either some very dear person or some very dear place seems necessary to relieve life’s daily gray, and to show that it *is* gray. If possible, one should have both” (135). To accept that there is a daily gray is only the beginning of the Frankfurt School’s *negative* solution. Lawrence’s and Forster’s novels encourage readers to negate the ideologies that are imposed upon them by society through an aesthetic experience of the daily gray—to include the common suffering implied by the human condition and also the social forces that exacerbate it. This is how Forster and Lawrence shows readers how to reestablish the eminence of *negative* power that is continually being systematically obliterated by the culture industry through *positive* outlooks, optimism, and fun.

Forster shows how exacerbated the tragic situation of the human condition has become through the events of Leonard Bast’s life. Helen says of the capitalistic “pragmatists,” namely the Wilcoxes, that they “talk of the survival of the fittest, and cut down the salaries of their clerks, and stunt the independence of all who may menace their comfort, but yet they believe that

somehow good—it is always that sloppy ‘somehow’—will be the outcome, and that in some mystical way the Mr. Basts of the future will benefit because the Mr. Basts of today are in pain” (172). The “sloppy somehow” implies a moral insensitivity (by the process of mechanization) and a historical ignorance embodied in the philosophy of the Wilcoxes. In addition to the false belief that the world is a good place, where good naturally and mystically results from order and conformity, Forster exposes the ignorance and naiveté of the Wilcoxes. Because consumption increases in the presence of historical ignorance, capitalism suppresses historical knowledge and moral sensitivity. In a condition where historical knowledge and moral sensitivity are suppressed, people lose their sense of moral sympathy because they believe in the fantastic and mythological qualities of faith—including faith in religious, political, or economic ideologies.

In dramatic fashion, Forster presents a struggle between the positive mythology of social ideologies and the complex grayness of the human condition. The “goblins” in Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony* subvert some of the highest held ideals in Western civilization. “They were not aggressive creatures,” Forster writes, “they merely observed in passing that there was no such thing as splendour or heroism in the world. . . . Helen could not contradict them. . . . Panic and emptiness! The goblins were right” (45). Forster forces his readers to see that the world *is* gray, mechanical cheerfulness alienates us from ourselves, and splendor and heroism are destructive illusions. He continues, entertaining an ironic doubt of the grayness, then asks, mockingly,

And the goblins—they had not been there at all? They were only the phantoms of cowardice and unbelief? One healthy human impulse would dispel them? Men like the Wilcoxes, or President Roosevelt, would say yes. *Beethoven knew better*. The goblins really were there. They might return—and they did. . . . Panic and emptiness! Even the flaming ramparts of the world might fall. Beethoven *chose* to make all right in the end.

He built the ramparts up. He blew with his mouth for the second time, and again the goblins were scattered. He brought back the gusts of splendour, the heroism, the youth, the magnificence of life and of death, and amid vast roarings of a superhuman joy, he led his Fifth Symphony to its conclusion. *But the goblins were there. They could return. He had said so bravely. . . .* (45-46, emphasis added)

Against the pronouncements from ideologies in Western civilization telling us to devote ourselves to ideals and causes (or cheerfulness), *Howards End* reveals that these ideologies are devastating to individual development. While Beethoven may have chosen to create a triumphant conclusion, he was honest enough, in Forster's view, to show the gray darkness of the world, to give the goblins a voice instead of suppressing those voices that displease.

Forster implores us to listen to the voices of the goblins, to hear the voices of Leonard Bast and Margaret and Helen Schlegel, even the voices of Mr. and Mrs. Wilcox, to keep these voices from being suppressed. In hearing these voices, individuals might come to understand better who they are *as* individuals and to see how they might achieve a deeper fulfillment of their physical and psychical needs rather than to deny their existence. This is how rebellious novels help individuals toward self-discovery. Refusing to judge each other based on moral codes, and rejecting the dictates of the conformity complex, they may more easily seek and find spiritual fulfillment.

#### James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and the Problem of Spiritual Fulfillment

Another rebellious novelist, who despite being from the Irish tradition is often associated with British modernism, is James Joyce. One of the key commonalities that binds together these novelists is the attempt to present, realistically and soberly, those aspects of the modern human condition that crush out individuality and spontaneity. Another common view amongst these

novelists is that they saw the latter as vital aspects of self-fulfillment. They may have focused on different aspects of what obstructs human connection, but, together, British modernism helps to illustrate the deep cultural problems that prevent spiritual fulfillment. Forster often depicted what he saw as “the daily gray,” that which obstructs spiritual development, whether it came from causes and social reform or from philosophies that ultimately caused “panic and emptiness.” Lawrence saw a key component of that obstruction as the disintegration of the organic connection within and between individuals through the crucifixion of the procreative body particularly as it reified and mechanized the body. Ford Maddox Ford saw it as the destruction of “unusual types” (read: nonconformists) for the preservation of stability in society.

This emphasis on what obstructs meaningful connection in human relationships is a variation on a theme amongst these novelists. In *Ulysses*, for example, Joyce accentuates the numerous ways in which a pervasive *absence* of love affects the citizens of his Dublin, particularly for Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom. While other characters participate in what might superficially pass for love (the affair between Molly and Blazes Boylan, the camaraderie in the pubs and work places throughout *Ulysses*’s Dublin, the orthodox and unquestioning patriotism of Dublin’s citizenry for Ireland), Joyce presents none of this so-called love as spiritually meaningful or fulfilling. There are only a few moments when characters actually mean something to one another. For example, Bloom finds something satisfying through his masturbatory moment with Gerty McDowell, in his interactions with Stephen in “Eumeaus” and “Ithaca,” and possibly through his rump-kiss after his return home to Molly. Although Stephen has found another person to whom he could connect, it seems lost on him what potentially meaningful connection he might find in his relationship with Bloom. In the end, however, all of these moments of connection end quickly and effulgently, like the shooting star that Stephen and

Bloom see as they urinate outside Bloom's home. Death and loneliness, as thematic figurations, shape the thoughts of Stephen and Bloom as well as the structure of *Ulysses*.

Therefore, one is left to wonder whether Bloom actually achieves meaningful connection with anyone in the novel. The easy answer is *sort of*. He ultimately fails in his attempts to connect with Molly and with Stephen, but there is a scene where two human beings connect to one another for a moment. Gerty recognizes herself as performing a feminine ideal of sexuality, but she finds fulfillment through it and achieves connection. Her fulfillment is not superficial, and neither is Bloom's.<sup>38</sup> Bloom would not have been satisfied if Gerty had not achieved fulfillment herself. "Thankful for *little mercies*," he muses (13.789-90, emphasis added). While their experience does not necessarily result in a strong, enduring connection between two human beings, it is nevertheless a small mercy: an encounter that satisfies both participants, in different ways, allowing for trust to be roused and a powerful though ephemeral moment in each of their lives. This act, though small and transitory, is the most hopeful scene in a novel that shows the almost unqualified spiritual catastrophe of the modern age. It is not much, maybe next to nothing, and Joyce makes certain not to let his readers make too much of it. But it is something. Thus, the world depicted in *Ulysses* does not bear up the hope that the society depicted would have insisted it boasted. There is little hope in *Ulysses*. It comes from strangers, from being open to spontaneity and the calls of the physical body, where neither person comes with an agenda for dominance, power, or control.

The sober hope in *Ulysses* exposes the failure of traditional means of fulfillment, from helping others (as Bloom tries again and again with Stephen) and from sheer satisfactions of the

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<sup>38</sup> Despite some of the insights made by Victoria Mahaffrey, who has condemned Bloom's and Gerty MacDowell's interaction as the victimization and objectification of women by the patriarchal Irish ideal of feminine sexuality, there is a momentary connection between these characters. Sexual politics are reduced by the excitement of a spontaneous attraction and fulfillment between Bloom and Gerty.

body (as Molly seeks with Boylan). Bloom and Gerty are open to the connection between men and women in what is shown as a natural desire, receptive to the artlessness in spontaneity, and feel the power that spontaneity has for temporary though profound connection. Therefore, *Ulysses* indicates for readers the way toward future possibilities for self-fulfillment in the midst of the multitude of conventions of the conformity complex that hinder, if they do not outright prevent, connection between human beings.<sup>39</sup>

Virginia Woolf's *rebellious* perspective, as presented in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), seems as though it integrates views quite similar to her contemporary rebellious novelists from British modernism. In fact, scenes in *Mrs. Dalloway* evoke similar emotions and challenge the same traditions that can be found across the oeuvre of Lawrence, Ford, Forster, and Joyce. She identifies and bewails the various sources of spiritual stagnation, from the numbing influence of the "European War" on Septimus to the stifling effects of a "practical marriage" on Clarissa. Like Lawrence's heroines (Ursula Brangwen, Lou Witt, and somewhat less so Connie Chatterley), Clarissa Dalloway is torn and conflicted by some mystic, undiscovered feelings within herself that have been suppressed throughout her life. She struggles with the conformity complex that suffocates those feelings. For example, Clarissa recognizes that "not for a moment did she believe in God" (29). More importantly, as though echoing Mrs. Schlegel, she remarks that "the religious ecstasy made people callous (so did causes); dulled their feelings" (12). Yet, at the same time, she indicates her devotion to certain traditions and values of English society that she will only later come to recognize as part of what suffocates her, including the belief that

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<sup>39</sup> The "anti-feminist feminist" critic, Camille Paglia, has noted that we will not be able to understand either sex or gender until we have come to clarify our attitude toward nature, human nature, that is. Like Lawrence and Freud, she conceives of human nature as being opposed by social conventions and civilization. These three writers would disagree on a number of issues, but they have no disagreements on the role of sex in nature. Paglia writes boldly, "Sex is the natural in man" (1).

she must “repay in daily life to her servants,” as well as “dogs and canaries,” and, “above all . . . Richard her husband, who was the foundation of” her life (29).

Still, there was something at the core of her that was unsettling though that she only barely discerned, like Lou Witt’s numb coldness: “There was an emptiness about the heart of life. . . . She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated” (31). At least part of that emptiness at the center of her life was the repression of her sexual feelings for Sally Seton, a woman with whom she had fallen in love and shared a kiss at Bourton. In that moment, “she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. . . . Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. . . . Had not that, after all, been love?” (32). In Woolf’s description, readers hear the echo of Forster’s revelations regarding Helen Schlegel’s reaction to when she kissed Paul Wilcox. Both of these moments become the most powerful and enduring events of each of their respective lives. In *Howards End*, the world of telegraphs and anger stomped out further possibilities of connection between them; in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the fear of breaking convention and compulsory heterosexuality thwart further development of the forbidden union between Clarissa and Sally.

Woolf links both heteronormativity and traditional marriage to the powerful forces that suppress what Clarissa’s naked self prompts her to explore. Both of those forces are part of the conformity complex that compels conformity. Additionally, she indicts the role that patriotism and similar ideals play out through Septimus’s trauma through the war effort. “Septimus was one of the first to volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays. . . . There in the trenches . . . he developed manliness” (86). The ideas of manliness, patriotism, and soldiery do not live up to their glorified status. Septimus, too, became

numb. The effects of fighting alongside a new best friend, Evans, killing men on the other side of the battle lines, and finally seeing Evans ultimately killed, as is common in anti-war novels, eventually led to Septimus's insanity: "[H]e could not feel. He could reason; he could read, Dante for example, . . . he could add up his bill; his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world then—that he could not feel" (88). A nation that seduced him into fighting for "Shakespeare" through ideologically imposed idealism caused him to die.

Throughout the novel, Woolf presents prestigious characters as ruthlessly power hungry despite whatever socially valued characteristics they may possess. After dealing with Mrs. Kilman, a newly born-again Christian who Woolf presents as a sanctimonious and hateful member of society who insufferably makes "you feel her superiority, your inferiority" (12), Clarissa reflects on the general nature of English society. "Love and religion! Thought Clarissa, . . . how detestable they are! . . . The cruelest things in the world" (126). Of course, the more profound, *organic love* that is part of meaningful human connection is not Clarissa's subject here, but the *socialized love* that accompanies value systems within the conformity complex, as in religious forms of love. Indeed, Clarissa even identifies such forms of love as destructive (127). Clarissa's sentiment rings like the reverberations of the ruminations of Rezia, Septimus's wife, who had contemplated earlier that "To love makes one solitary" (23). The love Rezia refers to is the kind engendered through socially stock forms of relationships such as marriage and the social expectations therein. More to the point, both Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw are quite deliberately after Septimus's soul. "Proportion" is the ideological value that they use to impose their dominance and compel conformity through the prestige of their social positions. "Worshipping proportion, Sir William Bradshaw not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it impossible for

the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion—his, if they were men, Lady Bradshaw’s if they were women” (99). As gatekeepers, social judges, and agents of repression of difference, these characters function as parts of the conformity complex’s apparatuses that suppress the naked self, specifically in the cases of Clarissa and Septimus.

Woolf does not merely *imply* how social values, such as proportion, compel conformity; she also targets directly how the very nature of the conformity complex converts dissenters. Proportion’s “sister,” Clarissa calls it, “Conversion, . . . feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to *impose*, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace” (my emphasis). Woolf not only critiques the conformity complex’s power and dominance through repression and conformity, but she also dissects the way in which the complex tends toward surreptitiousness, seducing constituents through the ideals and “false needs” beloved by the populace. Clarissa thinks to herself, “disguised as brotherly love, . . . [conversion] offers help, but desires power; smites out of her way roughly the dissentient or dissatisfied.” More specifically, conversion dwells in the hearts of people, “concealed, as she mostly is, under some plausible disguise, some venerable name; love, duty, self sacrifice,” and that “conversion, fastidious Goddess, loves blood better than brick, and feasts most subtly on the human will” (100). What Woolf identifies as “the human will” is quite synonymous with what I have described as Lawrence’s organic connection: the authentic, naked self. Her description of conversion’s “feasting” on the human will is synonymous with Lawrence’s conception of the conformity complex’s “severing” of the organic connection, which he sees as the process of submission to ideological reification and mechanization, and thus the process of compulsory conformity. In fact, Clarissa even labels those who conform as victims: “[T]hat Goddess whose lust is to over-ride opposition, to stamp indelibly in the sanctuaries of others the image of herself.

Naked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless received the impress of Sir William's will. . . . It was the combination of decision and humanity that endeared Sir William [Bradshaw] so greatly to the relations of his victims" (102).

The critique of the conformity complex in *Mrs. Dalloway* extends beyond the intimation that it creates a quiet desperation in people—as do many rebellious novels. To be sure, Woolf has Clarissa directly link the tendency of the conformity complex to compel conformity and stamp out individuality to Septimus's suicide. (148-49). Although Holmes and Bradshaw had "different verdicts," they were "judges," nevertheless, who "saw nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted" (148). Thus, it was not only in response to the devastation of Septimus's naked self's organic connection wreaked upon him by the atrocities he saw and committed in the war—a war he fought only because he was seduced by similar values and false needs as Clarissa was in her domestic context—but also because of the way Holmes and Bradshaw imposed their medical theories upon him. While, on some level, the doctors intended to help Septimus, they nevertheless contributed to his throwing himself out of the window and impaling himself onto the railings below: "But [Septimus] would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings," Clarissa ponders, "what did *they* want?" (149, emphasis in the original). Woolf implies here what Lawrence's man who died acknowledges explicitly, as I mentioned previously: "Humanity! Especially humanity in authority! There was only one thing it could do": destroy. Human beings, Clarissa considers, when acting as authoritarian aspects of the conformity complex, seek power; in so doing, they destroy those people from whom they take power, those whom they force to submit and conform or destroy through madness and suicide.

Part of Woolf's scathing critique of those characters who are completely devoted to conformity and the conformity complex lies in her exposing their ideological blindness. Holmes and Bradshaw could never consider for a moment that they themselves may have contributed to Septimus's taking of his own life. In fact, Clarissa reflects on the doctors' inability to make sense of it: "And why the devil [Septimus] did it, Dr. Holmes could not conceive" (150). But Clarissa comes to understand why he did it: "Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (184). In this scene, Woolf hammers in the final nail to all of the spiritual fulfillment and meaningful connection with which Forster, Lawrence, Ford, and Joyce were concerned. The seemingly infinite obstructions imposed by the conformity complex are given their final product on human life, that death is better than a life void of spiritual fulfillment. In contemporary society, according to Woolf, one's center evades discovery; attempts for intimacy between people gives way only to distance and misunderstanding—one may also hear T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock lamenting, "That is not what I meant, at all" (110). It is cultural impositions of the kind that Kilman, Holmes, and Bradshaw produce that leads to this terrible suffering: "Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable" (Woolf 185).

### Conclusion

Many characters are at least partially affected by their compelled conformity to the prevailing social attitudes of their culture, particularly the Schlegels, and Ursula Brangwen, Woolf's Kilman, Holmes, and Bradshaw in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Joyce's Molly in *Ulysses*, Forster's Wilcoxes in *Howards End*, Agnes and Herbert Pembroke in *The Longest Journey*, and Ronny Heaslop in *A Passage to India*, along with Lawrence's Skrebensky in *The Rainbow*, Gerald in

*Women in Love*, Rico in *St. Mawr*, the peasant and his wife in “The Man Who Died”—among numerous other characters in these and other novels. In Dickens they may likely have been villains, ending up in jail or dead. In British modernism, their voices are given a different tone. Their conformity is shown to be the source of their deepest sufferings, or the sufferings they inflict upon others. It does not matter to which culture one conforms; according to these novelists, conformity to social ideals is necessarily a repressive act, destructive to the naked self and the organic connection within and among individuals.

A fundamental element of the novels that I have discussed is the idea that fiction, at its best, can reveal to readers what Lionel Trilling called the individuals’ “standing quarrel with culture” (qtd. in *Vanishing* xi). Given the repressive effects of modern ideology and social morality, the naked self’s discovery of itself is almost a forgone conclusion. But some of the philosophical pillars of the Frankfurt School and the artistic and critical works of the British modernist project offer small pathways out of seemingly inexorable conformity. Reading serious fiction as a lived experience, the moment in which the reader aesthetically and vicariously lives the life of the characters, opens up new opportunities for *self*-exploration and *self*-discovery. Lawrence stated a guiding principle in self-discovery: that one must seek a “true relatedness,” that “[e]ach must be true to himself, herself, his own manhood, her own womanhood, and let the relationship work out of itself. This means courage above all things. . . . Courage to accept the life-thrust from within oneself, and from the other person” (“Morality” 174-75). This is how Lawrence encourages us to educate ourselves—not formally, through the ideological apparatus of the State, or the ideological progressivism of the political activists and social reformers—but by comparing the life thrust in ourselves with the life thrust we meet in the characters in the serious novels we read. In order to liberate ourselves from ideological conformity, these novels

suggest that we must discover our naked selves rather than develop a theory of human nature, right and wrong, or moral codes, *a priori*. In practice, they help readers recognize the necessity of contending with the pervasive social forces that compel us to conform, while resisting any tendency to consider individuals without regard to natural or innate structures. Lawrence wrote, with deep pathos, that “if we can’t hear the cries far down in our own forests of dark veins, we can look in the real novels, and there listen in. Not listen to the didactic statements of the author, but to the low calling cries of the characters, as they wander in the dark woods of their destiny” (“The Novel and the Feelings” 205).

In the next chapter, I will explore what I call the repressed self—in characters who recognize their need to resist and reject the imperatives of the conformity complex but fail to do so for various reasons. Through a side-by-side comparative examination of Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* and Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint*, I intend to show, among other things, that Western culture is, at least in part, essentially repressive and that merely recognizing one’s sufferings at the hands of a repressive society does not necessarily allow characters to reject the ways in which they are being repressed.

## CHAPTER 3

THE REPRESSED SELF IN THOMAS HARDY'S *JUDE THE OBSCURE* AND PHILIP ROTH'S *PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT*

A chief characteristic of the works that I describe as rebellious novels is the disillusionment of some of their characters. In the last chapter, I presented an overview of some of the various ways in which British modernism dramatized the means of repression by and resistance to conformity to what I call the conformity complex, the complicated network of social and cultural institutions that compel conformity. In this chapter, I intend to look more closely at the ways in which the conformity complex works not only to *seduce* characters into conformity but also at the ways in which it prevents even those who dissent from fully rejecting its ideals and values. For instance, Thomas Hardy's Jude Fawley describes this process of disillusionment a number of times; one such instance includes a description of his previous commitment to idealistic conventions: "But I don't revere all of them as I did then. I don't believe in half of them. The theologians, the apologists, and their kin the metaphysicians, the high-handed statesmen, and others, no longer interest me. All that has been spoilt for me by the grind of stern reality!" (309).

Jude's phrase, "the grind of stern reality," explains the process by which characters in rebellious novels come to loosen their commitment to idealism and social ideologies. However, even if the characters themselves cannot fully reject the grip of conformity, the aesthetic experience of "the grind of stern reality" within these novels provides a means for readers to see more clearly the coercions of the conformity complex and thereby to make their own disavowals. Consequently, Sue Bridehead and Jude Fawley in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) and Alexander Portnoy in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) share a specific kind of

trajectory of disillusionment in their novels. They begin with a fierce commitment to idealism, are slowly and painfully disillusioned with their commitments, but are in the end unable to reject social conventions. They discover rebellious ideas they come to recognize as more practical and realistic but cannot put them into practice because of their fear of social consequences and because of the repressive forces at work within their psyches. Following their inability to reject conventions and the social consequences for attempting to refuse conformity, these characters meet their disastrous ends.

Conformity is by no means an either/or activity. If we are social creatures, we necessarily conform to various cultural prescriptions of behavior. We learn the language of our family and peers; we adopt idiosyncratic gestures and habits modeled after people whom we admire; we find teachers, formal or otherwise, whom we tend to imitate. All of these behaviors indicate that emulation is tangled up within the web of our self-concept. Such behaviors are neither wholly indistinguishable from our individual personalities nor do they necessarily imply conformity. However, *ideological* conformity, particularly conformity to social conventions, as shown in rebellious novels, has disastrously repressive effects. There are varying degrees of conformity, ranging from compliance to social demands to unreserved acceptance and utter conventionality in regard to socially accepted norms. While it would be wise to consider the degree to which an individual accepts social dictates and what the motives are to conform, it may be inconsequential if the effects are equally calamitous. Robert B. Cialdini observes that it is important to distinguish “between informational and normative conformity motivations, the former based on the desire to form an accurate interpretation of reality and behave correctly, and the latter based on the goal of obtaining social approval from others” (606). However, my contention is that these considerations are of relatively small importance when attempting to

understand the deeply repressive consequences of conformity because both may lead to significantly catastrophic outcomes. Whether a person is striving to “behave correctly” or “obtain social approval,” ideological conformity necessarily shapes an individual’s worldview and imposes a social pattern onto him or her.

Two important qualifications should be made in an argument that states that conformity necessarily leads to disastrous consequences. First, one must consider to what extent particular behaviors that conform to social conventions already coincide with organic self-conceptions that result predominantly from the human condition, from the body’s interaction with the world, and from the psychological make-up of the individual. Our self-concepts are possibly over-determined, but two primary determinants exist. One determinant involves the way in which we absorb social ideologies, semi-consciously, throughout our lifetimes. Another determinant is the naked self—the blend of the biological, psychological, historical, and contextual—that becomes more recalcitrant and noncompliant in response to the impositions of social ideologies. The conscious naked self resists ideologies that do not accord with its own feelings, impressions, and recognitions. Social ideology may hinder or it may support people’s self-discovery, but when they conflict, there tend to be terrible consequences. The rebellious novel insists that the naked self’s prioritization of the self cultivates greater fulfillment. The second qualification has to do with whether an individual’s conformity is real or a pretense. I will discuss this second consideration at length in Chapter 5, where I examine certain kinds of resistance to conformity through a study of such characters as Ellison’s invisible man and Philip Roth’s Coleman Silk, who feign their conformity.

Idealism in the Forms of Convention, Conformity, and Commitment

The Western tradition is replete with wretched conformists, characters who either fail to resist the repressive power of social conventions or whose rejection cannot compensate for the social sanctions levied upon them for that rejection. Numerous examples from British and U. S. fiction come to mind, including Pip in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861), Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Sebastian in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1946), Alden Pyle in Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955), and Esther Greenwood in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), to name but a few. As even this short list of examples reflects, suffering due to social conformity spans across the cultural, historical, and gender differences of the authors.

However, in order to develop the repressive consequences rooted in ideological conformity, while emphasizing the idea that repressive social conformity is not limited to a specific culture or gender, I will explore three characters from two novels from different cultural periods. One of these novels shows the ways in which a female character suffers similarly to her male counterpart. Jude, Sue, and Portnoy endure social consequences when they fail to resist conformity. These characters, in various ways, conform to the ideologically based idealism prominent in their respective societies. The misfortunes of their lives spring primarily from their disastrous struggles with conformity and their inevitable inability to resist it. Only some of the catastrophe follows their attempts for conciliation with the institutions and social systems that promote repressive values. Roth and Hardy, like several other novelists, present the hardships that follow in the wake of characters who are conscious of their own differences from socially constructed ideas of who they are supposed to be but who, nevertheless, persist in acquiescing to social demands and modes of thought. These novels depict characters who are constantly faced with the battle between the social dictates of their cultural world and the powerful motivations,

rooted in their naked selves, which they feel are more legitimate than their social ideologies allow. These novelists emphasize the idea that oppressive adversity is inherent even in our tendency simply to acquiesce to social modes of thought. Thus, they reveal to readers that culture itself—ideologies, value systems, beliefs, and institutions that help to reproduce a culture—tends to be more often than not a great hindrance to fulfillment and actualization.

An important clarification is necessary before continuing. While there may be many cultural values that support the individual—freedom, for instance, may be a value that coincides with an individual’s organic conception of him or herself—too often, as these novels show, ideologies transform supportive values into abstracted *ideals* that can become destructive.<sup>40</sup> Thus, it may be fair to say that the version of freedom, or of any given social value, that these novels reveal as deleterious is that which is wrapped up in idealism. Principles, morals, beliefs, and the like that are inherited through a social *system*—that is inherited through a systematic transmission, in the vein of Althusser’s ISAs—are necessarily transferred to individuals *as* ideals. That is, the social transmission of values is a systematic process through which values become ideals so that idealism and social ideology are virtually indistinguishable. While an individual may have a pragmatic or intuitive knowledge to relax his or her striving after freedom or any other positive value, the system through which such values are imposed, transmitted, and inherited transforms those values into reductive and idealistic practices because, as I have argued in my preceding chapters, such is the nature of social *systems of thought*.

One such value that can become systematized and lead to a character’s demise is the desire to achieve excellence.<sup>41</sup> *Jude the Obscure* deals with the destructive elements in the desire

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<sup>40</sup> See Wayne Burns’s *A Panzaic Theory of the Novel* (2010) for more on the ways in which ideals, as abstractions, become sources of suffering. Also see Ortega y Gasset’s *Meditations on Quixote* (1910) for similar observations.

for excellence. *Portnoy's Complaint* explores the crucial stage of childhood development more deeply. By examining Roth's novel before Hardy's here, in reverse chronology—though a bit later I move back and forth between the two in order to compare them—I intend to illuminate first the crucial dangers of conformity. Alexander Portnoy's mother, in *Portnoy's Complaint*, exhibits god-like qualities that compel Portnoy, as a young child, to become “honest” (4); for his honesty and the other values to which she compels him to conform, she praises him profusely, referring to him as “Einstein the Second” for his great achievements (4). In his desperate desires to earn her fickle approval, he strives, for instance, to be the best student in his classes and succeeds, by and large. We are told that “Teachers go home happy to their husbands because of” him (14). However, young Portnoy also strives to be independent, despite his love for his mother. In one scene, Portnoy has no idea what transgression he has committed, but he knows that he is being punished for something. With insidious layers of guilt and insult, Portnoy's mother enforces the first and possibly strongest ideological apparatus that indoctrinates Portnoy into a systematized way of thinking, inducing him to believe devoutly that his self-worth is measured by his ability to please authority. She orders him out of her house, packs him a lunch, and says, “I don't love you any more, not a little boy who behaves like you do” (15). Moments later, his haughty attitude of rebellion turns into remorse for committing some unknown transgression. When he hammers upon the door, she turns the double lock. His fury and hammering deflate into helplessness and supplication; he asks to be let in “to beg forgiveness” for his sin and “promises her nothing but perfection” (15). This scene is only one example of the

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<sup>41</sup> Alan Donagan and Martin Steinmann, Jr., in “Art and Counterfeit Art” (1959), describe Wayne Burns's argument regarding art and counterfeit art “rather fetching” (252). Burns maintains that *art* gives symbolic illumination of the real world while *counterfeit art* insulates the reader within conventional ways of thinking. One critique that Donagan and Steinmann make is that “any given novel is a member of one of two classes, *art* and *counterfeit art*,” and “that the distinction between these two classes is sharp” (252). Their fair “rebuttal” of Burns's argument asks, primarily, for clarification regarding how to separate the two classes. However, my use of Burns's basic dichotomy is to merge his two classes into a spectrum, thereby complicating but preserving the useful characterization of novelists as illuminating and/or insulating.

ubiquity of her control over him and his conscience. In his psyche, she is omnipresent and omnipotent; she uses these powers, along with guilt and insult, compelling him to behave in ways that she dictates.

Between his genuine desire to please his mother and her stifling his acts of rebellion, there is little room to assert his independence. The only space for autonomy in a life that is dominated by his mother's morality is that which can be kept hidden from her.<sup>42</sup> Sexuality becomes an outlet for his need for autonomy: "My wang was all I really had that I could call my own" (33). Part of Portnoy's ultimate problem, however, is the development of what is sometimes referred to as the Madonna/Whore complex, or what Freud discussed in his essay "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life." Freud describes a disorder that afflicts men with "psychical impotence" who are otherwise "strongly libidinous" (*Sexuality* 48). This disorder stems from the Oedipal Complex and the taboos dealing with sexual desire for one's mother; these sexual taboos, associated with the mother as a virtuous woman, are psychically transferred to other "well-brought up" women, causing "impotence" in some men (55).<sup>43</sup> With Portnoy, the dilemma is compounded by the fact that Sophie Portnoy becomes a kind of seductress for young Alex. For Alex, sexuality becomes interwoven into the fabric of his relationship with his mother and his profound desire for her approval when he was four years old. He recalls her saying, "Who is Mommy's good little boy? Who is the best little boy a

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<sup>42</sup> Portnoy's attempts to keep secret certain acts from the reach of social censorship also supports my argument in Chapter 5, where I deal with identity, secrecy, and the naked self in Roth's *The Human Stain* and Ellison's *Invisible Man*. In Portnoy's case, the pervasive and domineering morality and conformity pervert not only his ability to keep secret and hidden certain desires of his naked self, but also the quality of those desires.

<sup>43</sup> It is important to note that with Portnoy it is not actual "impotence" from which he suffers in his relationships with "well-brought up" [*sic*] women. His dilemma comes from a deep dissatisfaction with the kind of sexual experience he has when involved with women who are committed to their society's sexual morality, women who Freud describes as "frigid" (56). Freud would consider Portnoy to be "psychoanaesthetic," one of many men "who never fail in the act but who perform it without special pleasure—a state of things which is commoner than one might think" (54).

mommy ever had?” In response to these seductive questions, Alex becomes “punchy with delight” (45). Furthermore, not remembering whether the smell that he is recalling is his lunch of tuna fish salad or his mother’s genitals, Portnoy remembers wanting to “growl with pleasure” and noting “how rich with passion” was that moment of maternal seduction (45). Thus, even the space he attempts later in life to mark out for himself, that of sexuality, is already early in his life paradoxically corrupted by the influence of virtue and morality.

In his later life, while Alex overcomes his submissiveness to his mother’s will, he still cannot escape conformity to an idealized system of values. In fact, his relationship with his mother, through her indoctrinating compulsions, frames his mindset through which he becomes submissive to social ideals. Alex unconsciously replaces his striving after approval and capitulation to Sophie’s behavioral mandates with seeking approval from and capitulation to the conformity complex and the system of middle-class, mainstream values. As a child, he was a “little over-innocent endlessly in search of the key to that unfathomable mystery, his mother’s approbation” (49). As a man, he becomes an idealist of another stamp, using language strikingly similar to that of the paragon of idealism, Don Quixote. Alex professes a kind of Marxist idealism when he declares, “I swear that I will dedicate my life to the writing of wrongs, to the elevation of the downtrodden and the underprivileged, to the liberation of the unjustly imprisoned” (170). Roth exposes the irony of Alex’s idealism, purporting righteousness through “socialism and the dignity of man” while revealing his violent cruelty when Portnoy, out of deep frustration with his father’s lack of appreciation for Alex’s ideals, exclaims, “Christ I could strangle him on the spot for being so blind to human brotherhood!” (168-69). Roth’s comedy sometimes obscures the power of what his novels reveal in terms of the destruction of the

crystalline orb of the ideal,<sup>44</sup> but destroying the claims of idealism is precisely what *Portnoy's Complaint* does.

Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* also demonstrates the destructiveness in characters embracing their society's idealism. While *Portnoy's Complaint* warrants greater attention in this regard, *Jude the Obscure* will demand more attention below. One important similarity in these novels is the way that conformity complexes exploit Jude's and Portnoy's natural affinities.<sup>45</sup> In Portnoy's case, affection and his desire to please, characteristics of his naked self, are at first exploited by his mother to mold a young man in such a way that fulfills her need to control another human being, justifying such control with the claims of maternal love. However, the conformity complex usurps Portnoy's submissiveness to the authority of his mother and takes control of his future by compelling his conformity to its moral system. Likewise, the conformity complex exploits Jude's natural affinities for affection, kindness, and fairness and thereby turns his affinities into ideals. Just as Sophie rationalizes her domineering ways with the rhetoric of maternal love, the conformity complex justifies its domination over the lives of individuals with the rhetoric of moral idealism. At the end of *Portnoy*, Naomi, the panzaic Zionist, cuts through the justifications of the conformity complex when she asserts, "all that is malignant in human character is nourished by the system . . . . Your system [American capitalism] is basically exploitive, inherently debasing and unjust . . . , [and] you are yourself . . . corrupted by the

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<sup>44</sup> Destruction of the crystalline orb of the ideal is a phrase from Ortega y Gasset's *Meditations on Quixote* in which he discusses the power of novels to undercut the claims that ideals make on those who profess them.

<sup>45</sup> In the year of *Portnoy's Complaint's* publication, H. C. Chipman, of Australia's National Literary Board of Review, recommended that this novel be banned from publication in Australia. He credited the novel by praising it as "an excellent satire of the outpourings of a patient to his analyst." He even understood the central theme of the book to be how "the principal character suffers from repressions arising from the restrictions imposed by his Jewish parents." Yet he condemned the novel because "the author does not deal with all [Portnoy's] repressions but only his sexual ones and to that extent the book is spurious." Chipman is wrong on two accounts. First, he supposes that Portnoy suffers only because of his parents. Indeed, it is *culture* that represses Portnoy, specifically the morality embedded in the conformity complex. The second aspect that Chipman misunderstands is that restrictions imposed on sexuality constitute literally and figuratively one way of showing how destructive repression can be and how it traps individuals and prevents them from living satisfying lives.

system.” Despite Portnoy’s attempts to fight the injustice of the conformity complex, Naomi crushes his idealism: “You are not the enemy of the system. You are not even a challenge to the system, as you seem to think. You are only one of its policemen, a paid employee, an accomplice . . . , [and] your job is to make such a system appear legitimate and moral by acting as though justice . . . could actually exist in that society—when obviously no such thing is possible” (261-62). Through this scene and many others like it, readers are made to see the ways in which individuals who are made to conform to social ideals and conventions are exploited by the system and the destruction that follows.

#### Idealism and the Naked Self: Intersection and Conflict

In *Jude the Obscure* and *Portnoy’s Complaint*, the conflict between the naked self’s passionate desires and the social dictates of moral idealism lead to their disastrous ends. Here, I examine *Jude the Obscure* first in order to emphasize the chronological consistency in my argument. Also, Hardy lays out plainly the dichotomy between what he calls the flesh and the spirit that Roth explores later. Hardy’s description in the “Preface to the First Edition” of *Jude the Obscure* is as apt a description of *Portnoy’s Complaint* as his own novel; both novels attempt “to deal unaffectedly . . . with the strongest passion known to humanity; to tell, without a mincing of words, of a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit” (5). On the side of what Hardy refers to as “the spirit” are moral conventions, codes of conduct, and social ambitions and aspirations; on the side of the flesh are the natural desires that spring up out of the naked self, including sexuality and the desire for meaningful connection, including kindness, affection, companionship, and sympathy. As indicated in the previous chapter, the naked self is not only what is usually denoted by the “flesh,” but also implies the organic whole of a human being. I contend that in his novels Hardy demonstrates the importance of the naked self as opposed to

what is merely connoted by “the flesh.” The primary distinction between the naked self and the spirit/flesh binary is that the naked self integrates the binary through spontaneous feelings often described as either carnal or lofty. This is a different conception than those that usually explain either carnal desires or so-called nobler aims. We see Jude’s ambitions springing from social influences that construct Christminster as a haven of intellectualism. Jude’s desire to become a don at Christminster then comes to shape his conception of himself. “Tis all learning there,” he is told, “Yes, ‘tis a serious-minded place . . . . [T]hey raise pa’sons there like radishes in a bed,” and it takes “five years to turn a lirruring hobble-de-hoy chap into a solemn preaching man with no corrupt passions” (21-22). Parsons, and therefore Jude himself, must renounce “corrupt passions.”

To Jude’s inexperienced and conformable mind at this point in the novel, sexuality is sinful and must be eliminated. However, through the powerful influence of Arabella, Jude comes to realize (only after having dedicated himself for several years to preparing to enter Christminster) that sexual desire is a more fulfilling act than learning and social ambition: “What were his books to him? what were his intentions, hitherto adhered to so strictly, as to not wasting a single minute of time day by day? ‘Wasting!’ It depended on your point of view to define that: he was just living for the first time: not wasting life. It was better to love a woman than to be a graduate or a parson; ay, or a pope!” (41). In one of Hardy’s moments of dry humor, Jude is in a spiritual reverie, dreaming of Christminster, when he is suddenly hit in the face with a pig’s penis, thrown by Arabella. As numerous critics have noted, but most persuasively Wayne Burns, the contrast emphasizes Hardy’s idea of the war between the flesh and the spirit. It is Arabella’s sexual appeal that attracts him and distracts him from his aspirations. “‘What a nice-looking girl you are,’ he murmured,” though it was unnecessary “to express his sense of her magnetism”

(35). Moreover, he neglects his previous aspirations to enter Christminster in preference for the more fulfilling, though idle, talk with Arabella: “He talked the commonest local twaddle to Arabella with greater zest than he would have felt in discussing all the philosophies with all the Dons in the recently adored University” (38). However, his sexual desire for Arabella lacks an organic connection and intellectual companionship. Consequently, he becomes bored with the relationship. Feelings of self-condemnation for being animalistic and carnal with her cause him to condemn himself and seek separation from her. Both his boredom with her and the pangs of guilt resulting from failing to live up to standards of social morality motivate him to leave his hometown. Despite his self-condemnation, his sexual adventures with Arabella reveal sexuality as a powerful influence over the course of his life, both as a fulfilling aspect of human relationships and as a cause of shame and guilt. The conflict between desire and socially enforced shame directs the course of his life toward a disastrous outcome.

Equally important is the fact that there is a corresponding relation between the naked self and prescribed paths for spiritual aspiration. Social prescriptions appropriate spontaneous feelings, in this case Jude’s desire to learn, and redirect it for the specific purposes of the conformity complex. Novels of rebellion show how the conformity complex appropriates characteristics of human nature that it is able to exploit and manipulate in order to maintain hegemony over the lives of individual men and women, including their aspirations. Therefore, I argue that Jude’s conflict is not necessarily between the flesh (as the term is commonly understood) and the spirit, but between the naked self and society (or the conformity complex, which denotes society’s ideological and repressive apparatuses of control). For instance, when Jude’s early teacher is leaving Marygreen, he says to Jude, “Be a good boy, remember; and be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can” (11). One of the first social commandments

Jude hears from the only person who commands his respect is to be kind to animals. However, through all his interactions with animals, his feelings for them result not because of his conformity to social mandates, but from his natural sympathies with them.

If anything, Jude's treatment of animals results from his feelings at odds with societal mandates, such as the one given to him by his employer, the farmer, Troutham. Jude "sounded the clacker till his arm ached, and at length his heart grew sympathetic with the birds' thwarted desires. *They seemed, like himself*, to be living in a world which did not want them" (14, my emphasis). Jude recognizes not only the injustice of denying the birds food, but feels a kind of cosmic affinity with them as entities that are oppressed by the world around them. Later, when Jude is interrogated as to why he did not perform his duty to scare away the rooks, he justifies himself by quoting his old teacher's dictate. However, he was not kind to the rooks *because* Phillotson told him to but because of his natural sympathy with the birds springing from his naked self.<sup>46</sup> His sympathetic heart, after reflecting on his own condition and the condition of the birds, recognized himself in their place. Such a recognition—that which originates in natural feelings—is at the heart of the difference between following the natural feelings of the naked self and following the dictates of moral and social codes of behavior. And as such, spontaneous feelings that cannot be appropriated are ever at odds with society and its attempts to condition people through guilt and shame.

For Jude, this recognition is a difficult one to make during his early years. Jude's idealism—most notably his aspirations to become a parson, his sense of obligation to marry Arabella when she thinks she is pregnant, and his self-condemnation for his strong sexual

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<sup>46</sup> Similar observations are made and explored by Caroline Sumpter in "On Suffering and Sympathy: *Jude the Obscure*, Evolution, and Ethics." She argues that Hardy offers a stronger defense of morality based on biological determinism than Darwin did. She goes on to claim that sympathy as a natural feeling is a more positive moral force in Hardy's novel than society's "rule-making" (672).

desires—comes into conflict with his naked, *transgressive* self. And while he learns to work out these differences over the course of his life, it takes too long to discover the importance of his naked self, leading to his continual misery and his heartbreaking end. Sue prophesizes, “You are Joseph the dreamer of dreams, dear Jude. And a tragic Don Quixote. . . . O my poor friend and comrade, you’ll suffer yet!” (162). Dreams, in this sense, equate to ideals, that which can only be dreamt of or imagined in contrast to what is real, actual, and viable.<sup>47</sup> The conformity complex attempts to make individuals into conformists, or “tragic Don Quixotes.” Thus, Hardy’s novel of rebellion exposes some of the ways in which British Victorian society manipulates Jude’s ideas and produces a large part of his idealism. It is undoubtedly Jude’s idealism that causes him continual misery.<sup>48</sup> *Jude the Obscure*, then, reflects Hardy’s struggle against the conformity complex’s attempt to make Quixotes of us all.

More central, however, to the naked self than the natural kindness that Jude feels toward animals and friends or the companionship he longs for with Sue Bridehead, for example, is the strong sexual feelings he has for women. With Arabella, the feelings that distracted him from his intended course to become a parson were sexual, by and large. With Sue, moreover, he thinks, “After all . . . it is not altogether an *erotolepsy* that is the matter with me, as at the first time. I can see that she is exceptionally bright; and it is partly a wish for intellectual sympathy, and a craving for loving kindness in my solitude,” but “whatever Sue’s virtues, talents, or ecclesiastical

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<sup>47</sup> A look at dictionaries helps highlight this distinction. The term “ideal” is defined as “a conception of something in its perfection” (Dictionary.com); “existing as a mental image or in . . . imagination only” (Merriam Webster); and a “thing conceived as embodying such a conception [or standard] and taken as a model for imitation” (Dictionary.com), whereas the term “real” is defined as “existing or occurring as fact; actual rather than imaginary or ideal” (Dictionary.com). The role that imagination plays in our ideologies may be the most problematic in working out the difference between the real and ideal, as it leads both to the conception of the ideal and, through the role that artistic imagination plays, to the destruction of the crystalline orb of the ideal.

<sup>48</sup> A small selection from a number of articles and book chapters indicates the critical agreement on the tragic force of Jude’s idealism: Arthur Mizener’s “*Jude the Obscure* as a Tragedy” (1940-41), Michael Hassett’s “Compromised Romanticism in *Jude the Obscure*” (1971), Barbara DeMille’s “Cruel Illusions: Nietzsche, Conrad, Hardy and the ‘Shadowy Ideal,’” (1990), and Marjorie Garson’s chapter “Jude’s Idealism” in her book *Hardy’s Fables of Integrity: Woman, Body, Text* (1991).

saturation, it was certain that those items were not at all the cause of his affection” (80). Even with Sue, the angelic image of his dreams, his attraction and affection derives their power from sex. It is his relationship with Sue that helps to make these recognitions about his puritanical ideals. Midway through the novel, Jude realizes that the socially sanctioned ideas that compel him to repress his natural desires are worthless and harmful. Sue mentions that because of his belief in such socially imposed doctrines, he must think she is sinful, but he responds by saying, “That may have *been* my view; but my doctrines and I begin to part company . . . . I’ll never care about my doctrines or my religion any more!” (170). However, though Jude recognizes the destructive forces that his principles comprise, he never escapes the prison of conventions that the conformity complex has set up for him.

Hardy shows through the structure of Jude’s disillusionment that the validity of the energies issuing from the naked self is greater than any supposed legitimacy of the claims of social doctrines expressed by the conformity complex. The description of the scene at the train station in which Sue and Jude had decided to be nothing more than friends articulates an important moment for such *naked energies*. They left each other’s company, but after “thirty yards both had looked round simultaneously” and had “quickly run back, and met, and embracing most unpremeditatedly, kissed close and long. When they parted for good, it was with flushed cheeks on her side, and a beating heart on his” (171). Hardy goes on to describe the moment for Jude. “The kiss was the turning-point in Jude’s career” in that “though his kiss of that aerial being had seemed the purest moment of his faithful life, as long as he nourished this unlicensed tenderness it was glaringly inconsistent for him to pursue the idea of becoming the soldier and servant of a religion in which sexual love was regarded as at its best a frailty, and at its worst damnation” (171). Spotlighting only the class issue in which Jude is barred from

Christminster because of his modest beginnings seems to leave out the important conflict between the naked self and society. Jude begins to recognize that it is “the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springes to noose and hold back those who want to progress” (171-72). Over the course of the novel, Hardy establishes the legitimacy of the naked energies of desire as that drive which leads to the greatest fulfillment in human life.

Hardy attacks the “artificial system of things” as the ultimate source of Jude’s misery. Two significant aspects of this phrase are critical. The first is the use of “artificial.” “Artificial” stands in contrast to “natural.” Throughout *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy defends the naked self against the conformity complex that sets up artificial structures that confine and repress individuals. Jude’s downfall is that, though he recognizes the quandary arising between self and society, he never *fully* rejects the dictates of the conformity complex in order to follow the spontaneous feelings and organic desires that have their origins in the naked self. Artificiality, through the overpowering mechanisms of guilt and shame, perverts Jude’s and Sue’s self-conceptions and compels them toward various practices of self-condemnation, as I shall show later when I discuss Sue Bridehead.<sup>49</sup> The second significant aspect of Hardy’s phrase is his indictment of any given *system* of social thought. Systems themselves reduce human life to manageable compartmentalized schemata and in doing so tend to repress that which complicates the visions that they propound. Any such reduction or repression has disastrous effects for the individual. Sue declares “that the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns”

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<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, the critic Holly Davis notes that in giving Sue the surname, “Bridehead,” Hardy points to her innate contradictions and caprice: “While the first syllable suggests her suitability for marriage, the second cautions her to preserve her maidenhead.”

(162-63). The phrase “real star-patterns” refers to those innate structures common to human beings. The “constellations” refer to those imposed social ideas and moral codes that unjustifiably (in Hardy’s view) condemn any natural feelings that do not conform to socially sanctioned patterns of behavior. Jude’s ruin stems from the fact that the conformity complex, early in his life, succeeded in convincing him that sexual renunciation equated to a kind of godliness. His attempts to renounce society’s moral pronouncements prove ineffective because the moral views had become too convolutedly entangled in his distorted self-concept. So much of Jude’s misery stems from this identity conflict: that “the human in him was more powerful than the divine” (164). The divine is not genuine sympathy, but abstract concepts of higher morality and the rightfulness or goodness of human life, particularly those concepts inflicted upon Jude’s psyche by Christianity.

Similarly, the conformity complex inflicts ideals upon Portnoy’s psyche that bring about devastating effects. One ideal that Roth calls into question in *Portnoy’s Complaint* is the idea of yoking respectability with sexual desire. Roth insists that there is more satisfaction in the fulfillment of sexual desires than simply those that are socially sanctioned. Social prescriptions regarding proper sexual relationships include the notion that one ought to love, sexually, only a partner who attains social standards of respectability. In Portnoy’s social milieu, such standards consist of intelligence, economic and intellectual ambition, and decorous conduct, among others. Portnoy suffers from psychoanaesthesia in his sexual relationships with well-brought-up women. Therefore, he finds himself in relationships with women whom he considers to be, in Freud’s terms, “ethically inferior” (*Sexuality* 55). In Portnoy’s relationship with Mary Jane Reed—called “The Monkey” because she ate a banana when she was invited into a threesome by another couple—Roth criticizes a culture that judges women who do not live up to its standards of

appropriate modesty or respectability, both intellectually and morally, as “ethically inferior.” Similar to Portnoy’s idealistic belief that his self-worth is bound up with his ability to please authority, he judges other people’s worth by their ability to command respect. Such a belief leads him to condemn himself and Mary Jane for her illiteracy.<sup>50</sup> He says, “D! I! R! . . . what am I doing having an affair with a woman nearly thirty years of age who thinks you spell ‘dear’ with three letters!” (184).

Roth’s attack on convention comes, in part, from his powerful portrait of Portnoy’s cruel treatment of Mary Jane, treatment that is fully motivated by the values of the conformity complex.<sup>51</sup> Such cruelty comes in many forms but includes mocking her illiteracy, forcing her to degrade herself by participating in a threesome in Rome with a prostitute, and leaving her in Greece when she threatens to commit suicide by jumping off their hotel room balcony. However, despite his eventual cruelty, he becomes aware of how deeply satisfying such moments with her can be. On the one hand, despite his ethical hang-ups, Portnoy experiences “*delirious* desire” for Mary Jane, but on the other hand, he maintains “something close to contempt” for her (185). Portnoy recognizes that with Mary Jane, he felt both “sensual feeling mingling with the purest, deepest stream of tenderness” he has ever known (186). Freud contended that, in order to achieve fulfillment in a sexual relationship, one must have both, but that rarely do men and women experience these two “currents of feeling” converging in a single

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<sup>50</sup> Roth deals with the issues of respectability and psychoanaesthesia in *The Human Stain* and *Portnoy’s Complaint* in very different ways. A number of parallels, however, exist: both Mary Jane Reed and Faunia Farley are illiterate, are viewed as failing to meet the standards of respectability, and their male counterparts come to a disapproving judgment about the women’s respectability after spending time with them in Vermont. These and other parallels will be explored further in Chapter 5.

<sup>51</sup> My use of the terms *convention* and *ideal* emphasizes the repressive aspects of both, as I argue that these two ideas are implied in Hardy’s phrase “the artificial system of things” and in what I’ve called the conformity complex. The term *ideal* can mean a model for imitation; “convention,” likewise, can mean “a custom or a way of acting or doing things that is widely accepted and followed” (“Mystery”). Both, in my analysis of Western culture, equate to the way in which individuals are expected to behave in a particular way, whether ideal or merely traditional. And when individuals do not conform, they tend to endure social consequences.

relationship (*Sexuality* 56). Portnoy, however, encounters these currents converging with no other woman in the novel. His relationship with Mary Jane Reed is, on its own merits, the most fulfilling and meaningful connection he has known, and because of indoctrinated ideas of respectability, he destroys it.

Mary Jane's defense of herself cuts through Portnoy's moral rhetoric. She insists that the dumb, coquettish aspects of her personality are not "bits," "They're *me!* And if how I act isn't good enough for you, then tough tittie, Commissioner" (197). Nearing the city where respectability is not only a condition for his employment but serves equally to justify the authority of the conformity complex, the respectable Alex Portnoy feels obligated to cast off Mary Jane for her lack of respectability. He wonders, in the depths of his moral, sexual dilemma, not if he loves her but "*Should I love her?*" (198). His judgment of her is produced by his social considerations: "there is 'my dignity' to consider, my good name. What will people think. What will I think" (199). While in Vermont, away from the ever-attentive social eye, Portnoy finds himself in deep fulfillment. When they discuss Yeats's "Leda and the Swan," she evinces a flicker of intellectuality when she asks him to explain Agamemnon and for him to recite the poem again (194). Her ability to understand the poem raises her in his estimation for a time so that he dares to think that she is a "*human being! Who can be loved?*" (194, emphasis in the original). Rather than deprecating such a woman for her *lack* of education, high moral sentiments, and social refinement, he dares to think to himself: "*Why not let her be what she is? What an idea! Love her as she is! In all her imperfection—which is, after all, maybe only human!*" (193, emphasis in the original). However, the calamity comes from his inability to resist complying with the ideals of the conformity complex. Rather than acknowledging the legitimacy of his naked self's desire for sexual fulfillment in a relationship that converges on the

two currents of feelings, affection and sensuality, he succumbs to the social standards of respectability and, in doing so, indicates his future inability to connect meaningfully with anyone else, as well.

#### Matrimony, Monogamy, and Moral Codes

A moral code, through the subsequent feelings of shame and guilt, make up one of the primary means by which the conformity complex cripples individuals. The contemporary Judeo-Christian moral view, for example, maintains that matrimony and monogamy are the only acceptable outlets for what Hardy calls the “natural sex-impulses.” *Jude the Obscure* and *Portnoy’s Complaint* show the harmful effects that such beliefs have on those individuals who feel differently. In the scene in which Arabella tells Jude that she is pregnant, his conformity to convention compels him to marry her. “It is a complete smashing up of my plans,” he says, but declares, “Certainly we’ll marry: we must!” (48). Though not considering Arabella to be a woman with whom he would actually want to spend the rest of his life, “such being the custom among the rural districts among honourable young men who had drifted so far into intimacy with a woman as he had unfortunately done, he was ready to abide by what he said, and take the consequences” (48).

Hardy shows how, in Victorian society, intimacy is punishable by marriage. The narrator goes on to satirize the idea of marriage and the marriage ceremony along with traditional beliefs dealing with the ideal of the eternal bond. Speaking of the couple, Hardy writes: “the two swore that at every other time in their lives till death took them, they would assuredly believe, feel, and desire as they had believed, felt, and desired during the few preceding weeks. What was as remarkable as the undertaking itself was the fact that nobody seemed at all surprised at what they swore” (48). These sentiments are echoed in Sue’s and Jude’s marriage contract, “by which that

very volatile [sic] essence, their love for each other, was supposed to be made permanent” (220). In Western cultures, the ideal of marriage, at least in theory, presupposes a constancy of feeling, if not the belief in the augmentation of the feeling in which both husband and wife grow to love each other more and more every day. But Jude, and later Sue, learns that marriage crushes their autonomy and spontaneity. Jude remarks on Sue’s initial marital optimism—a symptom of the conformity complex—that “Wifedom has not yet squashed up and digested you in its vast maw as an atom which has no further individuality” (151). However, from *Jude the Obscure* to the popular TV show *Downton Abbey*, love that grows between two lovers, particularly within marriage, represents an ideological commonplace, an accepted and assumed absolute upon which readers and viewers are induced to build their own beliefs about the future of their monogamous lives. An important difference is that Hardy satirizes the belief, whereas *Downton Abbey* and a number of popular, or to use Wayne Burns’ word “counterfeit,” works exalt such an ideal. Hardy describes a common flaw in the marriage system as basing “a permanent contract on a temporary feeling which ha[s] no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a life-long comradeship tolerable” (57-58).

*Jude the Obscure* and *Portnoy’s Complaint* attack such popular idealistic beliefs as ideological and indoctrinating. Sue recognizes the trap of the promise of eternal love: “I think I should begin to be afraid of you, Jude, the moment you had contracted to cherish me under Government stamp, and I was licensed to be loved on the premises by you—Ugh, how horrible and sordid” (203). Jude agrees with Sue: many people, he contends, “are possibly buying a month’s pleasure with a life’s discomfort” (204). Sue realizes “how hopelessly vulgar an institution legal marriage is—a sort of trap to catch a man,” or a woman for that matter (213). Sex and gender notwithstanding, both characters are shown to be dissatisfied with the institution

of marriage. Not only does Hardy imply that discomfort and dissatisfaction come through the institution of marriage, but it traps men and women into monogamy, as well. Sue fears that Jude will no longer desire her after he is contractually required to do so through “legal obligation” (214). Sue, when bound to Phillotson, asks a devastatingly rational question: “Why can’t we agree to free each other?” (176). She argues: “Domestic laws should be made according to temperaments. . . . If people are at all peculiar in character they have to suffer from the very rules that produce comfort in others!” (176). She goes on to ask, “Why should I suffer for what I was born to be, if it doesn’t hurt other people?” (176). Hardy arouses sympathy for Sue through her innocence fused with insight. Implicitly, Hardy indicts the system of socially prescribed behavior that compels conformity to social laws that cause misery to many and “comfort” to some for the sake of social stability. Portnoy expresses similar sentiments in his usual, ironic manner: “first this hole, then when I tire of this hole, that hole over there . . . and so on. When will it end,” he mockingly asks himself. “Only why should it end! To please a father and mother? To conform to the norm? . . . Whom am I harming with my lusts?” (103). Sue and Alex insist that as long as harm is not a primary or direct result of their actions, they ought to be allowed to act freely, rather than be judged and made to suffer for their behaviors. Therefore, social conventions are equated with misery. Thus, Hardy and Roth attack conventionality by revealing the misery and despair brought about by conformity. By indicating the repressiveness of conformity, *Jude the Obscure* and *Portnoy’s Complaint* encourage rejection and rebellion against those social conventions under which particular individuals suffer, encouraging a suspicious, even an antagonistic, stance towards conventions in general.

Part of Jude’s and Sue’s frustrations with marriage has to do with monogamy. Neither Jude nor Sue advocate free love, *per se*, but they seem to think that it is foolish to believe that

sexual desire—a necessary component in their relationship—can be maintained for a single person after years of marriage, possibly even after months or weeks. Hardy's characters feel the inconsistency between promises of love and the realities of marriage. Arabella, for instance, exposes what Hardy proposes are conventional interactions between husband and wife. When spying on Jude and Sue, she says, "How [Sue] sticks to him! . . . O no—I fancy they are not married, or they wouldn't be so much to one another as that" (230). Hardy goes on to describe Arabella's wonder at the fact that two people could maintain such affection for each other over the course of years. The implication is that such fulfilling affection as endures in Jude's and Sue's relationship could only exist if the couple were not married. That is to say, these characters only feel such affection because they are free from matrimonial constraints, the idea that, if they wanted, they could also love and be affectionate with other people. Hardy contrasts the delightful warmth that Jude and Sue express for each other, even though they have been together for a few years, with Arabella's and her husband's exemplification of conventional interaction between spouses: "they left the tent together, this pot-bellied man and this florid woman, in the antipathetic, recriminatory mood of the average husband and wife of Christendom" (233). The annoyance and bickering between Arabella and her husband are contrasted with the affection and delight between Jude and Sue. The implication here is that Jude and Sue are free to love other people, even if they are not necessarily (at a given instance) inclined to do so. Moreover, Sue mocks the injunction to love because of a marriage contract when she says, "If the marriage ceremony consisted in an oath and signed contract between two parties to cease loving from that day forward, . . . there would be more loving couples than there are now" (203). The novel dramatizes the idea that the social compulsion to love is no love at all and actually leads, at least for some, to the death of meaningful connection. Implicit in

these scenes, then, is the idea that the social compulsion to love one person is the cause of loveless unions.

Likewise, in *Portnoy's Complaint*, the institution of monogamy suppresses individuals' naked energies. Portnoy admits of his endless desires. He wants to have all different kinds of sexual experiences. However, social morality, which he himself has paradoxically fully accepted and fully rejected, condemns those wants as vile and beastly. Condemnations notwithstanding, Portnoy yearns for these moments, that "endless fascination of these apertures and openings" and declares that he cannot "tie [him]self to any *one*" (104, emphasis in the original). In defiance of social condemnations and pressures toward monogamy, Portnoy proclaims, "I simply cannot, I simply *will* not, enter into a contract to sleep with just one woman for the rest of my days" (104). Portnoy seeks adventure in each new sexual experience.<sup>52</sup> Portnoy does not seek sexual domination or exploitation of women.<sup>53</sup> When a relationship devolves into something like misogyny, Portnoy feels sincere guilt for his part in its devolution, as he does in his relationship with Kay Campbell, or The Pumpkin. More importantly, much of his misogyny stems not from his inner desires but from his idealistic beliefs, imposed by his family's moral apparatus concerning the nature of social respectability.

Through his sexual desires, Portnoy seeks new interactions, and while objectification comes into play through those desires, it does not encompass the entirety of them. It would be

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<sup>52</sup> A note on *adventure* may help to clarify the kind of sexual encounters that fascinate Portnoy. Like Sancho Panza, for instance, who joins the Don on his exploits not because he is idealistic (like Quixote) or because he seeks power, wealth, or glory, but because he follows his exuberant and energetic desire for adventure. I intend to discuss the idea of sexual experience as adventure when I explore Mickey Sabbath's relationship with Drenka Balich, in *Sabbath's Theater*, in Chapter 4 and Coleman Silk's relationship with Faunia Farley, in *The Human Stain*, in Chapter 5.

<sup>53</sup> The primary exception to my contention involves Portnoy's feelings toward Sarah Abbot Maulsby. He confesses, "Sally Maulsby was just something nice a son once did for his dad" (240-41). While the novel does not lend itself to the idea that Sarah deserved the treatment he visited upon her, the language of his confession evinces the anger, outrage, and humiliation that Portnoy felt about the way that Boston & Northeastern, the company his father worked, treated Jack Portnoy. However, for his behavior, Alex is equally angry at and ashamed of himself.

unfair to dismiss those desires he holds, which also include the virtues of frankness and honesty, in condemning him simply in order to further a political argument about gender equality. He imagines marrying woman “A with her sweet tits and so on,” and asks, “what will happen when B appears, whose are even sweeter—or at any rate, newer? Or C, who knows how to move her ass in some special way I have never experienced” (104). In this passage, novelty and adventure stir Portnoy, not domination or manipulation or even objectification, though he certainly objectifies women. Jeffrey I. Israel notes that Alex aspires to become sexually liberated but argues that “Alex’s penis is such a weapon of revenge . . . that it is difficult to see it as liberatory” (261). Indeed, Portnoy’s sexual behavior does not liberate him because his conformity restricts and partially deforms those attempts. However, Roth’s realistic depiction of desire embodied in physicality, or “objects,” is part of the poetic realism that subverts the ideal of purely spiritual love. Portnoy’s behavior, therefore, offends, perhaps, readers’ ideologically forged, moral sensibilities but not readers’ naked sense of morality. In this way, Portnoy explores the moral basis of monogamy and desire grounded in the body, exposing the former as a weak justification to help preserve the belief in the sanctity of civilization.

Roth insists, even more vehemently than Hardy does, that sexual desire inevitably ebbs away through the course of prolonged intimacy. “How can I give up what I have never had, for a girl, who delicious and provocative as once she may have been, will inevitably grow as familiar to me as a loaf of bread?” (104). One of civilization’s rationalizations for the great value of marriage and monogamy is that they promote and preserve acceptable practices of love. Portnoy fully rejects the notion that love is what binds people together. “Isn’t it something more like weakness? Isn’t it rather convenience and apathy and guilt? Isn’t it rather fear and exhaustion and inertia, gutlessness plain and simple, far far more than that ‘love’ that the marriage

counselors and songwriters and psychotherapists are forever dreaming about? Please, let us not bullshit one another about ‘love’ and its duration” (104-05). Psychologically, marriage functions as a repressive agent for the naked energies so prolific in Freudian thought. In *Sexual Personae*, the self-described “dissident feminist” Camille Paglia provocatively argues, “Western love is a displacement of cosmic [or natural] realities. It is a defense mechanism rationalizing forces ungoverned and ungovernable” (5). Marriage is part of that defense mechanism that attempts to govern—or repress—those polygamous sexual desires that would otherwise threaten the fabric of social stability. What it is not is a means by which individuals find autonomy or fulfillment. Loyalty and certain strains of fidelity, as those which characterize Jude’s and Sue’s relationship for a brief section of the novel, can help achieve autonomy and fulfillment, but social conventions based upon spurious conventional morality can only hinder individuals’ pursuits for meaning.

Readers of these novels, then, are prompted to question the moral grounds upon which matrimony rests; Sue interrogates specious claims about the morality of monogamy. Hardy presents matrimony, and subsequently monogamy, as a “sordid contract” (166). Marriage, in its religious sense, may have been able to persuade Sue of the necessity to submit to higher laws, but she does not give religious explanations any credence. She asserts, on the contrary, that marriage is an institution “based on material convenience in householding, rating, and taxing, and the inheritance of land and money by children, making it necessary that the male parent should be known” avowing that no moral basis exists in support of the institution (166).<sup>54</sup> In her insights, she refutes the arguments that propose marriage as a moral institution. Marriage is partially characterized as a social convention through which the inheritance of property, money,

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<sup>54</sup> In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Friedrich Engels explains monogamy in similar terms to Sue’s: “the express purpose [of monogamy] being to produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father’s property as his natural heirs” (92).

and land are to be transmitted. To view her position from a Marxist perspective, then, Sue exposes marriage as merely a bourgeois convention for the inheritance of property. In this view, religious and economic considerations also fail to justify the existence and imposition of marital acts.

Around the time of the publication of *Jude the Obscure*, other novelists took up a call against what they saw as the stifling constraints of married life. Kate Chopin, for example, describes marriage as an institution that sanctions the submission of men and women to the wills of their spouses. In “The Story of an Hour,” Louise Mallard finds out that her husband has died, and after an initial period of grief she awakens to the joyous recognition that “[t]here would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature” (214-15). The argument here is that marriage allows men and women to believe they have the right of imposition and authority. Similarly, D. H. Lawrence attributes what he calls “the battle of wills” as the cause of emotional paralysis by those who supposedly love one another (*St. Mawr* 21). I argue that Chopin, Lawrence, Hardy, and Roth (among many others) believed that it was no longer tenable to hold the view that matrimony is a patriarchal institution that oppresses only women by bringing “slavery side by side with monogamy” in order to impose “monogamy *for women only*” (Engels 93, emphasis in the original). While marriage and monogamy may have developed out of a patriarchal ideology, they have—if not from the beginning, at least since the nineteenth century—oppressed and continue to oppress men as well. So while Hardy shows that women at this time were *less equal than men*, particularly in socio-economic terms, Chopin correctly observes that marriage attempts to justify both men’s *and* women’s imposition of their wills on

their spouses, particularly within the confines of personal relationships, which is an important observation often overlooked.

Moreover, Hardy exposes marriage rituals as empty and fearful. He depicts the ceremony of matrimony and the understandable trepidation that the average bride and groom might have when they undertake the marriage ceremony by observing mere convention. As Shakespeare might have phrased it, such couples read their marriage vows by rote but cannot spell. Sue and Jude witness a couple in their marriage ceremony. They saw “the flowers tremble in the bride’s hand” and the “mechanical murmur of words” from the bride’s mouth (224). In contrast, Jude asserts that, because he has undergone such a ceremony before and understood its abstraction from the realities of marriage and married life, in his “experience, . . . it really does seem immoral . . . to go and undertake the same thing again with open eyes” (225). Both Sue and Jude understand the obstacle to their continued love for each other: “the most preposterous of all joint-ventures for them—matrimony” (225). To swear an oath of love would, they declare, be “to perjure ourselves” (225). More importantly, Hardy makes it clear that it is not only Jude and Sue who are so “peculiar” as to feel thus trapped and injured by matrimony but that, as Sue avows, “I fancy more are like us than we think!” (225). Thus, while Jude notes that “domestic ties of a forced kind snuff out cordiality and spontaneousness,” Sue asserts that “all [are] so,” meaning that it is not only Jude and Sue who suffer under the compulsions of matrimony but that “all” or at least many people become miserable under the social molds imposed upon them by the conformity complex (225). Sue fears, quite sensibly, that matrimony will inevitably lead to the dreadful end of their mutual sexual and affectionate desires.

*Portnoy’s Complaint* goes even further in its denunciation of marital commitments because of the way they bring about the deterioration of sexual desire. Portnoy suffers under the

feeling of overwhelming guilt for leading a life that snubs convention. These conventions, in his mind, include settling down, marrying a nice, culturally appropriate woman (read: Jewish), and giving his parents grandchildren. For defying these conventions he sends himself to a psychotherapist and lashes himself with judgment, calling himself “SELFISH” and accusing himself of “chasing cunt. And *shikse* cunt, to boot!” (100). Moreover, his rationalization echoes the sentiments expressed by Hardy—though his insights do not prevent him from experiencing intense shame and guilt. He says, “at least I don’t find myself still in my thirties locked into a marriage with some nice person whose body has ceased to be of any genuine interest to me—at least I don’t have to get into bed every night with somebody who by and large I fuck out of obligation instead of lust. I mean the nightmarish depression some people suffer at bedtime” (102).

Portnoy’s phrasing “nightmarish depression” adequately describes what Hardy’s Sue “suffer[s] at bedtime” with Phillotson. Sue has a “physical objection” to Phillotson, though she “respects” and is “grateful” to him (166). The first nightmarish incident of Sue’s feeling of love without sexual desire takes place when convention would have her join their conjugal bed. Instead of sleeping with her husband, however, Sue lays down some rugs in “a large clothes-closet” and makes a little nest-like bed. Phillotson walks in on her, understandably confused, and she trembles with fear; her fear stems from having to consummate her marriage with a man she respects but does not desire. He reluctantly acquiesces to her desire to sleep apart. In the morning, Phillotson observes the spider webs hanging over her nest-like bed and remarks, “What must a woman’s aversion be when it is stronger than her fear of spiders!” (175). The second nightmarish incident takes place when, after having mutually consented to discontinue any attempts to sleep in the same bed, Phillotson inadvertently returns to the room in which Sue

sleeps and “unconsciously began to undress” (179). Fearing, in her half asleep state, that he presumably wanted to have sex with her, “she had mounted upon the sill and leapt out” of the second-story window (179). When called upon to answer for her reasons for jumping out the window, she replies, “something frightened me—a terrible dream” (179). There is no comedy in this scene. Sue and Portnoy evince a deep anxiety toward having sex without sexual desire; it viscerally repulses them.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, these novels characterize submission to moral codes and conformity with social laws as antagonistic to self-fulfillment. Portnoy asks, “What else . . . were all those prohibitive dietary rules and regulations all about to begin with, what else but to give us little Jewish children practice in being repressed?” (79). Alex’s parents’ marriage is a union in which sexual desire has been squashed by the rules, regulations, and routines of domesticity. Jack Portnoy’s perpetual bane, constipation, is a symptom of his repression, and Alex foresees himself becoming a similarly “constrained and tight-ass human being” because in his view, conventional morality amounts to the belief that “life is boundaries and restrictions if it’s anything” (79). But these beliefs fly in the face of his “outraged common sense” (80). Portnoy is outraged, at least partly, at the pressure he feels to get married. Social pressures, from the beginning to the end of the novel, beget Portnoy’s downfall, as I shall show in the next sections. And voicing the kind of revulsion to the deadness that marriage comprises, even Hardy’s Widow Edlin notes that “Weddings be funerals ’a b’lieve nowadays” (Hardy 314).

### The Repressive Consequences of Conformity

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<sup>55</sup> *Jude the Obscure* and *Portnoy’s Complaint* do not meticulously show how matrimony acts as a corrosive agent upon sexual desire. Powerful and compelling depictions of the marital corrosion of desire, however, can be found in numerous novels, such as Roth’s own *The Professor of Desire* (1977) and Richard Yates’s *Revolutionary Road* (1961).

Shame and guilt are often the destructive social influences employed in order to persecute unconventional individuals. Hester Prynne's "A" is primarily a mark of shame. Her willingness to live on the outskirts of the community as an outcast indicates her forced capitulation to social convention. Likewise, Jude and Sue suffer from less conspicuous but equally disastrous marks of shame. In fact, though gradually setting himself at odds with a number of oppressive social conventions, Jude never fully abandons his excessively high esteem for books, learning, and the grace of Christminster. Sue had lost whatever esteem she had for the university before the start of the novel through her relationship with her undergraduate friend. For instance, throughout the novel, Jude often berates himself with the view that he is weak and sinful because of his passionate desires for Arabella and Sue, while Sue through the unfortunate consequences of the novel, ultimately comes to believe that the murder of her two children by her *adopted* son, Little Father Time, was a fitting punishment for following her carnal desires with Jude. The hair shirts of guilt and shame that Sue and Jude wear indicates the degree to which they have succumbed to the ideology they profess to reject. The demise of such intelligent and reasonable individuals further indicates the power that social ideologies have even over those individuals who attempt reasonably to resist to its influence. Similarly, Portnoy suffers from extreme compunction because of the conflict between the desires of his flesh and the social idealism instilled in him first by his mother and then by society.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> In naming his novel *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) after Hardy's Sue Bridehead, Evelyn Waugh explicitly extends Hardy's critique. Waugh exposes the evils of Catholicism as a form of ideological morality. No less critical of the conformity complex than *Jude the Obscure*, *Brideshead Revisited* depicts every fully devoted Catholic character as hard, mean, and dogmatically moral. For example, Sebastian tells Charles that Bridey is "all twisted inside" because of his desire to become a priest (88). Charles recognizes Bridey as the most religiously devout of the Marchmain children. Bridey's Catholic devotion is directly connected with his "twistedness." Charles says to him: "D'you know, Bridey, if I ever felt for a moment like becoming a Catholic, I should only have to talk to you for five minutes to be cured" (164). More importantly, Bridey becomes cruel when he tells Julia that his new wife will judge her for "living in sin." Charles says to him, "Bridey, what a bloody offensive thing to say to Julia!" to which Bridey coolly replies: "There was nothing she should object to. I was merely stating a fact well known to her" (286). The fact of "living in sin" that is well known to Julia is only a "fact" within the ideology of Catholicism. Seen from the outside,

In a key scene in *Portnoy's Complaint*, Alex finds himself under the pressures of shame and guilt, wondering whether he should cease all resistance. He asks himself, “*Why did Heshie capitulate? And should I?*” But how can I and still remain ‘true to myself’! Oh, but why don’t you just try! Give it a little try, you little prick! So don’t be so true to yourself for half an hour!” (65). Heshie, Alex’s cousin, submitted to the authority of his family, a cousin to whom Alex looked up, and if such a role model gave in, why shouldn’t he, Alex thinks. This thought of capitulating to the authority of family occurs when Portnoy remembers visiting his mother in the hospital after he finds out her cancer is benign. The sacrifices he knows she’d make for him, including giving “the food out of her mouth, that’s a proven fact,” diminish his ability to set his resistance at odds with authority (68). He berates himself as being “cruel” to a mother whom he “might never have seen again” because he wants to leave the hospital and play baseball with his friends (68). His taking for granted her being there to do “everything for” him lends itself to a certain amount of callousness on his part, but as a contribution to his permanent sense of guilt shows how pervasive his mother’s influence consists (67).

*Portnoy's Complaint* and *Jude the Obscure* demonstrate a few ways in which sensitive individuals suffer greatly when they concede to the social imperatives to respect the conventions of their community and culture while at the same time attempting to resist certain conventions that conflict with the promptings of their naked selves. Such an instance occurs early in Jude’s life. While employed by a farmer to sound a clacker to scatter the rooks who feed upon the corn, Jude was unable to fulfill his duties. As willing as he was to perform the conditions of his employment by scaring away the birds, he felt miserable that he was the instrument of their starvation. The farmer Troutham caught Jude allowing the rooks to feed upon the corn and then

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as the reader is made to see it through the eyes of Charles, it is no fact. It is part of what Hardy called the “artificial system of things.” For characters who acknowledge the legitimacy of physical demands, the world, trapped within an ideological moral system, is a bleak one.

again and “again struck Jude on the hind parts with the flat side of Jude’s own rattle, till the field echoed with the blows” (15). Jude’s compassion for the birds brings about a violent beating and his release from employment. Moreover, on his way home from this incident, Jude was distressed at the thought of crushing one of the earthworms spread on the freshly damp ground. “Though farmer Troutham had just hurt him, he was a boy who could himself not bear to hurt anything” and is described as “the sort of man who was born to ache a great deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life” (15-16). Likewise, when Jude’s and Arabella’s marriage ends, Jude suffers deeply and thinks of killing himself. However, he considers himself not to be “a sufficiently dignified person for suicide.” Thus he settles for the miserable habit of “the despairing worthless,” drinking alcohol (59).<sup>57</sup>

The beginning of Sue’s life bears up parallels to Jude’s life. Sue began a relationship with an undergrad from Christminster who helped her put into perspective the antagonistic character of social conventions. However, her adherence to the code of sexual virtue prevented her relationship with him to become romantic, so to speak. He died because she “was breaking his heart by holding out against him so long at such close quarters” (118). Sue admits that she has “never yielded [her]self to any lover”; despite being called “cold-natured” and “sexless,” she rationalizes her sexual repression as being, like some unidentified assembly of erotic poets, “self-contained” (118-19). Despite her rationalizations, Sue’s never having yielded to a lover, not only with the undergrad but throughout her early relationship bears the character of a fear of sex. With Phillotson, her lack of desire is explained by his physical repugnance. However, in both her relationships with the undergrad and Jude, Hardy implies that she is sufficiently attracted to

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<sup>57</sup> In “Gins and Spirits: The Letter’s Edge in Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*,” Alexander Fischler insightfully describes the ways in which Hardy yokes together, through the technique of punning, as in the word “gin,” to show the ways in which Jude is caught in social traps either caused by or resulting in his problems with alcohol. Importantly, Fischler’s examination includes the idea that by the time of writing *Jude*, Hardy had lost “faith in ‘reforming the world’” (1).

them, but her sexual arousal is stifled by her capitulation to the code of sexual purity. Her compliance with the code and her behavior that conforms to it cause the death of the undergrad.

A corresponding scene occurs through the short life of Ronald Nimkin in *Portnoy's Complaint*. The correspondence lies in the way that through the undergrad and Ronald Nimkin, the authors exhibit a fate that could be shared by the eponymous characters. At one point, because of Sue's opposition to sex despite what he took for her mutual affection and attraction, Jude remembered the undergraduate and "saw himself as a possible second in such a torturing destiny" (191). Portnoy similarly sees his own possible future in the fate of Nimkin. In Portnoy's struggle between his conflicting desires for conformity and resistance, he tells of "a fifteen year-old boy" who "hanged himself from the shower head in his bathroom" (96-97). Alex feels an affinity with Nimkin because of two characteristics that both of these young men shared: a deep desire to please their mothers and an extraordinary talent; Alex was intelligent and academically ambitious while Nimkin was exceptionally skilled at playing the piano. Portnoy recalls hearing the women of his apartment building gossiping of the suicide: "With that talent!" Followed by, "You couldn't look for a boy more in love with his mother than Ronald!" (97). He further recalls hearing Mrs. Nimkin weeping in his mother's kitchen, "Why? Why? Why did he do this to us?," at which point he criticizes Mrs. Nimkin: "Hear? Not what might *we* have done to *him*, oh no, never that—why did he do this *to us*? To us!" (97). Portnoy's disgust with the guilt that Mrs. Nimkin piles upon her dead son impels him to declare, with no small amount of righteousness, "Mrs. Nimkin, you shit, . . . what killed your Ronald, . . . is obvious: YOUR FUCKING SELFISHNESS AND STUPIDITY!" (98).

In this scene, Roth's realism evinces the deadly power wielded by social authority with what Roth describes as the "*inevitability* of [the] horrific occurrence" of Ronald Nimkin's

suicide (120, my emphasis). Ronald was the paragon of the nice, polite, and loving Jewish boy, Roth tells us—the kind of child molded by society to become a model citizen. Roth, through the mind of Portnoy, connects Ronald’s suicide specifically with the overbearing pressure to be good and obedient. In Portnoy’s mind, Nimkin’s suicide is the only means of escape from the tyrannical social morality torturing him. Ronald and Portnoy presumably suffer in similar ways. Repressive social expectations, through the vehicle of Mrs. Nimkin, suffocate Ronald. Likewise, Portnoy says, “I am marked like a road map from head to toe with my repressions” (124). While he observes his own repression, he insists that acting on his sexual desires does not diminish his moral integrity. Nevertheless, he suffers emotional and mental torture from sexual longings warring with morality: “Why,” he asks, “must the least deviation from respectable conventions cause me such inner hell? When I *hate* those fucking conventions! When I know *better* than the taboos!” (124). He continues to ask his absent mother, “what was it you wanted to turn me into anyway, a walking zombie like Ronald Nimkin? Where did you get the idea that the most wonderful thing I could be in life was *obedient*?” (125). The inevitability of Nimkin’s suicide and of Portnoy’s inability to connect meaningfully to another person are direct results of these characters’ capitulation to the repressive forces that convince them to honor and respect the conventions of their families and their cultures.

Sue respects Victorian society’s codes of feminine purity. It may be better understood that she submits because of her fear of transgressing those codes. Her own personal feelings resonated with the ways that the undergraduate challenged and rejected social conventions. In the first half of the novel, Sue organically began to discover her own independent, philosophical

view. Through the education she received from the undergrad<sup>58</sup> and her self-dependence she comes to appreciate her naked self: “I am more ancient than medievalism” (107). She embraces the feeling of being “outside all laws except gravitation and germination,” avowing that she is staunchly unconventional, craving the life of her “infancy and its freedom” and being an “Ishmaelite” (111).<sup>59</sup> Describing her undergraduate friend, she says he “was the most irreligious man I ever knew and the most moral,” which contrasts with her description of Christminster, Jude’s intellectual paradise: “It is an ignorant place, except as to the townspeople, artizans, drunkards, and paupers . . . . They see life as it is, of course, but few of the people in the colleges do” (120).<sup>60</sup> Sue is able to see through the artifices of convention and the suffocating consequences they visit on individuals. However, each time it came to put her theories into practice, as she herself admits, her “theoretic unconventionality broke down” (176).

Sue’s intelligence and sensitivity to the repressive consequences of conventions do not protect her against their pernicious effects. She recognizes how dominant a role is played by fear when she confesses to Jude, “I haven’t the courage of my opinions. I know I am a poor miserable creature” (190). Sue’s notions of prudence in regards to sexual behavior seem to permeate her every thought. In the characters of Portnoy and Sue, readers see the consequences of the conformity complex’s influence on the delicate psyche of sensitive and intelligent individuals. The conflict between their naked impulses and the strictures of moral convention

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<sup>58</sup> Among the authors on Sue’s reading list, a reading list daunting even to Jude, she has read a number of Roman satirists, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, and the early British novelists who similarly attacked the conventions of their age, “Sterne, De Foe, Smollett, [and] Fielding” (117).

<sup>59</sup> The editor’s note in the Norton Critical Edition of *Jude the Obscure* describes “Ishmaelite” as “Outcast or nonconformist” (111, n. 8).

<sup>60</sup> Sue’s admiration for artisans and drunkards connects to my argument in Chapter 4 regarding the kinds of resistance that transgressive reprobates employ against oppressive social forces. Such characters do not conform to convention and, despite common conceptions of such unprincipled types of characters, achieve greater self-fulfillment because of their rejection.

produce a terrible neuroticism that dominates their lives. In one scene, Jude understandably assumes that Sue's leaving of Phillotson and deciding to live with Jude indicates her accord in pursuing a sexual relationship. However, when they arrive at their hotel room she nervously winces from his intentions, implied by his having ordered only one room. "I thought you might do it; and that I was deceiving you. But I didn't mean that!" (189). Jude is baffled and asks, "Is this a sudden change of mind?" (189). Sue refuses to answer the question. She undergoes a constant tumult of moral and sensual energies, pulling in different directions, against which she tries to protect herself through rational thought. What is produced, however, is a neurotic character that, in his vexation, Jude reproaches, "sometimes, . . . I think you are incapable of real love" (190). Sue responds with a stock reply, intended to guard one's virginity: "My liking for you . . . is a delight in being with you, of a supremely delicate kind, and I don't want to go further and risk it by—an attempt to intensify it!" (190). Finally, conceding to Sue's dictum that their relationship will remain platonic, Jude is left in a state of bewilderment as to why she seems so afraid of sexuality. He says, on the basis of her previous admission, "I have sometimes thought . . . that under the affectation of independent views you are as enslaved to social codes as any woman I know!" (191). Jude is correct in his observance but unjust in his attitude.

Hardy shows through the events of Sue's life, what Jude happens to misunderstand, that social codes are not only rules or laws that can be followed or rejected, but that social conventions are destructive forces and that Sue is merely a victim. Sue cannot win. She is plagued by a fear of what will happen if she were to defy convention and show outright contempt for convention in general. This condition leads to an anxiety-induced and irrational self-hatred when she cannot find a solution to her dilemma: "she despised herself for having been so conventional" (156). Sue's neuroticism, and that of Portnoy, causes much of their lives' disaster.

Portnoy unwittingly, at least unwillingly, perpetrates the crimes of culture visited upon him onto others, particularly Mary Jane Reed, the only woman to whom he has been able to connect in the way he wishes with a convergence of the two currents of feeling. He criticizes her, continually, for not being the kind of woman society would admire when he, in part, desires to be like her. He imposes upon her the kinds of morality that he himself detests and decries. She asserts, “You’re the reason why I’m killing myself to be something more than just somebody’s dumb and stupid piece of ass!” (134). Portnoy’s own neurotic defense consists of a denial of his role in the inception of her own neuroticism and the deterioration of her self-worth. His denial takes the following form: I’m trying to resist convention; therefore, I could not be imposing them on her; “this hopelessly neurotic woman,” he argues, “this pathetic screwy hillbilly cunt, is hardly what could be called *my* victim” (135). But that is precisely what he has turned her into. At that point in their relationship, she is becoming his victim in the way he is the victim of the social conventions of his mother and the conformity complex. Ultimately, he drives her to the brink of suicide, if not beyond it. We do not know if she jumps off the balcony of their hotel room in Greece, but his callousness towards her reflects the callousness of the conformity complex toward the suffering of individuals.

Like Portnoy regarding Mary Jane, Sue comes to torture Jude with moral conventions that she has been decrying since they met. After Sue shames Jude into accepting the idea that their relationship will remain platonic, her jealousy further causes her to stifle him. When she finds out that the hotel in which they are staying is the same hotel in which he met Arabella for a night, she accuses him of being “cruel” and adding “I don’t like you as well as I did!” (192). Jude is once again baffled at her neurotic change of feeling. She mounts her bitterest criticism: “You’ve been false to me; you, my last hope! And I shall never forget it, never!” (192). Jude

defends himself by reasoning that by her own insistence they were to remain friends, not lovers. If so, she ought not criticize him for meeting his ex-wife at a hotel. He says, “You concede nothing to me and I have to concede everything to you . . . . I am not to approach you, nor anybody else!” (193). It is by incidents like these that Jude understandably misunderstands Sue’s sexual desire. He calls her a “disembodied creature,” a “tantalizing phantom,” and “hardly flesh at all” (194). Jude believes that Sue’s sexual frigidity stems from her fear of the social censure that would, and does, come from transgressing social prescriptions of sexual virtue. But her neuroticism, caused by her fear of social censure, leads to these incidents. However, because Jude, unlike Mary Jane Reed, generally fulfills a range of social expectations, Sue and Jude are able to overcome the social stigmas that prevent Portnoy from pursuing a relationship with Mary Jane.

More telling about the power of social forces, an important consideration for Jude and Sue when they contemplate getting married is the pressure they feel to conform to the social convention of matrimony. Hardy, like Kate Chopin around the same time, insists that marriage “is no worse for the woman than it is for the man, . . . and instead of protesting against the conditions they protest against the man, the other victim.” Sue goes on to agree with Jude’s analogy of a crowd crushing individuals where one individual blames the other individual who is but a “helpless transmitter of the pressure put upon him.” She insists that a woman ought to unite “with the man against the common enemy, coercion” (226). Thus, Sue and Jude both recognize the importance of rejecting the social conventions that crush their individuality and stamp out their naked selves.

However, rejection of social convention often leads to individuals being crushed by other social forces. Hardy implies that society generally resists individual difference. “The society of

Spring Street and the neighborhood generally did not understand, and probably could not be made to understand, Sue and Jude's private minds, emotions, positions, and fears" (234). Individuality is often antagonistic to social ways of thinking. Moreover, because they decided not to marry, to break with social convention, their son, Little Father Time, "would come home from school" and tell his parents "inquiries and remarks" that caused them all "a great deal of pain and sadness" (234). Even after letting it be known that they had gone to London and married, "an oppressive atmosphere" continued to afflict them (235). Importantly, it is not simply a particular town, time, or culture that afflicts unconventional individuals. Lionel Trilling noted about novelists' tendencies to dramatize this conflict that "[i]n its essence literature is concerned with the self; and the particular concern of the literature of the last two centuries has been with the self in its standing quarrel with culture" (qtd. in Johnson 9).<sup>61</sup> Jude, for instance, loses a job restoring the Ten Commandments in a little church through the panoptical function of society.<sup>62</sup> Two women, watching Jude and Sue working, sit gossiping about the nature of the "strange pair's" relationship. One says, "I wonder Biles and Willis could think of such a thing as hiring those" because, these women suspect, Jude and Sue are not properly married (237). Shortly after, Willis, the contractor who hired Jude tells him, "I am afraid I must ask you and her to leave off" (239).

Sue inverts the moral claims of social conventions. "I can't *bear* that they, and everybody, should think people wicked because they may have chosen to live their own way! It

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<sup>61</sup> Nancy Welsh's graduate experience, as cited in Chapter 2, parallels the kind of repressive experiences depicted in literature described by Trilling. She does not argue that all graduate programs coerce individuals into adopting a particular ideology. Yet, her argument does imply that some graduate programs oppress some individuals who fail to conform to a given ideological framework.

<sup>62</sup> Though Foucault primarily associates the panopticon with a "disciplinary society," Hardy and some rebellious novels show how something very like panopticism, when it cannot compel conformity, shifts from disciplining to crushing individuals spiritually and economically (*Discipline* 216). I will discuss this further in Chapter 5 in my examination of Roth's *The Human Stain*.

is really these opinions that make the best intentioned people reckless, and actually become immoral” (238). Another scene exhibits the destructive forces society exercises on nonconforming individuals. Jude belongs to a guild, the Artizan’s Mutual Improvement Society, which “includes young men of all creeds and denominations,” even “Agnostics” (239). However, a “reprobate” (239) such as Jude was ostracized by the members of the guild at one meeting because he did not meet “a common standard of conduct” and was forced into “resigning his office there and then” (240). The imposition of social moral codes and standards of conduct force Sue and Jude into two and a half years of “a shifting, almost nomadic, life” (243). Such codes destroy the life Sue and Jude may have had though they had “wronged no man, defrauded no man” and had only “done that which was right in [their] own eyes” (243).

Again and again in *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy exposes the injustice of social codes and moral idealism. Even Phillotson, the novel’s character most sympathetic to social convention, is persecuted for condoning nonconformity. He tells his staunchly conventional friend, Gillingham, “They have requested me to send in my resignation on account of my scandalous conduct in giving my tortured wife her liberty—or, as they call it, condoning her adultery . . . , insisting that the private eccentricities of a teacher came quite within their sphere of control, as it touched the morals of those he taught” (196). Phillotson’s compassion is punished because of its complicity with rebellious unconventionality. The specious reasoning given by the chairman of the committee to oversee Phillotson’s immorality is the same kind of rhetoric given by authorities of all stamps since the trial of Socrates. In a later scene, Phillotson attempts to convince Arabella, and perhaps himself, that his professional and economic accommodations—having lost his position as schoolmaster and his “good income”—since his moment of nonconformity are enjoyable: “I like the seclusion” of the more modest school, “and the vicar

having known me before my so-called eccentric conduct towards my wife had ruined my reputation as a schoolmaster . . . accepted my services when all other schools were closed against me” (250). Phillotson is doomed to an outcast state and to work in order to keep himself barely above poverty. Arabella, moreover, as the voice of Christian society at this point in the novel, berates Phillotson’s compassion, saying, “I shouldn’t have let her go! I should have kept her chained on—her spirit for kicking would have been broke soon enough! There’s nothing like bondage and a stone-deaf taskmaster for taming us women” (250-51). Arabella’s comment echoes the conventionality of Gillingham’s earlier advice: “I think [Sue] ought to be smacked, and brought to her senses” (184). It is no wonder that Phillotson identifies the pervasive marriage of cruelty and misery of life when he says, biting, “Cruelty is the law pervading all nature and society; and we can’t get out of it if we would!” (251).

Sue’s miseries are even greater than Phillotson’s at the hands of a society’s stifling morality. Sue tells Father Time, “All is trouble, adversity and suffering!” because landladies and landlords refuse to rent rooms to the unconventional family, pronouncing statements and questions such as “Now who wants such a woman here?” (260). What follows from social sanctions such as these is the atrocity of the scene in which Father Time’s suicide and the double homicide of his two siblings are revealed. Hardy explicitly shows that Victorian society and the imposition of specific modes of conduct are to blame for the death of Sue’s and Jude’s three children: “There is something external to us which say, ‘You shan’t!’ First, it said, ‘You shan’t learn!’ Then it said, ‘You shan’t labour!’ Now it says, ‘You shan’t love!’” (265). Society’s retribution against Sue and Jude takes the form of death and misery because they tried to follow the natural impulses of their naked selves. Sue describes the cosmic retribution:

a little more than a year ago I called myself happy! We went about loving each other too much—indulging ourselves to utter selfishness with each other! We said—do you remember?—that we would make a virtue of joy. I said it was Nature’s intention, Nature’s law, and *raison d’etre* that we should be joyful in what instincts she afforded us—instincts which civilization had taken upon itself to thwart. What dreadful things I said! And now Fate has given us this stab in the back for being such fools as to take Nature at her word! (266).

Sue regresses into a moral subservience to social convention after the loss of her children. She previously described her fear: “I felt a curious dread, . . . an awe, or terror, of conventions I don’t believe in. It comes over me at times like a sort of creeping paralysis” (258). Conventions paralyze her, and after the death of her children, she submits body and soul to the terrible righteousness of social convention. Irrationally, she blames herself and Jude for the death of their children in their endeavors to follow their naked selves and reject convention. Her neuroticism strikes up vengefully as she lacerates herself and Jude for daring to be unconventional. Finally, out of the depths of anxiety and guilt, she insists, “We must conform! . . . I am cowed into submission” (269). Despite Sue’s guilt-driven submission, throughout the novel Hardy has been showing not that Jude and Sue have transgressed universal or divine moral precepts—the belief to which Sue succumbs—but how the relentless imposition of social conventions bears the responsibility of her demise.

Here, Sue and Jude have virtually switched places since the beginning of the novel: Sue obsessively defends convention and universal conceptions of morality while Jude defends the naked self. She tells him that they “have been selfish, careless, even impious” in a “vain attempt at self-delight. But self-abnegation is the higher road. We should mortify the flesh—the terrible

flesh” (270). But Jude and the structure of the novel conflict with her call for self-abnegation. He declares, “there’s no evil woman in you. Your natural instincts are perfectly healthy” (271). However, her moral mortification has already taken hold of her, wishing to “prick [her]self all over with pins and bleed out the badness” (271).<sup>63</sup> Sue continues on her path of moral masochism to the point that Jude no longer recognizes her as the triumphant Voltairean iconoclast. She tells him, “I have nearly brought my body into complete subjection”—to which Jude responds, “[W]here is your reason? . . . You dear, sad, soft, most melancholy wreck of a promising human intellect. . . . Where is your scorn of convention gone?” (306). Jude asserts the wisdom of Hardy’s bitter realism: Jude and Sue have fallen victim to alcohol and ideology, respectively: “I was gin-drunk; you were creed-drunk. Either form of intoxication takes away the nobler vision” (307). Ultimately, she dissents and Jude is cast off because Sue conceives of herself as a morally repugnant woman. As a consequence, Jude virtually commits suicide by laying down in the wintry rain after which a “deadly chill” crept into his bones (308).

To emphasize the devastating consequences that social conventions have brought upon Jude and Sue, Arabella, as the novel’s final comment, says that Sue, who has remorsefully returned to Phillotson, is “tired and miserable” (322). In the novel’s closing scene, Arabella and Mrs. Edlin, possibly the kindest character in the novel, discuss Jude and Sue’s relationship over his deathbed. Mrs. Edlin hopes that Sue has “found forgiveness” and “peace” and dealt with her losses, but Arabella says, “She may swear on her knees to the holy cross upon her necklace till she’s hoarse, but it won’t be true! . . . She never found peace since she left [Jude’s] arms, and never will again till she’s” dead, too (322). As in the case of Virginia Woolf’s Septimus in *Mrs.*

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<sup>63</sup> The visual image of pins bleeding out Sue’s badness may be a literary influence for Kafka’s machine, “the Harrow,” from his short story, “In the Penal Colony,” in which victims willingly subject themselves to the physical torture of having their skin pierced for hours while the Harrow etches the name of their crime into their bodies. As I read it, this short story surreally dramatizes the gruesome psychological masochism brought on by guilt-driven submission to moral codes, in much the same way as Sue feels it at the end of *Jude the Obscure*.

*Dalloway*, death is purportedly a relief from the wretchedness of a life at odds with a society and its codes of conduct. While Jude's death is neither glorified nor gratifying, the notion that it brings him relief from life's misery, like it must have done for Father Time, impresses itself upon the reader. The deeper despair, then, must be Sue's who continues to suffer under the miserable machinery of guilt, shame, and the many other afflictions of social morality. Likewise, Portnoy will continue to suffer, and his miserable life, exaggerated in Roth's comic style, exposes the terrible conditions of the conformity complex.

In the final pages of *Portnoy's Complaint*, Portnoy has become sado-masochistic because of the neurotic effects of strict morality. Naomi tells him, "there is something very wrong with you. . . . You are the most unhappy person I have ever known. You are like a baby" (264). Pointing out that his "*Ghetto* humor" reveals his self-deprecation and extreme sense of shame, she charges Portnoy with being a "self-hating Jew" (265). Unable to overcome his irrationality and neuroticism, he lunges at Naomi in an attempt to rape her. Worse, he hopes he has contracted "VD" so that she can "carry it secretly back in her bloodstream" to her Jewish commune (266). "I am soiled," he thinks, "oh, I am impure—and also pretty fucking tired, my dear, of never being quite good enough for The Chosen People!" (266). Portnoy, with a few exceptional moments, has been a deeply sympathetic character. Even his nastiness to Mary Jane Reed and Sarah Abbott Maulsby, for example, has a sympathetic appeal because we know he is suffering, too, and that his meanness is a symptom of his wretchedness. But in this scene, Roth's sympathy for Portnoy is nearly depleted. What saves the reader from despising Portnoy is the fact that he cannot perform his vengeful rape on this honest and insightful woman, since he is "impotent in Israel" (268). And yet, his debased striving for approval from someone he deems worthy of approving him is a Sisyphean task. "Take me with you," Portnoy begs Naomi, "I'll

clear boulders till I drop, if that's what it takes to be good. Because why not be good, and good and good and good—right? Live only according to principle. Without compromise!” (269). As in the case of Sue, all of the coercion to be good has reduced Portnoy to a suffering wretch who cannot escape the neuroticism into which he has deteriorated.

Yet sympathy for Portnoy comes rushing back upon readers once they reflect that Portnoy is indeed moral but conflicted, as well. He feels the guilt for all the “CRIMES TOO NUMEROUS TO MENTION,” particularly involving Mary Jane Reed. However, he defends himself with the refutation that, unlike the criminals that he defends in court, he has an acute moral sensitivity, as he confesses to his therapist: “The things that other men do—and get away with! . . . To inflict a wound upon a defenseless person makes them *smile!* The lying, the scheming, the bribing, the thieving—the larceny, Doctor, conducted without batting an eye. The indifference! The total moral indifference! . . . But me . . . . It makes me want to *scream*, the ridiculous disproportion of guilt!” (273). Portnoy suffers not merely impotence but, more specifically, impotence-inducing guilt. Roth underscores the idea that there can be no moral justice in a society or a world where numerous people get away with crimes of all types and Portnoy is a victim because, despite his best efforts, he cannot overcome his subservience to moral codes and their consequences.

### Conclusion

Despite Portnoy's feelings of contempt for the broken ideals and impractical conventions of society, Portnoy's life is ultimately the twisted punch line of the tragicomedy. As much as he rails against social conventions, he still cannot escape them. Thus, *Portnoy's Complaint* suggests that there is no hope for Alexander Portnoy. Both *Jude the Obscure* and *Portnoy's Complaint* suggest that the constraints imposed by social power often too powerfully obstruct the

possibilities for individual rejection; that is, rejection of moral sentiments might be too difficult to accomplish because those moral sentiments are too deeply ingrained in individuals' ideologies. Still, Jude's words, spoken in an abject mood, after being defeated by a coercive society, serve as an appropriate indictment of the ravages of repressive conformity. Moreover, they also offer a sober, if gloomy, kind of hope:

I may do some good before I am dead—be a sort of success as a frightful example of what not to do. . . . And what I appear, a sick and poor man, is not the worst of me. I am in a chaos of principles—groping in the dark—acting by instinct and not after example. Eight or nine years ago when I came here first [to Christminster], I had a neat stock of fixed opinions, but they have dropped away one by one; and the further I get the less sure I am. I doubt if I have anything more for my present rule of life than following inclinations which do me and nobody else any harm, and actually give pleasure to those I love best. . . . I perceive there is something wrong somewhere in our social formulas: what it is can only be discovered by men or women with greater insight than mine. (317)

In his journey for self-discovery, Jude comes to realize that the Victorian ideological morality in which he believed earlier in his life, and that repressed his naked energies, crippled his potential for self-fulfillment and led not only to his own suicide and that of Father Time's but also to the profound self-loathing Sue continues to feel after having left Jude. *Jude the Obscure* and *Portnoy's Complaint* show how socially imposed codes tend to have disastrous effects for individuals. Hardy and Roth depict the journey of their characters' self-discoveries through the physical body. These journeys destroy the ideational constructs by which the characters had been indoctrinated. What hinders this process, however, are the conditions through which society punishes self-discovery and exploration. Jude mourns: "Perhaps the world is not

illuminated enough for such experiments as ours! Who were we to think we could act as pioneers” (277). And while Jude, clinging to a twisted hope that the novel implies is idealistic, says, “Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us,” the world is still not illuminated in the time or culture of Alexander Portnoy, some seventy years after *Jude* was published.

These rebellious novels demonstrate the repressive nature of conformity and imply that rejection of social conventions must take a different form than capitulation and steadfast declarations of self-autonomy. As I shall argue in subsequent chapters, there are two possibilities for the kinds of social disavowals encouraged by novels such as *Jude the Obscure* and *Portnoy's Complaint*. A number of rebellious novels in the West have dealt with two kinds of characters who reject convention. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the transgressive self, those reprobates with a devil-may-care attitude who delight fully in their naked energies without regard for social consequences. In Chapter 5, I will discuss those characters who attempt to keep their feelings and ideas hidden from the social panopticon and yet express them when social repercussions are least likely to become oppressive.

## CHAPTER 4

THE TRANSGRESSIVE SELF IN EMILY BRONTË'S *WUTHERING HEIGHTS* AND PHILIP ROTH'S *SABBATH'S THEATER*

In the previous chapter, I discussed a few examples of how the *repressed self* fares in rebellious novels. The repressed self can be described as the ruinous warring in a character's psyche of two or more conflicting desires—at least one desire, often the stronger one, comes from conformity to socially endorsed ideologies or coercion from any part of society itself, while the other comes from a character's *naked*, authentic self. The repressed characters cannot resolve or reconcile their conflicting desires and often meet with torturous psychic pain that cripples their relationships and their lives or, worse, they succumb to death, sometimes by way of suicide and sometimes from the violence of social forces. Moreover, these characters at least recognize some recalcitrant and antisocial feelings within them—often though not always sexual—but they cannot overcome the overwhelming pressure to conform to conventions, principles, and behavioral expectations embedded in dominant ideologies. They are trapped between their drive toward independence and autonomy, on one side, and the social dynamics compelling them to submit to the conformity complex on the other.

In this chapter, in contrast, the *transgressive self* can be described specifically by a character's ability to reject, often outright, those conventions and expectations that constrain the character's capacity to enact the freedom of fulfilling his or her organic desires. Transgressive characters, as I categorize them, more often than not, enact their transgressions brazenly and defiantly, without regard for public or social consequences—this will form the basis for the contrast with the *invisible self* that I will discuss in the following chapter, in which I explore novels with characters who keep their organic feelings and ideas hidden from social view.

Transgressive characters do not, as in the case of repressed characters, meet a common or consistent narrative end. While repressed characters necessarily meet with some form of personal tragedy, the transgressive characters' fates depend on the novelists' temperament and the story they are telling that determines whether they come to a harsher end, as in the case of Emily Brontë's Heathcliff and Catherine in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), or whether they are vindicated, as is Philip Roth's Mickey Sabbath in *Sabbath's Theater* (1995). In this chapter, I intend to show how, across time, geography, and culture, a few representative transgressive characters enact their rebellions, beginning with the least successful character, Catherine; continuing to the slightly more successful Heathcliff; and finishing with the relatively successful Mickey Sabbath.

While Jude, Sue, and Alexander Portnoy can be grouped with a number of similarly repressed characters in rebellious fiction, from Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier to Flaubert's Emma Bovary, Sabbath and Heathcliff can be placed among numerous *transgressive* characters, from Mark Twain's iconoclastic Huck Finn to Joseph Heller's anti-hero, Yossarian.<sup>64</sup> In the cases of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Catch-22*, novels in which the main characters *achieve transgression*—as opposed to stories that demonstrate repression or invisibility—their stories often trace the course and development by which the characters *become disillusioned* with reigning conventions and traditional ways of perceiving the world, while at the same time such

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<sup>64</sup> The success of a character's transgressive rebellion ought to be thought of as existing on a spectrum. On the less successful side of the spectrum, a character's repression has been more internalized and psychological (for example, Portnoy initially inherits a repressive ideology, recognizes it, but simply can not reject his repressions). As one moves along the spectrum, a character might inwardly reject ideological repression but suffers still from external repressive forces that are socially coercive. For example, we might see characters such as *1984*'s Winston Smith and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*'s Ronald Patrick McMurphy, who more fully embrace their transgressive selves, having rejected much of the social repressive ideologies in their culture, and thus suffer only slightly any kind of cognitive dissonance, but whose demise comes from institutionally violent sources, represented by O'Brien and Nurse Ratched, respectively. Heathcliff, somewhat, and Sabbath, to a greater extent, are able to resist more successfully the external repressions after having already inwardly rejecting repressive ideologies.

characters usually display, even at early points in their lives, features of a deviant or reprobate. For example, though Huck could recognize on the first page of his novel “how dismal” it was to have the Widow Douglas “sivilize” him (9, *sic*), he must undergo a number of adventures before he can proclaim without remorse or doubt, “All right, then, I’ll *go* to hell” (228, original emphasis).

Likewise, we meet Yossarian as he is ducking military combat by faking jaundice in a military hospital, but he must first come to terms, over the course of the novel, with the gory death of Snowden, before he can fully reject the ideals of patriotism, soldierly duty, and moral responsibility and go AWOL in an attempt to join Orr in Sweden. However, as with any attempt to define and distinguish categories with any degree of precision, it is best to view these classifications as on a spectrum. Furthermore, the novels that I have chosen to explore in this chapter do not chiefly portray the *process of disillusionment*, though they indicate it. I have chosen these two novels because they dramatize how transgressive characters fare who have largely, *already rejected* mainstream ideologies. While I focus in the second half of this chapter on *Sabbath’s Theater*, both on the indecent Sabbath and the perhaps more transgressive Drenka, I will first give an overview of how transgression in these rebellious novels encourages ideological abandonment; then I will move to a discussion of *Wuthering Heights* as it includes both a repressed character, Catherine Earnshaw, who will help to segue from our last chapter, and a transgressive one, Heathcliff, who will help move to a discussion of the transgressive characters in *Sabbath’s Theater*, who not only exhibit transgressive characteristics but invisible ones as well, assisting a transition to the next chapter.

Let me also clarify that it is not uncommon for some characters to move along the spectrum, from repression to open transgression and even, in some cases of successful rebellion,

*invisibility* (in Ellison's sense of the word, as I will discuss in my next chapter). For instance, Edna Pontellier begins fully entrenched in her conformity until she is awakened to her sexual frustration and the possibility for something better in terms of sexual passion, though she ultimately perishes under the weight of repressive conformity. Also, the heroically anti-heroic Huck and Yossarian become victorious in their respective processes of disillusionment and ideological rejection after having lapses into conformity, and Sabbath is triumphant in his transgressions, at least arguably so. However, the initially transgressive Jane Eyre, for instance, and the once Byronic and later blind and defeated Rochester can hardly be thought of as triumphant at the end of their novel. They both slip back toward (somewhat) unsuccessful rejection. And worse, Randall Patrick McMurphy, a reprobate nearly as gargantuan as Mickey Sabbath, succumbs to the system of coercive repression that ultimately lobotomizes him. Therefore, the point must be made that being transgressive does not guarantee anyone a fairytale ending, and this recognition will be essential to understanding Ellison's invisibility as I explore it in the next chapter.

#### An Examination of Some Critical Reactions to Transgressive Freedom and Vitality in *Wuthering Heights* and *Sabbath's Theater*

While some critics and reviewers of these novels recognize and appreciate their subversive power, particularly as they expose social sources of repression, many other critics exhibit a willful denial of that power in a defense of the status quo. Therefore, one of my chief aims in reviewing reactions to these novels is to highlight the ways in which both reviewers and critics struggle with the subversive power within rebellious fiction. One aspect of this overview, therefore, points to the way that dominant ideologies and moral stances often inhibit readers' abilities to appreciate the revelations of subversive art. Another aspect of this examination will

be to emphasize the way that at least some reviewers and critics have acknowledged the idea that rebellious novels do indeed upset oppressive moral and ideological status quos, thus suggesting the need to retain these novels, and others like them, as a resistance against repressive conformity.

The idea of the transgressive self in terms of the rebellious novel, as these novels depict it, requires the inclusion of individual freedom and human vitality. At his eightieth birthday celebration in his hometown of Newark, New Jersey, Philip Roth admitted that the favorite of his thirty-one novels was *Sabbath's Theater* because it was “the one in which he felt the most *free* as he wrote it” (Remnick, my emphasis). Similarly, Harold Bloom comments on the theme of freedom in literature in a lecture on Shakespeare’s Sir John Falstaff who, Bloom insists, is “the finest comic character in all literature” (“Shakespeare” 160): “Many of us become machines for fulfilling responsibilities. Falstaff is the largest and best reproach we can find. . . . We need Falstaff because we have so few images of authentic vitalism, and ever fewer persuasive images of human freedom” (*Shakespeare* 314). At the center of Falstaff’s freedom lies the notion that he “believed neither in men nor in causes, but only in the blessing of life itself, at the expense of all idealism” (“Shakespeare” 161). As such, Bloom notes that Falstaff is also “the greatest vitalist in Shakespeare” and that, paradoxically, his nihilism “helps account for the darkest element in [his] grand wit, *his realistic obsession with rejection*” (161-62, my emphasis). In *Sabbath's Theater*, Roth has Sabbath identify himself with Falstaff as “a fat old man!” (53). But the comparison goes much further than their mere appearances, as Peter Scheckner notes, calling the transgressive Sabbath “Roth’s Falstaff” (220). Certainly, it is a similar observation that leads Bloom to remark that *Sabbath's Theater* is Roth’s “masterwork” (*Genius* 207). Scheckner goes on to explain that as Falstaff rejects the so-called nobility of honor, soldiery, and general

respectability, “Sabbath has nothing but disdain for all [that] late-twentieth-century America holds dear” (225). Moreover, Scheckner rightly concludes that when “the Falstaffian world of Eastchapel and the tavern were gone once and for all, the world became a much grimmer place. Roth enlivened our world by keeping Sabbath alive” at the end of his novel (235). However, Scheckner does not emphasize adequately the degree to which Sabbath’s human freedom lies not merely in his disdain for twentieth-century America, but more directly in his dual characteristics: constantly pursuing more life/vitalism and, to borrow Bloom’s phrasing, his *realistic obsession with rejection* of any moral code based on reigning ideologies.

Likewise, Heathcliff, in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, utterly rejects what he sees as repressive values, particularly those whose origins lay within conventional Christian ideology. In his famous essay “The Rebel,” Albert Camus notes this rejection when he writes, “Heathcliff, in *Wuthering Heights*, would kill everybody on earth in order to possess Cathy” (3). Camus goes on to comment, “Ideology today is concerned only with the denial of other human beings” (4). Historically, he was describing a world attempting to recover from “the Hitlerian apocalypse of 1945” in which genocidal ideologies condoned mass murder and thus denied certain groups of people their rights to life (7). However, his observation about ideology and the denial of human beings still applies, though less violently, to the more generalized context of Western societies. Brontë’s Catherine Earnshaw also exhibits Falstaff’s attitude of rejection as she writes in her journal that her older brother Hindley’s “conduct to Heathcliff is atrocious—H. and I are going to rebel” (16). And rebel they do! A rebel, Camus tells us, is someone who says “no!,” and therein lies their rejection. Catherine and Heathcliff, in their rejections of social conventions, ultimately find happiness in death and in their inverted or reappropriated fulfillment of *heaven*. While they both utterly deny the authority of Christian laws—Heathcliff to a greater degree—

they still find each other in the afterlife in which “together they would brave Satan and all his legions” (258). In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë turns Christian morality on its head, and the worst of sinners, through an expression of their wild passions and deep commitment to each other (though somewhat perverse), find their own heaven.

*Wuthering Heights* and *Sabbath's Theater* were obviously written in and about very different historical contexts given that a female author wrote *Wuthering Heights* in the mid-nineteenth century in the moors of England, while a male novelist authored *Sabbath's Theater* in the second half of the twentieth century in the United States. Yet there is much in these two novels that bears comparison. As I will discuss further, some of these similarities include the fact that their authors make extensive use of the supernatural and gothic; the novels depict societies that are existentially oppressive, denoting how the world is bleak and cruel with regard to individual lives; their main characters tend to have a tint of vengefulness (again, Heathcliff more so) and who are outcasts and reprobates in terms of their respective cultures' conventional morality; Heathcliff and Sabbath each suffer the death of a best friend and kindred spirit during adolescence; they are both physically unattractive; they are deeply rebellious and transgressive; and *they thoroughly and openly reject* the social conventions, ideologies, and moral codes of their respective societies.

Moreover, an important and interesting similarity between these two novels involves the critical reception with which they were received at the time of their publications. The subversive power in the artful depiction of the range of human life in these two novels seems to have baffled many reviewers, both in Britain in 1847 and in the United States in 1995. One zealous reviewer of *Wuthering Heights*, writing for *Atlas*, asserted, “There is not in the entire *dramatis personae* a single character which is not utterly hateful or thoroughly contemptible. If you do not detest the

person, you despise him; and if you do not despise him, you detest him with your whole heart” (283). A reviewer for the *Athenaeum* even thought that the great truth in the novel could not redeem the narrative: “In spite of much power and cleverness; in spite of its truth to life . . . ‘Wuthering Heights’ is a disagreeable story,” and in spite of there being “so much feeling for character . . . [n]ever was there a period in our history . . . when we English could so ill afford to dispense with sunshine” (Chorley 281-82). Yet another reviewer, this time for *Palladium*, wrote, “The authoress has too often disgusted, where she should have terrified” (Dobell 294). These reviewers did not explicitly criticize *Wuthering Heights* for its lack of narrative power or rendering of vibrant pragmatism; on the contrary, it seems that it was the novel’s formidable literary realism, the violent and willful passions that the characters experience, clashing with preconceived moral sensibilities that led them to be so harshly critical.

However, most reviewers exhibited a surprisingly consistent confusion about the novel, often using the word “strange” to reconcile their mixed reactions toward what they seemed to have seen as perversity and moral repugnance, on the one hand, and literary artistry, on the other. For example, an anonymous reviewer for *Douglas Jerrold’s Weekly Newspaper* stated, “*Wuthering Heights* is a strange sort of book—baffling all regular criticism” (284). However, that reviewer went on to say that between the “brutal cruelty” and the “semi-savage love” there are “glimpses of hidden morals” and that there “seems to us a great power in this book but a purposeless power” (284-85). Another equally perplexed anonymous reviewer for the *Examiner* noted, “This is a strange book. It is not without evidences of considerable power: but as a whole, it is wild, confused; disjointed, and improbable, and the people who make up the drama, which is tragic enough in its consequences, are savages” (285). That reviewer went on, nevertheless, to say, “we” would “willingly trust ourselves with an author who goes at once fearlessly into the

moors and desolate places, for his heroes; but we must at the same time stipulate with him that he shall not drag into the light all that he discovers” (287). Even those who praised the revelations of truth asked that the revelations be regulated, presumably in order not to challenge the *status quo* too greatly.

Despite some harsh criticism of *Wuthering Heights*, there has also been a stream of positive critical attention ever since the novel’s publication, arguably none more important in the present context than E. M. Forster’s assessment. Forster describes *Wuthering Heights* as a “prophetic” novel, by which he means a novel whose “characters and situations stand for more than themselves; infinity attends them” (*Aspects* 132-33). Forster’s prophetic novels are akin to the kind of novels I have included throughout my discussion of rebellious novels, in the sense not that they proffer universals of *all* human individuals, but that the novels are existential. In other words, rebellious novels often present to readers historically contextual characters and their stories, but these characters and their circumstances stand for more than themselves, what Terry Eagleton describes as a novel having “a significance beyond itself” (13). They explore human existence and generalized conditions of human interaction, particularly between self and society, in historically specific and concrete ways.

Similar to *Wuthering Heights*, *Sabbath’s Theater*, like many of Roth’s novels, met with some conflicting reviews, though none as famous, perhaps, as the review written by Michiko Kakutani for *The New York Times*.<sup>65</sup> Mickey Sabbath, she wrote, “seems like an older, more embittered version of Alexander Portnoy.” She went on to criticize the titular character: “Sabbath remains such a willfully selfish character that his adventures become a kind of black hole, absorbing rather than emitting light. He does not grow or learn from Drenka’s death or his other

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<sup>65</sup> The conflict between Kakutani and Roth is widely known, as documented in Pierpont’s *Roth Unbound*. Since Kakutani provides a common type of negative reviews on Roth’s work, I will closely examine some of the common points she makes in her review of *Sabbath’s Theater*.

losses; he simply learns to reaffirm the narcissism that has informed his entire life. As a result, Sabbath cannot assume a tragic stature; he remains, merely, pathetic.” And she closed her review by upholding certain invectives spoken by subsidiary characters, such as when Norman, an old friend and producer of Sabbath’s *Indecent Theater*, denounces him as “pathetic,” an “outmoded old crank,” and “discredited male polemic,” concluding that the “reader who manages to finish this distasteful and disingenuous book can only heartily agree with Norman.” Kakutani’s ideological framework prevents her from seeing in Roth’s masterpiece what a number of other critics have seen.

In stark contrast, therefore, some critics provided unwavering praise for *Sabbath’s Theater*. One critic jested that “[i]f Philip Roth wasn’t the official spokesman for the testosterone industry before, he is now. . . . [*Sabbath’s Theater* is] a terrific book, though I don’t know how I’ll break the news to all the women who had problems with Roth’s previous books” (Klepp). And there were many others who also appreciated the subversive power of novel. Matthew Spektor, writing for *NPR*, called *Sabbath’s Theater* “Roth’s vile, brilliant masterpiece.” And Garth Risk Hallberg wrote, “the savage and profane *Sabbath’s Theater*—this face-sitting, breath-taking brute—is Roth’s most Roth-y book. Which is to say, his best.” Like the confounded reviewers of *Wuthering Heights*, despite their praise most reviewers of *Sabbath’s Theater* could not avoid, even if only in jest, criticizing the novel for what they called Sabbath’s selfishness, despicability, and depravity. Frank Kermode considered the book to be Roth’s “best and most erotic,” contending that it is even “among the most remarkable novels of the age” because of Sabbath’s “Rabelaisian range and fluency” (257). Though citing the novel’s comic “touch of the diabolic” (257), the amazing “energy of this book” (261), and its “anarchic force,” Kermode suggested that at the end of the novel “We are finally invited to despise” Sabbath

(263). Swinging like a pendulum between praise and condemnation, in his last sentence, Kermode applauded both Sabbath's and Roth's raging against the aberrant forms of *justice* in the modern world perpetrated by "all the enemies of life" in this "wickedly splendid book" (265).

The foregoing examination of these novels' critical reception is intended to show how they offer powerfully compelling challenges to reigning ideologies that many critics, even sympathetic ones, have been unable to reconcile with their own moral stances. Therefore, in contrast to what many critics and reviewers have emphasized, I want to give *Sabbath's Theater* a much fuller critical appreciation for its Rabelaisian vitality and freedom of the human spirit. For example, while Kakutani called Sabbath's sexual exploits "the depressing gropings of a dirty old man," she seems merely to regurgitate a reductive though popular interpretation that Roth reinforces a patriarchal, misogynistic view of women. And although her denigration seems to be a deliberate and direct allusion to Charles Bukowski's *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, Roth's novel reminds one more of the works of Bukowski's literary predecessor and hero, Louis Ferdinand Céline, and his literary masterpieces that likewise encourage readers to reject socially dominant, repressive ideologies. In *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, Bukowski writes, "to learn, do not read Karl Marx. very dry shit. please learn the spirit. Marx is only tanks moving through Prague. don't get caught this way please. first of all, read Celine [*sic*]. The greatest writer of 2,000 years." To be sure, in a review of Claudia Roth Pierpont's recently published and author-endorsed literary biography of Philip Roth, *Roth Unbound: A Writer and His Books*, D. G. Myers asserts that "Roth out-Célines Céline."

In other words, Roth's *Sabbath's Theater*, like Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night*, emphasizes the nightmarish ways in which socially dominant, repressive ideologies debilitate individuals' capacities for self-fulfillment and their abilities to form authentic identities. For

instance, Myers went on to write that Céline presents “a vision of human experience in which love does not exist and man is a creature of never-ending hatred.”<sup>66</sup> Myers also stated that Roth—like most rebellious novelists, I contend—writes his fiction as if responding to the question “How should one live?” Myers argues that in Roth’s novels, as in Céline’s, “The answers [Roth] gives are *sickening challenges* to the answers that readers bring, ready-made, to his novels.” Myers continues, “Roth’s fiction is a moral challenge to many readers, especially to Jews and women who find his portraits of Jews and women repellent.”<sup>67</sup> Roth, like Brontë and other rebellious authors, attempts to answer the question of how one ought to live by presenting dark, existential visions that subvert readers’ mainstream ideologies—what Myers calls ready-made answers. Indeed, Brontë’s reviewer who marked her fearlessness in exploring the moors of her characters’ natures was still afraid of what she might drag out of the darkness. These novels challenge accepted and socially endorsed ways of thinking that deny individuals the Falstaffian freedom that may bring them fuller, more vital lives.

My contention, then, is that Kakutani’s perspective, for example, is not merely one of many valid perspectives but rather one that refuses to adequately address serious questions raised by serious novelists. Indeed, Roth challenges traditional American reactions to our Byronic

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<sup>66</sup> Sabbath and Heathcliff, aligned with each other as out-and-out reprobates, are also aligned with Bardamu, the anti-hero of Céline’s *Journey to the End of the Night*, particularly because they approach life the way that Bardamu describes the working class should: “The poor, it’s true, get younger inside as they go along, and toward the end, provided that on the way they’ve made some attempt to jettison all the lies and fear and contemptible eagerness to obey they were given at birth, they’re less revolting than at the start. The rest of what exists on earth isn’t for them! It doesn’t concern them. Their job, their only job, is to get rid of their obedience, to vomit it up. If they manage that before kicking in, then they can boast that they haven’t lived for nothing” (327).

<sup>67</sup> This is reminiscent of Harold Bloom’s lament about why Roth has yet to win the Nobel Prize in Literature despite being, in his view, the most worthy American novelist: “Whether I will ever persuade the Nobel Prize people -- and I have tried -- I don’t know,” sighs Harold Bloom. “He’s not terribly politically correct, you know. And they are” (Senior). Bloom implies that the ideological considerations of multiculturalism and feminism prevent the Nobel institute from recognizing Roth’s literary greatness—as was the case with some reviewers of *Sabbath’s Theater* and *Wuthering Heights*.

heroes. Americans tend to tolerate a small fall from grace in their heroes as long as those characters ultimately redeem themselves with feats of honor and sacrifice, conforming to an archetype that they find to be morally acceptable. In that vein, Kakutani wrote that in contrast to other Rothian characters who struggle with competing demands between their social selves and their “anarchic,” self-gratifying selves and who ultimately choose what is socially acceptable—characters who, in her view, are morally respectable—“Sabbath . . . has no other self, that is, no ‘good’ self . . . that might oppose his bad-boy self [that] he has so heartily embraced.” The great literary critic Leslie A. Fiedler discusses the American desire, evinced here by Kakutani, for the bad boy to turn out good. In the ideology embedded within American mass culture lies the worship of what Fiedler, in his discussion of Mark Twain’s literary greatness, calls the Good Bad Boy. Describing Tom Sawyer as this type of personality, one character says, “He warn’t *bad*, so to say . . . only *mischeevous*. . . . *He* never meant any harm, and he was the best-hearted boy that ever was. . . .” (qtd. in Fiedler 285, emphasis in the original). Fiedler calls “the ritual praise of good-badness” the “true Americanism” (284-85). In *Tom Sawyer*, Fiedler continues, Sid is the Good Good Boy and Tom is the Good Bad Boy, but Tom ultimately, and eagerly, takes on the role of Sid, and thus Fiedler argues, “the Good Bad Boy and the Good Good Boy are not so different, after all—mother’s boys, both of them” (285). Huck Finn, on the other hand, when he has the choice to become either a Good Bad Boy or remain a “juvenile pariah, . . . idle, and lawless, and vulgar, and bad” at the end of his novel chooses to remain a “juvenile pariah,” or a Bad Bad Boy (277). Considering its enduring popularity, perhaps American readers can withstand a *juvenile* pariah but not a *geriatric* one.

In creating Mickey Sabbath, Roth re-introduces readers to an anarchic character, at once energy-loving and freedom-embracing, who reaches Rabelaisian heights. That subversive,

anarchic energy represents Roth's depiction of one mode of resistance against many repressive forces that threaten to coerce people to conform to accepted ideologies. *Wuthering Heights* and *Sabbath's Theater* are subversive novels because they contain "desperate evasions" that function as "acts of self-defense." Fiedler observes that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a "thoroughly horrifying book, whose morality is rejection and whose ambiance is terror" (287, my emphasis). Likewise, *Wuthering Heights* and *Sabbath's Theater* share what could be called a *morality of rejection*. Heathcliff absolutely rejects the belief that Christianity can bring him any kind salvation, and he rejects all other cultural conventions that stand in the way of his being with Catherine, including decency and even a humanistic respect for the dignity of all human beings. Likewise, Sabbath rejects anything that restrains his sexual adventures, most particularly the conventions of monogamy and fidelity. To illustrate how the novels' subversions of conventional ideologies through outright rejection and to examine the characterizations of Heathcliff and Sabbath as Bad Bad Boys may seem superfluous. However, to understand *the degree* to which these novels encourage readers' outright rejection of any moral or conventional conformity, specifically through their transgressive behaviors, such an illustration is crucial.

#### The Repressed and the Transgressive in *Wuthering Heights*

Heathcliff and Catherine, from the beginning, both possess rather defiant temperaments. They are tyrannized by Hindley, who—if we remember Forster's notion that in *Wuthering Heights* characters and situations stand for more than themselves—represents a cosmic kind of authoritarian figure, both violent and capricious (*Aspects*). Hindley is rather intoxicated by power, and his cruelty, both strange and spiteful, represents Brontë's view of the chaotic unkindness of the universe. Thus, the doctor who brings news of Hindley's eventual death speaks fairly: "He died true to his character, drunk as a lord" (144). Similarly, the mean and

supercilious Joseph represents the repressiveness of Christianity, and is described as “the wearisomest, self-righteous pharisee that ever ransacked the Bible to rake the promises to himself, and fling the curses on his neighbors” (33). Both Hindley’s and Joseph’s bullying and oppression serve to fortify and extend Catherine’s and Heathcliff’s defiance into outright rebellion and rejection. But moral judgment against their individual freedom comes from all around, as the Linton family observes that Catherine has been allowed to “grow up in absolute heathenism” while Heathcliff is condemned as a “wicked boy, . . . and quite unfit for a decent house!” (40). Moreover, Nelly also observes that Earnshaw’s frequent reproaches “continually hardened [Catherine], and she laughed if [Nelly] told her to say she was sorry for her faults, and beg to be forgiven” (34). Catherine has mere scorn for what cultural conventions deem proper for a young child, particularly a young woman. Similarly, having already rejected the Christian doctrine of turning the other cheek at about thirteen years old, Heathcliff tries to plan how he will take revenge on Hindley for his despotic cruelty. When Nelly, the voice of convention, shames him, stating that only God ought to punish, and people must learn to forgive, Heathcliff retorts, “No, God won’t have the satisfaction that I shall,” and he hopes that Hindley will not die before he has the chance to take his revenge (48).

Catherine’s and Heathcliff’s “angry rebellion against providence” illustrates their nearly complete rejection of mainstream ideologies (78). It is *nearly* complete only for Catherine, because she still retains some of the romantic idealism instilled in her by popular culture. The insightful criticism of the celebrated feminist critic Sandra M. Gilbert illuminates this point: Catherine’s “self-justifying description of her love for Edgar—‘I love the ground under his feet, and the air over his head, and everything he touches, and every word he says’ (Chap. 9)—is a bitter parody of a genteel romantic declaration which shows how effective her education has

been in indoctrinating her with the literary romanticism deemed suitable for young ladies” (390). In this respect, Catherine’s trajectory bears comparison with Hardy’s Jude and Sue and Roth’s Alexander Portnoy in that she is unable to reject fully the ideology that represses her. Her marriage to Edgar is the product of social forces influencing her to act in ways against which she *feels* completely at odds. Nelly asks Catherine why she is unhappy, since she professes to love Edgar; she responds by “striking one hand on her forehead, and the other on her breast. ‘In whichever place the soul lives,’” Catherine declares, “‘in my soul, and in my heart, I’m convinced I’m wrong” to marry Edgar (62). And as in the case of Jude and Sue, Catherine’s demise results from the war between her own natural and instinctive desires and social expectations. Heathcliff and Edgar come to represent the two sides of that war: “You and Edgar have broken my heart, Heathcliff! And you both come to bewail the deed to me, as if *you* were the people to be pitied! I shall not pity you, not I. You have killed me” (124, emphasis in the original). While Catherine here blames both men, and consequently the two warring internal forces—that is, the social ideologies with which she has been indoctrinated and which she has internalized, on one side, and her own instinctive desires, on the other—the novel does not let us suspect for long that her *naked*, authentic self lies with Edgar and the social customs that he represents.

Indeed, it is the suppression of her naked, authentic self by repressive social forces—Christian values, romantic idealism, and socially constructed notions of appropriate female behavior stifling her wild human vitality—that ultimately causes her death. Gilbert also argues this point: Heathcliff’s return to Wuthering Heights “signals the beginning of [Catherine’s] ‘madness’ . . . . Catherine’s marriage to Edgar has now inexorably locked her into a social system that denies her autonomy, and thus, as psychic symbolism, Heathcliff’s return represents

the return of her true self's desires without the rebirth of her former powers. And desire without power, as Freud and Blake both knew, inevitably engenders disease" (391). Gilbert's discussion of *Wuthering Heights* as a "rebelliously topsy-turvy retelling of Milton's" *Paradise Lost* (383) may also serve to help illuminate how Brontë's novel encourages readers to reject social ideologies and embrace their transgressive selves. However, despite her brilliant insights, particularly in terms of Brontë's Blakeian-like reversal of heaven and hell, Gilbert's feminist perspective refocuses the novel's broader impact through her critical attention primarily to Western culture's restraints of female autonomy by patriarchy. Her argument lessens the literary importance of Heathcliff in terms of the novel, as Gilbert subordinates his significance. She describes Brontë's rebellious retelling of *Paradise Lost* as "Western culture's central tale of the fall of woman and *her shadow self*, Satan" (383, my emphasis).

This is not to say that Satan, recast as Heathcliff, is somehow *more* important than Catherine. In my reading, these two characters simply follow two different trajectories common to many rebellious novels: Catherine more or less illustrates the repressed self while Heathcliff enacts a more successful form of rebellion that I call the transgressive self. Both trajectories are central to how rebellious novels demonstrate the destructive effects of social ideologies, including *but not limited to* patriarchy, for there are also other destructive ideological elements that plague both Heathcliff and Catherine. Thus, gender determines *part* of their fate, but it does not play the sole, controlling role. Moreover, an important observation that Gilbert makes about Heathcliff is that he also functions as a reflection of Catherine's truer self (391). To be sure, it is Heathcliff's unflinching rejection of Christianity and resolve for revenge that further progresses Brontë's wider critique of Western culture. That is to say that Gilbert compellingly argues that Brontë is Blakeian in her "radically political commitment to the belief that the state of being

[that] patriarchal Christianity calls ‘hell’ is eternally, energetically delightful, whereas the state called ‘heaven’ is rigidly hierarchical, Urizenic, and ‘kind’ as a poison tree” (383, my emphasis). That idea that so-called heaven goes hand in hand with conformity to social ideologies and that so-called hell signifies rebellion against and rejection of those ideologies is indeed the broader subversive revelation in the novel.

Brontë’s novel does not endorse anarchism as a political attitude, but the energy in *Wuthering Heights* is markedly anarchic. The denunciation of traditionalism and social hierarchy, the insistence of the legitimacy of Catherine’s and Heathcliff’s own feelings and perspectives, and the emphasis on passion and physical vitality point toward the anarchic nature of the novel. Martha Nussbaum supports this kind of view as she recognizes that Catherine and Heathcliff are “‘identified with the energy of the body” (395). Nussbaum also observes, “their heaven is not Edgar Linton’s static paradise, it is the vibrant realm of earthly passion, in which nature and the body become the very essence of the loving soul.” She goes on to argue that Catherine and Heathcliff’s notions of “agency . . . looks to the conventional Christian like the way to hell.” Therefore, in her crafting the anarchic Catherine and Heathcliff in their narrative sequence, “Brontë issues a defiant challenge to *all systems of conventional social virtue*, suggesting that the Christian ascent is doomed in its very nature to produce chilly and inauthentic human relations” (396-97, my emphasis).

Therefore, what fuels Heathcliff’s rejection of Christianity and cultural morality are the stifling constraints that moral codes produce on his vital energies. *His* perspective and *his* sense of life are the only legitimate ones in his view; all other views, such as the myth of salvation and redemption, are cast off as either fatuous or authoritarian. An important observation that Nussbaum makes concerns the idea that while Heathcliff is presented “as demonic and scarcely

human,” he is also the only character in the novel “who gives his life for another,” for in his love is “a deeper sort of generosity and the roots of a truer altruism” than any of the other characters, especially the more Christian ones (402-03). Indeed she later characterizes his love by its “uncompromised altruism” (403). Her observation is insightful—that Heathcliff’s love for Catherine is, in one moral sense, deeper than anyone else’s—but to project altruism onto his character is similar to saying that Shakespeare’s Aaron of *Titus Andronicus* might actually feel penitent in his near death *confession*.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Nussbaum seems to make the same confusion that Isabella makes about Heathcliff’s nature; in response to Isabella’s naïve adoration, Catherine attempts to disabuse “the infatuated girl” of her illusions: “Heathcliff is—an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation. . . . Pray don’t imagine that he conceals depths of benevolence and affection beneath a stern exterior! . . . [H]e’s a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man” (80-81). The novel bears out Catherine’s description, with the only exception to his pitilessness being his undying love for Catherine and Catherine alone. In contrast to elevating him to the ideals of altruism, however, the novel justifies his earthly, worldly, and energetic love for Catherine by its intense passion and his sincere regard for her, despite its vehemently, sometimes violently, tumultuous nature.

Therefore, the novel emboldens readers by providing them with a narrative characterized by a defiant acceptance of Rabelaisian energy. In two different forms, both male and female, with various ideological constraints, Brontë provides subversive paths of resistance. Both of these great critical minds conclude by bringing together astute insights about *Wuthering Heights* but ultimately departing from them, as did contemporary reviewers, in order for a particular

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<sup>68</sup> Aaron and Heathcliff are both unapologetic for actions that their cultures deem sinful. Sentenced to death by starvation, impenitent Aaron says: “I am no baby, I, that with base prayers / I should repent the evils I have done: / Ten thousand worse than ever yet I did / Would I perform, if I might have my will; / If one good deed in all my life I did, / I do repent it from my very soul.” Heathcliff’s tormented soul could have uttered a similar confession.

moral stance to triumph. Whereas Gilbert incisively presents the novel's inversion of the figurative hell over heaven and recognizes the jubilant Blakeian energies of both Catherine and Heathcliff as the predominant dynamics of the novel, she comes short in her criticism by denying the powerfully subversive aspects of Heathcliff's more fully developed rejection of moral authorities, in contrast to Catherine's, by blurring him out of focus. Nussbaum does not blur Heathcliff out. Rather, what she blurs in her otherwise perceptive criticism is the fact that he remains, even after death, part of the wild and earthly moors and that his downright villainous energy is inseparable from his love for Cathy. Therefore, they are both outcomes of his dual rejection of Christian morality and the morality of generalized altruism.

No altruistic soul is mine, Heathcliff seems to suggest, particularly in the second half of the novel. Therefore, Nussbaum's final analysis of the novel falls a bit flat when she turns Brontë's critique of Christian ideology as it is practiced in Victorian England, and of moral authority in general, into a kind of how-to guide for the amelioration of human societies. After she shows how Brontë charges Christianity to be too hypocritical, she advances that a society must then do more to "discourage vindictiveness and hatred"; to the charge that it supports "social hierarchy" she proposes that we must embrace differences and "truly universal love"; that rather than looking toward a "static paradise" in the afterlife, as Christianity does, we must strive to bring peace here on earth; and, finally, that in the face of Christianity's neglect of human imagination we must imagine the hearts of our fellow human beings (403-05). It is hard to disagree with the spirit of her altruistic, though high-minded, agenda. Yet it abstracts the realities of the world of the novel and reduces them to a four-step program. Furthermore, a program for moral and social amelioration seems out of place in *Wuthering Heights*. It is more fitting to find in, say, the novels of Charles Dickens. One thinks of his *The Adventures of Oliver*

*Twist* or *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, where social justice seems to be his primary concern. But such novels cannot, then, be classified as rebellious novels because the novelists' ideas go upwards toward abstraction when they should coalesce in the concrete and terrestrial. And while some of Dickens' other works are indeed rebellious, in my use of the term, strategies for social justice might look unconvincing or implausible alongside the disruptive power of *Great Expectations*. If Pip could somehow have resisted the sexually beautiful and aristocratic allure of Estella, the novel would have been merely sentimental, not *rebellious*.

Much of what I have been discussing about the critical reception of these novels, from contemporary reviewers to modern critics, concerns the nature of ideological inertia. From my critical perspective, a novel seems to ask its reader to take a journey that includes a temporary letting go of the reader's own ideological stances in order that it might challenge them. The reader is asked to evaluate the novel based upon how well the novel presents a compelling narrative in which those stances may be shown to be inadequate. It is in this context that Nussbaum's observation "about the freedom of the mind within the context of authority" (406) becomes central to the rebellious fiction. The beauty and compassion of such a reflection compares to that of Virginia Woolf when she ponders "the effect [that] poverty has on the mind; and what effect wealth has on the mind" (*A Room*, 24). And here Nussbaum provides the closest approximation of a defense of her assessment that *Wuthering Heights* presents a challenge to *all* systems of social virtue. In the spirit that Woolf encourages us to reflect on the nature of poverty, wealth, and privilege, Nussbaum asks us to consider the effects that authority, moral or otherwise, might have on the human mind. Rebellious fiction demands of its reader to consider the effect of authority.

Consistently, I argue, rebellious fiction leads one to the conclusion that *authority impoverishes the mind*. Authority tends to produce one-dimensional thought and behavior, irrelevant of the original intentions of the authority itself. But might there be some kind of “authority” that is conducive to the development of a psychologically nourished mind? Possibly, but even as Nussbaum critiques *Wuthering Heights*, and the frailer, more gentle love of Cathy and Hareton, she notes that “there is something unconvincing in the union” (409). There is something even in this presumably positive relationship model in *Wuthering Heights* that fails to nourish, a nearly dishonest over-simplification of human relationships. Perhaps abstractions in programs of social change do not fare well in the realms of literary realism and, as Ortega y Gasset declared, the crystalline orb of the ideal falls to the earth as incandescent dust because rebellious novels, as I have defined them, tend to be concerned with the critique of culture rather than with any program of social amelioration. In fact, social programs, as authoritative models, stand in contradiction to rebellious novels. We see in rebellious novels the failure of abstractions; if we tend to think too abstractly, rebellious novels show how abstractions deceive us. Thus, the language of literary realism, as Herbert Marcuse argues, “ceases to be that of deception, ignorance, and submission. Fiction calls the facts by their name and their reign collapses; fiction subverts everyday experience and shows it to be mutilated and false. But art has this magic power only as *the power of negation*. It can speak its own language only as the images are alive which refuse and refute the established order” (62, my emphasis).<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, I do not think that rebellious novels tend to support programs for cultivation of the mind, because programs tend to begin or become authoritative, and their methods often become prescriptive. When substituting one failed program for the promise of a new one, it is as

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<sup>69</sup> And even outside of the world of literary realism and the novel in general, we may do well to keep in mind the admonitions of such pedagogical theorists as Freire and Dewey, to recognize the limits of the authority of teachers as it effects the minds of students.

if rebellious novels, in their “power of negation,” agree with Benjamin, the skeptical yet wise donkey of *Animal Farm*, when he “refused to believe that either food would be more plentiful or that the windmill would save work. Windmill or no windmill, he said, life would go on as it had always gone on—that is, badly” (Orwell 65). Even Nussbaum makes such an admission when she confesses that, in place of an ideology such as the “lifeless and degenerate Christianity” in *Wuthering Heights* (405), “it is not as if [Brontë] offers a practical alternative” (408). *Wuthering Heights* does not offer a program for social improvement or a system of ethical behavior because one could not contain Heathcliff’s passions or Catherine’s unruliness. D. H. Lawrence, for instance, denounces such systems when he writes that he is not a moral *machine* following, or even willing to follow, ethical laws or a moral program, but rather that he is a moral *animal*, sensitive to the heart of others but still possessing contradictory and incongruous emotions (“Benjamin” 22). In his rejection of reigning ideologies, Lawrence reserves the right to be allowed to centralize his own emotions and to express their conflict, like Heathcliff and Catherine, in all their tumultuous intensity.

Therefore, rather than purporting altruism as a defining characteristic, Brontë brings attention to the complicated yet redemptive value of Heathcliff and Catherine’s tumultuous relationship. Even reacting to Catherine’s death, Heathcliff condemns the other mourners and utters a curse on her soul: “Damn you all,” he proclaims, “she wants none of *your* tears” (129, emphasis in the original). Then he condemns Catherine: “May she wake in torment! . . . And I pray one prayer—I repeat it till my tongue stiffens—Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living! You said I killed you—haunt me, then! . . . drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss. . . . I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!” And after dashing his head against a knotted trunk of a tree, he lifted up his head and “howled, not like a

man, but like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears” (130). This is a tortuous scene, and one that assists in garnering sympathy for the wild man. Yet not only do we have the image of his wolfishness again, but attention is brought to how violent his self-serving love is. He is violent when dashing his head against the tree, pitiless when he declares that Catherine does not care for *their* tears, and selfish and mean when he brings down a curse on her soul. Still, in the image of his savage howl, Brontë evokes a terrible sympathy for Heathcliff. Brontë must work up our sympathy for him, whatever his crimes have been and will be later in the novel, if readers are to embark on the journey of ideological rejection that her novel plays out.

One of Heathcliff’s first acts of rejection after Catherine’s death is the way in which he raises Hareton. While one could argue that his first act of rejection is his somewhat surreptitiously taking ownership of Wuthering Heights after Hindley’s death, I want to make a careful distinction between ideological rejection and straightforward revenge. They are not the same. While his revenge may be part of his rejection of Christian values, by no means need one reject Christianity in order to seek revenge, or vice versa. However, Heathcliff raises Hareton in a lax and permissive way; connecting to the freedom he and Catherine enjoyed as children wandering the moors, Heathcliff returns that freedom—granted to him by Master Earnshaw—to Hareton, Earnshaw’s grandson. In contrast to his own son with Isabella Linton, that “puling chicken” of a boy who according to Heathcliff is his “mother’s child, entirely” (160), Hareton is stout, healthy, and athletic. Twelve years later, we meet him at the age of eighteen as he spends his time “lounging among the moors after rabbits and game.” And as the novel is narrated from Nelly’s conventional perspective, with her comments we get her conventional judgments. But if Brontë asks us to sympathize with Heathcliff and Catherine’s energetic freedom, we have to hear

in Nelly's pronouncements the decrees of unprocessed social ideology that hinders the characters' autonomy. Based upon custom and tradition, Nelly declares Hareton a "brute" who was "never taught to read or write; never rebuked for any bad habit, . . . never led a single step towards virtue, or guarded by a single precept against vice" (152). Implicit here, though beyond Nelly's comprehension, is Heathcliff's rejection of popular wisdom on parenting. The protagonist spurns the Christian child-rearing clichés such as "spare the rod, spoil the child."

As a result, Heathcliff acquires double the recompense, persisting in his rejection as well as fulfilling his revenge. On one level, a sincere enough one, Heathcliff admits to being fond of Hareton. Not having lost all his humor, Heathcliff quips only half jokingly, "You'll be the favorite among us, Hareton!" (168). He goes on to tell Nelly, "I've much pleasure in him . . . ; and I can sympathise with all his feelings, having felt them myself." More importantly, Heathcliff has brought up Hareton in his own antisocial ideology: "[Hareton] takes pride in his brutishness. I've taught him to scorn everything extra-animal as silly and weak" (169). Undoubtedly, Heathcliff has indoctrinated Hareton into the ideology of the devil, so to speak. Heathcliff is no liberator, only liberated. And therein lie readers' chief dilemmas in reconciling conflicting feelings of sympathy versus injustice. "I have nothing to regret," Heathcliff proclaims. "And the best of it is Hareton is damnably fond of me! . . . If the dead villain [Hindley] could rise from his grave to abuse me or his offspring's wrongs, I should have the fun of seeing the said offspring fight him back again, indignant that he should dare to rail at the one friend he has in the world!" (169). Like the fallen Lucifer mimicking a jealous God, Heathcliff would visit his revenge on the third and fourth generations. Brontë, however, does not ask readers to condone or even forgive each and every selfish or malicious act in Heathcliff's history. It is as if in writing *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë attempts to cultivate a relationship between her

novel and her reader as tumultuous and passionate as that between Heathcliff and Catherine. Their love is not sentimental, and they would scorn anything that resembled it. When they act meanly or intemperately, they do not beg forgiveness from each other, not because forgiveness is tacitly given but because forgiveness does not come into play. Their love is animalistic; forgiveness is “extra-animal.”

In contrast, Linton and young Cathy’s courtship is mired in the extra-animal. Linton was raised, presumably, with a Christian upbringing until he was twelve, and his mother, Isabella, “reported him to be an ailing, peevish creature” (142). His seven-teen years of life were marked by weakness, physical and mental alike. If we believe Heathcliff’s initial reaction at seeing him, then his illness comes from his mother’s side. Linton’s sickliness comes directly from his mother’s lineage—his name bearing greater significance than as an homage—which is not to say that it is genetic, *per se*, but also the culture of Victorian civility in combination with the Christian spirit that pervades English society. His illness is the Linton family’s sickness of spirit made manifest. It is further exacerbated by Heathcliff’s revenge as he speaks of his son’s defects so frequently that Linton comes to consider himself worthless. Such a thought about themselves, Catherine and Heathcliff could hardly hold for longer than a moment, if at all. Thus, starkly different are the constitutions of the young Cathy and Linton compared to that of their parents, presumably because the younger two have both been polluted by the Linton stock. Rather than transcending forgiveness as the older pair did through ideological rejection, Linton, for instance, is saturated in a socially compelled need for it: “I *am* worthless, . . . and if you choose, you *may* say goodbye. . . . Only, Catherine, . . . believe that your kindness has made me love you deeper than if I deserved your love, and though I couldn’t, and cannot help showing my nature to you, I regret it and repent it, and shall regret and repent it, till I die!” (194). Cathy “felt she must

forgive him” and continue forgiving him again, until he should perish; what she felt most sorry for, however, was his “distorted nature” because “[h]e’ll never let his friends be at ease, and he’ll never be at ease himself,” continually feeling inadequate (194-95). Undeserving, repentant, and regretful, Linton is not made in the image of his father. Likewise, Cathy feels the compulsion to forgive, and to forgive endlessly. Their connection is pitiable rather than passionate. As *Wuthering Heights* is associated with the wild passion of the first couple, and *Thrushcross Grange* is associated with conventional English culture, Linton and young Cathy’s relationship is full of the effects of shame, penitence, weakness, and unworthiness. If Brontë had named her novel *Thrushcross Grange*, we might be tempted to think differently of the younger couple. As it is, she discourages any hope for the younger two.

Brontë develops the story of Heathcliff and Catherine as one of passionate ecstasy destroyed by the devastating influence of convention. When he is thirty-seven years old, about eighteen years after Catherine’s death, Heathcliff is healthy and happy. He claims to have a “hard constitution, and temperate mode of living” and “probably shall remain above ground till there is scarcely a black hair on [his] head” (248). Yet “[t]he entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda” that Catherine existed, that they loved, and that they lost each other (247). For eighteen years, Catherine has been his “one universal idea,” and feeling a strange premonition of their imminent reunion, he undergoes “both pleasure and pain, in exquisite extremes,” both anguish and rapture for being once again in the presence of his beloved (248). At this point, the subplot of Hareton and Catherine becomes a mere shadow in comparison to the foregrounded reunification of flesh and spirit in Heathcliff and Catherine.

Anticipating sentimental readers misjudging Heathcliff’s ultimate decision to abandon his original plans of taking revenge on the “representatives” of his “old enemies,” he confesses that

it is not “a fine trait of magnanimity” that impels the relinquishing of his plans, but boredom: “I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction” (247). And despite his awkward moment of expressed affection for Hareton, Heathcliff still proves to be that rejecter of ideologies to the end. Sensing a tragic end for her master, Nelly urges Heathcliff to “repent of [his] many injustices.” He retorts, “I’ve done no injustice, and I repent nothing—I’m too happy, and yet not happy enough. My soul’s bliss kills my body, but does not satisfy itself” (254). Again, the incessantly virtue-minded Nelly Dean warns, “from the time you were thirteen years old, you have lived a selfish, unchristian life,” and she requests him to send for a minister who might “show you how very far you have erred from its precepts, and how unfit you will be for its heaven” (255). Throughout the novel, Heathcliff scorns the idea of an eternal paradise outside of the moors and Catherine’s arms. On the verge of his reunion he proclaims, “Last night, I was on the threshold of hell. To-day, I am within sight of my heaven” (251). In response to Nelly’s sanctimonious request, then, Heathcliff declares again, “I tell you, I have nearly attained *my* heaven; and that of others is altogether unvalued and uncovered by me!” (255, emphasis in the original). He will not submit, for such is the strong will of the fully transgressive character. Neither the fear of hell nor the myth of divine punishment has the power to dominate his resolve.

Brontë constructs her novel to have Heathcliff’s death and his reunion with Catherine come as the last and therefore triumphant impression of her narrative. Even in death, Heathcliff’s “life-like gaze of exultation” seemed to be “girning [*sic*] at death” (256). Brontë develops the narrative so that readers ought to make no mistake that Heathcliff’s “godless indifference” triumphs over all the powers of convention and Christianity because the two lovers are the only ones to achieve any kind of “heaven,” as people have witnessed the couple wandering the moors, in the afterlife.

In their youth, the couple rejected anything that obstructed their freedom. But the powerful influence of upper-class culture and the peculiar charm of Christianity undermined Catherine's sense of who she was. Like Lockwood, she was, or at least became, afraid of her sexualized body. Her sense of agency was injured by the selfhood defined by religious and cultural precepts. Her authentic, *naked* self was shamed into becoming a social self—that is, a repressed self. Nussbaum notes that Heathcliff, in contrast, “lives in and fully acknowledges the depth of his passion” (407). Of Heathcliff's foil, she writes, Lockwood “thinks of himself as a snail, curling up inside his shell to avoid encountering the gaze of his passion. The snail without the shell is what he is ashamed to be. This is a deep image of the nakedness of the body,” and Christianity “reacts to our shame by telling us to cover ourselves—with a fig leaf, with a snail's shell, with the hope of heaven, the submission to authority, the flame of chastity” (407-08). Catherine's sense of self is corrupted by shame and fear, as much as Lockwood's, once she fully immerses herself in the Linton family culture when she is forced to stay there in her youth and in continuing her relationship with Edgar when she leaves. Such repressive ideologies make adherents ashamed not only of their many capacities for joy but also of their naked selves. Therefore, it is Heathcliff's undying loyalty to Catherine and his insistence on rejecting those ideologies that allows their subversive reunion at the close of the novel. The Blakeian energy she possessed in her youth was stamped out by mainstream culture, transmitted to her by the Linton family. Heathcliff endured with his Blakeian energies intact, and their reunion signals the value of rejecting ideologies in preference for the naked self's energy.

#### The Transgressive (and the Invisible) in *Sabbath's Theater*

In *Wuthering Heights*, readers are presented with two paths of transgressive resistance to ideological conformity. The success of Catherine's rejection comes at the cost of sacrificing her

life. While she wholeheartedly rejects repressive forms of Victorian ideology, she is unable to carry out her self-fulfillment. Through Heathcliff, Brontë carries further the dramatization of transgressive resistance. She depicts his defiant, Blakeian energy triumphantly, though not without its bitterness, giving readers an idea of what kind of sacrifices may be required to enact one's transgression. In *Sabbath's Theater*, Philip Roth provides a dramatization of transgressive resistance to ideological conformity by augmenting similarly Blakeian characters with a Rabelaisian force. For Mickey Sabbath, sexual energy in excess is eternal delight. The energy of sexual adventure fulfills Sabbath profoundly, as it does for his female counterpart, Drenka Balich. In *Sabbath's Theater*, these two characters suffer from social oppression and its moral condemnation, but they are able to navigate them without perishing from them. Thus, another source of delight for Sabbath is antagonizing aspects of society that he finds physically and spiritually stifling. The first, chief aspect of Sabbath's transgressive and subversive power, then, lies in his rejection of conventional American ideology, while the other radiates from his life force, his libidinal drive (in Freud's sense of the term). When it comes to his sexual adventures, there seem to be no self-imposed restrictions on his instinctual gratification. He even bemoans having missed his chance to have a sexual encounter with a man: "That Nebraska guy who gave me the books on the tanker. Yeats. Conrad. O'Neill. He would have taught me more than what to read if I'd let him" (330-31). But what he did discover by means of that tanker was the vitality to be found in sexual perversity and excess: "the worldwide world of whoredom, the tens of thousands of whores who worked the docks and the portside saloons wherever ships made anchor, flesh of every pigmentation to furnish every conceivable pleasure, whores who . . . spoke the scatological vernacular of the gutter" (81). Reflecting back, at sixty-four years of age, an ailing and always unapologetic Sabbath thinks, "Whores. Played a leading role in my life.

Always felt at home with whores. Particularly fond of whores. The stewlike stink of those oniony parts. What has ever meant more to me?” (153).

Moreover, it is important to note that fulfillment for Sabbath does not come as a result from domination, *per se*, exploitation, or power over a woman, although those aspects may comprise part of his adventures. Furthermore, when sexual fulfillment culminates in adventure, he willingly lets himself be dominated and gives up power, as he does when he allows Drenka to urinate on him. But one aspect that proves deeply fulfilling in his sexual adventures is to find and to help unshackle what he calls *soulfulness* in another human being, sexuality being simply the best and most pleasurable pathway to it. For instance, Sabbath displays his tender affection, shed of any romantic sentimentality, for his first wife, Nikki: “The soulfulness was there, that was always there,” and he continues to describe her tenderly: “the breasts so small that you could cup them in your hand the way you hold a ladybug to prevent its flying away, the impenetrability of the eyes that drew you in and in and told you nothing, yet told you nothing so eloquently—the excitement of the yielding of all that fragility! Merely looking down at her he felt that his prick was about to burst.” And he and Nikki delve into the adventure together:

They were both surprised by what they were doing together when he first struck her backside with his belt. Nikki, who was tyrannized by nearly everyone, displayed no true fear of being whipped a little. “Not too hard,” but the leather grazing her, at first lightly, then not so lightly, as she lay obligingly on her stomach, put her into an exalted state. “It’s, it’s . . .” “Tell me!” “*It’s tenderness—going wild!*” It was impossible to tell who was imposing whose will on whom—was it merely Nikki once again submitting or was this the meat of her desire? (130, my emphasis)

Still, soulfulness is merely one of the aspects of his sexual adventures.<sup>70</sup> Another is novelty. Through Sabbath, Roth depicts the importance of tenderness, wild tenderness, as well as the significance of new experiences. With his first as well as with his second wife, despite the excitement in the early parts of their relationships, the sex becomes stagnant, first with Nikki—“Even the orgasms that so enthralled him began to bore him after a while”—and then with Roseanna: “Roseanna’s orgasm required a great deal of her, an urging onward that was breathtaking to watch (until he grew bored watching *that*)” (131, emphasis in original).

Sabbath’s sexual boredom with his wives, Roth suggests, stems not from his failure of working toward the American ideal of a monogamous union with another human being, but from the failure of the convention itself. When Drenka, his most soulful partner—loyal and loving to each other despite participating in a clandestine, extramarital affair that often included sharing other sexual partners—requests that he forswear all other women, he is “charged, on pain of losing her, to turn himself inside out,” and he explains how intensely anti-libidinous monogamy is, not merely to himself, but to her as well (3). He jests, “One monogamous mate isn’t enough for you? . . . You like monogamy so much with him you want it with me too? Is there no connection you can see between your husband’s enviable fidelity and the fact that he physically repels you?” He goes on, “We who have never stopped exciting each other impose on each other no vows, no oaths, no restrictions, whereas with him the fucking is sickening even for the two minutes a month he bends you over the dinner table and does it from behind.” Sabbath even concludes by praising the sexual attractiveness of Matija, her husband, cook, and owner of a bed and breakfast, but still affirms the repressive nature of monogamy: “Every old dame in the country is in love with him and not just for his Slavic charm. His looks turn them on. . . . All

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<sup>70</sup> While Philip Roth’s and D. H. Lawrence’s conceptions of fulfillment may have very different elements, both of these novelists, within their oeuvre, are concerned with presenting depictions of their respective visions of fulfillment as well as the various social forces that obstruct individuals from achieving it.

agleam with grease, he turns *me* on. Only his wife he repels. Why? The ostentatiously monogamous nature, that is why” (4).

The aspects of non-monogamy join Drenka and Sabbath in a union greater than any other coupling in the novel. It is not merely their sexual encounters with numerous others, but also their erotic license, that binds them: “[I]nstead of being joined by the contractual they were interconnected by the instinctual and together could eroticize anything (except their spouses). Each of their marriages cried out for a countermarriage in which the adulterers attack their feelings of captivity” (27). Therefore, the world of *Sabbath’s Theater* upholds the idea of what Roth calls “the sacrament of infidelity” (31). Sabbath’s rejection of monogamy and embracing of novelty and promiscuity urges him on toward greater and greater vitalism.

Of course, the theme of novelty as part of sexual fulfillment can be found in many of Roth’s novels. As I discussed in Chapter 3, part of what forms Alexander Portnoy’s revulsion of monogamy is his preoccupation with novelty. He quips, “Imagine it: suppose I were to go ahead and marry A, with her sweet tits and so on, what will happen when B appears, whose are even sweeter—or, at any rate, *newer?*” (104, my emphasis). In *The Professor of Desire* (1977), readers see the matter treated less comically, more delicately, than in *Portnoy*, as David Kepesh mourns what Alex merely mocks—but the result is the same, nevertheless. Kepesh, in his mid-thirties, feels as though Claire has saved him from the wreck of his first marriage. After a period of passion and intimacy, both sexual and spiritual in nature, he reflects on their relationship and the nature of monogamy: “[G]one is the admixture of the merciless with the tender, those intimations of utter subjugation that one sees in the purplish bruise, the wantonness one thrills to in the coarse word breathed at the peak of pleasure. We no longer *succumb* to desire. . . . Which is, as we all know, how it must be” (199, emphasis in the original). And in the novel’s ending,

Kepesh laments not only the loss of his desire for Claire but also the loss of the spiritual connection that fortified their relationship: “Oh, innocent beloved, you fail to understand and I can’t tell you. . . , but within a year my passion will be dead. Already it is dying and I am afraid that there is nothing I can do to save it. And nothing you can do. Intimately bound—bound to you as to no one else!—and I will not be able to raise a hand to so much as touch you . . . unless first I remind myself that I must.” He concludes his lamentation: “I will be without desire [for you]. Oh, it’s stupid! Idiotic! Unfair! To be robbed like this of you! And of this life I love and have hardly gotten to know!” (261). While Portnoy refuses to relinquish novelty, Kepesh tries to force himself to live without sexual desire, which will be the most difficult part of his relationship with Claire, intimated by his association of their relationship to the last line of Chekov’s “The Lady with a Lapdog.”<sup>71</sup>

In spite of Kepesh’s sincere intention, the reader is left with the feeling that his endeavor of being happy within monogamy will ultimately fail. Not only does the novel prevent readers from believing that the couple will succeed, but we also see his amorous adventures continue in the novel’s sequel, *The Dying Animal* (2001). Sabbath, on the other hand, sees such an endeavor as futile and, more importantly, repressive. In an important scene in *Sabbath’s Theater*, after Drenka has asked Sabbath for “monogamy outside marriage and adultery inside marriage,” (19) Sabbath explains how monogamy, to himself as well as to millions of others, is deforming: “I am not by nature, inclination, practice, or belief a monogamous being. Period. You wish to impose a condition that either deforms me or turns me into a dishonest man with you. But like all other living creatures I suffer when I am deformed.” Just as important, Sabbath goes on to argue that

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<sup>71</sup> According to Kepesh’s translation, Chekov’s short story ends with this last line: “And both of them knew that the most complicated and difficult part was only just beginning” (260). And if Thomas Hardy’s Sue Bridehead’s feelings are any indication of the kind of relationship in which respect exists for a partner without sexual desire, the “difficult part” will likely devolve into antipathy and repulsion.

“the forthrightness that has sustained and excited us both, that provides such a healthy contrast to the routine deceitfulness that is the hallmark of a hundred million marriages, including yours and mine, is now less to your taste than the solace of conventional lies and repressive puritanism, . . . [which] seeks to impose its norms on others by self-righteously suppressing the satanic side of sex” (20). But Sabbath’s satanic side is less like the inverted idealism of Milton’s Satan, set on destroying the world of virtue, than the pagan energy of Dionysus or the Great God Pan.

In his enjoyment of what he calls “the delightful Dionysian underlayer of life” (237), Sabbath thrives on novelty: “He could never in his life let a new discovery get away,” and devoting himself to promiscuity the way that a Jesuit “monk devotes himself to God,” Sabbath tells us, “Most men have to fit fucking in around the edges of what they define as more pressing concerns: the pursuit of money, power, politics, fashion, Christ knows what it might be—skiing. But Sabbath had simplified his life and fit the other concerns in around fucking” (60). Yes, this “Monk of Fucking” (60) would never “voluntarily depart this stupendous madness over fucking” (329). The energy of that stupendous madness has not been lost on critics. For example, Frank Kelleter contrasts Roth’s use of sexuality to Updike’s: “By contrast, Philip Roth’s heroes . . . can detect nothing inauthentic about the religious pursuit of promiscuity. In this, they are refreshingly free from Updike’s didacticism” (265-66). Updike’s didacticism about sexuality might be comparable to what Sabbath attacks as “giving reality to all the worst things [people] want the world to know about men” (236).

Moreover, Kelleter’s observation about Sabbath’s *authentic* pursuit of promiscuity hints at what Roth seems to be showing throughout his fiction: the Dionysian underlayer of life is, as Sabbath calls it, “inherently human.” Sabbath even uses the language of religion and spirituality in describing promiscuity as part of “the erotic *mysterries*” and portrays himself as being “Virgil”

to Kathy Goolsbee's "Dante in the sexual underworld!" (237). Goolsbee is a student at Athena College, where Sabbath teaches a puppetry workshop. He has been accused of seducing her, of which he is guilty but rejects the idea that seduction is somehow shameful or unethical.

Moreover, Sabbath contends that the erotic mysteries are inherently human as the mysteries of other religions reveal "religious truth" and are "believed to impart enduring bliss" ("Mystery"). His bliss is primarily sexual, and his truth is about the necessity to delight in the diabolical, antisocial urges of the body. Frank Kermode observes this in his discussion about Sabbath's life-affirming exuberance in promiscuity as a contrast to conformity and the imminence of death and despair. He writes:

The trick is to use . . . intelligence as a propellant of a great kick at misery. If it has to be delivered by one whose opinions or improper prejudices, whose monstrous conduct, are disgusting, well, too bad. Others may make their way to the tomb measured and considerate; good for them, poor suckers. But theirs is not the only way: there is a diabolic alternative. Of course it will all end in despair, in hell—the hell of rejection by the *salauds* of respectability. But hell is energy, even if it has to be the energy of hatred. (*Pleasing* 264)

Kermode here associates respectability with death and conformity, while Roth presents Sabbath as the counterpoint that reveals hell and diabolical energy as the more life-affirming alternative.

Therefore, his seduction of Kathy, along with the numerous women he has also seduced, is, in Sabbath's view, part of a quasi-spiritual process of liberating their sexuality from the repressions of ideology. His prayer might be, *Help me lead them into temptation*. The thirty-three tapes he made of phone conversations with six separate female students were records of his Picasso-like artistry of seduction. They recorded "the way he was able to unshackle the girls

from their habit of innocence.” Like a Blakeian transformation, Sabbath attempts to guide these women from innocence to experience, from mainstream respectability toward their own diabolical energy: “The very repugnance that his aging body inspired in them had to make their adventure with him feel a little like a crime and thereby give free play to their budding perversity and to the confused exhilaration that comes with flirting with disgrace” (213). Giving free play to a so-called criminal adventure into disgrace fuses the language of mainstream ideology with the language of transgression. Like Brontë’s reversal of heaven and hell and Blake’s marriage of the two, Roth weaves the transgressive into the mainstream American view and, through his irony, has Sabbath show his disdain for the pejorative perspective of mass culture. As if anticipating judgmental pronouncements about Sabbath’s misleading the youth of America—as had by then become a common reaction to his fiction starting with the publication of his first book, *Goodbye, Columbus*—Roth reaffirms promiscuity and perversity as part of the erotic mysteries that are, in Sabbath’s view, inherently human. After having given up on puppeteering and theater direction, “the art in these tapes—the insidious art of giving license to what was already there—was the only art he had left” (214). Sabbath merely unshackles their urge toward perversity that has been suppressed by traditional American morality.

By insisting that a drive toward promiscuity, perversity, and excess lies within the realm of eternal delight, Roth encourages the reader to sympathize with Sabbath against his detractors who articulate and support the strictures of moral respectability. The dean and the committee that was formed to handle Sabbath’s scandal “described the tape as ‘the most blatantly vile example of the exploitation, humiliation, and sexual defilement of a college student by her professor in the history of this academic community’” (214). Deeming Sabbath’s actions a “psychological assault on an inexperienced young woman,” the committee, speaking for the

community, states, “Professor Sabbath has been able to manipulate [Kathy] into thinking that she is a willing participant” (215). Of course, Roth invites readers to see how the committee—“his supervirtuous antagonists” with “their angry, sinister fixed ideas about what should and should not constitute an education for twenty-year-old girls”—has merely superimposed feminist archetypes onto Sabbath and Kathy: he as the domineering male and she as the female victim (232).

In fact, Roth reveals such ideological impositions to be mere pessimism. In the case of Christa, the German au pair whose cynical view of Americans is based on her time in New York, her worldliness amounts to a collapsed romanticism. She is described as “all business: no sentiment, no longings, no illusions, no follies” and with a “cruel toughness” that culminated in a “mistrustful” attitude (54). Seeking adventure in America and fleeing the boredom of Germany, a place about which she believes she “know[s] everything and how it works” (55), here she sees exploitation everywhere she looks. Christa comments on how difficult it is to make friends in New York: “They want to use you. In any possible way. That’s the first idea that comes to their mind. . . . In New York they keep their true motives to themselves and announce to you other motives” (55-56). She goes on to explain her disillusionment: “Here there’s all this friendliness—and it’s fake. . . . The American way. I was very naïve when I came here. I was eighteen. . . . You have to be naïve when you come as a stranger. Of course you learn. You learn all right” (56). Of course her process of disillusionment, what she calls learning, does not come off as enlightenment, but rather as a deflating of her romantic naïveté into a deep distrustful cynicism. Thus, Roth preempts readers from agreeing with her accusation that Drenka and Sabbath exploited her. Sabbath responds to her accusation by arguing that harm never entered their interactions: “To exploit someone means to use someone selfishly for one’s own ends or to

utilize them for profit. I don't think either of us exploited you any more than you exploited either of us" (53).

Again, Roth encourages readers to sympathize with Sabbath in opposition to his detractors. Doing so emboldens readers also to reject the views embedded in their ideologies that would judge him and his actions as morally reprehensible. Sabbath's views refute such judgments by discarding codified morality and replacing those codes with practical considerations. Perhaps he did not bring either joy or illumination to Christa's life, but it seems as though her cynicism precluded the success of any such attempt. On the other hand, his association with Kathy and a number of other companions comes off as what could be viewed as a sort of diabolical enlightenment. In fact, Sabbath witnesses such illumination in Kathy. As she pleaded her innocence of any willing participation in exposing to the community his seduction of her and reaffirmed her devotion to him, "She had never looked more soulful. . . . She had never looked soulful to Sabbath at all." But as she implored him that her feelings for him were sincere, "she seemed to be digging into a spiritual existence that was news to her, as well. . . . Kathy Goolsbee had just grown up!" (236). That Sabbath recognizes her newfound soulfulness speaks to his keen awareness of character, unimpeded by ideological considerations.

The connection between Sabbath and Kathy is characterized, in part, by organic authenticity. That he set out to seduce her is undeniable, but seduction of his sort entails a sincere and authentic relationship. And Sabbath, "who liked to think that distrusting the sincerity of everyone armed him a little against betrayal by everything" (143), did not simply dismiss Kathy as a betrayer. Though the evidence pointed to her treacherous complicity in his disgraceful dismissal from Athena College, and despite the mental anguish he was undergoing at the time, Sabbath struggled with the sincerity of her pleas. After the tape of their conversation

had ended up on the dean's desk, and S.A.B.B.A.T.H. (or the ad hoc committee calling itself Women Against Sexual Abuse, Belittlement, Battering, and Telephone Harassment) had been formed, his life falling apart around him, his practical integrity would not allow him to lump her in, outright, with the numerous people who lined up to indict him, an integrity unknown to the ad hoc committee.

In fact, the ad hoc committee acts in the way that Roth describes those who declare his fiction misogynistic. In an interview with Daniel Sandstrom, Roth says, "Misogyny, a hatred of women, provides my work with neither a structure, a meaning, a motive, a message, a conviction, a perspective, or a guiding principle."<sup>72</sup> He goes on to say that his detractors "practice a rather commonplace form of social control: You are not what you think you are. You are what *we* think you are. You are what we choose for you to be. . . . The imposition of a cause's idea of reality on the writer's idea of reality can only mistakenly be called 'reading'" (emphasis in the original). And Roth's detractors impose their cause's version of reality on his fiction as S.A.B.B.A.T.H. imposes their cause's version of reality—that is to say, distorted reality—on Sabbath and Kathy.

And this episode in the novel demonstrates again Sabbath's "*realistic* obsession with rejection." In his taped phone conversation with Kathy, he encourages her to reject mainstream ideological conceptions and mores regarding female sexuality. Claudia Roth Pierpont asserts as much: "Indeed, in [Roth's] scheme of things, the freedom of men depended on women also being free. Surely that was clear if one read his books with an open mind, unimpeded by contemporary cant" (237). In the taped conversation, Kathy applauds Sabbath for being such an

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<sup>72</sup> On this theme of Roth's alleged misogyny, Debra Shostak writes in "Roth and Gender" that Drenka "may appear at first as a victim of misogyny, not just Sabbath's but the writer's as well, because she seems to embody male fantasy." She continues, however, "If a female character's possession of a voice is one sign that a text is not objectifying her, then Drenka . . . escapes misogynistic representation" (122).

animal, a “human animal,” and when asked what she is, she says “[a] bad girl.” He responds, ““That’s a good thing to be. It’s better than the opposite. You think you have to be a good girl?’ ‘Well, it’s what people expect.’ ‘Well, you be *realistic* and let them be *unrealistic*”” (234, my emphasis). Sabbath subverts ideological perspectives by supporting her authentic, organic feelings. She knows what is expected of her, socially, but feels that her perversity and promiscuity are more authentically her own as she utters again and again over the phone, “I want to suck you. I want to suck your cock” (233). And here is where Sabbath’s conception of soulfulness is shed of any sentimental spirituality. Roth doesn’t let readers think for long, if it ever even sneaks into their minds, that Sabbath is sentimental or a Good Bad Boy.

That dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual side of human existence, particularly as it is presented as a hierarchy, has a long tradition in Western literature. As I discussed in Chapter 2, D. H. Lawrence was a fervent critic of how disastrously this hierarchy affects the individual. His view is that while both are important for individual self-fulfillment—see Chapter 2 for how he combines the two as a mind/body connection rather than dichotomizes them in a hierarchy—the history of the West desecrates the former in order to exalt the latter to the detriment of the individual. In an important scene in *Sons and Lovers*, Miriam espouses a conventional belief about Paul regarding the purported goodness of people despite their conflicting feelings: “She believed that there were in [Paul] desires for higher things, and desires for lower, and that the desire for higher would conquer. At any rate, he should try. She forgot that her ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ were arbitrary” (228). Lawrence’s description of Miriam’s conceptualization of Paul would probably satisfy Fiedler and his notion of the Good Bad Boy. Like Lawrence, Roth encourages readers through his novels to reexamine the traditional hierarchy regarding the mind and the body, though stylistically Lawrence’s austere sincerity is

replaced by Roth's comic irony. In a humorous scene, Sabbath questions Kathy about whether she loves him, despite being as "old and loathsome" as he is. She says she loves him "in a way," specifically the way he exposes his mind when he talks. "My mind?" he jests, going on ironically to invert the old hierarchy: "I thought you loved my ancient penis. My *mind*? . . . Were you really only in it for my *mind*! You dared to introduce a mental element into a setting where it had no place. Help! I've been mentally harassed! Help! I am a victim of mental harassment! . . . You have extracted mental favors from me without my even knowing and against my will! . . . My *dick* has been belittled by you!" (244).

Throughout the novel, Sabbath's rejections do not merely replace one socially accepted ideology for another. Not only does he reject the coercions of the conformity complex, but he is also a constant opponent of socially established ideologies. He is, for instance, once referred to as "King of the kingdom of the unillusioned, emperor of no expectations" (359). Like Brontë's Catherine and Heathcliff, Sabbath's denunciation of traditionalism and social hierarchy, his insistence of the legitimacy of his own organic feelings and perspectives, and the emphasis on passion and physical vitality point toward the anarchic nature of the novel, though he is no anarchist, either socially or politically. Thus, while being evicted from Norman's Manhattan apartment and his "civilized ideals," not unlike Prince Hal banishing Falstaff, Norm mocks Sabbath. You have to be "Kept fresh by means of anarchic provocation. We are determined by our society to such an extent that we can only live as human beings if we turn anarchic." The princely Norm contemptuously asks Sabbath, "Isn't that the pitch? Hasn't that always been the pitch?" Of course Sabbath responds in kind: "You're going to feel quite dashed by this, Norman, but on top of everything else I don't have, *I don't have a pitch*. You have kind-hearted liberal

comprehension but I am flowing swiftly along the curbs of life, I am merely debris, *in possession of nothing to interfere with an objective reading of the shit*" (347, my emphasis).

Sabbath, moreover, recognizes in his "objective reading" that there is no protection against the cruel chaos of life and people's futile attempts to arm themselves against this chaos with ideological security: "Seeking protection from the other. Seeking protection against themselves. Seeking protection against everything. *But there isn't any*" (344). By Sabbath's declaration of owning neither possessions nor a fixed ideology, we get the best description of what his rejection of conventional ideologies, such as Norman's kind-hearted liberalism, allow him to do: get a more objective reading of the overwhelming chaos and painful existence of life. And of course, his reading is not quite fully objective. Neither impartial nor detached would adequately describe Sabbath's perspective as he "persist[s] in quarreling with society" (347). But his subjective perspective has jettisoned many of the social constructs that the conformity complex imposes on people as a socially convincing mythology.

Sabbath, then, could be described as an organic vitalist—possibly a critical experientialist: a realist who is non-dogmatic, imposing neither on himself nor on anyone else a codified or principled value system.<sup>73</sup> Rather than submitting to an ideology that has been merely transmitted through ideological state apparatuses, Sabbath's perspective, as such, has been hard won by living in the United States during the middle and later parts of the twentieth century, still informed by the epistemic constructs that compose that particular culture—concepts ranging from social constructions of masculinity and cultural images of Jewishness to philosophical notions of exile, psychoanalytical understandings of repression, and scientific

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<sup>73</sup> To clarify Roth's ideological critique, I think that Sabbath would agree with Max Stirner when he writes: "The divine is God's concern; the human, man's. My concern is neither the divine nor the human, not the true, good, just, free, etc., but solely what is *mine*, and it is not a general one, but is—unique, as I am unique. Nothing is more to me than myself!" (18).

explanations of biology and sex, to name but a few. To reject the belief in any kind of cause or code (political, social, or moral), particularly when discretion suggests a better course of action, does not mean rejecting all epistemological paradigms. Sabbath rejects what conflicts with his own epistemological perspective and sense of life.

And part of Sabbath's oppositional stance is a concomitant rejection of idealism. Similar to Faunia Farley's rejection of the ideal of purity that I will discuss in my examination of *The Human Stain* in the next chapter, Donald, a recovering alcoholic "who vaguely resembled the Sabbath of some thirty years ago," proclaims, "Ideological idiots! . . . Fascism. Communism. Feminism. All designed to turn one group of people against another group of people. The good Aryans against the bad others who oppress them. The good poor against the bad rich who oppress them. The good women against the bad men who oppress them." Of course Donald vastly oversimplifies the complexities of ideology, but he touches on a truth when he declares, "The holder of the ideology is pure and good and clean and the other is wicked. But do you know who is wicked? Whoever imagines himself to be pure is wicked!" (274). Donald continues:

There *is* no human purity! . . . It must not and *should* not exist! Because it is a lie! [His wife's] ideology is like all ideologies—founded on a lie! Ideological tyranny. It's the disease of the century. The ideology *institutionalizes* the pathology. In twenty years there will be a new ideology. People against dogs. . . . Then after the dogs, . . . Who will be to blame for corrupting our purity? (274-75, emphasis in the original).

Roth often uses sarcasm in order to antagonize readers into reexamining their ideological assumptions. It probably does not always work, but when he antagonizes, he often hits a nerve of discomfort by advancing an important insight.

Throughout Roth's fiction, ideals are constantly being exposed as "lies."<sup>74</sup> The conformity complex institutionalizes those "lies" and ideals as social truths, cultural mythologies, and national histories, decoded in this scene by Donald as "pathologies." Those truths, mythologies, and histories become irrefutable within the realm of mass culture and serve as the basis to oppress members of the group who do not adopt the national myths as their own, especially when it comes to cultural identities and social norms. Of course, Sabbath rejects those so-called truths and myths to the degree that it interferes with his authentic sense of self. He even goes on to say to Donald that he "wholeheartedly" endorses his "aversions." In their exchange, Donald calls Sabbath "The great god Pan," signifying not only that Sabbath's sexual interests are great but also that his adventurous freedom is god-like, in a pagan sense (275)—and perhaps introducing the idea of Pan is another allusion to Lawrence's philosophy whose *St. Mawr* includes an important conversation about the Greek god that I discussed in Chapter 2. Claudia Roth Pierpont reinforces this point: "The utterly free mind of Mickey Sabbath sets the tone for the freest of Roth's novels" (240). Certainly Sabbath's freedom, and the dramatic freedom of the novel itself, resides in part in the titular character's rejection of social constraints, especially those mental constructs that come off to his keen sense as denials of reality. The institutionalized pathologies of the conformity complex threaten to hinder Sabbath's vitality and his free play at life, and they are quickly made the butt of his comic irony and are summarily dismissed as both dangerous and absurd.

It should also be clarified that Sabbath does not reject every aspect of decency, virtue, and moral sympathy. For example, his affinity for soulfulness encompasses his own, personal

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<sup>74</sup> The fact that *Sabbath's Theater* includes the equating of ideals, such as purity, with "lies," explicitly and narratively, reinforces the notion that Roth and Céline have common philosophical perspectives in that individuals are beset by established ideologies, and that in order to live more fulfilling lives they must, to use Céline's phrase, "vomit" forth the lies and idealism that are imposed upon them.

feelings about what is most meaningful for an individual. However, because he finds that the codification of such values, like decency, impedes his free play, he often appears to be the abomination that his critics take him for. But on another level, he is actually kind and considerate, as illustrated through his connection with Kathy Goolsbee and the gentleness he exhibited in the face of a probable betrayer. Moreover, he is keenly aware of the harm that might arise from his mischief, having no intention of inflicting pain—except, at times, with his second wife who antagonizes him only slightly less than he does her. At one point, Rosa, Norman Cowan’s maid, stumbles upon Sabbath rifling through the bedroom of Norman’s daughter, Deborah, in the hope of finding erotic photographs of her. She is startled, not knowing who he is, and suspects he may be a burglar with a gun. As he knows that the danger is only illusory, Sabbath’s mischievousness leads him to see what might develop from the circumstances. After voluntarily leading him to ten thousand dollars that Norman’s wife, Michelle, has been hiding from Norm, Rosa began “sobbing like a child into the crook of her arm,” afraid that the “madman” in front of her meant her real harm. Faced with the guileless woman in tears, “He didn’t know whether to *follow his inclination* and put a hand out *to comfort* her or to appear more ruthless by reaching for the pocket where she thought the pistol was” (my emphasis).

Sabbath’s natural inclination is to comfort someone who is afraid, especially if he has been the force that has terrorized them. To be sure, “To be callous quite like this was not in his nature (except with a perpetual drunk [his second wife, Roseanna]). Sabbath did not care to make people suffer beyond the point . . . [that] made him happy. Nor was he ever dishonest more than was pleasant” (171). Even in his mischievousness, Sabbath is not unkind, balancing his own pleasure with the pain of another. In fact, he demonstrates the ability to sympathize with anyone, even victims of his naughty whimsy. With the exception, perhaps, of his saint-like deceased

brother, Sabbath demonstrates better than anyone else in the novel the ability to sympathize with other human beings. His sympathy, the novel suggests, results from his perspective of ideological rejection. His ability to sympathize is thereby unclouded by overzealous, idealized sentimentality, on the one hand, or an overly rigid form of justice, on the other. Sabbath's moral perspective primarily considers practical consequences, both his own as well as others. Therefore, when he sees no real harm, he sees no immorality.

This moral concern helps to illuminate his transgressive nature. Sabbath's transgressive, rejective disposition may best be seen in his attitude about art, specifically puppetry. He had learned from a puppet teacher in Rome both about the art of giving life to his finger puppets and to his deepest sexual desires. In the world of *Sabbath's Theater*, life is absurd, and ideals can get one killed—as he realized when his brother enlisted and died, living three days longer than anyone else in his crew after being shot down over enemy lines. Thus, through his puppetry, Sabbath is able to see how far he can go in his vitality and audacity: “All the way back to Petrushka, anything goes, the crazier and uglier the better. Sabbath's cannibal puppet that won first prize from the maestro in Rome. Eating his enemies on the stage. Tearing them apart and talking about them all the while they were chewed and swallowed” (244-45). Petrushka is a thinly veiled metaphor: Petrushka is for Sabbath what Sabbath is for Roth. Sabbath dismantles his enemies not unlike Petrushka's cannibalism: he tears them apart through his dynamic, transgressive vitalism and more explicitly in his conversations with other characters.

Before the Maestro in Rome, Sabbath merely dabbled in transgression. Sabbath had escapades with seemingly countless prostitutes—“a veteran six times over of the Romance Run,” a merchant seaman course strewn with ports known for their prostitution, including a memorable one who looked like Yvonne De Carlo. He had also already begun by the age of fourteen to

reject the ideology of mainstream America, after the death of his brother and witnessing the fatal effect that Morty's loss had on his parents. At sixteen years old, he was introduced to "[t]he wonderful world of perversity, discovered it right there," voyeurism, in a shoe department where his boss would lift women's legs so Sabbath "could see up their dresses" (422). However, the seventy-year-old Maestro gave Sabbath license to transgress even further. Discerning the master puppeteer's initial air of self-importance, Sabbath prepared himself for a victory lunch entailing his teacher's "boring old bohemian self-adoration" (234). But after ordering cognac for both of them, the Maestro said, to Sabbath's surprise, "Tell me about all the girls you fucked in Rome" (234-35). Sabbath began to speak "plainly and freely" to his teacher about his encounters with local women, and his teacher listened attentively to all his stories. One of the Maestro's chief interests was of "the precise age of each girl whose seduction he described." All were of legal age, between eighteen and twenty-four. "Only when Sabbath had finished did the maestro announce that his current mistress was fifteen," adding as he stood up to leave, "Of course I've known her since she's twelve" (235). Possibly, this "offense" marks the transgressive line past which the majority of American readers cannot follow. Still, it is a transgression with which the novel encourages readers to struggle, challenging their ready-made disgust at the thought of a seventy-year-old man having sexual intercourse with a fifteen-year-old girl.

Indeed, the Maestro's sentiments are aligned with a few other writers who have posed similar "sickening challenges" to readers' "ready-made answers." The disreputable and gallant Cavalier poet, Thomas Carew, in his poem, "The Second Rapture," asserts with the greatest of impropriety that the superlative enjoyment to be known by an elderly man is to have sexual intercourse with a young girl: "No worldling, no; 'tis not thy gold / . . . Nor fortune, honour, nor long life, / Children, or friends, or a good wife, / That makes thee happy: these things be / But the

shadows of felicity. / Give me a wench above thirteen, / Already devoted to the Queen / Of Love, and lovers” (i-ix). Carew’s speaker contests the charges of obscenity and sexual indecency in the mainstream moral views of seventeenth-century England by appropriating the language of Christian virtue, such as “rapture” and “Love,” to depict his own blissful transgression. And like Sabbath—whose name implies that he has his own sense of what is sacred—in whom we see a concern for practical consequences, there is a similar perspective espoused in *Lolita* when Nabokov’s Humbert Humbert reasons that he is innocent of crimes of which he has been charged, all the while encouraging readers to agree sympathetically.<sup>75</sup>

Arguing that he was “harmless” in regard to Lolita’s welfare and is therefore free from guilt, Humbert asserts:

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the majority of sex offenders that hanker for some throbbing, sweet-moaning, physical but not necessarily coital, relation with a girl-child, are innocuous, inadequate, passive, timid strangers who merely ask the community to allow them to pursue their *practically harmless*, so-called aberrant behavior, their . . . acts of sexual deviation without the police and society cracking down upon them. We are not sex fiends! We do not rape as good soldiers do. We are unhappy, mild, dog-eyed gentlemen. (87-88, my emphasis)

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<sup>75</sup> There are various ways to interpret *Lolita*, but many of the more common ways deny the aesthetic experience of the novel and pervert the reading on the basis of moral ideology. Many critics feel compelled to explain away Humbert’s feelings for Lolita either as a metaphor of some kind—as Leland de la Durantaye notes, Martin Amis considers the novel a metaphor for Russian totalitarianism—or as belonging to a pathological and self-deluded criminal-type who completely denies and effaces Lolita’s identity. Lionel Trilling takes us further when he writes: “we find ourselves the more shocked when we realize that, in the course of reading the novel, we have come virtually to condone the violation it presents. [. . .] We have been seduced into conniving in the violation, because we have permitted our fantasies to accept what we know to be revolting” (qtd. in Durantaye). What Trilling “knows” to be revolting is the transgression of his own ideological morality. Trilling’s sentiments demonstrate the way that moral idealism presents possibly insurmountable obstacles to how readers interpret serious fiction based on fixed ideological perspectives.

Lolita is a complex character, and Nabokov, I argue, tries to characterize her as worthy of being desired. Lolita possesses far more agency than most critics give her credit for, as Leslie Fiedler notes (*Love* 335). If that is true, then readers are encouraged through reading *Lolita* to understand desire, and the worthiness of being desirable, in new and different ways. For instance, throughout the novel, Lolita's mother, Charlotte, is portrayed as far more foolish, childish, and juvenile than Lolita herself. Nabokov, therefore, seems deliberately to suggest that Lolita is more worthy of Humbert's desires than Charlotte, even though only the latter is of legal, consensual age, thus challenging notions pertaining to appropriate sexual behavior.

A different if not mundane kind of transgression, adultery, provides another kind of challenge. In the depths of Sabbath's desperate struggle between living and suicide, nearly too old to be able to participate in the erotic side of life, he seeks to seduce Michelle, Norman Cowan's wife: "God, I'm fond of adultery. Aren't you?" he asks Michelle, the wife of the only friend he has left in the world, and even in these dire straits it is the excitement of adultery that drives him.

The softness it brings to the hardness. . . . A world without adultery is unthinkable. The brutal inhumanity of those against it. Don't you agree? The sheer fucking depravity of their views. The *madness*. There is no punishment too extreme for the crazy bastard who came up with the idea of fidelity. To demand of human flesh fidelity. The cruelty of it, . . . it is simply unspeakable. (336, emphasis in the original)

Ultimately and eagerly, Michelle agrees to an assignation later that week, and Sabbath is childishly joyous: "The robust road again! I have a mistress! He felt overcome and nonsensical as Emma Bovary out riding with Rodolphe. In the masterpieces they're always killing themselves when they commit adultery. He wanted to kill himself when he couldn't" (337). And

she becomes a co-conspirator in the revitalization of each other's libidinal energies: "What is happiness?" he asks. His answer: "The substantiality of this woman, . . . that laugh marked with life," her "wit," and "shrewdness," and especially her "fatty tissue." Far from a mere objectification, Sabbath appreciates the soulfulness in her transgressive capacity, her "knowledge that everything subterranean beats everything terranean by a mile, a certain physical poise that is the purest expression of her sexual freedom" (335). Sabbath feels that the human joyousness found in sexual activity, whether in spite of or because of adultery, obliterates any moral decree that finds it reprehensible. More importantly, with few exceptions—sexually transmitted infections and children, to name a few—the novel suggests that whatever practical repercussions might result from an adulterous affair, involving betrayal, originates in the ideological promise upon which monogamy is based rather than the actual consequences of the adulterous act.

Transgression, then, in *Sabbath's Theater*, as in *Lolita* and *Wuthering Heights*, does not invite readers to affirm their preconceived ideas pertaining to those who transgress—such as a probable moral deficiency of character, for example. Trilling readily admits this point about serious fiction, though he goes on to attack it as a kind of deceitfulness practiced by the author. Rather, through sympathy with a character and a specific, material understanding of the actual consequences of transgressions, such novels continue to make the uncomfortable process of reading transgressive acts into a process of destabilizing moral ideology. Therefore, Sabbath's comment on Jim Henson's Muppets can be read as Roth's comment on popular forms of art and their ideologically insulating effects. Contrasted with certain kinds of popular art that function to affirm the impositions of the conformity complex, Roth challenges readers by bringing attention to how transgressing traditional moral limits can be a moral destabilizer:

[A]ll the decent Muppets, making people happy with their untainted view of life: everything is innocent, childlike, and pure, everything is going to be okay—the secret is to tame your prick, draw attention away from the prick. Oh, the timidity! *His* timidity! Not Henson’s, *his!* The cowardice! The *meekness!* Finally afraid to be utterly unspeakable, choosing to hide out in the hills instead! To everyone he had horrified, to the appalled who’d considered him a dangerous man, loathsome, degenerate, and gross, he cried, “Not at all! My failure is failing to have gone far *enough!* My failure is not having gone *further!*” (208, emphasis in the original)

Roth’s unwavering courage in transgressing the traditionally comfortable moral boundaries of many of his readers can be seen throughout his fiction. In *Sabbath’s Theater*, though, it is possibly no more vivid than in Sabbath’s relationship with Drenka. With Drenka, Sabbath’s co-adulterer who had a parallel love for “adventure” (7) and whose “crudeness . . . lent her life distinction” with “her great taste for the impermissible” (27), Sabbath embarked on numerous sexual escapades. Drenka once participated in a threesome with Christa, the German au pair, and agreed “for a night to act as her john” which “seemed to do as much for him as it did for [Drenka] to be his prostitute” (8). And that is when Sabbath realizes that “her licentious abandon owed its flowering to him,” for “It was Sabbath who . . . had assisted her in becoming estranged from her ordinary life and in discovering the indecency to supplement the deficiencies of her regular diet.” As the Maestro had done for Sabbath, Sabbath had done for Drenka; he “had sanctioned for her the force that wants more and more” (9). Through her sexual exploits with Sabbath, “Drenka had found the means by which to be her husband’s dearest friend. . . . [Sabbath] made more than merely tolerable for her the routines of marriage that previously almost killed her—now she cherished those deadly routines for the counterweight they provided

her recklessness” (12). All of these fantasies and exploits served to make Sabbath and Drenka grow more tender and loving with one another and with their respective spouses: “[Y]ou began to love another man and discovered in time that you could now love Matija as well” (24).

Yet another sexual exploit has readers witnessing Sabbath and Drenka act out a fantasy where Drenka plays her own niece, Silvija, while Sabbath seduces her. Sabbath acts as the seducer with Drenka, as Silvija, “protesting all the while that ‘Mr. Sabbath’ must promise never to tell her aunt and her uncle what she had agreed to do for money” (23). These sexual encounters also made them fonder of each other, as Drenka expresses: “I love you, Mickey. I love being dirty for you, doing everything for you” (25). Sabbath and Drenka grow closer to one another through their various acts of transgression. Moreover, it must be stated that the transgressive acts that Sabbath and Drenka perform have two elements that make them powerful. The first is rooted in the social. The very act of transgressing traditional moral boundaries permits Sabbath and Drenka to grow closer; the sheer circumstance of transgression of social boundaries bonds them together. The second element is rooted in the naked self: Roth depicts the acts themselves—acts, often sexual in nature, that lend themselves to greater free play of the mind and body—to be formative in their deep connection, their tenderness, affection, and sympathy for one another.

Arguably, the most transgressively powerful act for Sabbath and Drenka entails a mutual act of urolagnia. In one of the most touching scenes in the novel, Sabbath is sitting next to Drenka’s hospital bed, holding his fifty-two-year-old lover’s hand, where she is dying from ovarian cancer. Doped up on morphine, she tells him she can’t remember how that venture started:

“Was it that you took your dick out and said, ‘I want to piss on you, Drenka. May I? I want to piss on you, Drenka?’ Is that how it started?”

“Sounds like me.”

“And then I thought, ‘Oh well, this transgression, why not? Life is so crazy anyway.’”

Then Drenka goes on to describe the experience and what it meant to her:

It came down, and as it came upon me, I realized it was warm. Do I dare to taste it? And I started with my tongue to lick around my lips, . . . and it just came into my face and it was warm and it was just fantastic; it was exciting and everywhere and it was like a whirlwind, what I was feeling, the emotions, . . . and it tasted sweet, like beer. It had that kind of taste to it, and just something forbidden that made it so wonderful. That I could be allowed to do this that was so forbidden. . . . And I started playing with myself as you were doing it, and you made me come, you know. . . . I just felt totally . . . I don’t know—taken by it. . . . I had to sort it through—did I like it or not—and I realized that, yes, it was like we had a pact; we had a secret pact that tied us together. . . . It was like we were forever united in that. (425-26)<sup>76</sup>

And then they both wept in the hospital room that would be the site of her last night alive; they cried together over a transgressive act that bound them together as nothing else did or could do. Then Drenka described how she felt when Sabbath let her urinate on him: “I had to stand above you, and so it made me feel like I can do anything, anything with you, and anything is all

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<sup>76</sup> While some readers may react to this scene, and specifically urolagnia, as gross or disgusting, possibly apart even from moral considerations, Roth has addressed such readers. In one interview, Roth describes the scene as fusing the “serious” with the “ridiculous.” Roth claims that for Drenka and Sabbath, recalling this moment amidst all the hospital paraphernalia of death and dying, it is “a very touching scene.” Roth asks that any reaction of disgust toward their transgressive act, then, be trumped by the endearing connection shared by these two characters through this unifying act of transgression. The transgressive nature of the act is, as Roth phrases it, “the right wrong topic for them to talk about.”

right. We're in this together" (426). In their frank conversation she continues, "Maybe what I was worried about was that I would regret it," whether afterward there would be "a sense of shame. I wasn't sure—would I have shame for it? . . . And now I even love talking about it with you. It was a lustful feeling . . . and a feeling of giving, also. In a way that I could not do to anyone else" (427).

Their uniting voyage into the transgressive, into the world of perversity, transcended what neither mere promiscuity, in one direction, nor monogamy and matrimony, going the other direction, could ever have provided either one of them. Drenka acknowledges what it meant to her when she says, "you were totally with me then, . . . in all senses, not just as my lover, as my friend, as someone, you know, when you are sick I can help you, and as my total blood brother. You know, it was a rite, a passage of a rite or something" (428). A chiefly important aspect of this rite is that it was spontaneously organic. Drenka's transgressive rite of passage is in one sense systemically structured in that urolagnia is considered sexually perverse in Western culture. If it were a conventional, mainstream act of love—say, one expected of a husband and wife on their wedding night—it could not yield the experience she felt. More importantly, though, if urolagnia became a socially prescribed rite of passage, a socially encouraged act through which all members of a social group are to pass, that would strip it of its transgressive, unifying power and turn it into a social performance of sorts. Not all transgressive acts are unifying, but that which is transgressive is necessarily anti-social. Implied through Drenka's reaction, then, is the idea that in order to perform such kinds of unifying acts, one must reject the associated shame and moral condemnation, as Drenka shed the social shell around which her naked self could burst forth. Therefore, Roth implies that in order to experience a transgressive act's unifying potential, one would need to fully embrace the transgressive act and abandon

oneself to it. If Drenka had not abandoned her shame, she would not have been able to feel the substantial heights and profound depths of that transgressive act with Sabbath.

Indeed, one of the important consequences of rejecting rigid, moral ideologies is the renunciation of judgment based on codified moral principles, which subsequently leads more readily to the open acceptance of another human being. Drenka tells Sabbath, “To have the lover, Mickey, to be very close that way, to be accepted by you, the American boyfriend.” Her relationship with Sabbath, she says, even helped in “overcoming my inferiority complex at being an outsider” (418). Sabbath becomes so vital to her understanding of her new life after emigrating from Croatia that she comes to say to him, while reminiscing about his singing to her and their dancing together, “I was dancing with America.” However, Sabbath remains the realist, a rather gentle one at this moment. “Sweetheart,” he responds, “You were dancing with an unemployed adulterer. A guy with time on his hands.” But she insists, “You *are* America. Yes, you are, my wicked boy” (419). Claudia Roth Pierpont makes an interesting if not sentimental assertion that, in contrast to Sabbath, Drenka “knows better. We know better” (205). If Sabbath *were* America, however, he would not, could not, be transgressive. The idea of America and Drenka’s sense of the word, “wicked,” seem incongruous and contradictory in the world of *Sabbath’s Theater*. It is easy to forgive Drenka’s oversimplification because—like Christa, whose idea of America developed out of her short but nasty and painful time in New York—Drenka’s conception of America emerged primarily from her life with Sabbath and the world of deviancy and superabundant sexual love that he had “wickedly” opened up for her. But it is much more difficult to approve of Pierpont’s assertion. If Fiedler was right when he asserted that the worship of the Good Bad Boy is the “true Americanism,” then perhaps Pierpont, as sympathetic to Roth and Sabbath as she is, is merely expressing her devotion to that belief. But

if Sabbath is truly Drenka's "wicked boy," then he is a Bad Bad Boy—the geriatric pariah—and his symbolic wrapping around him of his brother's old American flag with the forty-eight stars on it is a subversive, rebellious reshaping of America's future.

### Conclusion

Roth's fiction, and *Sabbath's Theater* in particular, exists as part of a long tradition in the Western literary tradition, remarked upon once by D. H. Lawrence, that shows a way for freer lives. "Men are free," Lawrence writes, "when they are obeying some deep, inward voice of religious belief. Obeying from within" (*Studies* 12). Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* also plays out Lawrence's hope for freer individuals. Catherine, Heathcliff, and Sabbath all set up their own transgressive, *inward* religious beliefs based upon their practical, organic experiences in stark opposition to conventional ideologies. Sabbath shares his experiential knowledge with Drenka, as well as with a few other characters, in order to open them up to *their own* inward, religious beliefs. Explaining how some of the mid-nineteenth-century American writers were exploring this new, freer America, Lawrence writes, "True liberty will only begin when Americans discover IT, and proceed possibly to fulfill IT. IT being the *whole* self of man, the self in its wholeness, not idealistic halfness" (13, emphasis in the original). That which is transgressive rejects the belief that idealism, what Lawrence calls "halfness," is a purported wholeness. Thus, transgression in rebellious novels opens up the reader to a new world and to new possibilities.

Only part of that transgressive wholeness lies within the domain of sexuality. Some thinkers have argued that the West is not sexually repressed, as Freud had contended, but that we are inundated with sex. There is certainly something to that line of thinking, but it is possible to be inundated and repressed, simultaneously. That which is allowed only in certain contexts denies acts out of those contexts, and Lawrence's wholeness and Brontë's and Roth's

transgressive characters point to a human need for more than only what is socially permitted. Certainly, glorifying promiscuity is not what any of these novelists do. Drenka tells us, “Yes, I had experiences where the men would just want to fuck you whether they cared about you or not. That was always harder for me. I give my heart, *I give my self*, in my fucking” (429, my emphasis). To discover oneself and to offer it in companionship—whether between characters in a novel or between novelists and their readers—is a common characteristic of rebellious novels. Rebellious novels track the journey of organic self-discovery within a repressive culture.

However, for those in the West, there are numerous repressive social forces that suppress the journey of organic self-discovery, as outlined by Althusser in his discussion of ISAs and RSAs and given concrete dramatization throughout literature, especially in rebellious novels. Therefore, as a number of rebellious novels indicate, in repressive societies, there is a need to keep one’s vital endeavor for self-discovery hidden. In the case with Kathy Goolsbee, her encounters with Sabbath, her unshackling herself of socially repressive habits—innocence, femininity, purity—and her growing soulfulness were abruptly ended by some members of the academic community who saw themselves as defenders of American morality. They interpreted Sabbath’s involvement with her pursuit for self-discovery as a “blatantly vile example of the exploitation . . . of a college student” (214). They had the “proof of [Sabbath’s] criminality” to keep him out of “every decent antiphallic educational institution in America” (236). Likewise, Drenka complains of the need to keep their relationship hidden, longing to have had more adventures with Sabbath. She wanted to visit the place where he grew up or New York, where he lived for some time; she says, I wanted you to “show it to me through your eyes.” However, instead of being able to experience those places through his eyes, they had to keep their relationship hidden from a censorious society: “Wherever we went, we always went to hide. I

hate hiding” (420). The demise of Catherine and Heathcliff and the moderate success of Drenka and Sabbath both indicate the prudence of keeping those aspects that are socially condemned hidden when one’s community is as repressive as those depicted in numerous rebellious novels. While it would have been a very different novel, one might imagine how scandalous Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* would have been if Catherine and Heathcliff maintained their passionate relationship in spite of Catherine’s marriage to Linton and if they had been able to keep their relationship invisible to the other characters.

Moreover, it wasn’t merely Sabbath’s and Drenka’s sexual affair that they had to keep hidden—which they did in motels and up at the Grotto, where they had some of their most emotionally intense moments. But even their more tender moments had to be kept secret, such as his visits to her hospital room, after visiting hours, where she had to be turned and moved on her bed by Jinx, the night-shift nurse. Sabbath “was there to help, cupping the tiny cup of cheekbones and eyes, kissing her forehead, holding her shoulders to help move her,” and feeling that, even without sex, they “could go on like this forever” (416), with Sabbath visiting her hospital room, holding her hand and talking, “night after night” (417). Their deep tenderness acted as a counterbalance to their great sexual adventures, so that when she died, he felt as if there were “[n]o one to conspire with, no one on earth with whom to give free rein to his most vital need!” (19). And her death brought to his mind the notion that loss is a distinguishing characteristic of life: “First Morty, then [his mother], then Nikki, and now Drenka. There’s nothing on earth that keeps its promise” (32).

Despite the passing of everything that promises to stay, Sabbath’s energy at the close of the novel is jubilant and animated by his vital antagonism: “He could not fucking die. How could he leave. How could he go? Everything he hated was here” (451). Sabbath’s antagonistic energy

pervades the novel, and he wanted more of it. Similarly, Catherine and Heathcliff's reunion at the end of *Wuthering Heights* implies that their passionate energy and socially defiant positions provide a vindicating framework. However, Roth takes readers further than Brontë does by having Sabbath *welcome* the censure of society. Indeed, Roth writes, "More disastrous entanglement in everything. For a pure sense of being tumultuously alive, you can't beat the nasty side of existence, . . . it's been a real human life" (247). Life for Sabbath may be nasty and brutish, but it is not short. He lives on to relish in his public disgrace, social failures, and libidinal vitality. He never ultimately conforms despite any doubts he has.

Sabbath's story could be the story of a Jewish Huck Finn, all grown up. Fiedler notes that Twain's novel ends "just short of Huck growing up, thus leaving us with the conviction that his gesture of *total rejection* and the brief, harried honeymoon which preceded it, are as endless as childhood's summers, really eternal," and therefore Twain's is a happy ending (288, my emphasis), much like the ending of *Wuthering Heights*. Sabbath, however, embodies Huck's gesture of total rejection and lives on, in an aberrant kind of triumph. Fiedler traces the Good Bad Boy in literature and writes that in spite of "a few generations and the 'sexual revolution,'" he has been afforded "a certain amount of good clean sex (not as the basis of an adult relationship but as an exhibition of prowess)" (289). After Twain, when Good Bad Boys "revolt" in American literature, as in the novels of J. D. Salinger and Jack Kerouac, they prove to be "ineffectual" with the characters' "inevitable adjustment to society" (289-90). In spite of the latter novelists' non-conformist attitudes, Paul Goodman remarks on "how conventional and law-fearing these lonely middle-class fellows are. They dutifully get legal marriages and divorces. . . Their behavior is a conformity *plus royaliste que le roi*" (qtd. in Fielder 290). More importantly, Fiedler describes their sexual exploits as a "flight *from* sexuality" (290). In *Sabbath's Theater*,

however, Sabbath's and Drenka's sexual adventures lead them toward spiritual maturity and soulfulness. As a Bad Bad Boy and a converted Bad Bad Girl, they offer readers a chance to witness, perhaps even to experience vicariously, the unifying power of transgression, something that is only hinted at in *Wuthering Heights*.

Sabbath guided Drenka, as he did many women, as a dispeller of myths and a directing reality-principle. In the next chapter, I will show how Ralph Ellison presents the rebellious path of invisibility in *Invisible Man* (1952). Then I will focus on how Faunia Farley, arguably Roth's greatest female character, functions *panzaically* in the life of Coleman Silk, in *The Human Stain* (2000). Both of these characters, in their own specific ways, carry out variations of Ellisonian invisibility. Sam B. Girgus, writing on this theme, observes that "in Roth the Jewish hero of thought becomes a kind of *underground man*, a symbol of perennial Jewish isolation advanced to represent . . . the alienated condition of modern man. Roth relates this hero to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" (169, my emphasis). Girgus made this observation in 1986, almost fifteen years before the publication of *The Human Stain*, in which Roth more fully realizes and narratively demonstrates the significant implications of invisibility as a path of individual rebellion.

## CHAPTER 5

THE INVISIBLE SELF IN RALPH ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN* AND PHILIP ROTH'S *THE HUMAN STAIN*

In the previous chapter, I explored the ways in which Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* depict the various ways of enacting a transgressive self, one of the complex paths that allow characters in rebellious novels to more fully express their authentic, naked selves by explicitly rejecting reigning ideologies. As I discussed, transgressive characters meet with varying degrees of success in their rebellion. Some characters achieve a certain amount of success in their open denunciation of values, beliefs, and ideals imposed upon them by the conformity complex while others are driven to madness or suicide by socially repressive forces. In this chapter, I intend to explore another path of resistance to conformity that I call the *invisible self*, borrowing Ralph Ellison's terminology. In order to augment a character's rejection of the conformity complex, it is not uncommon to observe characters hiding their rejection behind various veils of apparent conformity. As I mentioned in my introductory chapter, many of these tropes common to novels of rebellion can be found within George Orwell's *1984*. The epitome of repressive forces attempting to break down characters' resistance to conformity is the infamous Room 101, where O'Brien subjects Winston Smith to his worst fears in order to get him to betray his own naked self. Likewise, Julia, Winston's lover, is perhaps most memorable for being the most vociferous member of the Junior Anti-Sex League despite hating it and its repressiveness to her bones: "Always with the crowd, that's what I say. It's the only way to be safe" (101). Orwell describes Julia's belief, one present within many rebellious novels, that indicates the deep necessity for invisibility: "Any kind of organized revolt

against the Party, which was bound to be a failure, struck her as stupid. The clever thing was to break the rules and stay alive all the same” (109).

Thus, not only do rebellious novels tend to share the idea that large-scale social reform will not lead to doing away with repressive acts, they often imply if they do not straightforwardly express how invisibility is perhaps the best means to resist the compulsions and coercions of an oppressive society. Therefore, after discussing the literary tradition within which I place both *Invisible Man* and *The Human Stain*, I will conduct an examination of these two novels, moving back and forth by virtue of a thematic comparison. For example, one of the commonalities between these two novels is—as in many rebellious novels—the way in which they show how conformity is an act of oppression. Moreover, in order to highlight certain themes, I will juxtapose scenes from both novels, particularly to show how the painfully repressive process of conformity often leads characters to displace their feelings of anger and resentment for coercive conformity onto those who openly resist such mechanisms. Those feelings are often channeled into modes of aggression and violence, as we will see especially in my exploration of Roth’s *The Human Stain*.

#### A Brief Overview of Invisibility in Rebellious Novels

Novels such as Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) and Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain* (2000) depict the path of invisibility as a mode of resistance against some of the repressive aspects of the conformity complex. These rebellious novels consist of stories in which characters suffer under the influence of one or more socially endorsed ideologies. However, the respective protagonists enact seditious disavowals of the conventions and sacred ideals embedded in the ideologies that caused their suffering. A common theme in these works is an ideological critique and ultimate rejection of socially sanctioned systems of thought through the

lives of the protagonists. Part of these characters' sense of their lives includes the pervasiveness of malice and cruelty from the relationships that they have with members of their communities. Ellison deftly portrays his invisible man's trajectory beginning from a social idealism, moving through a gradual disillusionment, and ending in an anti-social enlightenment. The unnamed narrator of *Invisible Man* begins his young-adult life bursting with ideals inherited from American culture. However, throughout the course of the novel, from the prevalence of oppressive forces within American society, the invisible man comes to lose faith not only in the sacred ideals he previously held, but also in the hope for ameliorating the ways in which America puts those ideals into practice, as is the avowed undertaking of the Brotherhood, the political activist group that he joins in Harlem. The invisible man ultimately recognizes that the two paths he had been following—first of naive conformist and then of idealistic, social activist—not only prevented him from developing an organic, authentic identity but were also dangerous paths that could end in his meaningless death. Therefore, he comes to reject the imposition of the social expectations that constrain his efforts for identity, agency, and self-discovery.

Ellison deploys *invisibility* in a number of ways in order to highlight the power dynamic between an individual and his or her culture's hierarchical structure. Through the narrator's revelations regarding this power dynamic—one that is incompatible with American institutional promises of equality in the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Emancipation Proclamation—Ellison dramatizes the long and painful course of the narrator's disillusionment as a consequence of social brutality. The narrator arrives at a place where he finds himself at odds with both an oppressive society and with the agents who theoretically attempt to combat and reform that society's oppression, but who end up creating an oppression of another kind. In the wake of the

many scenes that demonstrate the ways in which social power is used to manipulate and abuse the invisible man, along with a number of other characters who become victims to social power, the invisible man comes to realize that his idealism plays a significant role in consenting and submitting to that social abuse and the loss of his individuality.

Similarly, nearly fifty years later, in *The Human Stain*, Philip Roth presents a story of disillusionment that ends in Coleman Silk's anti-socially enlightened rejection of the supposedly sacred ideology, imposed upon him by society, regarding the formation of personal identity based upon race, ethnicity, and cultural heritage, as well as the moral prescriptions that plague him. In *The Human Stain*, Ellie Magee points out to Silk that a few other people in their neighborhood are also racially passing. "Don't tell me I'm wrong"—she laughs—"you're blind" (134). Racial passing, in the context of *The Human Stain*, is Roth's redeployment of Ellisonian invisibility, modeled after his reading of Ellison's *Invisible Man*.<sup>77</sup> Ellie playfully mocks Coleman, "You're so vain, you thought you'd dreamed it up" (135). More importantly, however, Ellison was not the first to dream up the power of invisibility as a means of social resistance.

A number of novels include characters who embrace dissembling, secrecy, and other forms of invisibility in order to resist social, moral, or economic censure. To name but a few, Wemmick in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861),<sup>78</sup> the underground man in

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<sup>77</sup> As Timothy Parrish observes, Ellie's name serves as an homage to Ellison. Ellie and Ellison, both character and novelist, help to shed light on the radical possibilities of invisibility as an act of rejection of repressive social conventions.

<sup>78</sup> Wemmick is careful to delineate his professional opinion in his employer's office from his "Walworth" opinion (221), which—a variation of invisibility—existed in a "private and personal capacity" (224). Wemmick's duality (his visible/public life on one side and invisible/private life on the other) allows him to maintain professional integrity and the appearance of officiousness that is needed to carry out his profession while under the employ of the exacting lawyer, Jaggers, while also allowing him to express his "invisible" kindness and natural sympathies while at his home in Walworth that would conflict with his professional tasks and persona.

Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864), Huck Finn in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), Švejk in Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk* (1923),<sup>79</sup> and Julia and Winston in George Orwell's *1984* (1948) are all predecessors to Ellison's Bliss Proteus Rinehart, the invisible man, and the narrator's grandfather who tells the protagonist to "undermine [American society] with grins, [and to] agree 'em to death and destruction" (16). Moreover, Ellison's characters have some important heirs, in terms of invisibility, including Orr in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961),<sup>80</sup> Chief Bromden in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1963), and Coleman Silk and Faunia Farley in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000). Some critics might object to classifying together the antiwar novels of Heller and Hašek with the social criticism novels of Dickens, Ellison, and Roth, and what might seem like the arbitrary addition of Orwell's dystopian classic. But as Leslie Fiedler noted in his foreword to *The Good Soldier: Schweik*, "Not only in totalitarian societies, however, is the antiheroic spirit assailed by the guardians of the pseudoheroic. In more democratic nations, mass culture is entrusted with the job elsewhere assigned to the secret police" (viii). The heroic, or "pseudoheroic," is but one ideal attacked in novels that I have described as "rebellious," as such

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<sup>79</sup> Švejk, a Czech soldier, feigns imbecility in order to avoid fighting at the front during World War I. Švejk's invisibility is augmented by his public display of enthusiasm for loyally serving the Austrian Empire. However, his zealously professed efforts are constantly subverted by his cunning ineptitude, which helps him to avoid being killed in a war and fighting for a country for which he has rejected all claims of duty and loyalty. For instance, when accused of being a "malingerer" Švejk (humorously) responds, "No I assure you I'm no malingerer. I'm a genuine idiot!" (35).

<sup>80</sup> A few characters in *Catch-22* dissemble in the ways that Ellison and Roth's protagonists do. Most notably, Orr manages to carry out an escape from the U. S. army, and more importantly from the war, that entails a rejection of the ideals of soldiery, including honor, duty, loyalty, and a host of ideals that ideologically compel an individual to engage in warfare. Like the invisible man, Orr is also a tinkerer. And like Švejk, Orr feigns imbecility, and fools even his roommate, the novel's protagonist, Yossarian. "You're a happy imbecile," Yossarian says while Orr "was tinkering with the valve of the stove" that he had jerry-rigged "out of an inverted metal drum" in order to provide Yossarian with heat for his tent (310). Yossarian thought of Orr as "a warmhearted, simple-minded gnome" (312) but underestimated Orr's genius at dissembling. After Yossarian realizes his mistake, Orr's escape from war subsequently inspires Yossarian also to escape, though Orr's method is rather more convincing than Yossarian's simple act of running away. Still, their escapes, at once existential and actual, imply a disavowal of sacred social ideologies.

novels in general satirize, expose, or otherwise reveal the dangerous nature of ideals in Western culture. Fiedler goes on to assert that antiwar novels satirize the “deeply rooted . . . concept of Honor” and urge readers to recognize the idea that “no cause is worth dying for,” and that “inevitably it approaches the formation: no cause is worth the death of a man, no cause is worth the death of *me!*” (ix). And in the antiwar novel, *Catch-22*, as well as in the social protest novel, *Invisible Man*, the protagonists come to realize their opposition to the social power of cultural ideologies when they come to terms with the death of a fellow comrade-in-arms, Snowden and Tod Clifton, respectively.

Likewise, in his account of Coleman Silk in *The Human Stain*, Philip Roth extends Ellison’s affirmation of the individual who is beset by social forces of imposed identity. In a manner of picking up where Ellison left off, Roth depicts the ways in which Silk struggles to employ the Ellisonian concept of invisibility as an act of cultural sabotage in order to achieve personal self-fulfillment while resisting the oppression of social responsibility. Silk, a light-skinned African American, comes to reject his family and his racial identity and pass as Jewish for the entirety of his adult life. Few critics have noted the parallels between these novels, most notably Timothy Parrish, who traces many of the *literary* ties between the novels. However, what has been overlooked is the fact that these novels include a critical rejection, virtually wholesale, of beliefs and practices based upon American ideals, that is to say that they are thoroughly *rebellious*. By the end of the novel, Silk has followed a trajectory similar to that of the narrator of *Invisible Man*, going from young idealist to mature invisible man and on to an “irresponsible bastard,” which takes the form in Silk’s case of an old reprobate by participating in a life-affirming sexual relationship at seventy-one years of age with a thirty-four-year-old

woman. Roth reinforces the significance of Ellisonian invisibility as a means of social resistance by presenting Silk's deep satisfaction as a rebellious reprobate.

Therefore, in tracing Coleman Silk's parallel trajectory, one that augments the invisible man's, I will show how Roth redeploys Ellison's concept of invisibility as social resistance. Like the invisible man, Silk begins life idealistically. Accepting, albeit reluctantly, the roles and ideals imposed upon him by his father, young Silk observes, "Everything in life . . . was always pushing me to be a serious student. . . . [T]he saloon keeper's kid couldn't have tried harder to be any more serious" by striving ambitiously for "the serious life dedicated to serious things," and becoming an "ultra-respectable college professor" (22). The respectability of the serious life and the imposed notion of respectability constrain Silk in his attempt to discover more vital and fulfilling manifestations of his self-concept. After his father dies and a period of mourning, Silk realizes a new sense of freedom.

Following his father's death, two important events facilitate Silk's disillusionment. He realizes the oppressiveness of identities that stem from the dominant racist ideology in American society and from one's own seemingly affirmative racial heritage. The first of these important experiences takes place in a "Woolworth's in Washington, D.C.," where, for the first time in his life, he is called "nigger" and "[t]hat infuriated him" (105). Having previously been protected against such overt racism by his parents, he wonders, furiously, how his father could have "taken this shit" (105). On the other hand, Silk also feels the stifling power of racial solidarity at Howard University where he feels his personal identity is suffocated by what "looked . . . like just too many Negroes in one place" and felt like "a concentrated, false environment. Like a soda that's too sweet" (134). As a response to these two important events, Silk sees that "[y]ou can't let the big they impose its bigotry on you any more than you can let the little they become a we

and impose its ethics on you,” for both can be oppressive (108). Both can become “the coercive, inclusive, historical, inescapable moral *we* with its insidious *E pluribus unum*” (108). Silk, carrying out a form of invisibility, compromises his rebellious desires by capitulating to his father’s ideals regarding respectability when he passes for Jewish.

Some critics have met Roth’s redeployment of Ellisonian invisibility as racial passing with disapproval, because they see it is a betrayal of an authentic racial identity, a brazen and insolent rejection of the cult of authenticity.<sup>81</sup> One critic, for example, refers to Silk’s passing as “repugnant” (Neelakantan 32). Such condemnations of Silk’s actions misplace the location of authentic identity within race and ethnicity, whereas both Ellison and Roth insist that such identity lies elsewhere. In these novels, the authors show that rather than finding authentic identity in one’s cultural heritage, it must be found within the organic development of an individual’s sense of self. Fervently, those disapproving critics place the politicized “we” above what Roth calls the “raw I” (108). Roth writes, “All [Silk had] ever wanted, from earliest childhood, was to be free: not black, not even white—just on his own and free. He meant to insult no one by his choice” (120). Therefore, racial passing releases Silk from the lived dilemma in which his identity is “unjustly limited by” such an “arbitrary . . . designation as race” (120), and thereby Silk refuses “to accept automatically the contract drawn up for [his] signature at birth” (155) that defines his identity by social and ideological prescriptions.

Whether antiwar, dystopian, or social protest, rebellious novels bring awareness to the point that when mass culture is concerned, the life of an individual is perennially under the threat of the moral whims and mutable retributions of social ideologies. In rebellious novels, economic oppression, psychological despair, and death often result from an individual’s clash with the

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<sup>81</sup> For a deeper exploration and critique of the idealistic and ideological basis of the cult of authenticity, see the Indian-American novelist Vikram Chandra’s article in the *Boston Review*, “The Cult of Authenticity: India’s Cultural Commissars Worship ‘Indianness’ Instead of Art.”

power structures of mass culture. Rebellious fiction is replete with examples of protagonists who succumb to social power, from *The Stranger* and *The Trial* in Europe to *1984* in Britain and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in the United States. Moreover, in the manner of D. H. Lawrence's man who died in the novella *The Man Who Died*, also published as *The Escaped Cock*, who declares "my wits against theirs," a number of protagonists in other rebellious novels use their wits in order to veil themselves altogether or at least those integral aspects of their being that would come under attack if exposed to a dangerous public and its subsequent condemnation and means of punishment. Most importantly, such characters use their cunning in order to mask their rejection of the ideals rooted in the mass culture of the West, a rejection that, when made public, would lead to being branded with epithets such as traitor, criminal, or insane. In reading rebellious novels, as I will show through an exploration of *Invisible Man* and *The Human Stain*, readers are encouraged to make similar disavowals of those social ideologies through which culture attempts to impose ideological definitions of the self and to develop and put into practice their own creative variations of invisibility in order to create space for more authentic and organic self-discovery. These novels, therefore, in opposition to socially ascribed identities, incite a rebellious spirit that directs readers to discover an organic and experientially generated identity.

#### Social Conformity as a Root of Human Cruelty and Misery

Like Hardy in *Jude the Obscure*, Ellison and Roth vividly explore social sources of human misery in *Invisible Man* and *The Human Stain*. Ellison underscores the idea that a significant cause of human suffering comes from a belief in and conformity to ideologies that fail to place at their center the individual's freedom and organic identity. The invisible man begins by conforming to the democratic ideals of America and racial uplift. Early in the novel, the

invisible man tells us, "I visualized myself as a potential Booker T. Washington" (18). Later, he reaffirms his beliefs in becoming a leader, like Washington, when he announces, "I believed in the principles of the Founder with all my heart and soul. . . . I would do his bidding and teach others to rise up as he wished them to, teach them to be thrifty, decent, upright citizens, contributing to the welfare of all, shunning all but the straight and narrow path that he and the Founder had stretched before us" (99). But submitting to the ideal of the "decent, upright citizen," as the battle royal scene demonstrates dramatically, leads to senseless, brutal suffering by those who conform, both to the capitalistic system that sets individuals at odds with others like oneself, as well as the system of American idealism that urges individuals to commit themselves to programs of progress and the amelioration of American society. The battle royal scene analogizes the struggles of ordinary citizens who are made to compete against each other in a nasty, dehumanizing conflict simply in order to acquire a meager portion of the general prosperity held by those in power. While being beaten by boys not completely unlike himself, the narrator's thoughts are fixed on presenting his speech and on the supposed dignity it will bring him, not perceiving that that notion of dignity itself is yet another means of social control influencing his submission to and complicity with the nasty, brutish struggle.

The narrator's idealistic regard for the notion of dignity and trying to be a decent, upright citizen necessarily perpetuates the status quo and robs him of his human vitality. Thus, Ellison's novel implies that behind the beautiful ideals of the beloved country lie the unseen and harsh realities that repay their adherents with misery. The veteran doctor at the Golden Day, however, cuts through the narrator's blindness regarding the source of his own spiritual degradation: "Behold! A walking zombie!" the vet declares; "Already he's learned to repress not only his emotions but his humanity. He's invisible, a walking personification of the Negative, the most

perfect achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical man!” (94). The path of conforming to ideals leads to what D. H. Lawrence once referred to in an essay on why novels matter, as a “dead-man in life,” one whose vitality, spontaneity, and personal identity are siphoned off by misguided attempts to fulfill ideologically imposed identities, impositions from liberating as well as exploitative ideologies.

Therefore, social ideologies tend to have a seductive power over individuals and sway them toward conformity through an appeal to virtue. As in the cases of Jude, Sue, and Alexander Portnoy that I discussed in Chapter 3, the invisible man yearns to make the world a better place, and when he is given power in an organization committed to social change, he attests, “I was dominated by the all-embracing idea of Brotherhood” (Ellison 382). However, through the disillusioning process detailed throughout the novel, the invisible man learns later that the conformity complex manipulates such noble yearnings in order to maintain control over individuals.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the seductive power toward virtuous and righteous conduct is one of the most powerful means of control.

Another ideologically self-imposed role that the invisible man attempts to fulfill is that of an agent for change, attempting to reform the perverted realities of American ideals regarding social justice. Slowly and gradually, however, through the struggle between the invisible man’s endeavor for self-discovery and the ideological impositions of the Brotherhood, the invisible man learns that attempts to ameliorate the twisted ideals of the country can be dangerous, even deadly. The invisible man comes to realize the disastrous consequences of advocating for

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<sup>82</sup> In *The Vanishing Individual*, Wayne Burns discusses, for example, how the American media have appropriated Martin Luther King, Jr. as a symbol of political activism in order to demonstrate the progress of American civil liberties while at the same time the ruling classes have been limiting, undermining, and asphyxiating actual liberating activities (68). Barbara Foley, likewise, despite her harsh treatment of *Invisible Man*, makes a similar observation regarding the ineffectiveness of professors who try to oppose such antagonisms toward political freedom when she remarks: “Universities are, after all, principally ideology factories,” noting that professors often mistakenly think that they are doing something “oppositional” in their classrooms (“Theory” 115).

amelioration in those passages that relate the murder and funeral of Tod Clifton. During the public eulogy of Clifton, the invisible man finds himself unable to “teach others to rise up” or “to contribute to the welfare of all” (99). He cries aloud: “Let me tell it how it truly was! His name was Tod Clifton and he was full of illusions. . . . He thought he was a man and that men were not meant to be pushed around. But it was hot and he forgot his history. . . . He lost his hold on reality” (457). Like the famous errant idealist, Don Quixote, who also lost his hold on reality, Clifton died because of his illusions: he unwisely and overtly resisted one of the repressive state apparatuses. His physical resistance, when he landed an uppercut on the jaw of a pursuing police officer, was rooted in his cynical disillusionment with the ideals of social reform. The invisible man articulates the consequences, moreover, of militantly asserting a claim upon deserving dignity in public spaces when dominant repressive forces do not concede that dignity, when he cites the cause of Clifton’s death: “*resisting reality* in the form of a .38 caliber revolver in the hands of an arresting officer” (458, my emphasis). The invisible man becomes starkly aware of his, and by extension many people’s, insignificance within the larger social system, after coming to terms with Clifton’s death.

Tracing the trajectory from the invisible man’s idealism to his disillusionment evinces the recognition of his initial blindness to the dangers of social ideologies. For instance, during one of his first rabble-rousing speeches in Harlem, he narrates, he observed “the blurred audience whose faces I had never clearly seen” (353). At the time of that speech, individuals coalesced merely into an abstract concept, one that was elevated above the value of actual individuals. But in his last speech, in his eulogy for Clifton, he notes, “And as I took one last look [at the audience] I saw *not a crowd* but the set faces of *individual* men and women” (459, my emphasis). His recognition, signifying the importance of individuality, or rather actual

individuals, above any political ideal, stands in sharp contrast to the ideology proselytized by the Brotherhood, exemplified by Brother MacAfee who says, “The Brotherhood is bigger than all of us. None of us as individuals count when its safety is questioned” (405).

Individuals’ submission to causes, as in the case of the invisible man’s submission to the cause of the Brotherhood, can become yet another form of social control. Causes tend to have institutional power dynamics, and the invisible man comes up against those who hold power, namely Dr. Bledsoe and Brother Jack, both as a university student and within the Brotherhood, respectively. Even the cause of freedom can become oppressive when it is appropriated by power structures and subordinated to a hierarchy of abstract principles or demands.<sup>83</sup> The invisible man relates that “eighty-five years ago” his grandparents “were told that they were free . . . [a]nd they believed it. They exulted in it. They stayed in their place” (16). The invisible man’s father was brought up to value his so-called freedom in the same manner as did his parents, and he stayed in his place, as well. But the invisible man’s grandfather’s “deathbed curse,” as he describes it, sows the seeds of dissent. The novel dramatizes the process in which the invisible man gradually learns to hide his rebelliousness under the cloak of deference and conventionality.

The protagonist’s initial deference as a young man to the “lily-white men of the town,” however, the “big shots” who wore tuxedos, drank beer and whiskey, and smoked black cigars, is not part of his invisibility. His early respect for power structures is sincere, as is his initial regard and admiration for Dr. Bledsoe and Brother Jack. The protagonist’s ambition to become a potential Booker T. Washington subjects him to the confining limits of social approbation,

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<sup>83</sup> In a 2011 op-ed in *The Guardian* entitled “Occupy first. Demands come later,” Slavoj Žižek makes a similar observation. He argues that the Occupy Wall Street movement needs to safeguard itself against those who would co-opt its power and restructure OWS for their own interests. He terms such co-opting as “political clinching,” which could reduce the movement to a “harmless moralistic gesture.”

whether he seeks it from the white or the black communities. The college scholarship he receives from the white big shots of his hometown “to the state college for Negroes” fuels his ambitions and fosters his subjection to ideological confinement (32). The scholarship even mollifies, in his view, the contemptible humiliation that he suffered during the battle royal and the further degradation they visited upon him—the humiliation he suffered when he realizes that the coins for which he had fought with the other young black men were in actuality “brass pocket tokens advertising a certain make of automobile” (32). The worthlessness of the coins corresponds to the value that the society in which he lives appraises the invisible man’s worth. His mental exoneration of the white men for their barbarous treatment demonstrates his willing disposition to be subjected to hegemonic power structures.

At this moment in his life, the invisible man is indeed fully bound within American hegemonic ideology. Despite his grandfather’s warnings that “our life is a war,” the protagonist fails to see how fully cruelty saturates his interactions with his surrounding social environments. He wavers concerning that early dilemma posed by his grandfather. Ominously, the invisible man’s dream before leaving for college illustrates the theme of his life within his social context. He dreams he is at the circus with his grandfather and upon opening his briefcase (also given to him by the white big shots), he finds “an official envelope stamped with the state seal”; inside the envelope he finds “another and another [envelope], endlessly.” Then his grandfather explains that the envelopes are years (33). Finally, upon opening the last “engraved document,” he reads: “To Whom it May Concern . . . . Keep This Nigger-Boy Running” (33). The invisible man’s dream functions as a symbol of the consequences of compliance with ideological structures within which individuals retain little or no actual power over their own lives. A number of

critics are chiefly interested specifically in the novel's critique of communism,<sup>84</sup> but in scenes like these, it becomes painfully evident that Ellison's concern is not particularly with communism but rather, more generally, with those systems of social order that deprive individuals of autonomy through ideologically structured values.

Indeed, Ellison's protagonist only discovers the malicious and manipulative character of institutional power when Dr. Bledsoe brings him behind the veil, so to speak, to the space where he conceals his machinations. Bledsoe not only calls the invisible man a fool for not already having realized that "the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie," but also in a pivotal moment in the young man's life he is called, by the president of "the Negroes' college" no less, a "nigger." "It was as though he struck me," the invisible man relates, "He called me *that*" (139). After that, Bledsoe goes on to sermonize about institutional power: "Power doesn't have to show off. Power is confident, self-assuring, . . . and self-justifying. . . . This is a power set-up, son, and I'm at the controls" (142). Bledsoe calls him a "black educated fool" and insists that his "self-justifying" power influences and controls the power of men like Mr. Norton, a college trustee, because he says, "if I tell them that you're lying, they'll tell the world even if you prove you're telling the truth. Because it's the kind of lie they want to hear" (143). And in exposing his own greed for power and the protagonist's social inconsequentiality, Bledsoe tells the purported educated fool, "You're nobody, son. *You don't exist—can't you see that?* . . . Well, that's the way it is. It's a nasty deal and I don't always like it myself . . . . But I've made my place in it and I'll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am" (143, my emphasis).

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<sup>84</sup> The most recent work of criticism on Ellison's struggle with his early but later renounced leftist thinking is Barbara Foley's extensively researched *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man*. She argues that Ellison purged his novel of communist sympathies in order to make his book more marketable and sacrificed a more humane vision for his characters and their world.

Together with the motifs of sight, recognition, and social existence in this scene, Ellison orchestrates a kind of symphony in which the dominant strain is the power of embracing darkness and invisibility. In terms of the novel's morality, Bledsoe professes and exercises a *negative* invisibility, and B. P. Rinehart reinforces this negative invisibility later in the novel. The invisible man will model his own organic invisibility on these two characters but blends it with an existential morality that resonates with his natural sympathies (like Hardy's Jude does). Bledsoe derides the protagonist for his "vague notions about dignity" that he learned from teachers and idealists (144). He goes on to tell the invisible man, "let the white folk worry about pride and dignity—you learn where you are and get yourself power, influence, contacts with powerful and influential people—then stay in the dark and use it!" (145). Ellison characterizes the use of institutional power avariciously and "in the dark" as immoral. But more importantly, Ellison shows that even the use of institutional power in supposedly benevolent ways, as in the manner of the Brotherhood, can be equally oppressive. A large part of the novel demonstrates the invisible man's struggle to work out his *positive*, or moral, invisibility, a way to survive in an oppressive social structure without losing one's integrity based on an individual's natural sympathies. Thus, Bledsoe's premises and conclusion are put to a test by the invisible man's sense of morality. The first is affirmative—"learn where you are"—and he goes on to perceive who he is and what his social environment is like. However, the second is negative—"get yourself power, influence, contacts." The Machiavellian Bledsoe repulses the invisible man, while Rinehart later fascinates him. But they both help him to reach the conclusion: "stay in the dark!" Just as the invisible man progressively rejects the moral principles of his early childhood—the ambition fostered in him by the white town folk, the ethics of the Brotherhood,

and the idea that embracing invisibility is horribly irresponsible—he works out a personal, practical, and organic sense of morality.

In Ellison's protagonist's organic morality, invisibility is primarily a survival method necessary for the preservation of his selfhood, because he recognizes not only that he is disposable when someone else's cause is threatened, but also that he is the target of violence and humiliation from all around him. Bledsoe expels him from the college without his knowing it, a state of ignorance that is necessary to *keep him running*. Moreover, Bledsoe gives him what he thinks are letters of introduction with instructions to go to New York and show them to friends of the college in order to acquire work experience. In actuality, the letters, echoing the invisible man's dream, tell the reader to dismiss the protagonist summarily and function to keep him running with "vain hopes" of climbing the social ladder and achieving "dignity" (191).

Continuing his progression toward disillusionment, the young protagonist wonders, "What did I do? I always tried to do the right thing" (191). "Doing the right thing," he comes to see, subjects him, as previous ideological constraints had, to the pathways of social coercion and pain.

Likewise, the invisible man enters another space in which the underlying ethics of a cause are betrayed by rigidly applying its own principles, when he walks into the union meeting at Liberty Paints. Initially, they welcome him: "Come in, brother" (219). The union's warm greetings surprise Ellison's narrator. However, without any considerations of who the invisible man is—representative of the kind of poor, abstract thinking inherent in many causes—and upon learning that he works under a foreman named Lucius Brockway, the union members immediately turn hostile: "Get him the hell out of here. . . . Throw him out! . . . He looks like a dirty fink to me" (219). And even though it was his first day on the job and would have been impossible to have come under the sway of any kind of union adversary, they become

aggressively antagonistic—illustrating the irrationality in what Orwell might have termed *cause-think*, the same kind of thinking that moments before allowed them to welcome him too quickly as a kind of comrade or “brother.” As the invisible man’s first experience with causes that profess liberating ideologies, the union helped him to realize the dehumanizing effects of ideologically reifying actual people: “My face stung as though it had been slapped. They had made their decision without giving *me* a chance to speak for *myself*” (223, my emphasis). The cycle of antagonism continues when he returns to Brockway who, after finding out that he was at the union meeting (despite the fact that they were utterly hostile to him), says to the invisible man, “If you don’t git outta here, you low down skunk . . . I’m liable to kill you. The Lord being my witness, I’LL KILL YOU!” (225). In a moment of vivid self-disabuse, the invisible man reflects, “*You were trained to accept the foolishness of such old men as this, even when you thought them clowns and fools, . . . you were even trained to accept it when, angered or spiteful, or drunk with power, they came at you with a stick or strap or cane and you made no effort to strike back. . . . But this was too much*” (225, italics in the original). Ellison’s protagonist finally recognizes that adhering unquestioningly to the American values of respect for authority, the dignity of elders, and long-suffering patience could literally get him killed.

*Invisible Man* reverberates with ideological assertions from beginning to end, and its refrain is that social and political ideologies necessarily contain violent tendencies at one moment and alienating forces at another. Ellison composes these moments in order to build toward a crescendo in those scenes that depict the invisible man’s interactions with Ras the Exhorter, the Black Nationalist from the West Indies. Ras combines race and militancy to form his ideological vision. “I ought to kill you. Godahm, I ought to kill you,” Ras tells Clifton, “and the world would be better off. But you *black, mahn*” (370). As the Battle Royal scene sets the

theme for the transformation and revelations of the invisible man, it brings to the reader's awareness the way in which race is used merely as a tool for capitalistic oppression and sadism. Race, as used by the white big shots of his hometown, is certainly a justification for the preservation of their power, as they laugh at the young black men fighting each other, submitting to electric shocks, and perpetuating their own complicity with directives of obedience. With Ras, it is much the same. He simply inverts the value of *blackness*. "You *my* brother, mahn. Brothers are the same color; how the hell you call these white men *brother*? Shit, mahn. That's shit! Brothers the same color. We sons of Mama Africa, you done forget? You black, BLACK!" (370-71). Ras's moral position is one in which he is willing to commit murder without direct cause—his rationalization is that he is forced to live under a system that oppresses him—but does not only because his victim's skin color resembles his own and he aligns race with his ideological principles. The ideology based on race and militancy blind him to any kind of nuance. He envisions building "a glorious movement of black people. *Black People!*" (371); he imagines fighting against "the white enslaver" (372). His reasoning, however, is less concerned with how the system actually operates than it is with mere race. Although Ellison shows the invisible man's sympathy with "the crude, insane eloquence" of Ras's plea, the narrator sees that Ras's ideology is at least as racist as that of those whom he incorrectly considers enslavers (374).

Ras's unwavering commitment to a blinding ideology underscores Ellison's critique of ideology in general. Ras tells Clifton, "You black and beautiful—don't let 'em tell you different! You wasn't those t'ings you be dead, mahn. Dead! I'd have killed you, mahn" because, he tells himself, "You might be killing your black king!" (373). But the invisible man has already realized that race is used to justify class oppression. And in sympathy with other people who have been oppressed for any number of reasons, he thinks to himself, "their claims [were]

broader than race” (353). In his subsequent musings he relates, “I could glimpse the possibility of being more than a member of a race” (355). The invisible protagonist constantly questions why race is treated as a central issue when it seems to him that it is an accidental matter. Rather than working out what it might mean to be black, as Ras fixates upon, what has mattered to the invisible man, and remains a perpetual concern with Ellison, is what it means to be *human*.

Philip Roth explores this existential problem in his works, as well. Whereas Ellison underscores misery rooted in conformity to ideologies that fail to place an individual’s organic identity at its center, Roth extends Ellison’s exploration by showing that cruelty is perpetuated by the misplacement of antagonistic energies rising from disenfranchisement and coerced conformity. Suffering comes about through the manner in which cruelty intensifies within the interactions of a disempowered individual who takes displaced retribution on the world around him for his disenfranchisement and usurped autonomy. A peculiar factor exacerbating such cruelty is the punishing character’s sense of individual difference from social expectations. In these novels, nonconformity to socially prescribed behavior, ideas, and beliefs can aggravate the cruelty of individuals who have, under social compulsion, conformed to social prescriptions. Such exacerbation substantiates the underlying theme of these works: that conformity is a fundamental source of pain. The logic here leads the conformist to condemn those who do not sacrifice what they and other members of the conformed group have been made to sacrifice. For example, in *The Human Stain*, Lester Farley and, more reluctantly, Delphine Roux undergo painful processes of conformity, and in turn they commit numerous acts of social and physical violence on Coleman Silk and Faunia Farley. Delphine and Lester take misguided revenge on society by projecting onto Coleman and Faunia the source of their misery when in reality their misery lies in the compulsion to conform to and accept ideological thinking. What is more, they

justify their acts of social violence with the rhetoric of social values, such as decency and patriotism.

One of Roth's positions is demonstrated in the strain of cruelty pervading human life.<sup>85</sup> In order to emphasize the universality of human cruelty, Faunia Farley calls this trait the *human stain*, and it is analogous to the invisible man's grandfather's pronouncement that life is a war. Prince, the crow that is being rehabilitated at the Audubon Society, is the victim of the stain that goes even beyond humanity.<sup>86</sup> Shortly after escaping the confines of his cage, Prince is surrounded by hostile crows: "there were three or four crows that came. . . . Harassing him. Hitting him on the back. Screaming. Smacking into him and stuff. . . [because h]e doesn't have the right voice. . . . They would have killed him" (242). Earlier, Faunia sees two crows taking on a hawk: "Aggressive bastards. Mostly hostile" (166). Faunia sees in the crows' hostilities an analogy to what she calls "the human stain," and she says it "without revulsion or contempt or condemnation. Not even with sadness. *That's how it is.* . . . Impurity, cruelty, abuse, error, excrement, semen," and "It's in everyone" (242, emphasis in the original). From this vantage point, Faunia's revelations deny the rhetoric supporting the American value of purity with which social institutions justify their condemnations of individuals as much in the case of Bill Clinton's

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<sup>85</sup> In his discussion of universalizing, Timothy Parrish notes, for example, that Irving Howe "attacked both Ellison and Roth" for "having compromised their ethnic heritages in their pursuit of 'universal' American, literary selves" (424). Ellison and Roth were generally concerned more with existential questions about humanity than Howe's moral prescriptions allowed, as he thought that they should be concerned exclusively with racial questions in America. Conversely, Harold Bloom notes that it is their universalist concerns (and resistance to dealing merely with racial and ethnic identity) that makes their novels so powerful and compelling.

<sup>86</sup> Interestingly, *The Human Stain* is arguably Roth's most Hardy-esque novel in its pessimism and numerous references to Greek culture, making it very similar to *Jude the Obscure* in this way. Possibly as a nod to Hardy, "Prince" is also the name of the horse that is killed in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. In the oft-referred-to scene, Tess tells her younger brother, Abraham, that they live on a "blighted star" (21). To underscore her assertion that the world is a cruel, indifferent place, Prince, an old, overworked horse, is killed after Tess falls asleep on the road while delivering goods because her father was too drunk to do it himself. After being pierced by a mail-cart's "pointed shaft," Hardy describes the poignant scene: "Prince lay alongside still and dark; his eyes half open" lying in a "huge pool of blood" (22). One point of difference, however, is that society's cruelty in Roth's novel is more deliberate and calculated than the cosmic cruelty that brings about the demise of Hardy's Prince.

oval office transgressions as with Coleman Silk's affair with Faunia. More importantly, like the veteran doctor in the Golden Day in *Invisible Man*, Faunia's own life and the suffering she has undergone places her views, in terms of the novel, in a position that cuts through the rhetoric of self-affirming ideologies, particularly that of middle-class America with its look-on-the-bright-side-of-life attitude.

Therefore, Roth exposes "the persecuting spirit" (2) that saturates his novel, brimming with ideas of purity that are fundamental to some American ideologies, as a significant culprit of human suffering. "It's why all the cleansing is a joke," Faunia declares, "A barbaric joke at that. The fantasy of purity is appalling. It's insane. What is the quest to purify but more impurity? All she was saying about the stain was that it's inescapable" (242). In American society, the notion of purity is used to justify social methods of discipline, which Roth reveals to be socially instituted cruelty. The notion of purity has part of its roots in Christian theology, has permeated the ideologies of the West, and serves to justify otherwise unjustifiable acts. Impurity, in Faunia's view, is merely an individual's difference that is condemned and punished by the power structures that apply moral conceptions of virtuous conduct in order to obtain or maintain hegemony. Just as important, Faunia implies that difference and impurity are "inescapable" parts of human existence; they are integral parts of our rich human experience. Faunia insists that an individual's "impurity" is *essential* and implies that it is differentiated across individuals by their own personal and organic sense of life. To illustrate the personal and organic aspect of self and difference, Roth writes that Prince began to caw, "not in a true crow caw but in that caw that he had stumbled on himself and that drove the other crows nuts" (243). His difference is depicted metaphorically: "He doesn't know the crow language" (242). Instead, he "imitates the school kids that come [to the Audubon Society] and imitate him. . . . He's invented his own

language. From kids,” and Faunia, in her wisdom of sympathy, thinks to herself, “I love that strange voice he invented” (243).

Throughout the novel, Roth cultivates the crow analogy. While Silk and Faunia function primarily as victim crows, Lester Farley and Delphine Roux, function simultaneously as the hostile crow *and* victim crow. Just as important, most of the stories that Roth discusses in which character development takes place (from the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal to Silk’s familial relationships) depict an aspect of hostility and victimization. In some cases the victim transgresses a socially important moral precept while in other cases the victim may be chiefly innocent of any such offenses. In contrast to the news media’s conducting of a trial in order to indict Clinton for his oval office transgressions—a trial in which William F. Buckley called for the castration of the president on behalf of America’s “exalted ideals” (3)—Silk’s deeper transgressions are hidden from public view: passing as a different race, lying to his wife about his familial background, hiding his children’s racial heritage from them, and disowning himself from his mother and siblings. Therefore, some of Silk’s and Delphine Roux’s differences lie in the fact that while many of the most important experiences in his life are often kept secret (and when they are not he often suffers for them), her experiences are often made public as in the case of her humiliating public debacle with the “email ad for a Coleman Silk duplicate” (278) and the supposedly “anonymous letter” about Silk’s not-so-secret affair with Faunia (279).

Moreover, Delphine, as victim crow, suffers intensely at the hands of the members of her surrounding communities for her personal difference. Like Silk, Delphine desires to be a self-made individual rather than submitting to the pressures of familial traditions or “family ideals as they were set in the thirteenth century” (274-75). And so, like Silk, Delphine abandons nearly all of her family connections and leaves France for the United States. She feels that by leaving her

family she is rejecting the compulsion to conform to the traditions of her mother's aristocratic legacy. The people in the aristocratic society, in which her mother moved, all "shared the same stifling values and the same stifling religious obedience" with its "litany of charity, selflessness, discipline, faith, and respect—respect not for the individual (*down* with the individual!) but for the traditions of the family" (275). This social milieu, in her view, disdained intelligence, creativity, and development of oneself. Therefore, her family and society trampled on her own deeply felt creative desires regarding who she was. Delphine's mother embodied the values of the French aristocracy and "imposed them on the household, who would have enchained her only daughter to those values from birth to the grave had her daughter been without the strength, from adolescence on, to run from her as far as she could" (275). Rejection of social ideologies, however, does not guarantee any kind of individual freedom or happiness. Delphine's family and the French society in which she lived, unfortunately, were not the only sources of her misery.

Her interactions with the professional community at Athena College illustrate further how Delphine is alienated and oppressed. The "cabal of three women," Roth writes, is "[f]ull of animosity" toward Delphine because "their American notions of independence differ from her French notions of independence" (271). Delphine's relationship with the economics professor, Arthur Sussman, particularly invokes their disdain because they assume she is his mistress and must be flattered to be some powerful man's lover. However, in fact, she has not slept with him, but rather feels herself his equal and enjoys their conversations on *The German Ideology*. Similarly, the "Athena feminists" alienate her because they are resentful of her allure, "because men are drawn to her," and so they say that "she's a charlatan and illegitimate," and "one of those French male chauvinists in drag" (270). Through the malicious actions of her professional community, Delphine becomes "ensnared by . . . disapproval" in a country that promised

freedom and respect and yet she winds up “all but isolated in America.” She learns that there is “something very mean about life. . . . At its heart, very mean and very vengeful” (272). She is a young, sensitive, and intelligent woman (too intelligent, Coleman thinks) who suffers because she is independent, does not fit in, and because, Roth insists, the human stain of sadistic cruelty pervades human interactions in general.

Delphine *is* intelligent, at least in all things except when it comes to sex and Coleman Silk, in which case she is deeply irrational, and ultimately she, too, becomes vengeful. Many of her irrational distortions come in large part, as in the cases of the Brotherhood and Ras the Exhorter, from her *ideological attitudes*. In her case, her views regarding men and sex have become grotesque. In her intentions about wearing “chic” clothing, in one instance, she attempts “neither to desexualize herself . . . nor to appear to be trying to tantalize” Silk (186). However, through her understanding of sexuality, believing herself to be very attractive, she is not capable of believing that Silk is not attracted to her and not playing a sexual game. Therefore, she foolishly projects onto him intentions of “playing the seduction against the grain” (187). To help put Delphine’s circumstances in perspective, Roth weaves her philosophy in glaring contrast to that of Faunia Farley. Faunia is not high-minded or high-principled; rather, she is not principled at all. Also, one of Faunia’s distinguishing characteristics is her ability to accept life *as it is* and on its terms, both its dirty realism and its rare moments of profound tenderness and satisfaction. Delphine’s views of reality, on the other hand, are in some important ways distorted by her ideology.

Delphine harshly judges some interactions that she could otherwise have enjoyed were it not for her misguided ideological stance. For example, at age seventeen, she has a brief relationship with a man named Dominique whom she met at a lecture that Milan Kundera had

given on *Madame Bovary*. She had begun to think of him “as a fellow spiritual lover of literature” (261). However, once the sexual relationship began, it became “completely a physical experience with Dominique. . . . It was completely about her body” (262). She realized that she “wanted to be something more than a piece of meat on a spit, turned and basted, . . . [yet] she somehow gets locked in” (262). The dilemma she faces in these moments is the Western dichotomy of sex as animalism on one side and intellectuality as spirituality on the other. Her sentimental solution to this dilemma is “Sex, yes, wonderful sex, but *sex with metaphysics*” (262, my emphasis). Delphine’s idealism leads her to think that she can have both and that both can last. Faunia, however, undercuts such idealism. In an important scene she says to Coleman, “A man and a woman in a room. Naked. We’ve got all we need. We don’t need love. Don’t diminish yourself—don’t reveal yourself as a sentimental sap” (231). Roth, following D. H. Lawrence, shows the spiritual value of physical sex, even what is often considered *just sex*.<sup>87</sup>

Still, at the age of twenty, Delphine had met a man with whom she had an impassioned affair. He was a professor of classics, like Coleman Silk. He was “the one professor whom she’d been unable to resist” (186). He had what she wanted, *gravitas*, and therefore with him she feels that she was able to achieve her ideal of “sex with metaphysics.” The professor had given her a ring with the carving of “Danaë receiving Zeus as a shower of gold” (186). The image functions as a symbol for Delphine’s attitude toward sex, clearly representing sex as a *spiritual* act and barren of any animalism. How different Delphine’s idealistic view of sex is from Faunia’s, who, in Zuckerman’s words, sees Zeus chiefly in his raw animality: “All their Zeus ever wants to do,” she thinks, “is fuck—goddesses, mortals, heifers, she-bears—and not merely in his own form but, even more excitingly, as himself made manifest as beast” (242). Moreover,

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<sup>87</sup> What Roth depicts through Delphine’s inability to love Dominique has its analogy in Freud’s notion of “psychical impotence,” which Roth explores at length in *Portnoy’s Complaint* and which I discussed in Chapter 3.

because Delphine's views about sex and mate-choice presumably conform to other feminist views (in terms of the ideal of sex with metaphysics), she resents the "Athena feminists'" disdain and dismissal of her even more because she is baffled by their treatment. The feminists call her "a parody of Simone de Beauvoir," or in other words, "Beauvoir sold out to Sartre" just as Delphine, in their imaginations, has sold out to Sussman, "a very intelligent woman but in the end his slave" (269).

The interaction between Delphine and the Athena feminists illustrates the trope of blindness that recurs throughout *The Human Stain*, as it does in *Invisible Man*. The Athena feminists' treatment of Delphine parallels her own treatment of Silk and Faunia in its judgment and cruelty. This cruelty is rooted in ideological rigidity and a failure to see how one's own cruelty fuels the cycle of misery. Roth writes that the feminists watch Delphine and Sussman "and get it all wrong, everything is an issue, everything is an ideological stance, everything is betrayal—everything's a selling out" (269). Just as the feminists cast Delphine as the "parody of de Beauvoir," Delphine in turn casts Silk and Faunia as feminist ideological archetypes: Silk as the domineering male and Faunia as "the prototype of female helplessness" (194). We saw the same casting of archetypes in *Sabbath's Theater*—in Chapter 4—that we do here, when the committee to handle Sabbath's scandal with Kathy Goolsbee casts them in the same roles as Silk and Faunia, respectively. And because Delphine makes the mistake of ideological imposition, when it comes to Faunia and Coleman, she, too, gets it all wrong.<sup>88</sup>

Despite all of Delphine's troubled and poignant background, she fails to gain much sympathy because of her ideological rigidity. Owing to this rigidity, she willfully perpetuates the

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<sup>88</sup> Because of ideological demands, Delphine overlooks all of the mutual affinities that, in Forster's view of life that I discussed in Chapter 2, should bring her to esteem Coleman with respect and even bring her closer to him with a deep sense of sympathy, affinity, and compassion.

cycle of misery: she is not only *victim crow* but also *hostile crow*.<sup>89</sup> Among the slightest of her faults, she attempts not merely to appear to be Silk's "superior but a supercilious superior" (184). More importantly, she is instrumental in his dismissal from the college during the spooks affair, the set of events that began with allegations of racism and which lead, he believes, to the death of his wife, Iris. Furthermore, after already having forced him into retirement, when she hears about his affair, at seventy-one years old, with Faunia, "a full-fledged battered wife" (194), she becomes aggressively manipulative. Delphine believes that in Faunia, Silk has found the object of "a misogynist's heart's desire, . . . the perfect woman to crush" (194). So she sends him an "anonymous" letter that reads: "Everyone knows you're sexually exploiting an abused, illiterate woman half your age" (38). Zuckerman responds to the "inanely stupid letter" by critiquing Delphine's hyper-feminist perspective: "everything [Silk does] must have ruthlessness as its explanation, and everything Delphine Roux does must have virtue as its explanation. Isn't mythology," he contemplates, "full of giants and monsters and snakes? By defining you as a monster, she defines herself as a heroine. . . . She's giving the whole thing mythological status" (42). Zuckerman's equating Delphine's superimposition of ideological archetypes onto the world with mythological status is by no means specious or an exaggeration. Characters in literature have made similar superimpositions for centuries, not the least famous of which is Don Quixote's mistaking windmills for giants. The don's delusional mythological projections, rooted in ideological rigidity, parallels Delphine Roux's superimposing of her hyper-feminist ideology's mythology onto Coleman and Faunia.

The complexity of the ideological critique at the heart of Roth's novel does not lend itself to rejecting feminist *considerations* altogether. The many denunciations leveled at Roth

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<sup>89</sup> In *The Human Stain*, Prince, the crow who is victimized by the more cruel crows, acts as a metaphor for Faunia and Coleman while those hostile crows figuratively represent the social forces of conformity and coercion.

regarding his supposed misogyny lack credibility when one realizes that in *The Human Stain* (as in *Portnoy's Complaint* and *Sabbath's Theater*) the principal character who reveals truth to the fictional world of the novel, and by extension to the reader's world, is a female character. Faunia Farley is a dispeller of myths, not excepting Coleman's. She undercuts American ideals regarding sentimentality, love, morality, feminism, and democracy, all the way through traditional ways of American thinking. This is why she presents such a challenge. She is a *panzaic* character who subverts the quixotic ideals of the other characters and those of the readers as well. Zuckerman frequently characterizes her as having deep insight and an "antisocial wisdom" (27), a "savage wisdom" (40), because in contrast to Delphine and other characters who are saturated in ideological mythologies, Faunia rejects those impositions. If she were to believe in a god, such a god would not be the Western Christ, "the perfectly desexualized Christian man-god" with "all the guilt and shame that an exquisite *unearthliness* inspires," but rather Zeus, "exuberantly wedded to his own rich existence," which is "the *divine* stain. A great *reality*-reflecting religion" (243, my emphasis).<sup>90</sup> That is Faunia's power, and while others might eventually stand in accord with her view, they failed to recognize her insights on their own (though Coleman comes closest).

In contrast to Delphine's stereotyping of her as a vulnerable, unintelligent, working-class woman, Faunia's insightfulness arises from an intense intellectual curiosity. Telling Coleman about her youth, she says, "I could not go to school. Aside from everything else, it was boring. All this real stuff was happening in people's houses. Sure as shit happening in *my* house. How could I go to school and learn what the capital of Nebraska was? I wanted to *know*. I wanted to

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<sup>90</sup> Interestingly, there is a common celebration of pagan ways throughout many of these rebellious novels. For example, when Sue Bridehead, in *Jude the Obscure*, is iconoclastic about Jude's ideals, she, too, invokes the pagan world of the Greek gods. And in that pagan spirit, Lawrence invoked what he called "gods, great gods" that exist within the human psyche as a powerful, conceptual alternative to the ideology stemming from Western Christianity.

get out and look around. . . . I wanted to know the worst” (340, emphasis in the original). And one thing Faunia admires about the crows she watches “is that they’re all practicality” (169). In Roth’s and Ellison’s novels, practicality and rigid ideology are antithetical. Moreover, Faunia had never given herself over to a social path of ambition, but rather to her instinctive desire to know. Mirroring the invisible man’s ambitions to become a Booker T. Washington and the social conformity that path reinforces, Delphine, while rebuffing her family’s traditions, gives herself over completely to the social path of intellectual ambition wherein she conforms unreservedly to an institutionalized academic ideology that has ossified into a reality-denying mythology.

But Delphine is not the only hostile crow in the novel. Lester Farley, after emerging from an early life of unquestioning regard for orthodoxy, becomes a more brutal and murderous crow. Even Nelson Primus, Silk’s lawyer, says “Delphine Roux can’t hold a candle to Farley, not as psychopath and not as adversary” (76). Having come back from Vietnam, Zuckerman writes that Farley is “a loyal American who’d served his country with not one tour but two, who’d gone back a second time to finish the goddamn job” (64). Before his first tour, “he was the boy from the Berkshires who put a lot of trust in people and had no idea how cheap life could be, . . . happy-go-lucky Les, no threat to society. . . . But the second time, . . . he is ape-shit. . . . [H]e goes berserk” (65). Still, Zuckerman attempts to sympathize with Farley, as he did with Delphine, because all Les “did was what they had trained him to do: you see the enemy, you kill the enemy. . . . He is a trained killer. . . . He did his job. He did what he was told to do” (69). Farley’s compensation is to have been turned numb by his time in Vietnam, “Fuckin’ numb,” he says, “No emotions. Numb to the death of my own kids. . . . All my feelings are all fucked up. . .

Because I died already in Vietnam. Because I am a man who fucking *died*” (73, emphasis in the original).

Lester Farley’s perspective made a radical shift between two similarly destructive ideologies, from a strict adherence to traditional values, including patriotism, duty, and obedience to authority, to an anti-establishmentarian view, both of which had severely distorting features. His younger perspective lacked the practicality that Faunia understood so well. Lester’s lack of a practical sense, a questioning sense, made him commit brutal atrocities in Vietnam. One of these atrocities included volunteering for door gunning on a helicopter where “everything looks small from above. . . . Death and destruction, that is what door gunning is all about” (65). That destructive element warped his perspective. When he returns from the second tour, he “doesn’t want to be around other people” because “he has seen and done things so outside what these people know about that he cannot connect to them and they cannot connect to him,” and in his mind, “it’s the government’s fault” (66). While the government may bear the lion’s share of what happened to him, it is his ideological perspectives that perpetuate these atrocities in his life back home.

Farley’s perspective after Vietnam is so distorted that he succumbs to a new mythology. While his previous American mythological view falls to the wayside, including the line of thinking that American men should fight to protect their country, he succumbs to another ideological view that, like Delphine’s, sees himself as the victim to the monsters and evils of that mythical world. Like Delphine’s delusions based on hyper-feminist archetypes, Farley’s delusions blur some important distinctions. Even when ordering take-out from a Chinese restaurant, Farley would have “to wait in the truck while Faunia picked up the food. If he went inside,” Zuckerman relates, “he’d want to kill the gooks as soon as he saw them. ‘But they’re

Chinese,' Faunia told him, 'not Vietnamese.' 'Asshole! I don't care *what* the fuck they are! They count as gooks!'" (215). Farley's troubles come about not simply because, as Faunia asserts, "the guy was on the dumb side. . . . Too dumb even to fuck right" (29). His ideological perspective is even more distorting than Delphine's; a number of characters, particularly Zuckerman, "knew about what can corrode and warp a man who believes himself to have been grievously wronged" (63).

In *The Human Stain*, characters' ideological perspectives that begin without a certain level of practicality, critical reflection, or a solid sense of reality-reflecting perception tend to snowball into greater depths of distortion. As Farley projects himself into the role of out-and-out victim, he projects Faunia as a monstrous "[f]ucking bitch" who killed his kids (68). More grotesque, his delusional side prevents him from accepting his responsibility for driving her away. "She doesn't know what it's like," he complains, and declares that he "never hurt her and he never hurt the kids" (70). Yet, a few times, "in the middle of the night he wakes up choking her" (66). More egregious, according to Faunia, he "regularly beat her up. Beat her black and blue" (29). Rage and conformity, victimhood and ideology, numb feelings and a sense of alienation in Farley create a delusional state that leads to the eventual murder of Faunia and Coleman Silk, the latter of which he sees as a "kike professor" and a "Jew bastard" (70). Roth's novel shows how conformity, with its push toward suffering and the subsequent conception of victimhood that Farley constructs for himself, combines with social ideological forces to foster a prevalent form of oppression, racism.

But more importantly, Farley's experiences demonstrate how the slippery slope of conformity can move the obedient ideologue to rationalize murder with half-truths and ideological distortions. In the final pages of the novel, Zuckerman subtly confronts Farley, and

Roth shows how Farley justifies his heinous crime: “The subconscious mind. You can’t control it. It’s like the government. It *is* the government. It’s the government all over again. It gets you to do what you don’t want to do” (355, emphasis in the original). After having killed his wife, Faunia, and her lover, Coleman—and Zuckerman *knows* that Farley killed them both—Farley feigns ignorance about the whereabouts of his murdered wife and tells Zuckerman that he’s not sure what happened to her. “He shook his head. A sad shrug, a sigh—complete bullshit, deliberately *transparent* bullshit. ‘No idea. Ran away, I scared her so. Scared the woman shitless. My heart goes out to her, wherever she may be. Completely blameless person” (356). At this point in the novel, after having been treated for post-traumatic stress disorder, Farley may even believe part of what he says here, but that he can say it at all—after the rage and hatred for Faunia, Silk, the government, and the war—implies how beyond any feelings of guilt or remorse he is. And that is what Roth wants readers to understand about the human condition, that people are indelibly scarred with the human stain. Thus, Lester Farley’s eerie, haunting words seem to echo in the pristine “Arcadian mountain” scene in the closing pages of the novel: “If man has to do with it, stay away from it. That’s my motto” (360-61).

#### Invisibility as an Act of Social Resistance against Compulsory Conformity

Ultimately, the invisible man learns to harness his invisibility; his social resistance comes not overtly, like Clifton’s and the Brotherhood’s attempts to bring about political and social reform, but covertly by *hiding* himself. The narrator discovers a newfound and subversive wisdom through his interactions with Bliss Proteus Rinehart and, to a lesser extent, Mr. Bledsoe, as well as through the influence of his grandfather. The editors of *The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature* write that “Rinehart’s major function is to provide a mode of escape for the narrator. . . . He is the trickster par excellence” (Andrews 348). Thus,

when we meet the invisible man (in the prologue, after he has already undergone the events later related in the novel), he has already placed himself at odds with society and its ideals, intimated in part through his stealing energy from Monopolated Light & Power. The key element indicating how he employs his invisibility lies in this pronouncement: “I learned in time that it was possible to carry on a fight against them *without their realizing it*” (5, my emphasis).<sup>91</sup> He becomes a parasite on the energy company and by extension on the dominant and oppressive society in which he lives.<sup>92</sup> Ellison reveals to readers that individuals can become empowered in their invisibility. Invisible resistance, then, consists of a *quiet rejection* of social ideologies that repressively constrain those who conform sincerely, including any prominent religious, political, ethnic, or cultural belief system. Those who embrace invisibility, then, will be considered, in the invisible man’s own words, “horrible, irresponsible bastard[s]” (14) because implementing one’s invisibility in this way against reigning social, political, and economic institutions is an “[a]ct of sabotage” (7).

The narrator learns that his external comportment ought not belie his internal, intuitive, and subversive senses lest harm come his way. He declares, “I would have to take that part of myself that looked on with remote eyes and keep it always at the distance of the campus, the hospital machine, the battle royal”—all important sections of the novel that lead him to realize

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<sup>91</sup> The invisible man’s pronouncement here echoes Henry David Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience,” specifically in his positioning himself against conformity to social power structures all the while intent on manipulating the system: “I simply wish to refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually. . . . In fact, I quietly declare war with the State, after my fashion, though I will still make what use and get what advantage of her I can” (242). In fact, Thoreau’s declaration of war against ideological conformity is precisely what rebellious novels encourage in readers: “rebel,” etymologically, means to declare war.

<sup>92</sup> I borrow the term “parasite” from Wayne Burns, whose description of “parasitic anarchism” elaborates on Thoreau’s refusal of allegiance. In a sense, *Invisible Man* can easily be read as the process of discovery through which the invisible man becomes a parasitic anarchist. Burns describes a parasitic anarchist as one who does not believe that the system of corporate capitalism in the United States and across the Western world can be ameliorated, and that that system so deeply influences the minds of citizens that it virtually controls their choices; thus, those people who resist both working for the system, on the one hand, and attempting to ameliorate it, on the other, will position themselves as “parasites on the body social and body politic” (17).

his locus of social devaluation. “Perhaps,” he ruminates, “the part of me that observed listlessly but *saw all*, missing nothing, was still the malicious, arguing part; *the dissenting voice*, my grandfather part; the cynical, disbelieving part—*the traitor self* that always threatened internal discord” (335, my emphasis). This realization dawns on him at a pivotal moment in the novel, when he is going to give a speech, while still being used as an instrument of propaganda in the service of the Brotherhood. The dissenting voice helps him to realize how he awakens to his own, more profound feelings: “I feel suddenly that I have become *more human*” (346, emphasis in the original). The dissenting voice shares the attitude expressed by E. M. Forster’s Schlegel sisters and D. H. Lawrence’s man who died, among other rebellious characters discussed in Chapter 2. To become human, in the manner and context that these works express it, is a liberating experience, and conformity to social ideologies necessarily obstructs that liberation. The higher members of the Brotherhood criticize the speech: “It was a most unsatisfactory beginning,” and “The worst you could have done,” and it was “wild, hysterical, politically irresponsible, and dangerous,” they tell him (348-49). Because he began to awaken to his more authentic feelings and articulated them to others, the cause of the Brotherhood was threatened. The views expressed by the Brotherhood about those “more human” feelings reiterate both stereotypically misogynistic denunciations (wild and hysterical) as well as its characteristic reduction of individual value when political goals are threatened (politically irresponsible and dangerous). And in order to repress his sense of humanity, the Brotherhood orders the invisible man “to undergo a period of intense study and indoctrination” (351).

The Brotherhood’s process of indoctrination is deliberately intended to repress those *human* feelings that have given the invisible man a sense of individual worth, also hinted at by his grandfather. Flanking his sense of individual worth, he also struggles with the American

mainstream views imposed upon him about the worthlessness of African Americans in American society. Thus, he strains to understand how his grandfather could possibly be an exemplar of what it might mean to “be human”: “What had an old slave to do with humanity?” he scoffs (354). At this point he considers, although only momentarily, that his old professor, Woodbridge, articulated what being human means in a lecture on James Joyce: “Stephen’s problem, like ours, was not actually one of creating the uncreated conscience of his race, but of creating the *uncreated features of his face*. Our task is that of making ourselves individuals. The conscience of a race is the gift of its individuals who see, evaluate, record. . . . We create the race by creating ourselves [individually]. . . . For, you see, blood and skin do not think!” (354, emphasis in the original). Abstract principles, such as those regularly found in ideologies of racial solidarity, social uplift, or ethno-cultural identity, often function, in Ellison’s view, as repressive apparatuses deforming what Woodbridge refers to as the task of the individual, one’s drive to become human, as an individual as opposed to merely a member of, say, a racial or political group. And it is this revelation that energizes the invisible man’s desire to become more human rather than conform to an abstract ideological identity: “For the first time, lying there in the dark, I could glimpse the possibility of being more than a member of a race” (355).

Although the invisible man initially found pride in being “the new instrument of the committee’s authority” (363), the narrator comes to regard the Brotherhood with skepticism when Brother Wrestrum accuses the invisible man of opportunism and petitions the committee to throw him out of the Brotherhood. To the invisible man’s dismay, the Brotherhood takes the charges seriously in the name of “the safety of the organization” (405) and reassigns him downtown, away from Harlem where he was gaining power and popularity. Up to this point in his interactions with the committee, the invisible man believed devoutly in the ideal of

brotherhood, but the treatment of distrust and disrespect brought “serious doubts” to his mind about the practicality of brotherhood (405). He felt betrayed by their unwarranted distrust as he had been entirely devoted to their cause. He recounts, the committee would “shift me and investigate and I, still believing, still bending to discipline, would have to accept their decision” (407) even though he knew that “a sensible man” would have “run out” of the trial they were putting him through (405). His reassignment ultimately took him away from Harlem for quite a while, during which time the people for whom he fought were dispossessed and removed from their homes. During this time, his friend, Tod Clifton, also became disillusioned with the Brotherhood and began peddling Sambo dolls to make money simply in order to eat. The doll was a symbol of the commodification of African-American people as mere objects of entertainment. In the invisible man’s mind, they were a disgusting reduction of the human value of African-American people. However, having been driven to sell the degrading dolls, Clifton also subjects himself to hawking wares illegally that would eventually lead to his murder by an abusive policeman.

Importantly, after Clifton’s death, the invisible man comes to the realization that the struggle he and the Brotherhood had undergone in the cause for ameliorating the system had been for naught. “No great change had been made,” he asserts. “I’d been so fascinated by the motion that I’d forgotten to measure what it was bringing forth. I’d been asleep, dreaming” (444). In his attempts to awaken from the dream of romantic idealism so fundamental within the cause of the Brotherhood, as Ellison depicts it, he grapples with how to make meaning of Clifton’s death. The dispossession of the people for whom he fought and the death of Clifton put into perspective how “politically, individuals are without meaning” (447). The Sambo doll that Clifton had been selling brings to the narrator’s mind the idea that the system against which he

had been crusading “had the power to use a paper doll, first to destroy [Clifton’s] integrity and then as an excuse for killing him” (448). He first considers using his friend’s death as part of a “ruthlessness” in the cause of “Brotherhood” (448) because in the death of a social reform soldier, he thinks, “we must see the meaning of our struggle” (449). But more doubts rise in his thoughts about such a conception of human life. Considering the vast congregation of unfamiliar people now supposedly lamenting Clifton’s death at his funeral march, he wonders, “Did it signify love or politicized hate? And could politics ever be an expression of love?” (452). And so his struggles to discover meaning deflate as he concludes that Clifton’s “death was as senseless as his life was futile” (457). He insists that as Clifton’s lifeless body lies in his coffin, “we’re in there with him” (458). Striving politically for social reform amounts to a kind of death-in-life: the humanity-denying ideologies of political reform and their futility to substantially change the system of exploitation equate to the lifelessness of Clifton’s cold corpse.

The political uplift for which he had been fighting, therefore, becomes meaningless. Moreover, when the invisible man connects the idea of Clifton’s political efforts with his actual, dead body, he comments on the belief that people have in ameliorating the system: “why worry over a hope that’s dead?” (459). Almost like a harbinger for political activist reformers such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Huey Newton, the invisible man describes Clifton’s death to the Brotherhood: “He was shot because he was black and because he resisted. Mainly because he was black,” and that he’d probably still be alive “if he’d accepted being pushed around” (469). But the Brotherhood no longer values Clifton because he apostatized. Brother Jack describes Clifton as “a traitorous merchant of vile instruments of anti-Negro, anti-Minority racist bigotry” and blames the invisible man for helping him to receive “the funeral of a hero” (466). The Brotherhood’s cool dismissal of a former brother too easily devalues meaningful

connection for the invisible man's moral sense: "To hell with you," he thinks to himself, "He was a man! . . . a man and a brother" (467). But more importantly, the invisible man associates the devaluation of Clifton to the status of traitor with the possibility of being spurned and devalued himself ("Some folks call me a traitor"), because he realizes that all Brother Jack sees in Clifton's death "is that it might harm the prestige of the Brotherhood" (467-68).

In fact, he also realizes how devalued and dehumanized he has been from the beginning of his tenure with the Brotherhood. When the narrator says he thinks that the large number of people who gathered for Clifton's funeral turned out because they were given "the opportunity to express their feelings, to affirm themselves," Brother Jack declaims, "You were not hired to think" (469). "Naked and old and rotten" as Brother Jack's ideological devaluation of Clifton's and the invisible man's humanity is, it was finally "out in the open" for the narrator to see (469). Persisting in his own righteousness, Brother Jack rationalizes his denial of the invisible man's intellectual contributions by asserting, "the committee does the thinking. For *all* of us" (470). But his rhetoric is empty and the invisible man sees through it, sarcastically responding, "I had forgotten my place" (470). The Brotherhood's marginalization of the people of Harlem's feelings, its devaluation of Clifton, and its rejection of the invisible man's ideas are part and parcel of its rigid, ideological impositions: "We do not shape our policies to the mistaken and infantile notions of the man on the street. Our job is not to *ask* them what they think but to *tell* them!" (473, emphasis in original).

An important moment in the novel comes in a scene in which the invisible man questions the committee's supercilious conceit and their policy of furnishing *all* ideas: "Only the correct ideas for the correct occasion," Brother Jack proclaims (470). "'And suppose you misjudge the occasion?' 'Should that ever happen, you keep quiet.' 'Even though I am correct?' 'You say

nothing unless it is passed by the committee” (470). With the ominous threat of confronting the Brotherhood too directly, the invisible man begins to realize how important his invisibility is: “I was on a dangerous road and I thought of Clifton and tried to get off it. *I said nothing*” (470, my emphasis). Silence becomes his invisibility in regard to the Brotherhood. The narrator comes to value his personal and organic knowledge above the ideological principles of all the myriad ideologies that he has encountered throughout the novel. He says, “I’m describing a part of reality which *I know*,” and “I stand on what I see and feel and on what I’ve heard, and what I *know*” (471-72, my emphasis).<sup>93</sup> And in this scene he makes clear his resolute rejection of social ideologies in general. He reasons that Brother Jack, and the Brotherhood’s ideological principles, “came between me and the light” (473). He comes to see that ideals such as discipline, duty, and sacrifice are not worth the suffering they bring.

Brother Jack’s “disemboweled” eye helps the invisible man see through the specious logic of the Brotherhood. Brother Jack says, “You must accept *discipline* . . . . I lost my eye in the line of *duty*. . . . [Y]ou don’t appreciate the meaning of *sacrifice*. I was ordered to carry through an objective and carried it through. Understand? Even though I had to lose my eye to do it” (475, my emphasis). Brother Jack’s “medal of merit,” an eerie red badge of courage that prevents him from seeing things accurately, becomes part of his rhetoric of discipline, sacrifice, and blind conformity. The invisible man thinks to himself, “So that is the meaning of discipline, . . . sacrifice . . . .yes, and blindness; he doesn’t see me. He doesn’t even see me” (475). To the invisible man, his rejection of ideological impositions is akin to “the feeling that I was just awakening from a dream” (476). He thinks to himself, “what kind of society will make him see

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<sup>93</sup> The invisible man’s resolve to value personal, organic knowledge echoes D. H. Lawrence’s claim in “Why The Novel Matters,” that “as for knowing, if I put my finger in the fire, I know that fire burns, with a knowledge so emphatic and vital, it leaves Nirvana,” or other abstract principles, “merely a conjecture. Oh yes, my body, me alive, *knows*, and knows intensely” (195).

me,” and expresses a poignant joke about Brother Jack’s literal and ideological blindness, namely that if he himself were to lose an eye in the line of duty, “then I may not-see myself as others see-me-not” (477).

Then, the invisible man finds his invisibility. In an attempt to escape being further beaten by Ras the Exhorter, he finds a dark pair of sunglasses at a drugstore and is soon mistaken for Rinehart. The donning of “the darkest lenses” he could find is the narrator’s first fully deliberate attempt to embrace his invisibility (482). And though being mistaken for Rinehart, he thinks to himself, “it works” (483). And in passing the test of disguising himself from his friends, Brother Maceo and Barrelhouse, he recognizes that the “glasses were working too well,” as he was once again mistaken for Rinehart, a actual man as well as his own, new alter ego though he wonders, “what kind of man is Rinehart?” (488-90). Soon, however, he finds out. “You got to have a smooth tongue, a heartless heart and be ready to do anything” (493). That’s who Rinehart is and, to some degree, who the invisible sees he himself must become, because if “dark glasses and a white hat could blot out my identity so quickly, who actually was who?” (493). Because no one paid him special attention, he felt himself empowered as a personification of “THE SEEN UNSEEN, . . . THE INVISIBLE” (493-96). As Rinehart, “His world was possibility. . . . A vast seething, hot world of fluidity” (498). Ellison shows how his narrator becomes aware of the possibility of a personal, organic, self-created identity—one based not so much on ideological considerations, by which his identity had hitherto been confined, but rather on his personal sense of self, “a brief glimpse of the possibilities posed by Rinehart’s multiple personalities” (499).

Moreover, anticipating “Hambro’s lawyer’s mind” and a likely majority of Ellison’s audience who would condemn “Rinehart simply as a criminal,” the invisible man makes no real attempt to justify his becoming an “irresponsible bastard” (500). Ellison leaves the power of the

narrative to serve as justification for the invisible man's actions. Thus, the invisible man's irresponsibility holds a stronger moral position than the Brotherhood's ideology. Hambro, in agreement with the Brotherhood, unemotionally tells the narrator, "your members will have to be sacrificed" because "all who leave must be considered expendable. The new directives must be followed rigidly" (501). Hambro's rigid position is another reminder to the invisible man that his new path of invisibility is a necessary as well as a moral one. Hambro tells of the sacrifice some groups must undergo despite the fact that the Brotherhood are essentially forcing the sacrifice upon the members of his district without their willingness or knowledge. Again, the logic of the Brotherhood's idealism fails to sustain any claim to reason; he says, "The disciplined members will understand." He continues, "Change is achieved through sacrifice. . . . It's inevitable that some must make greater sacrifices than others" (502). The inequality of sacrifice, however, falling more heavily in this instance on the African-American residents of Harlem, strikes the narrator as grotesquely immoral. But more importantly, Hambro's logic implies that the cycle of systemic exploitation—with American racism and class oppression on the one side and the methods of political and social reform that lead to sacrifice on the other—will continue indefinitely: "a part of the whole is sacrificed—and will continue to be [sacrificed] until a new society is formed" (503). Finally, the invisible man denounces the cycle of sacrifice: "Look at me! Look at *me!* . . . Everywhere I've turned somebody has wanted to sacrifice me for my own good—only *they* were the ones who benefited. And now we start on the old sacrificial merry-go-round. At what point do we stop? Is this the new true definition, is Brotherhood a matter of sacrificing the weak? If so, at what point do we stop?" (505, emphasis in the original).

Responsibility, particularly for the district and the people for whom he had been fighting, is the last star to fall from the invisible man's ideal sky. Earlier, when the narrator thought of his

own integrity, built upon the “role of the Brotherhood, . . . it had changed to water, to air” (503). Like Falstaff’s catechism about the senselessness of “honour” in *Henry IV, Part One*, the invisible man concludes that integrity based on rigid, ideological principles is also senseless. And now, the idea of responsibility, as in his youthful notion of becoming a Booker T. Washington and helping the people to rise up, seems meaningless and *self-destructive*. He reasons, “You don’t have to worry about the people. If they tolerate Rinehart, then they will forget it *and even with them you are invisible*. . . . My ambition and integrity were nothing to them and my failure was as meaningless as Clifton’s” (506-07, my emphasis). His invisibility to the people—being *meaningless* in a human sense and *meaningful*, even slightly, only in a political sense—puts into perspective what had earlier felt like a betrayal exemplified by his ethical struggles over the concept of Rinehart as a disguised, multi-personalities trickster. But now he understands the anti-social wisdom of being part of a community without himself feeling responsible to them: “I’d have to do a Rinehart” (507).

The invisible man finds his identity, then, grounded in his personal sense of life in contrast to ideological principles: “past humiliations,” he ruminates, “flickered through my head and I saw that they were more than separate experiences. They were me; they defined me. I was my experiences and my experiences were me, and no blind men, no matter how powerful they became . . . could take that, or change one single itch, taunt, laugh, cry, scar, ache, rage, or pain of it” (508). Many of these experiences are carried with him in material symbolism as items in his briefcase, which he values highly. Here, the narrator makes sense of his failures and humiliations, the pains of his social non-existence, and his struggles with ideological definitions, embracing them as part of himself. In a crucial moment of recognition, he saw

Jack and Norton and Emerson merge into one single white figure. They were very much the same, *each attempting to force his picture of reality upon me* and neither giving a hoot in hell for how things looked to me. I was simply a material, a natural resource to be used. I had switched from the arrogant absurdity of Norton and Emerson to that of Jack and the Brotherhood, and *it all came out the same*—except I now recognized my invisibility. So I'd accept it, I'd explore it, rine and heart. (508)

With his new sense of self, he made sense of his grandfather's advice to "overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction" (16) because "they were blind" (508) and "refuse[d] to see [him]" (3). And because they were blind, "they would destroy themselves and [he]'d help them" (508). In his confessional manner, he says, "I would remain and become a well-disciplined optimist, and help them to go merrily to hell. If I couldn't help them to see the reality of our lives I would help them to ignore it until it exploded in their faces" (511).

However, in the race riot to follow, the invisible man perceives that even his attempts to agree 'em to death and destruction backfire. The mock-rape of Sybil and his fake list of new members given to the Brotherhood turn out to be aspects only of his complicity in the destruction that follows the Harlem riot. While his friend Scofield is sincere in thinking that his act of arson is a powerful strike back at the system of oppression and exploitation, the invisible man recognizes that the coming "crash of men against men" organized by the Brotherhood was not rebellion but death, and not "suicide, but murder" (553). The narrator acknowledges his complicity in being a "tool just at the very moment he thought [him]self free" and had made himself "responsible" for what was happening in Harlem (553).

Ellison's protagonist realizes that between two forces—the force set upon maintaining order through repressive state apparatuses and the force of rebellion fueled by passionate sense of injustice—individuals like him are often “caught in the crossfire” (557). The looting in the riots, the come-uppance that the district thought they were winning, merely served as an excuse for the police forces to put them down, much like the Sambo dolls served both to deprive Clifton of his integrity and then as an excuse to murder him. Any attempt “to awaken” someone on either side would likely expose him to being seen as a “Betrayal!” or a “traitor,” or “Uncle Tom” as Ras accuses him of being (557). The Brotherhood's plan was to use him to stir them to action and let Ras the Destroyer's militant action help “the streets to flow with blood, . . . black blood and white blood” in order to turn the “death and sorrow and defeat into propaganda” (558). And having been duped by the Brotherhood and its idealistic rhetoric and having been sucked in to the more general African-American belief in racial uplift, the invisible man saw starkly how mistaken he had been in his own idealism for attempting to ameliorate American society as well as trying to awaken the victims of oppression to the reality he had discovered. The characteristic marking the invisible man clearly and plainly throughout the novel is his “bottomless capacity for being a fool,” and only now was he “stripping away . . . his illusionment” (559).

The invisible man's trajectory led him to the awareness that “knowing now who [he] was and where [he] was” and “the beautiful absurdity of [the] American identity,” his life was more precious than any cause; pondering martyrdom, he thinks, “I was invisible, and hanging would not bring me visibility”—because not only Jack and the other members of the Brotherhood, but Norton, Bledsoe, Emerson, Mary, Sybil, Clifton, Ras, and the mob of oppressed people were also blind. He says, “I knew that it was better to live out one's own absurdity than to die for that of others” (559). Ironically, as the mob chased him through the stores and avenues of Harlem, he

realizes that their rigid ideological thinking saved him: “If they fired they could have had me, but it was important to them that they hang me, lynch me even” because their ideology of hatred saw lynching as the way to kill black men and traitors to civilization (560). Practically speaking, shooting him would have put an end to his escape, quickly, but “only hanging would settle things, settle the score” (560).

As the invisible man has done throughout the novel, he stumbles upon his wisdom. He recounts while wandering in “strange territory” that someone had “removed the manhole cover,” and, falling in, the invisible man plunged down, underground (565). The gang that had been chasing him sealed the lid over the manhole and all he could see was “black space. . . . Then I thought, This is the way it’s always been, only now I know it” (566). In his exhaustion, the invisible man falls asleep and dreams that he is “*the prisoner of a group consisting of Jack and old Emerson and Bledsoe and Norton and Ras and the school superintendent and a number of others whom [he] failed to recognize, but all of whom had run*” him; he protests their detaining him, and they “*were annoyed at [his] refusal*” (569, emphasis in original). But he finally and finally sees that all their ideologies in which he devoutly believed at various times were merely “illusions and lies” (569) that served to “Keep This Nigger-Boy Running” (33). Thus, when he refuses to allow them to free him from their illusions, he counters with the declaration, “I’ll free myself” (569). And after the dream in which they later castrate him, he wakes, still surrounded in blackness, but “Fully awake now” (570). In the blackness, moreover, he sees that the idealists and ideologues are “all up there somewhere, making a mess of the world,” and so he would “stay here, underground,” and invisible (571).

In the end, *Invisible Man* is a story of how cultural and ideological forces repress an individual’s organic identity as well as a probing depiction of what effects the socially

sanctioned conformity complex, or idealism as repression, have on a person. The narrator insists that one's own "feelings" can be "more rational" than a person's mind when his or her "will" is pulled in several different directions at once: "And my problem was that I always tried to go in everyone's way but *my own*. . . . So after years of trying to adopt the opinions of others *I finally rebelled*" (573, my emphasis). Ellison's novel is an affirmation of the individual and his or her personal, organic feelings against the dictates of social ideals, no matter how liberating they appear to be. What I have described as *rebellious novels* have that theme in common, though they all may have different artistic techniques and may even present different imaginative visions of the world to their readers. Rebellious novels are not *against* ideas or society; they do, however, show how often ideologies and society torturously suppress individuals: "I have stayed in my hole, because up above there's an increasing passion to make men conform to a pattern" (576). And yet, the invisible man desires to emerge from his coal pit and to return to the world above because, he tells us, "I find that I love. . . . I sell you no phony forgiveness, I'm a desperate man—but too much of your life will be lost, its meaning lost, unless you approach it as much through love as through hate" (580). He confesses that "the old fascination with playing a role returns" and thus "the hibernation is over. . . . I'm coming out, no less invisible . . . , but coming out nevertheless" (579-81).

In an important scene portraying the power of physical intimacy as part of an individual's rejection of social ideologies, Coleman and Faunia set themselves against society. After all of the harassment and disappointments in his life, Coleman kept himself in a "coal pit" of his own by ceasing all relations with anyone except Faunia and even disconnected his phone and answering machine, rejecting all but the connection he formed with her in their effort for solitude and intimacy (202). Zuckerman describes the pair as alone in his house, "each of them

protecting the other against everyone else—each of them, to the other, comprising everyone else, . . . beyond the ordeal of the world, in an unearthly paradise of earthbound lust” (203). In this “paradise,” Coleman had said to Faunia, “‘This is more than sex,’ and flatly she replied, ‘No it’s not. You just forgot what sex is. This is sex. All by itself. Don’t fuck it up by pretending it’s something else.’ . . . [Here, t]hey are the simplest version possible of themselves. The essence of singularity. . . . Nothing in life tempts them, . . . excites them, . . . [or] subdues their hatred of life like this intimacy” (203). And in this paradise they attain the invisible man’s cautionary idea that life and meaning are lost unless one pursues them as much through hate as through love.

Roth’s narrative emphasizes the value of physical intimacy in contrast to ideological/value-based intimacy. Sex, all by itself, congeals Faunia’s and Coleman’s passions into a wholly fulfilling sense of self-actualization. In comparison, Iris, Coleman’s wife, considers the breaking of a shared value, honesty, a form of wretchedness (178). Finding out that a mutual friend, Harvey McChesney, had been keeping another woman and family secret from his wife, Claudia, Iris asks, “Where’s the intimacy . . . when there is such a secret?” (178-79). It’s not the other woman who angers Iris so much, nor the two kids he had with her, though they are painful and brutal enough; it is *the secret* for which she detests Harvey so completely. In this scene, Coleman’s sentimentality had nearly caused him to become fully honest with his wife and tell her his secret, that he had been lying about his racial background for the entirety of their relationship. It was a foolish error “to think the best of everything and everyone, . . . [a]s though the battle that is each person’s singular battle could somehow be abjured” (179), through honesty no less. Roth contrasts the intimacy Silk has with Faunia with the pseudo-intimacy that Silk has with Iris in order to show how ideological values, though crucial in their own right, suppress those acts and ideas that could be more personally fulfilling.

Therefore, Roth sets up his narrative in order to help readers sympathize with the moral meaning of Coleman's lie, passing, and sabotage. Rather than leaving his "prospects to be unjustly limited by so arbitrary a designation as race" as it is conceived by "an unenlightened society," Coleman Silk takes up the lie that he had learned from his boxing coach: to pass as Jewish, or "white" (120). Silk's lie, more importantly, was not a rejection of "blackness" or race, *per se*; it was a rejection of one form of social oppression: "All he'd ever wanted, from earliest childhood on, was to be free: not black, not even white—just on his own and free. He meant to insult no one by his choice, nor was he trying to imitate anyone whom he took to be his superior, nor was he staging some sort of protest against his race" (120).

His lie is in no way a self-hating, racially motivated apostasy, but rather a mode of concealed resistance to conformity. "The objective was for his fate to be determined not by the ignorant, hate-filled intentions of a hostile world but, to whatever degree humanly possible, by his own resolve" (121). Zuckerman dubs the social coercions of "America's core values" the "tyranny of propriety, . . . a dominatrix in a thousand disguises infiltrating . . . as civic responsibility, W A S P dignity, women's rights, black pride, ethnic allegiance, or . . . Jewish ethical sensitivity. It's not as though Marx or Freud . . . or Stalin or Hitler . . . had never happened—it's as though Sinclair Lewis had not happened. . . as though *Babbitt* had never been written" (153, emphasis in the original). Therefore, through his choice to become the ultra-respectable Professor Silk, as a compromise between his personal desire to be free and his father's compulsion toward respectability, Coleman creates "an actable self" (136), a composite of the authentic, organic, and "immutable self" (179) along with an artificial persona under which could hide the "raw I" (108) in order to carry out his refusal "to accept automatically the contract drawn up for [his] signature at birth" to play only "the role socially assigned" (155).

Through this seamless construction of the authentic, personal and the actable, social selves, Silk managed to live, “at the same moment, entirely within and, surreptitiously, entirely beyond” what Zuckerman describe as “the walled city that is convention,” and “that was the fullness of his particular life as a created self” (335). Despite what the ideologues had been telling Coleman Silk, among many others, he conceives of himself as “an individual as real *apart* and *beyond* the social determinants defining him” (333).

Faunia’s greatest contribution as a character, apart from functioning as a *panzaic* character throughout, is to refrain from judging Silk for his great lie. Her panzaic education—a process of experiential rather than formal learning about the dangers of idealism and ideological thinking—encouraged her rejection of ideals as well as her sympathetic understanding of Silk’s anti-social “crime” (335). She describes her initial rejection of formal education, dropping out of school as an emancipated minor: “Aside from everything else, it was boring. All this real stuff was happening in people’s houses. Sure as shit happening in *my* house. How could I go to school and learn what the capital of Nebraska was? I wanted to *know*. . . . I wanted to know the worst” (340, emphasis in the original). In wanting to know the worst, Zuckerman writes, she wanted to know the truth. In describing how she was hired to clean up after a suicide—a man who shot himself with bird shot from a shotgun—Coleman affectionately respected her for her realistic, panzaic truth: “It was the closest Coleman had ever felt to anyone! He loved her” not because she was “courageous. Not heroic,” but “game in the face of the worst” (340). Moreover, here, his love becomes “instinctive. . . . He trusts her. . . . She’s not religious, she’s not sanctimonious, she is not deformed by the fairytale of purity, whatever other perversions may have disfigured her. She’s not interested in judging—she’s seen too much for all that shit” (340-41). And that’s when he tells her his secret, the first woman since Ellie that he tells, and she already knew. She

didn't run away, like Steena. "She didn't really seem to care. . . . When he told her the whole story, she listened all right, but not because she found it incredible, unbelievable or even strange—it certainly wasn't reprehensible. No. It sounded just like life to her" (341).

Faunia, the emancipated minor, learned as a teenager through her panzaic education what it took Silk more than seventy years to figure out: that judgment based upon idealism is destructive. In a literary reversal of an important scene in *Portnoy's Complaint*, Roth re-presents how one's conscience, or the *superego's* desire for respectability, thwarts the more fulfilling personal, organic feelings of affection for another human being. In Roth's earlier novel, Portnoy spends an intimate weekend with Faunia's literary predecessor, a jubilant yet naïve, unintelligent young woman named Mary Jane Reid, whose personal worth in Portnoy's estimation rests upon the fact that she excites him sexually. Although he constantly reproaches her for what he considers her sometimes unintelligent, unsophisticated, and shameful ways, they are able to enact a brief period of deep emotional and physical connection during a weekend getaway in Vermont, only to have him return to his harsh condemnations of her apparent moral inferiority as they approach New York city, where he is anxious to keep his reputation as a respected lawyer, a social standing he knows she threatens. In Roth's thirty-years-later re-presentation, early in their relationship in *The Human Stain*, Silk takes Faunia to Vermont and finds out that she is illiterate. Upon returning, she predicts, "You're going to drop me because I'm not a worthy, legitimate person who *reads*" (34, original emphasis). While he initially denies such an intention, he later confesses to Zuckerman, "she was right on the money about my having decided to give her up. All the way back from Vermont I was thinking exactly what she said I was thinking. But I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to impose my wonderful virtue on her. Or on myself. That's over" (35). Not only does Roth encourage the reader to reject considerations of social

respectability—something he could not, or at least did not do, thirty years earlier—but through Faunia’s story, Roth also emphasizes the profound connection that can be formed through sex, “all by itself” (203).

Coincidentally, Faunia’s supposed illiteracy functions as an allegory to Silk’s passing, as a disguise in order to help resist the coercions of repressive conformity. She did not use illiteracy “to infantilize herself, . . . but just the opposite: to spotlight the barbaric self befitting the world. Not rejecting learning as a stifling form of propriety but trumping learning by a knowledge that is stringer and prior” (297). She used her *invisible literacy* in order to avoid the impositions of respect; what decent person, the novel seems to ask, could rightly demand an illiterate person to be decorous? And in Faunia’s case, it seems to be a convincing situation. Thus, Roth’s title for the third chapter of *The Human Stain*, “What Do You Do with the Kid Who Can’t Read?” (146). Through Delphine and a telephone conversation that Coleman has with his son, Roth portrays American middle-class suppositions about illiteracy. Delphine sees Faunia as an “abused, illiterate” who needs the protection of a prominent, respectful professor against a lascivious degenerate’s sexual exploitation (38). Similarly, Coleman thinks that his son, Jeff, sees Faunia as a pathetic woman who works as a janitor, whose kids were killed in a fire while she was giving fellatio to a man in a pick-up truck, whose family forced her to run away at fourteen-years of age, and who is not worthy of his professor father because she doesn’t ask Coleman what he’s doing with her: “Because she knows what *everybody* is doing with her. Because she’s seen it all and there’s no hope” for such a woman (171, original emphasis). But, culturally speaking, Delphine is the illiterate one. She consistently misreads not only literature but life circumstances by imposing her literary theories on the real world, particularly with her student’s charges of Silk’s misogyny (191). Her inability to accurately perceive real world

circumstances dramatizes her theoretical literate-illiteracy as a deforming force. Thus, the chapter about a kid who can't read shifts from Faunia's circumstances, who we are, at first, led to believe is technically illiterate, to Delphine's situation in which she is essentially culturally illiterate.

Faunia, however, uses those cultural suppositions about a thirty-four-year-old illiterate woman to protect herself from the destructive ideals of American society, including ambition, respectability, and civility and the host of values associated with them. But more importantly, Silk and Faunia use their rejection and invisibility in order to protect their physical and emotional intimacy. Coleman, Zuckerman tells us, became a "calm, unoppressed, [and] entirely new being" (19), "a new Coleman, . . . the most satisfied Coleman there had ever been, . . . the Coleman contaminated by desire alone" (20). Zuckerman observes Silk's capacity to "burst with life" (126), like the great god "Pan" (25).<sup>94</sup> Through this "bursting with life," Silk and Faunia share a meaningful connection. Zuckerman observes that Silk is "deeply bound to her," insisting that "It's not family that's doing it, . . . it's not responsibility, it's not duty, it's not money, it's not a shared philosophy or the love of literature. . . . No, what binds him to her is the . . . sexual charge" (33). But what binds them together beyond the sexual thrill is their mutual rejection of the sanctimonious social standards of moral responsibility. In his relationship with Faunia, Silk is finally able to fully renounce the "wonderful virtue" that has been haunting him his entire life. Zuckerman describes the connection between Silk and Faunia: she "excites and arouses him" and

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<sup>94</sup> Here, D. H. Lawrence and Roth are aligned in their philosophical outlook. Silk's ability to "burst with life," like Faunia's name who evokes the idyllic half-goat, half-human lust for life, echoes Lawrence's concern in *St. Mawr* with Pan, or "all" of the unrepressed expressions of what it means to be human: "Pan once was a Great God, before the anthropomorphic Greeks turned him into half a man. . . . Pan wasn't he at all: not even a Great God. He was Pan. All: what you see when you see in full" (54). Lawrence's philosophy is also articulated in *Studies in Classic American Literature* when he discusses Benjamin Franklin's idea of the "perfectibility of man." Lawrence compares Franklin's concept of man with a "mechanical contrivance," such as a car. And in response to Franklin's belief that educating a "man" can help him become perfect, Lawrence asks, "Which of the me's [sic] do you propose to educate, and which do you propose to suppress?" (15). Lawrence's view of Franklin's notion of education and its effects bear resemblance to Althusser's conception of education as a repressive state apparatus.

is “not the most, but morally speaking, the *least* repellant person he knows,” who is “the unlikely intimate with whom he shares no less a spiritual than a physical union,” and “who is more to him like a comrade-in-arms than anyone else on earth” (164). The integration of a meaningful physical *and* spiritual union in which social ideologies are rejected is the fulfillment of the Lawrentian conception of relatedness and of the naked self. Possibly better than Lawrence was able to accomplish in his own fiction, Roth depicts this relationship vividly and compellingly, with its complexities and dangers. Therefore, in *The Human Stain*, readers are offered a convincing portrait of a relationship in rebellion against social creeds and ideals.

In this relationship, Coleman Silk is finally able to take “the hammer of Faunia to everything outlived, all the exalted justifications, and smash [his] way to freedom,” a sexual freedom that amounts to a kind of “Aschenbachian madness” through which he is able to be “intertwined orgasmically” with Faunia (171). In this ecstasy of intimacy free from ideological considerations, “Upright principles” become “unendurable,” and “Contact with her body [becomes] the only principle. Nothing more important than that” (171). In their invisibility, Faunia is able to *see* him. That is, because of ideological forms, we cannot see one another. Lawrence wrote that through the “glorification of the spirit, the mental consciousness” as ideological impositions we are but mere “shadows” and “spectres” to each other, “[a]nd by shadow I mean idea, concept, the abstracted reality” (qtd. in *Vanishing* 67). But Faunia, owing to her panzaic rejection, is able to see Coleman as something more than mere abstracted reality: “You know what? I see you” (228). She teaches him to resist the Western tendency to sentimentalize sex and love the way he did with Steena, his earlier *Voluptas*. She tells him, “It doesn’t have to be more than this,” indicating that the values that Western civilization associates with sex and love primarily abstract the subjects.

In contrast to abstracting their love into the metaphysical, she says, “Stay here with me. Don’t go. Hold on to this. . . . This is all we’re here to do. Don’t think it’s about tomorrow. . . . All the social ways of thinking, shut ‘em down. . . . The way we’re set up socially? ‘I should, I should, I should’? Fuck all that. What you’re supposed to be, what you’re supposed to do, all that, it just kills everything” (229). And though he struggles with “the fantasies of love” by which much of Western civilization is enculturated, she tells him that they are “A man and a woman in a room. Naked. We’ve got all we need. We don’t need love. Don’t diminish yourself—don’t reveal yourself as a sentimental sap. You’re dying to do it, but don’t. Let’s not lose this. Imagine, Coleman, imagine sustaining this” (231). In place of the Western love ideal, Faunia attempts to foster intimacy “[w]ithout the idealism, without the idealization” (233), and even without the ownership of monogamy (232). She shows Coleman how to connect with a human being through the emotion of organic sexuality rather than the emotion of imposed ideology. *The Human Stain* and *Invisible Man* share a common theme in that to the degree to which an individual is able to reject social ideologies, they are able to find meaningful ways to express their authentic selves.

### Conclusion

The implications within *Invisible Man* and *The Human Stain* challenge some of our historical considerations about culture studies as being limited by time and place. They speak to men and women of diverse times and various places. They have not been wholly reduced by historical circumstances even in the way that R. W. B. Leavis describes *Invisible Man* as a “classic representation of the American Black experience.” For example, in a review of Ellison’s novel in *Commentary* during the same year of its publication, Saul Bellow wrote that if Ellison had written strictly in a “minority tone,” he would have “failed to establish a true middle-of-

consciousness for everyone.” Harold Bloom echoes these sentiments fifty years later: “*Invisible Man* might be reduced to a period piece if it were primarily a vision of African-American dilemmas. The novel’s permanence stems from its universality” (808). *Invisible Man* is about the African American experience, but it is also an examination of culture’s oppression of the individual through socially oppressive ideology and idealism. On this theme Bellow also wrote in his review of Ellison’s novel, “the single individual must hide himself underground and try to save his desires, his thoughts, his soul, in invisibility. He must return to himself, learning self-acceptance, and *rejecting all* that threatens to deprive him of his” individuality (my emphasis).

The identity and the sense of fulfillment that Coleman Silk, Faunia Farley, and the invisible man find most meaningful stem from their individual, organic selves rather than socially imposed definitions of race or ideals of respectability. Rejection of social ideology in order to maintain one’s whole identity and physical and spiritual integrity is a fundamental strain in novels like *Invisible Man* and *The Human Stain* and a central aspect of the rebellious novel. In an essay on twentieth-century fiction, Ellison wrote that “great literary art” projects a complex “image of man,” implying that novels can help readers resist “the major group’s attempt to impose its ideals upon the rest” (26). In order to do so, however, the novelist must be able to ask questions such as “Who am I, what am I, how did I come to be?” and answer them from the perspective of *their* “own eyes” without fearing “to leave the uneasy sanctuary of race” (“Introduction,” *Shadow and Act* xxii). Readers, then, must allow novelists to follow their own *vision*. Genuine self-discovery arises from “that marvelous collaboration between the writer’s artful vision and the reader’s sense of life” by which readers and novelists alike are able to explore “other possible selves” (xx). Ellison insisted that much of good fiction “depends upon the individual’s willingness to discover his true self” (xix). However, with culture wars and

identity politics that tend not only to impose politically idealized identities upon individuals but also to condemn unconventional identities and ways of thinking that fail to meet ideological standards of moral responsibility, Ellison's and Roth's conceptualizations of invisibility, as yoked to embracing so-called irresponsibility, make these novels at least as relevant today as they were when they were written.

Moreover, the significance of invisibility as a means of resistance to conformity extends beyond its relevance to self-discovery and authentic identity. Indeed, as I argued in the first half of this chapter, characters who succumb to coercive conformity often undergo a process that displaces their anger and aggression onto those who attempt to resist conformity, in the ways that Delphine Roux and, to a greater extent, Lester Farley do by turning their aggression into violence against Faunia and Silk. As *Invisible Man* and *The Human Stain* explicitly dramatize, invisibility may save the lives of the characters who become victims of a repressive society. Thus, in order to better understand the ways in which social forms of violence permeate diverse relationships, rebellious novels such as these expose the sometimes subtle ways in which conformity often leads to suffering, devastation, and even death.

Furthermore, in order for individuals to recognize the complex sum of revelations implied through rebellious novels means that a grand project might be necessary in order to better understand repressive their societies are. That may be a significant way to discover their authentic, naked selves, to discern how outwardly transgressive they may become, and to determine to what degree their naked transgressions should be kept from social view. Thus, in the next chapter, my conclusion, I intend to discuss briefly the synthesis and culmination of the forgoing explorations. Moving from the ideology theory based primarily upon the Frankfurt

School, Althusser, Wayne Burns, and my considerations of rebellious novels, I describe that project, borrowing Nietzsche's phrase, as a "reexamination of all values."

## CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSION:

## THE REBELLIOUS SELF

I first read *Catch-22* when I was twenty-three years old, while living abroad in Sevilla, Spain. Reading Joseph Heller's masterpiece was a wholly new experience for me. It challenged me, calling into question values about which I felt strongly as well as some attitudes that I held primarily through blind acceptance, and I had been somewhat oblivious to how those values and attitudes affected my interaction with the world and my own identity. Of course many books, fiction and others, may help readers see the world in new ways, but this experience felt profoundly different. It was more sweeping; it had a wide breadth of reach in my own psyche. It went further, deeper, than with even the powerful novels I had already encountered during my bachelor's program. I had read Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, but Hardy's Victorian-era humor and his social critique were buried beneath more than a hundred years of history and cultural difference, and so it took a number of readings for me to more fully grasp Hardy's criticism of his society. Moreover, Hardy depressed me; *Jude* touched my soul, but the change that novel produced in me was slower to actualize. Heller's novel, on the other hand, produced an immediate and noticeable effect. Heller blended his absurdist humor that is integral to the novel seamlessly with the themes that interested him at the time of writing it. While reading *Catch-22* in a café, I must have laughed aloud a number of times. A woman sitting next to me asked, with a smile on her face, "What are you reading?" Embarrassed, I showed her the cover of the book, and she said she'd have to check it out sometime because she had overheard me laughing to myself for the last twenty minutes.

Now, I'm not sure how much Heller's absurdist humor had to do with the powerful effect that *Catch-22* had on me. But undoubtedly, it was chiefly the novel's convincing vision of the absurdity of the world that profoundly affected my thinking. In a brief essay, reflecting upon his novel, Heller writes that within the context of the novel's fictional world, the rule, Catch-22, "became a law" describing its "social system." He continues, "'they' can do anything to us we can't stop 'them' from doing. The very last use is philosophical" (474).

It is chiefly through supporting readers in revising their philosophy of life that rebellious novels are so important. Revising, reevaluating, re-assessing, renewing, and re-envisioning one's place in and relationship with the world can be the most powerful experience on human life. Therefore, central to the philosophy of life in *Catch-22*, as with most rebellious novels, is the notion of the "disintegration of belief" (474). At the time of publication, by virtue of the zeitgeist that existed in the 1960s and the Vietnam era, the novel's antiwar attitude was taken for granted. Thus, Heller did not write *Catch-22* as a novel that depicted the horrors and absurdity of war merely to provoke opposition to the U. S.'s involvement in Vietnam or any other country. He wrote: "The book dealt instead with conflicts between a man and his own superiors, between him and his own institutions. The really difficult struggle happens when one does not even know who it is that's threatening him, grinding him down—and yet one does know that there is a tension, an antagonist." Furthermore, part of what brought widespread acclaim for the novel was the spirit of the times, he writes, which included a "healthy irreverence. There was a general feeling that the platitudes of Americanism were horseshit." Just as importantly, Heller describes his process of writing *Catch-22*: "I move from situations in which the individual is against his own society, to those in which the *society itself is a product of something impenetrable,*

something that either has no design or has a design which escapes the boundaries of reason” (“Reeling,” 475, my emphasis).<sup>95</sup>

A primary aspect of the argument I’ve been making throughout this dissertation is how rebellious novels help readers understand who they are and what the world is really like, beyond the platitudes, stock images, patriotic phrases, national values, and socially endorsed ideologies that they culturally inherit. That is, in Chapter 2, I argued that there is indeed something *natural* about being human. While this nature is far from *essential* or *universal* to all humans, there exists a spectrum or bell curve of various traits and characteristics. D. H. Lawrence and other British modernists often explored what it looks like when the expressions of those traits are denied to the individual. That chapter served as a focused comparative study. By concentrating on Lawrence—whose fiction and non-fiction helped develop some of the theoretical foundation of my approach—I was able to cultivate a vision of what I call the naked self. And then I examined how that theory could be applied to the works of some other modernist novelists, including E. M. Forster, Ford Maddox Ford, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. Despite some important nuances and variations in how each novelist developed their own visions of a naked self, there was a significant common ground that demonstrated the often disastrous effects that characters experienced when they conformed to the coercive forces of the conformity complex.

Upon the concept of the naked self, in Chapter 3 I continued to build my argument about how characters suffer from ideological conformity, even when they recognize the harmful effects upon their naked selves. These repressed selves—as I call such characters—are often sensitive,

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<sup>95</sup> In a candid interview, Heller discusses his interpretation of *Catch-22*’s ending and its revolutionary implications. Yossarian’s desertion is “an act of opposition or an act of protest. It’s the only way left that he *can* protest without cutting his own head off. And he doesn’t choose to do that; he’s not a martyr” (Sorkin 23). More importantly, “in Yossarian’s situation . . . the monolithic society closes off every conventional area of protest” so that “*flight*, a renunciation of that condition, of that society, that set of circumstances . . . is the only hope left at the end of the book” (24). Heller here describes, in his own words, what I argue most rebellious novels imply: To the extent one seeks to achieve self-fulfillment, there must be a corresponding rejection of the conformity complex.

intelligent individuals who tend to be aware of substantial differences in the way that they are socially expected to think and feel compared to the way that they actually think and feel.

Through my study of Thomas Hardy's Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead, in *Jude the Obscure*, in combination with Philip Roth's Alexander Portnoy, in *Portnoy's Complaint*, I examined the psychologically repressive effects of the conformity complex in greater depth and breadth than in the previous chapter. Among the various recognitions I hoped to bring to light, I tried to show how, sometimes, the conformity complex is so powerful that even when characters grant that their own desires are more legitimate and more fulfilling than the social conventions coaxing them into ideological conformity, they continue to suffer from surreptitious social compulsions. Tragically, this psychological dilemma often leads repressed characters towards emotional paralysis, madness, or death.

From an examination of these repressed characters, I continued to explore two paths of resistance to the coercions of the conformity complex. In Chapter 4, I investigated characters who reject social conventions and traditional ways of thinking outright. I looked at the ways in which these transgressive characters are able to lead meaningful lives. Part of that analysis demonstrated that transgressive characters often fare better than uncritical conformists and much better than *repressed* characters.<sup>96</sup> By investigating how and to what degree the principal characters in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* are able to achieve self-fulfillment, I argued that transgression is a valuable mode for defying social impositions that inhibit an individual's development of his or her naked self. However, because

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<sup>96</sup> To clarify, my use of the term *repressed* here implies an important distinction. Uncritical conformists are also repressed. However, they are rather oblivious to the ways that conformity to moral codes and ideological paradigms repress them. Repressed selves, on the other hand, in my argument, are in fact aware of their repression and the dangers of conformity but are unable to completely reject the social compulsions that prevent them from more fully realizing their naked selves.

such transgressions often occur in the public sphere, there are often social consequences that bring about additional obstacles between individuals and their ability to achieve self-realization.

Therefore, in Chapter 5, I considered a second path of resistance to the conformity complex. Through a study of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, I argued that characters who keep their transgressions hidden from the public sphere attain the greatest amount of self-actualization. While there are many strategies for keeping those transgressive thoughts, feelings, and acts from the public eye, they all contribute to a character's *invisibility*. Both of these novels first develop the overwhelming need for nonconformists to engage in invisible acts. They then move to philosophical and moral bases upon which these characters enacted their invisible and transgressive selves in order to more freely cultivate their naked selves. However, neither of my arguments regarding transgression and invisibility is intended to imply freedom from social consequences. Both paths are tenuous and depend on the success of the individual's ability to actualize them. Although they work best in conjunction with one another, there is still no guarantee against the repercussions often leveled at dissenters and nonconformists. Faunia Farley, for example, leads a fulfilling life, despite the traumas of her youth and the drudgery of her adulthood, until her ex-husband kills her. Until their double-homicide, Coleman Silk and Faunia Farley achieve a great amount of fulfillment. But there are still a great number of novels that play out various aspects of rebellion and demonstrate the need for resistance to the conformity complex.

So when Heller speaks, for example, of how society itself is a product of something impenetrable that grinds down the individual, I hear in his description Jude Fawley grieving on his deathbed as the bells of Christminster toll in the background. I hear Alexander Portnoy ranting hysterically on his analyst's couch. Just as importantly, though, I hear, the knife stabbing

into Josef K., in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. I hear Emma Bovary's cries of agonizing pain from the arsenic slowly killing her, in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. I hear the taut noose gruffly grating around the Savage's neck, in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. I hear Randle Patrick McMurphy suffocating beneath Bromden's strength after McMurphy is lobotomized on Ratched's orders, in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. I hear Meursault grinding his teeth in his jail cell waiting to be put to death, in Albert Camus's *The Stranger*. I hear Edna Pontellier drowning in the Gulf Coast, in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. The point I'm trying to make here is that what Heller does in *Catch-22* is what many rebellious novels do, beyond the few that I discussed throughout my study. Such novels dramatize, convincingly, the deep and persistent conflict between society and the individual, and they show how individuals often succumb, either through death or madness, as a result of their conformity to the conformity complex or from their public rejection of it. Thus, such novels imply a necessary renunciation of allegiance to social values and a rejection of the social ways of thinking that prohibit organic development, thereby attempting to defy anything that grinds one down.<sup>97</sup>

So, really, any number of novels could have been substituted as my primary texts within the preceding chapters. For example, novels as different as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, or Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* could have been used in discussing the repressed self, since their principal characters—Edna Pontellier, Henry Fleming, and Sebastian Flyte, respectively—all end up dying as a result of ideological forces. Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* or Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* could have facilitated my discussion of the transgressive self, since the attitudes of Arthur Seaton and Huck Finn, virtually from the beginning of their respective novels,

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<sup>97</sup> The social and literary critic Alfred Kazin remarks, in his study of American novelists *Bright Book of Life*—a phrase taken from D. H. Lawrence—“*Catch-22* is about the hypothesis of a *totally rejectable world*” (507, my emphasis). That hypothesis, in some form or other, is one put forth by many rebellious novels.

was that of rejection of social value systems and ways that transgression is necessary in order to achieve fulfillment. Just as important, there are a number of novels that could have been the focus of the entire dissertation since they contain characters who embody the range of my spectrum of rebelliousness. Heller's *Catch-22*, George Orwell's *1984*, Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Twain's *Huck Finn*, Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night*—each could have been the central text through which I might have advanced my argument. And to go beyond novels, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Shakespeare's *Henry IV (Parts I and II)*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, or Homer's *The Odyssey* could have borne my argument, as well. Of course all of those works would have given my case a different shape and texture, but the chief argument could have been well supported by each of them. Indeed, further research and writing about these works and others, from this critical point of view, would be rewarding.

Wayne Burns developed his *panzaic* theory through his reading of the canon, and of course specifically from Cervantes' Sancho Panza, who continually gave the lie to Don Quixote's foolish, and often dangerous, idealism. In this work of satire, Don Quixote's idealism was shared by many of the Spanish people in 1605. Therefore, part of Cervantes's intention was to mock his society's way of thinking. He wanted to "laugh men out of their follies" (Griffin 7) in order to show that "the world consists not of spirit but of matter" (41) and to "provoke by holding up to scrutiny our idealized images of ourselves—forcing us to admit that such images are forever out of reach, unavailable to us, or even the last thing we would really want to attain" (60). The continued relevance of *Don Quixote* is that four hundred years later, Western culture still maintains a similar kind of idealism. That last point is so true that American culture, by and large, embraces an inverted *Don Quixote* in the form of *Man of La Mancha*. I was surprised and

disappointed, after having read Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, when I subsequently watched the musical that was supposedly based upon it. I reacted like the sick grandson in *The Princess Bride* after learning that Prince Humperdinck lives at the end of the movie: "You mean he *wins*? Jesus, grandpa. What did you read me this thing for?" Instead of continuing Cervantes's critique of idealism, or updating its relevance for a contemporary audience, Dale Wasserman has Quixote dream "The Impossible Dream," and what was a delusional, pathological way of viewing the world in the original work becomes three hurrahs for American values and the naïve optimism central to the conformity complex.<sup>98</sup>

Don't get me wrong. To this day, I still, occasionally, find myself belting out the catchy lines, "I am I, Don Quixote, the lord of La Mancha . . . ." But the principal problem with the musical reworking of *Don Quixote* is that it insulates viewers within the comfort of their conformity rather than disturbing it, as Cervantes's work does. That does not mean, either, that works of popular culture, or pop art, are unable to disturb viewers' sense of conformity to socially endorsed ideologies. In fact, it would also be valuable for studies to be written on a number of pop-culture *texts* from this critical perspective, as well. *House M.D.*, *Californication*, and *Nurse Jackie* are but a few instances of popular television shows that challenge the audience's ready made value systems. To wit, James Lipton, the host of *Inside the Actors Studio*, said of Gregory House, "he is, at first blush, the least likely candidate ever to top the marquee in an American primetime show." Lipton goes on to quote Hugh Laurie, the actor who

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<sup>98</sup> An even more up-to-date denial of *Don Quixote*'s original critique of idealism takes place in the HBO series *The Newsroom* (2012-2014). While a show with great acting, interesting character development, and Aaron Sorkin's trademark witty banter between highly knowledgeable characters, the show includes a blatant reversal of Cervantes's representation of idealism. Throughout the three seasons of the television series, Charlie Skinner (played by Sam Waterston), the president of Atlantic Cable News, explicitly and repeatedly identifies with Don Quixote. The Penguin edition of the novel even makes a cameo appearance in the series finale as a sentimental symbol of Skinner himself (who died of a heart-attack in the penultimate episode) and his idealistic mission: to bring *real news* to a reluctant, resistant, and relatively ignorant audience. The series and the final episode all, continually, celebrate idealism as the greatest of virtues, even in its obviously blind, naïve, and unrealistic forms.

plays House: “[T]he boldest thing they’ve done is to put such a mean, unsympathetic character at the center of the show.” Yet, to Laurie, House is a “hero.” Still, all of House’s unsympathetic qualities strip him of any semblance of the traditional American hero, particularly as such characters are typically presented in film and literature. Laurie says that the show poses an interesting question to the audience: “Would you rather have an unkind person who is right, or a kind person who is wrong?” Kind or unkind, House is nearly always right, and when he is not, his devotion to the scientific study of medicine helps him to correct his initial errors. As such, when he puts forth philosophical ideas that conflict with traditional American views (such as the common American belief in the existence of God, for example), the show implies, again and again, that he is right. That formula works to continually challenge the audience, their assumptions and values, and Laurie attributes that to House’s “humility before the facts,” which erodes the foundation of the kind of faith-based living that the show implies is common to a large portion of the American population, whether or not they are openly religious. Idealism itself can be a substitute for any specific religion.

However, a common reaction exhibited by American audiences is to explain away any ideological challenges so as to evade them. D. H. Lawrence once wrote, “The world is a great dodger, and the Americans the greatest” (*Studies* 7). Wayne Burns illustrates that concept. For example, in the chapter “The Body Made Insight,” Burns reviews some of the key works of literary criticism on Falstaff (*Panzaic*). Burns writes, “Falstaff is perhaps the ultimate embodiment of Panzaic individuality” (*Panzaic* 12). Even when critics make a comparable recognition, they often feel impelled to explain away its fuller implications. For example, Burns notes how Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman, in “Notes on *Henry IV, Part One*,” in *Understanding Drama*, continually acknowledge, “Falstaff’s Sancho Panzism (which they call

‘common sense’) is ‘devastating.’ But immediately they add that ‘it is also crippling—or would be to a prince or ruler. If it does not cripple Falstaff, it is because Falstaff frankly refuses to accept the responsibilities of leadership.’” Thus, Burns maintains, “despite their sympathy and insight” regarding Falstaff, “they too must banish plump Jack” (35). He describes this trend in academic criticism as number twelve of his sixteen “basic critical premises”:

Some capable readers, usually sophisticated critics, will acknowledge that a novel conflicts with their ideals but will then proceed to downplay the significance of the conflict—usually by altering or modifying the words as arranged by the author in ways that will either erase the conflict altogether or treat it like an aberrant element that has to be disposed of before moral idealism can prevail. (2)

This same trend is what Susan Sontag described as “the intellect’s revenge upon art” (“Against Interpretation,” 7). The process of “interpreting” a work of art dilutes or covers up art’s power to disturb one’s value systems: “Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. . . . Interpretation makes art manageable, comfortable” (8).

That is to say, the conformity complex often compels people, from literary critics to mass audiences, to dismiss, evade, scorn, condemn, or otherwise refuse the challenges presented by works of art. Consequently, it may prove extremely beneficial for there to be a study done on the various strategies of denial employed by critics and audiences, alike. Undoubtedly, there must be many stratagems that help conformity to endure in the face of such devastating challenges to our social systems of thought. But, more relevant to my argument, rebellious novels help individuals who are ready for those challenges that such works pose. These individuals are often seeking something, actively or passively, whether they are aware of their search or not. Yet I do not mean to imply that all rebellious novels will affect individuals in the same way. Reading is

too subjective an experience for that; many factors come into play, including ideological convictions, personal idiosyncrasies and interests, capacity for critical insight, openness to new ideas and experiences, and one's ability to devote time, energy, and willingness to such a search: that is the search for self-discovery and a sober understanding of the world.

I can offer an example. Admitting my own limitations in terms of encountering rebellious literature, I sometimes find myself disappointed with a novel that I had hoped would help me on my own search. Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, for instance, based upon advice from friends and colleagues as well as the general description of the book, held all the promise of a top-notch rebellious novel. However, my connection with that novel was limited. In other words, that novel's revelations were lost on me because of an admixture of my own convictions, approaches, and personal idiosyncrasies interacting with the qualities of DeLillo's award-winning novel. So, rather than erupting in a powerful discovery of the world around me, my reading experience deflated into boredom filled with what seemed like hypertrophied popular culture bashing. And this, surprisingly, coming from a novelist who, according to the dust jacket, won the Jerusalem Prize in 1999, "given to a writer whose work expresses the theme of freedom of the individual in society." Likewise, Harold Bloom, in a 2003 op-ed piece, endorsed not only DeLillo, but also a few other American novelists:

Today there are four living American novelists I know of who are still at work and who deserve our praise. Thomas Pynchon is still writing. My friend Philip Roth . . . is a great comedian and would no doubt find something funny to say about [Stephen King winning the National Book Foundation's award for "distinguished contribution"]. There's Cormac McCarthy, whose novel *Blood Meridian* is worthy of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, and Don DeLillo, whose *Underworld* is a great book.

As with DeLillo, my limited experience with Pynchon has also proved disappointing. Perhaps, of course, I need to give some of their other novels a try. However, in accordance with Bloom's usual traditionalist stance, his list of four praiseworthy novelists includes only *white* men. While that should not detract from the reputation of these writers as great novelists, perhaps we can include some other current, worthy contributors to rebellious fiction.

To name a few with whom I am only somewhat familiar, I am hopeful about Zadie Smith, particularly *White Teeth*. There's Edward P. Jones whose Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Known World* has been waiting for me on my bookshelf for the length of time that it has taken me to complete my dissertation. Jhumpa Lahiri is a promising prospect for a rebellious novelist, as is Arundhati Roy. Also, while Sherman Alexie has yet to impress me with what I know of his work, the relationship between the individual and society is a dominant characteristic of his fiction. His masterpiece, perhaps, is yet to come.<sup>99</sup>

Still, whether or not many contemporary novelists produce seriously rebellious fiction, there is the canon. The wide range of novels in the canon is certain to offer something to those readers who seek self-discovery. And it is the canon, or at least a range of novelistic visions, that is so important to the process of self-discovery. As a whole, these novels do not provide a particular program for readers; they do not impose a specific identity. That is, they do not merely offer stock responses, ideologically fabricated images, values, molds, or other predetermined forms or patterns simply for individuals to adopt blindly. They promote spontaneous and authentic development of an individual's sense of self through critical reflection. This kind of reading, then, is indeed dialogical, in Bakhtin's sense of the word.

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<sup>99</sup> Of course these are more recent novelists who are writing rebellious fiction. There are numerous other novelists who have already written their own rebellious novels and have met with popular success. There are Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), E. Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News* (1993), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) that have all garnered both popular and critical success.

Readers must struggle with the novels, their own self-concepts, and their views of the world—as Forster described the process of reading in *Aspects of the Novel*. The canon comprises numerous examples of the conflict between the self and society, and it encourages readers to develop their own ideological proprioceptors. The spectrum of rebellious success, for example, may find a different, perhaps a better, expression than the relatively clunky one I envisioned when I began writing this dissertation. On one side of this spectrum there lie the unsuccessful, or negative consequences—when characters fall victim to repressive, ideological forces—such characters end in death, madness, or misery. Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum lies unhappiness or relative discontent, or what Thoreau called “quiet desperation.” There is also the bliss of ignorance. Though blissful, such ignorant and blind conformity often later contributes to the negative side of the spectrum. There exists something like the conventional, heroic archetype in Swede Levov, the protagonist of Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*, who begets the native-born terrorist, his daughter, Meredith (ironically called Merry). When she bombs a U. S. post-office as part of a protest against the Vietnam War, she kills an innocent bystander. Consequently, Levov’s perfect, pastoral life comes crumbling down.

Still, rebellious novels may also help readers discover what it is that, for themselves, can help them find genuine contentment, that which lies on the positive side of the spectrum. Perhaps, by reading such novels, readers may develop their own ways of finding a deeply satisfying, organic, authentic identity that allows them to achieve fulfillment. That may be too hopeful given some of the gloomy literary analyses that have preceded this concluding chapter. But such is the hope I seek in reading rebellious novels. They provide a way in which readers can conduct their own “revaluation of all values,” as Nietzsche urged over a hundred years ago. He contends, “we free spirits are already a ‘revaluation of all values,’” and “[w]e have had the

whole pathos of mankind against us—its conception of what truth *ought* to be; every ‘thou shalt’ has hitherto been directed *against* us” (*Anti-Christ* 135, emphasis in the original). Nietzsche’s idea of a free spirit is someone who possesses “[r]everence for oneself; love for oneself, unconditional freedom with respect to oneself” (125). But, as he readily admits elsewhere—much as Lawrence believed that we rarely understand one another outside of socially manufactured concepts—“We knowers are unknown to ourselves. . . . The sad truth is that we remain necessarily strangers to ourselves” (*Birth* 149). Much of Nietzsche’s call for a reevaluation is founded upon the belief that, as many rebellious novels bear out, “[a] kind of honesty has been alien to all founders of religions and others like them,” including not only religions but also political systems, economic structures, social movements, and similar social ideologies (*Portable* 100). Founders of socially endorsed ideologies, he maintains, “have a thirst for things that are *against* reason. . . . And so they experience ‘miracles’ and ‘rebirths’ and hear the voices of the little angels! We, however, who thirst for reason, want to look our experiences as straight in the eye as if they represented a scientific experiment” (101, emphasis in the original). Rebellious novels help us to look our experiences straight in the eye; when they do not, they at least help us look at the characters’ experiences as straight as possible.

Authentic self-discovery is the purpose of a reevaluation of all values. The philosopher—as Nietzsche refers to someone who seeks to know him or herself—“has always found himself, and always had to find himself, in opposition to his today: the ideal of the day was always his enemy” (444). Hence, my argument attempts to bare out what Lawrence claimed in “Why the Novel Matters,” that perhaps better than philosophy or religion or any of the various schools of spirituality, novels, with their insistence on earthy realism as opposed to spiritual abstraction, can best help readers to discover themselves (193-94). They help to show how the conformity

complex, as a social value system, compels individuals to conform to identities that serve society to the sacrifice and repression of their naked selves. Rebellious novels also demonstrate how—even when individuals recognize the repressive aspects of the conformity complex and the consequences of their submission to it—it is still difficult if not sometimes impossible to overcome those ideological forces. They illustrate what seems again and again like a necessity: the rejection of socialized values. Finally, they offer paths of resistance to conformity: embracing one's transgressions and keeping them hidden from social view are but two. Such paths, these novels reveal, may be indispensable for the rebellious self to elude the compulsions of a repressive society and to seek out its own authentic sense of life.

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