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Politics and postmodernism in the fiction of Russell Banks, Don DeLillo and Robert Stone: an enquiry into the attempt to write a radical fiction in the era of late capitalism.

by P. Winward

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
Abstract

This thesis investigates the attempt to write radical political fiction in a period where postmodernism is the dominant aesthetic style. It examines the work of three American writers who produce novels that blend traditional narrative realism with anti-realist literary strategies and a sensibility that originates in the contemporary episteme known as the postmodern.

The first chapter is primarily concerned with describing the cultural, political and economic context of the postmodern. It begins with a critique of Fredric Jameson's influential Marxist analysis of postmodernism which goes back to the source of Jameson's argument, Ernest Mandel's Late Capitalism. I argue that the "neo-fatalist ideology of the immutable nature of the late capitalist social order" is the essence of the ideology of postmodernism and that Jameson's project is heavily influenced by that ideology. I go on to argue that postmodernism is modernism by other means and should be seen as a response to the end of the heroic age of modernism and the vastly changed conditions of the post-1973 world economy.

In the later chapters I engage in close readings of The Book of Jamaica and Affliction by Russell Banks, The Names and Libra by Don DeLillo and A Flag for Sunrise and Outerbridge Reach by Robert Stone. For each author the novels chosen can be divided into a novel about the relationship of America and Americans with the world and a novel about the domestic concerns and problems of American society. Thus I am able to examine how each of the authors deal with their society at home and abroad. I test these novels against the model of postmodernism I have delineated in the first chapter and, in particular, I engage with the question of whether the works are implicated in the fatalism of postmodernism that I see as its essential defining characteristic.
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1. Postmodernism in Historical Context

The problem of writing a realist narrative fiction that places itself in opposition to the cultural hegemony of the postmodern is the subject of this thesis. Employing Raymond Williams’ typology of cultural process, the internal dynamic relations of a given culture, the postmodern, can be seen as the hegemonic or dominant mode and a politically engaged literary realism as part of the residual element. The residual is described by Williams as having an aspect that has been wholly incorporated into the dominant and an aspect that is alternative or oppositional to that dominant. (1) This inquiry will begin by describing that hegemonic cultural element and then investigate in the works of three contemporary American novelists the question of whether their essentially realist narrative practices are incorporated into the postmodern or remain alternative or oppositional to the postmodern.

For the realist writer the present time could be described as an age of anxiety. Writing in the 1960s Philip Roth characterised his dilemma as a situation where, "The actuality is continually outdoing our talents." For Roth, "... the American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, describe and then make credible much of American reality." (2) The source of this anxiety has a material basis in the very means of production of novels. Walter Benjamin spoke of the loss of aura of the

(1) Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp.121-127. My use of Williams’ tools here introduces specific aesthetic practices into a typology that was formulated to engage with cultural practices linked to classes and groups in society. However, I believe that the typology can be effectively narrowed in this way.

work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. (3) He was referring to the visual arts, but sixty years later authors producing fiction intended to be read between the covers of books are confronted by new technologies. Cinema and television, of course, but also computer games and fictions which are designed to be run on computer programs. It has been claimed that these productions herald the end of the book as the material form in which literature is read. (4)

The history of the novel in the twentieth century points to one obvious and dominant reaction to the anxiety of realism in the face of the modern epoch with its technological and social revolutions. From Joyce's time onwards the literary movements that have come to be termed modernism and in their later incarnation as postmodernism have increasingly replaced realism as the form in which to express this new episteme. Raymond Federman, who has coined the term surfiction to describe his own fiction and that of other writers engaged in new literary practices, does not share Roth's anxiety. He writes that:

It is no longer a question of representing or explaining or even justifying American reality, but a question of denouncing the very vehicle that expressed and represented that reality: discursive language and the traditional form of the novel. (5)

For Federman and many other contemporary writers, "... the primary purpose of fiction will be to unmask its own fictionality, to expose the metaphor of its own fraudulence, and not


pretend any longer to pass for reality, for truth, or for beauty." (6)

Realism itself is a disputed term and, as many critics have pointed out, a matter of convention. In the words of one recent critic, "... a rhetorical relationship between the author and reader by which the latter regards the image as 'like reality'" (7) For Marxist critics realism has been a central problem of literary aesthetics beginning with Lenin's characterisation of Tolstoy's novels as the mirror of the peasant part of the Russian revolution. This somewhat simplistic reflectionist theory was modified, and some would say, turned on its head by the Althusserian reading of Pierre Macherey who sees the novel as a reflection that is symptomatic of the author's personal and ideological relations to their age and ultimately an attempt to "solve" the ideological contradictions of that age. (8)

A significant exchange in the ongoing debate is described in Eugene Lunn's account of the dialogue between Brecht and Lukacs in the thirties. For Lukacs the age of heroic realism was already over by 1848 and is typified by the achievements of Scott, Balzac and Tolstoy. The "comprehensive vision and omniscience" of the realist writers, their ability to present "general historical reality as a process revealed in concrete, individual experience" has been superseded by the vulgarisation of the naturalists such as Flaubert and Zola. (9) Opposed to


this view which implicitly writes off the realist project, (10) Brecht proposes a looser definition of realism, one that I believe better reflects the realist project in the last quarter of this century. Brecht wrote that, "Realism is not a mere question of form." He argued that, "Methods become exhausted; stimuli no longer work. New problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change." (11) I believe the writers I examine are responding to the challenge of this new reality.

The contemporary American novels that I engage with in the later chapters of the thesis were written by three authors who have not necessarily embraced the postmodern aesthetic. Robert Stone's work is firmly in the realist tradition and the least influenced by prevalent anti-realist theories. Russell Banks's fiction is seen in transition from the early literary experimentalism of the Fiction Collective towards what has been described as a Brechtian realism. (12) Don DeLillo's fiction is in many ways closer to the techniques and themes of postmodernism without totally abandoning the traditional narrative form of the novel.

I examine two novels by each of these writers. One that has as its subject matter Americans abroad in situations that can be described as imperial or colonial and the second more concerned with domestic matters. The Book of Jamaica, The Names and A Flag for Sunrise fall into the first category and Affliction, Libra and Outerbridge Reach into the second category. The fact that they have each chosen a subject matter involving their country's interaction with the world hints at the radical or oppositional stances that they adopt. In

(10) Lukacs saw realism as only possible when the bourgeoisie as a class was in the political ascendancy. For Lukacs socialist realism as the expression of the previously oppressed classes in the communist societies is the aesthetic antithesis of corrupt bourgeois modernism.
Sacvan Bercovitch's typology of the American novel they could be said to be creating anti-jeremiads, fictions that criticise America in the name of saving it. (13) Comparing their international novel with their domestic novel allows me to explore the full range of their engagement with the politics and society of the United States. My aim in this will be to assess just how they solve the dilemma, not only of writing realist fiction in the 1980s, but how they approach the problem of writing a politically engaged fiction in a postmodern age where the end of politics has been announced. Assessing their success or failure is important in the more general assessment of the possibility of a writing that challenges the dominant ideology of the time.

In this introductory chapter I intend to focus on the "world where everybody thinks that history began yesterday". (14) This will be an attempt to insert these six texts into a contextual framework that takes into account the aesthetic, the cultural, the political and the "ultimately determining instance" of the economic, particularly with reference to the dominant cultural and ideological "moment", commonly termed the postmodern. By doing this I wish to describe the context of the "reality" that these realistic texts work to reflect.

Crucial to our understanding of postmodernism is an understanding of its attitude towards history. The concept of history has been defined and used in very different ways. This is not simply because the meaning of the word changes over time. Hayden White has highlighted the literary devices used in the writing of history from Michelet to contemporary historians. He states that what is at issue in history writing is not simply the facts but, "How are the facts

(14) Matthew J. Broccoli, "Interview with Ishmael Reed" in Conversations with Writers II (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1978), p.231.
to be described in order to sanction one mode of explaining them rather than another?" (15)
Whilst acknowledging this, and the contested ideological meaning of history, I would propose a more rigid definition based on Marx and later Marxist writers. The Oxford Dictionary defines history as a "chronological record of important and public events." (16) I would expand on this citing Engels' letter to Joseph Bloch:

> According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of real life ... The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure - political forms of the class struggle ... judicial forms, and especially the reflections of all these real struggles in the brains of the participants ... - also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their *form* in particular. (17)

I would further define history as a praxis, a way of comprehending the past for a specific ideological purpose. Walter Benjamin makes this point clearly:

> To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger ... The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling class. In every era the attempt must be made to wrest tradition away


from a conformism that is about to overpower it. (18)

These definitions serve to outline my understanding of history and they act as a sort of definition of that classic nineteenth century realism which seeks to understand not only the contemporary moment but what led to that moment. Thus one of the concerns of my later chapters will be not only how the texts describe the world but how they attempt an historical explanation of the world.

Given the political orientation betrayed in this definition of history it will doubtless come as no surprise that what I diagnose as the single most significant politico-cultural presumption and tactic of the contemporary moment is the forgetting or erasing of the past. An example taken at random can be found in Studs Terkel's oral history of the United States in the Reagan years. A university teacher tells him, "I've had several students tell me we won in Vietnam." (19) Cultural re-representations of the war in eighties America by the media, politicians and the "culture industry" created a sort of historical amnesia amongst sections of the population. Anecdotal evidence could be multiplied but this historical amnesia involves more than isolated instances. The devaluation of history is part of a general philosophical shift from traditional narratives or master narratives towards the relative and the local, as in Jean-Francois Lyotard's The Post-Modern Condition, where he proclaims the end of such master narratives and the emergence of a sublime which presents "the unpresentable in presentation itself." (20)

I intend later to discuss these theories of the end of history, as well as the related ideas of the end of various other once sacred and essential concepts - the working class, industrial capitalism, the Enlightenment project, Marxism or Communism, and Modernism. What I

(18) Benjamin p.255.
want to stress here is the predominant feeling that something has come to an end, that there
has been a fundamental break or shift in the world or the way we look at the world. It is the
critical and aesthetic attitudes associated with the term postmodernism that I am interested in
here. Andreas Huyssen has linked the postmodern with history in a way relevant to what I
will be arguing. "The problem with postmodernism is that it relegates history to the dustbin
of an obsolete episteme arguing gleefully that history does not exist except as text." (21)

(2)

Huyssen's particular version of postmodernism is heavily influenced by Adorno and
Horkheimer's critique of the so-called "culture industry" and is within the general tradition of
the Frankfurt school. For Huyssen, postmodernism is primarily an aesthetic movement
associated with American Pop Art of the sixties and expresses the worldwide triumph of
American popular culture. This is a compelling and very popular interpretation of
postmodernism but it is one among many and rather than engaging in a series of descriptions
of the various most influential theories of postmodernism I wish to dwell on one important
and much debated theory. This is Fredric Jameson's argument that postmodernism expresses
the cultural logic of late capitalism, its moment of truth being that it "really expresses
multinational capitalism." (22) In so doing I hope to construct a model for interpreting
postmodernism that draws on Jameson's valuable and central historic parallels whilst also
arguing against the ideological bias of his propositions.

(21) Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism
(22) Anders Stephanson, "Regarding Postmodernism - A Conversation with Fredric
Jameson" in Andrew Ross ed., Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism
Jameson's theory began life as a talk given at the Whitney Museum in 1982 and then, as "Postmodernism and Consumer Society", included, essentially unrevised, in a collection of essays called *Postmodern Culture* in 1983. This first version was followed in 1984 with an expanded essay in *New Left Review* entitled "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism". Other essays followed which argued for the same thesis and addressed various aspects of the cultural and theoretical landscape; video, film, architecture and literature. The definitive incarnation of the theory was published in 1991 as a 600 page book with the same title as the 1984 essay. (23)

There are, however, indications of the direction of Jameson's thinking as early as 1970. An essay on Raymond Chandler and Los Angeles is concerned with questions of nostalgia, periodisation and the city itself which will later be central to his postmodern "dialectical theories". (24) In 1971 in *Marxism and Form* he referred to "post-industrial monopoly capitalism" as occultating the class struggle "through techniques of mystification practiced by the media and ... advertising." And he comments, "In existential terms what this means is that our experience is no longer whole ... we inhabit a dreamworld of artificial stimuli and televised experience." (25) Jameson's use of the language of existentialism here is significant. His first published book was on Sartre and he has commented that his Marxism arose from a grappling with Sartrean existentialism and its later metamorphosis into


Marxism. (26) I will argue that his later work on postmodernism continues this same emphasis on the existential and psychological effects of monopoly capitalism.

In "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" the kernel of his argument is his use of Lacan's interpretation of schizophrenia to adumbrate the psycho-cultural moment of postmodernism. In this version of his theory there is no mention of Ernest Mandel's work, Late Capitalism and only a passing attempt to link these new cultural and psychological phenomena to the wider sphere of society. He states that postmodernism is not a "description of a particular style" and that it is a "periodising concept". He does not draw the parallels between culture and capitalist development that he will later make. He is quite vague in his conception of these new phenomena - describing them as a "new economic order" and as "modernization, postindustrial or consumer society ... society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism." He dates postmodernism's inception in the United States from the late 1940s or the early 1950s. (27)

What seems evident is that between this essay and its expansion in the 1984 New Left Review version, Jameson systematises his argument and, in fact, "marxifies" it by borrowing Mandel's concept of late capitalism and its periodising schema. Whereas he had used the term postindustrial as one of the alternate descriptions of contemporary capitalism he now writes that our own stage is wrongly called postindustrial. (28) As Alex Callinicos notes the concept of "postindustrial monopoly capitalism" which Jameson utilised from Baran and Sweeney's Monopoly Capitalism was now replaced by Mandel's concept of late capitalism. (29) Baran and Sweeney's work along with Daniel Bell's influential The Coming of Post-

Industrial Society, essentially revised Marxist economic theory to argue for a capitalism able to adapt to new economic conditions. The evolution of Jameson's thesis is not an unproblematic progress from the post-industrialist revisionists to Mandel's orthodox Trotskyist reaffirmation of Marxist economic theory. As I will argue, Jameson's use of Mandel is selective and ultimately distorts Mandel's thesis; in a sense he turns Mandel on his head, somewhat like Marx was said to have turned Hegel on his head.

Jameson makes use of Mandel in two respects. Firstly, he adapts Mandel's tripartite periodisation of the history of capitalism; market capitalism, monopoly or imperialist capitalism and late or multinational capitalism. These correspond to Jameson's own cultural periodisation of realism, modernism and postmodernism. The third period, the postmodern period, begins in the 1940s with the third "industrial revolution" of machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses. (30) Secondly, he utilises Mandel's theory that this third stage expands the activity of capitalism into third world agriculture with the industrialisation of agriculture on a world scale and into the realm of culture, with the rise of the media and advertising industries - what Mandel called the "mechanisation of the superstructure." (31) Postmodernism is the cultural expression, the aesthetic response to this mechanisation and constitutes an explosion of culture "throughout the social realm." (32) However Jameson's explications of Mandel's theory are limited to two pages in the 1984 "Postmodernism" essay, a brief reference in his 1984 "Foreword" to Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition, and a concluding section of his 1984 essay, "Periodising the Sixties". Generally Jameson steers clear of any real grappling with the economic and political

implications of Mandel's argument, although in the "Sixties" essay he does briefly refer to Kondratieff's theory of long waves. To investigate what Jameson leaves out I want to briefly recapitulate Mandel's main arguments. *Late Capitalism* begins with a chapter on methodology, specifically an explanation of the relationship between the "general laws of capital", as discovered by Marx, and the history of the capitalist mode of production. (33) Mandel rebuts a number of monocausal, reductionist explanations of capitalist development and outlines the difficulties of satisfactorily describing the nexus between the generalised laws and the specifics of twentieth century economic history. He sets out the philosophic basis for his own, more dialectical, theory of the history of capitalism since Lenin's formulation of his own era as that of imperialism. (34)

In Chapter Four he argues for the existence of longer cycles of industrial expansion and stagnation spanning forty or fifty years which lie behind the 7 to 10 years cycles of overproduction recognised in the classic economic theory of Smith and Ricardo. The transition from a stagnant period to an expansionist one is characterised by the abrupt rise in the rate of profit (extraction of surplus value) which is caused by a revolution in "the technology of the production of motive machines by machines." (35) Conversely, the rate of profit will slacken and the world economic system enter a period of stagnation or depression when these technological innovations have been adapted in all the branches of the economy, and there is a gradual decelerating capital accumulation and a devalorization of capital. (36) In "Periodising the Sixties" Jameson avers that Mandel's thesis is drawn from Kondratieff's long waves theory. (37) But Mandel's discussion takes into account other theorists including

(35) *Late Capitalism* p.118. 
(36) *ibid.*, p.121.
Parvus, De Wolff and Schumpeter. Mandel particularly refers to Trotsky's criticism of Kondratieff. Trotsky argues that Kondratieff's proofs were based only on statistical evidence and that any analysis of these long industrial cycles needs to go beyond purely economic data and integrate "social and political developments." (38)

Mandel's next step is to describe this third technological revolution and how the resulting "long wave with an overtone of expansion" shaped our modern world. Briefly, Mandel's argument here is that: "Late capitalism ... appears as the period in which all branches of the economy are fully industrialised for the first time ... the increasing mechanisation of the sphere of circulation ... and the increasing mechanization of the superstructure." (39) This is the starting point for Jameson's thesis. He selectively appropriates the two consequences of this third technological revolution which coincides with his own cultural concerns: "Late capitalism can therefore be described as the moment in which the last vestiges of Nature ... are at length eliminated: namely the third world and the unconscious." (40) His essay arguing the nexus between third world revolutions of the fifties and the political/cultural rebellion of the American and French sixties, "Periodising the Sixties", employs Mandel's description of the industrialisation of the previously agrarian regions of the world. Thus for Jameson, Algeria, Vietnam, Cuba and so on exemplify the political response to imperialism's attempt to expand its tendency towards industrialisation into the third world. Similarly, the unconscious is theorised as being transformed, due to this industrialising process, into the cultural response known as postmodernism.

Mandel's theory of a third technological revolution does not simply attempt to sketch in the contours of the contemporary world. The chapter which addresses this subject (Chapter Six) presents an historical materialist analysis of the technological revolution. As his arguments make clear, any attempt to understand the post 1945 world must recognise its economic and political roots in the decades before the war. For world capitalism, faced with the severe

(38) Late Capitalism p.218.

15.
depression of the 1930s, a number of things needed to be done: reverse the trend for the rate of surplus value to fall, revalorize excess capital, shorten the turnover time of capital and reduce the share of wage costs in the price of commodities. (41) These were achieved through rearmament. Firstly, the creation of war economies by the fascist states and, in response, the rearmament of the other major industrial countries. At the same time the trend of the class struggle which had seen a revolution in Russia and the rise of powerful Communist and Social Democratic movements in Germany and elsewhere had to be reversed or neutralised. This was the basis upon which the accelerated technological innovations that constitute the third phase of capitalism were based and which were tested and perfected during the Second World War and the subsequent forty year Cold War stand off.

Mandel states that the main objective of this revolution was to "... radically ... reduce direct wage costs ... eliminate living labour from the process of production." (42) Its driving force, which accounts for the huge expansion of capitalist production in the fifties, is the constant hunt for technological rents. Mandel defines this as the immense surplus profits derived from a monopolisation of technological progress. (43) The process whereby a technological innovation which lowers the cost price of commodities is monopolised by one company or cartel therefore allowing it to maximise its profits until that innovation is generalised throughout the branch of production it is a part of.

There is another element of Mandel's argument that Jameson fails to incorporate into his cultural logic thesis. That is, that there is a limit point to the trend towards fully automated production in industry and agriculture. As Mandel says: "... the mass of surplus value itself necessarily diminishes as a result of the elimination of living labour from the production process in the course of the final stage of mechanization-automation." (44) In other words it is impossible for industrialisation to spread to the entire realm of production. Late capitalism

(41) Late Capitalism p.190.  
(42) ibid., p.193.  
(43) ibid., p.192.  
(44) ibid., p.207.
displays an "inherent inability ... to generalise the vast possibilities of the third technological revolution." The forces of production are turned into the forces of destruction - "permanent arms build-up, hunger in the semi-colonies ... contamination of the atmosphere and waters, disruption of the ecological equilibrium ..." (45) The point of Mandel's argument here is much the same as Marx's in Capital. The inherent contradictions in the capitalist means of production spell out that mode of production's eventual demise.

When we turn to Jameson in his introduction to Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism he states, apropos of the term "late capitalism", that:

... its qualifier in particular rarely means anything so silly as the ultimate senescence, breakdown and death of the system as such. ... What 'late' generally conveys is rather the sense that something has changed, that things are different, that we have gone through a transformation of the life world ...

A change which is decisive but less perceptible than earlier changes (modernization) but also more permanent because more all-pervasive. (46) This misses the whole point of Mandel's work, which is to argue that the "late" really does mean late. He begins his concluding chapter by stating that Late Capitalism is the epoch in the history of the development of the capitalist mode of production in which the contradiction between the growth of the forces of production and the survival of the capitalist relations of production assumes an explosive form. (47)

But for Jameson this viewpoint is merely a "temporal vision that would rather seem to belong to modernism than postmodernism." (48) Jameson may have used Mandel's formulations to reinforce his theory but he dismisses their political intentions as "silly" and consigns Mandel and the Marxist theory of the insoluble contradictions of capitalism to the rubbish bin of theory. Mandel and Marx become versions of that modernism which has been superseded by postmodernism. The postmodern thus becomes an epoch where economic

crisis and the class struggle play no part. For Jameson "late" simply means a "transformation of the life world"; a phrase which, I will argue in more detail later, signifies his relentlessly existential version of Marxism. Related to this are the diametrically opposed ways in which Mandel and Jameson choose to typify the central implication of the third technological revolution. For Jameson it is the cultural phenomenon of postmodernism and its schizophrenic sensibility. For Mandel it is the increasing elimination of living labour in the production process and the resultant increased exploitation of the labouring classes.

This reinterpretation of "late" lies behind what some critics have seen as the central weakness of Jameson's thesis. Douglas Kellner comments:

The analysis of the relationship between the new configurations of the economy and culture, and the failure to say much about the supposed new stage of multinational capitalism is, arguably, the weakest part of Jameson's analysis - i.e., he does not provide adequate mediations between the economic and the cultural and political in these essays and does not adequately provide a foundation for his theory in a systematic analysis of the political economy of the present age. (49)

It could be argued that Jameson is a cultural critic and need not concern himself with more narrowly political and economic matters. But by using Mandel's work he raises questions about those mediations between culture and economics which he does not address. As an avowedly Marxist cultural critic he may have been expected to approach this subject in a more rigorous manner as, for instance, Raymond Williams does in The Country and the City. Ultimately it is not simply a question of what Jameson fails to do but the political framework of his theory. His inadequate methodology betrays a political agenda that "names the system" (50) but fails to critically engage with it. It is an agenda that is in some ways complicit with that system and prepared, or resigned, to co-exist with it.

In order to engage further with Jameson's arguments and to illumine in a sharper way what

I have just claimed for his political project I want to map Mandel's own partially formulated, prolegomenary engagement with the cultural implications of his economic theories. *Late Capitalism*, after establishing the theoretical basis of this new stage of capitalism, itself proceeds to "name the system" in a series of chapters on various aspects of this new world organisation. These include the creation of a permanent arms economy, the rapid expansion of the service sector, the international concentration and centralization of capital, the unequal exchange between developed and undeveloped nations which has led to the present debt crisis, and the state of permanent inflation that has existed particularly since the slump of 1974-75. (51) It is in two later chapters, on the State and ideology in the age of late capitalism, that Mandel begins to explore some of the cultural and political ramifications of this fundamental change in the world system.

His thesis, which Jameson adapts, is that late capitalism constitutes "*generalised universal industrialization*". "Mechanization, standardization, over-specialization and parcellization of labour" has now spread from the sphere of commodity production to penetrate into "all sectors of social life." (52) This has a contradictory effect on the social life of the wage earning sections of society who are Mandel's object of analysis here. Returning, as he constantly does, to Marx, he cites Marx's appreciation of the "civilizing function of capital" which creates "... the material elements for the development of the rich individuality ... [of labour] ... in which natural necessity in its direct form has disappeared." (53)

There is a general extension of the living standards of wage earners, especially evident in the post-war United States. This is accompanied by social trends which are commonly described as constituting a consumer or media society. In particular, the massive social pressure, through advertising, to consume what were once luxury goods and which may be useless, or injurious to health. Whilst at the same time there is an economic compulsion to

(52) *Late Capitalism* p.387.  
(53) ibid., p.395.
consume goods and services which are now seen as indispensable; a car to travel to work, health cover, and so on. And there is a reprivatisation of the recreational sphere of the working class so that the voluntary self-activity and self-organisation of cultural and political groups like unions and co-operatives are replaced by mass circulation daily newspapers, radio, cinema and television privately owned by corporations and monopolies. (54) These cultural activities are organised along industrial lines; produced for a market and aimed at maximum profit. They are symptomatic of the trend towards the mechanisation of the superstructure. (55)

Mandel describes what he believes is the "specific form of bourgeois ideology" in this period. Whereas ascendant capitalism proclaimed the triumph of competition, the "rearguard action of declining capitalism" maintains the advantages of organisation. This is accompanied by belief in the "omnipotence of technology". This ideology proclaims the ability of the existing social order gradually to eliminate all chance of crises, to find a "technical" solution to all its contradictions, to integrate rebellious social classes and to avoid political explosions. (56) This declaration of the abolition of all contradictions lies behind many of the postmodern theories of the end of history or ideology and the various "posts" with which they are connected; post-industrialism, post-Fordism, post-history. (57) The effect of this ideology which dominates the social life of the individual is to reinforce and internalise "the neo-fatalist ideology of the immutable nature of the late capitalist social order", (58) where all the spheres of consumption, recreation, culture,

(54) ibid., pp.390-395. It should be noted here that although daily newspapers may now be declining in circulation they are to a large extent being replaced by magazines catering to specific social groups and tastes which are owned by the print media monopolies. The Internet with its impact on our computer-literate generation should also be mentioned here.


(58) Late Capitalism p.502.
education and personal relations are industrialised and commercialised.

Mandel goes on to say that the reality is the opposite of this ideological strategy:
... late capitalism is not a completely organised society at all. It is merely a hybrid and bastardized combination of organization and anarchy ... The quest for profit and the valorization of capital remain the motor of the whole economic process, with all the unresolved contradictions which they inexorably generate. In the framework of this private capitalist economic order, state direction and guidance of the economy are only makeshifts to patch up fissures and postpone explosions. (59)

The point here is that rather than proceeding from a position of power and control, late capitalism exists in a state of crisis, a state where the drive towards organisation and technologisation co-exists uneasily with its in-built anarchy and entropy.

Mandel speaks of the "crisis-management" of the late capitalist system. In the post-1945 period the Marshall Plan and other "dollar aid" programmes used Keynesian pump-priming methods to inject purchasing power into the international arena; a move that was effectively economic crisis management. Similarly Nixon's decision to take the US dollar off the gold standard in the early seventies to finance the Vietnam war, was an attempt to halt the growing debt and inflation crisis. Socially and ideologically this crisis management is designed to avert social upheavals with a "systematic attack on proletarian class consciousness ... The State thus deploys a huge machinery of ideological manipulation to 'integrate' the worker into late capitalist society as a consumer, 'social partner' or 'citizen'" (60) Its aim therefore, is to depoliticise the working class and to "dismantle proletarian class struggle." (61)

For Mandel, this economic and social crisis management has now reached an even more dangerous point. This is connected to his periodisation of this epoch, which is significantly

(59) ibid., p.502. (60) ibid., pp.485-486.
(61) ibid., pp.486-487.
different from Jameson's periodising of modernity. For Jameson postmodernism arose out of the ashes of the sixties which ended in the slump of 1972-1974. After 1973 the "dust clouds" rolled away to reveal a "strange new landscape" - the postmodern. (62) Whilst the fifties were the period of the "economic preparation of postmodernism or late capitalism." (63) However, Mike Davis has pointed out that Mandel sees this third technological revolution as beginning in the early forties in the United States and after 1945 in the rest of the world. "Are the sixties the opening of a new epoch, or merely the superheated summit of the post-war boom?" - he asks. (64)

For Mandel the sixties signal the end of something, for Jameson, the beginning. Mandel asserts that the relative failure to restrict the effects of the cyclical crises of overproduction after 1967 is an "... expression of the fact that the turning point between a 'long wave with an undertone of expansion' and a 'long wave with an undertone of stagnation' of late capitalism is now behind us." (65) In The Second Slump Mandel places the exact point of the break as the end of the sixties. He states there that the "generalised recession (of '74-'75) is thus a synthetic expression of the reversal of the 'long wave of expansion' ..." (66) Subsequently the recovery of 1976-77 was weak and the bouncing back of the world economy into a boom period which characterised it in the fifties and sixties did not occur. Instead this new incarnation of the "long wave" was characterised by a long-term growth rate of 50%, inferior to those early decades. (67) It is further characterised by a slow-down in the expansion of world trade, the absorption of the "industrial reserve army" which halts further rise in the rate of surplus value (this despite technological innovations) and decelerating economic

(67) ibid., p.13.
growth. (68)

Jameson's periodising schema replaces this transformation of the "long wave" brought about by innate economic factors with a model that sees the economic prosperity of the fifties and the rise and fall of the political turmoil in the sixties as the basis for this new postmodern "landscape". It is not just that the time-frames are different; the whole tenor of Mandel and Jameson's arguments are opposed. As Mike Davis notes; "... the crucial point about capitalist structures of accumulation ... [is] ... that they are symptoms of global crisis, not signs of the triumph of capitalism's irresistible drive to expand. (69)

Mandel's chapter on the ideology of late capitalism involves not only an analysis of this ideology, but a polemic against those "self-styled Marxist theorists" who proclaim the "omnipotence of technology". He ironically refers to one of those theorists in his account of the way late capitalist ideology works. "The fate of the one-dimensional man seems to be wholly predetermined." (70) His specific criticism of Marcuse, Habermas and the other theorists grouped around the Frankfurt school is that they elevate technology "... into a mechanism completely independent of all human objectives and decisions, which proceeds independently of class structure and class rule in the automatic manner of a natural law." (71) For Marcuse, "technology has become the great vehicle of reification." In the post-war era of great material wealth, the "stuff" of the world is "total administration", where reification works to transform the web of domination into a web of rational, scientific reason. (72)

This all-pervasive reification, as Terry Eagleton remarks, extends from commodity fetishism and speech habits to political bureaucracy and technological thought. It is a world devoid of contradictions, a "totalitarian" system which, as Eagleton concludes, is simply a projection of the fascist world Marcuse and Adorno escaped from onto the ideological

(68) Late Capitalism. See Chapter 14. (69) Davis p.83.
(70) Late Capitalism p.502. (71) ibid., p.503.
structures of the liberal capitalist regimes. (73)

Although Jameson's theory of postmodernism is in many respects very different from the Frankfurt school's various writings on the culture industry and the administered world of post-Auschwitz capitalism, I would argue that both are guilty of a fundamental mis-identification. They identify aspects of the late capitalist world, such as the triumph of technology and the power of the dominant culture to absorb and render harmless radical cultural and social movements, as unchanging and unchangeable, in fact the winning move of the dominant ideology. This despite Jameson's insistence that his conception of postmodernism is not monolithic and does not exclude "forms of resistance". (74)

Jameson's theory has been attacked from non-Marxist quarters as betraying a totalizing impulse similar to that which propels and distorts all Marxist analyses. (75) However his "totalizations" have also been attacked from the Marxist left because of a tendency to homogenise the "contemporary landscape", subsuming too many contradictory phenomena under a master concept. (76) Similarly, Warren Montag takes Jameson to task from an Althusserian perspective. Marxists, he claims, take their interventions in the contemporary moment from a given conjuncture which "can be grasped only on the basis of the antagonisms internal to it." But, he adds:

In Jameson's account of the present, the irreducible and overdetermined conflict is eclipsed by a pure systemacity. The historical present becomes an undifferentiated totality of contemporaneous moments in which instances lose their relative autonomy and art, architecture, literature, philosophy - even the Marxist philosophy of Althusser - are no more than unmediated

(74) Ross p.11.
(76) Davis p.80.
expressions of 'the Being of Capital'. (77)

To return to the point I made earlier in comparing Mandel and Jameson's periodising of late capitalism; where Mandel sees the early seventies as the turning point between expansion and stagnation, Jameson chooses to ignore this altogether. For him the period 1972-74 signifies the end of the sixties and the beginning of the postmodern. Jameson's thesis conflates Mandel's economic theory of late capitalism, and the various ideas, trends and aesthetic fads prevalent in the seventies and eighties which come together under the rubric of postmodernism. It "totalizes" those ideas into a framework that despite its Marxist flavour, is ultimately complicitous with the phenomena it attempts to analyse. The Frankfurt school could be said to have utilised the concept of reification to depict a world where the dominant ideology was all-powerful and resistance was useless. Jameson's postmodernism adapts the same outlook and basic methodology, mistaking surface appearance for historical materialist depth analysis. In the end postmodernism is all-powerful because it dominates all aspects of social and cultural life.

To examine just how Jameson's thesis intimates this fatalist ideology I want to look at his descriptions of the "postmodern landscape". He argues that postmodernism signals the end of the modernist consciousness with its related feelings of angst and anxiety as revealed in Munch's art or Kafka's fiction. Liberation from anxiety means liberation from all emotions as the self disappears. In its place the cultural products of postmodernism deal in what he, after Lyotard, calls intensities; free-floating, impersonal and euphoric. (78) This state of euphoria is linked to so-called *écriture* or schizophrenic writing associated with the *nouveau roman*, Beckett, and American postmodernists like John Ashberry and Ishmael Reed. He uses Lacan to describe the schizophrenic experience of those aesthetic works, specifically Lacan's account of interlocking signifiers which constitute meaning. When that syntactic relationship

is broken the links snap, a jumble of discrete and unrelated signifiers result. Thus the personal identity of the schizophrenic is associated with this kind of linguistic malfunction; an analogy that flows from Lacan's famous dictum that the unconscious is structured like a language.

Jameson uses this to reinforce his point that under postmodernism the subjective temporality of modernism is replaced by an atemporality or spatiality where the present is an endless moment that contains all previous historical styles and signifiers. Just as the schizophrenic's personal identity effaces past and future into the present, so the postmodern sentence moves in an "hermeneutic circle through time." Past, present and future in the sentence and in our experiencing of time are unified and we - the practitioners and spectators of postmodernism - are reduced to an "experience of pure material signifiers." (79) He continues by citing an extended passage from Marguerite Sechehaye's Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl which describes a schizophrenic experience in terms of the breakdown of temporality and heightened intensity. This intensity may be described in the negative terms of anxiety and loss, he says, but could be imagined in terms of euphoria and intoxicatory intensity. (80) He goes on to choose a "less sombre example" of schizophrenic writing than Beckett, a poem by Bob Perelman. And his conclusion is that when the "schizophrenic disjunction or ecriture" becomes generalised as a cultural style it ceases to be necessarily related to terms like anxiety and angst and "becomes available for more joyous intensities." (81)

Jameson's next step is to link these spatial and temporal discontinuities, whether experienced reading Perelman, viewing Duane Hanson's statues, or moving through Portman's Bonaventure Hotel, with concepts of the sublime and the unrepresentable nature of "present-day multinational capitalism." He devises the slogan "difference relates" to

(79) ibid., pp.26-27. 
(80) ibid., pp.27-28. 
(81) ibid., p.29.

26.
characterise the postmodern experience of form. It is a notion of "relationship through difference". It is like Nam June Paik's video sculptures that reject the realist dictum of following one particular narrative (TV screen) and instead, impossibly, attempts to follow and experience them all. There is no attempt, however, to understand the multiple screens/narratives. This "vivid perception of radical difference" becomes a "new mode of grasping what used to be called relationship." Something, as Jameson and others have remarked, like "channel surfing Pay TV's multiple stations. (82)

This activity is like a cross between Susan Sontag's camp connoisseurs, enjoying and loathing the objects of consumer capitalism and the Burkean terrible sublime, a vision of something awe-inspiring and unrepresentable. He "yokes" the two notions together to form a hysterical or camp sublime which, he goes on to argue, is the only possible way of viewing, not nature now, but technology. A technology that after Mandel's third technological revolution has created an "immense communicational and computer network" that cannot be grasped or understood by any one person or represented by any one art work. This has resulted in an explosion of culture into all areas of life; so that culture has become coterminous with social life. (83) This mesmerising and fascinating technological culture can only be represented by the postmodern sublime which must be read as "peculiar new forms of realism". (84) It does not represent that technology the way a realist or modernist aesthetic consciousness attempted to, but grasps the immense unrepresentable relationships by acknowledging differences and co-existing with them. The schizophrenic mode of thinking is presumably the aesthetic and existential means to "grasp" this totality.

This schizophrenic attitude then, is of primary significance. It is how we experience and represent this postmodern sublime, which itself is simply the expression in culture of the vast configurations of late capitalist technology. I would argue that Jameson's concept of the

(82) ibid., p.31.
schizophrenic is the link, the cultural-economic mediation between the late capitalist
economy and the postmodern cultural landscape. The other features of the postmodern
which Jameson describes flow from this schizophrenized spatial and temporal disjunction.
The historicist effacing of history, the replacing of the five models of depth with five
surfaces, the waning of affect, the use of pastiche instead of parody and the concept of the
society of the simulacrum can all be explained in terms of the schizophrenic attitude. (85)
The opposites of each of these new cultural phenomena are associated with a superseded
modernism. The depth models of essence/appearance and so on, the concept of history and
related ideas of the historical subject and historical agency, emotional affects whether
Modernist anxiety or realist passion and commitment, parody with its moral purpose and
fervour and what could be called a society of the referent all have in common the assumption
of a world that is knowable and which can affect us and be changed by our actions. It is a
world where, if the sign has been broken down into signifier and signified (the Saussurean
moment) it has not yet resulted in the complete divorce of signifier from signified to float in
an endless difference of deferred meaning. These new postmodern features are, on the other
hand, symptomatic of this broken Lacanian chain where textuality and schizophrenic style
predominate.

Jameson's celebration of the schizophrenic is not unique in recent cultural theory. Deleuze
and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and Jean Baudrillard in
*America* invoke schizophrenia in their formulations of the cultural milieu. As Neville
Wakefield points out, Jameson uses and acknowledges Lacan's post-Freudian account of
schizophrenia but ignores Deleuze and Guattari's development of Lacan to construct a
"revolutionary politics of desire." Deleuze and Guattari propose that the rootless, disjointed
nature of capitalist society conduces schizophrenic attitudes which decode and
deterritorialise meaning in a way corresponding to poststructuralist (Derridean) readings of

texts. In a sense they overturn both Lacan and Freud. They claim that the repressive Oedipalising structures of Freud and the Lacanian notion of a subject bound by language and society are "gone beyond" by the schizophrenic who is liberated from the norms and institutions of society and language. (86)

Wakefield criticises Jameson for not drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's revolutionary, molecular politics in his own schizophrenic thesis. (87) It seems to me, however, that there are a number of elements in common to the two formulations. Both elaborate ways of reacting to the world that involve a schizophrenic outlook, albeit Jameson with cultural/aesthetic overtones and Deleuze and Guattari more strictly political overtones. Both celebrate the schizophrenic as a style that is subversive and resistant. Deleuze and Guattari explicitly; Jameson, I believe, implicitly, in his account, described above, of how the postmodern sublime heroically but impossibly seeks to know the world of multinational capitalism. (88) Baudrillard's concept of the schizophrenic is somewhat similar to Deleuze and Guattari's. "The schizo is bereft of every scene, open to everything in spite of himself ..." (89) Only in Baudrillard, resistance, even that of Deleuze and Guattari's non-neurotic politics of desire, is useless. For Baudrillard their analysis is tinged with the now dead ideology of liberation. (90)

Wakefield's critique of Jameson's schizophrenic model is from a position in agreement with the anarchist or Deleuzean left. Jameson displays an "antagonism" and a "dismay" towards schizophrenized postmodern experience. His, is an attempt to reclaim an "authentic

(87) ibid., pp.94-95.
(90) Wakefield p.96.
cultural practice" and is "motivated throughout by a sense of loss." (91) Wakefield suspects that Jameson, as an orthodox Marxist, is attempting to reintroduce history into the postmodern universe. For Wakefield, and implicitly Deleuze, Guattari, and Baudrillard, Jameson does not go far enough in his construction of a schizophrenized postmodernism.

Other commentators have attacked Jameson's thesis from different positions. For instance, Mike Featherstone accuses him of "... over-generalisation ... and a lack of sensitivity to historical concreteness." His interest in totalizing means he "underestimates the differentiation of culture within pre-capitalist societies." This is because he fails to see that these "vivid intensities", supposedly unique to postmodern society, have been experienced by religious and artistic groups throughout history with the aid of "group catharsis, drugs and other means". He cites discussions of carnivality in the middle ages by Bakhtin and others. (92) But it seems to me that Featherstone's objections can easily be incorporated into Jameson's model. Jameson writes in the introduction to Postmodernism that the postmodern era should be seen in terms of Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling". (93) The postmodern is simply a cultural dominant, and presumably aspects of it could have existed earlier as "emergent" or "pre-emergent" structures of feeling. (94)

A criticism made by a number of writers is less answerable, in my opinion. In The Condition of Postmodernity David Harvey contends that Jameson shows an "alarming irresponsibility" in his account of schizophrenic experience. The example Jameson uses, (The Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl), reads like a "well-controlled LSD trip". Harvey quotes his own example from a recent press clipping. A man diagnosed as schizophrenic brutally and matter of factly murders his two children and now "sits under

(91) ibid., p.82.
(94) Williams in Marxism and Literature.
suicide surveillance”. (95) As Brandon Taylor has pointed out, if Jameson had quoted from passages later in the Sechehaye book the positive feelings of euphoria and intoxicatory intensity would have been replaced by terrifying feelings of dislocation and intense anguish. She experiences feelings of guilt, lethargy and helplessness and describes her state at one point as one where "a devastating tempest ravaged my soul." (96) Taylor makes the point that if we do experience a depthless, de-centred existence from what point can we become aware of this de-centredness. To be able to describe such an existence presupposes a consciousness capable of "unitary reflection" which can comprehend this new, de-centred state and can map it against what it no longer is. As he says, the schizo-process is interpreted from the outside. (97) He goes on to reinscribe modernism as a practice striving for truth and meaning and postmodernism as abandoning that search, (98) thereby betraying his own form of modernist humanism that fails to take into account the more reactionary aspects of modernism.

He criticises the anti-humanist nature of Lacan's poststructuralist Freudianism from which Jameson (and Deleuze and Guattari) drew their accounts of schizophrenia. Lacan inverts the relationship between language and the world, implying that the real world is a mere "epiphenomena of language." (99) Therefore, the emotions felt by a schizophrenic, including pain and terror, are simply text.

I do not think that Jameson intends to deny the reality of pain and terror or any of the emotions with which history is inextricably bound. People still feel these emotions but they are inexpressible, unrepresentable in the social and economic matrices of late capitalism. But

(97) ibid., p.67. (98) ibid., p.68.
(99) ibid., p.52.
his use of the schizophrenic state as an analogy for postmodernism does not seem to be adequate. In its clinical sense schizophrenia is associated with loss of affect and feelings of terror, displacement and helplessness. Louis Sass has written about the links between schizophrenia and literary and artistic modernism in *Madness and Modernism* from the perspective of a clinical psychologist. He makes a convincing case for seeing the memoirs, recorded interviews and drawings of schizophrenic and schizoid type personalities as exhibiting similar psychological states to those indicated in certain modernist writers and painters. His examples of the schizophrenic personality in modernism include Chirico, Kafka, Hoffmannsthal, Holderlin and other early twentieth century artists. Postmodernism, rather than being the unique expression of the schizophrenic personality, for Sass, is a form of hypermodernism where artists like Warhol manifest in more extreme forms the same attitudes as a modernist like Beckett. (100)

Sass limits his argument, intending it to describe some aspects of a congruence between schizoid behaviour and certain modernist writers and painters. He associates it with modernism and not with the new aesthetic/cultural practice of postmodernism as Jameson does. Unlike Jameson there is no attempt to claim for this homology the status of a totally new cultural and aesthetic outlook dominant throughout the advanced capitalist world. As I have said earlier Jameson utilises Lacan to construct his schizophrenia homology and wrote before the publication of Sass' book. It is interesting to note that Sass himself nowhere mentions Lacan. His account of schizophrenia is thus seen by Sass as peripheral to its major theorists (Jaspers, Bleuler, Kraepelin).

Jameson's use of the schizophrenia homology is somewhat like his use of Mandel to construct the economic basis of his argument. In both cases he borrows a term from another field of discourse to build his central argument upon and in so doing perverts or corrupts the original meaning and purpose of the concept. Taylor quotes Jameson's statement that we

should see postmodernism positively and negatively - its "baleful features" and its "liberating dynamism". (101) This is why Jameson privileges schizophrenic euphoria at the expense of terror and withdrawal. The need to strike an "equal balance" leads to a distortion of the consequences of our postmodern age (102) and is also behind his distortion of Mandel. The desire to strike a dialectical balance merely ends up as a rationalisation for the present system and a denial of the true political meaning of late capitalism: its economic and cultural crisis management to prop up a declining economic system.

(3)

The theory of postmodernism that Jameson offers is influential and widely debated and it exists in a field of study that is rapidly expanding. There are now postmodernisms of law, geography, ethics, science and so on which are far removed from postmodernism's original source in literary and aesthetic criticism. Jameson's theory thus competes with many other theories and interpretations of the postmodern. Some of these theories attempt "totalizations", descriptions that attempt to explain all the cultural, social and political features the theorist believes represent the postmodern. Other engagements with postmodernism are piecemeal, singling out one aspect of the concept to celebrate or defend. I will argue that generally these theories in their privileging of the idea of a new postmodern episteme express that same ideological crisis management that Mandel described.

Many writers on postmodernism begin their work by positioning their own ideas in relation to the numerous other theories current in academic discourse. This is usually in the form of an introduction that serves as an historical overview of the writings already published in the field. This is what Jameson himself did in his essay, "The Politics of Theory: Ideological

(101) Taylor p.69. 
(102) ibid., pp.69-70.
Positions in the Postmodernism Debate". (103) This essay proposes to give an overview of the debate by describing a number of influential theorists and positioning them in a sort of ideological grid depending upon their attitude towards modernism and postmodernism. Jameson's approach is critical; he insists on the politically progressive or reactionary functions of theories of the postmodern. Tom Wolfe's anti-modernist, pro-postmodernist position is reactionary, Habermas' pro-modernist, anti-postmodernist position is progressive. This enables Jameson to position his own version of postmodernism within the grid, largely in opposition to the other theories.

Another approach that eschews Jameson's confrontationalist stance is to present and discuss the multitude of varieties of postmodernism in order to allow the reader or student to make their own choice. For instance, Matei Calinescu in introducing an edition of papers presented at a conference on postmodernism surveys the field in a judicious, non-polemic way allowing readers to choose the approach which they find most convincing. (104) Each theory is described in a non-critical, pluralist way, as if they were dishes on a menu. This liberal, supposedly non-political version of Jameson's "ideological positions" avoids condemnation and allows each interpretation equal validity. Some are simply more widely known than others. The debate on postmodernism begins to resemble one of the traits of postmodernism itself - the innumerable choices that consumers have in postmodern society; from what brand to buy, which TV channel to watch, what sort of music, art or literature to


Although Jameson makes political judgements on the writers he analyses, in a sense he replicates the strategy of those writers. He offers choices, albeit choices refracted through a left-wing viewpoint and those ideological positions become just another survey of the cultural field. The point being that we as consumers get to make a decision on which postmodernism suits us best.

Rather than repeating this manoeuvre I want to attempt to examine the debate on postmodernism in order to catalogue some of its principal conclusions and assumptions. These, I will argue, are generic to the debate and are evident whether the participant in the debate is for or against postmodernism. In fact to see the debate in terms of who is for or against postmodernism is a false dichotomy. False because once the writer accepts the validity of the concept then the legitimacy and importance of the debate is reaffirmed. An assertion central to the debate is once again made. That is, there has been a break, a coupure, in the historical continuum. Something has changed in the way people live or act or think; whether that change is for the worse or the better.

There are four ontological levels where this transformation is mapped. On a macro level a change in the socio-economic structure of (Western) society as charted by Jameson for example, or David Harvey, Edward Soja and the theorists of post-industrialism and post-Fordism. Secondly, a basic change in our methods of thinking, whether about society, epistemology, ethics, gender issues or language. Lyotard with his claim for the end of meta-narratives is prominent here, as well as those theorists who have used the ideas of post-structuralist philosophy to advocate a new post-cognitive, post-humanist mental landscape. Thirdly, the rise of a new culture or a new class which brings with it new ways of looking at the world and new demands and requirements, whether they be aesthetic, social or political. Fred Pfeil's theory about baby boomer postmodernism is one instance, as are the theories of Iain Chambers, Dick Hebdige and others about the rise of popular culture, and Andreas Huyssen's claim that postmodernism is the result of the United States' emergence as the centre of the art world. Similarly the thinking around the ideas of post-Marxism, the
Green movement, and the localised politics of Deleuze and Guattari, and Michel Foucault are appropriate on this level. Finally, and most familiarly, postmodernism is presented as a change in aesthetic practice. In literature, the end of modernism to be replaced with postmodernism (or surfiction, fabulation, new fiction, historiographic metafiction) as denounced or espoused by John Barth, Irving Howe, Brian McHale and many others. (105) The same is true in other artistic field; dance, architecture, art, music, film, poetry, television and photography.

The implication in all of these ideas, "floating in the air" since the sixties, is that something established or dominant has been superseded by something new, innovative and adversarial. This change can be on the level of a transformation of the episteme, or on the level of a new Yuppie sub-culture, or a new movement in architecture or literature. The break is signified by the prefix "post" with its connotations of coming after and ushering in something unique. (106) All of the participants seem united in one respect. This sea change in the world is as significant a change as that which transformed the nineteenth century world into twentieth century modernity. From a world of Victorianism, realism, optimism, ameliorism and revolutionary nationalism into one of modernism, atheism, despair, internationalism and


(106) But see Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition where he claims that postmodernism actually came before modernism.
apocalypticism. What happened during that transition at the beginning of the century is now mirrored in the change from modernism to postmodernism near the century's end. Although I have been at pains to catalogue the major levels - socio-economic, philosophic, cultural and aesthetic - upon which the break is predicated, it is necessary to recognise that postmodern theories cannot be compartmentalised within one of these levels. For instance, Ihab Hassan's writing on postmodernism encompasses a change in aesthetic practice, the emergence of a new culture, and a new way of thinking about language and cognition, as well as pointing implicitly to a new society built on the ruins of totalitarian modernism. (107) Apart from this concept of a break; at whatever level or levels, there are a number of other assertions or assumptions made by the proponents of postmodernism. I now want to examine these in detail.

Because there has been a change, this change is seen as a change for the better. The most obvious example is Hassan's table of oppositions between modernism and postmodernism, where, as Steven Connor has pointed out, an "evaluative hierarchy" emerges. (108) The words used to describe modernism paint it as authoritarian, reactionary and old-fashioned, whilst those used for postmodernism present it as playful, liberal, new and desirable. The change has revitalised aesthetic practice and has improved the quality of works of art and ultimately our experience of life. There is an optimistic, even millenarial strain to such postmodern theorising. Postmodernism has arrived and banished the evil "other", and its new philosophic worldview, creative practices or political strategies are or are going to improve


(108) Connor p.112.
the world somehow. In Hassan's schema modernism is the disdained, discredited other. (109)
For theorists like Chambers or Hebdige the elitism of high culture, whether associated with
modernism or realism, is negatively opposed to the rise of the popular culture of television,
pop music, Pop Art and music video. These are not uncritically praised but they are
presented as more democratic and libertarian, more likely to be used to reach all people and
not just the privileged bourgeois elites. (110)

New political agendas and strategic practices have emerged out of the breakdown into
sectarianism and dogma of the New Left in the United States and the backlash against what
is perceived as the betrayal of the Parti Communiste Francais in 1968. Its reluctance to
allow its worker supporters to act in solidarity with the students is cited as evidence of its
monolithic alliance with the Soviet Union. (111) The Greens and other environmental
movements, anti-nuclear groups, coalitions of the unemployed and disadvantaged like Jesse
Jackson's Rainbow Coalition came to prominence, spurning the ideological manifestos and
Leninist like parties of the traditional left. They opted for loosely linked groupings and
localised activism, the ubiquitous slogan being, "Think Globally, Act Locally". These
political tendencies were theorised by people like Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, and Laclau

(109) The Postmodern Turn. But see Tom Wolfe, From Bauhaus to Our House (New York:
Farar, Straus Girouz, 1981), Robert Young, White Mythologies: Writing History and the
West (London: Routledge, 1990), Arthur Kroker and David Cook, The Postmodern Scene:
Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1986).
(110) See works by Chambers and Hebdige cited in footnote 105
(111) See Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing
Rage, Years of Hope (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1987) and George Katsiaficas, The
and Mouffe as "mobile arrangements", "non-neurotic politics" or "post-Marxism". (112) In a similar way theorists of post-industrialism like Alvin Toffler and Andre Gorz suggest positive, even utopian ways of existing in a post-industrial environment. (113)

The nexus between feminism and postmodernism is celebrated as a prolegomenon to a radical deconstructing of Western master narratives and the creation of a feminist discourse which is anti-patriachal, decentred and open. Craig Owens' essay on Cindy Sherman and other feminist postmodernists posits these artists as harbingers of an "insistence on difference" which is changing artistic practices. (114)

A similar optimism is evident in Linda Hutcheon's theory of postmodern literary practice as "historiographic metafiction". She argues that the totalizing forces that characterise late twentieth century society, the homogenisation of mass culture and repressive patriachal and racist attitudes, are not mirrored in postmodernism as Jameson and other totalizing theorists proclaim. Instead postmodernism is both complicit with, and critical of, contemporary society. Although she argues that her theory crosses aesthetic boundaries she concentrates on the work of contemporary fiction writers like Salman Rushdie, E.L. Doctorow and Ishmael Reed. Their work rethinks history as "a human construct" or text, whilst at the same time laying claim to real historical events and personages. Historiographic metafiction works within conventions of literary genre and historical writing in order to subvert them and implicitly to subvert dominant, patriachal, racist and elitist modes of thinking. By rethinking history as a construct these fictions expose the uses to which history has been put by political and social elites. This is achieved by emphasising the textuality of history and the narrative

(113) See Barry Smart, Modern Conditions, Postmodern Controversies (London: Routledge, 1992).
itself. (115) She acknowledges her debt to Charles Jencks and his theory of "double coding" in postmodern architecture. An architecture that cites historical styles in order to parody them and invent a new, more democratic, truly populist architectural practice. (116) Hutcheon and Jencks' version of postmodernism sees it as a subversive critical practice that they believe continues to successfully resist the encroachments of a totalitarian culture.

The rupture that has ushered in postmodernism is also characterised by the rise to prominence of ideas emphasising the relative nature of knowledge. This is not new in the Western philosophic tradition of course, Descartes famously arguing a version of it. However, with the increasing importance of post-structuralist theory since the late sixties relativism has seemingly become the dominant philosophic discourse. (117) What is significant here is that unlike other more "realist" philosophic positions, post-structuralist theory has been borrowed and reworked wholesale by large sections of the academic community and certain, more self-conscious producers of culture such as Raymond Federman and John Barth to theorise their postmodern work. This contemporary version of relativist thinking is epitomised by the uses made of Jacques Derrida's ideas on language and writing. (118) In particular his radical relativising of the association between signifier and signified. The implication behind Derrida's deconstruction of language and philosophic discourse in his work on Rousseau, Heidegger and others is evident in Lyotard's

(117) This is not necessarily the case. Philosophic positions ranging from Realism to Neo-Pragmatism have been influential, especially in Anglo-American circles.
interpretation of postmodernism as the era of the death of all master narratives. His report on knowledge and science metamorphoses into an account of how this contemporary "incredulity towards metanarratives" results in science as no longer being able to claim a slow progress towards absolute knowledge. It must now acknowledge that its goal "is no longer truth but performativity." (119)

Notions of relativity are present in postmodern literature and literary criticism. Ihab Hassan's table of modernism/postmodernism utilises concepts on the postmodern side that are normally associated with relativism: antiform, dispersal, anti-narrative, difference/differance, indeterminacy, and so on. (120) In Brian McHale's Postmodern Fiction a theory of the postmodern is offered that can be seen as paradigmatic of relativist arguments. As opposed to modernism's interest in epistemological enquiry postmodernism is concerned with ontological questions. Specifically the ontology of the literary text and the ontology of the world it projects or constructs. So for McHale the typical postmodern genres are science fiction and historical fiction where notions of being and existing in time and place are played with or brought into question. They are placed sous rature or "under erasure" in Derrida's phrase. This "theoretical description of a universe" posits the relativist notion that no one interpretation is truer than another, that ultimately all narratives, worlds or texts are fictional constructs. (121) Thus the difference between modernism and postmodernism is that whereas modernism questioned the verisimilitude of personal narratives (did Jim leap from the Patna?, is Quentin's version of Sutpen's life true?), postmodernism throws its hands up and declares: "believe nothing, doubt everything!" For McHale there can be no absolutes in postmodern writing.

The concept of relativism is closely tied to another general characteristic of postmodernism: the idea of the spatial. It is already implicit in McHale's literary definition of

(119) Connor pp.31-33.
(120) Ihab Hassan, "The Culture of Postmodernism" in The Postmodern Turn 1987.
(121) Postmodernist Fiction. pp.8-27.
postmodernism which posits the creation of radically incommensurable fictional worlds that bring into questions notions of being and truth. The epistemological questions raised by modernist narratives are essentially temporal; what comes next?, or what actually did happen and in what order? Hence the modernist's notorious handling of time and the oft cited influence of Bergson on Joyce, Woolf and other modernist writers. In Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow on the other hand, the Zone impresses us as being a vast, surreal landscape where time is collapsed to be replaced by a perpetual present. As in Guy Davenport's phrase, there seems to be a "geography of the imagination" at work in the postmodern literary mind. (122)

The idea of spatiality has, of course, been around since Saussure's work which privileged the synchronic over the diachronic. Structuralist theories have played a significant role in twentieth century thought, from semiotics and anthropology to literary theory. Postmodernism, however, seems to adapt the theories wholesale. Or it may be that what were once obscure academic concerns have now made their way into the Anglo-American world and into popular aesthetic consciousness. I am not concerned so much here with identifying reasons but in describing a way of looking at the world which backgrounds history and foregrounds notions of space, the horizontal and the contiguous. French theorists like Bachelard and Lefebvre are relevant here, but also Anglo-American geographers like Edward Soja and David Harvey. (123)

The subtitle of Soja's Postmodern Geographies is "The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory", and he argues that the temporal and historical have been privileged in critical theory over the spatial and the regional. A truly materialist analysis of social structures and


how they develop and are transformed must take into account "actually lived and socially created spatiality", as well as the temporal processes of "becoming" associated with history and the dialectic. (124) He faults Marxist analyses that inflate the dialectic and modernist projects that use Bergson's theories of time to present a world where time is fecundity and richness, and space, immobility and stasis. He identifies a new line of thought in Marxist theory associated with Lefebvre, Jameson, Harvey and the later Poulantzos which is more willing to admit into the dialectic discussions of space, cognitive mapping and geographic analysis. His own socio-spatial work stresses the importance of geographic "uneven development" in the growth and survival of capitalism. He cites Mandel's connecting of periods of intensified modernisation with geographic restructurings - from the industrial capitalism of the first world to the late transnational capitalism of the third world - as evidence of his thesis. (125)

Spatial analysis is a method for observing, recording and in the last instance understanding the world. It is a tactic adapted by those of a hermeneutic turn of mind, who wish, as Jameson states, to "map" the world cognitively. (126) Its main advocates are Marxists or fellow travellers responding to the "structuralist revolution". However the object of study, the world, has changed immeasurably since Marx, Freud, Heidegger and others were claiming the hermeneutic as the principal tool of human investigation. This new object of study is dominated by images. The technologies of film, video and the computer and their use in all aspects of daily existence from entertainment to work effect a profound change in how we interact with the world. What has been termed the "technological imagination" (127) is

(124) Soja p.18.  
(125) ibid., p.28.  
(127) cf. Teresa De Lauretis in the introduction to The Technological Imagination. "The pervasive technologisation of everyday life ... Has shaped and transformed all cultural processes ..." p.viii.
necessary to understand a world where the "real" is presented to us via the television news or where the exchange of goods is facilitated by Pay Television or the Internet. The primacy of the image in the postmodern era of instant communications is claimed by amongst others: Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, Marshall McLuhan and Arthur Kroker.

One of the central features of Jameson's description of the postmodern is the use he makes of these recent theories of the media. They inform his diagnosis of historical time and memory which postmodern culture transforms into "a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum." (128) Jameson's writings make only passing reference to Baudrillard and, instead, utilises Guy Debord's more materialist analysis of media society. In Postmodernism he refers a number of times to Debord's 1967 book The Society of the Spectacle using words like "extraordinary" to describe its premises. For Debord, ideologue of the anarchist Situationalist International, and for Jameson, the spectacle presented by our media and computer society is not simply a collection of images. These images mediate social relations among people. The media works towards the abolishing of "direct personal communication among producers." This process is part of "... the proletarianization of the world." It involves in no way a liberation from or within labour, the increase in leisure is for the few, at the expense of an increase in labour for the many. (129)

For Baudrillard, in contrast, information destroys meaning. The media society has imploded meaning, so that its content is devoured and only the medium, the signs are of any significance. America as a model for the rest of the world is a "perfect simulacrum". The Vietnam war was won by the United States in "the electronic mental space" and Apocalypse Now is more real than the actual war. Meanwhile the masses, once the subject of revolutionary theory, exert by their total indifference and silence a resistance to meaning and

(129) Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle Translator unknown. (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), sections 4, 26 and 27.
utterance that confounds the system's overproduction of meaning. Baudrillard seizes on a phenomenon of society identified by McLuhan in the sixties; the medium of communications (the electronic media) becomes as important as the message of communication. He proposes, apropos of this, that today simulation has no referential connection. It is, in his words, "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality", the map precedes the territory. Hence his concept of the "precession of the simulacra". (130)

It is not surprising that critical theory acknowledges Baudrillard and validates his theories by debating them (131) whilst Debord is remembered less as a precursor than as another sixties anachronism. As Steven Connor concludes about Baudrillard: his positions are less a critical response or analysis of media society, more a reproduction of its methods. He bathes in it and suffers from not enough nostalgia for the real. (132)

If Baudrillard's Marxist past haunts, in a peculiarly inverted way, his theory of the masses' revolutionary indifference (rather than their revolutionary practice), then his nihilism and despair are products of the postmodern age. And it is these elements that are used by theorists like Arthur Kroker and David Cook to formulate their vision of an excremental culture where the world is in ruins. For them TV equates with the real world; whatever is not


(131) For example: Douglas Kellner, Jean Baudrillard from Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), and Andre Frankovits ed. Seduced and Abandoned: The Baudrillard Scene (Glebe: Stonemoss Services, 1984).

(132) Connor pp.218-220.
filtered through that medium is "peripheral to the main tendencies of the contemporary
century". (133) In a less nihilistic vein Mark Poster links recent post-structuralist theorists
like Baudrillard, Derrida and Lyotard to the introduction of electronic communication
technology like TV, electronic writing and computer databases to claim for the age a
transitional status. From a "mode of information" of written information mediated by print
into one dominated by electronically mediated exchange. (134)

These various theories have their corollary in contemporary culture. The cultural hegemony
of TV and video of course, but also the American dominated movements of the sixties and
beyond; particularly Pop Art and Photorealism. In literature the fiction and poetry that use
electronic communication as both its subject matter and adapts it as a style or formal method.
Thus the subject of Bobbie Ann Mason's In Country is as much the video and MTV culture
that plays endlessly through the life of its main character as the more traditional theme of
coming to terms with the past. Jay McInerney's Bright Lights, Big City and Brett Easton
Ellis' Less Than Zero are similar examples of fictions that seem to derive their novelty from
their immersion in the images of popular culture. Whereas novelists like Ronald Sukenick,
Thomas Pynchon, Donald Barthelme and others structure their fiction like random bytes of
media news or suffuse it with the vast media configurations that control the paranoiac lives
of their characters.

Kraker and Cook's theory of a media dominated world in ruins where images are more
significant than their referents is described in relentlessly apocalyptic terms. For them:

Ours is a fin-de-millenium consciousness which, existing at the end of
history in the twilight time of ultra modernism ... and hyper-primitivism ...
uncovers a great arc of disintegration and decay against the background

(133) Kraker and Cook p.268.
(134) Mark Poster, The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context (Oxford:
radiation of parody, kitsch and burnout. (135)

Kroker and Cook's *The Postmodern Scene* epitomises the contemporary predilection for a sense of ending, albeit in a fashionably nihilistic and academically all-embracing way. Its despair is mixed with a compulsive desire to include every conceivable cultural manifestation of end consciousness.

Andreas Huyssen is specifically concerned with American postmodernism in his essay on postmodernism in the seventies but the apocalypticism he identifies has a wider context. He is concerned with the "temporal imagination of postmodernism", which he describes as "... the unshaken confidence of being at the edge of history [which has characterised] the whole trajectory of American postmodernism since the 1960s and of which the notion of a *post-histoire* is only one of the more sillier manifestations." (136) For Huyssen this is one of American postmodernism's strategies in response to the exhaustion of the radical European avant-garde. The consequences of this are Pop Art's reduction of art to commodity fetishism and the general depoliticisation of art as its world centre shifts from Paris to New York. It can be argued that this "sense of an ending", in Frank Kermode's phrase, is characteristic of post sixties postmodernism, (137) as well as being characteristic of the plethora of endings and "posts" that dominate contemporary academic discourse - post-Fordism, post-Marxism, post-history, post-humanism and so on.

What is obvious is that the inauguration of the nuclear age in 1945 has added a plausible technological fillip to the imagining of the end. The immense popularisation of science fiction via Hollywood, TV and mass paperback sales indicates that the consciousness of the Cold War and the arms race has suffused popular culture. This is certainly true of films like


47.
Dr Strangelove and Terminator and in avant-garde films like Godard's Weekend and Tarkovsky's Solaris. In the non-narrative arts like art and dance this is perhaps less prevalent (138) but in the narrative arts, such as film which are predetermined towards a temporal ending, millenarian or apocalyptic plots become increasingly central. Fictions of the Second World War by Mailer, Grass, Heller and others are instilled with a sense of doom and mass destruction. The dystopic futures in Ballard, Auster, Vonnegut, Robbe-Grillet and many others similarly imply catastrophe. Perhaps the original postmodern literary apocalypse is prefigured in Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow which after 700 pages of bomb-ravaged London and a European wasteland called the Zone ends with an image of a rocket poised to explode over the theatre in which we, the audience/readers sit. (139)

Here postmodernism's sense of ending has a pessimistic, even despairing tone which contrasts sharply with that other mood of optimism mentioned earlier; that sense of utopia encapsulated in the idea of a change (modernism to postmodernism) for the better. (140) That both moods can be labelled postmodern is an indication of another trait of the contemporary scene. This is its pluralism, its ability to mean many things to many people.

The relationship between postmodernism and pluralism first presents itself as a consciously initiated and designed manoeuvre in reaction against the monoculturalism of male white modernists and the monolithic institutions, practices and beliefs associated with the modernist project. Modernism here stands in for the rest of history, as if it were the culmination or apex of all the values postmodernism seeks to overturn. As a political or ideological tactic it is most often associated with French post-structuralist thinking. Jacques

(138) However artists like Anselm Kiefer and Ron Kitaj often employ images of catastrophe and ruin in their work.


Derrida's creation of terms like "differance", "dissemination" and "supplemantarity" introduce the idea of the plurality of meaning in language. Structuralism's basic premise had been that there was a fixed connection between signifier and signified, a stable and clearly defined structure that they named language. But Derrida argues that this connection is entirely arbitrary. The signified (meaning) is changed by its position in the chain of signifiers (sounds). There are no fixed connections between signifieds and signifiers, hence meaning is endlessly deferred and can never be reliably ascertained. Thus, Derrida's deconstructive strategy of reading traditional philosophic texts from Rousseau to Husserl against themselves, revealing how the assumption that language can be relied upon breaks down when passed through the sieve of the proliferating, endless chain of signifiers.

Derrida's subject is invariably language and philosophy, whereas other writers loosely associated with him under the rubric of post-structuralism direct their energies towards history, politics or sociology. Lyotard proposes the replacement of the old master narratives with micro narratives and strategies for our postmodern age. (141) Foucault called for "mobile arrangements over systems or structures of radical incommensurability", heterarchy over hierarchy. (142) Foucault's theory of history, or as he termed it, an "archeology of knowledge", shuns narrative readings of history and systematic theories like Marxism or Liberalism in favour of multi-perspectivism and dispersion. (143) Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari in Capitalism and Schizophrenia offered a micropolitics of desire, which via the concepts of schizoanalysis and rhizomatics, would abolish unified egos and group identities

(141) As Roland Barthes was doing 10 years before when he argued in "The Death of the Author" that the author and his hypostases - society, history, psyche - were defunct and the reader born. Image, Music, Text trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977).


and affirm reality as "dynamic, heterogeneous and non-dichotomous". As Best and Kellner put it in their book on postmodern theory; "A rhizome method decentres information and divergent acentred systems and language into multiple semiotic dimensions." (144)

As this theory seeped into the Anglo-American world it influenced the new post-Communist movements as theorised in Mouffe and Laclau's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and supposedly practised by movements like the West German Greens and Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition. It was a political practice that replaced one party revolutionary politics and monolithic theory with a politics of many constituencies; ecological, feminist, gay, third world.

There is, however, a second sense of pluralism. One that could be said to arise by accident. Ihab Hassan in an essay entitled "Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective" argues for a critical pluralism which both reflects the radical relativism of postmodernism and seeks to contain it by sketching the ironic indeterminacies of the postmodern condition. Hassan begins by saying that pluralism has in fact become the "irritable condition of postmodern discourse". (145) Hassan's own brand of critical pluralism attempts to define and contain postmodernism by constantly listing its characteristics and definientia in essays that list and catalogue rather than analyse. He repeatedly asserts that these lists are ad hoc and subject to revision. (146)

This hermeneutic nightmare which critics like Hassan gleefully embrace follows the seemingly limitless diversity of postmodern styles, projects, theories and descriptions.

Texts as diverse as *Finnegans Wake, Absalom, Absalom!, Projet pour une revolution a New York, Fiskadoro, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, Oscar and Lucinda* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* have been labelled as postmodernist or proto-postmodernist or partly postmodernist. This example could be multiplied in various ways: into other arts such


(146) *ibid.*, pp.18-23.
as architecture, painting and music, and into the interpretations of these works. For instance, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* could be termed postmodern using different sets of criteria: McHale's ontological definition, Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction, Hassan's indeterminance and perspectivism. Interpretations of postmodernism proliferate, and like the myriads of Biblical commentaries there is an academic industry engaged in the production of the meanings of postmodernism. (147)

The proponents of postmodernism celebrate its diversity arguing that unlike the elite, exclusionary discourse of modernism, the postmodern democratically embraces all styles, agendas and projects in the fields of art, culture, philosophy, criticism and science. But all this plurality creates problems. The traditional hermeneutic reading seeks a properly accurate description only to have meaning escape as postmodernism bursts its boundaries and like Derridean differance endlessly defers a final fixed interpretation. Of course in a postmodern world hermeneutics is no longer useful, outlawed as indicative of modernist elitism and as an attempt to reintroduce the patriachal, colonialist Author/Critic back into (academic) discourse.

The other problem that I see with postmodern pluralism is again one that faces the critic who begins from an hermeneutic stance. In such a world of limitless choice what choices can be made? The very proliferation of versions and interpretations of postmodernism (the references made so far in this chapter barely scratch the surface of the debate) confronts one as a confusing, disorientating and ultimately disabiling phenomenon. One which cannot be fully grasped and explained. As Hal Foster has said: "Pluralism is precisely this state of others among others, and it leads not to a sharpened awareness of difference (social, sexual, artistic, etc) but to a stagnant condition of indiscrimination - not to resistance but to

(147) Which is of course what this present interpretation of postmodernism is complicit with. Thereby becoming part of postmodernism's plurality of meanings.

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This immense plurality of choices is somewhat like Jameson’s concept of the postmodern as a vast informational configuration ultimately impossible to describe, but attempted in postmodern spaces like Portman’s Bonaventure Hotel and in postmodern writing like cyberpunk science fiction. Jameson himself aims to cognitively map this world but as I have suggested earlier his project is inextricably and fatally complicit with the object of his mapping. His writings are postmodern artefacts themselves.

Jameson at least attempts an objective analysis whereas the typical response toward postmodern plurality is a sort of fatalism. There are too many choices, the world is too complex to understand or change. Technology or ideological apparatuses or post-industrial capitalism cannot be defeated or improved and so one can only enjoy oneself whilst the world ends. For the critic wishing to give some account of the world, society, culture or literature the options seem to narrow into unqualified acceptance of postmodernism, as with Hassan or Kroker, or summary dismissal, even denial of its existence as critics like Gerald Graff and Charles Newman end up doing.

Fatalism in the postmodern discourse is revealed in other ways. Witness the technological determinism bordering on nihilism of Baudrillard and his followers. Baudrillard’s political odyssey reflects the trajectory of a whole generation of post-1968 activists and thinkers who, disillusioned by the fate of the radical movements, opt for the little victories and incremental gains of micro politics. These invariably appear as a postmodern version of the old Reformist politics. In a similar vein the announcement of the end of master narratives (or the


Author, or socialism) and the birth of the individual or the small group or mini narratives as the appropriate cultural-political gesture often hides a despair about the strategies and tactics that characterised earlier movements like socialism or the historical avant-garde. (151)

In the sphere of cultural politics Marcuse's pessimistic assertion of the powerfully absorbent nature of affirmative culture (152) often leads to fatalistic conclusions about the effectiveness of any cultural or political act. Nothing can really change or make a difference to the social and cultural status quo. For instance, Andreas Huyssen seems to conclude that the whole of American culture since the 1950s is a commodified and depoliticised version of earlier European radicalism. Postmodernism in the United States was up against a culture industry more powerful and more adept at integrating, diffusing and marketing a critical art movement than it had been in the 1920s when the historical avant-garde was attempting its radical integration of art and life through the techniques of shock and collage. (153) What once shocked audiences now simply entertains people and reaffirms perceptions as Hollywood's adaption of shock effect in films like Jaws and The Exorcist confirms. Other commentators have pointed to the commodification of modernism and the swift and harmless institutionalisation of postmodern literary trends as instances of the all-powerful nature of affirmative society. (154)

Similarly postmodern apocalypticism all too often implies a fatalism, a sense that we are in last times and that alternatives are impossible. I would argue that this is one of the implications of cyberpunk science fiction; but it is also apparent in such exemplary


postmodern writers as Pynchon, Joseph McElroy, Paul Auster and John Barth who produce paranoid fictions. The world is a vast conspiracy and characters (one thinks of Oedipa Maas at the end of *The Crying of Lot 49*) are powerless to act and can only wait or survive. Cinematic narratives espouse similar themes especially in conspiratorial thrillers like *The Parallax View* and *Three Days of the Condor* and science fiction dystopias like *Blade Runner* and *Terminator*. Their heroes escape or triumph yet this is contradicted by the all-powerful configurations of the systems they find themselves in. (155) Todd Gitlin writing on the roots of postmodernist culture cites Raymond Williams' concept of structures of feeling to describe it as a way of apprehending and experiencing the world. A world, he states, "two decades from the hopes and desperate innocence of the 1960s." (156) He sees in its cultural and literary artefacts - Graves' AT&T building, Warhol's Brillo boxes, Burroughs' fiction, Monty Python - a sense of exhaustion and a rejection of history which he terms the "blank stare of postmodernism". He concludes: "Postmodernism is an art of erosion. Make the most of stagnation, it says, and give up gracefully." (157)

(4)

The fatalism of postmodernism, with its associated stance of the impossibility of knowing or describing anything with any degree of absoluteness or verisimilitude and its consequent inability to intervene either in a political or artistic sense is, I would argue, the end point of postmodern ideology. I intend to link this with the conclusions I drew earlier in my

(155) One could argue, as well, that a sense of powerlessness is found in neo-Marxist accounts of postmodernism like those of Harvey and Soja, where the world is convincingly mapped but solutions or alternatives seem less important, as if added as afterthoughts.


(157) ibid., pp.358-360.
discussion of Mandel and Jameson regarding technological determinism and use those arguments to validate my point about the fatalism of postmodernism. Before doing this I want to go into more detail about the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. This, I hope, will lay the basis for my ideological definition of postmodernism by showing its inevitable connection with the political, economic and cultural events of the first half of this century.

As I stated earlier most of the theorists of postmodernism discussed have based their interpretations on the assumption that there has been some sort of change or break. A break between modernism and postmodernism or industrialism and post-industrialism or Marxism and post-Marxism. But is this necessarily true? Another position in the debate holds that postmodernism is simply a continuation of modernism. There is little if any difference between the two. It is a version of this argument that I hope eventually to propose. The argument for continuation like the argument for a break encompasses a wide range of positions.

The earliest version of the argument for continuation and undoubtedly the most common states that postmodernism marks a debasement of modernism; a falling off from the high achievements of modernist art, architecture, literature and so on. Irving Howe in an essay published in 1960 described the fiction published over the last fifteen years as post-modern because, "It tunes the ear to their distinctive failures". The insidious encroachment of a mass society where the population grows passive, indifferent and atomised has resulted in a fiction characterised by "affectless rebellion" and subjects and characters who lack "social definition". (158) Howe was referring to writers like Bellow, Salinger and the Beats, but the general tone of condemnation, linked with a hostile attitude towards the new American post-war mass culture, became characteristic of many of the attacks on contemporary writing, from the Beats to the black humour fiction of the sixties, experimental fiction of the seventies and the new realism of the eighties.

Similar work on the decline of modernism was being done by Harry Levin (159) and Clement Greenberg in the late fifties. Greenberg was especially influential and his essays celebrating the avant-garde as embodied in Abstract Expressionism also constructed a counter movement or rear guard. This was the ersatz culture of kitsch - "the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times". (160) He associated it with the propaganda machines of Fascism and Stalinism and prophesied dire consequences if it were to become the cultural norm and swamp the "only living culture we now have" - the avant-garde. (161) Thirty years later when postmodernism had become part of our cultural vocabulary, Greenberg's notion of the "post-modern" was that it constituted a relaxation of the standards of modernism. A modernism defined as "the continuing endeavour to stem the decline of esthetic standards threatened by the relative democratization of culture under industrialism." (162)

A more contemporary version of this argument is seen in the essays Gerald Graff wrote in the seventies collected in Literature Against Itself. In "The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough" he characterised this myth as a "cant term of our day". (163) Focusing on postmodern literature he defines it as a "movement ... which calls into question the claims of literature and art to truth and human value." (164) He connects this to romanticism's "loss of a significant external reality" which is both a liberation and an imprisonment in solipsism.

(159) Harry Levin, "What was Modernism?" in Refractions (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966 [1960]).
(161) ibid., p.8.
Postmodernism, like romanticism and modernism is a form of organicist art which evokes "a solipsistic universe in which human consciousness cannot transcend its own myths." Art is thus doomed to mean only itself and cannot be an interpretative commentary on the world. (165)

Graff's quarry, like Lukacs' (whom he quotes approvingly) is anti-realism in literature. The modernists are as potentially guilty as their postmodern children. However modernist fiction, "except in a few instances, incorporate[d] within its own structures much of the bourgeois realism ... it was undermining." Whereas postmodernism tends to carry modernism's subjectivization to its limits, "so that we have a consciousness so estranged from subjective reality that it does not even recognise its estrangement as such." (166) Again postmodernism is characterised as being a diminution and a betrayal of the achievements of Anglo-American modernism. (167)

The modernism that Howe, Levin and Graff refer to when they compare it to postmodernism is the modernism produced in Europe and the United States in the first forty years of the century and subsequently feted and canonised after 1945. The great figures whose works are studied in universities and rigorously and closely analysed by the academic community - Joyce, Woolf, Proust, Eliot, Rilke, Faulkner and so on. This modernism is invariably seen as a loose movement of like-minded writers with similar influences, their careers shaped by the similar conditions of war and social dislocation. This "narrative" excludes other writers and artists whose aims and assumptions were very different. Andreas Huyssen has proposed a "Great Divide" in modernism between high art and mass culture, the

(165) ibid., pp.391-398.
former represented by the high modernism of Joyce, Lawrence, etc, and the latter loosely included under the rubric of the "historical avant-garde" which he states; "clearly represented a new stage in the trajectory of the modern." (168) Likewise Charles Russell in his book on the literary avant-garde refers to two "... separate, if historically parallel traditions ..." Both are aesthetic responses to "alienation from the dominant values of modern culture." Modernist writers react in a highly individual way, often with despair. They search for a transcendental solution to the miseries of the quotidian. The avant-garde hope for the progressive union of artist and society and the movements they aligned themselves with aimed to transform society through art. (169) These movements were largely European in origin and included the Dadaists, Surrealists and Futurists.

Huyssen's use of the term "historical avant-garde" derives from Peter Burger's influential book which developed a theory of this avant-garde. (170) Huyssen uses this theory to develop his own thesis which is directed specifically at American postmodernism. It is the "endgame" of the historical avant-garde and not the radical breakthrough it is often claimed to be. Huyssen's version of the continuation argument is that postmodernism continues particular aspects of the modernist avant-garde on the levels of formal experimentalism and the attack on the institutionalised museum or university modernism. (171) But American postmodernism, which he associates with Pop Art and Fiedler and Hassan's literary postmodernism, represents the "fragmentation and decline of the avant-garde as a genuinely critical and adversary culture." (172)

The reason for this failure is that the culture industry of sixties and seventies America is

much more powerful and monolithic than it was in Europe in the 1930s when it was only beginning to exert control and influence. (173) As well there is the very failure of the historical avant-garde itself to sublate art and life and create a genuinely revolutionary aesthetic practice. He draws upon Burger's book here which convincingly describes the inevitable failure of these avant-garde projects. The unique nature of shock means it quickly loses its value to shock audiences and readers into a new consciousness. There is also the danger that it will end up reinforcing existing attitudes rather than challenging them. (174)

For instance, public reactions to Dadaist performances were often more concerned about moral and artistic values being attacked by nihilist (read Bolshevik) forces than with awakened consciousness.

Because of this failure, Burger suggests that the post-avant-garde cannot deny art's autonomous status and "pretend that it has a direct effect". It inevitably ends up institutionalising the "avant-garde as art" and "negates genuinely avant-gardist intentions". This despite the consciousness and intentions of individual neo-avant-garde (postmodern) artists. Their art is autonomous, produced as "work" for museums or public consumption and not to return art to the praxis of life which was the historical avant-garde's original intention. (175)

Russell is more sanguine than Huyssen about the post-avant-garde's ability to transform the world. Nevertheless he sees a diminution of the historical avant-garde's project in contemporary art and literature. He sees postmodernism as possibly a continuation of the "ironic self-consciousness of modernism" or perhaps their "attempt to alter, expand or liberate consciousness from a repressive and exploitative society." (176) He sees "vestiges of an avant-garde spirit" within postmodernism, but it is a tentative and self-critical venture. It

(173) ibid., p.168.  
(174) Burger p.80.  
is aggressively innovative but threatens to undermine any constructive, radical social vision or art. (177) He likens postmodernism to the "negative speed" of Dadaism. This is from Marcel Janko, one of Dada's founders who saw Dada as having a "negative speed", inherent in its "spiritual violence", and a "positive speed", which allows a return to creativity. (178) This negative or nihilistic speed precludes in postmodernism the "forming (of) any alternative systems of value and meaning." (179) His conclusion stated in an earlier essay is similar to Huyssen and Burger's:

Though influenced by the worldwide political unrest of the 1960's, the literature of the past decade has primarily been the expression of a period of retrenchment. The abstract and self-reflexive strategies of both postmodernism and the recent avant-garde signal sharply circumscribed aesthetic visions. Their nearly exclusive focus on the laws of semiotic systems contributes to the avant-garde's retreat from its former behavioral radicalism. (180)

The writers on postmodernism who see it as a continuation of modernism, whether it be from the canonical modernism of Joyce, Eliot and Pound or the historical avant-garde of Dada and Surrealism, are generally unanimous in their conclusion that postmodernism represents a decline in the authority and integrity of the pre-war modernist movements. Arguments to the contrary; that postmodernism continues and improves modernism are rare.

(177) ibid., p.238.  
(178) ibid., p.96.  
(179) ibid., p.247.  
Whilst we have seen earlier, the propagators and defenders of postmodernism claim it as a decisive break from modernism, an entirely new and different literary, artistic, social or political phenomenon.

In this next section I wish to briefly sidetrack in order to sketch a definition of modernism that incorporates the two versions of modernism already discussed. This is necessary because my interpretation of postmodernism is based on the premise that it continues in some crucial ways the project of modernism.

Although the term modernism has not been used to describe and periodise as many disciplines as postmodernism it also has a certain portmanteau meaning. A precise definition would appear impossible, its meaning being contested both whilst the great works of modernism were being produced, and now when they are canonised and available for historic re-examination. A definition that attempts to encompass all possible interpretations would be like Pynchon and McElroy's doomed attempts to incorporate the world into their fictions. However, unlike postmodernism whose history is presumably unfolding before us, modernism is a historically limited and circumscribed phenomenon. One dominant during a certain period, but whose precise historical parameters are open to argument. At its widest, say, between 1880 and 1940 and at its narrowest between 1910 and 1930.

Rather than attempting a definition of modernism that incorporates Zola and Joyce, Manet and Pollock, Haussmann and Mies Van der Rohe, I want to trace the genesis and development of modernism and thus discern a pattern that I believe postmodernism replicates. It seems plausible to trace the antecedents of aesthetic modernism which began

But see Philip Cooke, Back to the Future (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), who argues that postmodernism is modernism continued by other means and acts as an internal critique of modernism. p.x. And see De Villo Sloan, "The Decline of American Postmodernism" SubStance 54 (1987), pp.3ff., who sees modernism as fascist and the early postmodernism of Charles Olsen, Robert Creeley and other poets around the Black Mountain group as truly radical.
perhaps with Baudelaire, back to what Habermas has called the Enlightenment project. The eighteenth century philosophers of the Enlightenment; Condorcet, Voltaire, Diderot and so on, attempted to enrich daily life by freeing science, morality and art from their medieval incarnations and transforming them into methods and institutions that allow us to understand the world rationally and achieve moral progress and even happiness. (182) Habermas calls this an "incomplete project" and champions it against the "neo-conservatives" of postmodernism and post-structuralism. He is more sanguine about its success than his political fathers in the Frankfurt school. For instance, Adorno, who with Horkheimer, concluded that the mass culture industry (the rise of Hollywood and popular culture) spelt the demise of enlightened thought. As Terry Eagleton says, for Adorno after Auschwitz, "All rationality is now instrumental, and simply to think is therefore to violate and victimise ... Emancipatory thought is an enormous irony." (183)

In reaction, or more accurately, compensation Adorno proposed an art of negative dialectics which severely circumscribes the scope and utopianism of the modernist project. His thinking is really an end point and as Habermas has said, "modernity lives on the experience of rebelling against all that is normative." (184) David Harvey develops this idea of rebellion to produce a narrative of modernism that emphasises its dialectic between the transient and contingent and its search for the immutable and eternal. (185) As enacted in Ezra Pound's phrase "Make it New", modernity "... is characterised by a never-ending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself." (186) Harvey points to Nietzsche's attack on Enlightenment reason and morality (the search for order), to propose a philosophic basis for this ceaseless desire to make it new. Underneath the surface of the

(184) Habermas in Foster 1985. p.5.
(185) Harvey p.10. He is quoting Baudelaire.
(186) ibid., p.12.
order of modern life were vital, primitive energies which aesthetic modernism, following Nietzsche's logic, seized upon. As Harvey says, "The only path to affirmation of self was to act, to manifest will, in this maelstrom of destructive creation and creative destruction even if the outcome was bound to be tragic." (187)

The idea of "creative destruction" according to Harvey was to lead to the aestheticisation of politics and the glorification of violence that characterised fascism's utilisation of modernism for its own ends. (188) But before this, one wing of modernism attempted to recreate the eternal by "freezing time and all its fleeting qualities", through the techniques of montage and collage as practised by Eliot, Joyce, Picasso and others. (189) Such a narrative of modernism indicates a possible explanation of the two, seemingly mutually exclusive wings of modernism. The high modernism of Eliot, Yeats and Joyce attempted to "freeze time", stop the ceaseless innovations which threatened to swallow them and their socio-cultural world. Whereas the historical avant-garde, inspired by Communism and the example of 1917, sought to follow the logic of change to its conclusion, which they hoped would be the utopian synthesis of art and social life.

A recent, widely discussed version of the argument for two distinct strands of modernism is found in Marshall Berman's All That is Solid Melts into Air. However, he argues that the progressive modernists were such nineteenth century figures as Marx, Goethe, Baudelaire and Pushkin. Whilst in the twentieth century there has been a "dismal flattening out of social thought" expressed either as uncritical modernalotry (Marinetti, Le Corbusier, Marshall McLuhan) or as cultural despair (Eliot, Pound, Foucault, Marcuse). (190)

What strikes one about Berman's thesis is its widening of the chronological parameters of modernism to include Goethe, Pushkin and others usually associated with the Romantic

(187) ibid., p.16.  
(188) ibid., pp.33-35.  
(189) ibid., p.21.  
movement. As Perry Anderson points out, the modernist movement that is usually associated with the early twentieth century is curiously left out of Berman's account. Berman condemns that particular modernism as a decline in art and thought that his work wishes to reverse by returning to the utopian, revolutionary modernism of Marx and Goethe. (191) Anderson proposes a definition of modernism as antidote to Berman, which he calls a "conjunctural explanation." Modernism is best understood "as a cultural force field 'triangulated' by three decisive co-ordinates." (192) These three co-ordinates are firstly a "formalised academicism" in the arts derived from the "cultural tone" of the old aristocratic, land-owning classes whose influence persisted into the twentieth century. Secondly, the second industrial revolution (here he echoes Mandel) with the emergence of key technologies like the radio, telephone and automobile. And thirdly, the "imaginative proximity of social revolution" which induced either utopian hopes or dystopian apprehensions.

The modernists thus reacted against these cultural vestiges of the ancien regime whilst partly articulating their work within its framework. (193) At the same time they were attracted to this new machine age and, in its radical wing, were partaking of the apocalypticism engendered by the revolutions and near revolutions sweeping Europe. (194) Anderson goes on to account for the end of modernism after the Second World War. The post-1945 period saw the universalisation of bourgeois democracy, the eclipse of revolutionary movements and the realisation that this new technology far from liberating

(192) ibid., p.324.
(193) For instance, Virginia Woolf's verdict on Arnold Bennett as outdated. The modernist attacking the Edwardian who is seen as still too close to the values of Victorian England. This is the essay, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" in The Captain's Deathbed and Other Essays (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950).
mankind could be used to rain bombs down on people. (195)

Heretofore the definitions of modernism I have discussed have been primarily social and political in scope; explanations of how and why modernism emerged in the twentieth century and not descriptions of what actually constitutes a modernist work. Listing the features of modernism has been attempted many times (196) and these cataloguing exercises have often concentrated on one of the wings of modernism to the detriment of the other. An account that acknowledges this and proposes four unifying aspects that most "modernisms" have in common is Eugene Lunn's in Marxism and Modernism. These are: firstly, "Aesthetic Self-consciousness" or self-reflexiveness where attention is drawn to the act of creation or the "materials" that are being worked with. Joyce and Gide in the novel, but also Kandinsky, Picasso and Matisse in painting, Symbolist Poetry, and Pirandello and Brecht in drama. Secondly, "Simultaneity, Juxtaposition, or Montage" where chronological sequence is weakened or jettisoned in favour of a specialised form, which in the novel meant the exploration of psychological, Bergsonian time. Joyce again, Woolf, Proust, Faulkner in the novel, Eisenstein in film, Stravinsky in music, Cubist painting. This is also connected to the idea of a mythological, cyclical time as Eliot and Pound explored in poetry. Thirdly, "Paradox, Ambiguity and Uncertainty", in the face of the decline of religious, social and political certainties, a consequent ironic attitude in content and a form that stressed the ambiguities of multiple, unreliable or contradictory narration. Examples are many of the forementioned writers, as well as Kafka and Beckett and the ironic condemning stance of the

(195) ibid., pp.328-329.

historical avant-garde. Lastly, "Dehumanization, and the demise of the integrated individual", where character and realist narrative disappears in the works of Joyce, Faulkner and others to be replaced by highly subjectivized, atomised voices. Similarly, representation is destroyed in modernist painting, melody in music, personalised ornamentation in architecture. (197)

Other cataloguing definitions of modernism may be equally viable. The point being that modernism cannot ever be adequately described because it is so protean and its terrain so contested. Perry Anderson calls it the "emptiest of all cultural categories ... a portmanteau concept whose only referent is the blank passage of time itself." He goes on to skewer postmodernism with the same barb:

The futility of the term 'modernism' and its attendant ideology, can be seen all too clearly from current attempts to cling to its wreckage and yet swim with the tide still further beyond it, in the coinage 'postmodernism' - one void chasing another, in a serial regression of self-congratulatory chronology. (198)

Postmodernism, as an ideology which ascribes certain values to aesthetic works produced in a given historical period is as empty a project as the Anglo-American institutionalisation and valorization of modernism. Anderson rejects not only the ideology of (post)modernism, but the validity of the concepts themselves for describing "what actually happened".

As John Frow remarks, at the heart of concepts like the modern and modernism is an aporia. To be modern is to be in a "perpetual present", at "the end of history which nevertheless remains subject to history." (199) All that has been before is not modern, it is archaic, traditional and outmoded. The future is only the re-creation of the present moment. So inevitably what is now termed postmodernism is the eternally contemporary, the instant


before the apocalypse and what was once that moment, the modernism of say 1922 and Ulysses, is now outmoded and has become the new tradition.

But this is, of course, an illogical contradiction - how can there be more than one last moment? As Frow concludes about the term postmodernism, "There is ... a real glibness in many of the assumptions of an achieved postmodern condition." (200) He goes on to argue that, "Until our historical space is totally altered, there can be no 'beyond' of modernism which would not thereby be a moment of it." (201) One is tempted to resurrect Marx's joke about history repeated as farce in the reign of Louis Napoleon. (202) Postmodernism, eighty years later, reproduces the same attitudes and strategies that the first time had at least the significance of being new, and reflective of the crisis of early twentieth century capitalism. Or as Gramsci, quoted by Anderson, wrote of his own (modernist) time, "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in the interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears." (203)

What then is the relation of modernism to postmodernism? To answer this I wish to return to Jameson's thesis, discussed earlier, which proposed homologies between the three stages of capitalism and the aesthetic movements of realism, modernism and postmodernism. I have already argued that Jameson's account significantly excludes the political implications of Mandel's theory of late capitalism. Those implications that Mandel saw as the crux of his project; the disclosure of late capitalism's economic and ideological crisis management in the face of its decline.

(200) ibid., p.118. One need only think of Lyotard asserting the end of master narratives when some of the most powerful master narratives - Islam, Western imperialism - continue to change the world.

(201) Frow p.118.


If his account of postmodernism as schizophrenic jouissance in response to multi-national capitalism's vastness elides the real social and political significance of the third technological revolution, he, similarly, avoids any engagement with how modernism actually expresses the second imperial stage of capitalism. He states a number of times in his writings that modernism is a reaction to this second stage; described as "a result of cultural crises" in one essay. (204) Modernism is described in a range of books and essays, particularly in his book on Wyndham Lewis, but never in great detail. More often as an aside to his major argument concerning postmodernism. For example, in an essay on Syberberg's films he contrasts the modernism of Syberberg, where the aesthetic is a substitute for the new "absence of religion", with the postmodern textuality of Godard's films. (205)

For Jameson modernism is purely the cultural exploitation of the new technologies associated with monopoly capitalism; radio, cinema, automobiles, mass reproducibility. It is not seen as a response to the extension of capitalist social relations into the third world, which at that time was most of the world outside Western Europe and the United States. As Mandel says, "... the triumphal march of ascendant capitalism was accompanied by a spreading conviction of the omnipotence and benevolence of competition." (206) Against this the 1917 revolution in Russia dramatically enacted the resistance to this "triumphal ascendancy", which had its cultural expression in the historical avant-garde's struggle to transform life through their art. The flip side of aesthetic modernism was the turning away from the world and the political quietism and even reaction that characterised those modernists all too willing to live with the encroachments of a capitalism they fastidiously labelled mass culture. That Jameson never engages with the political implications of modernism as the expression of capitalist ascendancy and socialist resistance is not

(205) Ibid., p.74. See also Fables of Aggression: The Modernist as Fascist (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979).
(206) Late Capitalism p.500.
surprising in the context of his exclusion of Mandel's central thesis.

I would argue that he refuses to make those connections because he is ultimately complicitous with the subject he is attempting to dissect. That is, his writing is an example of the ideology of the postmodern. Thus his writing incorporates many of the features that I have been describing as typically postmodern. It is fascinated by images as his descriptions of postmodern spaces and the flatness and pastiche of contemporary art demonstrates. It is informed by a sense of an ending as the doomed apocalypticism of his theory of a world impossible to describe, only experience through schizophrenic euphoria, implies. His insistence on cognitive mapping points to his spatialising and relativizing approach to the objects of his study. The way he borrows ideas from many disciplines and uses the interpretative apparatus of post-structuralism, is indicative of his pluralism. In such a pluralist world Jameson eventually has too many choices: his only response is acceptance and fascinated disgust.

As we have already seen Mandel characterises the ideology of late capitalism as a "Belief in the omnipotence of technology." (207) This "myth" is of a “technologically determined, omnipotent economy which can allegedly overcome class antagonisms, ensure uninterrupted economic growth, steadily raise competition and thereby bring forth a ‘pluralistic’ society.” (208) Postmodernism is the ideology of that pluralistic society with its multiplicity of aesthetic choices, political agendas and social configurations. The next inevitable step is the "neo-fatalist ideology of the immutable nature of the late capitalist social order." (209) With so many choices, no choice can be made. Which is exactly what Jameson does confronted by a monolithic world system where there are too many choices. He can only respond by proposing a response that acknowledges its own defeat and complicity, and which floats, signifier like, above the referents of late capitalist social crisis management in a schizophrenic reverie. Jameson is often accused by his postmodern critics of a relentlessly

(207) ibid., p.501.
(208) ibid., p.487.
(209) ibid., p.502.
totalizing tendency, but Jameson's project pays only lip service to the concept of totalizing, it skirts that path and instead chooses yet one more relativist cul-de-sac.

The significance of Jameson's postmodernisation of Mandel's orthodox Marxist description of late capitalism is that it traverses the same path as both modernism and postmodernism. That is, it is an ideological attempt to crisis manage the whole twentieth century long malaise of capitalism, the "Age of Extremes" as Eric Hobsbawm describes it. (210) In his misrecognition of postmodernism Jameson enacts postmodernism's own blindnesses. He follows down the same path of fatalistic apocalypticism which cannot recognise its ideological complicity with the system of world capitalism it is supposedly criticising.

This is the same journey upon which the right wing of modernism trod in the first half of the twentieth century. As I have argued earlier the "make it new" aesthetic revolutions of modernism in a sense stand in for the political revolutions of early twentieth century modernization. They constitute a turning away from the world towards a space where time is frozen. It is, "... a kind of aesthetic withdrawal from reality", where the class struggle is a "repressed and buried reality". (211) Franco Moretti argues along similar lines when he characterises modernist irony as complicit with "indifference to history", part of the great turning away from public life towards the world "of consumption and private life". (212)

Even the historical avant-garde, despite the revolutionary intentions of many of its adherents, was ultimately complicitous with the consumerist society it hoped to subvert.

Peter Burger, sympathetic to those movements, contends that their failure to sublate art and life resulted in the realisation of their intentions in a way that "disvalues" them. Advertising and commodity aesthetics effects a false sublation of art and life where reality becomes the


(211) Callinicos p.49. He cites Franco Moretti. [See note 212].

latest manufactured lifestyle. (213) Jurgen Haberman, more critical of them, argues that their project "did not penetrate in a transforming, illuminating and liberating way into life-forms reified by capitalism, and deformed and distorted by consumerism and bureaucracy, but rather helps to advance these tendencies." (214)

Moretti's essay on modernism touches upon one of the key arguments I am making here. He states that like romanticism, modernism managed to coexist with various political regimes and ideologies and that its "unbelievable range of political choices can be explained only by its basic political indifference." (215) The range of choices open in this postmodern world, like the political choices open to Jameson in his theory of postmodernism, leads to "political indifference". This is exactly how postmodernism continues modernism, in its repetition of the fatalistic stance that the present system confronting it is essentially immutable.

The postmodernists write endlessly about the end of the Enlightenment but in reality they are rewriting and reliving it, in their response to the latest crisis of capitalism. Just as Nietzsche pronounced the end of the Enlightenment and plunged into the abyss of "creative destruction", so Foucault, for example, announces the death of man and all institutions and practices associated with him. Postmodernism is one more desperate response to a system that they see in crisis, but which also dominates existence like the social institutions, described by Marx, which tower over and appear normal to human consciousness. (216)

(213) Burger p.54.
Ihab Hassan's Comparative Table (217) notwithstanding, postmodernism constitutes a stylistic continuation of modernism which reflects this ideological continuum. A detailed analysis of their stylistic similarities is not my intent here. What does seem to be clear is that many of the attributes of modernism described by Lunn (see pp.65-66), are also characteristic of postmodernism; aesthetic self-consciousness, montage, narrative ambiguity and uncertainty, the dehumanisation of the individual. Both are essentially anti-realist, opposed to chrono(logical) narrative and relentlessly experimental. An argument could be mounted that certain strands of postmodernism explore neglected avenues of modernism. One thinks of magic realism's incorporation of the uncanny into the fragmented modernist universe.

There is also a difference in subject matter. Modernism spurned mention of the public sphere and its new technologies, preferring to examine the tortured private responses of the individual to these new horrors. For example, Prufrock, Stephen Dedalus and Quentin Compson. Postmodernism accepts that we are in a consumerist, public world and incorporates the language, strategies and even self-promotion of the new technologies of TV, advertising and computers. J.G. Ballard's career illustrates this. His preoccupation with all the new post-war technologies in novels like Crash and High Rise is summed up by his vision of nuclear apocalypse in Empire of the Sun.

At the same time postmodernist fiction is less ambitious, the short story, as in Donald Barthelme, displacing the heroic modernist attempts to write the world in Joyce, Dos Passos and others. True, there are postmodern mega-novels, like those of Pynchon, McElroy and Barth, but these lack the optimism of those modernist works. Joyce was confident he was recreating Dublin in his novel whilst Pynchon seems to be desperately trying to cram all he knows about this world into his fiction with the realisation that it is all ultimately unrepresentable.

The more public subject matter, the doomed attempts to comprehend the incomprehensible world, the exploration of unexplored avenues, are not so much differences as variations on

(217) Hassan in The Postmodern Turn.
the modernist themes. It is sameness with difference. Postmodernism is thus modernism continued by other means.

Yet I do not think one can discuss the postmodern as pale imitator of the modern. The differences I have been examining - the postmodern's obsession with endings, its embrace of consumer culture and so on - point to a very different historical conjuncture within which to view it than that delineated by Perry Anderson for modernism. My examination of Mandel's description of late capitalism is where this conjuncture can be discerned. Specifically, the rise of a set of aesthetic and cultural practices called postmodernism emerged at the same time as the great post-1945 technological revolution was reaching its apogee. At a time when a period of stagnation, of economic contraction and corresponding tightening of the political and ideological stranglehold was beginning. The differences then, emerge out of the need to cope with the new problems that have arisen in this new conjuncture. The proliferation of pluralities to disguise indecision and indifference, as well as the celebration of uniqueness on one hand, and the gloomy knowledge of imminent end on the other, are postmodernism's responses to this new crisis. As, in a similar way, is the liberationist rhetoric about deconstructing texts and meta-narratives, decolonising cultures and reversing traditional gender, racial and political stereotypes. This is all seem as part of the detotalizing of Western (Enlightenment, bourgeois, white, male) thought.

As Terry Eagleton remarks, "The term "post", if it has any meaning at all, means business as usual, only more so ..." (218) The new "post" system is not loosening up; not becoming easier to shuffle aside, as so much of postmodern rhetoric seems to assert. Rather the State is tightening its hold. As Eagleton says, "It is at just this historical moment, when it is clear that

what we confront is indeed in some sense a 'total system' ... that elements of the political left begin to speak of plurality, multiplicity, schizoid circuits, microstrategies and the rest." (219)

This attitude is, finally, one more strategy of crisis management. In the face of the new technologies used to increase control and surveillance and the massive economic and social chaos created by the long wave of stagnation, postmodernism, or post-Marxism here, propounds the theory that we are on the brink of revolutionising the way people think and act.

Alex Callinicos locates the change in the dominant ideology in the period after 1968, and the failure of the Left to force change in the late sixties. As such it is closely related to my present argument expressing in political and generational terms the economic transformations described by Mandel. Callinicos sees the generation of "postmodernists" - Lyotard, Foucault, Derrida - as symbolic of those who were active or influential in the sixties and who became by the late seventies disillusioned and politically inactive. The despair and disillusion grew out of the belief that the Marxist and liberationist movements passionately adhered to in the sixties, had failed, and a realisation that liberalism would not change anything. It was these feelings that created the mood that ensured the widespread acceptance of postmodern apocalypticism and fatalism. In fact, Callinicos writes, "... belief in a postmodern epoch generally (goes) along with rejection of socialist revolution as either feasible or desirable ..." (220) He labels their new ideology as a "... floating signifier by means of which this intelligentsia has sought to articulate its political disillusionment and its aspiration to a consumption-oriented lifestyle." (221)

Callinicos goes on to dismiss any "referent" for the term and to claim it as purely "the expression of a particular generation's sense of an ending." (222) To leave it at that I would argue, misses the point about postmodernism's variation on the twentieth century old aesthetic and cultural response to capitalism in crisis. Similarly, although I accept Anderson

(219) ibid., p.27. (220) Callinicos p.9.
(221) ibid., pp.170-171. (222) ibid., p.171.
and Frow's arguments that terms like modernism and postmodernism are portmanteau concepts, aporias, that have vague and essentially arbitrary meanings, they do serve a useful purpose. That is, as convenient words that can be used to describe successive moves in the strategy of the dominant ideology.

(5)

The major tasks of this introduction have been to isolate and analyse the features of postmodernism which lend themselves to my characterisation of it not simply in negative terms, but as the cultural expression of the profound historical changes that have swept the world since 1945. This is not a version of Jameson's grand aesthetic analogy: three technological revolutions of capitalism corresponding to three great aesthetic movements. I have been at pains to argue against the third part of this mega-narrative. There has indeed been a third technological revolution which has powered the post-war boom, but it has not been reflected in a totally new cultural consciousness. Rather, postmodernism continues modernism by other means, taking advantage of the new technologies created but also reflecting the changed economic conditions after the end of the sixties. That is, the point at which the world economy changed from a long wave with an undertone of expansion to one with an undertone of stagnation, and which consequently demanded the peculiar sort of ideological crisis management that postmodern apocalypticism, pluralism, false optimism and fatalism provides.

In this last section I wish to discuss some of the possible resistances in the sphere of aesthetics to the hegemonic postmodern ideology. To return to the idea that postmodernity is simply another tactic in the ideological crisis management of the present world system, I want to dwell on the contradictory nature of that phenomenon. Mandel writes against Althusser and those influential theories that ideology is somehow inscribed in our very natures, naturalised within them. Or, as Althusser said, "Ideology represents the imaginary
relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." (223) The unavoidable implication being that there is no escape from this false relationship to reality, that we are caged within ideology, somewhat like Weber's notion that the instrumental rationalisation of modernization has created an "iron cage" that imprisons humanity. (224) Likewise, structuralism conceives of totalities that are unchanging and unchangeable by privileging the synchronic over the diachronic.

In these philosophies the echoes of the "neo-fatalist ideology of ... immutable late capitalism" are evident. But Mandel stresses that the ideology of late capitalism is not all-powerful, it is an ideology in crisis and it expresses a crisis management that has been necessary throughout the century. Postmodernism itself is, like late capitalism, a contradictory expression of its organisation and anarchy. The organisation that has transformed the world into an industrial producer of consumer goods, and which has reached into the traditionally agrarian world, and into the unconscious itself via media technologies, and an anarchy which ensures that only certain privileged sectors of the world benefit and that every forty years or so a boom is followed by a massive bust which impoverishes and dispossesses masses of people who once benefited. I do not wish to argue for any correspondence between the organisation and anarchy of late capitalism and postmodern style and attitude. Rather, that the "cracks in the armour" of the present system must necessarily be reproduced in its culture and aesthetic style, specifically reproduced in the fiction of postmodernism. There is expressed within postmodernist fiction the technological determinism, anti-humanism and pluralistic embracing of all possibilities that distinguishes the culture as a whole, but also some of the forces and attitudes that oppose these dominant strategies.

(224) For a discussion of Weber see Callinicos pp.33ff.
I will present two brief examples to illustrate. The stance of the writer may be one of acceptance of things as they are, even a gleeful wallowing in the new state of things. The fiction of John Barth is an instance of this. His fiction adapts many of the stylistic devices of (post)modernism; hyperreflexivity, loss of the sense of self and subsequent dehumanisation, relentless emphasis on performance and play, anti-narratives that self consciously avoid significance. It does so at the service of a content that erases the contemporary world and history into the fears, pleasures and epiphanies of a bourgeois academic writer. In contrast the work of Thomas Pynchon is illustrative of a critical stance towards the way things are. It certainly reproduces many of the fictional devices of the postmodern and, in fact, invents many of the techniques that come to dominate the postmodern American novel. But it also addresses the contemporary world via the postmodern historical novel. Contemporary issues such as the threat of nuclear destruction, the legacies of imperialism and war, the impact of the mass media and how it distorts truth and the contested meaning of the sixties are woven into the texts. His fiction, especially Gravity's Rainbow, can be interpreted as extremely critical of the abuse of science and technology in the service of imperialist war; whether it be Germany in 1945 or the United States in Vietnam in 1970.

One could multiply the examples of that sort of postmodern work - one that is critical of aspects of the contemporary world. The feminist art of Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger, Godard's cinema of the late sixties, certain Rap and Punk groups, the magic realism of Marquez and Grass, and so on. It has been argued by Hal Foster that there are two types of postmodernism; a neo-conservative and a post-structuralist wing. The first attempts to return to history and the referent but only to erase it with its eclecticism, blank parody and cultural elitism, whilst the latter critiques referentiality and celebrates the "dissolution of the sign and the released play of signifiers." (225) Foster couches his argument in the typically postmodern binaries of referent/signifier, but his conclusions in some respects are similar to

mine. There does seem to be a progressive, radical side to postmodernism which, I would argue, is one of the cracks in the cultural armour of the contemporary system. Where I differ from Foster is that, in a sense, I would wish to turn his formulation upside down.

Post-structuralist postmodernism as practiced, for example, by Barth, Sukenich, Federman and Sontag in literature effaces history just as effectively as the neo-conservative eclectic parody of Venturi, Graves and Schnabel. (226)

I would agree with Foster that what he labels "neo-conservative" postmodernism does constitute an attempt to return to a referent. Unlike Foster, who in a typically postmodern way, seems to think that such a return is impracticable or undesirable, I would argue that the reinscribing of history into the discourse of postmodernism is a truly radical gesture. There are certain writers who I believe are successful in this reinscribing of history into the postmodern moment, Toni Morrison, Ishmael Reed, Salman Rushdie, Gunter Grass and Pat Barker amongst others. The writers I have chosen to investigate are on the whole less successful in this project and are in some ways, as I will argue, as complicitous in the ideology of postmodernism as Jameson in his sphere is. This is where my interest lies, in the ambivalences of a realist fiction that is both oppositional to the dominant and incorporated into its ideology. They are critical of aspects of contemporary society but ultimately complicit with its dominant postmodern ideology. In this they resemble the more explicitly postmodern American writers such as Thomas Pynchon, Robert Coover and William Gaddis who end up replicating many of the ideological illusions and aporias of postmodernism.

What I will argue in the remainder of this thesis is that the three writers I discuss blend attitudes and techniques commonly described as postmodernist with aesthetic practices associated with realism and the modernist avant-garde. This is not the typical gesture of nostalgically remembering a now extinct cultural time in order to consume it as one more undifferentiated, trivialised experience for jaded postmodern palates as Jameson pointedly

(226) ibid., Foster 1984., who seems to be attacking Charles Jencks' influential theory of postmodern "double-coding" here.
shows Warhol and postmodern American cinema doing. (227) It evokes these cultural practices and the historical milieu they exist in, to revitalise them and bring them into our contemporary moment, to make them relevant.

One final point is necessary to attempt a sort of quasi-autobiographical account of why the writers I discuss adopt an oppositional stance. It has been argued by Edward Said and others that the anti-colonial writing of Wole Soyinka, Salman Rushdie and others flows from the post-war decolonising process that seemed to reach its apogee in the sixties with the conflicts in Algeria and Vietnam. (228) It is from that same decade that I believe much of the oppositional energy of Banks, DeLillo and Stone derives.

I am not claiming or attempting to make a direct autobiographical connection between the writers and the events of that decade. (229) Instead, I wish to claim that along with other significant figures in the contemporary world, political and cultural, they derive much of their optimism and oppositional energy from the political events of that decade. Thus they contrast with those thinkers mentioned by Callinicos and Eagleton who, disillusioned, embraced the postmodern with so much glee.

Of course the significance of the sixties is the subject of an ongoing debate which I do not intend to get involved in here. Instead, I would make two points about that decade and its political legacy. Firstly, I would see its significance in purely political terms. The sixties as counterculture, an idea first given prominence by writers like Marcuse and Reich and

(229) But see later chapters on Banks and Stone where it is argued that their personal experiences in the sixties influenced and to an extent inspired their writings.

79.
continued by Lasch and Katsiaficas, (230) is a secondary concern. Sixties counterculture is one of the ingredients that make up our contemporary postmodern moment, but it is what happened on the streets of Paris, Prague and Chicago and in the jungles of Vietnam and elsewhere that is of prime importance. This leads to my second point; most commentators on the 60s see it as an end point, the end of student and left-wing militancy, of monolithic, Stalinist politics, of modernism itself. (231) What follows, in this scenario, is the postmodern.

Following Mandel [and also David Harvey (232)] I would see the events of 1967-73 as a transitional point. That between the long wave of expansion and the long wave of stagnation. The political turmoil of that era, most significantly seen in the various anti-colonial struggles, are the political expression of this economic change. So that, whereas in the sixties those in power were willing to give some leeway to the demands of the students and workers, in the eighties and nineties their response is characterised by Margaret Thatcher's crushing of the 1986 miner's strike and the Reagan and Bush administration's responses to third world opponents like Gaddafi, Noriega and Saddam Hussein.

My argument is that these political events and the economic ones they are closely linked with, are the context of my writers' oppositional stances. I would argue that what they do is unthinkable without the political legacy of the sixties, but that living and working in the [230] See Marcuse, One Dimensional Man and An Essay on Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). Charles Reich, The Greening of America (London: Allen Lane, 1971).


(232) Harvey p.38.
seventies and eighties they responded to that social and cultural epoch, to postmodernism in other words. And the ultimate ambivalence of their work, despite their radical sixties optimism, is the result of their positioning in an age where the sixties, like so many other troublesome relics of the past, has been written out of significant existence.

This introduction has served to place in historical context the close readings of the texts which follow. They will illustrate some of the ways that resistance to late capitalism's ideological strategy of postmodernism are achieved and some of the ways that resistance is neutralised by postmodernism.
2. Russell Banks

(1)

For Russell Banks the act of writing takes place within a particular political and historical context. He places himself in a generation of writers that share a similar political legacy, shaped in the sixties. In 1987, in a symposium on writing, he stated:

... I'm especially interested in the work of novelists and story-writers of my own generation (born between, say, 1935 and 1945) whose historical locus was created by entry into a large social world that happened at the time to be preoccupied with sex, race and violence, and the politics of same. Unpopular themes, maybe, or at least not very chic these days, but it's where we found death and other people, and as a result for many of us who emerged from the cocoon of adolescence in the raging sixties, the terms are an unavoidable vocabulary of self and mortality. Robert Stone, Don DeLillo, John Wideman, Rosellen Brown, Alice Walker and Ishmael Reed, Ray Carver, John Irving, Clarence Major, and maybe a dozen more ...(1)

Banks himself, was a "political activist ... involved in the civil rights movement and the protest against the Vietnam War" (2) and the writers he knows were also involved in "the political events of that time." According to Banks these writers carry with them an "idea of a meaningful event" that "takes place in a public way, that has to do with society in a larger

(2) Trish Reeves, "The Search for Clarity: An Interview with Russell Banks" New Letters 53:3 (Spring 1987), p.47.
way". (3) He thus places himself in a tradition that includes the two writers I will be examining later in this thesis. Writers who make the politics of race, sex and violence their theme.

As someone who positions himself in a generation of political commitment and activism, the criteria Banks uses to clarify his generation from those who came before and after is significantly linked to attitudes towards history:

What I think depresses me sometimes about American writers is our mistrust of history and our unwillingness to discover and apply to our own work and to the world around us any sense of history. Most of us abandon all hope, in a way, of having an historical perspective, so we tend to write about the domestic most deliberately and pointedly. Only a few writers like Ed Doctorow, Robert Stone or one or two others stick right out because they do have a sense of history, a particular view of American history, particularly. They are free, and in fact they are obliged to write about different things, not just the family, not just divorce ... they end up writing ... political fiction ... it's fiction with a sense of history - and a willingness to fight their way through this maze of histories. I mean, America is a country that is always trying to invent itself over again and pretend it has no history, and so our writers tend to go along with that myth. (4)

A particular type of writer and writing is being celebrated here. The historical and political against the domestic and presumably, non-political. The phrase that serves to distinguish the two types of writer in the passage is whether or not they have a "sense of history". It is repeated three times without any attempt to explain what it means. In the light of contemporary attitudes towards history, from Foucault to Hayden White, this phrase may seem naive and even deliberately misleading. On the most basic level, in terms of subject matter, Doctorow writes about the Rosenbergs and the '30s depression whilst writers of

(3) ibid., p.51.  (4) ibid., p.50.
the earlier, 1950s generation, like John Updike, write novels about marriage and divorce in small urban communities. But to have a "sense of history" is also to have a specific attitude toward the significance of the past and its uses for the present. In Banks's fiction, as I will argue, the use made of history is to serve as a framework and explanation for the actions of his contemporary protagonists. Whether that be the fact of colonialism in *The Book of Jamaica* or the genealogical and archetypal family relationships that characterise the working class protagonists of *Affliction*.

Banks is undoubtedly the most autobiographical of the writers I discuss. DeLillo writing about the conspiracies surrounding the Kennedy assassination and Stone about a fictional Central American revolution are creating fictional worlds that they have little obvious personal connection with. Whereas *The Book of Jamaica* in many respects coincides with Banks's own mid-seventies experiences in that country and *Affliction* is centrally about an experience that shaped Banks's own childhood. Reviewers of that later novel were quick to point to the autobiographical elements of Wade Whitehouse's past, his abuse at the hands of his alcoholic father. As Banks told one interviewer, "I was trying to understand my own life, and also my father's and grandfather's. I wanted to know what brought them to be the human beings they were ..." (5)

But Banks's interest in the past and its impact on the present extends to more than the simply autobiographical. In the earlier quoted comments on his generation of writers he can be seen as in the process of establishing his credentials as a leftist writer, one influenced by the politics of sixties protest. He is also engaged in placing himself in a tradition of writing that is critical of the American mainstream. In an introduction to a recently re-published edition of Nelson Algren's *A Walk on the Wildside* Banks writes that he knew Algren in the 1960s and that the older writer had been his mentor. He had shown Algren the manuscript of his first novel and like other young writers had been given "fatherly protection,

encouragement and example". (6) He includes a personal anecdote, recounting how Algren had him drive to a local bar for a beer to escape a writer's conference where he had been surrounded by writers "drinking sherry with their little fingers in the air". (7) Algren is part of a distinctive American literary tradition which is not part of that sherry-drinking coterie.

The introduction goes on to defend and re-appraise *A Walk on the Wildside*:

> It shouldn't surprise me that Nelson Algren, clearly one of the best novelists of his time, is not much read these days. ... for the news that Algren's work brings us is not good news: if the world he describes is at all like our own, then it's not morning in America, and it hasn't been for a long time. In an Algren novel, the only things that trickle down to where most folks live are disdain, violence, and sometimes, on a good day, benign neglect; racism, greed, sadism and misogyny are the warps and woofs of our social fabric ... Of course, he's writing about another time and a faraway place, right? ... what's that got to do with America in the go-go 1980s and '90s? All too much, I'm afraid. Which may be the reason we'd rather leave Algren unread on the shelf, him and the writers he springs from: Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, Frank Norris, Richard Wright, Sherwood Anderson. (8)

Significantly some of the writers mentioned in this passage are writers to whom Banks himself has been compared. According to one critic Banks has "earned a reputation as a contemporary Theodore Dreiser" (9) and Robert Niemi describes Banks's volume of linked short stories, *Trailerpark* as being "strongly reminiscent of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg*.

(7) *ibid.*, p.ix. 
(8) *ibid.*, p.vii.
The literary tradition that Banks throughout his writing career has continually invoked is characterised by its attention to dispossessed, impoverished and discriminated against sections of American society. These writers are quite often critical of American class society and the ethnic and racial divisions that segregate non-whites and immigrants. The ideology of American democracy and free enterprise is denounced as a lie and the political and social alternatives espoused are often socialist as in the case of Sinclair, or influenced by Marxism as in Algren's early work. Banks is making another point here. The time and place is not so far away, America in the 1980s is not dissimilar to America in the 1930s. His ironic use of the phrase "trickle down" recalls the theory, revived in "Reaganomics", that the wealth created by the owners of capital, less burdened by taxes, will trickle down the socio-economic ladder. It doesn't trickle down for Algren's characters and it isn't trickling down, Banks implies, for poor Americans in the 1980s, or his characters confined by economic necessity to trailerparks and dead-end jobs.

Without specifically mentioning his own political and aesthetic concerns, Banks, by invoking this literary tradition and affirming the relevance of its concerns for present-day America, clears a space for himself in the multifarious and expanding landscape of contemporary fiction writers. he is in effect invoking his own muse by placing himself at the end of a line that begins with Dreiser and Norris and which he is celebrating in Algren. The beer Banks has with Algren establishes a personal association which in tum signifies a literary and political association.

If Banks is a radical writer in the tradition of Sinclair and Dreiser he is also very much a contemporary of postmodern attitudes towards history. The contemporary writers he admires have to "fight their way through this maze of histories". Nineteenth century historiographers would have objected to the concept of multiple histories. For them, history was coherent,

Logical and empirically perceivable; and there was only one version of it. The multiple versions of the past implicit in novels like Thomas Pynchon's \textit{V} and Ishmael Reed's \textit{Mumbo Jumbo} are symptomatic of an attitude towards history that Hayden White has typified as central to modernism, and implicitly postmodernism. In "The Burden of History" he claims that modernism's hostility towards history is signified by the ubiquitous modernist tactic of suggesting the "essential contemporaneity of all significant human experience." (11)

As we will see Banks's fiction whilst exhibiting a "sense of history" similar to earlier radical writers in many respects also partakes of the modernist/postmodernist view of history as multivocal, as a maze of many different histories. That Banks writes political and historical fictions will be one of the burdens of this chapter. Yet there is a tension in his work between realist narrative and a performativity and self-referentiality more reminiscent of anti-realism. Or in other terms, a tension between content; realist political narrative, and form; postmodern metafictional techniques.

In biographical terms, perhaps, a tension between the 1960s and 1970s. As already indicated Banks is very conscious of the oppositional significance of the sixties. It is a decade which for him challenged the entrenched institutions and ideological apparatuses of the State. His first collection of short stories, was published by the Fiction Collective and the first chapter of his 1978 novel, \textit{Hamilton Stark}, originally appeared in an anthology of Fiction Collective material called \textit{Statements 2}. The Fiction Collective was formed in 1974 to allow the publication of non-realist, experimental fiction often ignored by the major publishing houses. The experimental writer, Raymond Federman joined because what motivated its members was an ambition to make "the Fiction Collective a real avant-garde outfit, to publish there as many as possible of \textit{our} kind of fiction." (12) Banks published "experimental fiction" in the company of Federman, Ronald Sukenick and Steve Katz whose


fiction, in essence, tended to banish history and most other subject matter in favour of a rigorously metafictional, anti-realist form. Banks's early fiction, his first two novels and first two short story collections, adopt many of the metafictional and deconstructive methods of the postmodernism of the Fiction Collective writers.

But even in his first collection of stories there are hints of his later interest in the historical and political with the "Che" stories which place a historical figure in a contemporary setting and which one critic praised for the realism of the observation. (13) By his fifth novel, Continental Drift published in 1985, he had largely eschewed the experimental for a style that is essentially realism. This was his breakthrough novel which brought him critical recognition. The critics generally liked its portrayal of its white "blue-collar" protagonist but some had reservations about the novel's knowing and self-conscious narration. Jean Strouse in the New York Times Book Review lavishly praised the novel but asked what was the point of the narrative intrusions which "condescend to Bob and lecture the rest of us?" (14)

I will be addressing Banks's meshing of a realism of content that has seen him compared with Dreiser and a narrative style that has puzzled and alienated his critics in my discussion of Affliction. What is apparent however is that Banks's style has progressed very far from the earlier metafictional jokiness of his first novel, Family Life. It would also seem that he has little interest in his earlier writings and in the only published monograph on Banks's work by Robert Niemi there is hardly any mention of his Fiction Collective period. He told Niemi in an interview that he became "'bored' with formal experimentation" and with proving to yourself "that you're making it up". (15) What was once perceived as a radical gesture, the writing of anti-realist fiction, has now been superseded by an attitude to fiction that could be termed as a return to the referent, a renewed interest in the experiences and vicissitudes of

(15) Niemi p.95.
the dispossessed and the political and historical content of their predicament.

The two novels that will be the focus of my attention in this chapter, The Book of Jamaica and Affliction are texts that enact the tension between political realism and a postmodernism which I have been describing.

The Caribbean, and in particular Jamaica have been a notable geographic motif in much of Banks's work. The story he has told interviewers of his abortive attempt to join the Castro forces in Cuba in 1958 when he was just 18 and running away from home is perhaps an early indication of this region's fascination for him. (16) Certainly his fiction has veered from the cold, wintry isolation of his native New Hampshire to the "other" of the tropical and communitarian Caribbean. In Continental Drift he uses a geographic metaphor to bring those two cultures into violent and tragic collision in a narrative that might be said to embody the postmodern preference for the spatial over the chronological. (17) In The Book of Jamaica he brings the white American to this "new" world. Unlike the protagonist of his later novel, this novel published in 1980, has as its main character a man who bears a resemblance to Banks himself. Banks wrote the novel after living in Jamaica in the mid-seventies for a period and has stated that he "fell in love with the place" and came to be fascinated by ordinary Jamaicans. (18) However, he found he could not "penetrate." "I couldn't eliminate my

(16) Niemi p.4.

(17) For Banks's Caribbean interest see also the short story collection, The New World: Tales (1976) and a recent novel, Rules of the Bone (1995) which returns to the Jamaican setting, but in a decidedly more sentimental style.

white-ness, my American-ness, my middle-class-ness." (19) At one level the novel he wrote out of his experiences in Jamaica could be said to be a meditation on this dilemma, the inability to truly connect with people of another culture, the difficulties the narrator experiences dramatise the difficulties Banks has referred to in fully assimilating into an alien culture.

The Book of Jamaica is an example of a sort of story that could be termed a "traveller's tale". One anonymous reviewer called the novel "a brilliant travel book that's passing itself off as fiction." (20) Traveller's tales are a type of writing characterised by their description of a person's travels and experiences in a strange and foreign land. It has to be strange (or made strange) for the reader and preferably the teller or character as well. It is almost exclusively a European tradition, coeval with the beginnings of European mastery over the rest of the world. Hakluyt's Principal Navigations, Voyages, Tramques and Discoveries of the English Nation and Raleigh's The Discovery of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana are examples from the sixteenth century. In the twentieth century with the discovery and mapping of most of the physical world they remain popular. Articles in magazines and Sunday supplements, travel books, memoirs and biographies of explorers, scientists and colonial administrators, even works of anthropology and socioeconomic analyses of non-Western countries are all part of a vast, eagerly consumed set of literary practices. Banks is conscious of the importance of the genre and has stated that all "good writing is travel writing." (21)

The appeal of this sort of discourse is self-evident. One of "ours" coming into contact with, and befriending, analysing, moralising upon one of "them". The "other" whom we are not and who is distinguished from us by race, culture, location, religion and endless other...

(19) Niemi p.95.
differences. I do not intend here to rehearse the debate over the social and political origins of these attitudes. Rather, I want to argue that attitudes ranging from curiosity to xenophobia are essential elements of these discourses and constitute a large part of their appeal. The traveller may seek to simply inform or to sermonise, patronise or ridicule or they may seek to explore the differences between us and them in order to bring the two cultures closer or to reinforce those differences. This last manoeuvre, I feel, is what most literary texts attempt to do. It is more evident in English fiction than in American because of the legacy of Britain's colonial empire. From the late nineteenth century English novelists, mainly male, have created fictions located in the old British colonies; Conrad, Forster, Graham Greene, George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh and more recently Paul Scott, J.G. Farrell and William Boyd. In these novels the native "other" is either the source of good-natured (?) satire and caricature or the distanced object of the protagonist's personal, liberal-humanist moral dilemmas. On the other hand, American fictions are much less likely to be located outside the United States, or else conform to the Jamesian tradition of exploring the relationship between Europe and America. (22)

The Book of Jamaica would then appear to be out of place in the dominant tradition of the American novel; more a product of a European tradition. The text itself directs our attention to its insertion in this tradition. When the anonymous narrator first arrives in Nyamkopong he is apprehensive. (23) He wishes he were:

... like Gaugin in Tahiti, all awash with open-eyed enthusiasm for the newly revealed alternative to bourgeois France, or Forster in India, skeptical, shrewdly compassionate, confident that what one did not know at the moment was really not worth knowing at the moment, or Dinesen in Africa, tender and secure in

(22) Don DeLillo's The Names which is discussed in a later chapter is a rewriting of the Jamesian novel of the clash of cultures of Europe and America.

(23) We are never told the narrator's name, although he is later nicknamed "Johnny". I refer to him as the narrator throughout.

91.
the tower of her absent self. But I could be none of these people ... (24)

All of these celebrated travellers produced works of art or literature that depicted their contact and interaction with alien cultures. By invoking their names the text places itself in that canon. As does the narrator comparing his visit to the Maroon community in the 1970s with Gaugin in Tahiti in the 1890s or Forster in India in the 1920s. The passage is ironic in a number of ways. As a typically postmodern gesture it recalls "great" works from the past. One thinks of John Fowles rewriting the Victorian novel in The French Lieutenant's Woman or Thomas Pynchon a Jacobean tragedy in The Crying of Lot 49. The intent of these works is not to meticulously recreate an historical genre but to comment ironically on that genre from the standpoint of the contemporary moment.

On the level of the extra-diegetic the text undermines the narrator's statement in two ways. The narrator invests his visit with a sense of journeying to a place untouched by Western society by implicitly comparing it to contacts with non-Western societies that occurred a century before and which, at least in an aesthetic and cultural sense, were uncharted. But Jamaica in the 1970s is not Tahiti in the 1890s, and as the narrative unfolds we see that the Maroons are assimilated into the larger Jamaican society and the world system. In this there is an irony at a deeper ideological level of meaning; one not readily recognisable at the level of narration. The narrator wishes he were these figures from the past who had heroically wrested a meaning and a polished and finished work of art from the raw experience of a contact with an alien culture. They are described in language that borders on adulation. Gaugin is "open-eyed", "enthusiastic", Forster, "shrewdly compassionate and confident", Dinesen, "tender and secure". The narrator is seemingly unaffected by the political and critical backlash against Western representations of non-Western societies in literature and art that has seen these sort of works accused of cultural imperialism in the last thirty years. The narrator feels at home with, indeed, endorses a tradition that is now often seen as

moribund and culturally racist. As I will argue in greater detail later, the narrator's ideology, which is the ideology of a specific class and political position in American society, is being criticised. The final irony is one that unfolds as the text is read. Despite his growing identification with and sympathy towards the Maroons the narrator is unable to bridge the gap between the two cultures and remains an outsider. He cannot and does not escape his cultural prejudices despite his sympathetic liberal ideology. Prejudices that are ironically foregrounded in his desire to be like Gaugin, Forster and Dinesen.

I would argue, therefore, that this passage points two ways, which map the two complementary projects of the text's use of the traveller's tale. In its self-conscious insertion into this genre and its strategy of stressing the fictionality of the narrator's "passage" into his own "heart of darkness" it can be read as a metafictional commentary on traveller's tales and as a postmodern meditation on the traditional themes of the clash between us and them, the journey into an alien interior and the Forsterian axiom of "only connect". Other readers of the novel have also pointed to the element of the travel tale and commented on its digressive "travelogue" style; Robert Niemi, for instance, called it "leisurely paced, almost desultory." (25) In these critical views of the novel the travel genre is simply one more of the elements of the novel that work towards telling the narrator's individual tale of his journey to self knowledge. There is no attempt to engage with the metafictional elements at work in the novel.

At the same time the novel is grounded in contemporary history; the social and cultural history of Jamaica that has shaped its contemporary situation. This grounding in the real history of real people, I would argue, is part of the text's political project. The depiction and exposure of the colonial nature of the relationship between the narrator and the Maroons and ultimately, Jamaica and the United States. That these two "projects" are complementary, unable to be separated, is the burden of my reading of the text.

The novel is sent in the 1970s, as the references to Michael Manley, who was Prime

(25) Niemi p.96.
Minister from 1972 to 1980, indicate. Manley was the son of Norman Manley, one of the founders of the People's National Party in 1938. It was formed in the midst of a bitter general strike which was one of the decisive factors in creating the political movement towards independence, achieved in 1962. The PNP was modelled on the British Labour Party and in 1939 declared itself a socialist party. Throughout most of its subsequent history it had the support of most of those opposed to British rule but was willing to accommodate itself to foreign capital. With the 1972 electoral victory and the general trend in third world countries of resistance towards Western rule it shifted its political base and priorities. It gained votes from the working class, traditionally tied to the right wing trade unions and by 1974 had shifted to become what Michael Kaufman has called "an ideologically left-of-centre, social democratic party". (26) He goes on to say that its eight years in office were a "genuine attempt at profound social reform." (27) From the beginning the PNP faced enormous difficulties in implementing its reform programme. Kaufman lists these as the fundamental structural roadblocks that accompany any country's "insertion into the world economy", along with conjunctural political and economic problems which ranged from the recession that swept the world in the mid seventies to the growing political opposition of the Jamaica Labour Party. (28) Opposition which sparked killings, riots and a general atmosphere of chaos. Corresponding to these internal difficulties was the opposition towards these reforms and undermining of the government initiated by the International Monetary Fund and the Carter Administration.

The novel's description of the poverty of the Jamaicans, interspersed as it often is with idealised descriptions of the culture and particularly the music of the people, emphasises the chaos and suffering of the country in the seventies. Darryl Pinckney has commented that the


(27) *ibid.*, p.2. 

(28) *ibid.*, p.3.
novel presents a bleak picture of the current situation. (29) The insertion of the Rastafarian element into the text in the narrator's friend Terron and various other minor characters is a sort of metonymic reference to the historical significance of Rastafarianism itself. It is a religion that has been described as millenarian and has flourished in times of political and economic upheaval as experienced in Jamaica in the seventies. (30) The Rastas in the novel represent one of the principal points of resistance to the police brutality and destruction that Colonel Phelps accommodates and as such are a narrative element that alerts the reader to the chaos of the world that the narrator is experiencing. The poverty in which most black Jamaicans live is not dwelled upon in the novel but is almost like a "given", something that just is. This is illustrated when the narrator wonders to his wife how their housekeeper can support five children earning fifty cents a hour.(p.78) As a depiction of a post-colonial society it can be contrasted to the work of V.S. Naipaul which also concerns itself with the chaos and violence that followed decolonisation. But novels like Guerillas and A Bend in the River are less concerned with the sufferings of the common people than with constructing a critique of the revolutionary forces that supposedly led to the chaos.

This economic and social setting and its historical context is not merely background colour for the novel. In a sense the narrative hinges on a transaction between individuals, the narrator and the Churches, that is only understandable in the context of Jamaica's deteriorating social and political climate. When the narrator returns to Jamaica, bringing his wife and intending to stay for a long period whilst he works on his book, he is doing so because of an attractive deal he has negotiated with the Churches. A deal made possible because of the "flight of capital" from Jamaica. The rich white population attempting to liquify as much of their property as they can to take with them when they flee the "socialist"

The house he rents from the Churches is the result of a deal made in the United States where the rent cheques go directly from the narrator's bank to Preston Churches' son's bank in Canada and in return the rent is cut in half. The narrator feels that, "Naturally, his cutting the rent in half was something of an aid to my not seeing anything wrong or unusual. I merely felt lucky. Its amazing, I thought, how lucky I am."(p.70) This financial windfall enables him to ignore the political meaning of the deal. As he says:

I did not understand or attribute any meaning to this departure for Canada, because I did not then understand or attribute any meaning to the flight of capital and capitalists from a country whose government had determined to eliminate, even by gradual and democratic procedures, capital and capitalists. Nor did I understand or attribute meaning to the flight of white people from a black country that had always been black but had only recently come to be governed by people who were black.(pp.69-70)

Through his ignorance and the deal he agrees to because it is convenient and lucrative he becomes a participant in an economic process that historically helps to cripple developing countries and increase their national debts.

The text's strategy, however, is to establish the narrator's difference from the clique of Jamaican whites that includes the elder Churches and his friend Upton West. The hostility of these people towards the Manley government is explicit. Abbie Church spits and says, "'It's all that goddamned Michael Manley's fault!'"(pp.71-72) At a dinner party they talk of coming racial war and the "...charismatic, self-proclaimed 'socialist' leader who was frighteningly popular with the illiterate masses."(p.76) If a black man is rude to them they smuggle another thousand dollars to Miami that afternoon.(pp.76-77) And the solution according to one guest at the party, "...an elegantly dressed and manicured physician" is "forced sterilisation ... a kind of genocide."(p.77)

The narrator's attitudes towards black-white relations and Jamaica's crisis gradually change. Whereas at first he was willing to ignore the consequences of his rental deal, at the
end he will have no part of the Churches' second offer. It is his growing comprehension of
the true nature of Jamaica's political and social conditions that alters his moral stance
towards property deals. After he realises what Caroline's income means in comparison with
his fellow whites; that he is, in a sense, exploiting her, he muses, "Insights like this were only
glimpses, however, glimpses that only now and then filtered through the fog of my greedy
ignorance."(p.78) So that at the end of the novel he has repudiated the deal:

I'm not going to help "take care" of the Churches, no matter how much it
benefits me in your upcoming new version of the old Jamaica ... it may take
ten or even twenty years for the human suffering to get so bad that this chaos,
as you call it, blows over and Jamaica becomes a seller's market again.
(pp.280-281)

With all the knowledge he now has of the true nexus between his shared colonial privilege
and the plight of the people he now feels great solidarity with he must withdraw from that
corrupt transaction.

This part of the novel is in the first part of the second section of the novel but
chronologically comes at the beginning when the narrator first arrives in Jamaica. His
realisation of the perfidious role of white Americans in the Jamaican economy is part of his
journey to self-knowledge that many critics believe is the novel's central subject matter. He is
"politically and morally awakened" by his experiences according to Robert Niemi and Darryl
Pinckney similarly sees his immersion in the culture as being part of a deepening
understanding of his role as outsider in the society.(31) One critic even goes so far as to
assert that the novel is about "a quest for the author's identity." (32) This is essentially true
and the narrator does undergo a set of experiences that educate him not only about
colonialism and racism but about the difficulty of real assimilation. As Banks has asserted,
"One of the themes in [the novel is] ... you can't escape your skin color in a racialised society,

(31) Niemi p.105, and Pinckney p.35.
(32) Current Biography Yearbook p.46.
even if you're white." (33) He has spoken of travel writing being not only about spatial journeys but about "a journey inward and across time." (34) This tension between the spatial and the chronological which Banks has described as a dichotomy between the Melvillean journey and the Hawthornean journey (35) enacts the tension I have mentioned in Banks's own fiction between the temporal and psychological concerns of realism and the spatial and regional concerns of postmodernism which I have earlier characterised as an attempt to map the new post-industrial world. (36)

What I want to emphasise here is not so much the process of this journey but the formal structure upon which Banks bases this journey. I mean by this that the novel is specifically a geographic metaphor which dramatises in its physical journeys the spiritual and political odyssey that the narrator undergoes, the trips back and forth between the United States and Jamaica which are elaborated in the text by various scenes in airports and the journeys undertaken within Jamaica. Particularly in the description of the trip to take the Gordon Hall Maroons to Nyamkopong which in retrospect we realise signals the beginning of the end of the narrator's sojourn in the Maroon paradise.

These can all be described metaphorically as journeys between black and white. This point is enacted not only within plot elements such as the narrator's disillusion with his racist white countrymen but in the text's constant dwelling on difference, centrally the difference between black and white. It is a theme that dominates the novel and it is first established in the first person narration of the Captain Blood section. The narrator's description of Terron very early in the novel introduces this theme. His voice is a "resonating baritone" with a "remarkable beauty" and it is contrasted to the narrator's own tinny voice which sounds like the "random banging of oilcans." Similarly Terron's language is a rich and exotic blend of "Jamaican English, country patois and Rastafarian neologism" whereas the narrator's language is "flat and uninteresting." (p.4) This is illustrated throughout the novel in Terron's

(33) Niemi p.105.
(34) "Itchy Feet and Pencils" p.1.
(35) ibid., p.1.
(36) See Chapter One pp. 41-43.

98.
speech which is filled with references to "I and I" and other terms that would not have been part of a white man's vocabulary in the eighties and which is characterised as a speaking in images that would be destroyed in translation.(p.17) In contrast when we are finally given the narrator's direct speech in sections 3 and 4 his language is circumscribed and passionless; when his first enthusiasm for Jamaica has turned to mistrust and bitterness.

Their political and spiritual outlooks are similarly contrasted, Terron's is visionary and apocalyptic with its references to "Prophecy" overcoming "Babylon" whilst the narrator's is a mixture of liberalism and cynical passivity. Terron sees the corruption of the current government as evidence of the "fire to come" whilst the narrator sees it as "another depressing episode in the history of the New World."(p.5) He describes their approaches to reality as being so different that we were "utterly opaque surfaces."(p.5) Later he again compares himself with Terron in a series of opposites, black-white, Jamaican-foreigner, Rastafarian-skeptic, Maroon-descendant of their historical enemy.(p.14)

This is how in fact the text operates, creating a series of opposites. For instance, the text sets up oppositions between winter and summer, coast and inland, town and forest, Maroon and Jamaican, appeaser and rebel, white and black. These opposites work towards the reinforcing of the central philosophic difference between the narrator, with his civilized, Western values and belief system, and the mystical and "primitive" culture of Terron. It is expressed in terms of optimism and pessimism:

There was no room in my culture for the kind of optimism that preserved them in theirs, and there seemed to be no room in their culture for the kind of rigor and thoroughness, the insistence on symmetry, that I believed preserved me in mine.(p.148)

It could be argued that the narrator's insistence on difference involves a process of stereotyping that the text itself participates in. By setting up this dichotomy between the free and easy-going blacks and the pessimistic and narrowly regimented American academic the text is enacting the sort of racist world-view that the Wests and Churches ascribe to. In
refusing the easy liberalism of asserting an essential likeness, the stressing of difference leads to the simplistic identification of race with its defining characteristics; music loving and ganga smoking Jamaicans and the American who cannot escape his Hawthornean Puritan heritage.

The philosophic difference between black and white is, in fact, inscribed in the narrative itself, in what Robert Niemi has described as the eschewing of "conventionally linear plot construction" and a "discursive" method foreshadowed in the novel's epigraph from Octavio Paz. (37) Paz contrasts Western causality where "cause produces an effect" with Meso-American "Analogy or correspondence" which is "close and cyclical: the phenomena evolve and are repeated as in a play of mirrors." Certainly Banks proceeds through the use of asides and digressions that are sometimes incongruous and even unnecessary such as his aside on Jamaican musical taste.(p.84) Similarly most of the Captain Blood section is superfluous to the main narrative and could be seen as an awkward insertion. But as Niemi argues the story is moved forward by "reiterative analogy" which is better suited to an island nation than the "causal dynamics" that are better suited to the "landscapes of modern industrial states." (38)

Paz's epigraph refers to the ceaselessly changing images of this method and the quotation ends with the assertion that, "The key expressions of change are, as in poetry, metamorphosis and mask." This points to another aspect of Banks's "Meso-American" philosophic style that Niemi fails to mention. There is metamorphosis in the changes that occur to the narrator and other characters throughout the novel, but there is also the use of mask as a motif. For instance, the mask of cultured tolerance that West and the Churches adopt and Colonel Phelps's use of very different approaches to the Gordon Hall Maroons and then, in the next instant, to the local police. But there is also the central significance of the mask that Mann wears. He is the passionate preserver of the Maroon heritage, as I will discuss later, and the genial friend and host to the narrator. However, when the narrator returns to Nyamkopong

when everything begins to turn sour, Mann has changed. He now has Phelps's job and he is
distant and unfriendly towards the narrator. There are rumours that he may have been
involved in Phelps's death and his daughters have arrived to add an element of greed and
opportunism to the situation. If Mann's earlier demeanour had been a mask then many of the
assumptions that the narrator had made about the legitimacy and rightness of his cause may
be questioned. It could be argued that Mann's character does not change, the narrator's
perceptions of him change. Whatever way this is looked at it acts as a sort of metatextual
parallel to the experiences of the narrator. Both reader and protagonist undergo a shock to
their perceptions that challenges assumptions they have made about the Maroons and Mann
in particular. The use of masks in the novel is part of its strategy of never allowing the reader
to make the easy assumptions that certain sorts of realist writing invite.

I will elaborate on other aspects of this strategy later in my discussion. What I intend to
examine now is the narrator's growing sympathy with Jamaica and the Maroons, which is the
obverse side of his estrangement from his fellow whites. A sympathetic education that is, in
a sense, reversed by his later experiences which could be said to be dramatised in Mann's
change of attitude towards him. The Maroons are first introduced as objects of
anthropological interest. He intends to interview them, "observing their conventions,
recording their talk, learning the names for the things they lived among, trying to understand
how they perceived themselves". (pp.13-14) This creates the expectation in the reader that the
narrator is some sort of field researcher or anthropologist and we are surprised to learn later
that he is an aspiring novelist. But this anthropological impulse is rapidly overtaken by
another sort of desire. He plans to return to Jamaica, "my purpose this time would be to
establish, in place of a point of view, a vision." (p.25) His purpose is more than scientific, it is
also spiritual, to experience them as something alternate to Western rationalism.

His motives are typical of what could be termed the late twentieth century version of
colonialism. He no longer wants to exploit the native "other" or convert them to his own
image, he now wants to understand them or even become one of them. But this is fraught
with danger and most reviewers of the novel failed to see that from the beginning Banks is setting up his protagonist for a reversal because the basis of his motives, whatever the sympathy he feels for the Jamaicans, is simply another version of the colonialising impulse. Reviewers have instead commented on just how sympathetic the text is to aspects of Jamaican life from music to politics. For Darryl Pinckney he becomes "immersed in the rhythm of life around him." (39)

What the narrator finds when he does experience the Maroons first hand is a dichotomy in their culture between those who compromise and those who resist. This has historical origins which are central to our understanding of the Maroons. It comes to have a metonymic significance because what we see is a contradiction played out in the rivalry between Phelps and Mann and in their differing interpretations of the 1738 treaty. This was the treaty signed with the British after the Maroons' partially successful rebellion. It is the central fact of their history and the reason for their uniqueness and sense of superiority over other Jamaicans.

When the narrator first arrives in Nyamkopong he is instantly drawn to Mann but distrusts Colonel Phelps and finds his manner irritating. (p.92) Although he does not specify exactly what that "manner" is, it is obviously one of hypocrisy and indifference. Phelps has interpreted the treaty so that a compromise between his community's autonomy and police greed and corruption could be worked out. The Colonel and his family prosper and the fiction of Maroon autonomy is maintained. Although in the realpolitik attitude of the novel it ultimately turns out that the alternative in Mann's leadership does not guarantee autonomy or respite from police oppression.

Phelps and Mann's different interpretations of the treaty stand as pointers to their opposing attitudes towards the world - one a pragmatic compromiser, a Christian, the other seemingly a visionary extremist, an obeah man. Phelps wants to let the treaty be taken to Kingston to be copied because the Government is keen to use the symbolic value of the treaty for its own

(39) Pinckney p.35.
use. (p.137) Phelps' party argues that unless the Government sees the treaty they will not believe it exists and therefore they (the Maroons) would not receive the "honors and privileges due to them." (p.149) Mann's party argues that once the treaty is let go it will be destroyed and their privileges lost. They would become like all other Jamaicans, "controlled by the outside police." (p.149) Mann's interpretation of the treaty is that it is still valid, still legitimate. He carries it with him everywhere and taps it for emphasis. It is a living document and if it is destroyed, he says "... the heart of Jamaica will cease to beat." (pp.149-150)

The split between Mann and Phelps is placed in an historical context and is described in terms of the 1738 treaty:

Half the Maroons believed that their relations with the government of Jamaica ... were defined by the treaty of 1738-39; the other half believed strictly in power and hoped mainly to sustain their present untaxed relation to the government and were willing to do just about anything the government asked in return. (p.121)

Further research has acquainted the narrator with the second Maroon war of 1795-1796 which was fought over British violations of the treaty. The Maroons of St James had been outraged and had fought whilst their brothers in Nyamkopong had refused to join, remaining neutral. He interprets this divergence of tactics as division and "lack of unity". (p.124) A clash between those who saw themselves as a separate polity and those who wished to accommodate and assimilate, between those who thought of themselves as Africans and those who thought of themselves as ex-slaves, between obeah and Christianity.

For American readers the parallels are obvious in Afro-American history. The historical split between the assimilationists like Booker T. Washington and the separatists like W.E.B. Du Bois. In more contemporary terms the split between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. The text thus invests this seemingly petty quarrel between two old men over a treaty that is of little consequence to the rest of Jamaica with a historical resonance and significance.

As Robert Niemi points out the uneasy tension between the two opposing positions has
begun to disintegrate with the request that the treaty go to Kingston to be copied. (40) The narrator has arrived in Nyamkopong at a point of historical crisis and he will be witness to an historical event that has been played out throughout the world, the point at which the historical compromise between invader and the invaded fails because the competing tensions between the interlopers and those willing to hold out by giving up some of their freedom can no longer be contained.

The historical split between the two Maroon towns in 1795 is paralleled in the novel's present by the difference between the Nyamkopong and Gordon Hall communities. It is when he and Terron first visit Gordon Hall that the narrator undergoes what Niemi calls, "the final stage in the narrator's metamorphosis, from 'tourist' to committed partisan." (41) This is true insofar as it goes, but as I will argue later this is by no means the final stage in the psychological journey. The difference between the two communities is established immediately by the fact that the Gordon Hall Maroons do not believe that Terron is a Maroon because he cannot name all the 36 herbs. (p.183) Where Colonel Phelps is pragmatic and corrupt Colonel Bowra is blunt and uncompromising. Phelps is a Presbyterian, Bowra a practitioner of obeah. Gordon Hall is like the Nyamkopong of a century ago, "... independent, suspicious, scornful and proud."(p.182) One of the central ironies of the novel is that the narrator sees the split in the consciousness of the Maroons as enacted between Phelps and Mann when the split is actually between Nyamkopong represented by those like Phelps and Mann who wear masks of one sort or another and Bowra who represents the real African, primitive side of the Maroon consciousness.

The two communities can be seen as distinct islands within Jamaica, which is itself, of course, an island. And as we have seen it is surrounded by the larger entities of the United States and the IMF. This could be visualised as a series of Chinese boxes, one enclosed within the other and the text maps these spatialised relations in human terms. That is, the relations between Jamaica and the world and between the Maroons and the rest of Jamaican

(40) Niemi p.102.  
(41) ibid., p.102.
society, and in a wider ambit, the relationship between blacks and whites.

The text adopts a process of naming and describing through the use of historical parallels.

(42) As the narrator first travels into the interior towards Nyamkopong he sees the strange black faces watching his car and is scared. It is a fear, he says, of a people whose ancestors had "fought generations of a just war against my ancestors." (p.88) This is a political fear, not just a racial one. He imaginatively projects this situation on to Vietnam, two hundred years in the future where an American traveller may feel the same fear watching the face of a man in a paddy-field. (p.88) Although the black faces may not have been Maroon, the passage's geographic and textual closeness to Nyamkopong links the oppressed Maroons with the recently oppressed Vietnamese. What the United States did to the Vietnamese in that war is linked to what the British once did to these ex-slaves. A few pages later the Nyamkopong Maroons are described as living on what amounts to a "government reservation." (p.91)

Upton had earlier described their situation as being like "certain American Indian tribes". (p.72) And later during his researches the narrator learns that the defeated St James Maroons in 1796 had been repatriated to Sierra Leone. He concludes that this is "... an old British and, recalling the fate of the Cherokee Nation, American technique, and it usually works." (p.120) (43) Similarly, although not specifically referred to in the text, the semi-autonomous Maroon communities and Mann's assertion that the Maroons should remain separate and pure, reminds the reader of the Jewish ghettos of Europe and the belief of many Jews that they should remain separate. These beliefs, which result from oppression and racial discrimination are paralleled in Rastafarian theology, which consciously models itself on the situation of the dispossessed Jews.

As a counterpoint to these analogies the communal life of the Maroons is described in ideal

(42) See also the naming of characters - Terron/earth, Mann/man. Their link to the land and to their fellow men is signified.

terms and implicitly contrasted with the more "civilized" life of the rest of Jamaican society. The narrator lives in Nyamkopong for a few weeks and settles into the routine of the community's day to day existence. During his brief sojourn the Maroon's subsistence lifestyle is transformed into a sort of paradise. Transporting the sick and aged in his car for free and then splashing in a waterhole with his Rasta friends and the local youth helps to create an image of Nyamkopong as care-free and close to nature. The language becomes reminiscent of ideal descriptions of island paradises:

> In the distance the minty green plain quickly lifted to the hills around Whitehall
> ... where the sun was setting, slashing the darkening sky with orange and lavender streaks, purpling the trees and macca bushes that covered the slopes
> ... we stood on the banks of the river, naked, cooled, drying our bodies with scraps of cloth.(p.145)

Against the Anglo-Saxon rigour, thoroughness and symmetry of the narrator's Western, rationalised, capitalist culture is set the Maroons' communal existence and their escape from order and control into a sort of blissful chaos. Reading this section, with its idealised descriptions, alarm bells start to go off. The Maroons are being romanticised in a way that itself has become a Western cultural tradition, Gaugin's Tahitians, Cooper's Mohicans, Melville's South Sea islanders are instances, nature and those non-Western peoples who inhabit that natural world are inscribed as primitive but uncorrupted and ideal.

The suspicion aroused by the narrator's idealised interaction with the community are ultimately relevant to my argument about just what his identification with the Maroons means. Even before he first visits Nyamkopong his attitude towards Jamaica is changing. "Jamaica, which in the beginning may have been for me no more than an image off a travel poster, was now becoming an idea."(p.79) As he approaches Nyamkopong, through Cockpit country, he feels that, "The tourist in me took another step backward, and the traveller came forward one."(p.85) But when he first arrives in Nyamkopong he feels inadequate, he is a "...white American... blind, and lost" and he is afraid the way Gaugin, Forster and Dinesen were never afraid.(p.91) Only when he meets and befriends Mann and Terron is he drawn
into the conviviality and casual anarchy of Maroon life and begins to be intrigued by their history.

It is at the festival to celebrate the Maroon rebel leader, Cudjoe, that he first begins to identify with their beliefs. He observes the dancers and Mann dancing at the centre, "bobbing and moving in energetic, perfect time to the drums." (p. 115) He is literally (and metaphorically) drawn into the circle of dancers. "I gradually found myself being pulled into the huge, slowly rotating crowd of dancers." (p. 116) Mann is central; smiling with a book in his hand, dancing in place, "... watching us, watch him, as if the whole thing were his gift to us and his whole pleasure was the pleasure we took from him." (p. 116) He is now part of the "we" of the dancers, he has merged into the whole. And it seems almost as if the narrator and Mann are merging into one as the mass revolves around the centre and the dancer's pleasure becomes and is drawn from Mann's pleasure.

The narrator has a similar experience when he visits the Peace Cave which is described in terms of an epiphany or a religious revelation. His experience undercuts his scientific rationalism expressed the night before, "I do not believe God entered human history ..." (p. 151) He realises:

- It was a world where people die but do not conveniently disappear, so I could not person it with memories or imagined history, Carey Robinson's or my history.
- I had to give it over to the dead, or risk the moral consequences of lying about deep matters. (pp. 162-163)

The narrator's immersion in Maroon culture, his attempt to become a Maroon reaches its apotheosis here. He sheds his Western, rational beliefs and, moved by what he can't explain, he embraces the possibility of prophecy and all the beliefs, like obeah, that flow from that.

This episode can be seen as the high point of his passage. From there the closeness and sympathy is slowly unravelled as the text prepares us for his disillusion. There is a significant experience with another set of Jamaican friends described in a passage just before the journey of "reconciliation" between the Nyamkopong and Gordon Hall communities. The flow of the narrative is paused and the passage takes on a symbolic significance in the light
of the Maroons' social standing in Jamaican society. At a Police Ball he attends with Jamaican friends there is a rock and roll band from Miami with Day-Glo lettering on their drums, an emcee who sings "My Way", and showgirls doing a Las Vegas routine. Worst of all, this last is introduced as "The Fighting Maroons of Jamaica doing their world famous War Dance!" and it involves sexually provocative dancing by loin-cloth clad dancers.(pp.187-190) It is, of course, indicative of how popular, mainstream culture ruthlessly co-opts all other cultures, a form of cultural imperialism and it also acts as a scenario for what may happen to the Maroon communities if people like Phelps get their way. Finally, proleptically, it is indicative of how the narrator's attitudes towards the Maroon communities will change, becoming hostile and negative.

There is another indication of his growing estrangement involving the journey in the van from Gordon Hall to Nyamkopong. The narrator and Terron are the intermediaries and they transport Colonel Bowra and his council in a night's journey that is described in detail. The travellers' mood is optimistic and hopeful, there is singing and a bottle of rum is shared. At one stop one of the Maroons dances and seems to leave the ground.(p.215) Again dancing is identified with joy and with the narrator's assimilation into Maroon culture. A cop at the same bar calls him a "white Maroon".(p.214) but despite the cop's generosity he is described as "gaunt" and "rat-faced" with a "cold critical look in his eyes."(p.213) He is a synecdoche for the central government, interfering, menacing and destroying the once pristine Maroon communities. His presence hints at the trouble to come with the police.

The optimism of the journey, nevertheless, creates an atmosphere of happy ignorance and naive hope that in a typical dramatic reversal will soon be shattered by violence. The brutality and indifference of the police and their spoiling of the reconciliation conference is the catalyst that plunges the communities into violence.(pp.241-242) The journey occurs throughout the night and is from the coast to the interior and is full of signs of violence that mirror the psychic violence of the dichotomy in the Maroon soul. In its indebtedness to the
great modernist themes of the symbolic journey into the psyche and its objective correlatives (44) it is almost parodic. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is evoked as it is evoked throughout the novel. The narrator's relationship with Bowra mirrors that of Kurtz and Marlowe, with the realisation that the darkness exists as much in the narrator's world as it does in the uncivilized "other" world of Bowra/Kurtz.

This is most clearly dramatised in the novel's climax where the narrator chops one of the Gordon Hall Maroon's hands off with a machete and to protect him from the angry Maroons he is spirited away to the airport where he hurriedly departs for Miami. In this end point all the unease and suspicions felt by the narrator after the debacle of the attempt to bring the two communities together explodes into this act of paranoid violence. This later atmosphere of mistrust is emphasised by the suspicions surrounding Mann's volte-face and Terron's concerns over his drug crop and those seeking to take it away from him which echo in miniature the suspicions created by the silver of the mine in *Nostromo*. The visionary Rasta has become the harassed capitalist in a similar change to that which Mann has seemingly undergone. Interestingly the act of violence is caused by the narrator's invasion of the space of those standing on the porch to watch the visiting politician. He shoves "people off their carefully chosen and tightly held pivot points, making chaos of a structure he hadn't perceived until after he had disrupted it."(p.306) Once more a central theme of the novel is enacted in spatial terms. The narrator has disrupted the structure of Maroon society as his historic ancestors presumably destroyed the harmony that the Maroons' ancestors once felt with their land. He becomes what he has passionately decided not to be, an exploiter and enemy of the people he had hoped to become part of. During the period towards the end of the novel where the narrator's unease and paranoia had been growing the text indulges in one of its frequent asides on Jamaican life, observing with contempt the "white rashas", white women who adopt the lifestyle and spout the rhetoric of Rastafarianism. In the light of what later happens to the narrator this is a proleptic aside, ironically referring to the doomed

(44) The novels of D.H. Lawrence and the poetry of T.S. Eliot can be cited as examples.
The pessimism of Banks's vision is evident here. The cultural, political and historical differences are too great to allow these opposites to ever merge or assimilate. The final scene, although prepared for in the atmosphere of tension and violence of the aptly and ironically named "Dread" section, comes as a shock to the reader. All of the comradeship and solidarity of the preceding scenes are undercut by the narrator's act, which, in effect, cuts his ties to the Maroons and Jamaica. In its refusal to allow any optimistic conclusions to be drawn the novel is reminiscent of other works by Banks which likewise end on tragic and even despairing notes. Bob Dubois's evil act at the end of Continental Drift can only be atoned for by his death and posthumous salvation. The grim and bitter ironies of the stories in Trailerpark and the disappearances at the end of both Hamilton Stark and Affliction recount outcomes that are similar in their tragic necessity and are qualified only partly by the hope embodied in the surviving narrators.

On a basic structural level the narrative has counterpointed the narrators' estrangement from his white Jamaican friends with his identification with the Maroons. The narrative has switched between these processes (expressed as changes in his attitudes) until the final thirty pages where the narrator's isolation and alienation come to include both whites and blacks. This narrative model needs to be translated into what could be called the ideology of the text. As I have previously argued, the narrator's estrangement from the whites coincides with the reader's increased understanding of the true nature of Jamaican society and its relation to the world economy.

The narrator's reaction to that estrangement is his growing identification with the Maroons. His solidarity with the oppressed is a classic liberal move; to identify with and become one of those whose side you are on. He believes, "like most Americans" in people's "essential sameness" rather than their difference and that "I could learn to know what it was like to be a Maroon."(p.25) What the text points to is that this is impossible, is, in fact, itself a form of oppression.

As we have seen the narrator romanticises Nyamkopong; like Gaugin and Forster, whom
he wishes to be, he transforms it into a sort of aesthetic object, a thing of beauty like a great painting or book. He is aware of the social contradictions that are tearing the community apart but erases them as he idealistically embraces the Maroons' lifestyle and beliefs. Yet, the semi-mystical epiphany he experiences on the Peace Cave expedition does not make him into a believer in prophecy. In his last meeting with Terron he is unable to accept Terron's fatalistic, Rastafarian belief that he need not be fearful. Prophecy, Terron tells him, does not need him to be fulfilled and Babylon won't fall because he leaves. (p.301)

It does not matter whether or not Mann really has been corrupted, the point is that the narrator's perception of Mann and the Maroon communities has changed. It has taken on the colouring of white attitudes towards blacks, fear and paranoia. In the context of America in the late seventies the text can be seen as enacting similar changes in attitudes that white American liberals were undergoing. From solidarity and support in the civil rights campaigns of the 1960s to the conservative reaction of the seventies after ghetto riots and the appearance of the Black Panthers in the late sixties. After his first visit to Nyamkopong he had decided to despise the whites and love a people, "I might never understand and definitely would never become." (p.112) This insight is forgotten, only to be brought home to him in a dramatic and violent way at the text's climax.

In at least one way The Book of Jamaica is a rewriting of A Passage to India. Like the narrator, Adele Quested is attempting to understand and empathise with a non-Western culture, in particular, through her friendship with Aziz. The mysterious and dramatic incident in the Marabar Caves shatters that dream and results in Aziz's trial. In The Book of Jamaica a cave serves a similar role. The mystery that surrounds Marabar, an emptiness in the text, itself like a cave, is echoed in the Peace Cave where the narrator performs a ritual he does not fully comprehend and can only have an outsider's understanding of. His epiphany is marked by an incomprehensibility and mystery that is comparable to Adele's experience at Marabar. A Passage to India ends, contradictorily, with an Aziz coming to terms with his experience and the humanistic inference that understanding and sympathy may be possible and The Book of Jamaica ends with the narrator's expulsion from the paradise. Forster's
novel, coming when the empire was beginning to break up reflects a sense of defeat and ultimate failure. The Book of Jamaica, fifty years later reflects a post-colonial world where even the exploitative but still human relation between coloniser and colonised has become a purely economic transaction between investor and investment. In the later novel capitalist and realpolitik relations dominate, not only social and political relations, but human relations as well.

I want now to turn to a discussion of the narrative strategies that are used to stress and counterpoint the thematic context of the journeys and opposites of the novel. The narrative is structured in such a way that there would seem to be two different stories contained within it. Part One deals exclusively with the unnamed narrator's obsession with an old murder case which he believes Errol Flynn was involved in. It is related in the first person and the narrator's search for clues is reminiscent of a mystery story. The narrator functions like a detective, a Philip Marlowe type, in whom the act of narration mirrors the act of detection/deduction. However, the mystery is never satisfactorily solved and the final scene, beside the hole where the body was allegedly stuffed down, evinces a mood of isolation and fear. It could be read as a version of Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 with its unsolvable mystery and its climactic atmosphere of dread and apocalypse.

Yet, Part Two begins as if Part One had not happened. The reader is briefly unsure whether the present narrator is the same person as in the first part. After the paranoiac obsessiveness of the concluding pages of "Captain Blood" the chatty, matter of fact tone of Part Two's opening paragraph disorientates the reader. The conversational tone acts to cast the narrator as a smug, self-satisfied, white American, who tells us he intended to go to Jamaica to escape the New England winter and enjoy the tropical delights of the Caribbean.(p.67) An escape made possible, we soon learn, by the unethical deal with the Churches. He seems more like Errol Flynn than the unnamed narrator of the first part. This epistemological uncertainty is quickly dispelled and the reader is reassured that the two narrators are identical. He talks about "this time"(p.68) and we begin to realise that the narrative has backtracked and that the
narrator's return visit, mentioned in Part One, is being referred to. But this uncertainty is briefly revived a few pages later when he arrives in Nyamkopong and meets a black man who turns out to be Terron. The character is defamiliarised by being reintroduced without a name.

The narrative is related in the first person for the first 170 pages. It enables the text to establish the reader's identification with the character's feelings and thoughts, his obsession with Flynn, his growing sympathy for the Maroons. In a sense, the reader becomes the character. It also enables the text to set up expectations of the character/narrator as a stable, univocal subject. We are manipulated into mis-recognising him as the pre-Freudian character of nineteenth century realism with a fixed, essential presence. Then in chapter three of Part Two the narrative voice is switched and the "I" becomes a "You" as first person narration becomes second person. The narrator becomes a character, an "other", but not from the distance of third person narration. Instead, he is addressed by the text. But is the addressee the implied author or the first person narrator splitting into two, addressing himself? This switch of point of view had been used earlier when the narrator had used the second person to imaginatively inhabit the life of a poor Jamaican in an act of sympathetic identification that is in essence a humanist attempt to know and be another, qualitatively different human person. A narrative of the life of a Jamaican everyman is recreated and its climactic act, betrayal over a ganga crop, prefigures the betrayals that beset Terron. (pp.128-131)

But when the text switches to the second person forty pages later this is not as a tactic of sympathetic identification. It is not the narrator imagining the "you" but the authority of the text inscribing the narrator as the "you". The short section where this occurs is towards the end of the Nyamkopong chapter, after the bonding experiences of the dance and the cave and the many conversations around Mann's table drinking Jamaican rum. The section describes his relations with the coastal Jamaicans and largely narrates his experiences at the Police Ball where he experiences a more corrupt and tawdry side of black Jamaican life and it also briefly introduces the Gordon Hall Maroons. The stay with the Gordon Hall Maroons is described as being spent "... in astonishment and confusion, all your expectations broken in
your lap. "(p.182) The strangeness of the village with its "Ashanti passwords" (p.182) is unsettling and works against his belief that he is no longer a tourist. (pp.181-182) Robert Niemi has described the moment of this recognition as the point where the narrator becomes committed partisan rather than tourist and argues that the switch to the second person signifies "a dramatic transformation in his narrator's identity." (45) But as I have argued I believe the transformation from tourist to partisan has occurred earlier, in the time spent at Nyamkopong, and that the switch to the second person signifies the beginning of his estrangement. The passage ends with a hint of what is to come, "You go on lying there in the corner, pretending to sleep, and all the way home to Anchovy the people talk to one another as if you weren't there, and they never once mention you or any white man." (p.191) The underlying hostility of relations between blacks and whites is reinforced here.

The text then adopts a third person narration in Part Three, addressing the narrator and Terron as the "American" and the "Rasta" before finally naming him as "Johnny", a colloquial name for a white friendly with blacks, an honorary black. (p.201) By Part Four everyone calls him Johnny. The text effects a distancing from the Johnny character, moving from identity with the teller of the tale and main actor to addressing him in a dialogue as "You", to the remoteness of the "American" and "Johnny". These are names for a character that can now only be known from the outside. The switch to the third person is foreshadowed in an earlier section of the novel just as the switch to the second person was. This occurs when the narrator is angry at himself for his association with the Wests and for currying "the approval of people he loathed." He begins to call himself "the dreamy American" and refer to himself in the third person as "he". This brief passage marks a point in his move away from his white countrymen towards his sympathy and identification with the Maroons. He realises that approval or disapproval are no longer strong enough stances to take towards them. (pp.110-111) As such the passage is forwarding the direction of the narrative in dramatising his transfer of sympathies, but it also, in the unexpectedness of the switch from

(45) Niemi p.102.
first to third person, directs our attention to the almost schizoid nature of the narrator.

This change in narrative voice, which transforms the narrator from subject to object, also changes the tense of the text's action. It begins with the "I" that remembers, the past tense. The "You" can be read contradictorily, as "you did this", but also opens up the possibility that the speaker is in some imaginary future telling the character what "you will do". This ambiguity between past and future tenses adds to the uncertainty created in the reader's mind. Finally, in the last two parts we are in the continuous present. The events occur in the present tense, "The American and the rasta toss their ... bags", (p.195) not "tossed" or "will toss". The present tense suits the change in narrative action as the unhurried pace of the narrator's thoughts and self-arguments, which meditated on the narrative, becomes the tense, frantic pace of a climactic build-up where there is no time to reflect on what is happening.

The effect of this is two-fold. Firstly, the reader's expectations and presumptions are unsettled, even overturned, and it brings into question just who is telling the tale and from what point in time. In the light of post-structuralist theory, the subject of the enunciation is split from the subject of enunciating. (46) Our readerly belief in the fixed presence of that "I" is no longer sustainable. Instead, we now have the two interlocutors of chapter three, Part Two, the narrator seemingly addressing himself within what we were once led to believe was the one person. Realist fiction concentrates our attention on what is said, or enunciated, thereby, as Terry Eagleton says, suppressing, "their modes of production." (47) In these sudden changes from first to second to third person narration our attention is drawn from the act of enunciation to the act of enunciating. The device, as the Formalists would say, is laid bare. We are confronted with a character that far from being a stable univocal presence, albeit one beset by self-doubt, is, in fact, a radically split subject. Ironically he refers to the "white rastas" as "practically schizophrenic", (p.262) something that could be said of him.


(47) ibid., p.170.
This is significant for the ideological reading of the text I have described above. Whilst the narrator is undergoing the process of attraction and identification with the Maroons he is like the "I" of similar texts which enact a process of education for their central character/narrator. The process of incorporation into Maroon culture is paralleled by the reader's incorporation into that discovering, deducing, self-reflecting "I". The switch to the second person comes immediately after the high point of his assimilation into Maroon culture, the visit to the Peace Cave. We could read this as the narrator's search for the Maroon "other" being completed so that he becomes that "other" and therefore must be addressed from outside as an "other". He becomes a "white Maroon" and as a presence alien to text and reader can only be addressed as such, as a "you" who is not "I" or "us". But the "other" still exists within that earlier "I" if we see the narrator as addressing himself. It is therefore, a contradictory state, one that is dialectically the subject and that which is not the subject, the object.

This, I would argue, expresses that state of self-delusion or bad faith which the narrator experiences as a white American attempting to become what he is not and cannot be - a Maroon. So this radical split between two sides of the narrator's existence, his reality as a white person, and his imaginary existence as a black person, is presented to us as a split between subject and object, between the narrator as "I" and the narrator as "You". He is addressed as "You" during the scenes where he goes to the Police Ball which have been previously described as setting the scene for the disillusion and violence that are to follow. When the narrative switches to the third person the narrator and Terron are beginning their expedition to bring the two communities together. The narrator's estrangement from the Maroons is appropriately reflected in the third person narration which distances him from the reader and from the Maroons. He is now simply the "American" or "Johnny" which is ironic given that what he will eventually do to one of his Maroon comrades is not friendly at all. The final naming is as "this white man".(p.309) This is how Bowra refers to him after the fight when he must be quickly spirited away. The tone is contemptuous and unfriendly. He has come full circle, from tourist and traveller to "white Maroon", to an unwelcome white man; just as he comes full circle from America to Jamaica and back to America.
Reviewers have either not remarked on these changes or have seen them as being part of the narrator's psychological journey. Darryl Pinckney sees the change in point of view as corresponding to "Johnny's' immersion in the rhythm of life around him." (48) Robert Niemi is closer to the mark when he describes the process as first involving the interpolation of the reader into the narrative by the force of the "direct address you" and then as a distancing with the sudden switch to the third person. (49) However, he also describes these shifts as suggesting that "his protagonist is being absorbed into the culture of the island. (50) I would argue that rather than absorption or immersion the distancing of the reader indicated by Niemi, is mirrored in the distancing of the narrator from the object of his narration. The device is finally political in that it points to Banks's pessimistic vision of black/white relations rather than to the sort of bildungsroman interpretation of Niemi and Pinckney.

I now want to return to a discussion of Part One because of what I believe is its significance in the overall structure of the text, as a "reiterative analogy" in Paz's terms. This part can be seen, as discussed above, as a postmodern detective story, a quest to solve a mystery that cannot be solved. As such it foreshadows the rest of the text which is also concerned with an impossible quest. The unsolved murder in "Captain Blood" becomes the unsolvable conundrum of how an outsider becomes part of what he is not. Both are failed projects and both end in atmospheres of terror, violence and paranoia. The section also acts, as Robert Niemi points out, as a "symbolic counterpoint to the saga of the Maroons." (51) Flynn's evil is reminiscent of the evil done to the Maroons by their colonial oppressors.

The narrator hears a number of versions of the story of DeVries' murder - Terron's, (pp.6-7) Smith's, (pp.8-9) the cook's, (p.32) Jack's, (pp.46-47) and Rocco's (p.51). The blame is laid to varying degrees on Flynn, Menotti and DeVries. None of the versions is ever privileged as being authoritative, instead, they act to unsettle and eventually terrify the narrator. He begins to feel that everything he sees and does is potentially a clue. As he says, "Everything was

(48) Pinckney p.35.  
(49) Niemi p.103.  
(50) ibid., p.103.  
(51) ibid., p.98.
significant, everything was tied to everything else."(p.54) He begins to feel menaced by strangers like the desk clerk who watches him in the Blue Hotel.(p.28) He thinks:

I could no longer stroll through these lives, like some kind of idiot tourist, without protecting myself. This was a world where evil powers - obeah, Mafia, corrupt cops sucking complacently on someone else's coconuts, ritual death, kangaroo courts, decadence and immense, exploitive wealth - all worked comfortably side by side like pickers in a vineyard.(p.48)

By knowing Flynn in Jamaica he has lost his innocence and must begin to protect himself.(pp.48-49) The crime takes on a metaphysical and apocalyptic significance, "The world was corrupt at the center, I knew that, and a primeval crime had determined that corruption, a crime known to everyone, white or black, Jamaican or foreigner."(p.43) His quest takes on both the personal meaning of a fall from innocence into knowledge and a global meaning of the corruption of a world.

The section ends with the narrator alone, staring into the hole through which the body may have been stuffed. He sees the sea below which "moved rapidly back and forth like a huge slick-bodied beast trapped and insane in a stone cage."(p.64) It is a vision of horror and dread, as if he had looked through the hole and seen the "corrupted world" embodied in the trapped "beast". As Robert Niemi has remarked the narrator must return home "empty-handed" from his visit to the hole just as the unnamed narrator of Hamilton Stark cannot finally solve the mystery of Stark's disappearance and both come to that realisation in similarly lonely and desolate places. (52)

This mood of paranoia and fear is returned to in the "Dread" section where the narrator is alone in Anchovy, fearing for his life as the police interrogate him about Terron and the ganga crop. He can now trust no one, including Mann. Even Terron, with his own paranoiac obsession with the ganga crop, is a source of fear and potential danger. Arriving in Kingston

(52) ibid., p.98.
on his way to Gordon Hall to deliver Mann's message, he joins the throng of people on the street who appear alien and hostile. He observes but is not part of the crowd (p.303) and when he reaches Gordon Hall, the failure of his quest is made manifest by his paranoiac act of violence. Just as he cannot really see through the hole to what happened that night near Flynn's house he cannot keep his status as 'Johnny'. He becomes "that white man" as a consequence of his violence.

In the text paranoia is freighted with more significance than simply a response to events of a menacing nature. In a sense, the paranoia arises because he cannot know the world - Flynn, the Maroons, Jamaica. The act of comprehending or recognising is akin to the act of controlling or owning. Possession of the facts equals possession of the world. When the narrator is unable to fathom the mystery of Flynn or cognize the real nature of the Maroons' beliefs he panics. He loses control of that way of thinking, linked historically with the Western, scientific rationalism on which his New England assumptions and beliefs have been founded. Robert Niemi makes a similar observation without linking what he sees as essentially a character flaw to the political and historical dimensions of the narrator's paranoia. He argues that the failed investigation is the result of the narrator's "obsessive desire for certitude, a potentially dangerous trait in a culture that operate along entirely different cognitive lines." (53) This is true, but again the novel is reduced to personal terms, to a description of the education of an American in a foreign country.

In a strategy that is typical of post-realist fiction, possession of the facts, of the world, is related to textuality, to the nature of itself as a text. The narrator's detective-like search for a logical and verifiable version of the DeVries' murder becomes an obsession with Flynn. He finds his mind "jammed with images" of Flynn:

... as Terron saw him - Captain Blood, obeah man ... and images of Errol Flynn as Smith saw him - an elegant mafioso don, a wealthy and famous land baron, a possible CIA agent - and images of Errol Flynn as

(53) ibid., p.99.
I saw him - a sybaritic debauchee, an aging and decadent movie star. But it was the conflict between the images, rather than their number, that troubled me, for while I saw the man mainly in psychological terms, Smith saw him in social terms, and Terron saw him in mythic terms. (pp.23-24)

In other words, there is a plethora of interpretations or readings of Flynn. The words used, "psychological", "social" and "mythic", are ways of interpreting that could just as easily be applied to a text, critical approaches to the reading of a poem or a film. Indeed, "Captain Blood" could itself be interpreted as a film review of Flynn's latest adventure epic, set in Jamaica. The title is, of course, that of one of Flynn's most popular movies and there are references to films throughout the section. The narrator imagines himself an actor in a movie, set in a Caribbean country in the 1930s, and later that he is a character in a movie just about to step out of the frame to "join the viewers". (p.38) The narrator then, becomes not only an imagined film character, but acts as a film critic as well, as he reviews or reads Flynn's performance. But the problem is he cannot decide on an authoritative reading of this text. This raises in him "... an irritated grasping after certainty ... anxiety, mistrust and depression." (p.24)

If "Captain Blood" is a meditation on Errol Flynn as text, the rest of The Book of Jamaica meditates on the text of history, specifically on the history of the Maroons. As with the multiple versions of the DeVries' murder there are a number of differing versions of this history. The version we first hear is Upton West's. It is a version that is sympathetic and broadly accurate, but paternal and removed from the Maroon's lived experience. It is an outsider's history. The Maroons are a "beautiful and mysteriously complex people", their history is "noble and violent". (p.72) Balanced against the travelogue tenor of his description, in words like "beautiful" and "noble" which define them as a colourful people for American consumption, is the sense of an object that cannot be grasped. They are "mysteriously complex". Even as they are categorised and defined, true definition is denied.

If Upton's version is that of the tourist brochure, the next version we hear has the solidity and learning of the historian behind it. Carey Robinson's book is also a seemingly positive
assessment of Maroon history. But it describes the Maroons' successful rebellion with "surprise and admiration" and it was not written for the reader who felt compelled to imagine how it was to live as the Maroons lived and face the choices they had to. (p. 74) From the patronising implications of "surprise" to the outsider's inability to recreate their experience in imagination, this version also fails to comprehend the Maroons' real experience. The books the narrator reads in Boston "... were not about Jamaica but were instead about abstractions like history and race and economics." (p. 79) The narrator's own version of that history is derived from his Boston research and refracted through the perspective of his personal contact with the Maroons. So when he relates their history, in a long passage, he connects it with the contemporary Maroon situation, specifically the dispute between Mann and Phelps over the treaty. (pp. 119-124)

The narrator's sympathetic account is chronological and linear. In sharp contrast is Mr Mann's account which anachronistically mixes figures and events from diverse historic periods with fictional characters - Columbus, Drake, Julius Caesar, various Queens of England, Winston Churchill, Friday (Robinson Crusoe) are mentioned along with the California gold rush, World Wars One and Two and the conquest of India. Maroon and Jamaican history is woven through this tapestry; the Arawak Indian resistance, slavery, the Maroon wars, Jamaican independence in 1962 and the visit of Queen Elizabeth the Second. The central "error" here is the fusing of the reigns of Elizabeth the First and Elizabeth the Second so that the Queen he connects with the 1838 treaty becomes the same Queen who helped Jamaica celebrate its independence in 1962. For Mann history is contemporaneous with the present. He does not see it as 400 years of chronologically unfolding events but as a syntagmatic relationship of events linked by the central figure of the Queen. (pp. 102-104)

As a religious world-view Mann's interpretation of history is essentially circular. The concept of circularity is the central image of the scenes where the narrator attends the Nyamkopong festival. The festival is described as like a "medieval country fair ... a midwinter rite designed to push the circle of time round again." (p. 114) The day is one of "circles and spinning" (p. 114) and when Mann draws him into the dance he is at the "center
of the circle;"(p.115) while around him is a "slowly rotating crowd of dancers."(p.116) As they dance blood sweeps through their bodies in "swift circles of time" and the crowd moves "like a spiral nebula toward a still center". (p.116) It is at this point that the narrator realises that Mann has not been making his history up, "It hadn't occurred to me that he had been telling the truth."(p.116) Linked to this circular view of history is Terron's eschatological Rastafarian belief in "... the fire to come"(p.5) and that "... only prophecy can bring Babylon down."(p.301)

In a sense, the text seems to privilege Mann's circular view of history, as the narrator (and through him, the reader) is drawn into the Maroons' culture. But ultimately, none of these views is validated. The narrator loses faith in Mann and his beliefs and just as Part One ended, he is unable to choose between these competing texts. Once again, textuality leads to paranoia.

The Book of Jamaica repeatedly draws attention to its status as a text in a metafictional gesture that subverts its apparently realistic mode of action. This begins with the title which refers to its contents, it is a book about Jamaica, and to its own ontological status as a book. There are many texts within the book; the various readings of Errol Flynn and Maroon history, as well as the narrator's "unfinished novel" (p.185) which is ostensibly his reason for being in Jamaica. There is Carey Robinson's "The Fighting Maroons" and the books he consults during his Boston research. And finally, there is the treaty, which Mann carries around with him and which is another disputed text. The narrator can be seen as the writer or creator of this text and all the texts contained within it. It is his book about Jamaica, perhaps his finished "unfinished novel". A similar effect is created in a passage where the narrator debates what the appropriate name for Mann is, as if he were a writer deliberating on the naming of his character.(pp.140-141) This metafictional reading of the novel is a reading not explored by other critics, including Robert Niemi who, in effect, reduces the novel to a personal tale that uses certain literary techniques to tell the tale. There is no attempt to see the novel in terms of a reading that is subverting that traditional, realist role of the novel.

In another sense the book is not only about Jamaica, it is Jamaica, a text or simulacrum of
it. And Jamaica in turn can be seen as a synecdoche of the world. Although lacking the all-inclusive informational overload of postmodern mega-novels like Ratner's Star and Gravity's Rainbow, it is informed by the same impulse. To imagine a world (Jamaica) and contain all the possible information needed to construct it.

Continuing this theme of textuality the narrator continually imagines himself as a character in a movie or a book. In a movie "designed to demonstrate the socialist view of history" where he would be the last person left alive because he would represent "capitalist evil. To kill me off early would destroy any possibility for dramatic action, and even ideology must allow for drama." (p.28) This is more than an instance of his growing paranoia. It points outside the narrative to the author or implied author who must himself steer between the exigencies of ideology and art. As such it may be seen as a metafictional description of the implied author's approach to writing fiction. Later the narrator imagines he has:

... slipped into an episode of Pilgrim's Progress and everyone I met there and every place I went to had a strictly allegorical function and no real life of its own - except for me, who alone among the characters, was also the reader of this book. (p.80)

The questions raised over the narrator's status as a character and the novel's status as a fiction provoke in turn questions about the novel's narrative realism. It engenders in the reader the feeling that more is going on here than the simple mimetic telling of the tale. Parallel to this feeling of uncertainty about fictional form is an alternative world created in the text. The narrator's assumptions of scientific rationalism and empiricism are juxtaposed with the world of "obeah" and "prophecy" where things are not as they seem. Just as the common-sense realism of the narrative is juxtaposed with intimations of intertextuality and radical self-doubt.

Jamaica is a world inhabited by Duppies (the restless, homeless spirits of the dead), prophecy and obeah. Flynn and Menotti are said to be "obeah men". The presence of Dr Menotti at his trial terrifies DeVries, reducing his testimony to squawks. (p.11) Flynn has

123.
seemingly magic powers; DeVries sees him at his own house, runs to Flynn's mansion to be 
greeted by Flynn, "somehow there before him".(p.11)

Balanced against the evil obeah of Flynn and Menotti is the magical world of the Maroon 
beliefs. The narrator's Peace Cave experience and his enfoldment into the circle dance at the 
festival act as glimpses into that belief system, as intimations of a world outside his 
empirical world-view. It is when he meets Bowra that the power of obeah is manifested. 
Bowra tells him the second time they meet that, "I saw you coming"(p.201) with the 
implication that he has the power of foresight. Bowra points his finger at a barman who 
immediately clutches his heart in pain.(pp.219-220) The narrator takes part in a ritual 
performed by Bowra involving the blood of a chicken and his own blood. This passage is 
followed immediately by the news of Phelps's death. Bowra had said before the ritual that 
there is no way for you to escape death "when the Maroons had decided you must 
die."(p.248)

That this ritual is the cause of Phelps's death is never discounted, not even by the narrator 
who had earlier dismissed the idea that Menotti had the power of obeah.(p.22) During this 
ritual Bowra rises like a "puff of smoke" and "disappears into the darkness".(p.249) Just as 
Gondo had risen above the floor and seemed to float as he danced (p.215) and the Maroons 
were said to have flown from Africa to Jamaica.(p.15) Earlier Bowra had promised the 
narrator that he would teach him to fly and that he will "see what you want to see."(p.185) 
The Rasta who had requested a death potion for his dying mother (p.198) later tells him that 
she has been miraculously cured.(p.265) When the narrator chops the man's hand off he has 
to spit on the severed hand to avoid its revenge.(pp.306-307) The narrator himself has 
become a wizard according to Terron and Big Ron.(p.265, p.301) No rational explanation of 
these beliefs and events is ever attempted by the narration. They may be superstitions, 
coincidences or hallucinations but they are presented in the same matter of fact way that 
other, more rational events are presented. Another magical, non-rational world is posited, 
existing side by side with the narrator's (and the reader's) common sense empirical world. 

The text raises questions of both an epistemological and an ontological nature. On the one
hand how to interpret texts, the actions of people, cultures and even whole countries (worlds) and with what degree of certainty can these objects be known? On the other, which world (that of philosophy or magick as in Part One's epigraph, linear or circular) is valid? How are they constituted, which world does the narrator inhabit (fictional character, implied author, reader)? Brian McHale's thesis, formulated in *Postmodern Fiction,* is that modernist texts concern themselves with epistemological questions, whilst, what he terms, postmodern texts concern themselves with ontological questions. This is the difference between Conrad and Woolf as typical modernists and Robbe-Grillet and Raymond Federman as postmodernists. These characteristics are a "dominant" and the change from one to another is described as "Intractable epistemological uncertainty becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability." (54) The Book of Jamaica embraces both dominants as in the passage where the narrator, contemplating the "primeval crime" that has corrupted the world, concludes that the world "was tipped off to one side, canted, wobbly, precarious." (p.43) The narrator's epistemological search has posed the possibility that there may be other potential worlds corrupted by the evil of obeah and men's actions.

The non-rational world of magic and obeah, glimpsed by the narrator, is most significantly linked in the text to that world which he aspires to become a part of but cannot. But in "Captain Blood" obeah is associated with Flynn and Menotti, with a motiveless evil. The narrator realises that, "There was never an explanation for why he did those things." (p.17) He feels that the power and knowledge they wielded, "was satanic, stolen fire, a Faustian exploitation of a corrupted racial and economic history. Was evil." (p.54) In this sense, the world of evil obeah is linked to Jamaica's history of slavery, colonialism and now IMF and US economic exploitation. Errol Flynn is the presence brooding over the text, the symbol of the evil powers of obeah and the stereotypical tourist. Significantly he is said to have perceived himself in relation to the "black peasantry" as "the white lord of the manor." (p.9) He is also the man who takes out of the country what he wants for his advantage, like the

(54) Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* p.11.
Churches, like the narrator, and like an IMF directive to repay a crippling loan. What we suppose Flynn has done to DeVries' wife is what the IMF is doing to the Jamaican economy in the middle seventies of the novel's setting. Upton West states late in the novel that:

"People here are terrified that the chaos will produce another Cuba, but you and I know how unlikely that is. The US would never permit it. Neither, for that matter, would the International Monetary Fund." (p. 280)

Upton's speech acknowledges the real state of Jamaican society and discloses the threat of social revolution, "another Cuba" - that lies behind the "flight of capital" and the violence and corruption of black Jamaica. The text names the spectre that haunts Jamaican whites and, as Upton's words make clear, the US and the IMF. The underlying chaos of Jamaican society has been the political and social backdrop of the narrator's experiences, "the corrupt bureaucrats and cops and petty officials ... the full-bellied black Jamaicans who [run] the country." (p. 110) That it is one of the corrupt whites who names the spectre of social revolution is, perhaps, an indication of the limitation of the novel's political vision. As I have argued earlier the danger of hypostasing the difference between blacks and whites is that a leftist version of stereotyping is invited, the good black and the corrupt white. Within that rigid framework the possibility of change is denied and if the question of revolutionary change is raised it is not raised by those who would make that change but by an outsider who can only observe the situation. The Jamaicans remain as unable to make their own history and as an "other" to be theorised about. Significantly the Jamaicans who could be said to most oppose the chaos and violence of Jamaican society as portrayed in the novel are the Rastas, who for all their talk of the "fire to come" are believers in a passive and exclusionist ideology that seeks to escape the world rather than change it.

As has been discussed the narrator is ultimately complicit in this Western exploitation, despite his good intentions, his sympathetic identification with the Maroons and his rejection of the values of his fellow white Americans. Robert Niemi asserts that, "The particularities of race, culture, and economics function as insurmountable barriers between the likes of
Johnny and the Third World poor." (55) The Book of Jamaica could possibly be read in purely formal terms, as a psychoanalytic account of the narrator's paranoiac schizophrenia or a metafictional meditation on certain fictional genres, but it always maintains a connection between its techniques of postmodern defamiliarisation and its grounding in the world of people and politics. This fictional strategy enables the text, within the limits I have mentioned, to constitute the narrator's passage to Jamaica and a synecdoche for United States' involvement in Jamaica and other non-Western countries.

(3)

Affliction was Russell Banks's sixth novel and was published in 1989 nine years after The Book of Jamaica. His previous novel, Continental Drift had been a critical success, praised for its portrayal of the tragic unmaking of its white, working class hero, Bob Dubois. In Affliction he again narrated the tragedy of an ordinary man and received similar praise as a "small town realist". (56) The reviews of Affliction spoke of the novel's gritty and realistic depiction of small-town America and its protagonist, Wade Whitehouse who is a well-driller, snow plower and part time policeman. Wade was generally seen as a grimly accurate portrait of a man destroyed by circumstance and his violent past. Elizabeth Tallent called the novel, "psychological portraiture of the highest order" (57) and other reviewers stressed the novel's scrupulous veracity in depicting a milieu that American writers do not generally pay much

(55) Niemi p.105.

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attention to. As one reviewer maintained, it is a terrain of "limited horizons" and "disappointed lives" where the "economic good times of the 1970s and 1980s didn't penetrate." (58)

Wade's story is told by his brother, Rolfe, painstakingly gleaned from memories and interviews and augmented by imaginative reconstruction of whatever events Rolfe was not privy to. In fact, it is this imaginative reconstruction that hints at the novel's anti-realist elements which, as in The Book of Jamaica, blends a mixture of realist and postmodernist narrative strategies. As I will show many of the reviewers do not acknowledge these elements or would prefer that Banks had left these awkward and clumsy narrative devices out of his novel. In proposing a reading that brings these elements to the centre of my argument I first want to turn to Banks's second novel, Hamilton Stark, which in many ways serves as a first, experimental draft of Affliction and which I believe will illuminate the essential significance of Rolfe's narration.

Hamilton Stark is a sort of "biography", told by Stark's closest friend. His life and mysterious disappearance are presented within a framework that heightens, even mythologises his significance. He is transformed from a New Hampshire pipe-fitter into a sort of modern, American, existential anti-hero. Despite five marriages Stark has chosen solitude. The narrator, musing on him, remembers him saying, "If you are lonely ... don't run out and fill your life with friends and acquaintances. Instead direct all your attention to the inescapability of your solitude, your absoluteness oneness." (59) Hamilton is one of the few people strong enough to maintain such a position. (p.225) He is independent and unique, slave to no one and in complete control of his life and destiny. He acts, is not acted upon. The narrator claims that he is the only human being he has known who does not speak "through his disembodied voice", (p.172) and that he is "my one last possibility for a


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self-transcendent ego in a secular age!" (p. 162)

Stark has many qualities that would be deemed anti-social in 1970s America. He is an extreme right-winger, racist, chauvinistic to the point of misogyny, violent and cynical. He subjects his wives to mental cruelty and even beats one according to her bitter memoir. He all but disowns his only child and drives his mother out of her own house. He is beyond indulgent love and has freed himself from the need to love or be loved. (pp. 3-4) He is associated with the demon Asmodeus, a mixture of rage and lust (p. 128) and with a uroboros, a self-consuming entity pictured with its tail in its mouth. (pp. 239-240)

This demonic figure exists in a landscape appropriate to his name - starkness. The New Hampshire described by the text is bleak and cold and the narrative unfolds in locations associated with solitude or violence, never conviviality or warmth; almost empty houses, the Canadian far north. The one exception is the College graduation ceremony which Stark turns into a pseudo-assassination attempt. The college is significantly called Ausable Chasm. Chapter Two describes the "matrix" of the story, its origins and context. Even the geography of the setting is associated with coldness, the ice age and glacial takeover. Its human history is that of the native Abenookis who defend their lowly state against successive invaders. (p. 33)

Stark then, is a disreputable, even repugnant figure who exists in a cold, bleak environment that acts as a sort of objective correlative of his isolation and lack of human feeling. The novel ends with his disappearance, perhaps into the solitude of the Canadian wilderness. The narrator's quest to understand Stark ends with his physical search for Stark, following his tracks in a wild snowstorm up the table-top next to his house. He finds no "human face" only an "empty space, a swirl of white ... Unimaginable Nothing." (p. 288) As a metaphor for Stark's fate and his condition (and by extension humanity's fate and condition) this seems cliched and melodramatic. Its obviousness, it could be argued, flows from the hackneyed obviousness of the novel's themes. The depiction of the existential superman, a man who thought Lee Harvey Oswald and Errol Flynn examples of interesting men. (p. 211) He is
a character whose glorification seemingly betrays an incipient fascism on the part of its "author".

Of course, the author is in inverted commas, because with the emergence of modernist self-consciousness, who actually tells the story becomes as important, if not more important than the story. As a portrayal of a sort of American version of the existential heroes of the fiction of Sartre or Camus the novel is easily dismissed; but the text is attempting more than that. The narrator, who is never named, and the narrative techniques "he" uses to tell his story, point to another interpretation of the novel.

From the opening sentence we are made aware that we are reading a fiction. The narrator has decided to write a novel about his friend called "A" whom he will rename Hamilton Stark in his novel. He sometimes discusses his novel with a friend called "C" and other figures on this level of narration are also given initials. There is, for instance, "A's" friend "F" who becomes Feeny in one fictionalised version of "A's" life. The exception to this is the completely named, Rochelle, who is also writing a novel about her father's life. She calls him "Alvin Stock" and chapters of her novel are incorporated into the text. Also incorporated are Rochelle's research materials, including tape recordings of her mother, Stark's first wife, and of his second wife. There are digressions; on the "matrix" - the region's geography and history, and on the narrator and Rochelle's own relationship. The narrator lists "100 Selected, Uninteresting Things Done and Said by Hamilton Stark" (p.202) and frequently comments on how, why and what he writes. There is the Police Chief, Chubb Blount's story, told in the third person, presumably by the narrator, and possibly a fictional recreation of Chubb's actions and thoughts. Finally there are discussions with "C" who gives his interpretation of Stark and his life in a situation, at times reminiscent of Quentin and Shreve retelling (inventing) Thomas Sutpen's life in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!

These narrative devices work in two ways; they create ambiguity about what is actually happening in the narrative and confusion about who is actually telling the tale. That is, following Brian McHale, the differing versions contradict each other on an epistemological level and an ontological level. On the epistemological level there is the central mystery of
Stark's character; misogynistic quasi-fascist or wise, courageous man whose life refutes hypocrisy and decadent values. Similarly, the narrative cannot decide between the three possible scenarios which would explain the bullet holes in Stark's car (pp.9-18) or whether he has gone to Canada or killed himself. There are the two versions of Stark's confrontation with Blount (p.127) which describe the gap between Stark's public reputation and the private man the narrator wishes to truly know. Three interpretations of Stark's character are eventually posited; the narrator's "self-transcendent ego", Rochelle's "demon", and "C's" "spiraling urobos" which is a sort of Freudian interpretation.(pp.242-243) The holding of these opinions leads to argument and the eventual destruction of friendships and relationships.

There is no resolution of the problem of who Stark is. He remains a mystery, a figure known from outside by various people and who, despite the narrator's attempts to fathom his life, remains elusive, contradictory, undecodable. As the novel's epigraph from Kierkegaard avows, "The individual has a host of shadows, all of which resemble him and for the moment have an equal claim to authenticity." The idea of a fragmented, equivocal identity is a classic modernist theme from Conrad to Faulkner and, as I have argued, is the central narrative strategy of The Book of Jamaica. Associated with this is the fractured identity of the text which is consistently self-conscious, undercutting its own authority in a state of textual (liberal) self-doubt. For instance, the use of lists to highlight the arbitrary nature of what is included in stories (chapter 8) and the "aside" which is actually a metafictional joke such as when "C" tells the narrator he will get in trouble with his readers for propagating unfashionable views (Stark's opinions about women).(p.234)

What I want to concentrate on is the text's central metafictional device, the use of Rochelle's novel and tape-recordings to augment Stark's "biography". The narrator's comments on these pieces of work immediately remind the reader of literary criticism. For instance, the only "significant flaw" in her novel is its "lack of humor."(p.128) A criticism echoed by the man on whom her novel is based who telegraphs her that, "You need some humor in your book."(p.128) The narrator's analysis is psychoanalytic and biographical.
Addendum B describes Rochelle's journey around the country to find "geographic and social material" about her father by tracing his footsteps so that she can write a "realistic novel" about him. (p. 92) She writes the three stories from his childhood in order to "justify her love for the man", and because she attempts to describe him "objectively" the risk is run that her text will be "dominated by the subject" - he is "too controversial and enormous". (p. 66) Her theory that he is possessed by Asmodeus is her attempt to rationalise her "compelling attraction" to a man she knows to be "morally obnoxious". (p. 130) The long discussion of the origins of that myth that follows acts both to further the characterisation of Stark and to recreate the creative thought processes Rochelle has used to devise her "demon" metaphor of her father. (pp. 130-134) In one sense it works to explicate his character and in another to deepen the mystery of who he is. On the metatextual level it works to reinforce the narrator's psychoanalytic (Freudian) interpretation of Rochelle and her text.

The principal effect of this metacritical dimension of the text is to confuse the levels of narration. In Addendum C the narrator explains who each of the characters are in Rochelle's Chapter 8 and who they are in his novel. (pp. 93-94) The explanation is intricate and the reader becomes unsure of who each character is and which story-telling level they inhabit.

We are presented not only with Rochelle's novel and source materials but with the narrator's novel, or, perhaps, his notes in preparation for a novel. What is being foregrounded is the act of reading realist fiction. Rochelle's realist novel becomes just another element in the chaotic jumble of the narrator's novel. Also raised is the question of what is real and what is fiction. Characters that seemingly have three levels of "reality"; "A", "Alvin Stock", "Hamilton Stark", provoke questions about who is writing what, who is being written about? Rochelle, we are told, is herself a "mask" among "other masks, other formats, other castings of reality. You may continue to call this one Rochelle, if you wish." (p. 66) The implication is that the narrator has invented her, she is just another character in his novel. But later we learn that they became lovers, argued about the narrator's use of her book and split up. (Long Note pp. 235-242)

The use of the comically long note that describes the break up of their relationship is also a
dialogue between her realism and his experimentalism. The he/she cataloguing of their speeches and actions signifies the two opposing literary methods. She works in a tradition (p.238) and he wishes to imaginatively use her texts.(p.235) They first slept with each other, in fact, after discussing a modern novel.(p.170) Their debate parallels the text's own dialectic between realist explication and innovative experimentalism. The novel is a postmodern rewriting of the realist "The Plumber's Apprentice", one that questions the nature of what a realist text is and does. The image of the uroboros comes to describe not only Stark's affairs but the narrator and Rochelle's liaison, which is ultimately the "self-swallowing" (p.239) relationship between realism and experiment. Ironically he is forced by their break-up and his final act of "criticism" (the sarcastic rejection letter he sends to her (p.241)) to write his next chapter in the realist style he loathes. The romantic language he had earlier used to describe his passion for Rochelle now seems like the enthusiastic passion of a writer for material he can use.(p.172)

In the text everything, every relationship and event, is transformed into the narrator's obsession about how to tell his tale. Hamilton himself, a manipulative genius, is a sort of author. When he shouts "Live Free or Die" during Benson's speech, terrifying the old man, the narrator theorises that this may be "ironic overpraising" to actually criticise the speaker. Hamilton has raised this to an art form.(pp.182-183) Hamilton here, and throughout the novel, is presented as writing his life, being in total control of it and even deciding when it should end. But also Hamilton (and Rochelle and "C") are creations of the narrator, who as godlike author endlessly creates characters and stories to fuel his own egoism or satisfy his own needs. The use of the long note, which is, of course, more about the teller than the tale, conjures a fleeting resemblance to Nabokov's Pale Fire. In that novel Kinbote's commentary on Shade's poem is the real point of the text. Hamilton's life, like Shade's poem becomes an excuse for the expounding of the narrator's views. The narrator may not be mad like Kinbote but he is certainly strange and eccentric. His hobby is learning bird calls (p.237) and his friendship with "C", with its elaborate pretensions to urbane civilization (cigars, fine wine, references to Goldsmith), is like a parody of a pseudo-intellectual, would-be author.

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In this interpretation of the text the cosmic nihilism of the closing scenes, the "Unimaginable Nothing", becomes an aspect of the text's ironic contradistinction between the narrator's over-reaching literary ambitions and the ordinariness of his subject, a misogynistic plumber. "Unimaginable Nothing" may be an apt description for the narrator's literary pretensions, as well as the final, ironic allusion to the patchwork pastiche of genres and styles that the text has moved in and out of. For instance, the description of Lemuel Stark's encounter with the Abenookis which parodies Hawthorne and Cooper, and the depiction of Stark as a cross between existential hero and romantic New England transcendentalist, attuned to the spirit of the place he lives in. Numbers 22 to 39 of his "uninteresting" actions depicts a man at peace with his environment, working in it and part of it, like Thoreau at Walden Pond. (pp.205-207) Rochelle's realist chapters can similarly be seen as a pastiche of the roman-a-clef and the novel of a young working class man's sentimental education. And finally, to extend this interpretation to its logical conclusion, the mysterious persona of the title character becomes simply a parody of the modernist obsession with indeterminacy and fragmentation and his fate a parody of the more gloomy examples of "existential" fiction. Banks's use of parody in the novel is missed by most commentators on the novel who see it as either a "quest for the author's identity" or "the narrator's quest for self." (60)

Many of the narrative elements and themes of Hamilton Stark are echoed in Affliction. Both novels present a central character who is a white working class male in his late 40s, a man prone to acts of violence who is solitary and aloof. Both men disappear and violence and guns are involved in each case, albeit in a more dramatic way in the later novel. Both protagonists have tortured relationships with their daughters and are estranged from their wives. They come from families where domestic violence is either habitual or threatened. They have cruel, unloving fathers and mothers unable to control their partner's violence. Both Hamilton and Wade in consequence see their mothers as ineffectual and almost

(60) Niemi p.75 and Current Biography Yearbook p.46

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complicit in the violence they experience. Their attitude towards women is chauvinistic and they treat the women in their lives cruelly and violently. What is clear in both novels is their authors' uncompromising and hostile assessment of the way men treat women in the communities in which the novels are set.

This setting is contemporary America, in small New Hampshire towns and rural communities where the weather is seemingly always the middle of winter with blizzards and heavy falls of snow. In this they represent the antithetical climatic setting of the tropical The Book of Jamaica. A central theme in both novels is the clash between the values of the protagonist and the values of the society he lives in. It is much more obvious in the earlier novel with Hamilton's quasi-Nietzschean affinities but Wade is also at odds with the circumscribed materialism of LaRiviere and Jack. There are other, more incidental parallels which point to the essential similarity of the novels. For instance, in both novels the Native Americans, Abenookis in the earlier novel and Abenakis in the later novel, are described as being dispossessed by the waves of incoming white settlers. In fact both novels are engaged in a historical contextualisation of the narrative's contemporary events.

Finally their "stories" are told by another person who is close to them and who attempts to recreate their life and understand the mystery of their disappearance. Both of the narrators begin to identify with and become personally involved in the lives of the men they are attempting to comprehend and explain. Both narrators are involved in a process of creative writing, or even what could be termed a mythologising of their subjects. Rochelle and the unnamed narrator in an explicit and self-conscious way because they are literally writing narrative and Rolfe implicitly in his imaginative reconstruction of Wade's last days. Banks's approach to narration is shown in his comments to one interviewer where he stated that he was "interested in re-inventing the narrator" which he claims was a convention "that went out the window in the 20th century." He wants to re-invigorate the convention, to restore a "sense of intimacy, a face-to-face, arm-around-the-shoulder contact" like the ancient mariner
addressing the wedding guests in Coleridge's poem. (61)

Affliction is in fact a rewriting of Hamilton Stark; one which reverses the postmodern rewriting of the realistic "The Plumber's Apprentice" in the earlier novel. It rewrites experiment as realism. The relationship between the two novels is noted in only one of the reviews of Affliction and in Robert Niemi’s monograph on Banks. Elizabeth Tallent pointed out that Rolfe’s "exorcism by storytelling" has attracted Banks before and cites Hamilton Stark as example. (62) Robert Niemi also notes the "narrator-protagonist relationship at the center of Hamilton Stark and that Banks adopts it to somewhat different purposes in Affliction." (63) This different purpose "represents an advance over the earlier novel" because it more comprehensively merges the younger Banks with his older self. (64) Niemi’s reading is autobiographical and I will examine those aspects of the novel later in the chapter. Both critics grasp the significance of the narrative similarities of the two novels. What I will argue is that the central significance of Rolfe works on more than a functional or autobiographical/psychological level.

I will argue that the relationship between the narrator and protagonist continues Banks’s project of writing political fiction that unites experiment and realism. In this sense the later novel is also a politicisation of the themes of Hamilton Stark. Where that novel could be largely seen as a typical experimental fiction of the 1970s, one that sacrifices content and meaning for innovation for its own sake, Affliction attempts the far more difficult task of rewriting Hamilton/Wade’s life in terms of the malaise of late capitalist America and its impact on its disenfranchised citizens.

To return to the general introductory remarks of Chapter One of the thesis, Hamilton Stark exemplifies the neo-avant-garde project which typifies American postmodernism. In terms of how readers perceive it Peter Burger’s description of the historical avant-garde's objectives is an accurate assessment, "The recipient's attention no longer turns to a meaning of the work

(61) Thiebaux p.121.  
(62) Tallent p.7.  
(63) Niemi p.150.  
(64) ibid., p.151.

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that might be grasped by a reading of its constituent elements, but to the principle of construction." (65) The "individual parts ... are no longer subordinated to a pervasive intent." (66) Hamilton Stark's attack on the "institution" of the classic bildungsroman parallels the historical avant-garde's self-criticism of art (Duchamp's ready mades). But this project has failed. Its political intent was to withdraw meaning and thus by shocking the reader, direct their attention "to the fact that the conduct of one's life is questionable and that it is necessary to change it." But, as Burger points out, shock is generally "non-specific" and it quickly loses its effectiveness. There is no such thing as "expected shock". (67) This failure to integrate art into the praxis of life has a two-fold result. As Andreas Huyssen argues, citing Hollywood movies like Jaws, shock can now reaffirm perception rather than change it (68) and this "false sublation" of art and life is common practice in advertising and commodity aesthetics. (69) And secondly, post-avant-garde art must either resign itself to its autonomous status (realism) or try to break through that status. But this neo-avant-garde attempt to rekindle the sublation of art and life falters because all it can now do is to institutionalise the avant-garde as art and thus negate genuinely avant-gardist intentions. This despite what could be the truly avant-gardist consciousness of the artist. (70) Andreas Huyssen has argued that the American avant-garde should be seen as a movement, beginning thirty years after the advent of the European avant-garde, in a context of 1950s conservatism and anti-communism, which is drained of the political content and objectives of the historical avant-garde. He sees the Pop Art movement of the 1960s, not as a reaction against modernism, but as its conservative, cold war version, springing from modernism's canonisation. (71) Hence the tradition that Banks writes Hamilton Stark in is doubly obsolescent. Its shock

(65) Peter Burger, Theory of the Avant-Garde. p.81.

(66) ibid., p.80.                                    (67)ibid., pp.80-81.

(68) Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide. p.15.

(69) Burger p.54.                                    (70)ibid., p.58.

(71) Huyssen p.190.
effect has long been negated by the assimilationist power of consumer culture and American postmodernism was a project inextricably complicit in American consumer culture from its inception. As I have argued in Chapter One, Hamilton Stark, as a typically postmodern novel, is ultimately pointless, because of its rigid metafictional framework and its relentless undercutting of all certainties; aesthetic and epistemological. It enacts a refusal to allow any identification with itself on the level of narration or to break out of its aesthetic "world" to the world outside. I therefore disagree with Robert Niemi's assertion that the novel is "essentially concerned with the construction of male identity within a patriachal social order." (72) What I will argue for Affliction (and which is also true for The Book of Jamaica), is that by its organisation along the lines of an ongoing dialectic between shock and identification, it is a much more "radical" text.

Most of the favourable reviews of Affliction whilst impressed by the vigorous and gritty realism of the depiction of Wade's tragedy were uneasy with the use of Rolfe to narrate the story. Sven Birkerts judged Banks's device of using Rolfe as narrator to be a "canny one" but felt it presumptuous to expect the reader to believe he could enter his brother's thoughts and feelings. He asserts that, "... we soon forget that Rolfe is doing the telling", and that we come to regard him as a "transparent screen through which we peer at the stages of the action." (73) Similarly, Fred Pfeil, in a review essay that I have on the whole found very useful, cannot believe that, "... Rolfe can know all he's saying or execute this masterful narration." He objects to Rolfe's "self-pitying", "whiney" tone and concludes that, "We can easily do as we read what Banks should have done as he wrote and excise whiny Rolfe from the text." (74) Both reviewers do not believe Rolfe can function as a narrator or "stand-in novelist" (75) as Birkerts calls him and that he either can or should be ignored. In a similar vein Robert Towers calls Rolfe's narration "annoyingly obtrusive" and Stephen Trombley believes that

(72) Niemi p.75.  
(73) Birkerts p.41.  
(74) Fred Pfeil, Another Tale to Tell. pp.80-81.  
(75) Birkerts p.41.
the author does not have "sufficient control over the brother's narrative to make it anything other than earnest and pedantic." (76) These judgements, I feel, stem from an attitude that either reduces Rolfe simply to the ontological status of another character or confers upon him an ontological status equivalent to that of the author.

I would argue that Rolfe acts as a literary device that can function on a number of levels depending on the way the text is approached. As a "character" in a realistic novel he establishes our identification with the narrated events, he is our way into an understanding and empathy for Wade's fate. One of the few reviewers who saw positives in the use of Rolfe was Julian Loose who saw him as "an unusually eloquent and imaginative narrator." Again, as with Niemi, this sympathy towards Rolfe's narration is based on the critic's comprehension of the autobiographical role he plays in the novel. (77) However, Elizabeth Tallent argues that the use of Rolfe results in "an enormously complex point of view for the novel" because his "fastidious and isolated consciousness is dissolved into a disturbed, passionate one." (78)

Opposed to what could be termed Rolfe's classic Aristotelian function of establishing the reader's identification with the protagonist, he has a Brechtian function, to distance the reader from the action. This he does in two ways. He reminds us that this story is detective work, speculation, a sort of fiction. And he adopts a prose style that, in its tactics of mythic and historic elevation and methods of pausing the action with reflections and digressions, never allows the reader to totally identify with Wade as a realist or organicist text would do. With the narrator of Hamilton Stark as a prototype in mind he can be seen as an unreliable narrator, one who knows and assumes too much and who we suspect may be deliberately manipulating our responses and perhaps missing the point of Wade's story. This "Brechtian"

(78) Tallent p.7.
assessment of the novel was first made by Fred Pfeil. But in his reading the technique is limited to the way the prose, by commenting unsentimentally on the action, works towards a distancing of the narrative in order to tell rather than to show. Rolfe's narration has no significance in this process according to Pfeil; it is wholly enacted in the prose style which is described as the use of the "steady-sighted, straightforward additive sentence, scrupulously naming as it goes." (79) I believe Rolfe's role as narrator is central to the novel's "Brechtian" effects and in order to argue for this assertion I want to begin by discussing Wade and from there discuss the wider inferences and connections made by the text.

Wade is an ordinary American, a member by trade, situation and outlook of the white working class. His tragedy is set in a small New Hampshire town, which for readers of Banks's earlier stories such as those in Trailerpark and Searching for Survivors has connotations of narrow-mindedness, frustration and despair. It spans only a few weeks, encompassing the opening and closing days of the local deer hunting season. The text's "present" is refracted through a future and past perspective. The future is Rolfe's narration, several years after the narrated events, where inferences and assumptions are made, scenes imaginatively reconstructed and judgements and conclusions arrived at. Rolfe's narration also moves backwards to contextualise and explain the present in its relationship to the history of the Whitehouse family and Wade's once bright future.

The novel's epigraph from Simone Weil refers to affliction as the "great enigma of human life". (80) This is apt given both the intensity of the mental and physical distress Wade suffers and has suffered throughout his life and the mystery, not only of what has happened to him, but of why he acts in the way he does. There is a hint in this statement that the enigma of Wade's life and death may, despite the best efforts of narrator and author, remain

(79) Pfeil p.78.

an enigma. In suffering his afflictions Wade reminds us of Job and also, as Alice Bloom has remarked, of Faulkner's Joe Christmas. Bloom calls Wade "the most pitiable male character in American fiction" since *Light in August's* Joe Christmas. (81)

The first section of the novel, which culminates in Wade's discovery of his mother's body, sets the scene, introduces the characters and their relationships and poses the problems which are orchestrated into the solutions Wade finds for his impossible situation. The quickening of action after this turning point, with its rising crescendo of anguish, rage and "affliction", which climaxes in the shootings, is a common dramatic device. Wade's decision on Rolfe's advice, to try and solve all his problems in a logical sequence and manner, to act decisively is like Act Five of *Hamlet*, where the tragic conclusion is set in motion by Hamlet's "the readiness is all" attitude.

This first section places Wade in a geographic and historical setting, a contemporary social and political setting and a personal setting. The physical setting, as all of the narrative will be, is refracted through Rolfe's narration. Rolfe asks us to imagine a village where the Whitehouse family has lived for five generations, with houses and shops, a river, meadows and tall trees. He asks us to, "Think of a village in a medieval German folktale." (p.2) The family history begins to be invested with archetypal and mythic themes.

Rolfe's voice recounts the civic history of Lawford from the Abenaki Indians fishing the river, to its first white settlers, the brief period of prosperity and the present "dead economy" caused by the Great Depression's destruction of the timber industry. It is now a place abandoned by its most talented children (like Rolfe) and used by part-time residents for holidays and by the deer hunters. (pp.8-11) Next to the town is a monadnock, a "lump of dirt and stone disgorged whole by the retreating glacier", (p.50) called Parker Mountain. Rolfe recounts the history of the surrounding land; how the Abenakis were robbed of their land, how it passed from the ownership of the settler/entrepreneur, Parker, into the hands of Capital - the Great North Woods Products Company and finally how, via bankruptcy,

depression and absentee landowning, "proprietary rights had come full circle." (p.51)
Ownership of the land once again determined by use more than law. The first part of this description is like a micro-history of American expansion, conquest, settlement and capitalist consolidation. Banks is establishing the archetypal significance of this physical setting. Nowadays the land is free, due to indifference and unprofitability and this is a sort of bleak parody of the original native's relation to the land. During the course of the novel Wade will discover that it is once again becoming subject to the law of profit, as LaRiviere schemes to buy land. So the setting is not only a "medieval German folktale", it is also the end product of a historic process, being repeated on a smaller scale by LaRiviere and Mel Gordon. The expansionism of white settlers, with its corollary of the dispossession of the native people, is mirrored in the disempowerment and exploitation of the citizens of Lawford, of whom Wade is the symbol.

When we turn to Wade's public context, we see him as prominent local citizen, as worker for LaRiviere and as a resident liked, but pitied and feared by those who know him. For Wade his job as town cop is an inevitable consequence of his previous career as a military policeman stationed in Korea. It is, perhaps an appeasement of the memory of his brothers killed in Vietnam, a war he was not a part of. The war memorial set across from the Town Hall, where his office is, had been part of his childhood. As a child playing softball he had been able to read the inscriptions of the names of the war dead. (pp.19-20) He feels that to get your name there "you were truly, undeniably, hopelessly dead" (p.20) and now his brother's names are added. Its significance as a symbol of death is mythologised, it appears in the "pale moonlight like an ancient dolmen." (p.37) As the text recurrently shows, Wade's present is the product of his past. He cannot conceive of not being the town cop, he feels it is his responsibility and his right. (p.82) Even in the midst of his paranoia and rage, just before the violence begins, he has time to visit the State Trooper's headquarters to ask if he can become a State Trooper so he can wear a uniform like his brothers wore. (pp.305-306)

It is evident that Wade's sense of power as "town cop", is based on shaky foundations, on a loss of power and "manhood". When he goes to Gordon's house to give him a ticket for
disobeying his traffic directions he is attempting to reassert his authority over Gordon. But Gordon's wealth astonishes him, his children's coolness unnerves him and his wife's beauty dazzles him. Gordon contumaciously throws him out and his only recourse is to drift into a fantasy about "saving" Gordon's wife. (p.145) This scene more than any other directs our attention to Wade's powerlessness and it also indicates the class nature of that powerlessness. Gordon as a representative of the *nouveau riche* can afford to disdain Wade's bluster, his attempt to cross class boundaries by asserting an authority that he does not really have. The class basis of this exchange is prefigured in one of Rolfe's historical asides where he describes the five families who own the area and who combine to prevent the purchase of property by Jews, blacks and until recently Catholics. (p.139) Nearly all the commentators on the novel stress Wade's working class origin and then for the large part deny his class position and turn him into the American ordinary everyman. But the "daily indignities" of his working life (82) flow from his position in a class system that the text shows to be in place behind the facade of democracy. Even Fred Pfeil who adopts a Marxist reading of the novel fails to comment on just how much a part of Wade's affliction are the humiliations that flow from his position in Lawford's society. (83) This is also evident in his treatment at the hands of LaRiviere as his employer and even his estranged wife, Lillian who is from a middle class background (her drunken father was a gentle man) and who in one scene tellingly makes him wait outside her home to pick up Jill. She now makes him feel "stupid" (pp.321-322) and he remembers how she had shamed him during their divorce by remarking of the clothes he wore, "'You look just like you are, Wade.'" (p.315) Similarly his experiences with the lawyer, Hand, are humiliating reminders of his lack of status in society.

Connected to his feelings about Mel Gordon is his reaction to the death of Twombley. His lack of official power is brought again to his notice when he is embarrassed at Nick's

(82) Niemi p.155.

(83) The reviews I have read and Robert Niemi's monograph on Banks do not consider in any detail the class nature of the humiliations Wade suffers.

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restaurant for not knowing about the shooting. At the shooting site he is more of a spectator
than a participant in the investigation. His interest in the case, his growing suspicion of Jack
and slowly building belief in some larger conspiracy involving Gordon and LaRiviere, is a
direct response to these public embarrassments which graphically demonstrate to him his
loss of power. By believing these conspiracy theories he empowers himself and his position.
And as with Gordon's wife there is an element of "romance", of fantasy in these obsessions.

The inclusion of LaRiviere in this conspiracy is a response to Wade's similar humiliation
and loss of power in his workplace. LaRiviere is the town's one success story and his
business is like a "small republic". He is not only Wade's employer, he got Wade the
job of town cop and can ensure his loss of that job. He sold him the trailer he lives in and
ripped him off, Wade realises, and although Wade does not know it, once slept with Lillian.
He has the power to make Wade get up in the middle of a blizzard to plough snow and to
sack and re-employ him when he needs to. He is consigned to the odious task of driving the
snow mobile, having been found unfit by LaRiviere to work in the office. Despite all this he
has loved LaRiviere since he was a child. His boss represents the community and it is
Wade's need to belong that motivates him. He knows that LaRiviere's winning of the snow
ploughing contract was a dubious manoeuvre to acquire a monopoly and increase his profits
but voted for it anyway. Part of his reason was practical, to keep a steady job and part
of it was another fantasy because LaRiviere is the sort of wheeler-dealer he admires and
wants to be. But once Wade's world begins to collapse LaRiviere is drawn into the
conspiracy. His dependence on LaRiviere, the control his employer has over his life, takes on
sinister overtones.

Wade's third public incarnation is as a resident of the small town, someone who drinks in
local bars, eats at Nick's restaurant and accompanies his child to Halloween parties. In other
words he is a citizen. The people of the town, specifically those at the Town Hall in the
opening scenes, act like a chorus. They are given a voice to express the general feelings of
the community about him. Sympathy because of his "hard case" wife and his love for his
daughter. But he is a "sonofabitch" and a "mean drunk"(p.22) and when he is enraged the only response possible is Margie's, "... get out of the way and stay out of the way."(p.33)

As I have tried to suggest a discussion of Wade's public personae necessarily involves the beginnings of an understanding of the private aspects of his character. The theme of loss of power is, of course, central in Wade's relationship with Lillian and Jill. The first scene, the disastrous excursion with Jill to the Halloween party, reveals to Wade and the reader, that he is losing his child's love. He can no longer do the things he once did with Jill when she was younger and truly his daughter. This is like a second betrayal, a re-enactment of his rejection by Lillian. The argument he has with Lillian and her new husband and the suppressed violence of his responses, indicates the rage he feels about this. When Wade sees Lillian again at the funeral it is obvious to Rolfe that he still loves her.(p.237) For Wade, Lillian has become enshrined in his memory, their romance and marriages, events he needs to cling to. And as the flashback in Chapter 14 makes clear, his confession to her that his father beats him is the act that draws them together and affirms their love for each other. In a sense she takes over the role of his mother, the succourer of his pain and anger. At the funeral he wishes her to conform to his fantasy of when, "They were going to turn into a marvellous man and a powerful woman and brilliant couple."(p.237) The frustration of this fantasy, which is his life dream in a way, propels him into a rage that takes him to Hand, whose name recalls a famous Federal Court judge, Learned Hand. This reminds us of the social chasm between them and the lawyer's power over Wade. Ironically, although in a wheelchair and thus without the physical power that Wade has, Hand represents legal and public power. The same power that had humiliated him during his divorce when he had been portrayed as a bad husband and father. His loss of power in the private sphere is paralleled by his public humiliation and loss of power and even though, through Hand he partially achieves his goal of more access to Jill, he is humiliated by Hand's bringing up of the violence in his marriage.(pp.314-315)

His current relationship with a local waitress, Margie Fogg, is, in contrast to his idealised marriage, a much more passionless affair. They were "possibly too familiar with each other
ever to fall in love", and on "cold and lonely nights ... depended on each other's goodness."(p.32) For Margie their relationship is already dying, she finds herself regarding him from a distance, "... his inconsistency was patterned and self-serving", but she sleeps with him because she is lonely, to satisfy a need.(p.151) Motivated by his growing loss of control and desperation Wade proposes marriage. Her decision to accept is once more pragmatic, just as his emotional reasons are, once again, embedded in a fantasy. When she accepts he embraces her and Pop thinking:

He held the old man he would take care of from now on and the woman who would be his helpmate and partner in life, the woman whose presence in his life, in this old house way out in the woods, would help make Wade's life a proper father's life, one he could happily bring his daughter home to at last.(p.219)

As Margie tells Wade, there is a little boy in him (and most men) that he tries to hide.(p.173) The adolescent attitudes he has towards Margie and Lillian are reflected generally in his attitudes towards women which are conservative, even prudish. He has to restrain himself from scolding two teenage girls leaving a women's health centre; they have probably just had diaphragms fitted, he thinks, or even more scandalously, "just had abortions!"(p.160) Waiting in a bar in Concord, he is embarrassed overhearing three women discuss the size of a man's penis and becomes enthusiastic over a baseball game to hide his feelings.(p.164) Passages like these seem to transfer the loss of power he feels in his private and public life into a dimension where society's changing values conspire to embarrass him. However, as Fred Pfeil points out Banks's depiction of his women characters "are more uncertainly observed than understood" and he instances the "sentimentalized Margie Fogg."(84) Other reviewers do not comment on this aspect but I would agree with Pfeil that Margie is invested with such strength, self-knowledge and sympathy that she appears like a male writer's version of a feminist heroine. Although it could be argued that just as Wade is

(84) Pfeil p.79.

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obviously idealising Lillian throughout the novel, Rolfe in his narration is idealising Margie, investing her with the empathy for Wade that he guiltily feels he has not displayed.

Wade's only male friend is Jack Hewitt whom Wade thinks of as "a damned good kid."(p.24) His envy of Jack's young girlfriend and surplus income which is symbolised by his new truck will be one of the triggers for Wade's descent into violence. He believes that Jack is "under the impression that he is going to live forever", but comforts himself that he will eventually end up like him because, "You can't escape certain awful things in life."(p.36) Ironically, of course, it is Wade who will ensure that Jack will not live forever.

As with his other relationships Wade's feelings are refracted through his fantasies. Jack is an ex-professional ball-player who has only through injury been denied success, he is young and he is loved. Wade thinks of him with envy, sorrow and repressed rage because he represents that romantic image of himself and his love for Lillian that is now only a bitter memory. He "still believed in romance", but "held against that warmly golden glow, his present life looked grim and cold and terribly diminished."(p.27) It is little wonder then, that Jack's role in the death of Twombley is incorporated by Wade into his conspiracy. Jack is either LaRiviere's partner or his dupe. Jack, like Lillian and LaRiviere is one of the people whom Wade weaves fantasies about in what amounts to a Walter Mitty-like illusion.

Jack's connection with baseball and more significantly with hunting connects him with a public sphere of male violence. Wade does not take part in either of these activities but his actions are set within their context. The deer hunters are one of the constituents that make up Lawford's yearly round of existence. They are a migratory herd of males "... sated from having participated, even if only marginally and ineptly, in an ancient male rite."(p.11) Later the text describes the hunting:

... wave after wave of killing noise, over and over, sweeping across the valleys and up the hills. Slugs, pellets, balls made of aluminium, lead, steel, rip into the body of the deer, crash through bone, penetrate and smash organs, rend muscle and sinew. Blood splashes into the air, across tree bark, stone, onto smooth white blankets of snow, where scarlet fades quickly to pink.
Black tongue lolls over blooded teeth, as if the mouth were a carnivore's; blood trickles from the carbon-black nostrils, shit spits steaming into the snow; urine, entrails, blood, mucus spill from the animal's body ...(pp.68-69)

The text ensures we experience this not as a sport, but as violence, perpetrated by men on defenceless animals. After the kill they hurry home with the trophy strapped across car roofs, "excited in ancient ways". (pp.74-75) The language expresses this as desecration, as violence and in the reference to "ancient ways", as something which has a long, almost mythic history.

As Julian Loose remarks, this "seasonal display of great outdoors virility forms the perfect backdrop" to the main narrative. (85) That the novel's action spans the opening and closing days of the deer hunting season is indicative of its linkage of the private violence that afflicts Wade with the public violence that the text makes clear is more dangerous than mere sport. The motif of the hunt with its associations of male bonding and the slaughter of innocents has been used before in American fiction, in Faulkner's tale "The Bear" and Norman Mailer's Why are we in Vietnam? The latter explicitly draws the connection in its ironic title between its surreal Alaskan bear hunt and the Vietnam war that was being waged at the time. As in Mailer's novel Banks is keen to draw the parallels between the culture of male violence and the private acts of males influenced by that culture.

The images of the hunting violence are connected with other scenes of violence so that the text weaves a mosaic of violent acts; male on male, on female and on the environment. Pop's beating of his wife and children is central. A violence passed down to Wade who has a reputation as a wife-beater and who lashes out at Jill in the scene where Margie and Jill decide to flee the house. (p.337) Halloween night is described as a sort of anti-carnival with teenage boys vandalising property and terrorising the community, just as Wade and Rolfe once had done. (pp.11-12) Jack Hewitt is associated with the world of professional sport and a love of guns and he and Wade are involved in two pursuits and arguments. Whilst Jack and Twombley hunt they hear gunfire, "as if skirmishes were being fought down there, isolated

(85) Loose p.1146.
mopping-up actions and occasional sniper fire." (p.77) The passage could describe any modern war but is perhaps most aptly associated with the Vietnam war. And in a text where references are made to acting and role-playing it is not entirely beyond the realm of impossibility to infer an allusion to the Hollywood film, The Deer Hunter where Vietnam, deer hunting, winter and working class males are elements in the cinematic text. The images of male violence create a cultural context in which we respond to Wade's violent acts. It makes them seem almost inevitable. Significantly it is the death of Twombley at the start of the season that ignites Wade's conspiracy obsession and the last day of the season with the sound of gunfire in the background is an ironic counterpoint to his stalking and killing of Jack. (pp.344-345) In these last scenes Wade becomes a hunter.

I now want to turn to Wade's relationship with his father which is another of the novel's themes that acts as an elaboration of similar themes in Hamilton Stark. But where Stark's father's role and significance is limited and peripheral, Glenn Whitehouse is invested with terrifyingly realistic characteristics and a historic significance I will discuss later. He first appears in the "present" of the text at what comes to be a turning point in the narrative, the discovery of Sally Whitehouse's body. His introduction shocks the reader because of his familiarity from the long flashbacks that have described Wade's childhood and adolescence. We do not expect him to be alive and playing a part in Wade's life as a man. Our view of him has been shaped by these flashbacks which depict him as like a "deadly automaton" who "burned, burned" with alcoholic rage. (p.97) What is most striking about the depiction of Wade's first beating is Wade's terror as he struggles to avoid his father's blows, "... he realized that he was burrowing his face into the couch, showing his father his backside as he dug with his paws like a terrified animal into the earth." (p.101) A link is established in the reader's mind between Wade burrowing like a terrified animal and a terrified deer struggling to avoid death at the hunter's hands. Despite her desire to help even his mother appears complicit in his beating. She still held the popcorn bowl, "... as if she were his assistant and the bowl contained certain of his awful tools." (p.101)

The later flashbacks in Chapters 13 and 14 depict the moment of his father's loss of
absolute, undisputed power in the household and Wade's first move to escape that cycle of violence. When Pop cheats to avoid being beaten in an arm wrestle by Charlie we become aware he is losing his strength (and patriarchal power). And when Wade finally confesses his situation to someone outside the family he begins to consider the possibility of escape. But there is no scene where Wade successfully defies his father as there is in *Hamilton Stark* where Alvin Stock knocks his father out with a cast-iron skillet. (p.110) Instead, when Wade tries to stand up to Pop and defend his mother he is brutally beaten and left like "a marionette with its strings cut."(p.199) When he tells Lillian this he begins to escape. But this moment also marks the beginning of his romantic fantasy about a better life with her. A fantasy, we are aware, that is doomed to never be fulfilled.

When we see Pop in the flesh, as it were, he seems rather an old pathetic figure, wearing "ancient slippers", looking "elderly and fragile". (pp.208-209) He does not seem to recognise Wade and is pathetically unaware that his wife is dead. His sad bewilderment contradicts our image of his "burning" rage. It is only at the funeral when all his children are present that he becomes more like the man in Rolfe's memory. The malevolent, snarling force who berates his children as "candy-asses" and claims that all of them are "morally inferior" to the dead woman. The image of the raging, demon-possessed figure, (pp.229-230) recalling Rochelle's image for Stark, is qualified by the text. Specifically by Rolfe's mediating memory of the funeral service. For Rolfe, they must all feel guilt for not saving their mother from his wrath, and because she suffered and endured him she is, indeed, worth more than them. He realises she endured because she loved him and "so did we ... His violence and wrath were our violence and wrath: there had been no way out of it." (p.236)

The incipient fatalism of this conclusion is appropriate. From this point on in the text the "violence and wrath" of the past, of the father, is acted out in the present, in the increasingly violent acts of the son. Most of the commentators on the novel have seen these scenes as being central to the novel. Sven Birkerts comments that it is "a law of human nature that what enters as experience exits as behaviour" and he sees the novel as a Greek tragedy with Wade being driven not by the will of the gods but by the "imperatives of his misshapen
character. (86) Fred Pfeil sees it as one of the triumphs of the novel in that it presents this "terrible cycle in subaltern lives in which powerlessness breeds self-loathing breeds hysterical violence" without "voyeuristic sensationalism" or "mere 'sociological' accuracy." (87) He also refers to Greek tragedy, citing Oedipus Rex, and also asserts that Banks's achievement demonstrates Marx's insight that men make history but not of their own choosing. (88) I will discuss later just how these claims for the novel are modified by its use of the Rolfe narration to undercut this tone of high seriousness.

However, the text has been preparing the reader for the tragic consequences of Wade's existence by setting his actions in a context of place, public affairs and private relationships. This can be contrasted with the typical strategy of most contemporary American fiction which portrays violence as random, arbitrary and essentially meaningless. This latter is a gesture familiar in the black humour fiction of Thomas Pynchon, Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut that was written throughout the 1960s. In this kind of writing the meaninglessness of a chaotic and godless world is mirrored in the lives of characters who experience a series of violent and arbitrary disasters, such as the "human yo-yo", Benny Profane of Pynchon's V. The genre has remained popular in the fiction of John Irving and Lisa Alther in the eighties. Affliction is like recent novels such as Tim O'Brien's In the Lake of the Woods and Richard Bausch's Violence in its attempt to understand the political and human meaning of a violent act.

In a way Twombley's death and Wade's discovery, through Alma Pittman, that LaRiviere is buying land for some lucrative deal, are red herrings. The dramatic implications of these events are not exploited by the narrative. They are subordinated to the personal story of Wade's violence and act simply as triggers for his growing paranoia. However, they are significant in two ways. Firstly, they are part of the context of the public sphere against

(86) Birkerts pp.40-41.  
(87) Pfeil p.77.  
(88) ibid, p.79.
which Wade's story is set. He lives in a world where it is possible for corrupt union officials
to be murdered and where prominent citizens indulge in criminal land deals and
get-rich-quick schemes. Secondly, as cause of his violence they stand as the public, political
side of his actions as opposed to its private motivations. The inescapable circle of childhood
domestic violence, marriage break-up, alcoholism and despair are one side of the
"explanation" offered by the text. The other side is the increasing paranoia he feels about the
world he lives in. If people he knows and counts as friends are involved, if there is a scheme
to exploit the town, where does it end? It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this paranoia
has its emotional roots in his private tragedy.

Wade's paranoia, one feels, is part of his fantasy life. He wildly assumes that Twombley
was killed because he discovered that union funds were being siphoned into buying
land. (pp. 284-285) He imagines Jack and LaRiviere discussing him, concluding that he
cannot be bought off. By uncovering the conspiracy Wade will be vindicated in the eyes of
the world, his power will be restored. But towards the end he seems no longer in control of
his fantasies. When he sleeps with Hettie he confuses her with Lillian, slipping into the
past. (pp. 310-312) Wade's public and private lives are tangled up and he cannot unravel them.
He feels that, "The world was full of secrets, secrets and conspiracies and lies, plots and evil
designs and elaborate deceptions, and knowing them - and now he knew them all - filled
Wade's heart with inexpressible joy." (p. 249)

These plots may be explained by the narrative; Twombley's death an accident, LaRiviere's
scheme simply an unconnected, possibly unscrupulous but not criminal business deal. But
they are real to Wade. His fantasies take on a resemblance to the paranoid conspiracy
theories that dominate such postmodern texts as The Crying of Lot 49 and William
Burroughs' The Naked Lunch. In this Affliction resembles The Book of Jamaica where the
protagonist of that novel begins to be beset by similar fears. Of course, the point in these
texts is that the world may very well equal the paranoid projections of the narrative voices.
What is of significance here is that Wade's particular response to his collapsing world is to
project it as a vast conspiracy. And it is significant that the only "proof" we have that Wade
actually believed and thought these thoughts is Rolfe's narrative based on telephone calls, interviews and imaginative reconstruction.

What I want to attempt now is a re-reading of Affliction with the significance of Rolfe's narration as the basis of my reading. The first part of the discussion is comparable, perhaps, to a first reading of the novel. Wade's tragedy and the rush of the narrative towards conclusion, the narrative striptease, (89) is central to the reading experience and we can, as the reviewers mentioned, excise the narrator from our memory. But the presence of Rolfe creates unease, niggling doubts in a reader's mind which encourage a second reading, one that steps away from the tragic narrative and turns its gaze to the way the story is told.

As a narrator Rolfe has a number of connections with the tale he tells. It is his brother who is its subject, he appears as a minor character in the flashbacks that help to explain Wade's actions and he is a participant, both as the person Wade vents his anger and pain to in the late night telephone calls and as one of the family members at the funeral. He is therefore, involved, complicit in the tale he tells. He is the source of the narrative voice. This is foregrounded from the beginning and throughout the text. We are never allowed completely to forget that it is a fictional recreation of "real" events. He begins with what amounts to a defence of why he has decided to tell his older brother's story. He is "uniquely qualified" to tell the story because he is already separated from the family by his choice of lifestyle and residence and because he too, has been "ashamed and angry practically since birth". His purpose is to "exorcise" Wade's story because it is his "ghost life".(p.2) A dialectic between identification and distancing is set up from the beginning of the novel.

At first Rolfe is not really interested in Wade's rambling confessions. The long phone calls are listened to "as if he were a boring soap opera on TV".(p.3) He is drawn in because of a change in Wade's voice in a call a day or two after Halloween when, "I was no longer distantly monitoring my brother's confused painful life but was instead practically living

It." (p.4) This emphatic transference is the rationale given for his involvement and later his unique qualification to tell Wade's story. Rolfe becomes Wade, stands in for him, just as we readers, through Rolfe's narration, come to identify with and stand in for Wade. The process of identification with the principal character is a technique that allows the reader imaginatively and empathetically to "live" the character's experience. Hence, Rolfe here is the ideal reader of the tragedy and the statement of "practically living" Wade's story can be seen in a different way. The narrative also works to alienate the reader. So we can see Rolfe's assertion that he "lives" this experience as an indicator that he will take over from Wade, use the raw materials of his calls to write his own story. The contradictory impulses to identify and alienate are present throughout the narrative.

When Rolfe describes the first scenes of the Halloween party he draws back and reveals his sources. He has talked to Margie and she has told him what happened that night. The scene changes to Rolfe and Margie at Nick's the night before the interview actually takes place. (p.33) The text does this fade out to a later point in time again and again. Chapter 19 reconstructs Wade's movements after he has lost the truck, "he left evidence behind him, a trail of sorts ..." (p.266) Later we are made aware that he has interviewed Nick, Alma, Jill, Chick and Golden in order to reconstruct Wade's last known movements. (pp.330-334) Rolfe has an active role as detective and by seeing him as a detective attention is drawn to the fact that a "case" is being prepared or a fiction researched.

As Rolfe, early in his narrative states, all the evidence gathering cannot fully tell the story. "How can I know what Wade thought about Hettie and Jack ..." (p.47) He answers himself:

I do not, in the conventional sense, know many of these things. I am not making them up, however, I am imagining them. Memory, intuition, interrogation and reflection have given me a vision, and it is this vision I am telling here. (p.47)

He elaborates further on the role of intuition in this process:

There are kinds of information that instantly arrange themselves into coherent, easily perceived patterns, and one either acknowledges those...
patterns, or one does not. For most of my adult life, I chose not to recognise those patterns. ... Once I chose to acknowledge them, however, they came rushing towards me, one after the other, until at last the story I am telling here presented itself to me in its entirety.(p.48)

This could be a description of the writing process, the intuition and recognition of patterns that enables stories to be told. What is accented here is that this vision is essentially a creative act. Later he muses that, "... facts do not make history ... without meaning attached, and without understanding of causes and connections, a fact is an isolate particle of experience."(p.339)

There are other ways in which attention is drawn to the fictional nature of the narrative. Quite often it inhabits the mind of characters that Rolfe does not have a brotherly affinity with. At various times it describes what Margie is thinking and feeling and what Pop thinks. But Rolfe could not have interviewed Pop and so could not know what he felt sitting in the funeral car with him, he could only surmise.(pp.232-233) At other times the narrative voice acts almost like a chorus; when it describes the town's feelings about Wade (pp.21-22) and the feelings of the local landowners about Mel Gordon's possible Jewishness.(p.139) The novel begins by involving the reader in the process of imaginative creation. It asks us to, "Think of a village",(p.2) to "Imagine with me" the scene on Halloween's eve in Lawson, (p.7) to "Let us imagine Wade and Jill talking", and to "Picture, if you will" the costumed children at the Town Hall.(p.20) A scene is being set, and by inviting the reader to imagine all this, instead of pretending it is simply happening, it distances the reader, making them aware of the construction of the scene. The omniscient third person narrator or equally controlling, subjective first person narrator are eschewed for a narrative voice that refuses to presume or pretend the "realness" of what it narrates.

The text flickers between the conventional, dramatized reconstructions of Wade's final days and the narrative voice of Rolfe, drawing our attention to him and why he speaks and revealing in the process much of his life. Whenever the narrative, the unfolding mystery of
the story, dominates our responses, building to a climax, there is an anti-climactic return to Rolfe's voice, often at the start of chapters where he draws conclusions, makes connections with his own experience and prepares us by setting the scene for the next piece of dramatization.

This dimension of fictionality is further reinforced by a narrative device that encourages readers to see events as versions of events. That is, there are a number of scenes in the text that suggest multiple or alternate explanations. There are Alma and Wade's differing theories about LaRiviere's scheming and Wade and Rolfe's theories about who actually murdered Twombley. At the end there is the paranoiac version of the murder espoused by both brothers and what Rolfe tells us really happened. (p.351) Similarly, there are Rolfe and Wade's contradictory memories of who it was that Pop beat so badly he had to be hospitalised, (pp.274-277) and finally, the two different versions of the actual shooting. (pp.78-79, pp.86-88) In the first Jack shoots him, in the second Jack realises Twombley has accidentally shot himself. Both are presented as actually happening and the second version creates a vertiginous feeling in the reader, and is what Madison Smart Bell, quoted by Robert Niemi, calls "a little metafictional trickery." Niemi surmises that Banks takes the risk of confusing the reader to lend credence to Wade's theory that Twombley was murdered. (90) But I would argue that the reader is made uneasy, and this creates the reader's sense, one shared with Rolfe and Wade, that the truth is unknown. The reader feels that whichever version chosen is an arbitrary one, determined more by the controlling narrative voice than any "objective", textual truth. The contradictory versions are not there ultimately to explain Wade's paranoia in a rationalist manner but to undermine the reader's faith in the veracity of the narrative.

There is a similarly unsettling scene during the chapter which describes the family meeting before the funeral. As I have already argued, the funeral is one of the pivotal points in the unfolding of events, the trigger for Wade's murderous rage. Yet at this dramatic point, with

(90) Niemi p.156.
Rolfe participating and observing all that occurs, the narrative pauses and seems to step back and view the action from a distance. It is the scene where Wade manhandles Pop and throws him to the floor after he has aggressively brushed Margie aside and attacked him. The narrative describes this scene using a language that records what happens in a dispassionate, semi-objective manner. But then it moves across the room to Rolfe watching the scene. His participation had been minimal and now he observes them as if they were "characters in a play". He describes how they turn to him in a line, "... shedding their roles ... Then the three of them looked out towards me and linked hands, and, I swear it, they bowed low. That is how I saw it. What else could I do? I applauded."(p.231) Coming in the middle of this series of dramatic confrontations, which we assume are seething and brewing in Wade's mind, this vignette is bizarre, almost surreal. It could be explained as the process of returning to some sort of normalcy after the abnormal heights of rage and passion; but Rolfe sees it as theatre and role-playing. Once again, the scaffolding, as it were, of the narrative is exposed. A surreal and bizarrely comic element is evident throughout the novel. For instance, the scene where Wade throws the snowball at the police cruiser which drives on "as if Wade were not there"(pp.91-92) and the incident where Wade chases Jack and LaRiviere's truck ends up sinking into the iced over river.(pp.260-265)

These scenes, which tend to upset the build-up of tragic intensity and the use of Rolfe continually to remind us that what we are reading is a version of events and not the authoritative version that is assumed to be given in a tragedy, are part of the metafictional strategies of the text. Patricia Waugh's definition of metafiction is that it is "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality." (91) I have already mentioned in the Introduction the connection between this strategy and postmodernism and

also the metafictional elements of *The Book of Jamaica* earlier in this chapter. *Affliction* is also concerned with the "laying bare of the device", but not simply to comment on the fact that realism is not all that real. Rolfe's narration, as I have argued, works both towards a distancing between reader and narrative and a drawing in of the reader so that what Rolfe so painfully discovers and comes to terms with, the reader also experiences.

Apart from the metafictional dimension of the narrative there is a continuous impulse towards a metaphorization of Wade's situation. A constant elevating of his status which imbues it with a significance other than that of a strictly personal tragedy. Wade's bad tooth generates a physical pain that accompanies all the mental pain he feels throughout. After the disastrous Halloween party, sitting alone in his office, it begins to throb and he knows that soon it "would be the only thing he could think of, the only thing that could abide in his mind."(p.46) After Twombley's death, alone again, in his trailer, he eats gingerly to avoid antagonising the tooth which "growled quietly in the right corner of his mouth's cage."(p.135) On the day he kills Pop the pain is the worst it has ever been, "... it had turned scarlet ... was eating its way in toward the center", and affects his vision so that he saw things "in discontinuous flutters and flashes."(p.295) Shortly afterwards he tears it out with a pair of pliers; a sequence the text describes in graphic detail so that is seems like some horrifically violent act.(pp.296-297) The tooth takes on a metaphoric significance, a symbol of Wade's state of mind. Just as the pain will be the only thing that abides in his mind so does the obsessive, enraged paranoia only abide in the climactic scenes. It affects his vision just as his moral vision is ultimately affected and it is a metonym of his own life situation; where he, like the tooth, rots in the cage of his personal and social world. The act of violence towards the tooth, almost inevitably, mirrors the violent acts he will commit against his personal and social nemeses - Pop and Jack. As a part of himself, his murder of Pop is like his violent extraction of the tooth, a self-inflicted act, a sort of suicide.

The climate of the region is also used in the text's metaphoric strategy. The ice-age glacier that created Parker Mountain is a geological sign of the region's weather. Life here has been
characterised by winter for "tens of thousands of years". (p. 60) Ice, snow, arctic winds, blizzards, overcast skies are so much part of the climate that people hardly notice the arrival of winter because they have "barely noticed its absence in the first place." (p. 61) The cold is of everpresent significance; Jack and Twombley track through snow whilst hunting, Wade directs traffic on icy roads and is called out in the middle of the night to plough snow from the roads. His mother freezes to death and the last physical evidence of Wade are his snow tracks leaving Jack's body. (p. 350) The text does not specifically link Wade's frame of mind or his actions with the Arctic cold, instead it stands as a contextualising metaphor for solitude and lack of human warmth and communication. In this new ice age barbaric acts are possible. As I have stated in my discussion of The Book of Jamaica climate often plays a central role in Banks's fiction and other commentators have remarked on this. (92)

It also acts as a metaphor for the times, the "freeze-out" of Reagan's economic policies in the 1980s. Lawford itself, is a town whose prosperity has been ruined by the 1930s Depression and which is still isolated from the greater American, capitalist community. A specific link is actually made by the text between that President and Wade. When he is first physically described it is as an actor (another metafictional reference) who would be cast as the "decent but headstrong leader ... in range-war westerns of the '50s." (p. 15) A description that could, ironically, fit Wade's war on corruption and murder in Lawford. As town policeman he is, in one sense, a leader and authority figure and in his office a map of his domain hangs on the wall. (p. 30) His name, of course, is Whitehouse. Probably the most well-known fact about Ronald Reagan is that he was an actor, one who played in 1950s westerns. These connections are made but not pursued by the text. They are an aside, a textual joke, but they do establish links in the reader's mind between Wade's situation, the economic state of the community and the contemporaneity of the novel's action with the

(92) For instance, Elizabeth Tallent calls it "This wintry novel, breathing cold from every page ..." p. 7.
economic policies of the Reagan Administration. Wade, it could be argued, becomes one of the victims of government policy. A reader conversant with Banks's earlier work would be aware of the connections he makes in his fiction between the frozen New England north and the dispossessed lives of his characters, as with Bob Dubois in *Continental Drift* and the residents of *Trailerpark*.

The text's strategy of metaphorisation is used to comment on the climactic scenes of Wade's descent into violence. When Pop is killed, Wade burns him on a pyre in the barn. The barn itself has symbolic significance, as a place in Wade's memory where he once saw his father's power challenged and whose subsequent neglect reflects the neglect and abuse of the family itself. The pyre, in yet another reference to masculine culture, can be seen as like a Viking burial, with the warrior stretched on a bench burning, with his face a "rictus yanked back in a fixed gaping grin." (pp.344-346) The image is like something out of a horror movie.

The central act of male violence that preceded this, the act of patricide, is imbued with a significance that allows it to represent the whole generational cycle of violence. After Wade has hit Jill and she and Margie are leaving Margie testifies that she looked back and saw Pop, who had seen everything, with a "smile on his face, like a devil." (p.338) Pop's burning face is a horror movie image with its "gaping grin", it is, "His terrible triumph". (p.346) When Pop had once more hit Wade with what Wade thinks is an iron bar he has a look of "mild disgust" on his face as if a "man compelled to perform a not especially pleasant task." (p.342) The same look he had when he beat Wade as a child, described in almost the same words; "... his face twisted in disgust and resignation, as if he were performing a necessary but extremely unpleasant task for a boss." (p.101) Pop's blow is then frozen, the scene like a tableau as the text describes it, in terms that give it historical connotations. The decision to do it made long ago, so implying that it is something beyond Pop and Wade's control. The bottle becomes:

... a mighty war club, a basher, an avenging jaw-bone of an ass, a cudgel, bludgeon, armor-breaking mace, tomahawk, pike, maul, lifted slowly, raised like a guillotine blade, sledgehammer, wooden mallet to pound a circus tent stake into the ground, to slam the gong that tests a man's strength,
to split the log for a house, to drive the spike into the tie with one stroke, to
stun the ox, to break the lump of stone, to smash the serpent's head, to
destroy the abomination in the face of the Lord. (p.342)

These metonymies work to establish the historical, cyclical significance of the act, based in a
tradition of violence, power and work. Fred Pfeil faults Banks for passages like these,
accusing him of a "revved-up rhetoric" that creates a "ghastly ahistorical mythology." (93)

This is true, Rolfe is in a sense involved in the creation of a myth, not only the family myth
to explain his brother's actions but also a myth of how this small piece of news is the result
of a generational process which in effect dooms Wade to his actions. I have already
discussed Banks's pessimism in my discussion of *The Book of Jamaica* and it is evident here
in Banks's insistence that Wade's actions flow not only from how Pop treated him but are
inevitable in the light of his social and anthropological origins. The deer hunters are
described as participating in "an ancient male rite"(p.11) and Rolfe towards the end claims
that both his and Wade's lives are paradigms, "ancient and ongoing."(p.340) It is this
insistence on the inevitability of Wade's actions, its tragic necessity, as it were, that gives the
novel its tone of grim fatalism. The narrative's strategy of mythologising complements this
and works against the realistic and contemporary aspects of Wade's story. Wade's murder of
his father is an inevitable consequence of the tradition of male violence he is bound up in.
Significantly, once Pop is dead, he realises he loved him and he tenderly touches his dead
father's face and immolates his body, standing over him like "a priest blessing the
host."(p.343) The bitter irony being that, "The son finally turned out to be a man just like the
father."(p.341) The statement whilst ironic also points to a complementary reading of Wade's
relationship with his father. This is Robert Niemi's assertion that because Wade is the only
one of Pop's sons unable to "successfully negotiate his Oedipal conflict" he "unwittingly
begins to become his father." (94) Following from this when Wade is finally able to stand up
to his father the consequences are tragic, like the consequences that follow Hamlet, another

character for whom an Oedipus conflict has been claimed, when he attempts to resolve his relationship with his father.

Rolfe’s narrative voice, which has been analysing these imaginatively recreated actions, distances our reactions, making the reader contemplate and reflect on them even as they are described. Rolfe’s voice had earlier aptly summed up the events he was about to describe; "...our stories, Wade’s and mine, describe the lives of boys and men for thousands of years, boys who were beaten by their fathers, whose capacity for love and trust was crippled almost at birth."(p.340)

At the same time that Rolfe’s narrative elevates and distances the action it also makes connections between his and Wade’s life and in so doing involves the reader more directly in the tragedy. So that it becomes not only Wade’s story but Rolfe’s and ours. In the passage he goes on to say that the "best hope for a connection to other human beings", for those like he and Wade, is to elaborate for themselves an "elegaic mode of relatedness". To absent ourselves from "the tradition of male violence" by accepting "the restraints of nothingness - of disconnection, isolation and exile".(p.340) This is what Rolfe has done - he has separated himself from his family and community, he has escaped, he believes, the "certain awful things in life."(p.36) Later he asks himself why it was he that escaped when he had no special talent or inclination to study and teach history.

He realises that he is still connected to his past and his family in ways which he has denied. The change in tone of Wade’s voice that captures his interest, described earlier, is also noted in the "troublesome echo" between Wade’s toothache and his own "periodic headaches."(pp.5-6) There is a sort of transferral of sympathies here objectified as corresponding physical pains. He feels that his interiority and Wade’s living "out there on his skin" are "merely mirror images of each other, our apposite modes of life twinned versions of the same radical accommodation to an intolerable reality."(p.215) It is these connections that motivate Rolfe to tell his brother’s story and to refuse to sell the decaying family home to LaRiviere. Because, as he began by saying, Wade’s story is his story and he ends by asserting

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that you forget it (the newspaper account of the tragedy), "because you cannot understand
how a man, a normal man, a man like your or me, could do such a terrible thing."(p.354)
Rolfe and, by extension, the reader has become involved in the commonplace, everyday
tragedy.

There are a number of other aspects of Rolfe's role in the text. Rolfe is childless and
unmarried, he is a man of "meticulous routine", and he sees Wade as "a gloomy, alcoholic
and stupidly belligerent man, like our father ..."(p.3) In his own way Rolfe is himself
pathetic. He feels himself an outsider in his life, wondering why he is there, with no "special
gift". He feels this at dinner parties and watching his affluent students drive their new
cars.(p.202) Contrasting himself with Wade he acknowledges their appositeness, but also
their difference. Beneath Wade there is "solid rock, an entire planet solid to the core", whilst
beneath him there is "empty space" through which one could tumble toward "a cold and
distant black star".(p.215) This is his, "elegaic mode of relatedness ... of disconnection,
isolation and exile."(p.340) When Pop has to ride with Rolfe in the funeral car, the narrative
claims that he feels "self-conscious" with Rolfe, that he "was cold, that boy."(p.232) The
night Wade rings him to talk about Twombley's death he is reading a "new history of
mankind" and when Wade hangs up he cannot sleep. He is haunted by visions "of whirling
suddenly in the snow, aiming down the barrel of a gun, firing."(pp.132-133)

In escaping from Wade's life Rolfe has marooned himself, has turned himself into a person
more at home with a book than with another human being. He has never been assimilated
into his chosen situation and role. Wade's calls reintroduce him into that life of family and
community, like a prodigal son returning. This again is the text's process of identification,
but it also can be read in other ways. Rolfe's leap from a history book to visions of a rifle
firing is like the move from passive withdrawal from life to active embracing of it. I
disagree, therefore, with Fred Pfeil's statement that Banks "elects a studiously detached point
of view." (95) It would seem to me that the narrator is very closely concerned with what he is

(95) Pfeil p.78.
narrating because it is changing his life. When Rolfe adopts a rhetorical tone, as Pfeil has also noted, it is essentially because he is unable to adopt that tone of detachment. What is happening is happening to his brother and the pain, guilt and anger he feels is the result of his realisation that Wade could be him. As the novel concludes, Wade's story is over, "Except that I continue."(p.355) Rolfe will continue to live the rage and guilt of his and Wade's fate.

The fact that the narrative is Rolfe's own act of creation is Rolfe enacting that move from passivity to activity. He writes Wade's and his own story in an act of self-creation. He also "acts" through what he says to Wade in their telephone conversations. He has his own theories, equally incorrect he admits later, about Twombley's death and they begin to influence Wade. In Wade's final call, Rolfe responding to the beginnings of a migraine and an "anxiety-producing conversation" takes over and gives Wade a list of actions to take. He will get Wade to solve his problems the way he does. And as Rolfe says, he follows, "my advice to the letter. Which is why I feel today less than innocent, less than blameless for what eventually happened."(p.290) This could be read as the natural reaction of a close relative unable to prevent a tragedy and blaming themselves, or it could be read as a confession of guilt, as if in manipulating Wade's actions Rolfe was an accessory to the violence. Given Rolfe's control over the narrative and its closeness to his story this inference, once more, creates the uneasy feeling in the reader's mind that Wade's tragedy is a fiction, an event written by an author, manipulated by a brother. This hint of unscrupulosity echoes the actions and narrative strategies of the narrator of Hamilton Stark. In a sense, both write their fictions and both are complicit in the way the fiction/events turn out.

The role that Rolfe plays in the novel also invites another sort of reading. This is a reading that looks to autobiographical elements in the structure of the novel. In an interview I have quoted previously, Banks in discussing the novel, declares that he was trying to understand his life and the lives of his father and grandfather. Robert Niemi quoting an interview Wesley Brown conducted with Banks remarks that the author's description of his life could be seen as evoking Wade and Rolfe as "before-and-after aspects of himself." Banks told
Brown that when he was younger he had been a violent man and as he grew older he "became a controlled and restrained man who withdrew from any situation where I was vulnerable." (96) Niemi's chapter on Banks's life makes it clear that Banks was violently treated by his father when he was a child. Niemi reads *Affliction* as part of Banks's, "... continued process in merging the violent, wounded man of his youth with the circumspect man of letters he has become." (97) But as Banks stated in an interview with Laurel Graeber the characters were not patterned after specific individuals and the genesis of the novel was in Banks's vision of its violent climax. (98) Although the autobiographical origins of the narrative are established I would argue that such a reading would limit the complexity of the text. (99)

This autobiographical reading and the Freudian reading I have mentioned earlier are interpretations that tend to smooth out the awkwardnesses of the text, to remove what could be seen as its structural and ideological contradictions. This is, essentially, what reviewers were doing when they wished to excise "whiny Rolfe" from the text. What I wish to return to are the two contradictory readings of *Affliction* that I have been explicating in my discussion so far. The first, focusing on Wade, is essentially a realist interpretation; the explication of his tragic last days and final violent acts, and is closely connected to his loss of power. The second reading, focusing on Rolfe, is in many ways anti-realist, using narrative devices and fictional strategies developed by the historical avant-garde, particularly Brecht, and contemporary postmodernism. At this point I wish to abstract from this double reading of *Affliction* a dialogical structure which I find in Banks's fiction, especially the two novels I have discussed in detail. And from this dialogic structure an interpretation of the novel which rewrites it in a anagogic sense. What Fredric Jameson has called the ultimate horizon of

(98) Graeber p.7.
(99) However, I am not asserting that Niemi limits his reading of *Affliction* to a strictly autobiographical reading.

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reading, the political reading in terms of collective history; the destiny of the human race as a whole. (100)

Affliction in a less schematic way than The Book of Jamaica generates a similar two-fold structure as that novel. I have already discussed the tensions created between the tale and its telling, personified in the text as that between Wade and Rolfe and the realist reading in opposition to the postmodernist reading. The realist/anti-realist opposition is a way of naming a tension in the text between explication and those distancing and alienating devices that can be called Brechtian. Or, as the narrative tells it also comments, self-criticises, jokes and generalises. The effect on the reader is the creation of a tension between identification and distancing.

Pursuant to this, in terms of genre, there is an opposition between the text's tragic and comic elements. The circumstances which push Wade to act are inevitable, a triumph of fate over choice. Wade and the other characters cannot impede or avoid his breakdown into violence. This is, of course, paradigmatic of tragedy. And an argument could be mounted for seeing Wade in terms of a tragic hero, fatally flawed by his violent temper. As with classic tragedy the past is central to the action of the plot, having been its prime mover. Finally, the narrative action, like that of Shakespearan tragedy and its modern progeny such as the suspense thriller or the mystery, describes a course from the measured introduction of characters to build up slowly towards a bloody climax. A climax, that as with tragedy, acts to satiate the reader's desire to know more.

Against this the text acts to slow and delay the narrative flow in ways I have previously described. Rolfe, as manipulator and writer, takes the role of trickster, joking and playing games with his material and on his readers. This is essentially a comic strategy, and it is characteristic of comic narratives where such things as mistaken identity delay the progress of the narrative towards its happy ending. It is designed to make bearable the tragedy and

absurdity of human experience. If we understand the world of Pop and Wade to represent "age" and the old ways and Rolfe's new world to be that of "youth", the classic comic resolution of "the regeneration of the social order" is discernible. (101) The fractured social world of subaltern violence is subsumed into Rolfe's civilized Bostonian world. He restores the shaky foundations of the political superstructure by transforming them into comedy.

The realism/anti-realism dichotomy can also be seen in aesthetic and political terms. The text's realism in the tradition of the polemic realism of London, Dreiser and Algren is associated both with the working class as its subject and with Marxism as its ideological basis. (102) On the other hand, anti-realism or modernism is associated with bourgeois decadence in an argument synonymous with the aesthetics of Lukacs. The metafictional aspects of Affliction place it in a postmodern canon; metafiction being one of the dominant tactics of literary postmodernism. So the subject of Affliction is also the bourgeoisie (Rolfe) and its ideological basis, the postmodern aesthetics of late capitalism.

From this final opposition I want to abstract a concept that Jameson has termed an ideologeme. Which, as he puts it, can manifest itself as a "kind of ultimate class fantasy about the 'collective characters' which are the classes in opposition." (103) To explain this I want to elaborate, again using Jameson's methodological framework, the three semantic horizons of a text which widen out the "social grounds of a text". Firstly, political history, the chronicle of events; secondly, the synchronic struggle between social classes in a given society at a given time; and lastly history conceived in its widest sense of the sequence of modes of production. (104)

Affliction's themes are most obviously the cycle of familial, subaltern violence into which class society inescapably thrusts individuals. In a sense, Wade's history is the personalization of this social fact. Related to this is the whole culture of male violence which generates and

(101) ibid., p.116.
(102) ibid., p.104. As Jameson remarks, realism is the "central model of Marxist aesthetics."
(103) ibid., p.87. 
(104) ibid., p.75.
perpetuates the cycle. To read the text simply as a critique of violence, however, is to read it on an ethical level, linked to a psychoanalytic interpretation of individuals like Wade who make moral choices. But this ethical/psychoanalytic reading is subsumed into a political reading that focuses on the environment of late 1980s America. It locus is the social particularity of the Whitehouse family:

... Wade's face is a classic example of an ancient type of North European face ... that first appeared in this form twenty to thirty thousand years ago ... among tribes of hunters and gatherers ... driven from fertile estuarial homelands by a taller fairer fiercer people who possessed agrarian skills and tools, clever weapons and principles of social organisation that allowed them to conquer and enslave others. ... Wade's body, like my own, is of a similarly ancient type, evolved over tens of thousands years of holding the reins of another man's horse in the cold rain while the horseman does business inside by the fire, of climbing rickety ladders with a load of bricks in a hod, of yanking back the head of a boar with one stout arm and reaching around with the other and slashing its throat with a single stroke, of drawing sticks on a cart from someone else's woods to someone else's fire. ... It is, I suppose, the kind of body that made it possible for European princes and popes to wage war against one another for a millennium.(pp.56-57)

As the passage indicates they are from a labouring class, one whose labour power has served to enrich others and fight other people's wars.

With this in mind we can read the text on an anagogical level as an allegory of American political and social life in the Reagan years. Wade, then, becomes a synecdoche for the American working class male and the violent culture into which they are born. His embittered and despairing situation that of a working class cowed into apathy and fear by conservative social and political tactics; the slashing of welfare, attacks on unions and the further enrichment of the already rich. And on a global scale, perhaps, expresses the trends of post-Fordism and flexible accumulation which are creating elite forces of technocrats and
dispossessing millions, in non-Western countries and the West. (105) On the level of political history, the text responding to the "real contradictions" of Reaganism posits an "imaginary resolution". (106) It is in that sense a symbolic act, one that constructs a fantasy of Wade's tragic fall as a metaphor for the social and political disempowerment of an entire class. In so doing it points its finger at the "problem" and asks the reader to respond, to do more than experience the narrative. It is an attempt to re-enfranchise the American working class and place it back on the political agenda. It is not only Wade who is afflicted. The text's ideological agenda is contradictory, generated, as it is, by the contradictory post '60s impulses of disillusion with the failure to change society and the utopian optimism that change may still be possible. On the other hand, the tragic fate of Wade, on the other, the text's attempt to make the reader think and reflect on what they are reading and Rolfe's stoic determination to go on.

Returning to the figures of Wade and Rolfe and what they signify about the text's ideological agenda, we can posit another level of political meaning, more generalised than the above historical interpretation. As an escapee from the working class culture and milieu of Lawford Rolfe is an example of that social mobility which is characteristic of American society. Not the Horatio Alger myth of "rags to riches" but the slow, piecemeal mobility that occurs over generations as the children of workers or immigrants rise to higher levels of wealth and class position. Rolfe's upward mobility is of a type that is characteristic of the late twentieth century, that of mobility through higher education which allows those qualified to rise above their social origins.

Rolfe is a teacher of history and as a writer of history his brother's story can be seen as an historical text he has produced. Although Rolfe is not bourgeois in terms of social origins or wealth he can be seen as an adjunct of that class because of his status as an intellectual. It is

(105) See David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity for a discussion of these ideas. (106) See the chapter "On Interpretation" in The Political Unconscious for further explication of this concept.

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the intellectual whose function, invariably, is to perpetuate and defend the values of the ruling class. The mode of writing associated with him by the text is bourgeois; modernist/postmodernist, as opposed to Wade's realism. His description as a character, or actant (function of the text), is developed to set up the opposition between the working class and the middle class. He communicates with his pen whilst Wade uses the telephone. He is associated with articulacy, sophistication, mental labour, as against Wade's inarticulacy, ignorance and manual labour. As I have argued in my two readings of the text, there is a contradiction between the realism of Wade's story and the postmodern means of telling the story. Wade, associated with the former represents the working class and Rolfe, the latter, the bourgeoisie. So that Affliction on this level is constructed around a contradiction in aesthetic and social terms. The text, therefore, is at once articulating and textualising the constitutive form of class relationships, that between a dominant and a labouring class. (107) And this dialogical structure contains and subsumes the text's historical meaning (Reaganism, the condition of the working class in 1980s America).

On the final horizon of political meaning; that pertaining to the wider sweep of history organised around the Marxist term, modes of production, the text is necessarily characteristic of late twentieth century American capitalism (or, after Mandel, late capitalism). As Jameson points out, modes of production are not univocal, stable conceptions but abstractions from the real which contain contradictory characteristics, vestiges of old modes, forecasts of new. (108) In Affliction, as I have argued, the social is signified by the aesthetic. The dichotomy between Wade and Rolfe becomes the antithetical impulses of realism and postmodernism. Realism, associated with the nineteenth century and the high point of capitalism, its expansionist, optimistic era. Postmodernism (after Jameson), associated with late capitalism, an era of perpetual crisis and apocalyptic pessimism. The text in a contradictory way nostalgically longs for the certitudes associated with realism and exists in the uncertainties of

(107) Jameson pp.82-83. (108) ibid., p.89.
postmodern skepticism and late twentieth century self-doubt. Peter Burger has characterised the contemporary scene as one in which realism and the avant-garde co-exist. (109) He has incorporated into this assessment the parameters of the Lukacs/Adorno debate which is applicable to Affliction. That contradiction between the Lukacsian impulse to denounce anti-realism as bourgeois decadence and the Adornian impulse to assert that only the non-organic makes sense in a world after Auschwitz.

It is between these two contradictory impulses, which come to supplement each other in Affliction and The Book of Jamaica, that political meaning lies. The texts express the deeply entrenched pessimism of late twentieth century political art, coming after the failed revolutions of 1917-1948 and the failure of the libertarian movements of the sixties. But they also react against this pessimism and reaffirm the importance of praxis and changing the world. Banks's 1985 novel, Continental Drift, ends, "Go, my book, and help destroy the world as it is." (110) Affliction's strategies are designed in the final, political sense to re-enfranchise subaltern and working class people, to regain a sense of history as real and able to be engaged with, and to rekindle belief in the possibility of change.

(109) Burger p.84.

3. Don DeLillo

Don DeLillo's first novel, *Americana*, published in 1971, at first glance appears to be representative of a certain sort of sixties novel, what could be termed the novel of hippy redemption. Its protagonist flees from a corrupted urban environment and journeys across America in search of a more authentic and ethical life experience. DeLillo's description of the cynical world of network television and corporate culture catches the flavour of unease with success and distrust of authority that characterises Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* and the fiction of writers like Richard Brautigan and Thomas McGuane. When David Bell begins his journey into America's rural heartland and his own past much is made of the contemporary culture's betrayal of the land, its native peoples and the promise of its revolutionary origins. What we all really want to do, according to an old Sioux mystic, is to, "wallow in the terrible flaming mudcunt of Mother America", to be "engulfed by all the so-called worst elements of our national life and character." (1)

Yet statements like these are largely asides to a narrative that enquires into the creative process and engages with questions of role playing and identity in a way that anticipates the metafictionalism that comes to dominate American fiction in the '70s and '80s. Inherent in this novel is the tension between a political attitude towards America that was shaped in the sixties and an engagement with themes of media image, spectacle, conspiracy, apocalypse and technology that are characteristic of the postmodernism of recent decades.

As I stated in the Introduction what I am interested in is how DeLillo solves the problem of the conflict between political engagement and the depoliticisation implicit in the

postmodern project. I shall begin with a discussion of the critical attitudes towards DeLillo in order to assess how his fiction is seen in the critical debate about contemporary American writing and in particular its relation to the cultural debates on postmodemism. This will be an introduction to extended readings of two of DeLillo's later novels, The Names and Libra.

The critical response to DeLillo's fiction has ranged from condemnation to acclamation. George Will, a conservative columnist, accused DeLillo of "bad citizenship" and "literary vandalism" in reviewing Libra and described the novel as "yet another exercise in blaming America for Oswald's act of derangement." (2) Will is quoted by Frank Lentricchia in the introduction to Introducing Don DeLillo, a collection of essays in praise of DeLillo's novels. Will and a number of other conservative reviewers are quoted by Lentricchia to set up, as it were, the counter argument, the defence of DeLillo's writing that the book represents.

Lentricchia himself is an academic who is perhaps most well known for the monograph he wrote on American literary criticism, After the New Criticism, which attacked both the new critics of the '50s and the poststructuralists of the '70s and '80s from a position informed by the "new radicalism" of Foucault and post-Marxist theory.

Lentricchia is thus perfectly suited to his role as defender of DeLillo against the onslaughts of the Bush-Reagan neo-conservatives. Whether or not Lentricchia and the other contributors to Introducing Don DeLillo, as members of the academic left, actually represented an opposition to Reaganism or were simply part of the intellectual "propaganda model" (3) is debatable. For the most part critics who were concerned with the politics of DeLillo's novels argued that DeLillo undermines the conventions of language and genre through irony and postmodern deconstruction. For instance, Matthew Morris in an essay on The Names, argues that the problem of colonialism is the novel's principal theme and that DeLillo shows how


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language is used in the interests of political and sexual oppression. Against this DeLillo celebrates the non-exclusionary word "and" to rebut the elitism of sexism and racism. (4) Even a writer critical of DeLillo as a "white, male writer" approaches him within the boundaries of postmodern discourse; DeLillo's failure to achieve a real opposition to the institutions of language and power is attributed to his identity as a white male, unable to draw on the oppositional energies of women and third world writers, whose position in society creates their radicalism. (5)

The majority of DeLillo reviewers and critics eschew political questions altogether and are content to dwell on other aspects of his fiction. His reputation is as a novelist predominantly concerned with language, conspiracy theories and having fun at the expense of popular fiction. For instance, reviewers of The Names almost unanimously declare that the novel is about language. The reviewer for The New York Times states that its characters are "entombed in language", The Village Voice Literary Supplement that it is "the clearest symbol yet of language as trap" and the Boston Review that DeLillo with "excessive thoroughness" suggests that what matters about language is its underlying "pattern". (6)

Some reviewers claimed that its emphasis on language meant that plot, character, "real life" were unfortunately sacrificed. But his defenders championed his deconstructive and reinvigorating use of language. Indeed, the conservative critic, Bruce Bawer, in an article vehemently criticising DeLillo's work for its "emptiness" and tawdry view of American life

caricatured his supporters' response along these lines, "I can hear DeLillo's devotees saying, 'you realise his subject is not "real life" at all, or even ideas about life, but words, words, words - language, codes of every kind, the whole question of signification?'" (7) An example of this approach is John Johnston's appraisal of DeLillo's early work which he calls, "novels of language" where "... kinds of speech, especially professional jargons, collide or enter into dialogue and contestation." (8)

In the same essay Johnston points to another favourite subject of DeLillo criticism - his fondness for the use of popular genres in which to frame his ironic ruminations on contemporary American society. According to Johnston his first eight novels reveal DeLillo's "... explicit awareness of the novelistic subgenre as a formal frame that can be adopted to serve his own fictional project." Americana is a Bildungsroman, End Zone a sports novel, Great Jones Street a rock and roll novel, Ratner's Star science fiction, Players a thriller, Running Dog a spy novel, The Names "international intrigue" and White Noise combines the campus and disaster novels. (9) Early reviewers and critics tended to quarantine the novels into genre categories and treat each as a distinct example of a particular style of novel. This was particularly true of End Zone which was included in monographs and essays specifically devoted to sports fiction. (10)

Critics also point to DeLillo's adventure into "pulp" writing, his pseudonymous novel

(9) ibid., p.261.
Amazons, which blends sports (ice hockey) and sex (a woman in an all male team), both popular subjects for the American TV culture DeLillo dissects and ironises in his more serious work. (11) This "airport lounge novel" purports to be the true story of the first female to play in the National Hockey League, written by herself and published under her own name, Cleo Birdwell. (12) This gesture allows DeLillo to make jokes at the expense of the popular genre of the sports memoir and to ironically impersonate a pulp writer. The use and misuse of language, the obsession with games and rituals and the satirising of the American media are similar to the themes of DeLillo's earlier work. However the tone is lighter, the comedy less bleak and the apocalyptic, dystopian themes of the early work are absent. If DeLillo's fiction is about the parodying of genre then this aside would seem to reinforce that description, the author slipping his serious persona to revel unashamedly in a pulp genre novel.

One characteristic DeLillo (and postmodern) theme absent in Amazons is the dramatisation of the paranoid mind. Critics of his fiction have often remarked on its depiction of a paranoid universe, filled with conspiracy and suspicion. Those who emphasise this side of DeLillo's work group him with those other exemplars of American postmodernism, Thomas Pynchon, Joseph McElroy and William Gaddis, in whose fiction an individual's relation to society is one predicated upon suspicion, betrayal and omnipotent menace. Commentators on individual novels have pointed this out a number of times, in particular of the conspiracy thriller, Running Dog and Libra, which some critics damned as being tinged with the same attitude as its subject matter, its conspiratorial plot an expression of its author's own leftist paranoia. (13) A hostile review essay in Partisan Review sums up this attitude; "conspiracy",

(11) See Don DeLillo, White Noise for his most ironical treatment of popular culture.
the reviewer writes, "is the thread on which he strings all his fixations". She concludes that after all, "Paranoia ... is a distortion of reality." (14) Reviewers of *Libra* pointed to the same elements of paranoia and conspiracy. In *The New York Review of Books* he is called the "chief shaman of the paranoid school of American fiction" and in *The New Yorker* every character "is an artist of paranoia" and the novel goes right to the source, which is "the primal scene of American paranoia". (15)

An essay DeLillo wrote for *Rolling Stone*, "American Blood", ostensibly on the Kennedy assassination, explores the paranoiac myths of recent American history where, "we consume social problems and threats as if they were breakfast food". He notes the shift in public opinion from 1964 to the end of the seventies where the majority of Americans now believe in the conspiracy theory as opposed to the officially sanctioned lone gunman theory. He claims that, "Conspiracy is now the true faith". (16) Paranoia and conspiracy would seem to be a central theoretical preoccupation of DeLillo's fiction culminating in *Libra* which could be said to put into fictional form what he had hypothesised in "American Blood."

The only full length monograph devoted to DeLillo's fiction, Thomas LeClair's *In the Loop*, proposes a different interpretation of his work. DeLillo is a "systems novelist", like Pynchon, Gaddis and Coover. He writes novels that construct systems of knowledge that connect the individual to the global. Systems theory as a metascience aims to find the essential relations among the social sciences, ultimately to provide a new paradigm for thinking about reality. (17) LeClair bases his essays on each of DeLillo's first eight novels


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around this theory in order to differentiate him from mainstream postmodernism and point to
the positive aspects of such a project, principally its critique of mastery and its reinvigorating
of traditional modernist themes such as uncertainty, multiplicity and linguistic relativism.

(18) This interpretation is almost exclusively LeClair's. Only Eric Mottram shares an
approach similar in some respects to LeClair's. In his essay on DeLillo's fiction he argues that
DeLillo analyses the "real needs of man" as that of a need for monadic systems, "Network,
organization, enclosure with rules and rituals". (19) Both LeClair and Mottram's arguments
merge with the more conventional claims for the paranoid conspiracy themes at some points
and with the ideas of ritual and play that readers of *End Zone* first discovered.

What all of these critical views of DeLillo have in common is a placing of his novels in the
context of postmodernism, whether unstated and implied, or made specific as in John
McLure's assessment of the fiction as "postmodern romance" (20) His work is seen as not
only being contemporary, as in, of the moment, but also as a postmodern version of that
contemporary moment. DeLillo's fiction is said to subvert traditional fictional genres and
literary values, it is profoundly anti-realist.

Certainly DeLillo's fiction displays many of the features that commentators have described
as being characteristic of postmodern literature and of the wider postmodern imagination.
My own descriptive summary of the principal claims of the publicists of postmodernism,
outlined in the Introduction, correlates with a number of the stylistic and thematic concerns
of his fiction. Postmodernism's apocalypticism is expressed in the paranoiac atmosphere of
*Running Dog* and *Great Jones Street*, and the implied apocalypses of *End Zone* and *The

(18) ibid., pp.8-13.

(19) Eric Mottram, "The Real Needs of Man: Don DeLillo's Novels" in *The New American

(20) John McLure, "Postmodern Romance: Don DeLillo and the Age of Conspiracy" in
Names, and the real apocalypse of Ratner's Star which ends with Billy Twillig peddling his tricycle, shrieking insanely as some unnamed doom seems to draw near. Similarly White Noise is a novel which deals with the sociological and psychological after-effects of an apocalypse ("The Great Airborne Toxic Event"). His latest novel, Underworld is structured around two events that happened on the same day and shaped the post-war consciousness of the United States, the hitting of a famous home run and the detonation of the first Soviet atomic bomb.

The concepts of spatiality and the geographic imagination are implied in LeClair's analysis of the novels as systems based with its emphasis on horizontal stratification as opposed to the vertical chronologies of realist narrative. Fredric Jameson's review of The Names makes this specific in its insistence that the novel's real theme is space not language. (21) Associated with this is the relativism of techniques that foreground simultaneity and montage. For instance, the opening and closing scenes of Players, or in Ratner's Star where plot development is replaced by successive satiric episodes of Billy's journey through the history of mathematics.

The media, especially television and film, as in Running Dog's pornographic Hitler film and the Zapruder footage in Libra, indicates familiarity with the world as described by Baudrillard and Debord. The obsession with genre and the refusal to be tied down to one particular literary strategy is also, perhaps, an indication on the narrower stage of genre, of postmodernism's relentless pluralism. Finally the grim pessimism of much of his fiction, its seeming failure to offer alternatives to the apocalyptic vision of the contemporary world he describes, would point to a similar fatalism that I diagnosed earlier as being integral to the postmodern world-view.

What follows is an extended discussion of just how two of DeLillo's later novels, The Names and Libra, fit into this prevalent view of DeLillo's fiction. In what ways do these

novels conform to my descriptive model of postmodernism and thus in what ways are the critical views I have mentioned accurate, and in what ways do the novels diverge from this interpretation? And also in what ways do they conform to Will's political attack from the right, Lentricchia's defence from the putative left and the non-political perspective of the vast majority of reviewers?

The *Names* was published in 1982 following a three year period DeLillo had spent in Greece. He has stated that in writing this book he was searching for a language, sentences, that captured the "kind of sun-cut precision I found in Greek light and in the Greek landscape." He also talks of the "sensuous clarity of the Aegean experience." (22) What is evident in the prose of The Names is an expansion of description, an interest in the external world, the city, the desert and so on which is not present in the earlier fiction. He no longer seems limited by the constraints of genre and pastiche which had characterised his earlier novels. The often deliberate flatness of style, the clipped dialogue which relentlessly caricatures Americanspeak, the descriptive passages which ironically refer to the trivia and dross of American culture are incorporated into a more descriptive, even lush style, a style that did seek to capture the sensuousness of living in Greece, whilst at the same time invoking portraits of doom and apocalypse. Early in the novel he describes Athens:

> From the terrace the city stretched to the gulf in smoky vales and rises, a seamless concrete village. Rare nights, for whatever atmospheric reasons, you could hear planes taking off down by the water. The sound was mysterious, full of anxious gatherings, a charged rumble that seemed a long time in defining itself as something besides a derangement of nature, some onrushing nameless

This passage illustrates one of the principal strategies of the writing. It is concerned with the external, the environment that surrounds the characters and at the same time it points beyond the external to the social, cultural and political themes of the novel which are a "derangement of nature". This external world intersects, or perhaps interfaces with the interiorised world of James Axton and his circle of friends with their modern, urban obsessions and paranoias. The descriptions of the crowded, traffic-heavy Athenian streets, the noise and colours of the Acropolis, the twisted dark streets of Middle Eastern cities, the empty stretches of desert, loom behind the sophisticated chatter of Axton's friends and his self-consuming relationship with his wife and child. The evocation of these locations is connected with the forces of an alien society which seems to threaten the emigre circle Axton moves in. It is connected with the political acts of anti-Americans and the mysterious spiritual violence of the cult, and it is ultimately connected with the "onrushing nameless event" that unsettles Axton in the night.

The Names is a novel of Americans abroad. In particular, the situation of expatriate Americans in the late 1970s in a country with a history of some hostility towards the United States. But also a country only a short distance from that part of the world that has been an obsession of American foreign policy since 1945. This region has taken on an even greater significance for the United States since the 1979 revolution in Iran and the American government's continued protection of the deposed Shah. This protection, along with the historic memory of America's role in the establishment of the Pahlavi regime after the CIA engineered coup that overthrew the nationalist, Mossadeq in 1953 will lead inexorably towards the protracted hostage crisis. This crisis in the last year of the Carter Administration was one of the prime reasons for the defeat of Carter and the advent of Reagan as Americans reacted to what they saw as the humiliation of their country and the ineffectual efforts of the

liberal Carter. It ushered in an Administration that excelled in sabre rattling in the face of the anti-Americanism of various Islamic states. The region was already an obsession of most Americans because of the impact of the oil embargo of the early '70s when the oil sheiks of OPEC were demonised with the same xenophobic intensity as Khomeini and Qaddafi were to be demonised 10 years later. American political life in the period could justifiably be characterised as paranoiac about Islamic/Arabic hostility. It was little wonder that the American people turned from the stumbling efforts of Carter, symbolised graphically by the disastrous aborted rescue mission and towards Reagan who promised and delivered a more aggressive, less compromising policy towards these governments. And this conflict, of course, stands in for the continuation of the Cold War with the Soviet Union; some Middle East governments hostile towards the Soviets and supported by the United States, against those, like pre-Sadat Egypt and Libya leaning towards the Soviets or attempting a "plague on both their houses" neutrality, and who are treated as hostile towards American interests.

The anti-Americanism of the Iranians and other Islamic states was shared by the Europeans as well, not necessarily governments but organisations and oppositions who perceived the United States as imperialistic because of its interventions in Vietnam, Chile, Guatemala, Iran and other countries. Whilst their governments allied themselves enthusiastically or pragmatically with the United States in organisations like NATO and SEATO many of their citizens saw America as the world's policeman for imperialism and capitalism and as the destructive purveyor of American cultural values. The belief that Hollywood, McDonalds and Disneyland were destroying European culture and tradition was widespread.

The period in which the novel is set is also a period in the history of Greece that could be described as one where the pendulum swung from alliance with the United States to non-alignment, from pro to anti-Americanism. It was the post-junta era immediately before the ascendancy of PASOK or the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement, the movement that brought Andreas Papandreou, a former Berkeley professor, to power. One of his first acts was to declare opposition to NATO and threaten the removal of US bases. Greece, indeed, has had a post-war history which does not quite fit into the pattern of the Western European
democracies grouped together to oppose the Soviet Union backed Warsaw pact. The Greek communist party struggled for power between 1946 and 1949 in a civil war that ravaged Greece against the American backed Royalist government, thus threatening the carve-up of Europe engineered at Yalta in 1945. In the sixties the military coup of the Colonels had guaranteed the support of Greece for the anti-communist forces. That Greece was susceptible to the threat of communism is probably best illustrated in Costa-Gavras's film Z, about the assassination of the liberal politician Gregory Lambrakis and the subsequent slide into dictatorship because of the perceived threat of communist takeover. Papandreou, who had returned from exile in 1974 thought that Greece should be modelled on non-aligned Yugoslavia and also sought links with the Syrian Baath party and Muammar Quaddafi's Libya. PASOK did not gain power until 1981 but the anti-American mood of the country was strong throughout the period after the re-establishment of parliamentary democracy. Once in power, however, PASOK's opposition to American influence in the region was less than the Communists and other leftists had hoped. For instance, the bases remained and the Communists saw PASOK's role as to contain real opposition whilst preserving the links with the United States. Despite Papandreou's ambivalence towards genuinely challenging America many Greeks saw him as an opponent and significantly the character in The Names who most typifies Greek anti-Americanism is named Andreas. It is within this context of anti-Americanism and the resurgence of leftist opposition that the novel is set.

The change then from the earlier novels to this one marks a deepening seriousness of purpose and a widening of his satiric scope to encompass Americans abroad as opposed to the eccentricities of Americans pursuing their own peculiar cultural obsessions. DeLillo, in fact, says of The Names that it is, "the book that marks the beginning of a new dedication", as opposed to his earlier work which is "off-the-cuff, not powerfully motivated". (24) The novel, I will argue, is a fable about Americans abroad, a postmodern and political version of

the Jamesian novel of international intrigue. This postmodernisation of a genre casts a wider net than in his earlier fiction where sports novels or science fiction were parodied. The novel reveals in its meditation on Americans abroad aspects of the contemporary world that remained unreported in the news of the day.

What *The Names* also does as a postmodern text is to re-work other genres equally central to both literary realism and modernism. In fact the novel’s structure is essentially accretive in that it is a series of re-imaginings of literary genres. It is a novel that charts the education of its hero, but an education not only of love as in Flaubert’s *L’Education Sentimentale*. It is also an education in the real nature of the world and like the characters of the great realist and early modernist novels from Dorothea Brooke to Paul Morel it is a journey from innocence to experience. It is also a novel that has a close affinity with the modernist novel as epistemological detective story, an enquiry into the nature of being and reality. A central mystery, the nature of the cult, is slowly unravelled as in the novels of Conrad, Ford and Faulkner. There are also elements of the typical modernist themes of exile and alienation that are given the "postmodern treatment". Finally the novel partakes of strategies that are usually identified with classic postmodernism, in particular, the merging of epistemological concerns into ontological obsessions and a persistent flavour of absurdism in many of the situations. I will call these motifs rather than re-workings of literary genres or parodies as a convenient shorthand.

These motifs exist in the same writing space, a synchronic pattern layered upon each other which the reader gradually uncovers, like peeling an onion; itself, of course, a modernist metaphor par excellence. There is in each of these motifs a parodic element, they are developed knowingly, with the ironic proviso that this text is not *The Portrait of a Lady* or *Absalom, Absalom!* What is interesting and what I would argue is the main difference between *The Names* and typical parodic postmodernism is where this parody leads. I find in *The Names* that this postmodern method sometimes leads to connection with the wider world of history and politics and sometimes inwards into mystification and empty formalism. There is a tension, a contradiction at the heart of *The Names* between DeLillo’s political
agenda and his concern with language and spiritual experience. John Kucich has criticised The Names for muddled plotting and a central character who is apathetic and withdrawn. He argues that this is because DeLillo is a white male writer unable to come to terms with a postmodern world, whereas feminist and minority fiction has been able to draw out the "possibilities of postmodern narrative technique". (25) Kucich's criticism of DeLillo's inability to articulate "the alienation of his white male characters in usefully oppositional ways" flows from his belief that "postmodern thought encourages ... the facile linkage between desires for opposition and social identity." (26) Although I do not agree that the failure on DeLillo's part to create genuinely politically engaged characters has its basis simply in his identity as a white male writer, I do believe that some of the criticisms levelled are justified. As I will argue, his failures are also inherent in his position as a bourgeois intellectual with a vision of the world informed by the pessimism and relativism of postmodernism.

I want to begin by focussing on James Axton, the novel's central character and first person narrator. The tone of his narration is in turn reflective, ironical, inquisitive, obsessive, bewildered and fearful. There is a movement in the tone of the narration from the control of the outsider, reflective and ironical, to that of threatened insider, bewildered and fearful. What does in fact seem obvious and what was picked up by most reviewers is that Axton is involved in a sort of journey towards self-knowledge. On one level this journey is from political naivety towards political knowledge and complicity. He has been unaware that his work as information gatherer for large corporations is actually a front for CIA intelligence activity and that his boss, Rowser, is actually his CIA control.(p.316) His conversational sparring with the leftist Andreas takes on a sinister meaning. He is scared, "I didn't want to be the victim of a misunderstanding."(p.319) This fear is confirmed by the fact that he may or may not have been the target of an assassination attempt. He is vertiginously introduced

into the late modern world of terrorism and espionage, his cultural paranoia invested with a cause that is tangible and immediate. Likewise, Rowser's own comic paranoia characterised by his habitual greeting, "Are they killing American?" (pp.45, 95,193) is now freighted with menace. (27)

When we first meet Axton he is something of a political innocent more concerned with his failed marriage and his son than anything going on in the wider world. He partakes of the disengaged cynical chatter of his expatriate circle. His growing awareness of the cult and its mysterious linkings of language and murder darkens his vision and serves as a foretaste of his own predicament as victim. While at the same time it is one of the areas of his life that disguises his real situation. His obsession with the cult may give him experience of the violence of the modern world but it does not prepare him for the violence that enters his own relationship with the world. Indeed, his final incarnation in the novel as a person aware of his status as victim of global politics rather than ironical observer is in one respect a transcendence of his obsession with the cult. This is because this awareness also involves an entry into the world of communication and humanity as symbolised by his visit to the Acropolis where he accepts that he is part of the crowd and history. He is thus not outside or above history as he once imagined himself and thus not like the cult who are attempting a similar avoidance of the twentieth century through ritual and violence.

Critics have been divided on the significance of the Parthenon episode and the question of Axton's "education". Arthur Saltzmann, reading the novel as something like the education of an artist, sees Axton's realisation that "our offering is language" as part of his "maturity into an artist" who has the "opportunity afforded the artist 'to shape himself as a human being"

(27) Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (New York: Vintage, 1994) recounts how an American naval officer was killed by terrorists in Athens and his death was labelled a "CIA conspiracy" by PASOK newspapers. (p.269) This occurred in 1983 but it shows the general tenor of anti-Americanism in the Papandreou years.
through the language he uses." (28) Whereas Dennis Foster sees Axton as remaining "complicit with the languages of our institutions." (29) What is clear is that the critical debate is conducted on aesthetic and linguistic grounds and is not, as I have argued, connected to the political truths Axton has been learning about his own country and the nexus of crowds and power.

At the same time Axton is undergoing a sentimental education, one not towards marriage but away from it. Axton is divorced and his education is in coming to terms with the failure of his marriage by accepting his complicity in the break-up and in re-establishing communication with his son. Throughout the novel his failed relationship with Kathryn had haunted him and he had been troubled by his jealousy of Owen Brademas. The list of 27 depravities has tortured him. But late in the novel whilst talking to his friend Lindsay he can say of Kathryn that he does not, "... feel her presence anymore."(p.321) There is a hint here that he is beginning to accept their separation and that the obsessive registering of the shock of living apart is dissolving.(p.321) But the journey of acceptance is only completed when he read Tap's manuscript and senses in it a special meaning. He finds the "spirited misspellings" exhilarating, the mis-renderings "freedom-seeking" - not because Tap makes the errors natural to an 11 year old but because they are deliberate. "It pleased me to believe he was not wholly innocent of these mistakes. I thought he sensed the errors but let them stand, out of exuberance and sly wonder and the inarticulate wish to delight me."(pp.313-314) He feels that the text establishes a connection between him and his son. It creates a private language between them and compensates for "Ob", the private language between Tap and Kathryn that he feels excludes him.(pp.10-11)

The act of reading Tap's manuscript can be said to culminate Axton's education both

(28) Arthur M. Saltzmann, Designs of Darkness in Contemporary American Fiction


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politically and sentimentally. Most critics have again seen the significance of the manuscript in terms of language; its limitations, misuses and obfuscations. Paula Bryant argues that, "His progress through the novel is thus a movement away from an entrapment within language, towards a realization that words ... can be regenerated within himself." Hers is a reading that emphasises a personal passage for Axton, from a language that denies to one that celebrates, and the last chapter is a "reaffirmative metafictional response to the serious questions about language that the novel itself raises." (30) Dennis Foster reads Axton's education in language in a more political way. Axton rediscovers the preverbal pleasures of language which are compared to Julia Kristeva's, "preverbal experiences of the child's body" which linger into adult life. This pleasure enables a level of insight that disregards the referential and allows the text, via Tap's manuscript, to retain the sense of language as the "fallen wonder of the world." In other words language can function as a legitimate escape from the reality represented by the modern world, the CIA and the cult. (31) These sorts of readings of the novel are constructed in the dialectic between the cult's obsessive search for pattern and Tap's wildly exuberant mis-readings of language. I will return to the significance of the Tap manuscript later but suffice to say Axton makes a journey of self-realisation, from entrapment in an obsessive epistemological search for pattern and meaning to an acceptance of multitudinous meanings as symbolised by his visit to the Acropolis and his final words, "Our offering is language." In a typical postmodern move the jouissance of the text as Roland Barthes would say is invoked to provide completion and fulfillment. (32)

Axton then, undergoes a transformation in the novel by means of an education - political, sentimental, linguistic. But Axton is not the typical hero of such a novel - he does not set out to understand or engage with the world, he does not have a mission as one thinks of Stephen

(30) Paula Bryant, "Discussing the Untellable: Don DeLillo's The Names" Critique 29 (Fall 1987), pp.16, p.18, pp.24-25.

(31) Foster pp.160-172.

Dedalus going to "forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" in Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Instead in the first paragraphs of the novel he tells us, "I preferred to wander in the modern city, imperfect, blaring." (p.3) These wanderings prompt him into a number of meditations on the city and its crowds, noise, movement and memories. In the course of the novel he wanders across Greece, commuting between Kouros and Athens, visiting the Mani and other places in his casual and unsystematic search for the cult. Describing his past life he significantly tells us that he has been a free-lance writer and has wandered through a number of jobs. He reminds us of the flaneur of Baudelaire's poetry, the roaming eye that gazes on the streets and street-dwellers of Paris but always at a distance, disconnected from the bustle. As Walter Benjamin has remarked, "In the flaneur the intelligentsia pays a visit to the marketplace." (33) Axton is part of a circle of American expatriates, an intelligentsia that chatters about the world they inhabit, the cities they visit, their own mutating relationships.

This disengagement, intrinsic to one aspect of the character of the flaneur, is implicit in the ironic narrative voice of Axton. The ironic voice is used relentlessly to undercut many of Axton's memories and reflections. He cannot take these things seriously it seems. It is also used in a self-deprecating way, to mock his own actions and declarations. The use of the "27 depravities" is a case in point. It is used as a weapon against Kathryn while at the same time it is an accusation he levels at himself, "... I've sometimes had to remind myself it was my list, not hers." (p.17) In a sense he is both victim and executioner. (34) Remembering his sixties radicalism he acknowledges the connection between lifestyle and politics in a similarly deprecatory way, "I stopped smoking grass when the war ran down." (p.108) He is also ironic about his present situation and the lifestyles of his friends as when he describes

the Maitlands’ rootless existence (pp.40-41) which could be a description of his own lifestyle.

When the text inhabits the voice of other characters the voice is often similarly ironic, as with Frank Volterra’s comments on the role of film in this century and on the Manson family’s American violence, (pp.200-202) and Owen’s on the American way of murder.(p.171) It is, in fact, this ironic voice that undercuts our first reading of the novel as being simply about Axton’s journey of self-discovery. It is true that Axton comes to understand aspects of the world and his relationship to it that he was unaware of when the novel began; in particular, his manipulation by the CIA and the power of language to communicate and liberate. However, this must be read against the text’s frequent tendency to ironise the observations and reflections of the characters and in many instances their actions. This theme of a man’s education and self-discovery is postmodernised in the text, a postmodernism akin to that described by Charles Jencks as “double-coding”. Jencks was writing about architecture but what he argues fits nicely into discussions of certain forms of postmodern literature. Double-coding is the combination of modern techniques and a modernist sensibility with a method of citing historical styles that is populist in impulse. (35) In literature it is the use of a literary style or genre that has been dominant in the past, in this case the novel of a man’s education, with the knowledge shared by author and reader that this genre can no longer be presented innocently. This technique of ironically referring to past literary conventions can be used, it is argued, to say things inevitably already said, in new and refreshing ways that will enable a reader to apprehend them in a different light. What makes this uniquely postmodern and differentiates it from modernist theories such as Harold Bloom’s "anxiety of influence" is its relentless ironising of earlier genres, its refusal to be respectful or even serious about earlier literary conventions.

The double-coding of The Names could be said to return to the motif of education by re-representing it not simply as journey from innocence to knowledge but in terms of

language, as journey from language as entrapment to language as liberation. This is obviously the significance of the readings of the novel by Bryant and Foster quoted earlier. But I am also interested in how this method works to undermine the political implications of Axton's discoveries. Quite simply the reader never engages with what happens to Axton, partly because we are distracted by the competing plot of the mystery of the cult, partly because the ironic voice reduces our sympathy for the character and partly because the thriller conventions of the plot telegraph the revelations. The Names is a sort of cold war spy novel where all the action is carried out off-stage and only impinges on Axton at the very end and then only ambiguously. Although the reader may not have guessed the political connections of Axton's work when they are revealed they do seem inevitable, a plot device used before and to better effect in fiction by LeCarre and others. If this is why we were reading this novel we would be disappointed.

The impact of the revelation is weakened by what I have described as our lack of sympathy for Axton. I know that this might seem a naive way of looking at character in a postmodern age but nevertheless I feel that the political impact of what Axton learns is lessened because neither he nor any of the other characters except for Tap and the anonymous cult members have any illusions to lose. The ironic tone mocks Axton's role, in a sense a self-mockery because he is the narrator, and when we do learn he has been duped we are neither surprised nor particularly horrified. In the cynical late twentieth century and for an American abroad it seems almost predictable. This is, of course, not so much a weakness as a convention. In a world where every betrayal and atrocity has been perpetrated, in a world of "cynical reason", (36) fiction does not outrage or expose so much as confirm and distance itself via irony and parody.

I want now to turn to other aspects of the novel, to widen the scope of my discussion by analysing some of the antitheses set up in the text. The chief of these is between Axton and

Owen. If Axton is the flaneur Owen is the detective, the person who recognises patterns and seeks to solve mysteries. As an archeologist he seeks to solve the mysteries of the human past and to understand the artefacts he discovers. In the course of the novel it is the cult which comes to demand his attention, in fact, his growing obsession. The cult also haunts Axton but he never embarks on a deliberate search for its members. His experiences with the cult, as when he sees the name of the cult on a rock, are essentially accidental. His interest is piqued by Owen and by Frank Volterra, an acquaintance also looking for the cult. As a wanderer and flaneur Axton is the representative of those characters in the novel who let the world pass them by, who comment ironically on it but do not engage with it, like his fellow expatriates, the Maitlands, who have seemingly been present at all the world's trouble spots of the last twenty years.(p.40) Contrary to this accidental life Owen conducts a detective like search for meaning, whilst Volterra is also obsessively searching for the cult in order to film its rituals and Andreas Eliades's obsession is political and anti-American. Their obsessions are paralleled by the cult itself searching for a mystical abecedarian connection between language and death. They are all participating in quests of a sort and it is the text's ironic strategy that all of these quests should either be disappointed or have bitter consequences. Volterra never films the cult, whilst Owen does make contact but is left shaken by his apparent complicity with murder. The cult itself is dispersed and most of its members either die or wander off.

The patterns of wandering and searching are associated with geographic space. The wanderers inhabit the city and mingle with the crowds and flourish amid the bustle and noise of urban space. They remember other crowds as when David Keller recalls the party he threw, whilst outside the streets of Tehran were filled with people opposing the Shah, a memory ironically undercut by the fact that he was more worried about the traffic than the crowds. Axton, of course, undergoes a sort of epiphany at the end of the novel whilst in a crowd of people visiting the Acropolis. This milieu suits the wanderers whereas the desert seems the natural sphere of the searchers. This culminates in the final scenes of the cult in
the Indian desert. The cult avoids cities and people, it appears near villages and in remote areas and this is naturally where Owen and Volterra go to look for them. Axton sees the name of the cult on a rock in a deserted mountain region. Owen before his search begins is first seen on an island, a solitary space.

This distinction in the text between wanderers and searchers is reminiscent of the quintessential postmodern novels of Thomas Pynchon. DeLillo has mentioned his admiration of *Gravity's Rainbow* in a 1993 interview in *The Paris Review* (37) and *The Names* in certain limited ways echoes an earlier Pynchon novel, *V*. In that novel Pynchon sets up a dialectic between the schlemiel-like wanderings of Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil's hunt for the meaning of the historical woman whose name invariably begins with V. (38) Brian McHale sees *V* as one of the paradigmatic texts of modernism becoming postmodernism. Stencil's detective like searching is equated with the epistemological dominant of modernism whilst Profane's aimlessness represents the aleatory nature of the postmodern. In *V* the surreal historical worlds that are described point to the ontological dimensions of postmodern fiction which are concerned with the projection of possible universes. Thus, for McHale, the mystery tale is the favoured modernist strategy whilst science fiction and the historical novel are the favoured postmodern strategies. (39)

If we test *The Names* against this thesis we can detect a basic homology; an opposition between an epistemological and an ontological enquiry. The story of Owen and Axton's gradual unravelling of the mystery of the cult is the modernist tactic, par excellence, although whether the mystery of the cult is ever fully deciphered is a moot point. Axton first hears of the cult from Owen and thereafter we come to learn more and more about it as the "detectives" uncover its workings by questioning witnesses and renegades. Axton stumbles across its name, "Ta Onomata" or *The Names* and later interviews the deserter, Andahl.


Owen travels to India to find them and finds himself being "gravitationally bound to the cult, as an object to a neutron star, pulling towards its collapsed mass, its density." (p.286) Volterra searches for the cult in order to film it, ideally as they perform their central rite, the committing of ritual murder. His girlfriend Del tells Axton that he plans to film the killing from a helicopter. At first Axton does not believe her, feeling he would not let an innocent person be killed. But then he remembers Volterra's claim that, "The Twentieth Century is on film." (pp.200, 248-249) Volterra is fascinated by the "pure American thing", and has filmed the motels and mobile homes of middle America (p.155) in a way that recalls David Bell in *Americana* filming his journey into the American heartland. His need to make films has cut him off from his friends and he is seemingly ready to film anything regardless of ethical considerations. (40) The medium of creating film has devoured the content, the message. He fails in his search and is contrasted with Owen who has a pure, almost archeological purpose in making contact with the cult; to study its members. Volterra's search also fails, primarily because he is soiled, compromised by the culture of the century.

Volterra also points to another aspect of the cult; it is always mediated through other materials, we learn of it second hand. This is primarily because Axton who narrates learns about it via Owen and later Andahl. But Owen also knows of it second hand. In a peculiar passage, which is inserted into the action at the end of Axton's trip with Tap to the Mani, it is implied that Axton may have come across some cult members. The passage is composed as a series of questions and answers and the reader is never sure that this is Axton reporting or a fantasy of some sort. (pp.189-191) The fact that it is described in this disembodied, generalised way is a reminder of the cult's perpetual mediation through the words of others. What we finally learn of the cult comes to Axton in Owen's story. This mediation is perfectly symbolised by Volterra's desire not to see the cult but to film it, again presented at one remove from reality. This sense of their being not quite able to be confronted or captured,

(40) One thinks of Haskell Wexler's film, *Medium Cool* (1969) where violence and injustice are filmed with the film-maker seemingly uninvolved.
their elusiveness, is a central modernist strategy, similar to the haze that surrounds events in Conrad, late James, Faulkner and Woolf.

Again this elusiveness is emphasised in the scene where Owen tells Axton what he has seen. This final extended passage is somewhat like the classic modernist scene where a story will be, as it were, retold or rewritten in a dialogue between two characters. Quentin and Shreve recreating the central mystery of Thomas Sutpen's behaviour in *Absalom, Absalom!* is a famous example, as are many of Marlowe's narratives in Conrad. As Axton says to Owen, "'We're submerging your narrative in commentary. We're spending more time on the interruptions than on the story.'" (p.300) What the cult actually stands for, its significance, has perplexed most critics and various interpretations have been offered. But in a sense that obscurity is the point. If we see the novel as a modernist text, the cult is the centre of the kernel and we can only know the layers of the shell. (41) We never know with absolute certainty why the cult performs its ceremonies and we are given only peripheral information on what the ceremonies mean by various characters. We are aware of hypotheses about what the cult means in the term of various characters' beliefs and values, as when Owen exclaims that they mock us, but we are always denied an intrinsic meaning. Parallel to the mystery of the cult is the major political event of the novel, the attempted assassination. This event is similarly shrouded in mystery; were they after Keller or Axton? which group do they represent? are they connected to Andreas Eliades? Again no answers are forthcoming; the reader is left in the same state as Axton, mystified and confused.

Against these epistemological themes of mystery and doubt there are intimations of other worlds, an ontological concern. Obviously the cult is indicative of this, being a religious sect which has invested its energies in another, purportedly spiritual world, one opposed to reality as normally perceived. They attempt to invoke it in their murderous rituals. In a similar way the search for meaning by Owen, Volterra and Axton and the minor characters such as

Andahl and Vosdanik is explicitly connected to the discovery of new worlds or new ways of looking at the old world. Owen tells Axton that the world has become "self-referring".

Whereas previously men could hide from themselves in the world, or from God or death, now "... the world has made a self of its own." (p.297) This world is associated with the deciphering of codes and languages. Vosdanik tells Axton and Volterra that the "river of language is God" and that if you know "... the correct order of letters, you make a world, you make creation." (p.152) Owen, indeed, has been trying to escape the world by deciphering the code of the cult. He wants to be, "The man who stands outside it", by which he means history and the world. (p.288) And as Andahl tells Axton, "A secret name is a way of escaping the world." (p.210) The cult with its secret name has escaped the ordinary world and Owen wants to be a part of that escape. But as he tells Axton the world cannot be escaped from, it has created a self of its own. Just as the cult cannot transcend the world by its ritualised slaughter, it ends up ravaged by the world it hoped to escape, Owen fails to transcend his world and admits failure to Axton.

His failure to transcend his world may perhaps be a metaphor for death. The cult's fascination with the connections between language and death seem to point towards that. McHale has pointed out that one possible ontology, or state of being, is death itself, which is certainly a different world from the one in which we live. (42) However the text resists a definitive reading and in fact the references to this "self-referring world" strike one as a little portentous, rhetorical declarations that do not add to signification and perhaps detract from it. What can be drawn from this is that the text is working towards the undercutting of a historical and readily identifiable literary strategy, as it did with the motif of Axton's self-education. In this case the modernist epistemological strategy is ironically, even cryptically undercut by references to ontological questions such as what world can we inhabit? and what world do we wish to inhabit?

The idea of inhabiting different worlds is intrinsic to another theme of the novel; what

could, after Henry James, be described as the "international theme". This is a motif that most critics fail to mention or mention only in passing. Thomas LeClair however, does deal with this aspect of the novel, arguing that "the suppressed violence in James is made explicit in *The Names*." He sees the novel as being a "Jamesian [inquiry] into evil" which gradually moves away from its initial Jamesian qualities into a world that is distinctly more violent and barbaric than James's world. (43)

I want to emphasise the ontological state of DeLillo's characters, who in their displacement and voluntary exile resemble extreme twentieth century versions of James's characters. All of the characters in the novel are in a sense tourists and the text quickly establishes their status as transients. Some are only here for a season like Kathryn and Tap whilst others like the Maitlands have worked in the area for many years in many locations. Axton is only in Athens because of its convenience for his work and the people he socialises with are there for similar reasons. Volterra is there to make a film and Owen for his dig. The text reflects upon this in a number of different voices. As Axton remarks, "We were a subculture, business people in transit, growing old in planes and airports." Early on he reflects on the difference between these present day visitors and Americans who came to Europe in earlier times. "Americans used to come to places like this to write and paint and study, to find deeper textures. Now we do business."(p.6) Americans who came to write and paint are those who came in the nineteenth century and who have been depicted in novels like Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* and James's *The Portrait of a Lady* amongst others. And also the later generation of writers, the so-called "lost generation" of the 1920s with representative works by Hemingway and Fitzgerald who also wrote about Americans in Europe.

Axton says that he, "... began to think of myself as a perennial tourist", where you can drift across continents and can "...escape accountability" and are "... expected to be stupid". "Tourism is the march of stupidity", he declares. (p.43) Tourism is later called

(43) LeClair p.178.
"tomb-building", the collecting of sights of the world."(p.54) His circle of friends are likewise always jetting off to other countries and thus airports come to be central to their definition of self, "Air travel reminds us of who we are. It's the means by which we recognise ourselves as modern." It is an image that ties in with Owen's attempt to escape the world because the "... process removes us from the world and sets us apart from each other."(p.254) The point is made that perversely all of this travel makes it harder to communicate: Modern communications don't shrink the world, they make it bigger. Faster planes make it bigger. They give us more, they connect more things ... The world is so big and complicated we don't trust ourselves to figure out anything on our own.(p.323)

There is too much information, too many sensations opened up by this existence to be able to comprehend the world, presumably as it was once comprehended by earlier generations of Americans abroad.

The novel is filled with instances of failed communication and failures to understand. It is generally the Americans who are guilty of this, as if this is an attribute of their being as tourists. In an illuminating exchange between Charles Maitland and his son who is visiting his parents, the son comments that his father loves to misconstrue, "This is the theme of his life, pretending not to know."(p.165) The implication is that Maitland prefers not to know about the world he lives and works in. This is the same sort of American arrogance described by Graham Greene in The Quiet American where Pyle's misreading of Vietnamese history and politics results in violence and the murder of innocents. The point about this sort of wilful ignorance of other cultures is made humorously in an exchange between Maitland and Axton. Maitland complains that, "They keep changing the names", meaning the names of countries like Persia and Rhodesia. He calls the name changing the "Ministry of Slogans, The Ministry of Obscure Dialects."(pp.239-240) The Maitlands are portrayed as being particularly guilty of this misrecognition but they represent an American trait. Axton's Indian friend Anan tells him that when he lectured in America students, "... all wanted to come to me for lessons in meditation. A Hindu. They wanted me to teach them to breathe."(p.92)
The failure to understand works in other ways as well as, for instance, in Axton's relationship with his concierge who knows no English. Axton ends up lying in the little Greek that he does know to avoid having to explain complicated things. But it is in the realm of politics that the non-communication between Americans and Greeks is most clearly seen. The only non-American character with more than a supporting role in the novel is Andreas Eliades. He is really less of a character than a spokesman for a particular political attitude toward Americans. Later, as possibly being involved in the assassination attempt, he willloom in Axton's mind as a danger, but for most of the novel his function is to show how Americans are seen by some Europeans. His comments link in with this theme of the American failure to understand the world. "It is very interesting. ... how Americans learn geography and world history as their interests are damaged in one country after another" , he says and adds, "I think it's only in a crisis that Americans see other people." (p.58) Later speaking to Axton he engages in what amounts to a radical critique of American foreign affairs, "You don't see us. This is the final humiliation. The occupiers fail to see the people they control." (p.237) (44) Eliades's assertions are specifically leftist and are one opinion in a spectrum of opinions about America. Nevertheless, it becomes apparent in the novel that as Americans in a foreign land American expatriates inevitably become a sort of symbol, they represent certain values which may evoke opposition, emulation, envy and so on. Just as Americans construct the world as "other", America itself is constructed as "other" by non-Americans. Axton reflects on the nature of his work and acknowledges that kidnappings and ransomings are "routine business" and that "US executives led the world, being targetted with particular frequency in the Middle East and Latin America." (p.46) Discussing this targetting with Kathryn he tells her that:

"America is the world's living myth. There's no sense of wrong when you kill

(44) This has been said before, notably by Franz Fanon in books like The Wretched of the Earth (1961). Eliades is parroting the anti-imperialist classics.
an American or blame America for some local disaster. This is our function, to be character types, to embody recurring themes that people can use to comfort themselves, justify themselves and so on."(p.114)

The logical outcome of this is the assassination attempt with David Keller or Axton becoming the target, the "other" representing America as enemy. In his fear and paranoia after the event Axton thinks "American", which is the final depravity of the 27 depravities listed earlier. Throughout the novel Axton has ironically invoked them in passages that self-deprecatingly undercut his actions and statements. The final one is lent a deadly irony, it is a depravity that could end in death. What has been a self-conscious way of avoiding blame by admitting it now stands like an accusation and potential death sentence. That it is his nationality that is freighted with such deadly significance is a reminder of his position as outsider and “other” in this foreign country. As DeLillo told an interviewer, "We're just waiting for it to happen to us" and this is what creates what he calls the "humor of political dread" which affects the tone of so many of the conversations Axton and his friends have. (45)

From this description it is obvious that the international world of DeLillo's characters is very different from the world of James's characters. Even more so, I would argue, than the difference between the worlds of culture and business. In James's fiction the national traits of Americans and Europeans are contrasted in a clash of cultures that can be comic or tragic. The essential clash is between American innocence and naivety and European experience and corruption. One thinks of Isabel Archer's tragic journey from innocence to bitter experience at the hands of Europeanised Americans. James has an almost utopian desire to catalogue and investigate those traits from both cultures which could be amalgamated to create a more ideal society. (46) American freshness to reinvigorate the jaundiced European

(45) DeCurtis p.58.
eye and European sophistication and "sense of the past" to temper American overeagerness.

There is no such utopian strain in DeLillo's fiction. James was writing at a time when the idea, the myth, of America representing the ideals of revolution, recently reaffirmed in the civil war of 1861-65, still had great credence in European eyes. Although that ideal still retains some of its integrity in contemporary eyes much of its power to inspire has been dissipated. It has been replaced by an alternative myth, explored in the text, of America in the words of Khomeini as, "the great Satan". America has become as corrupt, if not more corrupt, than the Europe James was describing. James's Americans come to Europe to sample and experience the grail of culture that Europe represented, to finish their educations. DeLillo's Americans are businessmen, risk takers and adventurers in a hostile world. They are consciously linked by the text with the adventurers of an earlier era. Charles Maitland remarks of their existence, "'It is like the Empire. ... Opportunity, adventure, sunsets, dusty death.'"(p.7) This explicit link to colonialism characterises the role Americans are given, whether it is true for that particular American or not. DeLillo rewrites the Jamesian international novel as a dark late capitalist fable where utopian hopes are superseded by dystopian fears.

The status of the novel's main characters as Americans in a hostile world makes them potential targets for attack and creates links in the novel between the explosive political situation of the late 1970s and their transience and sense of fragile mortality. Describing his work Axton catalogues a series of Mediterranean locations and their related dangers, "Our Iranian control was dead, shot by two men in the street. ... Our associate for the Emirates woke up to find a corpse in his garden."(p.143) Occasionally the text pauses to describe the current political situation:

This was the period after the President ordered a freeze of Iranian assets held in U.S. banks. Desert One was still to come. ... It was the winter Rowser learned that the Shi'ite underground movement, Dawa, was stockpiling weapons in the Gulf. It was the winter before the car bombings in Nablus and Ramallah, before the military took power in Turkey ... (p.233)
Such precise historical referencing places the text in a political and social context and also reinforces the atmosphere of doom and fragile mortality. Vedat Nesin, a Turk, tells Axton that he is lucky, "You are a target only outside your country. I am a target outside and inside." (p.195) This is an ironic form of luck.

As an outsider in an alien culture James was acutely aware of the strangeness of the European world as his characters experienced it. If they are not corrupted or destroyed by their experience they are immensely changed and cannot return to who or what they once were, like Strether in The Ambassadors. The strange world DeLillo's characters experience however, is not so much another country or continent but another way of seeing the world. He uses the international theme to dramatise his view of individuals in the postmodern world as outsiders, as alienated from the experiences, beliefs and relationships with which they once had a connection. I intend at this point to build upon what I have said so far about how the novel postmodernises literary conventions and genres to argue a case for seeing the novel as being about this modern and postmodern state, this twentieth century state, of alienation.

I have previously discussed the significant differences between The Names and James's international novels, but in this one essential respect they are writing from similar sets of experiences. As a literary exile writing in an English tradition of the realist novel rather than the American tradition with its elements of romance and moral fable, there is one literary tradition James cannot draw upon. F.R. Leavis in The Great Tradition pointed out the influence of George Eliot's Daniel Deronda on The Portrait of a Lady but there is one important difference. (47) As a literary exile and a cosmopolitan James was cut off from the "organic community" in the sense of the English (rural) past that was open to Eliot and the English novelists and poets who wrote in that tradition. This English realism was filtered through the romantic revolution in poetry at the beginning of the nineteenth century. James was always an outsider in that tradition and his fiction, as Terry Eagleton has argued, elevates an intellectual and critical consciousness to a level, that in a sense, stands in for the

organic community and its sense of the past. (48) James stands at the beginning of the modernist consciousness of the alienated state, a consciousness DeLillo inherits. This is what The Names is essentially doing, rewriting the modernist novel of alienation. In the final part of this section I discuss exactly how the novel establishes connections between modernist alienation, the contemporary world and DeLillo's version of postmodernism.

Fredric Jameson reviewing The Names lauded its "marvellous, electrical elliptical dialogue, witty in some new (and American) way ..." (49) He places the dialogue in a thematic context that is less about language and more about space. "'Real languages,' then - in other words, people's concrete social relations - are in The Names figured by way of space rather than by way of the thematics of words ..." (50) The novel is about "the peculiarly American experience of space" through which culturally different "others" are perceived. This perception, Jameson writes, has shifted eastwards since Henry James's fiction of nineteenth century Europe. The things he made strange in his fiction are now commonplace, part of our lives in the world of mass communications, and so it is to the East, Greece, Jerusalem, India, Amman that the point of perception is shifted, because it is in these places that Americans are still strangers and outsiders, and consequently the enemy. (51)

Jameson's review shifts the focus of critical interpretation away from language as most other reviewers exclusively emphasised, toward the politics of space. His reading is part of his ongoing work on postmodernism, of which The Names becomes one more example. DeLillo like other exemplary postmodernists is concerned with representing the problem of structural intelligibility that is at the heart of late multinational capitalism. He characterises that dilemma in the beginning of the review as:

... the increasing incompatibility - or incommensurability - between

(49) Jameson p.119. 
(50) ibid., p.120.
(51) ibid., pp.120-122.
individual experience, existential experience, as we go looking for it in our individual biological bodies, and structural meaning, which can now ultimately derive only from the world system of multinational capitalism. (52)

Jameson is correct in sharply differentiating DeLillo from those writers who limit their fiction to the telling of individual stories of domestic tragedy and who thus ignore the problem of representing history and the political world. Similarly, his work is differentiated from those fictions that attempt to offer this or that individual destiny as typical of the world in a sociological sense. Where I would differ from Jameson's view of the novel is in what is left out of his analysis, although, admittedly Jameson is only briefly sketching an introduction to the novel in his review and only beginning to draw out the novel's historical and spatial context. This context could be described as Americans interacting with a late capitalist world where the traditional culture and politics of Europe (Eliades's socialism) meets the revived culture and politics of resurgent Islam, which stands in for Third World nationalism. First and third worlds meet in the space of the novel. But what I believe he fails to analyse is how the text begins to explore the political consequences of this three way collision.

One consequence that flows from the interaction of America(ns) and the Third World is located in American paranoia, particularly Axton's paranoia. In a political context of widespread hostility towards Americans in the region and a revolution that Eric Hobsbawm has described as "one of the major social revolutions of the twentieth century", (53) the Iranian revolution of 1979, that paranoia can be read as American fear of revolution. Although I feel it would be more accurate to read it as a fear of the masses, a nativist fear that American culture may be swamped by these masses of "others". This has, of course, been a motif throughout American history. Explicit fears of invasion in American writing has largely been limited to genres on the periphery of the academic mainstream such as science

(52) ibid., p.116.
fiction. However, in American postmodernism's obsession with fears of surveillance and control from within there are perhaps echoes of these nativist fears. (54)

In *The Names* itself the turn away from the world that I have described earlier as motivating the cult and those who search for it is also an attempt to negate, through withdrawal, the fears these movements of people in the Third World arouse. This is one possible way of reading DeLillo's later novel, *Mao II*, where Islamic extremism, the description of Khomeini's funeral, the terrorists and hostages, create a sense of the otherness and danger of this world for Americans and the writer Bill in particular who perishes trying to become involved in the Lebanon crisis. (55) This is one of the impulses present in *The Names* that Jameson ignores. But what I wish also to explore are the text's other impulses, particularly its representation of alienation.

Jameson only hints at this spatial alienation, an alienation which can be summed up as the new imperial power (America in terms of its economic and cultural imperialism) interacting with the colonised (non-communist Europe and the Islamic world) in the late twentieth century context of explosive nationalism and the end of post-war prosperity. In this context the relationship of coloniser to colonised is irreversibly warped. Jameson reads this situation in terms of "structural intelligibility" (56) (or structural unintelligibility I would say). That is, the idea that we cannot know the world but only live on its margins. As I have already discussed the text sets out this spatial dilemma of Axton and his compatriots as Americans abroad in a world hostile to them, and thus they become symbols of the coloniser. It does this, as Jameson indicates, in its ability to see this dilemma in more than purely personal terms. In terms involving a set of different spaces and experiences of that space, Axton in

(56) This is Fredric Jameson's phrase from his essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism". (1984)
Athens, Owen in the desert, Tap in imaginary Kansas, Kathryn in a Canada opposed to Axton's America. In each of these experiences there is a refusal to leave it simply as an existential experience, modern man in an alien world. Rather, the idea of exile, the archetypal modernist response to the twentieth century, is injected into this context of political breakdown and sense of apocalyptic doom. The theme of exile is not universalised here, it is particularised.

The theme of a particular political exile and sense of alienation is approached by the text on a number of levels. In a central way in its depiction of the relationship between Axton and his wife and child. The very fact of their separation is seen in geographic terms, "How easy it was to sit there and reorganize our lives across the jet streams and the seasons."(p.82) Axton is a long distance father, and he compares himself to David Keller flying across the Atlantic to New York to eat banana splits with his children and then back to his new wife Lindsay.(p.83) The Axton's separation is not as extreme and Axton has taken his job to be nearer his wife and child. Nevertheless, the geographic separation dictates his life and he is dismayed when Kathryn talks of returning to America.

This spatial and emotional separation is seen in metaphoric terms in the fact of their differing nationalities. During one of their arguments she tells him, "'You know how it is with Canadians. ... We love to be disappointed. Everything we do ends up disappointingly.'" He thinks, "She seemed to be accusing me of something."(p.128) One of the 27 depravities is, of course, "American" and their separation is along national boundaries, like the US-Canada border. This relationship is not an equal one. The text does not tell the history of their break-up or make judgements about who is to blame, but their present relationship is presented in terms of a man/US versus woman/Canada opposition. At one point he remembers seeing her return home in a blizzard whilst they were living in Canada. He imagines the scene in terms of, "The colonial theme, the theme of exploitation, of greatest possible utilization ...",(p.266) where American pimps cross the border to work and American crime families set up shop in Canadian cities and they own the corporation's processing plants, a huge share of the Canadian earth. Likewise their pollution, manufactured
and cultural, spreads like cancer. It is an arresting image, not only of American influence and control in Canada, but of the unequal nature of their marriage. Axton has always, whatever his actual behaviour, been the symbol of an oppression that exists purely because of a biological division reflected in society and culture. It is also, of course, an image of American influence on a world scale, the context in which these expatriates live.

Their failed relationship is first presented in an ironic almost offhand way. In the course of the novel the tone becomes more serious as the emotionally painful repercussions of their estrangement are touched upon. The 27 depravities are an ironic chronicling of the trivialities of his behaviour that enrage Kathryn and he uses them as a weapon against her. On this level the breakdown and separation is seen in a casual way, like the comic Hollywood version of a failed marriage. Thinking about marriage, Axton observes, "Marriage is something we make from available materials. In a sense it's improvised, it's almost off-hand."(p.39) And explaining his marriage to Charles Maitland, "She used to say this marriage is a movie", and later he talks of the feeling that "... we were making it up day by day."(p.39) Their arguments have that slightly distanced nuance as in an exchange where she calls his depravities a "game" and says, "How strange to be nostalgic about the end of a marriage."(p.112) Later he describes an argument as "... long and detailed, with natural pauses", which moves from room to room in the house at Kouros. "It was full of pettiness and spite, the domestic forms of assault, the agreed-upon reductions." After a while their only motive is to "... extend the argument to its natural end."(p.122) Like many of their arguments and their relationship as a whole it is made up of little rituals, as if they were each playing roles they have played before. "The argument had resonance. It had levels, memories. It referred to other arguments, to cities, houses, rooms, those wasted lessons, our history in words."(p.123) They are in a sense trapped by what has gone before, the patterns of their marriage repeat themselves in their estrangement. They cannot escape from these patterns. The narrative voice approaches this lightly, ironically, but what begins to come through are deeper emotions, memories and regrets. The argument has "... an inner life, a force distinct from the issues."(p.122)
are experiences too painful simply to describe which demand to be mediated through ritualised role-playing and the adoption of an ironic, nostalgic stance.

These feelings are most sharply felt when Axton is separated from Kathryn. He is always aware of their separation, seeing himself as "a man living apart." (p.44) Speaking to her over the telephone, it becomes an "... instrument of familiar distance, the condition of living apart." (p.134) Memories of her and their life together haunt the narrative. Remembering a particularly violent confrontation, the look on her face has, "A rage that will astonish me forever." (p.256) It is an essential part of his consciousness, his condition as he describes it, of a man living alone. This aloneness links with intimations of mortality. He thinks, "I will die alone." (p.82) The end of the marriage equates with the end of life and the feeling of transience in hotels, and in travel that is bound up with thoughts of death.

Axton's estrangement from Kathryn is mirrored by his failings as a father. Not until he reads Tap's story does he connect with his son's real feelings. Their separation is evident in the "Ob" language which is the private dialogue of Tap and Kathryn and which excludes Axton. It is also evident in Tap's fixation on Owen who seems to have become a kind of replacement father, a father who does not disappoint as Axton does. In one telling scene Tap is fearful of a swarm of bees and his father seeks to reassure him by pointing out their beauty. Tap gives him a look "... that spoke some final disappointment." Axton realises this and thinks, "As if I could tell him anything at all, fake father, liar." (p.121)

The relationship between Axton and his wife and child is familiar in contemporary American fiction. The depiction of dysfunctional marriages and father-son relationships is central in the writing of Cheever, Updike and many others. There is a forty year American realist tradition of this sort of fiction. What the text is doing here is demoting it to one strand in a wider social depiction of contemporary estrangement and loss of connection. To turn briefly to the only other passage where Axton is seen in relation to a woman one can see in the episode with Janet Ruffing the depiction of a sort of verbal rape. The language of seduction becomes increasingly aggressive and they end up in a back alley where they have sex that is tawdry and almost like a rape. I would thus differ with more sympathetic
interpretations of this scene Dennis Foster makes when he claims it is a sort of adolescent seduction through the naming of its component parts and actions, and Paula Bryant when she argues that it is part of Axton's movement "toward a more direct and emotional language."

(57) What Axton does is to replace a natural loving act with an act based on power (the power of language appropriately) and menace. Thus his alienation is taken a step further and is freighted with references to a world where sexual alienation takes the form of rape as means to express sexual feeling.

At the same time the text is also focussing on the themes of alienation and loss of human connection in its references to culture and politics. DeLillo will deal with the cultural alienation of society in greater detail in his next novel, White Noise, but he does engage with these themes in this novel. In one of their arguments Kathryn accuses Axton of preferring to see the Elgin Marbles rather than the Acropolis, "You want to see the rip-off, the imperialist swag in its proper surroundings."(p.123) Axton prefers the simulacra to the real and as such is typical of a society that consumes images and ignores reality. Significantly, his father is obsessed by television, "Most of his anger came from TV."(p.178) He is enraged by what he sees on the TV news, his world mediated by its nightly image in TV. In a sense it is his world, "The TV set was a rage-making machine, working at him all the time, giving him direction and scope, enlarging him in a sense, filling him with a world rage."(p.179)

The link between the image viewed on TV and political events is also evident in the lives of Axton's fellow expatriates. They see the events of the world as they appear on their TV screens, the Iranian revolution remembered as images on TV. This behaviour is similar to scenes in Mao II; for instance, Karen's fascinated viewing of Khomeini's funeral where the image and the viewer's reaction to that image seem to take on dramatic weight denied the description of real events. (58) The connection of this theme with that of mortality is shown in Keller's fear that his death by "riot or terrorist act" would not be covered by the

(57) Foster p.168 and Bryant p.20.  
(58) Mao II pp.188-193.
media. (p.194) The identification of viewer with what is viewed, the idea that we ourselves are simply simulacra in someone else's TV-mediated eyes, extends even into the vision of our own deaths.

This theme is central to the parallel quest of Volterra to capture the cult on film. The quest to film the world and its significant moments is similar to David Bell's attempt to capture the essence of America with his camera. Filming the cult perform one of its ritual murders sickens Axton, he cannot believe Volterra would do it, "He wouldn't let them kill a man, he wouldn't film it if they did. We have to draw back at times, study our own involvement." (p.249) The voice of humanism. But this is precisely what the mystery of the cult is doing, drawing in Volterra, Axton and Owen. As Volterra argues it is a natural step, "Film is more than twentieth century art. It is another part of the twentieth century mind. It's the world seen from inside ... The twentieth century is on film." (p.200) Again there is this mixing of simulacra and real, viewer and viewed, inside and outside. We capture the world on film as we are captured on film ourselves. The metafictional implications are obvious, the characters who utter these statements themselves captured in language as they capture the stories of the world on film and in language.

Del's description of how Volterra planned to film the murder triggers other images in our heads as we read. The description of how the camera will film from a helicopter using the "frenzy of the rotor wash" to create a "visual element" (pp.248-249) recalls TV news footage of the Vietnam war and the helicopters in Apocalypse Now. Her description is in some respects more chilling than the description of the actual murder. The writing, metafictionally reflecting its own process of mediating reality, is able to reinvigorate these jaded stories seen nightly on TV by describing the very process of our watching/reading them. It is DeLillo's variation on the Formalist device of estrangement, making the reader see something new in a formulaic genre. For instance:

"They murder the old man. They kill him with stones. Cut him, beat him. The dust is flying, the bushes and scrub are flattened out by the rotor. No sound in this scene. He wants the wind blasts only as a visual element. The severe
angle. The men clutched together. The turbulence, the silent rippling of the bushes and stunted tree. ... He doesn't want the helicopter gaining altitude to signal the end is here. He doesn't want the figures to fade into the landscape. This is sentimental. It just ends."(pp.248-249)

This passage functions on several levels. It is a chilling depiction of aestheticised violence, as distanced as the violence on film and TV screens. It makes metafictional reference to the writing process in its implied comments on the immoral reproduction of the private pain of others and the social pain of the world. It raises questions of a Heisenbergian nature, how much influence does the observer have on the observed?, is the observed altered irrevocably by its observation? Will the murder be done for the camera's benefit? (Which Volterra hints at.(p.200)) The cult seems to take on a symbolic status, one of those terrorist groups who kill for the cameras. This also raises questions of the morality of the act of filming, one more American imperialist gesture designed to exchange aesthetic pleasure for money or fame, one more aspect of the degrading of those cultures who must perform for civilized and jaded eyes.

Finally, it is about the alienation of culture from everyday life and morality. The fact that the world is always mediated through film, video-tape or computer module, that technology stands between the viewer and the real, pointedly reveals the broken springs of the culture. The intellectual and artistic achievements of a people, which once had some connection with actually lived experience, now, in the guise of popular culture, serves to separate us from the real. Baudrillard's celebration of the simulacra is in DeLillo's eyes not grounds for optimism, but for a pessimism similar to that of the Frankfurt school. (59) Experience is devalued

(59) I am thinking here of works by Baudrillard like Simulations and In the Shadow of the Silent Majority as opposed to the cultural pessimism of works like Adorno and Horkheimer's Dialectics of Enlightenment and Herbert Marcuse's One Dimensional Man. I am not arguing that Delillo has necessarily read those works, just that I am reminded of those works when reading his fiction.

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by being endlessly reducible by technology, and therefore of no consequence because it is always already mediated by that technology or through the eyes of those who wield that technology - witness Volterra who is willing to devalue death to produce aesthetic pleasure. At the same time the text is explicitly working to connect this with the violent banality of American life and its continuous reproduction in the media and its fascination with violence. The manifestations of American culture like the Manson murders and the lone gunman (p.202) are what obsesses Volterra. Del says of him that, "... he's fascinated by the pure American thing. The aimlessness, the drifting."(p.155) Kathryn remarks that, "We do the wrong kind of killing in America. It's a form of consumerism. It's the logical extension of consumer fantasy. People shooting from overpasses, barricaded houses. Pure Image."(p.115)

The violence of terrorism and civil unrest that instils fear in the expatriate Americans and which they and we know via the media, has seemingly gone a step further in America, where that violence has become pure gesture. Not even a political gesture, a media gesture to gain your Warholian 15 minutes of fame. A stunt that instantly becomes part of the American consumer fantasy of violence. It is part of Axton's education that this cultural alienation, expressed as violence, begins to haunt him. He cannot forget Del's narrative of the filmed murder proposal, "Silent. The rotor wash. ... Dust spinning around them. Their hair and clothes blowing. The frenzy."(p.259) It is also what comes to haunt the reader as the narrative unfolds. The implication in all this that cannot be avoided is what could be called a Baudrillardian phenomenon. That is, that even the cult and the world of Middle East terrorism and fanaticism that it stands in for, are simply one more media construct. A construct not necessarily for a particular purpose, for instance as part of a CIA plot, but simply as phenomena that are an effect of the postmodern world of "structural intelligibility".

I turn now to a discussion of the theme of language in *The Names*, especially as it relates to the cult and Tap's story. Fredric Jameson is quite correct when in discussing the celebration of language in the novel he states that:

... the "concept" of language or talk is not some end in itself, some ultimate
formal stopping place which then becomes closure and mandala, decoration
and provisional metaphysic, it here lives from a content it has drawn from
another place and another thematics, namely that of social life proper. (60)

He is referring to the "talk" of the expatriates that he believes is "figured by way of space
rather than by way of the thematics of words." (61) But this has to be balanced against the
cult sections of the novel which he believes are "... artificial, made-up and quite gratuitous."
(62) The cult ultimately stands in for a mysticism at the centre of the novel, which is a
compensation, an imported content of a different type. It thus is an "irrational end" of an
otherwise "rational and intelligent, satisfying novel." (63)

Although I believe Jameson's criticism of the cult parts of the novel to be correct to a
certain extent I want to argue that the cult should not simply be dismissed as an unnecessary
element. The cult sections are an integral part of the essential meaning of the novel,
principally the novel's examination of the alienation of modern life. What separates this
novel from earlier explorations of these themes such as in Players and Running Dog is its
introduction of parallel worlds which act as counterpoints and illumine each other. If the cult
plot were to be left out of the novel we are left with an exploration of the same themes as
these earlier novels, the nexus between politics and culture that reduces people to paranoids
or mindless consumers. The cult plot complicates this theme, transforming it into a
philosophic attack on the excesses of modern life.

One of the things that most strikes the reader of the novel is the proliferation of languages
and codes. There are, of course, the spoken languages, the English, Greek, Arabic and the
language difficulties they create, such as in Axton's problems with his concierge. Then there
are unofficial languages, particularly the private "Ob" language of Tap and Kathryn. There is
the language of business which Axton tells us is "... hard-edged and aggressive ... a blooding
of the gray-suited ... corporate man."(p.47) There is the language of skepticism and science

(60) Jameson p.120. (61) ibid., p.120.
(62) ibid., p.121. (63) ibid., p.121.
which is supposedly the opposite of the language of religion but may not be. Axton and Kathryn's knowledge of their origins is described as "... material ... from exploded stars" and is "... our shared prayer, our chant." (p.92) The language of mathematics which Charles claims "... makes no sense if you don't know the secrets, the codes. It means nothing, says nothing ..." (p.164) And there is finally the language of politics and the military-industrial complex. Rowser is the best exponent of this as his obfuscatory language hides from Axton its real significance - to provide risk analysis not for purely commercial purposes but for the gathering of intelligence for political and economic purposes.

Languages, whether formal or informal, are central to the text. The physical nature of language, their recording or writing is also a central theme. Early in the novel Tap tells Axton that Owen has told him about the word, "character" and its etymology from a Greek word meaning pointed stone or branding instrument through to its modern English uses, not only as a representation of a person in fiction but as a mark or symbol (p.10) The idea of symbols, of things representing other things is introduced and it is significantly connected with a sharp instrument, a tool for writing, and in the context of the cult, a sharp instrument used to kill. Later Owen recounts the story of how an English anthropologist used a young Kurd to make a paper cast of Babylonian letters by inching along a rock mass, perhaps using the letters themselves as handholds. (p.80) As a metaphor for the physicality of language this is exemplary, the boy uses the written form of language, the indentations, in order to read that language and avoid a fatal fall. Owen's interpretation of the story is that it illustrates how far men will go "... to satisfy a pattern." (p.80) Kathryn and Owen then discuss the story in the context of imperialism, the Western urge to, "Subdue and codify", (p.80) to control another civilization and then decipher its secrets for domestic, scholastic consumption. This is an ironic exchange given that, as I have mentioned earlier, Owen is engaged in just such a search for pattern in his investigation of the cult. If Volterra is engaged in a mode of control that seeks to aestheticise the cult, Owen's purpose is to anthropologise it. The metafictional dimensions of his function in the novel have already been discussed, but what is important
here is that his deciphering or reading is ironically associated with a form of Western intellectual imperialism.

The cult which stands at the centre of the novel, is the ultimate language that must be translated. Just as "Ob" excludes Axton from his family and his inadequate Greek excludes him from communication, the language of the cult excludes meaning, the imposing of coherence or pattern, on all the main characters. The search for the cult becomes the ultimate act of comprehending a language and its natural corollary, imposing a pattern upon it.

The point about the cult however, is that it refuses to have meaning imposed upon it. A typical postmodern device if one thinks of Pynchon's V symbol in the novel of the same name or the enigmas at the centre of novels like John Fowles' The Magus and Paul Auster's New York Trilogy. This is why it appears as such a gratuitous plot component for Jameson and why I believe that unlike the enigmas that surround Pynchon and Fowles' work, the enigma at the centre of The Names is ultimately without any epistemological significance.

The revelation that Owen and Axton arrive at separately illustrates the totally arbitrary nature of the cult's violence, its essential meaninglessness. They choose their ceremonial victims by way of the first letter of names, the names of people correlated with the name of the place they happen to be in. Hence their name, Ta Onomata, The Names. The first point that could be made about this is that it foregrounds the arbitrary nature of language, and thus the dominant contemporary view of language "popularised" by the French from Saussure to Derrida. The slippage between objects and our names for them and the way they are represented in speech as a combination of signifier and signified opens the way to a view of language that defies or refuses meaning, as the cult does. It is interesting that the cult is characterised as meaninglessly violent, as if there is a link between the act of naming, which is essentially the creating of language and the violence that it is engaged in. The text views this sort of language, one associated with post-structuralist theory as negative and anti-life.

But the cult is not just a post-structuralist theory of language. In the text it is also a version of religion, a mysticism that the text is demystifying. But in this religion the moral universe at the centre of all religions is absent. Del tells Axton that as Volterra searched for the cult
she felt, "... there was something dead, there was an emptiness at the centre of all this." (p.245) The search is empty and dead because the cult is meaningless and amoral. It lacks meaning as a religion because it has replaced a moral centre with an amoral obsession with pattern and ritual. Owen's search for the cult ends in his making contact with it and perhaps participating in one of its ritual murders. He learns nothing about the cult in a humanistic or even scientific sense, or that he has not already hypothesised about already to Axton. The adventure is without meaning or enlightenment. He had earlier told Axton not to look for meaning or answers and Axton had replied, "'Pattern, order, some sort of unifying light. Is that what we're supposed to come away with?'" (pp.168-169) A comment that may well be a joke on the reader looking for a unifying meaning in this text.

At the centre of most religions is a god or gods, but Owen asserts that the cult are not "a god-haunted people". Their murders indicate, "'No sign of ritual. What god could they invent who might accept such a sacrifice ...?'" (p.116) This could be DeLillo's comment on the essential nature of religion, as an empty and dead search for pattern in the world which ultimately replaces a moral centre with an amoral ritualism. Or, perhaps it is simply a critique of a particular type of religion, one that is amoral and cynical.

Because there is non-meaning at the cult's core it does not mean that the text or the action of the narrative does not create meaning for the cult. What the cult does and how the characters react to the cult creates meaning. (64) On one level what the cult does in arbitrarily killing innocent people for no moral reason is mock the religious, indeed, humanist impulse to build systems of meaning in order to hold off or neutralise the fear of death. It does this by overdetermining it. Firstly, moral and political meaning is emptied out of its rituals, they are done purely for abecedarian reasons. Then its goal as a cult is death. Owen says they want to "vault into eternity" (p.203) and later Andahl tells Axton that, "'The whole program leads up to this. Only a death.'" (p.209) To neutralise death the cult kills

(64) For instance, Eric Mottram sees the novel as being about how far men will go to find a pattern. The New American Writing, pp.78-79.
innocent people whilst Axton and Owen in order to create meaning in their own lives and to neutralise their own fear of death, search for a pattern in the cult's actions. It does not matter that there is no meaning as Owen knows from the start. Owen is aware of just this connection between the cult and death and he tells Axton:

"We know we will die. This is our saving grace in a sense. No animal knows this but us. It is one of the things that sets us apart. It is our special sadness, this knowledge, and therefore a richness, a sanctification. The final denial of our base reality, in this schematic is to produce a death. Here is the stark drama of our separateness. A needless death. A death by system, by machine-intellect." (p.175)

He could be talking about our twentieth century way of killing - machine death.

Indeed the text is at pains to give these ideas of death and separateness a political dimension. The text makes the point that the searchers come to resemble the searched for. Discussing why he visited the cult Owen tells Axton that it may have been, "... to acknowledge my likeness to them." (p.293) Singh has told him, "You're a member now." It is denied but Singh insists, "Of course you are." (p.298) Similarly Axton, although he never gets as close to the cult has an affinity with it. He tells Owen, "I've been consistently right about the cult. ... The cult is the only thing I seem to connect with, It's the only thing I've been right about." (pp.299-300) Their search merges them with the cult, they are both engaged in their own imposing of meaning on the world.

The affinity is widened, it is not just between them and the cult but between what the cult does and what their culture stands for. There is no attempt to establish a contrast between innocent America and the guilty cult representing Middle Eastern terrorism, or perhaps, imperialist America and the colonised Middle East. In the novel's political terms they are simply different versions of the problem of violence and its sanitisation in language and ideology. The kind of killing done in America is, "consumer fantasy ... Pure image" which has, "No connection to the earth." (p.115) This domestic form of murder leads to the romanticism of terrorism, the beautiful language of destruction which includes, "... stun
grenades, parabellum ammo" which "... some soft-eyed boy from Adone, slung over his shoulder, Kalashnikov, sweet whisper in the dark ..." might carry.(p.115) And it also includes, Axton muses, "... the language of the mathematics of war, nuclear game theory, that bone country of tech data and little clicking words", (p.115) that is the language of governments and not of terrorists or crazed loners.

DeLillo has written comically about this language of destruction in *End Zone* where these euphemisms for nuclear war are ironically twinned with the language of sport and competition. In this novel there is a tone of unease and suspicion that betrays the characters' paranoia about the world they live in. The connecting of individual violence, the lone assassins, with both the abecedarian and ultimately arbitrary violence of the cult and the violence of politics, both official and oppositional, points to the text's narrative paranoia. I do not believe that there is anything behind this paranoia as developed as a theory of an ultimate political conspiracy sponsored by the CIA or other American elites and institutions. Rather, the text's insistence on these connections reveals DeLillo's attempt to explain the "structural intelligibility" of the postmodern world of multinational capitalism and political violence. That it fails to do this has as much to do with DeLillo's pluralistic, anti-ideological politics as it has to do with the impossibility of representing the unrepresentable. (65) DeLillo's understanding of the world-system is made explicit in an interview with Anthony DeCurtis where he talks of living in a "kind of circular or near circular system" with "rings which keep intersecting at some point." He is interested in the "secrets within systems." (66) As a "systems novelist" (67) his understanding of the world is concerned less with struggle and conflict than with grasping how the wheels are oiled in the vast multinational system which is the contemporary world.

(65) This term is again from Jameson's "Postmodernism" essay.

(66) DeCurtis p.61.

(67) Thomas LeClair calls DeLillo a "systems novelist" along with his contemporaries, Pynchon and Coover. *In the Loop*. 1987.

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In the context of the language of destruction the cult works towards a "... static perfection of some kind. ... One mind, one madness. To be part of some unified vision. Clustered, dense. Safe from chaos and life."(p.116) The cult overdetermines and reifies death and is the mirror image of the wider society. It has as its final goal the escape from chaos, or from history itself. It is an escape from the world into a solipsistic, world-excluding self. The cult's secret name is a "... way of escaping the world. It is an opening into the self", (p.210) according to Andahl. He tells Axton that differences have emerged among the cult members over a film (Volterra's) or book about the cult, a document like the Bible to "contain the pattern."(p.212) It is the first intimation of the break up of the cult precisely because the world is now intruding into its self-centredness. The cult's fondness for deserts and isolated locations expresses this need to escape the world.

Owen's impulse is similar. He tells Axton he would like to participate in the seven circuits of the Ka'bah at Mecca to be part of the masses. He sees it as the opposite of solitude and the "sanctity of personal space", but in a way it is another escape from the world, from individuality and the responsibilities of history and the individual. Axton's impulse earlier in a conversation with Ann Maitland had been similar, half jokingly, to live as a "lonely, sad expatriate."(p.160) When Owen searches for the cult in the deserts of north India he begins to stand outside history.(p.288) He is in a place of cyclical time where, "The word for yesterday was the same as the word for tomorrow."(p.287)

The cult is "nearly dead" when he arrives. Emmerich tells him that language is not history, it is "... precisely the opposite of history. An alphabet of utter stillness", (pp.291-292) and that the cult has lost purpose and has many differences, "People wander off. People die."(p.292) Emmerich is described as a man for whom murder has become, "... part of the dream pool of his self-analysis. The victim and the act are theory now. They form the philosophic basis he relies on for his sense of self."(p.291) Owen has extracted from this experience a theory about the nexus between world and self:

"The world has become self-referring. ... This thing has seeped into the texture of the world. The world for thousands of years was our escape,
was our refuge. Men hid from themselves in the world. We hid from God or death. The world was where we lived, the self was where we went mad and died. But now the world has made a self of its own." (p.297)

It is a world in "which there is no escape". (p.297) What Owen has learnt from the cult is that there is no escape from the world, it must intrude and destroy the attempt to live purely in the self, in the alphabet of language, outside history and time.

This urge to escape world/time/history is the ultimate alienation, the ultimate denial of "being in the world" or of participating in the human community. Rowser's paranoia acts as a counterpoint to this desire. His "gift for numbers" has enabled him to separate what he does, his accountant-like plotting of the world from the "terrifying events" he has culled from those figures. In fact his thoroughness is said to be a "pathological condition." (pp.45-46) He has so internalised his actuarial view of the world that he cannot conceive, except in nightmare, of a world outside politics. Axton imagines him in "empty, remote innocent Labrador" with, "No politics, no risk." It would be a place that is "an offence to him, a white space he could not know through numbers. He would die there, gesturing." (p.51) It is Rowser who intimates to Axton a sense of danger, his advice is to resign and find a job somewhere in the States. (p.272) His fear of what the "parent" might do, a euphemism for the CIA, is communicated to Axton and the reader. Rowser's mind is described as binary, "On-off, zero-one". It is like a computer, in its number crunching precision, its blinkered view of the world, which sees it in terms of prediction, risks, likelihood, and thus denies the human dimension of politics. Rowser is a version of the cult in his denial of the world, but in military-industrial terms, the ultimate organisation man, rather than the cult's bizarre version of mysticism.

Axton professes a naive enthusiasm for what Rowser is doing and for the American role in the world. He tells one character that, "This is where I want to be. History. It's in the air." (p.97) But when Charles Maitland tells him of the connection between his employer and the CIA he finds it necessary, "... to do some retrospective thinking of my own." (p.315) He realises bitterly that, "... it had the effect of justifying everything Kathryn has ever said about
me."(p.317) He is corrupted, he is the 27th depravity, "American". He muses that the CIA is "America's myth", the "tiers of silence ... conspiracies and doublings and brilliant betrayals."(p.317) His alienation from his family is given a political dimension and the nature of it, the attempt, whether conscious or not, to pull the wool over his own eyes, to deny the world and his less than innocent role in it, as American spy, parallels the cult's and Owen's own Byzantine self-duplicity. The appropriate metaphor for the novel, referred to early in the text, is "the Minotaur, the labyrinth, Darker things". (p.84) which are below the surface and which Owen actually and metaphorically digs up and Axton inadvertently, almost comically discovers. The failed assassination attempt which may or may not have been meant for Axton is his inevitable, terrifying and humbling interface with the world. His naive enthusiasm to be part of history comes home to him in a way that does not reflect happily on him. He has become a dupe of history, a theme which is central to DeLillo's ninth novel Libra.

Axton says of objects which he cannot interpret that he does not "know the names of things". (p.138) It is an appropriate metaphor for the alienation that most of the characters to varying degrees suffer from. They are alienated from knowledge of the world by not knowing the names of things and thus alienated from successfully integrating with the community, the community evoked in Tap's novel. This is the final part of the text, the coda, and it is the only part in which Axton does not play a central role. It is entitled, "The Prairie", which immediately characterises it as an American landscape, as opposed to the "Island", "Mountain" and "Desert" which are ubiquitous.

I have mentioned it only in passing before because like the structure of the text it is almost an afterthought. It is a possible solution to the paranoid nightmare of alienation, betrayal and non-communication that has dominated the text and certainly a number of critics have seen it that way. (68) In the text it acts as a commentary and expansion of Part 3's final scene.

(68) Of the critics I have cited - Paula Bryant, Dennis Foster, Matthew Morris and Eric Mottram - all read the "Prairie" section this way.
Axton's long postponed visit to the Acropolis. This is where he merges with the crowds who flock to visit the ruins and realises, "It wasn't a relic species of dead Greece, but part of the living city below it." He says that the "human feeling" that emerges from it is a "cry for pity" and it is a "voice we know as our own." (p.330) Axton's insight is a recognition of his and our humanness. It constitutes the beginnings of a change of perception and outlook on Axton's part. He has learned from the Acropolis that it was "not a thing to study but to feel." (p.330) The implication is that the dry alienated attempts to interpret the cult are being replaced with an urge to feel the world, be a part of the "great city". The urge to escape the world has become the urge to be part of it. "Our offering is language" is his final thought, (p.331) not so much language as a triumph of post-structuralist theory but as a metaphor for human communication and society.

But is this the same language that has resisted Owen's interpretations and been seen as dead and stultifying, connected inextricably with the cult of death? Tap's novel, in a sense, answers this question by presenting a language that feels rather than analyses. The misspellings and inaccuracies of his prose give us a richer, more human language as many critics have noted. (69) Interestingly DeLillo himself has said that we feel, perhaps superstitiously, that children have "direct contact to the kind of natural truth that eludes adults." (70) The language of Tap's novel displays that sort of natural truth and it is linked to the content of Tap's novel, the safety of the community and the language that springs from that community. Earlier Owen had spoken of his boyhood and the "safe place" of the "church, by a river, among cottonwoods". Hearing those sermons he remembers the light and warmth which carries "history in it" (p.172) and which is a known and loved tradition, a tradition that is not alienated. But when they move to a Pentecostal church he is not safe, language comes to threaten him by being incomprehensible. It involves a loss of connection

(69) For instance, the essays by Paula Bryant and Dennis Foster cited earlier.
(70) DeCurtis p.64.
with his parents, "His father fell away to some distant place, his mother clapped and wept." His "need for safety" is assaulted and this is left as, perhaps, an explanation of his ceaseless searching for understanding, to interpret the world and thus recapture his childhood sense of safety.(pp.172-173)

Tap's imaginative re-creation of Owen's world is, I believe, meant to be an act of community, a successful attempt to interpret the signs, the stories Owen has told him, and thus retell Owen's fall from grace in a regenerative way that restores him to the human world from which he has been severed. The "preacherman" poses to Orville the question of what he must do to be part of that church, that community. He must speak in tongues, "Seal the old language and loose the new."(p.336) But he is unable to do this and thus unable to participate in the community, "He only wished to free himself from this dreadful woe of incomprehension."(p.338) He is "shunned" because he does not comprehend and is thus cut off, "The gift was not his."(p.338) And so he runs off into the "rainy distance". This can be seen as a parable of original sin, or one of the loss of tradition and community, the loss of faith. And it can be seen as dramatising the moment when one comes face to face with the knowledge that language dissembles as much as it illumines. And finally, perhaps, as the original moment of alienation, of the severing of culture from nature.

The novel refuses to offer the escape back into the certainties of childhood and tradition. Tap's text acknowledges the "nightmare of real things, the fallen wonder of the world",(p.339) which Owen in his obsession with the cult has attempted to deny and which Axton is forced to recognise in his political experiences and his final moments of illumination as he visits the Acropolis. This is a world where objects are valorised, where signs, as in Rowser's world, become overloaded with significance and thus made meaningless. If Axton does discover language as community he is still in this nightmare of real things, this world where language and culture are alienated from nature and tradition. It is a qualified, limited knowledge, but one which the text implies, is perhaps the only possible response to the "fallen wonder of the world".
The eight novels DeLillo wrote before *Libra* incorporate into their plots aspects of contemporary culture such as the war games and fear of nuclear war of *End Zone* and the international terrorism and murderous cults of *The Names*. *Libra* is his first novel set in the past and like his latest novel, *Underworld*, it can be said to be attempting an explanation of the contemporary moment through an examination of key moments in the post-war history of the United States. If the Vietnam war is the historical event that dominates the action of Robert Stone's novels, a point I make in the next chapter, then in *Libra* the defining moment or moments are the "seven seconds that broke the back of the American century." (71)

*Libra* is an historical novel with Kennedy's alleged (?) assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald as its historical protagonist. Norman Mailer's recent book on Oswald is subtitled, "An American Mystery" and its aim was to attempt to solve the mystery of who Oswald was because he is the enigmatic figure at the centre of the larger mystery of who shot Kennedy. *Libra* gives us DeLillo's thesis about who Oswald was. In essence he is the personification of those lone killers in *The Names*, shooting from highway overpasses and attic rooms, "Unconnected to the earth." (p.171) In an interview DeLillo has described Oswald as one of those "disaffected young men who seem to approach their assassination attempts out of a backdrop of dreams and personal fantasy much more than politics." (72) In *Libra* he seems to be describing in great detail the intimate obsessions, fears and yearnings of just such a man, someone embodying the "pure American thing" (p.155) of aimlessness and drifting. However, unlike the lone killer portrayed in *Underworld* who shoots fellow drivers on the Texas freeways, Oswald is portrayed as a failure, a patsy, a "dupe of history" as he will call himself. (p.418) For after all in this version he fails to kill the President.


(72) DeCurtis in *Introducing Don DeLillo*, p.51.
As an historical novel *Libra* introduces other historical figures; Kennedy himself, Oswald's wife and mother and the men surrounding Oswald in the 18 months before the assassination, chiefly Ferrie, Banister and De Mohrenschildt. It is of course a convention of the genre, as famously used by Walter Scott, to introduce fictional characters who stand alongside the historic personages. In *Libra* the principal fictional characters are part of two narrative segments that intertwine with the biography of Oswald's life. These are the CIA conspiracy involving Win Everett, Mackey and Parmenter, and the author-like Branch who wrestles with the mountains of information surrounding the historical event at a later point closer to our time of reading.

In some respects then *Libra* resembles a conventional historical novel. And if we limit our understanding of what the term historical novel means to the level of a novel about historical persons and events then the novel fits this criterion. There are, however, more sophisticated analyses of the genre and I want to discuss *Libra* in the light of two such theories, Georg Lukacs's Marxist account of the historical novel and Linda Hutcheon's use of the term, "historiographic metafiction", to characterise her poetics of postmodernism. For Lukacs, following Hegel, history is the narrative of man as "the product of himself and his own activity in history." (73) Men create history by their own activity, their struggles, defeats and triumphs, and writers like Scott, Balzac and Tolstoy enact this process in their novels. Scott, for instance, is described as creating characters who give "living human embodiment to historical social types." (74) Historical abstraction is revealed through the presentation of concrete historical types and the historical process is enacted in the adventures and actions of a central character and the characters, fictional and historical, around that character. Their experiences and struggles point to larger historical events and conflicts. John Frow has remarked that for Lukacs the historical novel allows the critic "to read through the text" in

(74) Ibid., p.34.
order to draw conclusions on the level of the "conventionally political". (75)

One cannot read *Libra* in this way, not least because as Lukacs is at pains to show, the classical form of the historical novel is corrupted between Balzac and Zola because of the failure of the proletariat to seize power in the revolutions of 1848 and the need for the bourgeoisie to consolidate the hegemony of capital. (76) More pertinently in DeLillo's novel there is no attempt to present characters who embody historical processes, as, in what for Lukacs would be a "corrupted" manner, the American naturalists from Upton Sinclair to John Steinbeck do. This is largely evident in Steinbeck's typicalisation of the class struggle in the lives of characters such as the Joads and their epic and heroic journey to California in *The Grapes of Wrath*. In *Libra* the very concepts of class struggle and history are questioned. That is, the novel in its use of indeterminacy, chaos and ambiguity to present its narrative turns these concepts on their heads and questions their validity and authority.

Lukacs's theory can be seen as emerging out of the social realist phase of Marxist criticism and his theories have been seen as outdated amongst other contemporary Marxists. (77) Linda Hutcheon's theory, on the other hand, is entitled *A Poetics of Postmodernism* and it is centrally engaged in the contemporary postmodern project, specifically the reinscribing into the centre of what has been marginalised by the Western canon. What Hutcheon terms, historiographic metafiction is a form of historical writing that defamiliarises our expectations of what history and fiction do in order to show us how history is a discourse used by the "centre" to erase those groups and classes not in that privileged position that allows them to write history. At the same time it acknowledges its own complicit status as ideological discourse. She argues against Andreas Huyssen's thesis that postmodernism relegates history to the dustbin, and avers that, "History is not made obsolete: it is, however, being rethought -


(76) Lukacs pp.204ff. Especially p.239.

as a human construct." (78) For Hutcheon this new form of historical novel is "intensely self-reflexive" and "paradoxically also lay(s) claim to historical events and personages. "It works within conventions in order to subvert them" through parody, intertextuality and a questioning of the referent, that "install(s) then blur(s) the line between fiction and history." (79)

I believe that Hutcheon tends to valorise historiographic metafiction, inscribing it with a revolutionary value, and confusing it, perhaps, with post-structuralist theory so that at times the fiction seems to function only to reinforce the theory. Nevertheless the concept is useful for our understanding of what Libra is not. The novel certainly conforms to the concept in a number of ways, in particular, the metafictional dimension of the Branch sections and the way it places the marginalised Oswald at the centre of both the known history and the conspiracy theory surrounding that known history. Yet despite its historical framework the novel is ultimately about the present and it intends to show us, I would argue, that the assassination can explain the present moment in America's history. It does not intend to restore the marginalised to their rightful place in history or radically undermine our concepts of history and reality and their verifiability, although this latter is a by-product of DeLillo's project. In some of the historiographic metafictional novels Hutcheon cites, L.C. by Susan Daitch, A Maggot by John Fowles, Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie, the idea of history as a process of change created by the revolutionary activity of men, is powerfully dramatised. In Libra history itself is erased, the novel is about our continuous present that extends both into the past and the future.

What then is the significance of Dallas for DeLillo and the society he speaks for in his novels? In an interview he has commented on the assassination in broad terms:

I think we've all come to feel that what's been missing over these last

(79) ibid., p.5. p.113.
twenty-five years is a sense of manageable reality. Much of that feeling can be traced to that one moment in Dallas. We seem to be much more aware of elements like randomness and ambiguity and chaos since then. (80)

One possible reading, then, of the novel is that it is a description of the life of Oswald that is overloaded with significance, over-determined as it were, by the twenty-five years of controversy surrounding the event and all of the accompanying social and political ambiguity and chaos that it has seemingly created. This could be judged a failure - the text setting out to explain the assassination and its aftermath in its exploration of the motivations of the man said to be the lone assassin and that by incorporating the baggage of conspiracy theory, chaos and other postmodern themes it weakens its attempt to portray the mind of a killer. But if, as many critics do, we see Libra as ironically rewriting history and undermining both official and unofficial versions of the assassination then the novel succeeds in its political and artistic objectives. (81)

The reviews of the novel picked up on the themes of conspiracy, paranoia, secrecy and the "seven seconds that broke the back of the American century". However, when critics began to approach the novel more systematically the question they often asked was what sort of novel is Libra? Michael Shapiro asserted that Libra is a "true life novel ... a fictional recreation of events and tendencies, which also involves in-depth investigation." (82)

Norman Mailer's novelistic recreation of the events of Gary Gilmore's life, The Executioner's Song, with its portrayal of Gilmore as solitary sociopath and its vividly described American

(80) DeCurtis p.48.
(81) See Frank Lentricchia's essay, "Libra as Postmodern Critique" in Introducing Don DeLillo.
(82) Michael Shapiro, Reading the Postmodern Polity: Political Theory as Textual Practice (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1992), p.68.

228.
Midwest would be an obvious example. (83) Other critics have been more interested in seeing Libra as a version of the historical novel, one that uses various postmodern or post-structuralist strategies to rewrite its historical narrative. Paul Civello claims Libra "undoes" the naturalistic novel of Zola which itself is a form of the historical novel. DeLillo, Civello asserts, "privileges fiction over history". (84) Thomas Carmichael argues that DeLillo's subversion of the "subject in history" is a postmodern subversion "in which the subject uncovers its lived relation to the world as an intertextual network of endlessly dispersed and displaced writing." (85)

In Civello and Carmichael the textuality of Oswald as fictional character and subject in history is emphasised in a way that, in particular postmodernist fashion, turns inward away from history and the world towards the trace of language and text. But I would argue that Libra is at least partly an attempt to confront those larger issues of history and the self's relation to history that have been a central theme of the historical novel. As in The Names the opposition between the self and the world becomes one of the novel's major themes. In this novel however, the world is more often than not associated with history, in particular, Oswald's complex relationship with history as it exists in his own peculiar, unhinged consciousness. His belief, for instance, that he will become a part of history like his Communist idols, Stalin and Trotsky. The novel can be seen as an extended study of the relationship between history, representing the world outside the self, and the individual self.

(85) Thomas Carmichael, "Lee Harvey Oswald and the Postmodern Subject: History and Intertextuality in Don DeLillo's Libra" Contemporary Literature 34:2 (Summer 1993), p.206.
As William Cain remarks, "Oswald seeks the epiphany of entry into history." (86) This theme is indicated in the epigraph, Oswald's letter to his brother, "Happiness is taking part in the struggle, where there is no borderline between one's personal world, and the world in general." (p.1) As DeLillo himself said in an interview Oswald is swept out of the room, representing the self, into history, "To merge with history is to escape the self. I think Oswald knew this." (87) It is in this duality within Oswald that the novel explores the themes of history and textuality.

Libra also stands in an interesting relation to the novel it immediately follows - White Noise. If that novel can be seen as DeLillo's most completely realised depiction of America in the 1980s, Libra could be seen as describing the historical origins of that contemporary world. The ambiguity, randomness and chaos mentioned by DeLillo in the interview are ultimately about the advent, for want of a better phrase, of a postmodern sensibility. This is associated, as he also remarks, with the media, "the power of television was utilized to its fullest, perhaps for the first time, as it pertained to a violent event." This has led to the inculcation on our sensibilities of "a sense of performance as it applies to televised events." (88) Those seven seconds were filmed and televised, but they also broke the back of the American century in another way. After the prosperous, in some ways politically naive fifties, the assassination ushered in the very political and very cynical sixties. It was thus a profoundly symbolic event in a political as well as a postmodern way. This is what the novel attempts to confront, the peculiar relationship between the political and the postmodern. It does so by postmodernising the assassination and linking that event with the twenty-five years of "unmanageable reality" which has come to be termed the postmodern.

Postmodern novels will often use as their starting point another text, usually a work of fiction such as J.M. Coetzee's use of Robinson Crusoe in Foe or more generally a genre of

(87) DeCurtis p.52.
(88) ibid., pp.48-49.
fiction such as the use of the Western by Ishmael Reed, Richard Brautigan and Thomas Berger, amongst others. In *Libra* DeLillo uses a historical document, The Warren Commission Report which is described in the novel as "the Joycean Book of America", a novel in which "nothing is left out." (p.182) DeLillo has stated that he draws his raw material from that "masterwork of trivia", the Warren Commission and indicated that some of the dialogue is taken straight from the report. (89) Like that massive 26 volume document the novel is full of the minutiae, the often seemingly irrelevant information, of the lives of Oswald and the other players in the drama. In this it resembles the mega-novels of postmodernism, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, Joseph McElroy's *Lookout Cartridge*, Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew*. This idea of the mega-novel is like the informational overload of our computer age of information superhighways which can only be represented by novels that attempt, like *Ulysses*, to include everything about their subject. Without attempting the all-inclusiveness of *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Libra*, in referring to the Warren Commission Report, does point to the vast amount of material that has been written on the subject of the assassination. Branch's perpetual lament is that he will never finish collating all of the information on the assassination and that consequently he can never really be sure that he will produce a definitive version of his subject. The breadth of information in the Warren Commission Report and the triviality of much of that information serves to remind us not only that its official version is selective and perhaps distorted, but that other versions of the assassination, including this version, are similarly not necessarily truthful. In this way, of course, not only are concepts such as historical truth questioned but the very process of reading this or any fiction is questioned.

The Branch sections function as commentary on the historical narrative. They are historiographical interjections, interpreting the history as it is narrated in the rest of the text. Glen Thomas argues that Branch's methodology of history "demonstrates the limitations of

(89) *ibid.*, p.54 p.62.
empiricist historiography" because he is unable to make coherent sense of the events. (90) Whilst not disputing this I believe there are other dimensions to his role. In Branch's anxiety about information overload and what may be withheld by the Curator there is the implication that history is a construct. It is inevitably influenced by the predominant beliefs and prejudices of the time and could be said to reflect the zeitgeist of the time. This is Hayden White's contention, that history writing is ultimately about itself and the true goal of history is not collecting of facts but the question, "How are the facts to be described in order to sanction one mode of explaining them rather than another?" (91)

White urges historians to adopt a methodological and stylistic cosmopolitanism in history writing that acknowledges its version as one among many. (92) This is essentially the function of the Branch sections. His struggle with the facts of the event, the Zapruder film, and all the other pieces of information that appear to create more ambiguity and confusion the deeper he investigates, undermines our readerly acceptance of the omniscient narration of the Oswald and Everett sections. We are forced to acknowledge that in Branch's world, and by implication our postmodern age, these "texts" are simply one version amongst many. This is a long way from Lukacs's reflectionist theory of historical fiction.

Branch is also, of course, a version of a novelist, and Paul Civello has seen him as a "parody of Zola's experimental novelist." (93) When the text inhabits Branch's mind the present tense is used as if he is composing his materials, whereas in the rest of the novel the past tense is used, as if those materials have been transformed from the raw data Branch mulls over into polished narrative. He inhabits the same tense as author and reader and his status as a fictional character is also foregrounded. He is fed information by the Curator

(91) Hayden White, "The Fictions of Factual Representation" in The Literature of Fact. p.44.
(92) See Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse.
(93) Civello p.36.
whom he begins to feel may be manipulating him, perhaps mocking him, (p.299) and who may be giving him selected information. (pp.298-299) Later he becomes wary of "cheap coincidence" and thinks "someone is trying to sway him toward superstition." (p.379) This relationship between Branch and the Curator, who never appears in the novel, is reminiscent of Beckett's *Trilogy*, where characters begin to perceive the existence of their creators, their authors. Branch as a character is manipulated by the Curator as author figure and just as he is manipulated by all of the information, by the immense weight of historical fact, the reader is also oppressed by the weight of conflicting information both in the novel itself and in theories and debate surrounding the actual historical events.

At one point Branch muses that Oswald "seems a technical diagram, part of some exercise in the secret manipulation of history." (p.377) He fears that the Curator and the CIA are engaged in a conspiracy against him, his understanding of the assassination begins to resemble a vast conspiracy. This is expressed in Branch's thinking as the unresolved contradiction between reality and theory. The photos of the slain President and other grisly mementos "mock him" saying, "This is your history. Here is a blown-out skull for you to ponder ... this is the true nature of the event ... Not your roomful of theories, your museum of contradictory facts." (p.299) This reality is telling him what it looks like to get shot and that "facts are lonely things." These facts are described as, "The endless fact-rubble of the investigations ... The simple facts elude authentication. (p.300) Reality confronts theory and throws the theories into confusion and creates a situation where not even the simple thing, like what make of gun did Oswald use to shoot himself in Atsugi, can be known for sure.

The names of those who have been linked to the assassination and found dead are listed in a number of passages. (p.58. p.183 p.378) This affects Branch, he is "writing a history, not a study of the ways in which people succumb to paranoia. There is endless suggestiveness." (p.57) At the same time he feels vaguely guilty. He has been given a wage and a new room to his house and endless office supplies to write this history, but often submits figures on bills for lower than the amount he has actually spent. (p.183) Branch is
aware of the vastness of his task, "Branch must study everything. He is in too deep to be selective." (p.59) The raw material has an openness to interpretation and all the information that is perhaps not supplied or that has gone to the grave with those dead in mysterious circumstances are part of the problem. His task is an ironic comment on the predicament of the conspiracy history writer. For Branch history has become a sort of fiction.

He thus comes to believe in conspiracy, in particular, history as conspiracy. He begins to "think someone is trying to sway him toward superstition. He wants a thing to be what it is. Can't a man die without the ensuing ritual of a search for patterns and links?" (p.379) This is a complaint against conspiracy theorising, as if all these plots have become too much for Branch and the author and even the culture to handle any longer. It is a desire for a return to the old pre-assassination verities, the Eisenhower '50s, when a thing is simply what it is. But it is also the end point of Branch's obsession, even as he protests he is inextricably involved in it. His belief in conspiracy is now pointed - someone is "trying to sway him". Later he thinks of the Curator withholding material from him, delaying the fulfilling of requests, ignoring others totally. He wonders if "the Agency is protecting something very much like its identity - protecting its own truth, its theology of secrets." (p.442) He realises that the "case will haunt him to the end." (p.445) He is trapped in this room (in the novel he never leaves it) just as Oswald and Ruby inhabit small rooms, apartments and gaol cells and the conspiracy itself can be said to have been hatched in small rooms. There is a sense as the novel ends its Branch sections that what has happened to Branch in the course of the novel has also been paralleled in its impact on American life and culture. DeLillo has commented that he does not think the novel is a paranoid work, it is a "reasonable piece of work which takes into account the enormous paranoia which has ensued from the assassination." (94) A point he has made in his essay on the assassination, "American Blood", where he cites a poll that reported that eighty percent of Americans believed in conspiracy. He concludes that, "Conspiracy is now the true faith." (95)

(94) DeCurtis p.66.  
(95) Rolling Stone p.76.
The omniscient historical narrative reinforces this assertion over and over again in the novel. The novel's treatment of the known facts and the historical mementos that give weight and meaning to those facts are likewise imbued with what I would call an ironic postmodern voice which constructs the conspiracy and the conspiratorial temper of the time in order to undercut it with hints of its opposite. That is, the ambiguity and chaos loosed by the assassination contradicts the sense of perfect control and order implied by the paranoid worldview.

A telling example of how the text uses an historical memento both to incorporate paranoia into the story and at the same time import the element of chance is in the account of how Oswald had himself photographed with a rifle and a copy of the Socialist Worker's Party paper, The Militant. This photograph would later become an emblematic representation of Oswald as enigmatic, crazy killer. In another postmodernised version of the events, Oliver Stone's film JFK, that photograph is literally assembled, collaged by a CIA (?) technician and thus imbued with the aura of conspiracy. DeLillo has referred to Stone's film as an example of "the nostalgia for a master plan, the conspiracy which explains absolutely everything." (96)

In Libra we see the photograph's creation as a little vignette of Oswald and Marina's life together; it has little to do with politics, "It's for Junie, to remember me by."(p.278) It is not the normal sort of memento given a child. The very fact that Oswald felt the necessity to provide a memento fits in with his millenarial musings on history throughout the novel and the sense evident throughout of prolepsis, of events foreshadowing a final event and a narrative rushing toward that event. Then there is the rifle and the magazine that is conveniently arranged so he is given a label - militant. His clothes are black and Marina protests, "Dressed all black. It's foolish Lee. Who are you hunting with that gun? The forces of evil?"(p.278) Ironically a force of evil is what Oswald will be eventually called. Oswald's behaviour does not fit with the conventional and will become something more, as his shadow

(96) Maria Nadotti, "An Interview with Don DeLillo" Salmagundi 100 (Fall 1993), p.94.
and "thin smile" are "carried forward by light and time into the frame of official memory." (p.279) This is prolepsis and it creates a sense of insignificant events freighted with significant implications. This is reinforced a little later when Oswald who has a subscription to Time imagines, "the backyard photo in Time" and he as the socialist hero who shot the fascist General Walker. The photo will appear in Time but he will not be its hero. What is emphasised here is not conspiracy but the thoughts of a strange and lonely man and the episode itself is indicative of the chance nature of events. The photograph now stands for Oswald as assassin but when it was made it was simply vanity and a sort of megalomania that was behind its creation; a private gesture becomes a public symbol.

The assassination is the central historical event of the novel and it is represented as chaotic and confusing. Images, many of them already familiar to the reader from documentary footage, follow one another in a series of little scenes. Montage is both a modernist and postmodernist device and DeLillo uses it here to present his version in a relatively straight chronological narrative. This method has in fact been used throughout the novel. Oswald's life is told in a series of short scenes, the backyard photo scene which is less than a page long, being one. Similarly the CIA plot is presented as a series of short scenes; in Win Everett's home, in the training camps and in the secret meetings. The assassination, although narrated in a seemingly logical fashion, for the participants is anything but logical. A woman on the grass beside the road thinks she sees certain actions and cannot locate the source of the sounds she hears, "This wasn't making sense at all." (pp.398-399) Another bystander sees the President looking "extremely puzzled", he is applauding "already deep in chaos". (p.398) The media bulletins going out are full of indecisions, and of spelling errors - they do not make sense. (pp.402-403) Nellie Connally in the car with her husband who is also shot does not know whether they are dead or alive, a man riding escort with blood and tissue sprayed over him does not know whether he also has been shot. (p.399)

The event is presented to us as if it were a film with close-ups, panning shots, quick switches of viewpoint. What emerges is a sense of the event's arbitrariness and confusion, how it throws this world of a politically celebratory event (the Presidential motorcade, the
cheering crowds) into a world of chaos. The only ones in control are the four assassins. Raymo is aware that Leon has fired too soon and that he seems to be picking them off one by one. He calmly braces his weapon and waits, sighting through the scope (p.397) and it is the shot that he fires that kills the President, the one that causes Jacqueline to say, "They've killed my husband."(p.399) All this is shot by a movie camera, whilst a man watches the man filming (Zapruder) and thinks he ought to go to ground.(p.400) Amidst the chaos it is ironically recorded for posterity so that all Americans can relive the chaos.

This captures the chaos of the event as it actually happened to the participants and as it appeared to those who watched the footage of the Zapruder film, another famous historical memento. As Branch says of this crude home movie, "It is the basic timing device of the assassination and a major emblem of uncertainty and chaos."(p.441)

This sense of chaos, felt by all observers at whatever remove, is indicative of the mystery surrounding the shooting, the indeterminacy of the event. For Glen Thomas it is an event that is unintelligible and "the site of multiple meanings" (97) and for John Johnston it is an event that can only be read as "an essentially unrepresentable multiplicity whose every manifestation is entangled with conflicting versions and contaminated physical evidence." (98) On one level the novel purports to be the definitive version, the correct solution to the mystery surrounding the assassination and an historical fiction in the classic sense of providing a narrative that impersonates the narrative of history. But these historical events are not safely behind American society, as, for instance, are the events of the Civil War, as related in historical novels like Shiloh by Shelby Foote, himself an historian, and The Killer Angels by Michael Shaara. The assassination is still contested, still the subject of claim and counter claim. The novel thus enters the culture as one of the many theories about the assassination, and in true mega-novel fashion attempts to fit as many components of other

(97) Thomas p.120.
theories into its frame - the CIA, the Cubans, the Mafia, Oswald as crazed lone gunman. So when we read it we are never wholly certain of what we are reading, fiction, history, another of the endlessly proliferating theories about the events? I believe this is why writers on the novel have claimed so many different labels for it, from true-life novel to deconstructionist fiction; it resists categorisation. The ironic detachment of the style, which is a DeLillo trademark is well suited to the subject and choosing such a subject is an ironic gesture. (99) What is created is a reading experience that is continuously unsettling, which even as it purports to give us the truth proclaims to the reader that truth remains a mystery, like the cult at the centre of The Names or the nuclear experiment that casts its pall over White Noise. As such this pretending is like other postmodern pretences such as Nabokov's impersonation of a poetic critique in Pale Fire, Umberto Eco's detective story, The Name of the Rose, Ishmael Reed's western, Yellow-Back Radio Broke Down.

This is part of the novel's aesthetic consciousness, a strategy that is inherently postmodernist. As I have previously remarked DeLillo's oeuvre can be viewed as a series of parodies of genres where the particular conventions of the genre tradition are turned on their head. There is a knowingness or self-consciousness in the text because author and reader share the knowledge that although the novel is supposed to be a sports novel or an historical novel it is actually undermining the conventions of that genre.

The ironic use of genre and the undermining of the conventions of historical and realist narrative are strategies that I have described in Chapter One as postmodern. There are a number of other elements in the novel which are heavily influenced by postmodern style. The first of these is the use of the media to describe the fantasies and obsessions of the characters. References to television and the cinema also serve to place the context in which the

(99) Compare this to another recent novel about the events in Dallas, James Ellroy's American Tabloid (1995) which is much more certain about its version of events. Its "conspiracy theory" excises Oswald altogether and it strays further from the accepted history but in the realist historical tradition asserts its version as the truth.

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characters live. This is particularly so for Oswald whose inner life is shaped and consumed by images from Hollywood and its antithesis, the agitational material of socialist literature. The socialist literature, indeed, is mediated in Oswald's mind through images from Hollywood movies. As Paul Civello argues, he has been "co-opted by the system through the media" despite his ideological struggle. (100) One of the first images in the novel describes mother and son watching television together. In a passage that describes in realistic terms their circumscribed, shabby existence in New York city a phrase protrudes which is strange and fantastic. In the basement room, "... blue heads spoke to them from the TV screen." (p.4) This could be read as simply an unusual way of saying they watched television but in the context of their lives and what each of them does and think it can be read as offering a comment on their eccentricities, their madness. Like schizophrenics or visionaries voices literally speak to them out of the TV set. Their actions, it is implied, emerge out of their peculiar relationship with the images they consume.

For Oswald Hollywood will play a major part in his fantasy life. He sees John Wayne in the flesh whilst serving in Corregidor and thinks of Red River and Wayne's character's reassuring fatherliness. A father we are aware is something he does not have. Whilst in Moscow he imagines someone as an actor playing a character from the spy movie, Led Three Lives. (p.164) Shortly before the day of the assassination he watches two movies, the first Suddenly, is about an attempt to assassinate a president. Oswald we are aware has trouble separating reality from fantasy and assumes the president is Eisenhower, even though the text tells us that the film-makers have deliberately resisted the temptation to specify historic figures. He feels he is being watched for his reaction and he knows the assassin will fail. He thinks, "It was, in the end, a movie. They had to fix it so he failed and died." (pp.369-370) Is Oswald thinking here about what happens in the movie or about what may happen to him? The second movie, We Were Strangers is about an attempt to assassinate a tyrannical Cuban dictator. Oswald feels that, "he was in the middle of his own
movie" and that the actor playing the assassin "... has to die. This is what feeds a revolution." (p.370) This is an intimation of his own death and failure, because after all, we will be told later, it is not Oswald's bullet that kills the President. The passage also illustrates how closely merged are Oswald's outward actions and his inner fantasies, fueled by Hollywood images.

Other characters also think in terms of cinema images. One of the commandos, Wayne Elko, is a man willing to blow up a car for a hundred dollars. He sees the Cubans (the assassins) as:

... like guys straight out of ... [his] favourite movie, *Seven Samurai*,
warriors without masters, willing to band together to save a village from
marauders, to win back a country, only to see themselves betrayed in
the end. (pp.144-145)

The assassins are romanticised via cinema images and again, as with Oswald's two films, there is a hint of failure. Like the seven samurai they will be betrayed in the end, Castro is not overthrown despite the demise of Kennedy. Marina Oswald, overwhelmed by the affluence of her new country, is amazed walking past a department store to see her and Lee's image on a TV set. "It was the world gone inside out. There they were gaping back at themselves from the TV screen. She was on television." (p.227) The technology amazes her and that it is television pointedly refers to the power of images in American culture. The image beguiles and threatens her. The assassination itself has been described as a media event, "a unique collective (and media, communicational) experience" as Fredric Jameson calls it. (101) This is connected to the charismatic nature of Kennedy. Guy Banister claims that he "actually glows in most of his photographs," (pp.67-68) and for Marina he is a sort of magical presence, who "floats over the landscape at night, entering dreams and fantasies ... He floats through television screens into bedrooms at night." (p.324) Thus Kennedy's sexual

charisma is alluded to and at the same time there is a surreal echo of the blue heads that spoke to Oswald and Marguerite from the television. In essence this is the private impact of Kennedy's public persona, he was, as it now has become a commonplace to conclude, America's first media president. As Paul Civello asserts, his arrival in Dallas "is treated as a cultural performance, a 'media event.'" (102)

The references to the media and cinema point to the relationship between the media driven fantasies of the characters, particularly Oswald, and their violent actions and dark conspiracies. There is also a surreal element in this nexus between characters and media images. It is evident in the bizarre scene between Oswald and his mother watching television and in the ironic and surreal voice that the text adopts to record Oswald's thoughts. The tone is slightly flat and matter of fact and is interspersed with snatches of bizarre dialogue. The narrative inhabits his mind and reports his thoughts in a series of statements which when sitting there on the page hint at a surreal, insane world:

He had his one-volume encyclopedia of the world, which his aunt Lillian said he read like a boy's novel of the sea. Kinetic energy. Grand Coulee Dam. He would join a communist cell. They would talk theory into the night. They would give him tasks to perform, night missions that required intelligence and stealth. He would wear dark clothes, cross rooftops in the rain. (p.37)

This is fantasy, but also disturbing. It is imbued with images from film and television and fantasies culled from popular culture. Similarly his conversations are not quite normal and again full of cinematic romanticism. Talking to a friend and the friend's sister his responses begin with a political subject, the Rosenberg trial, and then when his interlocutors react in a jocular fashion they become tangential. "'The main thing is in communism that workers don't produce profit for the system'" and "'If you look at the name Trotsky in Russian, it looks totally different ... Plus here's something nobody knows. Stalin's name was Dzugashvili. Stalin's name means man of iron.'"(pp.39-40) These non sequiturs add to the weirdness of his

(102) Civello p.49.
character and the political innocence of his statements are naive to the point of absurdity. No communist in the 1950s would mention Trotsky and Stalin in the same breath except to praise one and denounce the other and no American would casually mention those names in conversation. Oswald is presented to us with a combination of surrealism and irony.

These surreal elements alert the reader to another typical postmodern strategy, the hinting at the existence of other worlds. The television screen hints at another, less real world that impinges on the ordinariness of his family existence and throughout the novel Oswald is associated with other worlds in his fantasy life. He is, in a sense, inhabiting another world when he fantasises a political life or a life that is "chosen" by history. Early in the novel he is given a political leaflet and thinks, "There is a world inside the world."(p.13) He is aware that inside the everyday there is another world connected with politics and with the subway rides where there is "a secret and a power". He feels this "secret force of the soul, in the tunnels under New York."(p.13) This is the text's attempt to intimate something to the reader that the character cannot know - the fact that although Oswald inhabits the world of this narrative as a character, he by his actions will come to live in the world outside the narrative, as a figure in the reader's memory. It is as if the text is dramatising the idea that by acting the individual emerges into the consciousness of us all, as historical figure.

The idea of different worlds is also implicit in the very concept of the plot. The purpose of this plot, as conceived by the CIA is to solve the Castro problem by assassinating Kennedy. This involves the manipulation of Oswald to become the dupe of history. It is the same sort of misinformation that created the "facts" that made the Guatemala coup possible. The CIA radio broadcasts created a version of reality that superseded reality and created the environment in which the coup in Guatemala could succeed. What Win Everett and his fellow conspirators want to do is to create just that situation in America. They wish to invent the world by creating a new version of it, one where Castro is a direct danger to the security of the United States. In a similar way the reporters waiting for news after the assassination want to hear the "word" as "magic wish" because, "With a word they could begin to grid the world".(p.414) They hope to create via their news reports the version of events that America
will believe. The novel implies that it is not only Oswald who is a dupe of history; a world has been created for us to believe in. Win Everett, already beginning to worry about the direction of his idea, thinks the world is "where we hide from ourselves" and what happens when "the world is no longer accessible?" His answer is that we invent a false name, "invent a destiny". (p.148) For Everett, whose version of the events is a near miss which will soon be superseded by another, more sinister CIA plot, the world is no longer a sure place. Versions of the truth and worlds shift and change shape and nothing and nobody can now be trusted. Everett can no longer trust anybody, just as the reader can no longer trust the narrative.

DeLillo has played down the importance of paranoia in his fiction, telling an interviewer, "But I'm not particularly paranoid myself. I've drawn this element out of the air around me, and it was a stronger force in the sixties and seventies than it is now." (103) Nevertheless Libra, in particular, engages with these issues that have come to dominate the American psyche as we have already seen in the Branch sections. DeLillo may be right that it isn't as strong a force as twenty years ago but it remains a powerful idea outside the liberal/conservative mainstream in the actions and declarations of the extreme right and radical Protestant sects. Richard Hofstadter has called it "the paranoid style in American politics" and pointed to the McCarthy witch-hunts of the fifties as its primary modern manifestation. (104) Indeed, in the sixties in some circles of the radical movement there was a left-wing paranoia about what the State was doing. This paranoid style may now have shifted to the edges but DeLillo as a writer has his roots in the era when it was a part of the mainstream, and his early fiction certainly reflects this mistrust of government. Libra could, in fact, be seen as returning to some of the themes of his first novels, Americana and End Zone.

Libra's mistrust of the CIA is, in a sense, a return to the left-wing paranoia of the sixties


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and Frank Lentricchia has argued that we should read the novel anachronistically, in the light of Watergate and Iran-Contra. (105) It is a part of a tradition of postmodern paranoid novels which include work by William Gaddis and Thomas Pynchon. For instance, in Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 Oedipa Maas searches for the mysterious Trystero conspiracy and is beset by proliferating clues or signs which create an atmosphere of paranoid anticipation and fear. I would argue that Pynchon's novel is finally not about the paranoia generated in the sixties by real government activities such as the notorious COINTELPRO of the Nixon Administration. (106) Rather it is about semiotics, the reading of signs and the impossibility of interpretation in the as yet unnamed postmodern age. Oedipa's paranoia is ultimately not about the conspiracy of government, it is about the impossibility of decipherment which is a turn away from politics. Libra's approach to its own government conspiracy, I will argue in opposition to Lentricchia, enacts a similar turn away from the political ramifications of its subject matter. The plot to kill Kennedy is the conspiracy at the centre of Libra. It is the object and subject of the paranoia of the text and it consumes all the characters, especially Oswald, who is a pawn in the conspirator's game. I will examine later how that conspiracy impacts on Oswald but what I want to do now is discuss some aspects of this theme, the epiphenomena of conspiracy, as it were. Of central importance is the role of secrecy in the life of many of the characters, a necessary corollary of any conspiracy. Oswald, again is the exemplary case. Early in the novel the narrator's voice, which as it relates what Oswald does also impersonates what he thinks, tells us of Oswald's Marxist books, hidden in his room, "The books themselves were secret". They make him part of something which involves secrecy,

(105) Lentricchia p.200.

(106) COINTELPRO was a spying and political sabotage program involving the planting of agent provocateurs. Run by the FBI, its primary targets were New Left organisations such as Students for a Democratic Society. See Kim McQuaid, The Anxious Years: America in the Vietnam-Watergate Era (New York: Basic Books, 1989), p.154.
"Men in small rooms. Men reading and waiting, struggling with secret and feverish ideas." The books, the ideas, even his name must be secret. He thinks of Trotsky and his other name, "He would need a secret name", (p.41) which he indeed creates when he calls himself Hidell which significantly includes the word, hide.

Secrecy also plays a part in government. Kennedy is hated for many things including his "Perfect white teeth". Banister who is telling Ferrie this has a theory about his charisma, "Do you know what charisma means to me? It means he holds the secrets." These "dangerous secrets" of "Plots, conspiracies, secrets of revolution" are now held by the government represented by Kennedy. But he concludes, "Strip the man of his powerful secrets. Take his secrets and he's nothing." (p.68) Later he thinks of Kennedy as, "The man with the secrets gives off the glow." (p.141) Win Everett, the leader of the conspiracy in its early stages is also conversant with secrecy. Naturally as a CIA agent and as a conspirator against his government secrecy is uppermost in his mind. When Mackey and Parmenter meet Everett for one of their first discussions about their conspiracy Everett tells them about his daughter and secrets. How her hands move, how she touches him, because secrets are "an exalted state, almost a dreamstate ... They're a way of arresting motion, stopping the world ..." They are here also because, "there's something vitalizing in a secret." (p.26) He then proceeds to lay out his plan to stage an "electrifying event". (p.27) As CIA operatives they feel more intensely about secrets than just as something that is part of their jobs. Being involved in secrets has a power, an energy similar to the power Banister imagines Kennedy must have.

Everett is also aware of the dangers of secrecy. He tells his wife about, "Spy planes, drone aircraft, satellites with cameras that can see from three hundred miles what you can see from a hundred feet." They collect and process, "All the secret knowledge of the world", they will drain loyalty and conviction from people, will make us "vague and pliant". (p.77) Later in the novel we actually catch a glimpse of a man who is probably Gary Powers, the U2 pilot shot down over the USSR. The technology Everett fears is already with us and he is scared that his government will use it on Americans, thus enacting a fear that will come to dominate
the mainstream of protesters later in the sixties. That is, the fear of spying by the government on its opponents, a fear given credence when Nixon's dirty tricks campaign which led to Watergate began to come to light. Everett expresses the same fears; he is presented as a reasonable man, a sort of disillusioned centrist and democrat. Of course what he initiates triggers a much more dangerous conspiracy than the one he envisioned and this is, of course, one of the text's ironies. Everett and his fellow conspirators have secrets from their government and as the reference to the U2 incident shows, the government has secrets from the people in whose name they govern. The argument could be extended to assert that the CIA, as the secret arm of the government, fulfils only its natural function when it conspires against the elected arm of the government represented by Kennedy.

The cast of characters on the periphery of the conspiracy are themselves a collection of paranoiac conspirators, living lives which are secretive and isolated from the American mainstream and coloured by a paranoia about the secrets withheld from them by the government. David Ferrie who lures Oswald into the conspiracy thinks he can cure cancer and hints to Oswald that he may have flown U2s. He tells him that the names of the U2 pilots are "the deepest secret in the government." (p.316) Other major figures in Oswald's life are similarly obsessed by secrets. Jack Ruby, beset by financial worries and a not so willing associate of the Mafia, feels victimised. They are "... all over me about excise taxes", the IRS, the unions, the competition next door and increasingly the Mafia. (p.255) It is a short step from this world on the verge of chaos, where he feels beset on every side to identifying his problems in a paranoiacally political context. He believes there was a plot to kill Kennedy, "The John Birch Society or the Communist Party were the suspects uppermost." (p.421) And just as Oswald is manipulated into the assassination attempt, Ruby is manipulated by Jack Karlinsky of the Mafia into killing Oswald. He will be a hero if he kills Oswald and his loan will be forgiven by the big boss, Carmine. So he participates in this final plot to solve this larger conspiracy and make Oswald "vanish". (p.430)

There is also, of course, General Walker whom Oswald and Dupard attempt to assassinate. It is ironic given that we know that Oswald's later target is a man representative of liberalism.
and the bright hopes of the Democrat Party, that his first target is the political opposite, a right-wing conspiracy theorist who seems to believe in the whole catalogue of loony right-wing plots, which are collectively labelled the "Real Control Apparatus" in his mind. Their influence is universal:

The Apparatus paralysed not only our armed forces but our individual lives, frustrating every normal American ambition, infiltrating our minds and bodies with fluoridisation, with the creeping fever of trade unions and the left-wing press and the income tax, every modern sickness that saps the nation's will to resist the enemy advance.(p.282)

He believes that the Red Chinese are massing below California. These thoughts cross his mind just before Oswald's bullet wounds him and he blames the shots on the Real Control Apparatus which cannot be identified or observed, it is like "naming particles in the air, naming molecules or cells ... It is the mystery we can't get hold of, the plot we can't uncover."(p.283) His paranoia has no connection whatsoever with reality, it is an extreme version of the paranoia of Everett, Ferrie and the rest of the conspirators. It shows us his insanity, but also is a comment on the nature of the paranoia which is metaphorically and literally drawn out of the air.

The text is at pains to contextualise that paranoia in the temper of the times. Many of the participants of the conspiracy are obsessed by xenophobic theories of threats from within American society and from outside it. Walker's Red Chinese and Banister's racist ravings epitomise this milieu. Kennedy is Banister's chief object of fear and hatred but the niggers, leftists and Chinese are also part of his paranoid world-view. He works arduously to list all his enemies:

He wanted lists of subversives, leftist professors, congressmen with dubious voting records. He wanted lists of niggers, nigger-lovers, armed niggers, pregnant niggers, light-skinned niggers, niggers married to whites. You couldn't photograph a nigger. He'd never seen a picture of a nigger where you could make out the features. It's just a fact of nature they don't emit light.(p.140)
The comic exaggeration of the categories of "nigger" and his absurd belief that they could not be photographed is sinister, darkly amusing and symptomatic of his paranoia. They are so "black" they cannot emit light, which is obviously as much about their skin colour as it is about his perception of their cosmic, supernatural moral and political evil.

For the paranoid the object of his fear, here comically, becomes imbued with superreal qualities. It is the Chinese who represent the threat from outside. They are massing south of the border "by the fucking tens of thousands." They are typified, as the xenophobic fear of the times has it, as small and numerous; they have, "Little red stars on their caps."(p.351) His paranoia has a function in his life; to rationalise his actions, and the text depicts this rationalisation not as if he is actually mentally disturbed but as if he is rationally paranoid. He has a self-awareness about this rationalisation that is a sort of double-consciousness. He wants to believe it is true and does believe it is true and at the same time knows it isn't. But what matters was "the rapture of the fear of believing" which justifies everything, all the violence, even the cheating on his wife, "It allowed him to collapse inside, to melt toward awe and dread."(p.351) It is not only a rationalisation but a sublime experience. As art had once been a sublime experience for Kant and other philosophers, (107) paranoia is the sublime experience of our time. In the decade of McCarthyism and the emergence of communist China many Americans may well have felt those feelings. Banister's melting into awe and dread is a shared experience, a consciousness of the times.

The paranoid frame of mind is pervasive in Libra, it is normalised because it is so common, so much a part of their psyches. It is figuratively and literally in the air as in the rantings of DJ Weird Beard whose monologues are vaguely menacing. He says, "Feel night come rushing down. Don't y'all sense it around you? Danger in the air ... They're saying awful things about our leaders ... Oh the Air is swollen. Did you ever feel a tension like right now?"(pp.381-382) For Weird Beard Dallas is a model for the rest of the country, we all

dress, talk and "think alike". This vague threat for which Dallas is only one version is a "little itchy thing ... seeping out. Don't you feel it oozing to the surface?" His ramblings are troublingly prescient, the implication being that the violence of American paranoia and xenophobia, which is bubbling beneath the surface, will come "oozing out" in some violent or terrible event.

Weird Beard's monologue also points to another postmodern theme - that of apocalypticism. As I have discussed in Chapter One there is a fin de siècle sense in postmodernism of impending doom and often a representation of end-time. Banister infers a similar air of impending doom when he reads in a right-wing magazine, "Even now the cross-hairs are centered on the back of your neck" (p.142) someone is aiming a gun at you. For an instance he is aware of what Kennedy might feel, the prickling on your neck imagining the assassin's gun pointed at you. Exactly of course what will happen, one of the text's many prolepses. This foreboding is in the air. "There were forces in the air that men sense at the same point in history." (p.143) The text, through the use of these prolepses, creates this idea of coming apocalypse and unlike Banister's paranoia, the apocalypse in the logic of the novel is a real apocalypse. It is the apocalypse of the assassination, which via Banister's "some point in history" and Oswald's relationship to that same history, awaits the reader of the text. It will be a time when we are "already deep in chaos" (p.398) The act of reading and being aware of the ending recreates Banister's "cross-hairs" centred on the back of your neck. The apocalypse in Libra is both imminent and immanent. The narrative rushes toward the assassination, which is its little apocalypse and at the same time the sense of crisis which followed the assassination is inherent in the text. It has a foreknowledge, a deliberate psychic anachronisticism in its depiction of the chaos, paranoia and secrecy of its characters and events. The drawing in of the reader into the immanent apocalypse is reminiscent of other postmodern novels, in particular, Gravity's Rainbow with its final scene of readers as a theatre audience with a rocket overhead poised to explode.

I have been discussing how the text refracts the assassination through the lens of an ironic,
postmodern consciousness, obsessed by secrets and conspiracies, constructed via the images of media and popular culture. This represents a postmodernisation of history. But it is in the depiction of Oswald and his relationship with the conspiracy that the ideology of the text lies. It is in his character that the postmodern strategies, the postmodernisation of history, meets the detailed psychological portrait of the lone killer, which is an attempt to humanise that history by making it the subject of the text.

The depiction of Oswald is central to our understanding of the ideological and historiographic strategies at work in *Libra*. For Thomas Carmichael *Libra* is a fiction of the postmodern "intertextual relationship." (108) In *Libra*, Carmichael argues, DeLillo manipulates the intertextual relationship of his fiction and the Joycean Warren Commission Report and thus Oswald's significance is that he "... merges only as an effect of the codes out of which he is articulated, and these codes function in the novel self-consciously as signs of an endlessly disseminating network of intertextual traces." (109)

This can be related to Glen Thomas's Lacanian reading of Oswald's doubleness, where Oswald is "marked as a split sign, a product of doubling and uncertainty." (110) Just as Oswald is constructed by the text, the history he inhabits is itself the product of an engagement with history, always experienced as "prior (re) textualisation." (111) Carmichael is quoting Fredric Jameson here and his influential argument in *The Political Unconscious* that history "as we Marxists" come to it is always already a text, and we are in Carmichael's words, involved in "an infinite regression of prior textualisations." (112) For Jameson and Carmichael the Kennedy assassination is significant only as an experience "which trained people to read such events in a new way." (113) In this theory historical events make us better interpreters, better readers of other, similar events.

Compare this interpretation of the novel with the criticism of *Libra* in *Partisan Review*.
"Yet even in this most skilfully drawn of DeLillo's novels, he cannot abstain from driving his indictment of America to a fanatical extreme." The reviewer, Pearl Bell, quotes a CIA agent, pre-Dallas who exclaims, "All the danger is in the White House, from nuclear weapons on down." This statement is described as a "haymaker", which DeLillo fails to demonstrate or prove. (114) For Bell history is obviously a series of known facts that are fought over in an ideological and political sense. In this common-sense, political approach facts have a contemporary significance that affect the way we live and that must be either denied or affirmed; they are not simply text and thus open to any number of readings.

Is *Libra* only "prior textualisation" or is it an engagement with the ideological meaning of the assassination, his own speculative hypothesis of the spirit of what happened in the assassination and how it affected the United States in the next 25 years? DeLillo has described this 25 year process as the unravelling of the coherent reality most of us shared. We now enter a world of randomness and ambiguity that for the individual is uncertain and unresolved. (115) The assassination, for DeLillo is "a story about our uncertain grip on the world" (116) and it is a moot point whether the text is politicising those 25 years of chaos or depoliticising the assassination, turning it into another ironic postmodern spectacle. It is in the text's depiction of Oswald that I believe an answer is to be found.

Oswald's life recalls the picaresque idea of the hero's geographic wanderings; New York, New Orleans, Japan, the USSR and finally Dallas. Throughout these travels the text presents him to the reader in two contradictory ways. He is dehumanised as victim and dupe of history, like Pynchon's "yo-yo" characters Benny Profane and Tyrone Slothrop who have no control over the forces around them; and he is humanised as victim, the archetypal victim of modernism, the man alienated from his time and context, struggling to reconcile with it, to become in the novel's vocabulary, a part of history.

For William Cain, DeLillo, by endowing Oswald with "very American fears about

(114) Bell p.142. (115) Rolling Stone p.73. (116) ibid., p.76.
anonymity ... sympathetically magnifies him." He is developed along different lines than those which "afflict Americans in postmodern times", he is typified and humanised. The novel is powerful because of its "evocation of mysteries about American selfhood and history." (117) This is an argument that stands in direct opposition to most interpretations of Oswald, typified by John Johnston's assertion that Oswald, and Kennedy, are simulacra. (118) I want to test Cain's argument against the evidence of the text's depiction of Oswald. Does he represent a characterisation that is essentially humanistic and thus is his life more tragedy than absurdity?

The title of the novel has a significance in Oswald's life. He is a Libran, capable of seeing the other side, a man who harbours contradictions. Ferrie says of him, "This boy is sitting on the scales, ready to be tilted either way." (p.319) This is at the point where Oswald is drawn into the plot and is an description of Oswald as a man of contradictions and confusions, a person able to be manipulated - he can be tilted whichever way the conspirators wish him to go. There is also the sense that he is able to be manipulated by history, a pawn in history's game as much as he is a pawn in the conspirator's game. But if this image sets him up as a man who can go either way it also has a less negative significance - he is a person who can make choices and those choices draw him into the conspiracy as he tries to make sense of his chaotic life. The novel itself is involved in this contradictory balancing; history as process that we cannot control and history as narrative that can be altered by the actions of its players.

We first see Oswald riding the New York subways, but with no destination, "He was riding just to ride." (p.3) Immediately his aimless, picaresque nature is established and the text gives us a prolepsis, a symbolic foretaste of his role as passenger on history's train. Significantly, he is not the driver, he is just along for the ride. In the next scene his mother is introduced and she is the first of his many persecutors and manipulators. His idea of himself as victim of "the system" is inherited from his mother, concocting her defence against Mrs Ekdahl's


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accusations in a courtroom of her imagination. (p.11) Oswald talking with Bobby Dupard in the Navy gaol cell connects his idea of himself as political victim, member of an oppressed class with his mother, "Scraping up pennies" for the next move. For him it is, "His mother never-ending." (pp.106-107) Marguerite Oswald's role in the formation of his self image as oppressed victim is repeated, self-perpetuated as it were, throughout the novel.

He seems to be a failure, nothing seems to go right for him. He purchases a .22 rifle which he cannot get to fire, (p.47) he is beaten for riding in the back of the bus with the negroes, (p.33) in Japan he catches the clap, (p.114) he signs up for a foreign language qualification test and rates "P" for poor throughout. (p.163) When the CIA search his apartment they find a copy of Dostoyevsky's The Idiot in Russian given to him by his tour guide and presumably a joke at his expense. (p.179 p.150) His Russian debriefer, Alek thinks of him as a boy with a "quality of trailing chaos behind him." (p.194) He is compared to Chaplin (p.194 p.289) because his clumsiness mirrors the bumbling Chaplinesque persona without any of that character's ability to outwit or evade retribution. His assassination attempt on General Walker fails and behind his back his wife adds a sarcastic comment on the back of the Militant photograph sent to George de Mohrenschildt, "Hunter of fascists - hahaha!!" (p.290) For the Kennedy conspirators he is a decoy, his role is to "provide artifacts of historical interest", he is in the end "redundant". (p.386) When he makes the attempt on Kennedy he fires too early and only wounds him and his next shot hits Governor Connally. (pp.397-398) According to the text he cannot even get the act he will become famous for right. This catalogue of failures seems to position him as just that sort of lonely disaffected man who would become a lone killer and thus contradicts Lentricchia's assertion that DeLillo's, "American tragedy ... is much more America's than it is the tragedy of an isolated psychopath." (119) Rather than being a symbolic American tragedy, the story of Oswald's life, as told in DeLillo's narrative, emerges more as the particular tale of a lonely and disaffected young man, one of the solitary killers "firing from overpasses".

(119) Lentricchia p.198.
The text is establishing Oswald as a person not in control of his situation. He may wish to make history by identifying himself with the makers of history and thus transcend his powerlessness but his desire itself is a symptom of his lack of power - he is haunted by feelings of disconnection and alienation. He sees himself in the third person, the shadow of his life keeps falling across his path. (p.133) Making love to Mitsuko he is partly outside the scene, monitoring the act. (p.111) He is seemingly uninterested in Kennedy's visit to Dallas, even though he plans to assassinate him (p.374) and after the assassination he hears his own name and thinks, "They were talking about somebody else." (p.416) The way in which he is represented adds to our feeling of Oswald as alienated and out of step with his time. For instance, with the other shooters on the firing range he readies for sleep and has a series of seemingly disconnected thoughts, lines from films, "Take 'em to Missouri, Matt", thoughts of his discharge and of Marina, "The President reads James Bond novels", his plans for a new project, then a catch phrase, "The revolution must be a school of unfettered thought." (pp.334-335) This is how he is often presented as thinking - in unconnected snatches which create a picture of him as a schizophrenic, as someone whose thoughts are alienated from each other. As William Cain argues, he is "dissociated from the scenes he imagines: he sees himself seen." (120)

His suicide attempt in a Moscow motel is the most developed example in the novel of Oswald's alienation and self-destructiveness. His random thoughts are interspersed with quotes from the Historic Diary which we later learn was written years after the event when he is leaving Russia and is "the true voice of that episode." (p.211) Similarly, the thoughts that pass through his mind seem to have little to do with his act, and its motivation remains fuzzy; in Oswald's mind as well as ours. The razor reminds him of Gillette sponsoring the world series on TV, he imagines the reactions of the Russians and his family, he defends and legitimises himself even as he slashes his wrist. At one stage he wonders how they measure cuts - "in centimetres" - and tells himself not to fill the bath up too much. (pp.151-153) It is (120) Cain p.279.
an absurd and pathetic action that illustrates his distance from reality and the true nature of
the world.

In its insistence that we pay heed to what is going on in Oswald's mind, the mind of the
killer firing from overpasses, the text attempts to move away from the idea of the
assassination as absurd and random. It is given significance by being explicated in
psychoanalytic terms. Oswald, as we have seen, is obsessed by TV and film, they help create
his self image, but he is also obsessed by history, in particular the history and theory of
Marxism, which he uses to validate himself, to create an identity, an id that can withstand his
mother, poverty and beatings. Through the books he glimpses the lives of their creators with
their pen names and revolutionary names:

These were men who lived in isolation for long periods, lived close to
death through long winters in exile or prison, feeling history in the room,
waiting for the moment when it would surge through the walls, taking them
with it. History was a force to these men, a presence in the room.(p.34)

He fantasises about joining a communist cell and being "given tasks to prove himself."(p.36)
His fantasies of clandestine espionage and party work are a form of empowerment, "Nobody
knew what he knew. The whirl of time, the true life inside him. This was his leverage, his
only control."(p.46) He uses it when he feels most powerless, least in control, as when he is
in the marine brig and tries to "feel history in the cell", the "history out of George Orwell, the
territory of no-choice"(p.100) which the individual has to allow himself to be swept along
by. It is a way out of his solipsism and failure; he knows that Trotsky has written that
revolution "leads us out of the dark night of the isolated self. We live forever in history,
outside ego and id". (p.101) Essentially what Oswald wishes to do is escape from life by
achieving fame or notoriety and thus going down in history. As William Cain states, he
"craves a role that will clarify his life and destiny." (121)

With Oswald it is all connected to his feelings of failure and his desire to escape from

(121) ibid., p.277.
himself. It is in the end a form of self-destruction, an urge given physical expression in his suicide attempts. After his disaffection with the Soviets he comes more closely to identify with Trotsky. In Russia he had barely thought of Trotsky but now "he can feel the man's spirit" and he feels himself hounded out of Europe, exiled and hunted just as Trotsky was. (p.214) He feels Trotsky is the "pure form", (p.312) the pure form of revolutionary that he wants to be, a loner cut off from his roots but still defiant and undefeated. When he arrives in Moscow he believes himself "a man in history now". (p.149) When he begins to make connections with the anti-government milieu in Dallas he believes that "he was no longer separated from the true struggles that went on around him." (p.248) And later as he is drawn into the plot he believes he is being swept up by history, towards a vision, and that he was done with being a "pitiful individual, done with isolation." (p.322) He is convinced that he will eventually be famous, that his name will live in history. Hence that Historic Diary, "He believed religiously that his life would turn in such a way that people would one day study the Historic Diary for clues to the heart and mind of the man who wrote it." (p.212) Just as the classic works of Marxism are read, just as Trotsky's works are read.

Oswald's final political allegiance is to Castro and his desire to participate in Castro's revolution is what will draw him into the Everett plot. In fact the heroes and the heroic texts of Marxism are central to Oswald's characterisation and would seem to contradict DeLillo's assertion, quoted earlier, that he acts from "dreams and personal fantasy much more than politics." Although, of course, it could be argued that Oswald's personal fantasies are expressed as Marxist because this helps to make him unique in 1950s America, it is a part of his conscious choosing of an outsider status. Yet the significance of Marxism for Oswald is largely not remarked upon by most critics of the novels. The obsession with Marxism is invariably subsumed into the concept of history which in turn becomes part of the dialectic of self and history through which Oswald is positioned as either victim of history or agent of history. Frank Lentricchia writes that Marxist Oswald will become at the moment of his death, postmodern Oswald, but his essay largely ignores this aspect of Oswald, preferring to
see Oswald as "a contemporary production." (122) Yet it is interesting that DeLillo invests so much time on Oswald's Marxist fantasies. In Norman Mailer's study of Oswald the people who knew him say little about Oswald's obsession with Marxism. In fact according to a KGB report, "He has a poor conception of ... Marxist-Leninist theory." (123) DeLillo chooses to foreground one aspect of Oswald's life, his secret obsession with Marxism, in order to portray Oswald as a man who compensates for his failures through politics and political fantasy. The ultimate move in this strategy is to argue that the assassination is the result of this psychological compensation. His act is not motivated by ideology or gain and it is not quite the motivation of the isolated killers. It is bound up with politics and is yet inherently an apolitical act. I would argue that this allows DeLillo to import a political content into the text only to drain away any significance it might have. It is emptied of content because Oswald is finally a most unpolitical actor, history and politics act on him, and Oswald's Marxism is really an empty signifier. It is a version of the assertion that the personal is political, a statement that tends to dissipate politics into the ether of everyday life. Its function in the text then is to obliterate the political rather than celebrate or eulogise it.

But what then of William Cain's argument that Oswald develops as a character, is given tragic significance? It could be argued that he develops a sort of self-knowledge during the course of the novel and by being presented in human situations with all that that involves - domesticity, affection, guilt, disconnection, he comes to take on a sort of humanity. Writing in his Historic Diary the night before he leaves Russia he reflects on his experiences and his voice is a mixture of mania and self-knowledge, "Limits everywhere. In every direction he came up against his own incompleteness. Cramped, fumbling, deficient. He knew things. It wasn't that he didn't know." (p.211) He knows that he is caught in a trap of his family's expectations, "A family expects you to be one thing when you're another. They twist you out

(122) Lentricchia p.197, p.203.
of shape ... You are trapped in their minds. They shape and hammer you. Going away is what you do to see yourself plain." (p.244) His mother is the dominating and unsettling presence that he is trying to escape from when he flees to the Marines, the Soviet Union, into fringe politics, into the act of assassination. One reviewer saw Marguerite Oswald as the creation of a misogynist because of her pernicious influence and paranoiac strangeness, (124) and if Libra were read purely in psychoanalytic terms she looms as the bad mother of the 1950s who destroyed their sons with their possessiveness and vindictiveness.

It is at the point when he realises he has been tricked into the assassination attempt that he reaches a clear understanding of his role and place in history and the true dimensions of his betrayal:

[He was] ... the victim of a total frame. ... Other people were responsible for the actual killing. They fixed it so that he would seem the lone gunman. They superimposed his head on somebody else's body. Forged his name on documents. Made him a dupe of history. He would name every name if he had to. (p.418)

He thinks that his life work will be an investigation of what he has done, thus ironically mirroring the life work of other obsessed searchers for the truth of the assassination. He thinks, "Time to grow in self-knowledge, to explore the meaning of what he's done." (p.434) He is resigned to his plight, "He could easily live in a cell half this size." (p.435) The last glimpse of Oswald before his death while not portraying him as having transcended his predicament or having reached some higher plane of knowledge does show a man beginning to come to terms with what has happened to him, still not in control but determined to understand and resigned to the consequences of his act. But there remains, as always, an element of self-delusion, "He and Kennedy were partners. The figure of the gunman in the

(124) Ms 17 (January-February 1989), p.126. DeLillo is accused of giving us with Marguerite "the monster mother indispensable to male American novelists."
window was inextricable from the victim and his history. This sustained Oswald in his cell. It gave him what he needed to live." (p.435)

According to Cain, DeLillo, "in a daring act of writerly compassion ... grants Oswald a heightened understanding of himself." (125) This would then fit into an interpretative framework that sees DeLillo giving life and human significance to the absence at the centre of the assassination, Oswald is given a humanity denied him by history. For instance, in the brief scene where Marina visits him he is seen through her eyes, and her memories of the marriage is part of the humanising impulse in the novel. She remembers the "mild face of the boy she'd married", then the worker in Texas and Louisiana, dirty and weary, and now cut and bruised and looking so bad he must be guilty. She has retained her wedding ring and photos of him, domestic mementos of their life together. And as she leaves him she thinks of her return to the domesticity of her aunt and uncle.(pp.424-425) What is happening here, as with the ordinary domesticity with his children the night before the assassination ("Ordinary in every way, simple moments adding up, with rain falling on the lawn."(p.390)) is that Oswald is becoming one of us. This idea is best illustrated in the scene where Beryl Parmenter, wife of one of the conspirators, weeps as she sees Oswald's death on TV. She sees something in his eyes:

... a glance at the camera before he was shot, that put him here in the audience, among the rest of us, sleepless in our homes - a glance, a way of telling us he knows who we are and how we feel, that he has brought our perceptions and interpretations into his sense of the crime.(p.447)

In other words, a connection between Oswald and the viewer and reader is made and a complicity in the crime hinted at, not Oswald as the cause of Kennedy's death but perhaps American society itself.

It is clear that Oswald emerges from the novel as more than just a simulacrum or a construct of history as many critics have argued. But there are problems with seeing him as a

(125) Cain p.286.
tragic or simply a pathetic figure, destroyed by his mother and American society, and finally reaching a point of awareness of his tragic situation. Norman Mailer's book on Oswald was written in the belief that Kennedy's death would be more tolerable "if we can perceive his killer as tragic rather than absurd." (126) Mailer attempts to make him a tragic figure in an 800 page narrative that in its formal similarity to the nineteenth century novel positions Oswald amongst the heroes of those novels who are humanised and typified by their authors. This is the essence of Cain's argument, that DeLillo achieves this transformation of Oswald from pathetic and absurd solitary killer to a person freighted with tragic significance because of his ordinariness and his resemblance to other men. But it is precisely Oswald's status also as a postmodern construct that belies this argument.

I want to return here to Lukacs's theory of historical fiction that mirrors in miniature, the totality of a society in a given period. Terry Eagleton, commenting on Lukacs's notion of typicality, asserts that Lukacs means by this term, "those latent forces in any society which are from a Marxist viewpoint most historically significant and progressive." The task of the writer is to flesh out the typical "in sensuously realized individuals and actions." (127) If Oswald were indeed a representative man, a type of the American destroyed by the culture and society he lives in, then we would begin to see him in the terms adumbrated by Lukacs and Eagleton. However, Oswald never transcends the banal and the pathetic. As illustrated in the scene where the Militant photograph is taken he remains a victim of his own vanities and megalomaniacal fantasies. He remains the "dupe of history" as is shown in the other major plot strand of the novel, the CIA conspiracy. The text does work towards creating a significance for Oswald, but it is not in the political terms of the Lukacsian historical novel. Before examining this strategy I will look at the conspiracy in more detail, because it is against both these plot strands that an alternative historical narrative is outlined.

The interspersing of the two plot strands on one level adds to the novel's ironic

(126) Mailer p.198.

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foreknowledge, we know that everything Oswald does is leading toward the assassination which tends to increase our awareness of how pathetic and victimised he is; we are constantly reminded that he is being set up. He is a victim of history, as represented by the CIA plotters and later the Mafia and Cuban exiles. The narrative of the conspiracy could be described as moving from domesticity to death. It begins in the breakfast nook of Win Everett's kitchen where he is thinking appropriately enough of secrets. His wife watches him and the scene establishes the ordinariness of their lives and helps to humanise Everett. He is the only of the conspirators whose home life we see in any detail. His wife's thoughts are expressed so that we gain a sense of how they relate to one another, how she tries to connect with him and allow for his silences and the things that cannot be said. It is a relationship built on secrets, a microcosm of Everett's professional life and the world created in the novel.

This narrative will end of course in Kennedy and Oswald's deaths, but the plot itself has its origins in Kennedy's own wishes. This is one of the ironies that propel the narrative. Like overzealous courtiers the CIA plot Castro's overthrow or murder because it is what they think the President wants, "They all knew that JFK wanted Castro cooling on a slab but they weren't allowed to let on to him that his guilty yearning was the business they'd charged themselves to carry out."(pp.21-22) He must be protected and thus remain unsullied. The committee organised to do this is described as being in four stages, designed to organise the work and at the same time screen the President and the CIA chief from too much knowledge. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco Everett ends up semi-retired; cynical and disillusioned. It is from a shared disillusion that the conspiracy emerges, "We need an electrifying event."(p.27) For Everett the near-miss which will galvanise Kennedy into action has an almost mystical power, "This plan speaks to something, deep inside me. It has a powerful logic."(p.28)

But Mackey is already making the "second leap". "They had to take it all the way."(pp.219-220) Mackey is deeply embittered with the Administration and the CIA:

He'd seen too many evasions and betrayals, fighting men encouraged and then abandoned for political reasons. They didn't call it the Company for nothing. It was set up to obscure the deeper responsibilities, the calls
He thinks the CIA indulges in realpolitik, in a pragmatism that he no longer believes in. He feels closer to the Cuban exiles, whom he helps train, and is sympathetic to their beliefs and those of the right-wing milieu that surrounds the Cubans. He is more ideological than the other conspirators and it is he who will betray Everett.

It is through Everett's consciousness that the betrayal of the plot is shown. It is when Everett first becomes aware of Oswald and his future use as a patsy that he first begins to be wary. What Mackey finds in his search of Oswald's apartment makes Everett feel "displaced" and gives him a "... sensation of the eeriest panic" because it is "a glimpse of the fiction he'd been devising, a fiction living prematurely in the world." (p. 179) His fiction has become real. Later he muses that he is "wary of Oswald", he realises he is making the same mistakes the "Senior Study Effort" had made before the Bay of Pigs, there is too much distance between him and those in the field, too little control. He muses, "Plots carry their own logic. There is a tendency of plots to move toward death. He believed that the idea of death is woven into the nature of every plot." This leads him to wonder with a proleptic insight, "He had a foreboding that the plot would move to a limit, develop a logical end." (p. 221) This heightens the dark suspicions, furthers the plot of the thriller while at the same time raising questions about who is in control and can the conspiracy be controlled? The conspiracy takes on a life of its own and the only certain thing is that its logic would move toward death. It is a best laid plan that began with Kennedy's wish and will eventually come to cause his death.

Everett amongst the minutiae of his domestic existence, his wife and child, struggles to defend himself in his mind against the accusations of history, just as Marguerite Oswald and Jack Ruby do. He thinks the polygraph is the "only hope of deliverance after what he'd done, what he'd loosed into the crowd", (p. 362) not so much Oswald as Mackey. He knows now that his plot is betrayed and that the polygraph will make them see that, "he only wanted what was right for his country. He loved his country. He loved Cuba ... A forgiveness would come into their eyes." (p. 363) In this scene Everett has become, like Oswald, a dupe of history, in the hands of forces he may have set in motion but cannot control. He prepares for
bed doing the things he always does, "This means they are safe for another night."(p.364) These are rituals to protect him and his family because the chaos threatens to destroy them. As Alek said of Oswald, "chaos trails him".

The conspiracy seems to develop a similarity to fiction and Everett acknowledges this when he feels it must develop towards a logical end and muses on "plot in fiction" and that the tighter the plot, "the more likely it will come to death".(p.221) The conspirators are in a sense the authors who write this plot with Oswald as its unwitting main character. When Parmenter remembers the success of the earlier CIA-engineered coup in Guatemala this same element of fictiveness is invoked. The broadcasts that the CIA organised which created an atmosphere of misinformation and fear and which helped to bring down the government were "like a class project in the structure of reality."(p.125) In writing some of the broadcasts Parmenter helped structure reality and contributed to the writing of history as it was made.

But if the conspiracy has an air of fictionality about it, it is also very much tied to the realpolitik and has an overt economic basis. If Mackey is the extremist ideologue and Everett the misguided patriot Parmenter is in it for the money. When the rebels took over and the Americans and Batista's police fled, "... Laurence Parmenter's future was still in the ground of the unexplored oil properties of Cuba".(p.126) This is the same world as DeLillo's earlier Running Dog with its nexus of government agencies and business and commercial interests. The conspiracy ultimately boils down to an attempt to recover investments in Cuba. Parmenter is connected to the "... gambling interests, the casinos and hotels, the men who bought off officials routinely ... men who thought longingly of the millions they'd once skimmed from the gaming tables in Havana." Parmenter wanted nothing to do with "those roly-poly wops."(p.129) This is the connection with the Mafia. If the Cuban shooters are disillusioned patriots or ideologues like Mackey and Everett, the Mafia are the economic connection or rationale. They are in it to protect their financial interests. When Ferrie meets Carmine Latta to discuss the Castro/Kennedy problem, Latta nostalgically remembers the glory days in Havana, "It was fucking paradise, Havana, then. The casino was gold leaf walls. I mean beautiful. We had beautiful chandeliers, women in diamonds ... Batista gets his
envelope, everybody's happy." (p.173)

Thus the conspiracy which originated in disillusion, patriotism, right-wing extremism and economic interests in its own inexorable death-ward logic ensnares Oswald, enticing him with the bait of Cuba and fame. He is the perfect man for the conspiracy because he has, in a sense, been a party to his own manipulation. A part of his psyche is happy with being the helpless pawn in history's hands. As in the novel's first scene he is riding just to ride. He enjoys the feeling of "no-choice" on the New York subways which has a "secret and a power" which thrills him and gives him a "satisfying wave of rage and pain." (p.13)

So the two strands of the plot come together in a way that is satisfying in a psychological and a narrative sense. Many critics have commented on the double nature of the plot. Lentricchia notes the counterpointing of the plot-driven CIA conspiracy with its cause and effect structure and the aimlessness of the Oswald scenes which replicate Oswald's picaresque existence and argues that this allows DeLillo to "toy with conventional political and novelistic expectations." (128) Most critics, however, tend to seize on the use of coincidence to connect the two plots and creates a pattern that Joseph Kronick argues, "transforms all randomness into a plot whose perfect expression is death." (129)

Oswald is certainly aware of coincidence as a factor in his life. In a sense his thoughts are energised by coincidence, little felicities that help him to define himself and which act as rationales for his actions. Castro's middle name is similar to a name he once used, he walks through the door when Banister was trying to find him, the revolver and carbine arrive on the same day, he is reading the same book as Kennedy. (p.336) These coincidences coalesce in his mind until, "Everything that happened was him", (p.385) has a significance in his life, like the assassination movies he watches and interprets to fit his situation.

The concept of coincidence is of crucial significance in *Libra*. DeLillo has claimed in an interview that Oswald's assassination attempt was "based on elements outside politics ... things like dreams and coincidences and even the movement or the configuration of the stars." (130) Certainly Oswald is shown as gravitating towards the attempt by the felicities of coincidence, but this is given more significance in the novel than simply character motivation. As Paul Maltby has commented, citing DeLillo's statement, there are "repeated invocations of invisible transhistorical forces ..." which are "... the stuff of metaphysics, not to say the occult." Maltby calls this a "romantic metaphysics" rather than postmodernism; DeLillo endorses or at least is willing to consider "supernatural interventions in human history." (131)

These "transhistorical forces" are referred to by David Ferrie in replying to the question, "Which way will Leon tilt?" There is a bridge between Oswald and the plot to kill Kennedy, he states:

What makes a connection inevitable? There is a third line. It comes out of dreams, visions, intuitions, prayers, out of the deepest levels of the self ...

Its a line that cuts across causality, cuts across time. It has no history ...

(p.339)

John Johnston has seen this third line as a "resonance effect" which creates the echoes and correlations between the two narrative strands, a superlinear effect which, in essence, transcends historical or narrative linearity to deconstruct the line between history and fiction. (132)

This is a plausible account of the novel's form, with its intertwining plot strands. However, a specific ideology is imported into the text by this content of dreams, deeper level of the self

(130) DeCurtis p.51.


(132) Johnston pp.322-325
and non-history. The text replaces the empiricist historiography that Branch despairs of with a theory of history as chance, the lucky outcome of random events, a version of chaos theory. (133) But it is a chaos that is invested with a mystical dimension, similar to the mystical centre of *The Names* represented by the cult. As DeLillo told DeCurtis, "I would say that mystery in general rather than the occult is something that weaves in and out of my work."

(134) Chance and coincidence in history have generally been acknowledged as playing a part in the unfolding of events, but by privileging coincidence and fetishising it with a mystical aura the text tends to turn history into myth. It means that the text does not reflect history as Lukacs would have it or complement or improve history as Hutcheon would have it, but negates history so that it becomes one more concept subsumed into the postmodern.

If the idea of history is given more significance in the novel it comes more from the fictionalised plot element rather than the enquiry into the mind of Kennedy's killer. The CIA conspiracy literally destroys the sense Americans have of their country, it intrudes upon their assumption that their leaders know what is best for the country. In this interpretation of the historical significance of the conspiracy it stands in for all the other betrayals and dirty tricks and deceptions that have undermined the worth of the American government in the eyes of its citizens. Naivety is replaced with knowledge, conspiracy theories are reintroduced into the American consciousness, the rebellious sixties are ushered in. Oswald's awareness that he has become the dupe of history can then be interpreted as representing the growing awareness of all Americans in the wake of the assassination and those other innocence-shattering events of the sixties and beyond - civil rights, further assassinations, Vietnam, Watergate - that their government is not the benevolent administration of Roosevelt or Eisenhower.

This then is "the seven seconds that broke the back of the American century". All this lends the novel a portentous tone so that what is really a series of episodes in the life of an ordinary

man, who is something of a failure is lent an air of historical significance. His character can be said to be overloaded with historical significance. It is really the opposite effect of that contained in political novels such as Upton Sinclair's The Jungle or Frank Norris's TheOctopus. In those novels the life of the protagonist stands in for a certain class, and its significance is that other, just as ordinary, men have gone through similar experiences. The reader either identifies with or is educated in the life of working class. In Libra this life of the ordinary and abused individual who is the representative of that same class is given a meaning that has nothing to do with the particularities of his life or class. We feel at times that the author is slumming. Oswald's thoughts and actions are always presented to us ironically in the text's relentless postmodern style while at the same time they are given an exaggerated and portentous historical significance as symbol of the seven seconds that broke the back of the American century. If Oswald is the manipulated victim of the CIA conspiracy he is also the manipulated victim of the ideology of the text as posited in the Branch sections.

I would argue that the ultimately dehumanising strategies of postmodernism characterised by the text's ironic metahistorical style undermines its attempts to humanise history through Oswald and Everett. The detailed and sympathetic psychological portrait of Oswald as dupe of history and the text's attempt to give a wider political meaning to the assassination is its attempt to rewrite history against the Warren Commission's guilty verdict on Oswald and its whitewashing of the events. In this it is attempting also to apportion the blame for the assassination and the turbulent era it supposedly ushered in away from one man towards the machinery of government and even Kennedy himself in his wish to rid himself of Castro. In fact, the blame is widened to all Americans in Beryl Parmenter's realisation when she sees Oswald's final moments that we all share something of his dark wishes and that he is "there in the audience", one of us. But Oswald is always seen through the distorting lens of irony which ultimately reduces him to a network of traces, a collection of the text's ideological and stylistic idiosyncracies. The reader can never really identify with him because the "joke" is always at his expense. The Militant photo which will come to represent the face of evil in a suburban backyard as shown in Time was planned as a memento for his child. The obsession
with the heroes of communism and his belief in his eventual entry into history is undercut by
our knowledge that he will enter history not as hero but as villain, as patsy or as lone assassin
depending on your theory. He fires shots at the Motorcade but does not kill the President and
so the assassination becomes a joke on him as he is blamed for something he was not able to
do. In the minutiae of the text, in particular its descriptions of his thoughts, the text maintains
an ironic distance, we always know what he thinks will be contradicted by the historical
record. His secret hopes and obsessions laid out via the Report and the text itself as the
pitiful meanderings of a nonentity made famous by the actions of others. Perhaps the
principal irony is that he becomes not only the victim of conspiracy and history but also the
victim of the text's version of history.

This ostensibly political version of history, which has been said by leftist critics to be a
riposte to conservative beliefs and the establishment's version of the assassination, undercuts
its own premises. The text proposes to transform the demonised victim of history into a
figure representing us all, one who emerges as a sort of low tragic hero and at the same time
to uncover the true villains in the CIA and the upper reaches of American government in
tacit agreement with that distorted image of American capitalism, the Mafia. Oswald ends up
as less than tragic hero as his character is ironically reduced to the level of patsy and fool.
And the conspiracy upon which the claims for a radical rewriting of history are based is
likewise undercut by the novel's relentless ironising. In the conspiracy Everett is betrayed by
his own patriotism and like Oswald is given aspects of humanity, made an ordinary man. But
this is not the betrayal that really matters, it is only minor. There is the betrayal of Oswald, of
course, but there is also the betrayal of Kennedy and Everett which is part of history's joke on
Kennedy as claimed by the novel. He initiates the plot that has been instigated by Kennedy in
his unstated wish to get rid of Castro. Ironically it will kill him. In Libra he is the architect of
his own death and the sort of history that is invoked is not political at all, it is absurd. Just as
absurd as the story of Oswald's life told by the text, with his crazy mother and the other
outsiders and loonies he comes into contact with.

The assassination itself, the central event of the novel is overladen with irony and absurdity

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to the point that it appears to lose its political and historical significance. The assassination functions somewhat like the cult in The Names, it is the empty centre around which the text creates mystery and awe. It has the same indeterminate sense of not being able to be fully understood or known. It is not a conundrum to be solved or a problem of history to be unravelled but a mystery in and for itself. It is the occasion for the text, its object not its subject. Again DeLillo's penchant for mystification appears to be lurking between the lines of the historical novel. The victims, the assassins, the observers, the journalists who report it do not know what is going on, they are trapped in the chaos. The Cuban assassins know what is happening but they are subsidiary to the chaos that is described. The event is filmed and then written about extensively and given a definitive version in the Warren Commission Report but the text tells us that this does not provide solutions. The events create confusion and terror at the time and the unsolved mysteries that still surround the events continue the confusion and terror into the following years. The text purports to solve the mystery but actually adds to it, creating an absurdist version to set alongside the heroic, tragic or cynical solutions posited by the conspiracy theorists.

In the mystery and confusion of the central event and in Oswald's life of "trailing chaos" wherever he goes there emerges another ideology in the text that contradicts the ideology variously condemned and celebrated by critics. This is the sense of events leading to disorder, conspiracies (and fictions) leading to death as in Everett's deathward tending plots, mysteries that with more and more information being provided are not solved. These are all entropic movements, as if the second law of thermodynamics is illustrated in American history and the assassination is an incremental event in the eventual demise through loss of energy of the country. It is a metaphor that Thomas Pynchon has explicitly used in his fiction, particularly The Crying of Lot 49 with its meditations on Maxwell's Demon, whilst in Libra and White Noise it is implied in the sense of doom and apocalypse that haunts those texts. In Libra Oswald and the conspirators seem to possess an awareness of immanence, as if Oswald's crazy actions and the conspiracy's calculated actions possess within them the kernel of the end-time, characterised in the text by the deaths of Kennedy and his secret
Where this leaves the reader is not with a mystery solved or a conspiracy uncovered but with a fatalism, a sense of the inevitableness embodied in the text's controlling ironic and proleptic voice. This is the postmodern fatalism that I have described in Chapter One and this is where Libra as a political novel fails. Despite its attempt to rewrite history against the grain of the Warren Commission Report it ends up enacting the same politics as other postmodern works that flounder in fatalism and entropy. If The Names is an international novel that ends up as a mystical fable Libra is a political and historical novel that ends up as apolitical and anti-historical and as part of the structure it seeks to break down.
4. Robert Stone

Throughout his career Robert Stone has maintained a commitment to a style of fiction that is firmly in the tradition of realism, albeit a realism that is shaped by the culture and aesthetic of his time. In this he is unlike Don DeLillo and Russell Banks. Don DeLillo’s ostensibly realistic novels, as I have argued, are imbued with the themes and methods of anti-realist postmodernism. Whilst Russell Banks in his early work was committed to experimental writing and developed a later style that effectively allied realist and postmodernist literary techniques. Stone’s work, on the other hand, has always been in the tradition of narrative realism and has eschewed literary devices that draw attention to their own nature or devices that distort or upset the narrative flow. He has his American antecedents in the work of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, two stylists of modernism who maintained a loyalty towards the narrative tradition. The Great Gatsby has, in fact, been cited by Stone as a major influence in his decision to commence a writing career and as an inspiration throughout his career. (1)

But I would argue that his commitment to realism cannot be categorised as conservative in the sense of clinging to an outworn tradition. When asked about the failure of realism to describe the experience of the Vietnam war in an interview he defended realism, but in a qualified way:

... realism in fiction - a realism of sorts; obviously it’s not the old style of realism - but this kind of realism has been making an amazing comeback in America during the past fifteen or twenty years. It’s almost as if that tradition which people were ready to write off in the Fifties and Sixties

suddenly came back in a big way. (2)

His version of realism is not quite the traditional version. In another interview he declares that, "Realism as a theory of literature is meaningless. I can start with it as a mode precisely because I don't believe in it." (3) Nevertheless, Stone aims to represent the world as it is or as it appears to him. His novels are plot driven, they revolve around characters who are given plausible psychological motivations, the milieux they inhabit are often exotic but are always recognisable and the moral and political orders created in his novels are within the tradition of nineteenth century realism.

He is also seen as a writer committed to left-wing causes and like DeLillo has been attacked by conservative critics for his radicalism. (4) The subject matter of his novels would seem to illustrate his political world-view: a novel about a right-wing conspiracy to overthrow American democracy using the power of the media; a novel that proposes that America's war in Vietnam has corrupted American society as expressed through the struggle to possess a large quantity of heroin; a novel about a Central American revolution and the involvement of various Americans in that revolution; a novel about the corrupting and destructive influence of Hollywood on those involved in the industry that is in the tradition of Nathaniel West and Fitzgerald; and finally a novel about heroism and despair in the entropic age of Ronald Reagan.

Stone has said on a number of occasions that one of his principal reasons for writing is to

(4) For instance, Joseph Epstein in Plausible Prejudices: Essays on American Writing criticises his fiction because "not a hint about what is best about America has ever showed up in a Robert Stone novel." (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985), p.123.
influence people, "to crowd people out of their own minds and occupy their space." (5) In an essay entitled "The Reason for Stories: Toward a Moral Fiction" he argues for a moral fiction and says of his own fiction:

In the course of wringing a few novels from our fin-de-siecle late-imperial scene, I have never been able to escape my sense of humanity trying, with difficulty, to raise itself in order not to fall. (6)

He maintains that a writer must accept that his work contains "a moral and political dimension" and that, "Commitment can be useful. ... Moral enervation is bad for writers." (7)

But as with DeLillo, I will be investigating the reality behind what I believe is largely a myth. Although reviewers for the main part claim Stone as a writer in the tradition of "existential adventure" (8) like Conrad and Hemingway, it could be argued that Stone's concern with the lives of the dispossessed and victimised places him a tradition that includes writers like Upton Sinclair and John Steinbeck. But this essentially supposes that Stone's fiction is completely the opposite of postmodern fiction with its emphasis on anti-realist experiment and its themes of apocalypse, spectacle and conspiracy. He has, in fact, stated that his difference from writers such as John Barth and William Gass is that "... they take realism too seriously and so have to react against it. I don't feel the necessity of reacting against it." (9) What this chapter will be engaging with is the question of how Stone's novels,

(7).ibid., p.76.
(9) Woods p.42.
whilst eschewing postmodern fictional techniques, are yet instances of the postmodern. I will be proposing that in spite of his ostensible leftism Stone is irredeemably corrupted by the postmodern zeitgeist.

In the opening chapter I pointed to a fatalism, an inability to choose and hence a profound disbelief in the possibility of change that characterises postmodernism. It is this same world outlook that characterises Stone's fiction and in my opinion most firmly places him as, if not a postmodern stylist, then as a postmodernist of sensibility and political consciousness. I will be arguing this in my investigation of two of his novels. The first, A Flag for Sunrise is his third novel and his most conventionally political novel. It is a novel that summarises the themes of his earlier fiction and I will look at it in the context of that earlier work. The second, Outerbridge Reach is one of his more recent novels and whilst that novel is not political and turns away from an examination of the world to an examination of the individual and his relation to nature I believe it continues many of the themes that have characterised Stone's earlier fiction.

But before turning to the novels I want to briefly discuss the significance of the Vietnam war in Stone's fiction. Along with Tim O'Brien, Larry Heinemann and a few others he is seen as among the premier American writers on that war. And this is on the strength of a visit of a few months in 1971 in the capacity of journalist and, as he stated, on the strength of one journey outside of Saigon to where military action was taking place. (10) O'Brien and Heinemann, or course, are veterans and Michael Herr who was also a journalist established his credentials by his prolonged proximity to the fighting. Nevertheless, Vietnam plays a major role in Stone's fiction. Dog Soldiers is his "Vietnam" novel, set there and later in California and the Southwest in a space that suggests and even symbolises Vietnam. In A Hall of Mirrors, published in 1967 but begun in 1961, Rainey reads newspaper headlines "proclaiming the nation's daily bag of Asiatics." (11) As Stone admitted to Robert Solotaroff

(10) Ruas pp.277-278.
this was added late in the genesis of the novel to make it more contemporary. This despite the fact that he was writing about early 1960s New Orleans and the war only became a major news story after Johnson’s escalation of American involvement in 1964. (12) In A Flag for Sunrise Holliwell first hears of the Mission at French Harbour from Nolan, a CIA operative he had known in Vietnam and he is motivated to go there, in part, because of the guilt he feels about his actions in Vietnam. Children of Light is much less a Vietnam novel but it too is about the corruption and drug use of the 1960s of which Vietnam was very much a part. And in Outerbridge Reach all three of the principal characters have been profoundly affected by Vietnam and their actions and choices and declarations in the affluent 1980s are inextricably linked to their memories of those experiences. For the reader of Stone’s fiction Vietnam is the key needed to decipher Stone’s moral and political concerns. In an interview he has said that:

Vietnam was a terribly important thing for this country. It’s like a wound covered with scar tissue ... it is embedded in our history, it is embedded in our definition of who we are. We will never get it out of there. (13)

His thesis is that America’s experience in Vietnam has corrupted the Republic and the admirable parts of America’s idea of itself. This is linked to his diagnosis of the American malaise, whether that malaise is heroin in California, the Hollywood community or the actions of a Republican couple in Reagan’s America.

It has been estimated that the United States has intervened in the internal affairs of Central American and Caribbean countries more than 100 times in the last 125 years. (14) The recent incursions and interventions in Panama, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Grenada are part of a grand tradition rather than a policy unique to the Reagan/Bush years. What Gore Vidal

(12) Solotaroff p.27.  
(13) Schroeder p.154.  
amongst others has called the "American Empire" and William Appleman Williams "The Tragedy of American Diplomacy" is most recognisable in America's relation with its near neighbours in the south. Williams begins his book of the same name with a discussion of America's role in Cuba between its liberation from Spain and the Cuban revolution and concludes that American power has been "exercised vigorously and persistently" in Cuban affairs in those 63 years and that the reality of American polity has not "enjoyed any persuasive correlation with the ideals avowed as the objectives of the power." (15) In other words Cuba's economy was not modernised or democraticised and the commitment to self-determination was betrayed.

The slippage between the ideal and the reality in Cuba describes the American role throughout the region and is the context in which Stone sets A Flag for Sunrise and its imaginary setting of Tecan/Compostela. Stone has remarked that geographically Tecan is Honduras and politically, with the outbreak of rebellion against Somoza in 1977 up to his overthrow by the Sandinistas in 1979, it most resembles Nicaragua. (16) Events, he has said, have overtaken his subject matter "in the worst way again", referring specifically to the murder of missionaries in El Salvador. (17) Hence the novel and its author have understandably gained a reputation for prescience and political savvy. It has been seen as a novel about American imperialism, for some critics an indictment of America's actions in the


area. (18) Particularly given the atmosphere of the Reagan Administration's Cold War rhetoric and stated hostility towards leftist movements in Nicaragua, El Salvador and elsewhere.

The novel sets up a number of interesting parallels with contemporary history. The fate of Justin is the most obvious and reminds the reader of the murder of missionaries by Government death squads, not least the murder of American nuns in El Salvador in 1980. There is a corrupt regime which is facing an insurgency in the mountains and jungles amongst its native population which could be the Sandinistas or just as easily the FLN in El Salvador or the rebels in Cuba in 1958-60. The earthquake in Tecan's capital a few years before the action of the novel parallels the earthquake in Managua which was one of the catalysts of the Sandinista rebellion. There are a number of other similarities in the novel with recent events in Central America. The Zeccas in their official capacity and later the shadowy men who aid the military in their espionage and torture in the aftermath of the uprising parallel similar US involvement in the internal affairs of the region. Whilst the purpose of Holliwell's visit to Compostela is represented as part of the cultural presence of America in that region.

What I want to start with is a closer examination of these parallels in the wider context of the novel's critique of American imperialism. It has been noted that Stone's novels often follow the lives of three central characters who come into contact and conflict with each other and with the world. Rheinhardt, Geraldine and Rainey in *A Hall of Mirrors*, Converse, Hicks and Marge in *Dog Soldiers* and in *A Flag for Sunrise*, Holliwell, Justin and Pablo. What is also central to the novel is a triangular structure on a macro level, one involving the State of Tecan, the United States government and the rebels. An historical parallel could be Cuba in the late 1950s or El Salvador in the 1980s. The novel's depiction of the relationship of these three structures or forces is central to the novel and is the context in which the three

principal characters act and react. The relationship between the United States and the Tecanian government is of primary importance, which is not surprising in a novel where the main protagonists are Americans in Tecan.

The nature of the relationship is that between imperial power and client state, and the novel convincingly portrays this relationship and many of the nuances of the relationship. What is first established is the difference between Tecan and the United States. In the first chapter the absence of the rule of law and democracy in Tecan is shown. Father Egan is terrorised and impelled to get rid of the body of a girl the local police chief has murdered. The legitimacy and authority of Campos is indicated by the picture of the President of the Republic on his wall - "appearing as the apotheosis of the nation-state," (19) and on the other wall a picture of John Kennedy. The two pictures tell us who is in control here. Tecan is shown to be a corrupt and brutal state through the testimony of many of the American characters. Nolan tells Holliwell that it is still the fifties in Tecan, "The cops lock you up for reading Voltaire." (p.22) It is beset by natural disasters. Marie Zecca mentions banana and coffee diseases and "the worst of the quakes." Her husband adds they get all the new diseases and "hold fast to the old ones." For the Zeccas, Tecan is "little by little ... going down." (p.129) Later Tom Zecca tells Holliwell tales of the corruption and profligacy of the President. His dogs "probably eat more meat than the population of Tecan." (p.139)

Holliwell's first experience of Tecan is at the border crossing and this experience encapsulates the contrast between Tecan's barbarity and corruption and the "normal" world. Compostela itself is not averse to intimidation and even "disappearance" and its "progressive" stance and friendship with Cuba is liable to alarm American conservatives. But its reserve of international goodwill is funded by its "contiguity with Tecan" where "everything was perfectly dreadful." (p.66) Holliwell has trouble obtaining a visa and then at

the border crossing he and the Zeccas witness a particularly brutal example of the actions of the Tecanian military. The intimidation of the "hippie gringos" suspected of carrying drugs is reinforced by the casual use of a gun to scare off some boys stoning a trapped cow. "The gringo youths in line recoiled at the firing." (pp.135-138) The environment of casual violence and brutality is Holliwell's introduction to Tecan and as Zecca says, "that was an average day at the gates of Tecan." He adds that it is, "Best not to think about" what will happen to those youths discovered with dope. (p.139)

This introduction to the country is underscored near the end of the novel when Holliwell is being interrogated. Soyer tells him, "In Yanquiland it's true that no one dies. Here life is sordid." (p.365) America's relationship with this country is represented in a number of ways. Primarily it is through the relation of the characters to the plot, why are the Americans in Tecan? Apart from Pablo who seems to drift there aimlessly like some deadly bacillus they are there for a purpose. The Zeccas are part of the official American presence and are perhaps CIA, Bob Cole is a journalist wishing to cover the rebels, the Cuban nationalist Soyer is employed by the Tecanians to extract intelligence but his real boss is the United States. Holliwell's interest is stimulated by his old CIA friend, Nolan who wants him to check out the Mission. Father Egan and Sister Justin are there to minister to the people and her idealism and passion for the cause of the people is shown in her growing involvement in the cause of the rebels. Significantly, the novel refuses to criticise the role of the Mission which in the hands of other writers might have occasioned criticism of religious, specifically Catholic, colonialism.

Nolan in the scene that initiates the action of the novel by propelling Holliwell into Tecan sums up the relationship between the two countries, "O.K. ... they're murderous troglodytes and we put them in." (p.21) The Zeccas tell us more about America's role in Tecan. Zecca says of himself that he represents "Policy" and in relation to who will be next President he tells Holliwell that Arturo, the brother, is a "stopgap ... While Policy decides what to do next." (pp.140-141) In other words American interests decide who will rule the country. Soyer is there, he tells Holliwell, to "do your dirty work." (p.368) Discussing the rebels he
details the aid the United States has given to the government, "an outrageous air force", training in radar detection, the training and advisement of the Guardia. (p. 152) The reasons for this are articulated by Zecca, parroting archetypal American Cold War propaganda, "If we don't back them now, we'll have a Russian submarine base in Puerto Alvarado." (p. 152) The actions of the Americans in supporting the brutal regime are defended by Zecca, the mouthpiece in the novel for official American policy. It is part of "The Big Picture." (p. 154) As Stone has remarked of American power, it is "... unaware of its effects. ... Its serving its own interests as it sees them, but it is inflicting great hardship and great harm on Tecan."

(20)

Thus we are given a fictionalised version in microcosm of American Cold War policy. It is an interpretation that could be said to be a classic left-wing critique of American foreign policy. This critique extends to the economic and the cultural. As they travel through Tecan observing the poverty of the countryside there is an illuminating exchange between Cole and Holliwell. Cole asks what does it make us if "most of the world lives in this kind of poverty so that we can have our goodies and our extra protein ration ... ?" And Holliwell replies that it "makes us vampires."(p. 143) Nothing more is said about the economic nexus of the two "worlds" except indirectly in the character of Heath the Englishman who is there to observe the Tecanian situation to ensure the protection of his employer's economic interests. (p. 369) The novel implies that underneath Zecca's defence of "Policy" there lies an economic motivation, to preserve the interests of American business abroad.

The pervasive influence of American culture in the region is first shown in Lieutenant Campos' reading material, American detective magazines. (p. 6) Holliwell's stay in Compostela en route to Tecan is used in the novel to generate a narrative tension as the protagonist journeys toward Tecan and collision with the other central characters. But it is also somewhat of a digression used to explore some of the ironies and nuances of the cultural imperialism of the United States and Europe. Ocampo, the CIA operative and friend of

(20) Ruas p.291.
Holliwell is presented as a man threatened by his own culture because of his ambiguous role in the society as spy and homosexual. Ocampo sees himself in terms of an image created by the dominant culture, the old professor in the German film, Der Blaue Engel. Holliwell tells him, "'Movies are movies ... This is your life.'"(p.73)

The purpose of Holliwell's visit is to give a lecture at the local Compostelan university and that act in itself could be seen as an example of American cultural imperialism. The lecture could, in fact, be seen as the ideological centre of the novel. It is similar in some respects to the lecture given by Rollo Martins in Graham Greene's The Third Man. Holliwell is another innocent involved in a situation whose undercurrents of violence and intrigue he is not fully aware of. The abusive and hostile audience, the contemptuous host and death threats that later result because he is branded as a Marxist or nihilist give the incident a feeling of menace amidst the farcical nature of his drunken ramblings. What he tells the audience is not what they want to hear and their reaction reminds one of the hostility that has greeted other truth tellers:

"... American pop culture is often laughed at by snobbish foreigners ... But let me tell you that we have had the satisfaction of ramming it down their throats. ... Our popular culture is machine-made and it's for sale to anyone who can raise the cash ..."(p.97)

Compostela is successful because it can afford the culture.(p.97) Holliwell links this to America's geographic colonialism, "'We considered spaces unoccupied by us as unpeopled.'"(p.98) What America sells the world is the "'debasement of polite society.'"(p.99) Holliwell is equally dismissive of Marxism, "'analogous to a cargo cult'"(p.100) and describes himself not as a leftist but as a "'middle class professor'" and a "'liberal'".(p.103) Yet Holliwell's farcical lecture contains many of the themes of similar leftist critiques of American cultural imperialism.

Finally the novel's examination of imperialism contains an historical dimension in its references to the celebrated American adventurer in Central America, William Walker (p.134) and in the creation of any imaginary Conquistador, Martinez Trujillo. This man's
search for gold led him to the burning alive of the native population if they did not produce the gold he believed they had in their possession. (pp. 129-130) This connects to the modern Indians of Tecan, also oppressed by the regime and their American backers. It also connects to American actions in Vietnam where Vietnamese peasants were burnt alive in napalm attacks.

Towards the end of the novel Holliwell comes into contact with the sharp edge of the co-dependent relationship between the United States and Tecan. These are the scenes where he is interrogated and threatened with torture by Campos and the two foreigners. He is held in contempt as an American. Campos declares that the Americans are pygmies when it comes to culture (p. 362) and Heath tells him that he is "having all these moral adventures you can dine out on in the States." (p. 364) What they want from him links directly to the ambiguous nature of America's role in the region. As Campos says, "We know their profound concern for international morality ... Their dedication to human rights", (p. 364) they are scared of getting their fingers burned. (p. 364) What they need is a version of events that will satisfy the political designs of their masters and at the same time satisfy the proprieties, "a coherent version of events that may someday find its way into someone's files", in case some politician asked about what has happened. Their role must be explained and in a sense blotted from history. The United States must be seen to be upholding democratic ideals. Heath tells Holliwell that Soyer needs these, "Appearances ... It's part of his job." (p. 366) And later that we must, "Preserve the forms." (p. 367) This is the central political irony of the novel, that in order to preserve those forms Soyer and the others are prepared to torture an American and give up another American to the brutalities of the regime.

The novel's description of the relationship between the two countries is informed throughout by the historical presence of Vietnam. Its memory motivates many of the American characters and it acts as an historical parallel to the Tecanian situation. What the United States is doing to Tecan, the text implies, has been done before in Vietnam. Soyer is 282.
the only character motivated by a different episode in American history. As Heath says of him, "He's lived out some bad history ..." (p.369) and his anti-communism along with his contempt for American domestic politics marks him as part of the Bay of Pigs milieu that DeLillo described in Libra.

Holliwell is remarkably similar to a number of the other central characters in Stone's fiction. In Outerbridge Reach Strickland's Vietnam past involves his torture and humiliation by his own side and Converse in Dog Soldiers is haunted by his Vietnam memories of fear and cowardice. In Holliwell's past is his prior involvement with the CIA in Vietnam which we are led to believe has caused him shame and regret. This is why he initially rejects Nolan's request for help and his liberalism is perhaps a reaction to the guilt he feels about his involvement in Vietnam. It represents on a deeper level the guilt and torment felt by the nation.

Nolan like Holliwell had gone to Vietnam "on their government's service" (p.18) and he has suffered a terrible experience in Vietnam, being buried alive during Tet by the Vietcong. (21) Tom Zecca had also been in Vietnam working in combat intelligence, interrogating prisoners. He is at pains to state that he did not torture or kill prisoners and that he had acted with honour throughout. That he has to make such a declaration of course alerts the reader not so much to his possible guilt but to the fact that he feels besieged. Others have criticised him and the United States and he feels he must defend his country's honour. (p.153) Zecca's defence is directly connected to his present role. He is in Tecan to reconnoitre the lay of the land in "terms of intercontinental defence" (p.153) and he defends his role in the face of Holliwell's questions. Holliwell wants to know whether giving the Tecanians advice on counterinsurgency and partying with the ruling classes is not compromising his oath and his honour. (p.154) One feels that this exchange could be as much about Vietnam as it is about Tecan. His wife, almost inevitably, has also been in Vietnam, as an AID worker and the journalist Cole is described in passing as a "Vietnam burn-out." (p.149) Thus the centrality (21) His fate echoes the fate of Strickland in Outerbridge Reach.
of the Vietnam experience is established, it is, as Robert Fredrickson has remarked, "the touchstone experience, a haunting nightmare one cannot leave behind." (22)

Holliwell can be seen as a character whose failures and weaknesses place him somewhere between the martyred goodness of Sister Justin and the aimless evil of Pablo in the moral hierarchy of the novel. His attitudes and beliefs can be identified as central to those of the text itself. He is presented as a liberal who decries American foreign policy whilst refusing to be hoodwinked by the ideology or rhetoric of his country's chief critics, a realistic and clear-eyed viewer of the world. But he is also a person damaged by his experiences in Vietnam, somewhat like the nation he represents. Holliwell admits to being a "Vietnam burn-out" or maybe "just badly seared"(p.149) and Zecca agrees claiming that, "Everyone that ever saw that place is a little fucked up."(p.149) The little scar that Justin sees on Holliwell's earlobe is perhaps the ironic stigmata of those psychological scars he has suffered in Vietnam.(p.352)

By that point in the novel it seems almost inevitable that Holliwell should have a visible manifestation of his Vietnam experience. He is presented as being obsessed by memories of Vietnam. He tells Ocampo that he knows how it works "down here" and this, as Ocampo realises, is because of Vietnam.(p.78) Near the end of the novel, after he has betrayed Justin and she has realised this betrayal he muses that it is his "fate to witness popular wars", and that Vietnam had been a popular war amongst his radical friends.(pp.375-376) Even at the moment when he must confront his actions he is judging himself in terms of his Vietnam experience. When he first sees the palace in Tecan's capital he gets a "Vietnam flash" which awakens a feeling of "nostalgia and dread". Aspects of the city remind him of Saigon.(p.147) With Justin he smells jacaranda and it reminds him of Vietnam smells which he associates with the smell of war, "The smell of the world turning."(p.313) In these passages not only are we being shown Holliwell's Vietnam psyche but that psyche is linked to the present political

situation. Tecan comes to represent Vietnam, it is Vietnam and what happens there, from American involvement to rebellion against an American-backed regime to Holliwell's own tortured and flawed progress is a Vietnam story transplanted to an imaginary setting.

Holliwell remembers Vietnam as a time when "... the most specious lunacy had been conceived, written and enacted on both sides of the Pacific", where "no one could be held totally responsible for his utterances during that time."(p.25) It is this same Vietnam sickness that had been central to Stone's earlier novel, *Dog Soldiers*. In that novel the lunacy, mendacity, corruption and evil had been represented by the three kilos of heroin over which the characters fight and kill each other. All the characters are in some way corrupted by the heroin and by extension Vietnam, and their corruption is made to represent the corruption of America. That novel is a tour de force which takes an essentially simplistic symbol and makes it an emblem of American corruption whilst at the same time keeping to a stripped down thriller structure. In its use of the heroin as a symbol of corruption it is reminiscent of *Nostromo* with its all-encompassing symbol of the "silver of the mine". In *A Flag for Sunrise* there are no obvious symbols and Stone interweaves his Vietnam thesis with his analysis of American foreign policy in the region.

Holliwell's obsession with Vietnam is used as the hook upon which the novel's thesis about Vietnam and American foreign policy is hung. To examine the ideological implications of this thesis in the novel Holliwell's progress needs to be looked at in more detail. Whilst in Vietnam Holliwell had glimpsed a piece of paper in Nolan's typewriter which read, "'The Jew is at home in the modern world.'" Holliwell thinks, "Can of worms there."(p.18) This intimates to us something interesting about Nolan, his paranoiac and racist vision of the modern world which can be seen to stand in for similar attitudes in the American psyche. However, it is also a starting point in the text for our vision of Holliwell. Later he wonders if Justin is "at home in the world - the modern world, like the Jew in Nolan's strangely arrested hypothesis?"(p.223) He concludes that she would think she was at home and that she had a "marvelous view of the world."(p.224) In other words because she has an ideology, a belief system, she is at home.

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The implication that springs to mind is that Holliwell is not at home in the world and it could be argued that as a liberal he is almost by default without a coherent ideology. As his lecture and his almost apologetic confession that he is a liberal suggest he is more at ease refuting American policy than in believing in anything positive. What the text shows us throughout is that political disaffection is translated into a spiritual, transcendental alienation. After leaving Nolan he thinks, "He was... at that moment, really without beliefs, without hope - either for himself or the world. Almost without friends, certainly without allies. Alone."(p.24) When he is in Tecan he struggles against despair, "Despair was also a foolish indulgence... It was necessary to believe in oneself... The loneliness was hard."(p.225) His attitude to life is stoical, forever staving off the loss of hope.

Holliwell is first seen at the point just after he has left his home and family. We never see his wife and daughters and his only contact with his wife is a telephone call whilst still in New York.(p.25) This fact is acknowledged by him when he is in Tecan, "He was thinking about his wife and daughters... he had lost them." There had been something, it had not been possible for him to know and "little by little, without an outcry of any sort", he had lost them.(p.165) What it was not possible for him to know is not explained, but it is perhaps some ability he has lost in Vietnam, the ability to connect or commit himself totally. He is rootless and in a sense stateless, an American by definition but not treated as such by the Tecanian authorities. He is without loyalties.

Early in the novel we learn that he drinks heavily, drinking before breakfast.(p.15) As a heavy drinker he is a typical Stone character. Characters in his novels from Rheinhardt and Geraldine in A Hall of Mirrors onwards either drink heavily or take drugs. Marge in Dog Soldiers becomes addicted to heroin, Walker and Lu Anne destroy themselves through drugs and drink in Children of Light and even the Republican housewife, Anne Browne, in Outerbridge Reach has a drinking problem. Stone often charts the progress of his characters via their addictions and those addictions often represent an integral part of his fictional critique, whether that be of Hollywood in Children of Light or the pernicious effects of Vietnam in Dog Soldiers. In A Flag for Sunrise Holliwell's alienation and despair is
indicated by his drinking problem. As, in a similar fashion, Father Egan's drinking is part of his loss of faith in the efficacy of his mission.

Holliwell's alienation is illustrated in other ways. There is an interesting indication of his self-image early in the novel in a scene where he begins to cry whilst driving after hearing a sentimental "musical recitation" about a young football player. That he indulges in this sort of fake emotionalism is ironic given our first glimpses of the other Americans: Father Egan menaced by the vindictive Lieutenant Campos, Justin debating the practicalities of revolution and Pablo possessed by rage, murdering his dogs and threatening to kill his wife. Holliwell, in a sense, stands in for the reader, about to come into contact with this brutal and violent world.

He is thus not prepared, we realise, for what he is about to experience. As Robert Fredrickson has said, his "personal sense of absence debilitates him." (23) His progress southwards is one of an increasing fear, the death threats in Compostela, and a growing sense that he is alone; in turn Nolan, Ocampo, Nicolay and the Zeccas all disappear from his life. He becomes increasingly powerless, a point Stone made in an interview whilst talking about Dog Soldiers, "They perform a lot of actions, but they are still finally helpless ..." (24) That Holliwell is alone and fearful and without the certainties of belief and hope that sustain Father Egan and Justin, or for that matter the revolutionaries such as Father Godoy and Ortega and Aguirre is obvious. What this lack of belief will lead him to is a betrayal of Justin and by implication the Tecanian revolution and in the final scenes a betrayal of his own humanity and morality. When he hits Soyer for insulting him and his nation ("a nation of betrayers") there is a bitter truth in Soyer's gibe that it is too late to be a man. (p.368) When later he accuses Soyer of being responsible for Justin, the Cuban replies, "No... You are." (p.371) When Justin accuses him of betrayal he can only reply that he does not know if he has betrayed her. (p.375) We sense that Holliwell is a defeated man.

If Holliwell has a function in the enunciation of the politics of the text it is in his meeting

(23) ibid., p.326. (24) Schroeder p.159.
and conversation with Justin. It is a dialogue that could be described as that between hope and despair or between pragmatism and idealism. To understand this dialogue I will examine the function of Justin in the novel. What role does she play in the novel's action and its ideology?

The position she and Father Egan are in at the beginning of the novel immediately calls to mind the novels of Graham Greene. There is a strong temptation to label Egan a "whisky priest" in the tradition of Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, despite Stone's demurral that Greene is not a favourite of his. (25) A situation where a Catholic priest disillusioned with his religion is menaced by a representative of a right-wing dictatorship recalls Greene, but Greene, of course, would never have made a female Catholic's dilemma of faith and commitment the centrepiece of one of his novels.

Justin is rebellious and heretical. Sister Mary Joseph tells Justin that she does not believe it all ends in the "old grave"(p.29) which leads one to surmise that Justin has been denying life after death. Later she tells Mary Joseph that she has had it with the order (p.32) and by staying in French Harbour against the express orders of the Church she is staging a mutiny. As Egan says, "I'm reinforcing this mutiny with my frail presence."(p.36) Justin believes that Mary Joseph's theology is "pie in the sky."(p.29) For her religion has a political dimension. She lambastes the LSA as "a bunch of right-wing psalm-singing sons of bitches" who "suck ass with the Guardia" and "fink for the CIA."(p.31) At one point in the novel Holliwell sees her reading *To the Finland Station*, Edmund Wilson's famous book about the revolutionary left.

Her idea of God is connected with the victims of the world and not the winners:

So, she thought, let God be in those children on their carousel, in Godoy, in these people proud and starving. Because if not there, then where would he be and to what purpose and what would it matter?(p.124)

Her mutiny against the Church ends with the Mission being closed and the revelation in a

letter from their Order's head that the Mission property is to revert to its real owner, the Millimar company of Boston, parent company of International Fruit and Vegetable.

Ironically, the land is owned by a multinational corporation, another link between Tecanian politics and American economic interests. By deciding to help the rebels she goes against the grain of that religious, political and economic matrix that has characterised what some historians have labelled "missionary colonialism".

She accedes to Father Godoy's request for help whilst Holliwell in response to Nolan's request refuses thus indicating one of their principal differences; she is engaged and he is disengaged. Before Tecan she had been arrested for marching in Mississippi for civil rights (p.50) and we are aware that she is the sort of person, a person committed to righting wrongs, who would respond to the request that Godoy makes. She thinks, "All her life she had worked and soldiered with the best; wherever work and soldiering were required she could pay her way."(p.50)

Her idealism does have a personal dimension. She tells Godoy that she feels for him "in a particular way."(p.241) She had thought earlier, "Will you just touch me ... I will do whatever you ask. I will face the Guardia, I will die, I will try to kill for you, will you just touch me?"(p.240) There is a sexual element here but also a desire for there to be something human and personal between them. But for Godoy, we realise, it does not have a personal dimension. He, in a sense, rebuffs her, lying to her that he too feels something "in particular." She later feels that despite his deceit and unctuousness he is right and that her feelings were a child's feelings and she is not complying with the "rules of the game."(p.241)

A difference is established here between Justin and the rebels. As I discuss later in more detail they are concerned with ideology and power and in using people like Justin for their ends, whilst Justin acts out of personal feelings, because she genuinely does pity the poor and oppressed Tecanians. As she concludes, "a Revolution, no less, was a Revolution, but a broad was only a broad."(p.242) Her reaction is to feel that she is unworthy and should be scourged, "walk in the fiery furnace." She will become the handmaid of the revolution:

To struggle unceasingly in the name of history. ... I'm gonna be there on
that morning ... It'll be the worthy revolutionary twice-born me. The objective historical unceasingly struggling me. (p.242)

In this passage we see that Justin's mixture of faith, political commitment and pity for the oppressed is connected to a self-loathing and a desire for punishment, that is portrayed as hysterical and tied to what could be called a martyrdom complex. She will sacrifice herself for the revolution because Godoy has spurned her advances that could be seen as sexual. In the novel Justin represents positive ideals, she is the figure of good as compared to the evil of Campos and Pablo, she is idealism and hope as compared to Holliwell's despair. But in the text's psychologising of her impulses this symbolism is given a simplistic explanation and is undermined because underneath the symbolism we see the text's misogyny. Justin does not act as she does because of a rational belief in her radical Christian ideology but because she is a frustrated nun. Her heroic actions are thus devalued and her symbolic power in the novel lessened. It is as if Stone realised he was creating an idealised and unreal character and sought to present her in a more rounded and critical way. But the evil that happens to religious workers in similar situations happens to them because of historic circumstance not because they wished it so.

After the rebellion has seemingly failed she has her meeting with evil, personified by Campos, just as Egan confronts it in his attempt to minister to Weitling, the child murderer and Holliwell does on the boat with Pablo. "She saw now what he plainly was and why she had always been afraid of him. She saw that she would be spared nothing ..." (p.382) What he is it is implied is a demon, pure evil. Her last sensations are that she is being affected by something more than electricity, "You after all?" (p.383) In other words she experiences at the point of death the presence of God, her martyrdom is rewarded with confirmation that humankind is not alone, that her actions and fate have not occurred in the context of a godless universe. The text carefully refrains from directly stating that it is God who moves her, it is all in her feverish and tortured consciousness, perhaps an illusion? But it does further distinguish her from the other characters in the novel, she is touched in one way or
the other by God and I would disagree with Robert Solotaroff here who argues that it is "an unanswered question" whether Christ is where Justin finds him. (26) Whether the presence is real or metaphoric I think it is obvious that Stone intends us to conclude that Justin has experienced something akin to the visions of Christian martyrs at their deaths.

Justin's last words are significant, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord."(p.383). They have a profound effect on her torturer who as we have already seen needs his Catholic guilt absolved by the Church. His fate is that he will be consumed by guilt, "I knew that God had played a trick on me,"

(p.399) he says. But I do not agree with Richard Poirier who states that this is Justin's, "retaliation on the killer ... who will be haunted by her words with no hope of mercy." (27) Because Egan will not absolve him the ironic result of his murder is that he must imagine a world, "in which there is no trace of you whatsoever."(p.400) His failure to be absolved is the narrative's revenge on the character rather than Justin's.

Her final words and her experience of God work towards establishing a symbolic significance for her character. There can be no hint of personal motive in her final act. She is no longer, as she thought to become, the handmaid of the revolution but the handmaid of God. As Stone has said, "She despairs of God and turns to man and finds God." (28) The text makes it clear that real hope rests with her religious experience and significance and not with the hope and actions of the revolution. Earlier she had been connected with the Emily Dickinson poem that gives the novel its title, "'A Wife - at daybreak I shall be -' he heard her say. 'Sunrise - Hast thou a flag for me?'"(p.350) This is a prolepsis of her fate, she does become the wife or handmaid of the Lord and it indicates her significance as a symbol of hope, of the sunrise.(p.404) But she represents hope and otherworldly goodness as opposed to the evil of Campos and Pablo and the complicity and alienation of Halliwell. So in the end the novel silences its earlier attempt at a psychological explanation of Justin and allows her to become a symbolic element in its Manichean worldview. The reader troubled by the text's

(28) Ruas p.290.
portrayal of this semi-hysterical woman, ready to sleep with both Godoy and Holliwell and thinking of herself as a martyr for the revolution now must accept her as a symbol of good in an evil world.

To turn to the relationship between Justin and Holliwell is also troubling. Their sexual encounter strikes the reader as melodramatic and forced, something a thriller writer obeying the conventions of their craft might write, not the scene of a writer creating a novel of ideas in the thriller mode. But their encounter is the dramatic centre around which the framework of their dialogue of worldviews is presented. It is an encounter, both sexual and intellectual, which takes place in the context of a growing sense of danger and threat. Their intellectual dialogue is signalled in Holliwell's realisation that Justin, "was different; she was heart, she was there, in there every minute feeling it. This kind of thing was not for him ..." (p. 274) She believes that Tecan is not beyond justice and that, "'Even here we have history, Things change. People want their rights.'" Holliwell replies, "'Does history take care of people?'" (p. 274) Later, much closer to the point of the outbreak he tries to warn her to leave, "'They can have their goddam revolution without you. If they win, they'll expel you anyway.'" She will not pull out, she is here to help people. (p. 355) Holliwell tells her that, "'God doesn't work through history'" and "'There aren't any morals to this confusion we're living in. I mean you can make yourself believe any sort of fable about it. They're all bullshit.'" (p. 357)

Holliwell's confused liberalism and sense of alienation is stripped away in this passage to reveal his empty shell of nihilism and cynicism. At least Pablo and Campos believe in something even if it is simply an evil incarnation of their inner self. Holliwell in comparison is the veritable man without belief, a figure given greatest realisation in Dostoyevsky's fiction. Holliwell's nihilism is opposed to Justin's idealism, her reply is to tell him the story of seeing a house being pulled down a road by some men, "'It made me feel like people could do anything in the world if they put their mind and their strength to it.'" (p. 357) She does not have "'faith in despair'" like he does and tells him that he gets high on despair. (p. 358) Their meeting and dialogue dramatises the novel's themes of hope versus despair, idealism versus
pragmatism, commitment versus lack of commitment. William Pritchard has accused the dialogue of being "too classy", full of "literary sensibilities". (29) Yet Stone is less concerned with realism here than with presenting to the reader an almost Platonic dialogue between two seemingly opposing ideologies. That they are not so antithetical is one of Stone's beliefs, they are both "committed to the idea of history as positive" and Marxism is essentially a "combination of Darwinism and the Christian world view", he told Charles Ruas. (30) In Justin's merging of political and religious martyrdoms there is a narrative reinforcement of Stone's claims.

Pablo, the third character in the novel's triangular structure, is invested with a lot of the energy of the writing, in contrast with Justin who always seems a little unrealistic and Egan who seems a simplistic caricature of a troubled priest. Like the evil characters of Shakespeare and many other writers Pablo is rendered with a vividness and liveliness that is missing in other characters.

We first see him high on amphetamines, contemplating desertion from the Coast Guard, killing his dogs, menacing the witnesses to that act, scaring his young son and finally almost murdering his wife. He is beset by anxiety and paranoia, he has a constant feeling of, "time running out, of seconds being counted off toward an ending." (p.60) What could be described as a drug rush with Pablo is almost like his normal state of being. It is in these passages that the description of Stone's prose style as a sort of drug-induced surrealism seems most apt. (31) Squeezing hamburger meat and circling his wife's bed with hamburger patties are the actions of a crazy man. The squeezing of the meat is reminiscent of the scene in Moby Dick.

(30) Ruas p.293.
(31) See, for instance, Jeffrey Klein, "The Vietnam Connection" in The American Scholar 44 (Autumn 1975) who referred to Stone's fiction as "warped from within" and "slyly surreal." p.688.
where the whale's sperm is squeezed, but where that is an act of community Pablo's act is an act of the self against any thought of human community.

The text inhabits his mind swinging from paranoia to overconfidence. In one passage worrying about the intentions of the Callaghans he first thinks that they still held the power and he must defend himself. "Then he was all right again - he was better than all right. ... His was the life of adventure." Moments later, "His elation fled", he is "Showerless and negative."(pp.269-270)

He is beset by doubts and uncertainties about himself. Cecil asks him if he is black or white and he replies, "'I'm a white man ... Anybody can see that.'"(p.85) Just as the colour of his skin is thrown into question so is his sexuality. His encounter with the homosexuals, Bill and Tony, begins with him trying to shake them down and ends with him humiliated, picking up a bill from the floor. He is involved in hustling "queers" and there is a hint in this practice that he is part of that milieu, perhaps has a past as a homosexual prostitute.(pp.80-84) At one point, whilst travelling on a bus with Indians he falls "victim to his wonted suspicions." Later this paranoia is tinged with both racism and his uncertainty about his own origins, "In the hot cramped space he realised suddenly that he had some kinship of the blood with these dark stunted people whom he so despised ..."(p.157)

The scenes of Pablo on the Callaghans' boat replicate the style and mastery of suspense that marked the chase scenes in Dog Soldiers, reminding the reader of that sort of American fiction which can present scenes of action with an attention to details of character and a moral dimension missing from commercial fiction. In this Stone is in the tradition of Hemingway and Nelson Algren. These scenes are interspersed with the more leisurely and studied scenes of Holliwell and Justin's progress toward each other and as such are a narrative device that ensures the reader's attention. However, the significance of Pablo in the plot is at first a little uncertain. There is already one figure of evil in the novel in the person of Campos who represents the evil of tyranny and State brutality and hints of another madman, the mysterious child-killer. We already have American characters representing both
the committed and the uncommitted, the idealist and the nihilist. Why then do we need another American character who drifts toward the action in a haze of drugs, paranoia and violence? His reason for existence in the novel would seem to be purely to allow a more thriller-like counterpoint to the novel of ideas that is taking place in the other scenes.

Pablo does not sit well in the political novel *A Flag for Sunrise* ostensibly is. Holliwell, the Zeccas and Soyer more than adequately represent American complicity, perfidy and wilful blindness apropos United States involvement in Central America. Pablo, in fact, represents something quite different - a moral and religious vision of evil. He is a figure in a different sort of novel, not the political work the novel first seems to be. Stone's religious beliefs are complex and not at all orthodox but he does believe in a world other than the world we live in and which impinges on our world in various ways. (32)

In this novel he is attempting to present in a contemporary political setting a Manichean vision of good and evil. Pablo is one of the manifestations of that evil, a purely American version of it. For Steve Chapple he is one of the "damaged killers that sidle through the forests of America" (33) and for Robert Solotaroff he best embodies Stone's comment in an interview that he was attempting to capture the bitterness and anomie of those "frustrated by the elusiveness of American promise." (34) This seems to ally him with the lone killers of Don DeLillo's novels, but Pablo is an altogether different proposition in my opinion.

It is the man he hopes to rob, Naftali, who tells him that, "History will turn you around every time, sailor."(p.231) This is a reference to the circumstance or coincidence which will upset his plans but also in a wider sense to the forces of history in which men are caught up. But Naftali's philosophic reference point is not Marx but Nietzsche. He quotes Nietzsche about the thought of suicide helping "bring a man through many a long hard night."(p.232)

(34) Solotaroff p.111. The interview was in *The Paris Review*. See footnote (3).
In this scene with Naftali Pablo's significance begins to take on a mystical dimension.
Naftali's death has a distinctively nihilistic tone, a man despairing of life allowing himself to be murdered. (35) But it is the giving of the diamond to Pablo that introduces an element of mysticism into the scene. Naftali says:

"There is a creature in another dimension whose jewelry is dead worlds.
When this creature requires more of them it plants the seed of life on a tiny planet. After a while there are people and then nothing - a patina."(p.234)

This could be seen as a sort of creation myth involving a creation not for a good purpose. It is like a Gnostic myth of creation which, as Stone himself has remarked, presumes "that all material existence is flawed and basically evil" (36) and perhaps Naftali, on the point of death, sees Pablo for what he really is, the personification of that flawed material existence. Naftali also seems to foretell Pablo's end, a "dying man's curse", thinks Pablo.(p.235) He sees Pablo's skull, "'eight fathoms under the fan coral. Your skull is the counter ... it's the only ball in this game.'"(p.235) Pablo's demise does fulfill this "curse", sinking under the surface after Holliwell has killed him, but the imagery is interesting in another way. Naftali talks about, "'Brain coral ... In the brain coral you see the skull of the earth, the heaping of the dead.'"(p.235) And back on board ship Pablo closes his eyes and "luminescent ranges of coral began to form behind them."(p.237)

In the metaphoric structure of the text this "brain coral" is connected to the coral reefs where Holliwell scuba dives and what Holliwell experiences on that dive has been called "the epiphany which stands at the center of the novel." (37) This is where Holliwell confronts a fearful presence which could possibly be explained away as a shark. Stone has remarked in an interview that what is down there in the deep we don't really know. "It could be (probably

(35) One is reminded here of Kirov in Dostoyevsky's The Possessed who is willing to kill himself whenever the revolutionaries require.

(36) Ruas p.292.

(37) Fredrickson p.327.
is) that right over the reef where he is diving is where Egan dumped the body in the beginning." (38) The fearful presence is the corpse of the young girl and perhaps many other dumped corpses. It is thus the "heaping of the dead" that Naftali mentions and the brain coral is the coral of the reef. The text thus makes a political connection, the evil of the deep experienced by Holliwell is the evil of the regime, the reef is haunted by the crimes of the regime. This is reinforced later when Heath tells Holliwell, "I'm the shark on the bottom of the lagoon." (p.370) But the text is implying more than this. Stone went on to say in that interview, "More than this, though, just what's down there is awful. It's unknown. It's things themselves." (39)

Holliwell first experiences the pleasure of the natural world, "The icy, fragile beauty was ... beyond man's imagining ... It had been years since he had taken so much pleasure in the living world." (p.208) No other character is presented in such close contiguity with the natural world and in such a way as to highlight a pleasurable and life-sustaining connection with that world. This is like Eden before exile. He confronts the drop, "an abyss", and glimpses a moray with "venomous eyes". (p.208) Further down he sees fish racing away and the ocean begins to tremble. "Turning full circle, he saw the same shudder pass over all the living things around him - a terror had struck the sea, an invisible shadow, a silence within a silence." (p.208) He senses another presence, "The thing out there must be feeling him." (p.209) He rises to the surface in a panic thinking of himself as "prey". As Robert Fredrickson has argued it is at this point that Holliwell confronts what he has denied and, "Before such evil ... the decadent leftist falters." (40)

Sandy, the dive master talks about the drop as being a place where divers have suicided (p.211) and trying to explain what has happened to Holliwell he says, "Dat drop, people see tings, den dey don't know what dey seen. Dey be frightened after." (p.212) At the moment that his exhilaration had turned to fear he had been at the "borders of narcosis" (p.208) so the

(38) Schroeder p.163.  (39) ibid., p.163.
(40) Fredrickson p.327.

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experience may be purely physiological. But whatever the naturalistic reason for the experience within the context of the novel it represents an experience of fear and of what comes to be associated with evil. The brain coral that Hollliwell saw on his way down is later linked in the Naftali scene to the mystical, Manichean vision of the novel. Naftali tells Pablo, "There are reefs outside, Pablo. And reefs inside - within the brain of the diver."(p.235) If the reef represents a place of evil then this implies that this evil is within the brain of the diver. This links Hollliwell with Pablo via the evil that is within both men.

Before discussing their meeting which ends the novel I will turn to the other significant meeting that Pablo has, the one with Father Egan where this mystical dimension in the novel is further developed. Father Egan has been portrayed by Robert Solotaroff as undergoing a spiritual transformation which at its most obvious is marked by the two crucial scenes he has with Campos. In the first he is cowed into complicity with the Lieutenant's designs and in the next to last scene of the novel he defies Campos and refuses his confession. (41) This spiritual journey is bound up with his Gnosticism which Stone in an interview has also referred to, "Father Egan has found his way to this kind of Gnostic mysticism." (42)

This is true to a certain extent but I also believe that the text's representation of evil as the two demons, Pablo and Weitling, meet creates an effect on the reader that displaces the ideology of Father Egan's sermons, consigns them to the margins. Egan has been ministering to the hippies at a place near the stelae, a dead place, "It's a boneyard, that's why we're here."(p.288) Apart from it being a place where people were sacrificed for religious reasons (p.340) it is also connected to government barbarity as Hollliwell thinks seeing it for the first time.(p.354) And in Egan's mind it is the world itself. He begins to talk of the jewel in the lotus. "'You're the lotus. The jewel is in you.'" He goes on, "'Whirl is King and it's lonely and in shadow, but over there - well, that's life over there, that's where the living belongs ... Living concealed ... within this meat.'"(p.308)

This, of course, refers most obviously to the spiritual soul within the corporeal "meat". It

(41) Solotaroff pp.87-90. (42) Ruas p.292.
can be connected via the jewel image to the diamond that Pablo grasps and that Holliwell heedlessly throws away at the end of the novel. As such it could represent Holliwell's final divorce from the life force of Justin and in his murder and self-identification with Pablo, his embracing of death, or the evil in man. Egan's sermon can also be contrasted with Naftali's myth. Where that symbolised death and evil, in the deep, the jewel in the lotus is connected with the forces of life and immortality. "It is sown in corruption ... it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power!" (p. 308) In these words Egan is representing the same things that Justin stands for in the text, the forces of spiritual rebirth, the fact of life in death, the flag for sunrise.

But when Egan hosts the meeting of Pablo and Weitling it unleashes a level of hate and madness that has a supernatural quality. Weitling regards Pablo with a "face [that] had gradually contorted itself into a mask of hatred beyond loathing." He says of Pablo, "He is a devil." (p. 335) Then as Egan and Pablo's flesh "crawls" Weitling sings with a face distended by fear. It is like an invocation to evil spirits:

"He is more terrible than you can know. ... He will make blood run out until fields are covered and he will bowl the sun to dry it. He has not mercy for Weitling. Not for children. They are in depravity, he says ... He takes them up, their bones, their gut bags. He makes rain out of them ... He makes the rain of parts of children. The fish are fed with blood. ... We are shit upon the ground to him." (pp. 337-338)

I have included a large portion of his speeches because they give something of the apocalyptic intensity and lunacy of his ravings. The novel here has strayed far from its portrait of the political evils of imperialism. This is a transcendent evil that again is referring to things outside this world, as Naftali did in his myth and Egan does when he speaks of the "jewel in the lotus".

Most discussions of the novel that I have read do not cite these scenes or give them any centrality whatsoever because they do not sit well with a novel that has been read as a
political thriller or a political novel of ideas. In fact I would agree with Jack Beatty's comment that these scenes "weigh down the action at a late moment of its uncoiling." (43) What these passages do point to is an attempt on the part of the author to link the political evils delineated in the novel with this supernatural evil that Weitling and Pablo embody.

Egan's vision of evil is informed by a Gnosticism that sees the spiritual as existing alongside the corporeal:

"This colossal immanent force and it's a gleam in the muck. Layer upon layer of intention, consciousness. Measureless will. Unseen and encompassing everything. ... It's woven in ... Hiding in the universe.

Everywhere and yet never anywhere. Always present and never available."
(p.341)

Although he sees Weitling as the "victim of things as they are. Some chemical in the blood, a shortage of sugar in the brain cells and they get the process whole", (pp.342-343) he also looks beyond the narrowly biological explanation of Weitling's madness. Weitling is elected because he has seen a vision of things as they are, presumably the measureless will beneath the surface of the everyday. "Unlike you and me, they see it plain ... It burns out their minds and they have to call it revelation." It is what Satan also experiences, "Satan is the way things are."(p.343)

Egan goes on to tell the exhausted Pablo more of this theological myth in the story of the "errant Sophia, the whore of wisdom" and the "Demiurge" who is the creator of the material world.(p.346) This scene has created a complete theology that can be used to explain the events of the tale. The hints of this theology revealed earlier by Egan and in the scene of Pablo with Naftali are explicated in far greater detail. In this cosmology there is a world of "measureless will" beyond our ken. Justin glimpses it at the moment of her death, Egan is 

able to explain it but cannot connect with it. He wonders after Pablo is asleep whether he "could presume to address toward It a prayer", that is, to pray to the, "Incomprehensible" across "the awful gulf of the abyss". But in the end "he dared not". (pp.346-347) Although he has a knowledge of this spiritual world he does not seem to be able to have that sort of vision of it that Justin and Weitling do. But he has been "elected to awareness". (p.402)

Of the three characters who seem to represent different versions or degrees of evil only Weitling is a true visionary, one who sees things as they are and is thus equated with Satan. Campos, as the representative of political evil is not afforded any glimpse of things as they are. His theology is thoroughly quotidian, it is limited to a sort of pragmatic Catholicism, penance when it suits him in order to assuage guilt. Pablo, on the other hand, is given glimpses of things as they are. In his benzedrine driven visions of paranoia and terror and in the scene with Naftali and in the giving of the diamond which is associated with the idea of the jewel in the lotus. But in the end we are led to believe that his limited imagination ensures that he can never truly glimpse this unseen world. He dies without epiphany or vision, a tawdry impoverished death. Holliiwell's encounter in the deep is, perhaps, a glimpse of another world but he too is mired in the trivialities of this world. He cannot understand Justin or her spiritual motivations and is purely involved in his struggle to survive.

What emerges from this discussion is that Stone's vision of cosmic evil is as important thematically as the political dimensions of the novel. Robert Fredrickson argues that Stone becomes, "the novelist of the Demiurge, an explorer of evil's origins." He claims it is Stone's answer to the current "fashionable left-wing rejection of humanism." (44) What is apparent is that this cosmic evil, similar to what Marlowe confronts in Heart of Darkness establishes the notion that this evil is innate and thus contradicts the Marxist notion that evil is a product of

the action of social forces upon individuals. This contradiction becomes more apparent in the final scenes of the novel. In the boat with Pablo, Holliwell realises, "There was a terrible justice in it that he was not in the mood to savor." (p.386) This justice is the punishment of the danger and madness that Pablo represents and that he feels he deserves because of his betrayal of Justin and the fear he has felt, because he has so easily abandoned the rebellion. As Richard Poirier argued, Holliwell's failure to support Justin has the "inevitable consequence" of "isolating him" in a world where there is no buffer between him and the "realities" represented by Pablo. (45)

There is also a "justice" in that the two men are alike, they are Americans not needed or wanted in the serious struggle that is now going on in Tecan. They are not blessed (or cursed) with the visions or idealism that Justin, Egan and the revolutionaries have. In their wanderings they express an essential truth about a certain kind of American. They are rootless and displaced, Pablo's dispossession has reduced him to madness and evil, Holliwell's spiritual and intellectual dispossession has led to his loss of hope and to doubt. In a sense they are made for each other. On the boat, "Holliwell looked at him then ... It was like looking into some visceral nastiness, something foul. And somehow familiar." (p.386) And a little later, "It was as though he had been cornered after a lifelong chase by his personal devil." (p.387) He realises that Pablo represents an evil that has been following him all his life. Holliwell confronts what he believes is a devil, "I know you now ... Should have known you. Know you of old." (p.393) This is like a revelation, like Christ confronting Satan in the Bible.

Meanwhile, Pablo is locked into his own madness. Holliwell's behaviour is turning him around. (p.390) "'You got to understand something, Holliwell. There's a process and I'm in the middle of it. A lot of stuff I do is meant to be.'" (p.389) For Pablo, everything that has happened to him has "happened for a purpose." (p.391) He tells Holliwell about Naftali's assertion that the eye you look at the world with, "'that's the eye it sees you with.'" (p.391)

(45) Poirier p.38.
Halliwell thinks of an old science experiment and a chimpanzee's eye looking at him through a spy hole and declares that, "'I think I might be part of the process too ... I learned a few thinks down here.'"(p.391) This is a moment of identification with the other. He too has been done over by his experiences. In keeping with the mystical nature of the novel Pablo has understood his experiences in terms of that other world, which sees you as you believe you are seeing the world. Holliwell sees it in personal terms, in terms of his failure:

He had learned what empty places were in him. He had undertaken a little assay at the good fight and found that neither good nor fight was left to him. Instead of quitting while he was ahead, he had gone after life again and they had shown him life and made him eat it.(p.391)

The "they" that has made him eat life in one sense are Soyer and Heath and all the others who had led him to his present point and it is also history itself, the force of circumstance beyond his control. And it is also, perhaps, the "they" who see through your eye into you.

Holliwell decides he must kill Pablo after Pablo has told him that he had planned to kill him but now, "'We're buddies ... We're brothers.'"(p.393) He recognises Pablo's evil and equates it with the "force he had encountered over the reef", (p.393) going on to describe it in terms of "the thing itself" which is, "Stronger perhaps, when the illusions were stripped away ... Comforting to think of it as some aberration, a perversion of nature. But it was the real thing."(p.394) It is the thing itself which Egan encountered in the clearing and Naftali also before his death. As Pablo sinks Holliwell looks into his face:

He was at a loss now to find the shimmering evil he had seen in it before.

The stricken features were like a child's, distorted with pain and fear and yet still marked with that inexplicable flicker of expectation. It was a brother's face, a son's, one's own. ... Just another one of us.(p.397)

And he "gets the joke", "'We're the joke on one another. It's our nature.'"(p.397) This is Holliwell's final bitter realisation. That Pablo's face is his own, he is one of us, it is our nature which as the text has made clear is the sinful nature that all men have. Justin transcends that nature at the moment of her death, Egan struggles with it and Campos and

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Pablo embrace it. This is the ultimate moment of self-recognition, Holliwell recognising himself in Pablo and realising that in the action of murdering Pablo before Pablo murders him he has become Pablo. (46) Stone has commented that he intended the reader to feel "sorry for the guy", he is "a real little rat who is almost ennobled by his addled mysticism." (47) It is debatable that the reader does actually feel sympathy for Pablo but it is apparent that the reader's identification with Holliwell is challenged by his recognition of his affinity with Pablo and the fact of his own murderous and evil nature.

The idea of the evil of human nature has been referred to a little earlier in Holliwell's story of the buffalo and the scorpion. At this point Vietnam is once more invoked, it is a story told in Vietnam and probably Tecan as well. The scorpion stings the buffalo thus dooming them both to death because as the scorpion says, "- it's my nature."(p.396) It is in Holliwell's nature to kill Pablo and to betray Justin and the revolution. It is not force of circumstance or history that has led him to this fate.

The final ironic action of this scene is Holliwell’s unwitting throwing away of the diamond. In one sense it is reminiscent of that scene in Dog Soldiers where Converse leaves the heroin behind. At the end of the novel the thing of great value no longer has any value. But in this earlier novel this has something of the hint of a positive action. In this novel it is an accident, Holliwell thinks it is a rhinestone (p.397) and thus the action points to the absurdity of the situation. In this pitiless and lonely setting the things of the world do not have any value. It is also symbolic of the loss of the jewel in the lotus. If the jewel is that immortal portion of man Holliwell heedlessly throws it away as he did with Pablo when he killed him and his face became just like "one of us".

At the end of the novel Holliwell is rescued but he is not redeemed. He is "afraid of the sunrise",(p.402) and thinking of Justin, "She has her sunrise ... and I have mine."(p.404) But

(47) Schroeder p.158.
his sunrise is simply the bitterness of self-knowledge. He invokes the "Demiurge and the Abridgement of Hope" and the eye you see it with that sees you back.(p.404) Holliwell's rescue is not a new beginning or a rebirth, one thinks of it as more likely the first day of a life of bitter guilt. These final scenes echo Nostromo where Decoud is marooned on the boat in Sulaco Bay and kills himself because of an inability to be alone. Holliwell, alone after Pablo's death, is filled with that same sense of despair and nihilism that Conrad means us to believe Decoud experiences.

What I will now return to is a discussion of that third part of the political structure of the novel represented by the rebels. It is here that I believe the final pieces in the ideological puzzle of the novel will be found. The cause of the rebels is dramatised in Justin's engagement with their cause culminating in her political martyrdom. But this is only an indirect reflection of the revolution given that Justin is an outsider, an American. As actual Tecanian participants in the rebellion there is only Father Godoy, the briefly mentioned bookkeeper and the rebels who pick up the Callaghans' guns from the stranded Pablo. As one reviewer noted, Tecan seems "almost uninhabited" except for the Americans. (48) The only other Tecanians in the novel are the revolutionaries who plot the uprising and their part in the narrative is confined to a long chapter that begins Part Two of the novel.

What is interesting about this chapter is firstly that it seems out of place in a novel dealing primarily with Americans in a foreign country. It is intrusive, almost as if it was added or inserted from another text. It is, as I will argue, central to the ideology of the text but at odds with the thriller-like plot of the narrative. What I would argue is that it is an ideological compensation for what is missing in the text. In terms of narrative firstly what is missing is any account of the rebellion itself or its aftermath. In fact, as I will discuss later, the aftermath itself is problematised, or presented ambiguously; we are never too sure whether the rebellion was successful. This does not result in any narrative loss of logic or effect, the


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fates of all the characters make sense and add to the dramatic effect of the novel. In this sense an account of the rebellion is not needed and in fact would be superfluous. But if we see the text as a political representation of this triangular structure - American involvement, corrupt Tecanian State, opposition to the State - then the climax of this structure is left out. It is, as Pierre Macherey has theorised, an ideological silence that the narrative cannot present because to do so would betray its class position, its politics. (49) The rebellion is the point at which the Opposition comes into conflict with both the State and the American backer. If the novel were limiting itself to a description of a corrupt third world regime, as V.S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* does, then the absence of that third element would not become a problem. But because it is part of the novel's structure the reader must wonder why it is not given a satisfactory resolution.

What is also missing is much discussion of the reasons for the revolution. In this the novel shares a narrative strategy with *Nostromo* which also fails to tell us anything of the causes behind the revolutionary movements. (50) What we are aware of is the general condition of Tecan, its corrupt and brutal government and the poverty and indigence of its people, but the actual specific causes of the uprising are only briefly mentioned. Zecca does allude indirectly to causes when he discusses the problems of the counter-insurgency, the mechanics of American military aide for the beleaguered government. "There's a basic, quite justified piss-off all over the country. It's particularly strong up in the Sierra where the Atapas live..." (p.151) He goes on to mention the "usual spectrum" of "Fidelistas, Trots, Maoists" and the east coast where "nobody expects trouble." (p.151) From this we get some idea that the opposition is among students in the cities and Indians in the mountains, but not much else.

In the place of this political dissection of the Tecanian situation the text gives us the


(50) Wilding p.88.

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chapter describing a meeting of the central committee of the revolutionary party.
Significantly most critics have ignored this section of the novel. In the place of the
description of the revolution in practice, of those making the revolution we are given a
portrayal of the theory and organisation of the revolution, how the uprising is planned by
those who command and perhaps do not directly participate, the Lenins of the revolution.
Aguirre is the point of view through which the other characters are seen. He has been in
political exile in Prague, a location that immediately places him in the political context of the
Communist parties of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. He is no Fidelista or Trotskyist.

The real meaning of the meeting is indicated by Aguirre when he thinks, "There was only
one person in the room who could provide for his requirements ... and he had now to wait,
benign and courtly, until the real conversation could take place."(p.182) This is the
discussion with Ortega when the others have left. The meeting of Tecanian rebels is really a
democratic facade for the real political purpose of Aguirre's presence, to establish links
between the future leader and the Soviet Union. Aguirre muses on his comrades in an
ultimately disparaging way. For instance, A La Torre was "so thoroughly the emotional
product of social forces as to pose a dilemma", he is "almost too good to be true" and could
be discussed with his old Prague comrades as an example of these social forces.(p.183)

Jack Beatty claims that this scene "brings out the idealism and moral ruthlessness of the
revolutionaries" and compares them to the revolutionaries in Malraux's Man's Fate. (51) It
seems to me though that there are a number of false notes in the chapter that indicate that
Stone has little understanding or sympathy for the revolutionaries. For instance, Aguirre's
"frail heart" beating "in his throat" when Ortega tells him he will live to see the
revolution.(p.186) Whilst Ortega is given qualities of Lenin-like foresight and understanding,
Aguirre has taken a long time to realise the "young man" will lead but "the young man
seemed always to have known it."(p.185) When Ortega tells Aguirre that he has already
mourned for the spy, Morelos, (p.186) his ruthlessness would seem to have outstripped his

(51) Beatty p.38.
idealism at least as compared to Justin who is the moral centre of the novel.

I do not agree with Robert Solotaroff's assertion that Ortega is "the closest thing to a positive wish fulfillment we will ever find in a Robert Stone fiction." (52) Ortega tells Aguirre that after the revolution the new leader will not be Christ or Bolivar or Jefferson or "the people"; for reasons of pragmatism and not cynicism he will be the leader. But his justification and the ideals and aims of his participation in this history is again presented with bitter irony. They will turn the "poor creatures like you or me" into "the People".(p.193) In fact his very essence is cynical the text implies, as in his statement about the intentions of the future leadership, "To dispense life to some and death to others in the name of a form of humanity which for all we know may never exist?"(p.193) The form of humanity is the "socialist man" of Soviet propaganda and Ortega is cynical enough to question whether this exists at all. Instead of this the leadership will manufacture the "People". The text here is extremely hostile towards the characters and Ortega in particular, they are presented as cynical exploiters of the political situation. And the implication must be that their backers, presumably the Soviet Union, are similarly cynical and exploitative.

The politics of this section is made clearer when Ortega tells Aguirre that they have prepared a "most moderate non-Marxist manifesto" and that because "gringo asses got kicked forever in Vietnam" Congress would never authorise intervention in Tecan.(p.189) The similarity with the actual situation in Nicaragua is striking and I would guess that perhaps this passage was written late in the genesis of the novel after the Sandinistas had taken power. Congress did indeed forbid the Reagan Administration from aiding the Contras and the Sandinistas were seen, not least by some members of Congress, as progressive and

(52) Solotaroff p.84.

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preferable to the Somoza regime, (53) just as the new "moderate, non-Marxist" regime in Tecan will be presumably preferable to the current corrupt regime. If we press the analogy into the context of this chapter then what we have is a distinctly Reaganite version of history and the Nicaraguan situation. One of the accusations levelled at the Sandinista government was that the "non-Marxist manifesto" designed to win liberal support in the United States was actually a mask for the essential nature of the leadership which is directly backed by the Soviet Union for political purposes. In fact it is one of the reasons the Administration gave for its involvement in "Iran-Contra", to wage the war against the Soviet Union in Central America. With this in mind one wonders about the significance of the name of the character Ortega and its link to Daniel Ortega, the leader of the Sandinistas. A text that is ostensibly about American involvement in Central America here becomes an indictment of the involvement of America's Cold War enemy of 40 years standing. It is like a piece of late Cold War Reaganite propaganda.

The hostility of the text towards the revolutionaries is made explicit in a number of other ways. Ortega's decision to have Morelos shot has a "studied harshness" that reminds Aguirre of the "Old Man". (pp.192-193) The "Old Man" is quite obviously Stalin and the approach the men take has been learned in those years of the Stalinist regime of terror. Not only are these men not interested in the Tecanian people as people but their actions and attitudes resemble those of Stalinism and are tainted with the cruelty and murder of that regime. For Aguirre and Ortega the ends justify the means regardless of human life as also witnessed in the fates of Ocampo and Cole.

Similarly, Aguirre's admiration of the Carlist opponents he faced during the Spanish civil war for their unswerving devotion to their cause indicates a resemblance between the two

opponents. They are like us, he implies, "men who in their hearts believed much of what we believed."(p.191) The text tells us that the two ideologies of fascism and communism are the same. They plan the details of the uprising mentioning and discussing men like Godoy as pawns in their strategy. But where men like Godoy will fight and die, for the two leaders, as Aguirre articulates at the end of the chapter, "We shall have a drama."(p.194) The very nature of the revolutionary leadership is portrayed in the chapter in hostile terms which link it with the worst excesses of Stalinism and ultimately fascism and repeat many of the right-wing condemnations of communism. In making this argument I am departing radically from the chapter proposed by Solotaroff and, indeed, by Stone himself. Stone has said that he meant Ortega to "be admirable, but he's got historical baggage." (54) The historical baggage Ortega carries is, in fact, Stone's own historical baggage of the Cold War demonisation of the Soviet Union and the Cold War strategy par excellence of labelling all nationalist movements supported by the Soviet Union as Stalinist and ultimately not in the best interests of the people.

When the plan is put into action we become aware of the human consequences of their cynical strategies. Significantly the chief martyr is an American and Justin's death can be read in yet another way. As a symbolic fate, America murdered not only by Campos representing the corrupt regime, but also at the hands of Aguirre and Ortega, cynical representatives of America's Cold War enemy. The text has also given us other clues to the nature of the revolutionaries. Godoy's "betrayal" of Justin is one indication. So too is the scene where Pablo is involved in the picking up of arms by the rebels. We are already aware of the cynical nature of this deal. The Callaghans are in it for the money not for the politics and are willing to murder for profit. This is an arms deal as mercenary and cynical as any the United States has engaged in with the Tecanians. The fact that they deal with the corrupt and amoral Callaghans and that Pablo is the person who actually completes the deal lends the transaction a symbolic significance. Pablo is one of the novel's manifestations of evil as

(54) Solotaroff p.224.
discussed earlier and by participating in this exchange the rebels can be seen as doing deals with the devil.

Against this we get some acknowledgement of the courage and idealism inherent in participating in such an uprising against a much stronger enemy in the character of the bookkeeper turned rebel commander. He has been ennobled by his actions and Holliwell, the tired cynic, feels envious of him, "He had had a moment."(p.378) The unnamed bookkeeper addresses his prisoners, "He told them what his job had been until the day before and how never before had he known who he was, but in the Revolution he had found his freedom as they would find theirs."(pp.378-379) This sentiment almost appears like a throwback to an earlier age of heroic leftist writing, a statement not out of place in a novel by Malraux. But in the only other mention of this character he is dead, killed by the Guardia later that night.

For all the idealism of that small passage the overall feeling is of the waste of life and the deluded beliefs of the participants, dying for a cause that we have seen presented in that earlier chapter as part of a foreign nation's Cold War strategy. Holliwell's bitter comment that "a terrible beauty is born" sums this feeling up. Yeats' poem memorialises a failed uprising but with hope that its consequence will be change for Ireland. Holliwell's sneer summarises his and, I would argue, the text's view of the uselessness of this uprising and is in contrast to the original meaning of the poem.

The whole question of the success of the uprising is brought into question by the narrative. In the scene where Justin is murdered it appears to have failed and Holliwell's ironic reference to "Easter 1916" would tend to reinforce this view. But later we see Campos desperate to gain confession from Egan, "He had not made it to Miami like the President, so he was forcing Jacob's ladder."(p.398) So the President has been toppled but we learn no more. The rebellion may have been successful or there may be another reason for this - perhaps his replacement by another representative of the State, one more beneficial to the
interests of the Americans. (55) Whatever the case, the final outcome of the rebellion is not specifically dealt with by the narrative, it remains a mystery. This ambiguity is another silence of the text. It could be argued that the text is unwilling to choose which narrative possibility to follow because it is unsure where its sympathies lie. On one hand with Justin and the bookkeeper, the revolutionaries who give up their lives for their ideals and on the other hand with the interests of American security and imperialism, to defend Tecan (Nicaragua etc) from the dangers of Soviet expansionism. In this final ambiguity lies the ideological ambiguity of the novel, which the text can finally not resolve and must leave unanswered.

My lines of argument so far have followed two paths, the political and the religious or moral as expressed in the text's explication of the Gnostic doctrine of evil. Critics have largely chosen to follow a thematic approach suggested by Stone himself in an interview in Triquarterly where he says of the novel that it is "more about the problem of living in a kind of meaningful, moral way in a world which is apparently godless." (56) Critics have seized on the implication of despair in this statement - the apparently godless world - and seen the novel as being about despair, apostasy, apocalyptic menace and other related themes. John G. Parks encapsulates this approach when he says of the novel's protagonists, "Each of these pilgrims waits to see what the sunrise will bring, and for each it is nothing." (57) In relation to the metaphysical aspects of the novel, apart from Robert Solotaroff's discussion of Gnosticism in relation to Father Egan there is what appears to be an embarrassed silence. The reviewer for The Times Literary Supplement claims that the novel "degenerates into

(55) An historical parallel is the replacement of the Diem Government in South Vietnam in 1963 with one more in tune with American policy.


boozy metaphysics and embarrassing mysticism", (58) and Joseph Epstein argues that it attempts to "deepen its political subject matter to invoke a "vision of cosmic evil." (59)

What characterises most of these critiques of the novel, including Solotaroff's more detailed appraisal in his monograph, is their limiting of discussion to the individual, moral situation of the characters. In other words what happens to the characters in this extreme situation where their moral values and beliefs are tested, somewhat like Zola's characters in the fictional "experiment" of a coal miner's strike or a war. I would, in contrast, rather approach the novel as being about a number of different themes that do not finally cohere. I am influenced here by Fredric Jameson's argument about the dialogic structure of texts. He qualifies Bakhtin's famous theory by adding that the "normal form of the dialogical is essentially an antagonistic one, and that the dialogue of class struggle is one in which two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code." (60)

The opposing discourses here are the discourse of liberalism, represented by what is essentially good about the United States - democracy, freedom of speech and assembly, and the discourse of what might, in the language of the text, be termed ideology, by which I mean systems of thought that deny openness and freedom. Under this rubric we have the tyranny of the Tecanian State, the exports of the United States that are not liberal such as counter espionage and support of corrupt regimes, the authoritarianism of the Catholic Church and finally the dogmas of Marxist-Leninism as put into practice by the rebels. The shared master code here would be the polity, rhetoric and diplomacy of the 40 years of the Cold War, which in 1980-81 was about to begin its late and final intensification as Reagan came to power in the United States. What I mean by this is that the novel should be placed in the context of this Cold War code; it is an individual document (an ideologeme) within the collective discourse of that war of hot action and words.

The structure of the novel on a literal level involves an opposition between the Tecanian State and the rebels and between the United States government supporting the regime and those Americans who oppose the regime. Nolan, the Zeccas, Soyer and Heath represent American government interests whilst Justin and Father Egan in his spiritual battle with Campos and Holliwell in his doomed "little assay at the good fight" represent those Americans opposed either directly or indirectly to the interests of their government.

But on what, after Jameson, could be termed an anagogical level, a level at which the collective meaning of history is read into the text, (61) the novel's structure is transformed. What we now have is the Americans involved in the uprising on one hand and not only the Tecanian State and the Americans supporting the State but the rebels as well on the other hand. The only Tecanian who does not fit into this structure is the bookkeeper and all the nameless Tecanians who are the victims of this war which is, in effect, a synecdoche of the Cold War. For this to make sense we have to see the Cold War not as simply being between the two formal antagonists of the United States and the Soviet Union. Some of Stone's own statements in interviews will give us a clue here. In one he has stated that he is "suspicious and fearful of organised or institutionalised power, whether it is "alternative" or "establishment", (62) and in another that he would not want Chase Manhattan or the Soviet Union or some people on the left running the country but "if some people I know on the left were running the country it would be the greatest country in the history of the world." (63) And finally what is best in America - idealism, rectitude in government, the Constitution - does not export to other countries, "The point is that so much that is best in America is a state of mind that you can't export." (64) The dialectic then is between what is exported and what is "best" about America, between the economic impulse of imperialism and the Cold War foreign policy and the ideals that cannot be exported but in the name of which the Cold

(61) ibid., p.31. (62) Ruas p.282.
(63) Chapple p.41. (64) Woods p.56.

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War was fought - freedom and democracy. Against these ideals are the ideologues and those corrupted by power - the rebel leaders with their dogmatic and pragmatic Marxism, the Zeccas with their support of American polity, Soyer and his ideological anti-communism, Campos and his Catholicism by form and his representation of the brutality of the regime. For those ideals which do not "export" are Justin and Father Egan.

This is the essential political architecture of the novel and it is the ideology of American liberalism though distorted in the novel and never presented to the reader as such an ideology. It is muddied, as I have argued, by the mystical impulse in the novel articulated in its portrayal of evil and especially the scenes between Pablo and Naftali and between Egan, Pablo and Weitling. In a sense Pablo is the maverick character who disrupts the political logic of the text. He is an American who is neither a representative of power nor an opponent of it, he exists as a manifestation of a rootless evil, detached from the bounds of history. What is happening in the text in the crudest sense is that religion, or rather Stone's late twentieth century version of religion, is imposed on this political scenario and historical allegory (Tecan equals any Central American country especially Nicaragua).

Pierre Macherey describes fiction in this way, "The book ... circles around the absence of that which it cannot say, haunted by the absence of certain repressed words which make their return." (65) What is absent in A Flag for Sunrise is in essence the class struggle. This may seem surprising in a novel which has read as being only about such a class struggle, a social revolution no less; but the mystical impulse of the novel resolves itself in two ways to cause this absence. Firstly and most importantly in the agenda of the novel it is involved in the character of Pablo, who representing a sort of evil, not political like Campos or visionary like Weitling, represents the evil in ordinary man. When Halliwell murders Pablo, albeit in self defence, he becomes Pablo, he is as guilty as Pablo. We have been prepared for this by Halliwell's earlier betrayal of Justin and the revolution, he is complicit. What flows from this

(65) Macherey p.80.
final identification of these two characters is the intimation that we are all like Pablo, all corrupted by evil or capable of it. Secondly we are presented with the alternative action, the martyrdom of Justin which, as I have argued, is not really about self-sacrifice for a political cause but an act that causes the seeker to glimpse a vision of God, to achieve salvation or confirmation of faith. Both of these crucial scenes effectively disguise the political and reimpose a world of personal and mystical ethos.

It can be argued that Stone's earlier novel, Dog Soldiers, like the Vietnam novels of many other American writers, is haunted by an absence, an aporia in the form of its silencing of the enemy. That is, we learn much about the effect of the war on its American participants and very little about the Vietnamese participants who after all were fighting a civil war that lasted 30 years. The aporia in A Flag for Sunrise is similarly the Tecanians who suffer, struggle and die in their country, and if we see Tecan as a fictional version of Vietnam, that Vietnam aporia is replicated in this later novel.

The other silence is finally not so much politics as history. That concept is invoked a number of times in the novel, primarily in the scenes between Ortega and Aguirre and in the scene where Naftali tells Pablo, "History will turn you round every time sailor."(p.231) But it is also invoked at the end of the novel, almost as if it is intended to comment upon or conclude what has gone before. Holliwell's last thought after his rescue is, "A man has nothing to fear ... who understands history."(p.404) Stone has commented that this is ironic, a "kind of joke" and that it indicates that a man with the "proper historical perspective" will not be surprised by anything that happens. According to Stone, this is something Marx or Engels might have said. (66) In fact Richard Poirier calls it an "emphatically historical novel." (67) However, I would argue that this attempt to reintroduce history, albeit in an indirect and ironical manner, is an attempt to give a political closure to a novel that has strayed far from political considerations. In Macherey's formulation it is an imaginary

resolution of a real contradiction. (68) This is what the final scenes between Pablo and Holliwell have been about, substituting a mystical revelation for the fact of revolution and political change, or the class struggle. The text then attempts to resolve this contradiction between mysticism and class struggle in its return to history, its attempt to invoke a historical reading.

As in many texts that which must be suppressed sometimes emerges, as it were, against the ideological grain of the discourse. The scene with the bookkeeper is such a "return of the repressed". Essentially this is articulated in that character's isolated, vain and soon to be doomed belief that he "had found his freedom" in struggle. In a novel where the commitment of the bookkeeper and the other Tecanian revolutionaries and the commitment of Justin is finally eclipsed by the political non-commitment of Holliwell and the political quietism of the ideology of the text, such a sentiment appears as not being part of the story. It is from another text, one written by Malraux or Jack London.

I stated at the beginning of this discussion of A Flag for Sunrise that although not postmodernist in style as DeLillo's novels obviously are, the novel can be claimed to be postmodern in its sensibility. That is, it exhibits that postmodern approach to commitment and to history that I described in the opening chapter. It is a text, centrally in its portrayal of Holliwell, that is tinged with the postmodern fatalism that intimates that immutable late capitalism cannot be altered, improved or overturned. In the text's privileging of non-commitment over commitment, Holliwell's nihilism over the idealism and activism best illustrated by the bookkeeper, and in its retreat into mysticism, it replicates a strategy that is enacted to varying degrees by many other artefacts of postmodernism.

Robert Stone's first three novels all end in a violent and cataclysmic event: in turn, a race riot, a fire-fight and a revolution. In *Children of Light* and *Outerbridge Reach* there are no apocalyptic climaxes. The suicide of the leading characters, Lu Anne and Owen Browne, conclude the narratives of these more personal and seemingly less political novels. Yet *Outerbridge Reach* can still be considered a novel of extremes. After all, outside of participation in war or revolution, the decision to enter a solo, around the world yacht race would seem the ultimate test of personal courage and self-sufficiency. (69)

*Outerbridge Reach* was written and set in a time when political consensus, strident patriotism and complacent self-satisfaction were the norm; the Reagan era and its brief aftermath in the belligerent presidency of George Bush. Whilst certain British novelists such as Pat Barker and James Kelman responded to the "Conservative revolution" in that country with novels about unemployment and the urban poor American writers on the whole preferred to ignore the political or concentrate, often in sensational fashion, on the violence and drug culture of the ghettos and its impact on Middle America. Russell Banks's novel about a homeless youth, *Rule of the Bone*, was one of the few exceptions.

Robert Stone's novel about the Reagan era satirises Reaganism whilst at the same time positing an heroic alternative in the story and tragedy of Owen Browne's personal quest to live authentically and courageously in a corrupt world. Thus the novel whilst being ostensibly about a non-political subject seeks to impart a decidedly political cast to its

(69) Stone based some of the events of the novel on the actual events of a solo round the world yacht race in 1969 where Donald Crowhurst gave false readings of his position to give the impression that he was winning the race. He seems to have become insane and committed suicide as he approached England. See Solotaroff pp.140-142 for the controversy surrounding Stone's use of this incident.
depiction of the America Owen seeks to transcend. Stone has stated that, "Over the long process of defining America we seemed to have reached a point at which our nation signifies the virtual apotheosis of the interested self." (70) Stone's moral condemnation of his country in the age of Reaganism has been noted by reviewers. John Leonard, for instance, writes that Stone finds "America confounded" wherever he goes, and George Packer accuses him of a censorious and humourless vision of America in the novel. (71) In fact Stone's oeuvre could be described, in Sacvan Bercovitch's terms, as a jeremiad, a denunciation of the nation in the name of the promise of America. (72)

Outerbridge Reach is divided almost equally into two parts. It is in the first part that Stone criticises American self-interest and greed whilst in the second part Owen takes part in the race in an effort to escape or overcome the shabby moral world he feels trapped within. This gesture is, of course, reminiscent of similar acts of disengagement from corrupt American society that have characterised the heroes of American fiction from Natty Bumpo to Ishmael to Huckleberry Finn. Owen is fleeing into the wilderness like his literary ancestors. What he is actually fleeing from is delineated in part one. In fact the ideology of the novel cannot be understood without coming to terms with just what is going on in the Brownes' relationship and their interaction with the society around them. In a sense the first part poses the problem or question, for which Owen's voyage is the attempt at an answer or solution.

The problem is posed by the novel on a number of levels. In its portrayal of late twentieth century America there is what could be termed an entropic level of operation. Things do not work as they used once to work. (73) This is a primary message of the novel's tone of regret

and it is indicated in the way non-human phenomena no longer seem to work. In this the novel follows the more surreal fictions of American writers like Pynchon in *The Crying of Lot 49* and William Gaddis in *A Frolic of His Own*.

The novel begins with a remark about the weather, "That winter was the warmest in a hundred years. There were uneasy jokes about the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect."

(74) There is an echo here of the opening of Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* with its evocation of the coming of fall. The opening sentence of Stone's novel evokes a modern day metaphor for entropy, the destruction of the environment and its impact on the weather because of the actions of humans. Nothing could be at once more universal and far-reaching, affecting as it does the whole planet, whilst at the same time being ordinary, a topic of idle conversation. A sense that is captured by the paradoxical "uneasy jokes" that both reassure and undermine confidence. The text moves then from the universal to the particular by describing Owen's problems with the boat he is trying out. The pump does not work adequately, "A hundred grand's worth of Flash Gordon curves and fancy sheer - hostage to a plastic tube."(p.4) It is some kind of "'South Korean fuckup'", he is told, (p.5) and he tells his friend Buzz Ward later that, "'Nothing works anymore.'"(p.6) He takes the boat for a test sail and is not able to use its "electronic gear to good advantage", it has been "imperfectly calibrated."(p.163) In the first storm of the actual voyage the boat begins to break down:

The sound from below was nasty indeed. ... There was something human in its nastiness, a squeal, a squawk ... Its whine suggested loud vulgar language and cheap macho menace. Bad workmanship and sharp practice. Phoniness and cunning. Fucking plastic, he thought, enraged. It sounded like a liar burning in hell. Plastic unmaking itself.(pp.299-300)

Entropy is here expressed in terms of the in-built tendency of the man-made to disintegrate, the plastic is the epitome of the artificial, a man-made substance that replaces natural


320.
materials. Owen rages not only against the bad use of plastic, the workmanship, but also its very use rather than a material more authentic to the craft of boat-building. The boat breaks down because of how it was constructed, the result of "sharp practice" and human greed. Entropy is shown as the world's intrusion into the natural world. The market forces, as it were, that turn the commodity from something with a use value into something with an exchange value. Later Fay will tell Strickland much the same thing, "Sometimes they cut corners", he says, "A cheap boat will knock you around a lot." (p.316)

There is also in these opening scenes the entropy of another man-made object, one that cannot be repaired by the replacement of one of its components. Anne tells him over the radio, "The market fell seventy points yesterday." (p.5) The Brownes face money problems which are precipitated by this market crash which recalls the crash of September 1987, "Black Monday". The market is mentioned subsequently in relation to these money problems and Owen jokes to his wife that she should have gone to church, "To pray for the market." (p.26) The issue is resolved for them after some time has passed:

They had succeeded in meeting the margin calls, cashing in some retirement accounts and some of their best investments. They had saved the house on Steadman's Island by refinancing it. A considerable debt remained to them. (p.57)

This passage serves to give us some idea of their wealth, they are comfortable but have had to make sacrifices to avoid financial disaster. As John Leonard puts it, they are not aristocrats, they do not own the nation, they are "indentured to it." (75) That they live beyond their means parallels the nation living beyond its means in the decade when the Reagan Administration blew out the national debt.

Owen's response to Anne's "seventy points" statement is, "Leaks everywhere", (p.5) a reference to the problem with the boat but also a sly textual joke about the law of entropy itself. The second law of thermodynamics which is the scientific law of entropy posits a loss

(75) Leonard p.490.
of heat in any physical system and the leak in the boat, like the leak in the sky and in the market is a leakage of something vital to the future survival of the particular system, or machine. It is perhaps also an oblique reference to the marriage itself. One variation of the phenomenon of entropy is the entropy of communication, the leakage of communication in any relationship between two people. (76) In their relationship there is a sense of an entropic loss of communication.

Browne's spiritual malaise is associated with what he believes is a loss of vitality and community in his own country. At one point he watches a TV documentary on Cuba which like other such documentaries offends him with its leftist bias. "But the vision of its imagined country, a homeland that could function as both community and cause was one that remained with him. Browne felt his own country had failed him in that regard."(p.44) He believes something is lost and that the "war would never be fought because the enemy had proved false."(p.45) This reference to the end of the Cold War and the enemy turning out not to be Communism has turned the world on its head. The importance of the war he fought in Vietnam, which symbolised his youth and idealism, has been undermined because the enemy has proven to be not as strong and dangerous as once believed. Vietnam and the communist enemy represented a cause he could believe in and live for, now, "he was tired of living for himself ..."(p.45)

Where some Americans would see a new economic enemy in Japan or China, Stone has his character deciding that the enemy that must be conquered is himself and the natural world, the sea. Thus rewriting for contemporary readers the impulse that motivated Melville and Conrad's sailors and Hemingway's adventurers. Owen imagines freedom, "On the other side

of darkness", it would be "a good fight or the right war - something that eased the burden of self ..." (p.45) Owen's decision to enter the contest has something of the continuation of the war against Communism, the idea of service to one's country in defence of its ideals. It is translated in these non-political times at the "end of history" (77) into a personal odyssey, a struggle against oneself. Significantly his impulse arises out of an entropic sense that his country has failed him and his enemy has failed him. He is in this the converse of Strickland and other disillusioned sixties radicals whose visions of social change have been destroyed in the 1980s with the triumph of Reaganism. Owen similarly has had his vision of the sixties shattered by the materialism and lack of commitment of the 1980s. For both sides of the political coin it is a sense of the entropic loss of idealism that characterised their purpose in life.

Owen's sense of the world as being worse off, of his country failing him, is related to an idea that he must replace what is lost with an act that recaptures those lost values. Owen is in what could be called a mid-life crisis. Jogging in the morning he, "could not seem to outrun the thing that had settled over him" and he regrets having left the Navy (p.23) Anne seeing him asleep, having turned from the advertising copy he had been writing to Melville's White Jacket, thinks he has wasted his life with her (p.62) This is in itself an ironic juxtaposition which sums up Owen's dissatisfaction. His reality is a profession that is a debased form of writing. Compared to the flawed writing careers of Converse and Walker and Rheinhardt's aborted musical career, Owen's profession does not even aspire to artistic merit. He has turned to Melville's novel of adventure and bravery, where the hero acts to change his lot and strives against the powers both of the natural world and the authoritarian world of cruel Naval discipline. It is what Owen wants to be and lying asleep in his privileged home he most pointedly is not.

The irony is sharpened further by Anne's thought that he has always been the better writer than she, whilst she has been the better sailor. He is better at the thing he does not want to be

and his wife is better at the thing he wants to do. When he tells Anne of his intentions he
defends his decision by talking of what he has missed, "... I've never done the things I ought
to have done years ago. I took a wrong turn ... This ... is a chance for me to get a hold of
things ... To make it up."(p.99) The voyage is a compensation for the things in life he has
missed. Owen's feelings here mirror the feelings of other Stone characters such as
Rheinhardt, Converse and Lu Anne. Stone has said in writing of the so-called "American
dream" that he is trying to "define that process in American life that puts people in a state of
anomie, of frustration. The national promise is so great that a tremendous bitterness is
evoked by its elusiveness." (78)

Owen's decision is specifically linked with his nostalgia about Vietnam, a regret both Anne
and he feel because Vietnam represents the time when their marriage worked. Anne knows
this, "You're thinking about the war"(p.99) she tells him after he has announced his plan to
compete.

His experience in Vietnam is central to his concept of his own personal worth and
standing. Early in the novel he has a reunion with two of his friends from the Naval
Academy he had attended. The three had been persecuted during their time at the Academy,
but nevertheless they pour scorn on the demonstrators of the time (p.8) and Owen considers
that they "had been the last good children of their time."(p.9) The last patriots perhaps or the
last of the obedient fools who had believed their government, unlike the unruly peace
demonstrating children. And now they are "all redundant."(p.10)

Throughout the novel he is haunted by memories of Vietnam. He compares his fear of what
will happen to him on his solo voyage with the fear he felt before combat. He remembers
that neither fear of death nor pain nor the cries of the enemy had managed to paralyse his
hand. What had caused him fear was variety with its implications of uncertainty and anarchy,
"he had always regretted the lost chances, played safe and been sorry." He wants to test
himself and, "Now the action had come for him and he was afraid."(p.167)

(78) Woods p.49.
Owen continually sees his life in terms of Vietnam, in the re-experiencing of its events and emotions in such a way as to attempt to give his present life some sort of meaning and order. Stone has been called the "meteorologist" of the Vietnam experience, "an expert at detecting its long-term effects"; (79) whilst Outerbridge Reach has been described as a novel about a "stage in the life of our times" that has only things sullen and despairing to say about itself. (80) But this novel treats the Vietnam experience in a different way than it is treated in both Dog Soldiers and A Flag for Sunrise. In those novels Vietnam is primarily a metaphor for the malaise of American policy, it represents the corruption and perfidy of late imperialist intervention in the world. In Outerbridge Reach Vietnam is a defining experience of manhood for Owen and for Owen and Anne it is a time when they were most happy, a golden time in their marriage. It is not part of the malaise for them but the mythical panacea. For Strickland, in contrast, it is both a triumphant memory of success and the source of bitterness and nightmare and can be seen as the reason for his cynicism and moral turpitude. But for Owen it lives on as a dream of youth and his adoption of Melville's motto, "Be true to the dreams of your youth", indicates that his voyage is at least partly his attempt to recreate his Vietnam experience. Put simply, in the earlier novels Vietnam is a nightmare and in this novel it is a nostalgic dream.

Owen is presented to us as the product of a certain set of Vietnam experiences very different from those of Converse, Holliwell and Strickland. One critic has seen Strickland and Owen as personifying the "division in the psyche of the Vietnam generation", between the conflicting honour of the patriot and the honour of the resister. (81) Whilst I believe this is a simplistic interpretation, one contradicted by Strickland's ambiguous status in the novel, it is true that Owen does represent a certain political outlook that could be described as


(81) Menand p.94.
originating in a certain attitude to issues such as Vietnam. Certainly his experiences have shaped his political outlook and reflect those ideas of discipline and success instilled in him by the Navy.

His worldview in some ways resembles those right-wing social views associated with the politics of Reaganism. He argues with Anne over Maggie's put-down of musical performers on television as "losers". Anne dislikes the word but Owen significantly replies that it is "'in the air ... these days.'" He thinks kids should have "'a horror of losing'" and that they should not be taught that "'somehow winning is morally suspect.'"(p.131) The celebration of winners and winning and the contempt for and marginalising of the losers of society was, of course, a rhetoric of the social policy and ideology of the apologists of Reaganism. It is a staple of that sort of conservative ideology. Owen lectures Strickland on what is wrong with America:

"I think most of us spend our lives without ever having to find out what we're made of. Our lives are soft in this country. In the present day, a man can live his whole life and never test his true resources."(p.139)

We feel that when he mentions these soft lives he may well be referring to these same people who once demonstrated against the government and now protest other issues. The alleged aftermath of the sixties, the dangerous liberalism and political correctness and so on, which is the stuff of the demonisation of the left prevalent in the eighties, is apparent in Owen's attitudes.

It is mixed up with his male chauvinism, he is "scandalised by her insolence" when she contradicts his opinions (p.131) and when they make love he feels that it "went well" and that, "the lesser forces gave way before the strong."(p.132) The text links his beliefs about success and failure in society with his sexual politics, he thinks of sex as winning and implicit in their marriage is his belief in the traditional role of females in marriage. Anne acknowledges this when she asks him after sex, "'Did you win that one?'"(p.132) Also, significantly, his vision of that victory is described as a "sun-dappled ocean", an azure sky and "pennants flying."(p.132) In his worldview thoughts of success and winning are connected with the sea.
Owen's political beliefs come into sharpest focus in his argument with the cabinetmaker, George Dolvin, whose opposition to Vietnam has led him to withhold taxes and in consequence lose his boat. Owen blunders into an argument with him and is provoked into attempting to explain what went on in Vietnam, the "Rules of Engagement" that were sometimes violated in the "heat of battle or by criminal behaviour."(p.126) Dolvin tells him he sounds like Nixon or Reagan and quits, returning his money and dismantling his work which Owen had earlier realised was of a high quality. Ironically the excellent craftsman has turned out to be one of those people who have contributed, in Owen's view, to the softening of American life. But we feel sympathy for Owen over this episode, he had wanted to "heal the quarrel."(p.127) Dolvin, we learn from Crawford, is something of a hothead. He is like a modern day John Brown, thought to be a mad bomber, jailed over opposition to abortion and possibly a Seventh Day Adventist.(p.128) The clash between right and left has not turned out as one would expect if this were a novel intent on caricaturing Owen as a Reaganite. Dolvin is the character caricatured as a crazy extremist. The text betrays here a certain ambiguity in its attack on Reaganism as represented by the Brownes. It is an ambiguity, in the treatment of Owen in particular, that I will argue serves to subvert its professedly oppositional stance.

Owen has a stiffness and reserve that causes people to distrust him, but his manner is also a defence against the world. He is treated sympathetically, he is never an insider like the Club sailors or the inner Hylan circle. When he visits the psychiatrist he tries to avoid saying anything that might reveal himself, but he does say that sailing alone is perfect and other people make sailing less perfect.(p.147) Owen here admits that he draws strength from his aloneness. He is essentially an outsider and has been throughout his life. He and his two cadet friends had been outsiders, "wrongos and secret mockers, subversives, readers of Thomas Wolfe and Hemingway."(p.11) Yet their bohemianism had not prevented them from being spat on by another sort of bohemian as symbols of an unjust war. Remembering these things Owen thinks, "Yet I also am an outsider."(p.11) Even his wife thinks that he has never really inhabited the house they live in, he had never made it his own and appears to be continually apologising for being in the same room.(p.56)
Owen is a romantic and an idealist. He is not in it for the money (p.143) and he tells Strickland he wants to teach children to sail, that would be one of the legacies of his achievement.(p.141) His romanticism is mixed up with his attitude towards Hemingway. Thinking about his earlier self he wonders whether he would at that stage in his life have imagined a future as a "suitably disillusioned and world-weary" man.(p.12) "The image would have been a romantic one, but romantic in the postwar modernist style. Its heroic quality would have been salted in stoicism and ennobled by alienation."(p.12) This imagined future would have been the result of being "an uncritical reader of Hemingway ..."(p.12)

This is a complexly presented example of Owen's character, the older man imagining a younger self uncritically in the thrall of the Hemingwayesque myth of stoicism, alienation and disillusion. Ironically this well may be what the older Owen is in the grip of; he too is trapped by his self image and the image he has of his place in the world. Given the overtones of a Hemingway adventure in part two of the novel it is possible to see the text as also adopting a somewhat uncritical stance towards the Hemingway myth of stoic individual battling a cruel and indifferent world.

When Owen and Buzz escape Buzz's wife and bond together this experience is, in effect, a pastiche of similar situations in Hemingway, in particular, the late Hemingway of The Old Man and the Sea. They fish together and that night discuss Owen's trip and later Buzz croons to the moon and is answered by wolves. That little vignette with its excessive dwelling on the motives of Owen and issues like courage and virtue acts as a signpost for the larger trip where those ideas will be thrown into conflict with the reality of the natural world. There is also another oblique reference earlier when Owen has been attracted to the communitarian nature of Cuban life in opposition to his political prejudices about the country. This is a nation that is of course inextricably linked with the Hemingway myth. The connection is strengthened when he tells Anne he wants to go to Cuba if the market fails, he has been dealing with customers all day and is in a disorderly state. He tells her his customers could do with "a little grace under pressure."(p.44) This Hemingway credo, used ironically here, is
another sign alerting the reader to Owen's involvement in the Hemingway mythos. Grace under pressure we are shown is just what Owen wants to achieve on the voyage.

One of the sources of Owen's disenchantment with his life is found in his marriage. What essentially characterises their relationship is the comparison of what it once meant to what it now means. This is dramatised in a short scene where they take the ferry to Steadman's Island, thus repeating a trip they had took when they had been courting. It had been "a different world" (p. 95) in the sixties, one representing hope and youth whilst the eighties represent discontent and a feeling of failure. They now sit side by side on the ferry and Anne is aware that, "they seemed to be avoiding each other's eyes." He has a "silent, indifferent manner" which causes her to suspect that he is embarrassed by "all these reminders of their old love." The shared memories of love do not bring them together and Anne feels, "... the remnants of the breathless romance strewn around her, demystified and ironical with time, exposed to the grey rain." (p. 95) Memories of their old romance are ironic reminders of what their marriage has become and the melancholy of these feelings are expressed in the "gray rain", the weather a comment on the emotional state. At home she feels that, "something was missing" and that he seemed unaware of it, they were drifting apart physically. (p. 97) Again there is a conscious allusion to Hemingway, specifically the ending of A Farewell to Arms and Frederic Henry walking back to the hotel in the rain after Katherine's death.

The apartness Anne feels creates a "vertiginous confusion", a fear of falling and a state where she "was paralyzed with nameless dread." (p. 96) These are like classic symptoms of existential angst. Although these are Anne's feelings one could assume that Owen feels the same confusion and dread. Quite simply the world in the eighties is a strange and fearful place for both Anne and Owen.

Anne also loathes those Vietnam demonstrators, they are "epicene young creeps". (p. 220) She also contrasts the sixties with the present, remembering them in Hawaii during his Naval service, "the deliciousness of youth and the feeling of fuck the world, the proud acceptance of honor, duty and risk." They had "proved life against their pulses" (p. 101) and she believes
that now he is "capable of bringing great strength to bear ... She has seen hope in his face that night and it was beautiful. He was not the only one who needed to be a believer." (p.102)

She has the same beliefs as her husband and is imbued with a similar romanticism. She tells her father that she has encouraged him every step of the way, "... he loves boats. He loves the sea. Those are clean, simple things. I love him because he loves those things." (p.207) This is another deliberate echo of Hemingway, his belief in the simple clean things of life. Anne's assertion is a defence of her husband and a restating of his, and Hemingway's, romantic credo. Significantly it is also linked to their patriotism, he has had a few things to say about the state of the country, she tells her father. (p.207) For her it has all to do with winning. And her thoughts end the first part of the novel, "Winning was all, she thought. It was the only revenge on life. Other people wanted reassurance in their own misery and mediocrity. She required victory." (p.208)

What Stone is presenting in this first part is a portrait of a man dissatisfied with the direction America has taken in the past twenty years. Yet, ironically, Owen is a participant in that society, he is no political outsider or subversive and his marriage and his house on Steadman's Island show us that he has made a down payment on the American dream. Both Owen and Anne are treated ironically as being almost quintessential examples of the political beliefs of 1980s Republicanism. Yet, as I have been arguing, Owen is sympathetically portrayed. John Leonard has remarked on this ambiguity in Owen's portrayal:

It's easiest to understand Owen as symptomatic of a corrupt American ruling class. After all, in this race, he cheats ... But such a comprehension fails to explain why we like him more, even so, than Strickland ... (82)

He is on one level meant to be the object of our scorn, for his failings as a husband, a sailor and even an officer, as Crawford makes clear when he calls him the sort of officer who is gung-ho, "The kind you don't want over you." (p.176) At the same time he is meant to be the object of our sympathy and identification. This is most clearly brought out in the second part

(82) Leonard p.494.
where we see him as the ordinary man attempting the impossible, the holy fool vilified by his enemies and betrayed by his wife, the secular seeker for redemption.

In fact his character would seem to be forced into serving two contradictory functions. One reviewer has remarked that a similar ambiguity in Anne's portrayal between her Republican conventionality and toughness creates, "a not entirely convincing composite. ... It may be too many attributes for one fictional character to bear." (83) I would argue that this is a similar flaw in the depiction of Owen. Reviewers have seen him as "hollow" and "empty" (84) and this is perhaps because he is meant to function on too many levels. He must serve both as the primary exhibit and example in Stone's satire on Reaganite values and as the heroic overreacher of the proportions of Shakespearan tragedy.

This ambiguity is evident in the text's use of the Hylan sub-plot to portray him as both willing accomplice in his fate and victim of corporate manipulation. The relationship between employer and employee points to the exploitative nature of big business and is an essential part of the text's portrayal of the Reagan years, the victimisation of a man who is loyal to his employer. To help save the Hylan Corporation Thorne is willing to use Owen and endanger his life. Viewed through this perspective Owen is a victim of forces greater than himself, like a contemporary version of the worker caught in the trammels of industrial capitalism.

Owen works for Altan Marine, the survival of which is dependent on the fortunes of the parent company, the Hylan Corporation, now facing bankruptcy and possible criminal proceedings. Thorne tells his lieutenants that they will continue with the proposed film being made about Hylan to ensure an "Appearance of normalcy."(p.53) They plan to use Owen's ill-conceived voyage and the film of it to negate the bad publicity of criminal activities and financial ruin. Owen with his good looks and Vietnam record will replace Matty in the competition and continue the "appearance of normalcy". However, it is Riggs-Bowen who

(83) Menand p.96.
(84) Adams p.29 and Leonard p.494.
articulates the plot when he tells Strickland, "... it's all Thorne's way of turning ruin into prosperity. Or trying to. The club's being used."(p.119)

At the novel's end, despite the failure of the voyage and the loss of any good publicity it promised, Thorne has survived. Matty Hylan's perfidy had come to light, "Cooked books, forged storage receipts." But Thorne had survived every "allegation of dishonesty."(p.387) The media had mocked him and his dead wife but he will have his revenge, "His attorneys were reviewing areas of defamation."(p.387) At this point one cannot help concluding that Thorne, unlike Owen and Strickland is a survivor. Rather than appearing as the corporate villain, Thorne, with his rough charm and lack of pretension, emerges as an antidote to all the poseurs and hypocrites represented by the "slick yuppie press."(p.387) He is imbued with a vitality that contradicts his purported ideological role.

It is interesting to note that reviewers have largely ignored the relationship between Owen and his employer. Whilst Robert Solotaroff in his chapter on the novel argues that Stone is "beyond portraying empowered Americans as inevitably corrupt", Thorne, for Solotaroff is "intelligent, honest and toughly idealistic." (85) I would argue that Thorne's portrayal is somewhat like Owen's in that it is decidedly ambiguous. It could be argued that Stone's attitude to Thorne gradually softens as the novel progresses. He is first presented as being little more than a corporate criminal willing to manipulate the Brownes and Strickland for his company's advantage, but by the second part he becomes the embattled corporate survivor and in his own way capable of heroic action. Like Owen, Thorne would seem to function in the novel both as the repository of values and actions inimical to the text's anti-Reagan ideology and at the same time a heroic personification of the "can-do" spirit that the text is purportedly satirising.

Owen's fate highlights a theme of many of Stone's novels, the individual caught up in historical forces, revolution in Central America or the moral corruption and violence emanating from Vietnam. In a similar way Owen's adventure is given a political dimension.

(85) Solotaroff p.156.
by making part of its motivation issue from that sort of business manipulation that was a hallmark of the eighties. In a sense the Brownes could be a fictionalised version of those victims of forced mergers and rationalisations or the Saving and Loan scandals that characterised the corporate practice of the eighties.

So the Brownes emerge not only as an expression of the Republican ideology of the eighties but also as its victims. But significantly this is all presented in a sub-plot which is of minor importance compared to the themes the text explores later. In the overall structure of the novel the role of Hylan is given only cursory attention and its ultimate significance is in its portrayal of the defiant, ebullient Harry Thorne. This is reinforced in the portrayal of another minor character, Owen's father-in-law, Jack Campbell. He also is a corporate capitalist who has sailed close to the wind and he views Owen with contempt. He tells his daughter that he has, "'wrung more salt out of my socks than that man of yours ever looked at'" and that the idea of getting in touch with your feelings is "'malarkey'".(p.206) His forcefulness is an indictment of Owen's wavering and indecision. Jack Campbell and Thorne are ostensibly villains, persecutors of Owen, but the conclusions they reach about him are lent credence by his failure to complete the race and the disgrace of his deception. In some ways they are more attractive characters than Owen.

Although, as I have argued, the novel fails to fully engage with the theme of Owen's exploitation, it does attempt a symbolic moral condemnation of America's failures in the Reagan years in its depiction of Owen's sailing trip to Outerbridge Reach. He sails his aptly named yacht, Parsifal, down to Kill Van Kull, one of the inlets around Newark Bay. The ominous sound of the name "Kill" is matched by what he sees in the salvage yard, "black derelict shapes" which are wooden tugs and ferries scattered around like a marine equivalent of a car junkyard. They "lay half submerged and gutted" and are owned by his father-in-law whose unscrupulous past is mentioned, "the presiding chief of a race of water ruffians ... who had lorded it over certain sections of dockland since the last century. Rich from rum-running, bootlegging and two world wars ..."(p.73) The language throughout this description evokes images of death and fear, "the soiled tide", "some phantom disaster" and the remembered
scrap of the area's history. "Thousands of immigrants had died there, in shanties, of cholera, in winter far from home. It had been a place of loneliness, violence and terrible labor." (p.74)

Almost casually in this grim description of what appears to be a sort of marine hell on the outskirts of the great city of Manhattan Owen notes a place marked on the charts as "Outerbridge Reach". (p.74)

The text is presenting a geographic metaphor for Owen's place and meaning in the world. He is literally surrounded here by symbols and names of death and ruin, just as he is surrounded by the sharks and exploiters, the doubters and mockers in his life. Robert Solotaroff quotes Stone on the genesis of his novel where he happened upon "a kind of marine landscape and a blighted landscape" in the middle of the reach. (86) A number of critics have pointed to the similarity of this geographic symbol to the "Valley of Ashes" in Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. (87) In an earlier interview Stone had described the importance of Fitzgerald's novel in his decision to become a writer (88) and Outerbridge Reach can be said to have a similar symbolic function in Stone's novel as the Valley of Ashes does in Fitzgerald's. Owen is, in fact, a faint echo of Gats by with his lower class origins and his heroic and romantic dream to transcend his quotidian existence. Fitzgerald imbues his image of the valley, like the reach, on New York's outskirts, with a significance that is reinforced throughout the novel. The "spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it" seem to settle on every character in the novel. Gatsby is introduced on the first page of the novel with the comment, "what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams." (89) In Outerbridge Reach Owen's vision of this wasteland is clearly meant to represent the

(86) ibid., p.138. 
(87) ibid., p.139 and Leonard p.490.
(88) Woods p.27.
corruption and degradation of American society but this vision is undercut by Owen's own ambiguous character, which is at once an instance of the blight and the means to a mystical transcendence of it.

This is embodied in the other function of Owen's excursion, the text's introduction of the name itself. It serves as a clue to Owen's meaning in the ideology of the text. He embodies a heroic concept, he is the overreacher, the man who tries to achieve too much and dooms himself in the attempt. When we read that casual reference to the place he passes we are alerted to a deeper meaning by the fact that it is also, of course, the novel's title. Owen's response to his over-familiar mid-life crisis will be something that will transcend his conservative and bourgeois existence, that will take him outside the realm of the Rabbits and Zuckermans of American fiction who are similarly bowed down by the hypocrisies and expectations of America. It is the grand gesture and it is very deliberately linked to Shakespearan themes. Owen is being compared to a Shakespearan hero, a Macbeth, Othello or Henry V. The night before he leaves he reflects that he fortifies himself with "night-before-battle scenes from Shakespeare and cavalier poetry" and then quotes a snatch of poetry which illumines this, "Now thrive the armorers and honor's thought/Reigns solely in the breast of every man."(p.187) He sees himself and is seen through the prism of heroic endeavour, of girding one's loins before going into battle. However, Stone clearly means the Outerbridge Reach scenes to serve as a metaphor for the journey through moral corruption and self-interest that the "wounded knight", Owen must progress through. (90) Robert Phillips calls it a failure of America to "function as a community or cause". (91) What is interesting is that whereas the central symbol of A Flag for Sunrise was the cosmic evil that Egan, Justin and Holliwell confront in that novel's Gnostic vision, this novel is imbued with a sort of moral disgust which emerges in its attempt to rewrite Fitzgerald's attack on the "careless" rich of twenties America to America in the Reagan years. But

(90) Solotaroff p.140 briefly discusses the Parsifal myth.
(91) Phillips p.497.

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whereas Fitzgerald's moral vision is personified in the character of the observer, Nick Carraway who is a stern moral critic of the rich, Stone's jeremiad is compromised both by Owen's ambiguous role in the novel and the character of Strickland who is too much a symptom of the corruption ever to observe it from any impartial moral standpoint. And in The Great Gatsby the Buchanans' corruption is shown as the failure of "a civilization, of a way of life." (92) In Stone's novel the sympathies of the text in its treatment of Owen and Thorne, almost appears seduced by the siren calls of the very ideology it intended to attack. The vision of cosmic evil that pervades A Flag for Sunrise is largely absent from the later novel. It is replaced by a sense of moral disgust which never reaches the intensity and passion of his indictment of America in Dog Soldiers where the struggle for the heroin represented the "rapacious and pitiless folly" of the society. (93)

What I want to turn to now is just how the text deals with this theme of Owen's heroism because it reinforces my argument about the ambiguous nature of Owen's characterisation. The text adopts an ironic stance towards that concept, one that is undercut by its sympathetic attitude towards what Owen is attempting. Before he makes the decision to race we see him reading a book about Nelson and Trafalgar,(p.86) an ironic comparison is thus invited between a naval heroism that changed history and the less glorious, more mundane heroism of entering a round the world solo yacht race. There are also the ironic comparisons with Lindbergh which Duffy promotes (p.103, p.172) but which could be seen to deflate Owen as much as inflate him, given Lindbergh's later political activities in support of Hitler. His incompetence as a sailor and his decision to deceive his family and friends during the race also undercut his heroic status.


(93) From the epigraph to Robert Stone, Dog Soldiers (London: Picador, 1988). The quotation is from Conrad's Heart of Darkness.
heroic reacher for things others cannot and will not strive for in our distinctly unheroic society. As a novelist Stone reverses a strategy that has a long tradition in the novel, one used, for instance, by Cervantes, Fielding and Thackeray. These writers ironise heroes but as a realist writing in a cynical postmodern age Stone adopts the opposite strategy. He begins by ironising his hero and then undercuts that ironic stance by imbuing Owen with some genuine heroic qualities, as the ordinary man attempting the extraordinary. This is shown in the text's dealing with the themes of fear and courage. Buzz Ward, who is here perhaps, the voice of the author, talks to Anne about courage. "'You can't have moral courage without physical courage'" and "'All good men have physical courage'", but it is possible to have "'physical courage and moral weakness.'"(pp.246-247) What Owen may have had in Vietnam was physical courage but what he has lacked since then is moral courage, his overcoming of his fear is as much moral courage as it is physical courage.

Strickland recognises the fear Owen is feeling and it reminds him of his own Vietnam fears. He reflects that, "'Fear was contagious. Such a tender emotion, truly the mother of sensibility.'"(p.193) He is aware of what Owen is going through and his awareness confirms for the reader the enormity of what he is attempting and anchors the struggle Owen is having with fear in the context of Strickland's own dealings with fear, significantly linked, as are Owen's, with Vietnam. Owen's struggle is mentioned in a scene where he is reliving Vietnam memories by visiting the area where he first reported for duty on the only ship of his naval career.(p.166) This brings on his own recognition, "'He knew the nature of his lassitude. It was fear.'" Not just a fear of death or pain but the varieties of fear, "'Still, the thing had such variety. It could change temperature and color, taste and odor, hit you high or low.'"(p.167)

This fear is first described in terms of how it affects one physically and is then described as like a child or brother around your heart and compared to an innocent child punished for something not done, "'the infant reprobate, beaten senseless by the rod, by the drill sergeants
and the good nuns of life." (p.168) (94) What he really fears is not death. "His fear was not of being overcome but of failing from the inside out. Discovering the child-weakling as his true nature and having to spend the rest of his life with it." (p.168) The "terrible panic" (p.189) that he feels just before he goes and his worry "that he was not sailor enough to make the trip" (p.188) has to be overcome because he does not want to "eat the bread of quiet desperation instead." This echo of Thoreau's claim that, "The mass of men live lives of quiet desperation" (95) reveals that what Owen is overcoming in going, what he is reaching for, is a conquering of his own self and a victory over a life that is constrained by the minutiae of daily life. Owen, presented to us as the ultimate bourgeois is attempting something that a Shakespearan or romantic hero might attempt. This is something the book argues that requires moral as well as physical courage.

What Owen will face in the second part of the novel is hinted at in various ways in the first part. Both through the prolepses of the text and the warnings and doubts of the characters that come into contact with him. On a test sail of the competition boat Owen falls overboard, "clutching in the last dreadful minute at the rail and sliding over, the sea rising over his eyes like disgrace." (p.165) This forecasts his fate. Then, at the moment he decides to enter the race a women at the boat show remarks of Hylan's disappearance, "'If I was Matty ... I would have disappeared during the race. I'd vanish at sea ... I'd not sail around the world but say I did.'" (p.88) There is another, more subtle and ironic prolepsis in his belief that, "Eventually ... he would develop an interior voice, a commanding self able to cope with sea and solitude." (p.123) The inner voice he does, indeed, develop will lead him to deception, madness and eventually suicide.

(94) There is an autobiographical element in this passage. Stone himself was an orphan and endured an, at times, unhappy childhood. See Solotaroff pp.1-7.

There are a number of warnings in the novel, although only one is given to him directly. Just before he leaves Strickland blurts out, "Don't go ... don't." (p.199) But he immediately recants and tells Owen he is "just kidding." The other warnings are not given to Owen. Riggs-Bowen tells Strickland that he wouldn't go, "'The sea selects ... God bless her, Hype doesn't float.'" (p.120) Fanelli and Crawford are sure it will be a disaster. Fanelli thinks he is a "'phony'" and a "'hype artist.'" They think the boat is a "'piece of shit'" and that he is "'accident prone.'" Crawford bets Fanelli that he will either win or die. (pp.176-177)

Anne is also beset by doubts despite her need to believe that he will succeed. When he first tells her she knows that she can dissuade him but, "then there would be the rest of his life to get through." (p.100) She will not attempt to stop him because to do so may further harm the marriage and be a source of conflict and regret, and further regret is something that must be avoided at all costs. And during their final night together she thinks, "Of course he must not go. Of course his experience was insufficient and his preparations jury-rigged." Again she cannot go through with it, "He will regret it forever. She would always have stood between him and the sky-blue world of possibility." She lays awake that night "heavy with fear." (p.190) In these brief episodes of struggle in Anne's mind the romanticism and idea of victory that imbues both their minds is undercut, as if the unconscious fears and dangers of what he will face come back to haunt her. It is like a return of the oft repressed but never completely eradicated fear of death and failure that has blighted their life together since the glorious years of Vietnam service.

One warning that he is given is contained in Buzz Ward's letter to him. Buzz is connected to Owen's nostalgic memories of Vietnam, but he has experienced life and death with an intensity that Owen has never experienced. Which is, of course, one of the sources of Owen's discontent. Being a captive of the Vietnamese Buzz has undergone a nightmare experience reminiscent of Nolan's in A Flag for Sunrise. On their Hemingwayesque fishing trip he half jokingly announces that he will tell Owen the secret of life. This is, "'Value your life ... Value your family.'" (p.155) The thing he had achieved in Vietnam had been not dying, "'That was
my only power." (p.154) Owen replies that his life has been, "pedestrian and dishonorable. I would like to command such a power." (p.154) That is, the power of survival. Owen is again romanticising and Buzz attempts to bring him back to reality, telling him to value your life and not throw it away.

Owen does not have the courage to read Buzz's letter when it arrives. (p.162) The implication is that he will not read it because he wishes to remain in his romantic and heroic delusion, he does not want to be disenchanted by reality. When he does read the letter his fate is, in a sense, already sealed. Buzz's warning is that solitude must be kept from becoming a prison and that it is only in alien situations that we are alone - one can be alone at sea and not be alone. This is precisely what Owen is not able to do, his solitude does become a prison. He will eventually come to blur reality and illusion, the true and the false. But this warning from his friend is another mark of the novel's use of tragic irony; the advice had been ignored by Owen until its import is too late to help him.

I have discussed how the ending of A Flag for Sunrise echoes Nostromo with that image of a man alone amidst the vastness of the ocean. In this novel, with the central narrative event of a man's participation in an ocean race there are echoes of both Conrad and Melville. There is a similar exploration of man's relationship with the sea as an almost mystic connection, and its power to destroy or make a man. In Lord Jim in a moment of weakness, it destroys Jim's name and career; in Youth it can be seen as part of a boy's initiation into manhood. Owen also goes through a rite of passage. That he is alone does not make him all that different from Conrad's heroes, who are often depicted as being alone despite the presence of other sailors. Melville's significance in the novel is made explicit when Strickland discovers Owen's journal entry with its quotation from Melville, "Be true to the dreams of your youth." (p.396) Some reviewers have seen this as indicating "a passage into Melville" and Robert Phillips goes so far as to claim that like Moby Dick this novel is "a parable on life and existence" in which Stone employs, "the sea as his image of reality, which ultimately is
ungraspable." (96) It is true that Melville's novels are filled with outcasts and loners, but a dimension missing from Stone's work and centrally present in Moby Dick is a sense of the ship as a community, a microcosm of the nation in all its ante-bellum complexity. (97) Melville and later Jack London in The Sea-Wolf created societies that expressed their author's social and political views. Stone, in the tradition of Conrad, is more concerned with the individual's relationship with the natural world which in the form of a vast ocean expresses the individual's immersion in an indifferent universe which is, indeed, "ungraspable". Just how that relationship evolves is shown in part two of the novel.

What happens to Owen on his voyage is perhaps inevitable given his positioning by the text as an overreacher, a man doomed by his own vaulting ambitions. In part two the text's ironising of Owen gradually disappears to be replaced by a series of philosophic musings and quasi-mystical epiphanies as he interfaces with the natural world. At first he is stiff and pompous in his communications with Anne and Duffy, still maintaining his public facade. But after some bad experiences, the bout of sickness because of his cut leg and his fear of tetanus and his thoughts of turning back, he survives the night and in the morning finds it "difficult to imagine his way back into the depths of fear and helplessness that had assailed him." He is already being transformed and it is connected with his emerging relationship with the ocean and with nature:

It had all to do ... with the zones of transit he had crossed. Within them, what was human met with what was not. Over there, the continent with


(97) There are a number of recent studies of Moby Dick that examine the idea of the novel as a metaphor for contemporary society, among them, Michael Gilmore's essay in American Romanticism and the Marketplace (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985) and Michael Paul Rogin, Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983).
its frantic egoism ... Here the sea, serene and unforgiving. Out of such places, interior storms arose. (p.217)

The interior storms that will arise in him will mirror the destructive storm that seals his fate. He is, in essence, merging with the natural, he has crossed the transit zone from civilization into wilderness, a journey familiar to readers of American literature. It is a journey undertaken by Natty Bumpo in Cooper's Leatherstocking novels, by Ishmael in *Moby Dick* and by many of the characters of Hemingway. (98)

The storm which wrecks his boat serves to accelerate a process that had begun as soon as he set sail, the process of his isolation. His loneliness surprises him because, "In his deepest recollections, it seemed to him, he was always alone." (p.212) He is already drawing into himself, "He was finding that, at sea, the richest occupations, the keenest sensations, were interior." (p.225) This involves a withdrawal from the race, "It was as though he wanted not to be in the race ... He felt as though he might be in rebellion." (p.231-232) His growing sense of interiority is translated into an action, described as a "rebellion" again. (p.332)

Taking advantage of an unlikely coincidence, a terrorist action by Basques he decides, "Let invisibility be matched with silence." (p.319) As Robert Solotaroff has remarked Stone plays "novelistic God" to enable Owen to be truly cut off from the world. (99)

He keeps up the pretence of involvement in the race thus preserving an image of himself as succeeding. He is not fully divorced from the world and is still clinging to its old hypocrisies. This created image is a "road not taken", (p.332) a what might have been which we are meant to conclude would be part of some other fiction, some glorification of individual heroism and adventure, a consumption for propaganda purposes. (100) What Owen is doing is "fashioning a counterworld in which to locate his improved self", creating the image the world wants, the


(99) Solotaroff p.231.

(100) The sea stories of C.S. Forrester and Patrick O'Brian come to mind.

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solitary hero-sailor, the Chichester he reads about. He goes on, "At the same time he would have to live secretly in the actual world as the man he had become." (p.346) There is now a very real gap between the Owen for consumption and the real Owen he is becoming.

Throughout Owen muses on some of the central themes of the novel, deception, concealment and exposure. Early in his voyage he had begun to meditate on the difficulty of truth-telling, "The past was always disguising itself, disappearing into the needs of the moment. Whatever happened got replaced by the official story or competing fictions." (p.249) This is an acknowledgement of the inherent problem involved in writing and recording the truth. It is one of the reasons why he begins to feel that what he writes in his log has no connection with the actual experience and that the filming is somehow inauthentic. (p.234, p.283)

His realisation that the boat is irreparable leads him to question how he could have ever deceived himself into believing it could take him around the world. "It had all been pretending", he thinks; "He was what raised the stink at the heart of things. There would always be something to conceal." (p.302) He is beginning to doubt his own authenticity and sincerity, realising that he had always been a concealer. This is connected to memories of his father and childhood and his father's imagined voice telling him, "Everybody loves you when you're someone else, son." (p.303) Owen believes that his family history is like Silas Marner, a tale of false accusation and exile that he obviously identifies with. Owen is English not American, he is the child of servants not a scion of the Establishment, he owes his education to his employer not his father. (pp.179-180) His suspicion of narrative deepens:

Concealment was a constant theme ... The very process of telling the stories was a game of withholding. Every narrative was reversible and had its outer and inner side. They were all palimpsests. (p.321)

Owen's realisation of the fictionality of narrative and its links to the inauthenticity of this present dilemma and his existence per se is a classic existential epiphany. Inauthentic existence, in one account, is an existence, "moulded by external influences, whether these
circumstances be moral codes ... or whatever. (101) One is either divided in oneself or becoming one with oneself if the difficult route towards authentic existence is undergone.

One reading of Owen's experience would be then that by the gradual shedding of moral codes and the trappings of contingent existence he reaches a state of authentic being. Having shed everything Owen then sheds his very identity and finally his life. At the same time there has been a change in the nature of the thing he is at odds with. In part one it is the politically corrupt society he is opposed to, but in part two it is, in existential terms, the meaningless and indifferent universe, represented by the sea, within which he must create his own personal meaning.

The themes of fiction and deception are also reminiscent of the postmodern suspicion of the truth of fiction and its frequent metafictional impulse to draw attention to its own status as lie. The text may perhaps be telling us not to believe the things it is purportedly telling us in such a classically realist fashion. It is true that for Owen to have such thoughts would not have been possible without the centrality of that theme in the culture over recent years but I believe the text is more concerned with dramatising Owen's growing realisation of the inauthenticity of his existence, the hypocrisy of his life and by implication his country than it is with exploring that essentially postmodern theme.

For Owen the natural world is, in a sense, merging with his internal world. He is beginning not to be able to tell them apart. He experiences optical illusions and hallucinations caused by tricks of light and weather. The most spectacular is his vision of, "Peaks hung upside down ... It was as though an upside-down island hung suspended there." (p.311) It is at this point he begins to experience nature not as simply a series of aural and optical tricks but as a series of surreal visions that issue from his inner mind. He is also beginning to imbue nature with personal meaning; the petrels are out there, perhaps, "For me?" (p.323) The next time he sees the island it is the right side up and is real and it is ironically called Invisibility. (p.331)

In this desolate landscape which is perhaps a polar version of the hell he first witnessed at

Arthur Kill he enters a house where he sees a woman. "When it disappeared, he could almost remember a face, a frowning blue-eyed look."(p.349) And then through a window he sees the setting sun where he is sure he saw it set hours before, it is "as though the sun hung out of time." It is because he has taken "liberties with time and located himself falsely. These are the interstices, he thought."(p.350) What he is seeing has a surreal quality and he explains it to himself in terms of having violated time by lying and pretending. He is in the interstices between the real and the hallucinatory or false, between the natural and the human. His hallucination continues as he senses the woman again, feels sexual excitement and talks to her. She wants him to stay and he has a vision of himself as being part of the motions of the planet, like a deasil motion going clockwise as the sun appears to cross the sky. He is bound by hooks and lines to the axis of the world and he turns in the "ancient deasil motion."(p.351) This bizarre vision is reminiscent of those old astronomical drawings of the movement of the spheres with a figure of a man at the centre. As John Leonard has pointed out it is a reminder of the fate of Melville's Ishmael, "Round and round, then ... like another Ixion I did revolve." (102)

Owen here seems to be totally merging with the natural world, he has become that world. Tied to the axis his situation is oddly reminiscent of Strickland tied to a stake in the Vietcong tunnel. The presentation of Owen as martyr to the world is made explicit here, it is a crucifixion image, as if Owen's ordeal has taken on all of the connotations of Christ's passion, a sacrifice for the good of the world. The images of the women are more mundane, intimations of his loneliness and his competing need for human contact, perhaps even the human part of him that rebels against the God-like Christ part. Owen's hallucinations are apparently teaching him things about the difference between essence and existence, between appearance and reality. "It was necessary to experience life correctly but at the same time compose it into something acceptable."(p.352)

(102) Leonard p.494.
Owen's identity is disintegrating. He is unable to connect the person he now is to the person he once was. He remembers speaking to the press corps in Vietnam with an "appearance of rectitude" surrounding him, significantly unable to recall whether he was giving them information or misinformation. He thinks, "I am neither that person ... nor the person remembering that person. There had been something like a death." (p.359) It is not only that he cannot recall who he once was but that his present self is shattered and dead.

This could be seen on a moral and psychological level as a shutting down, as it were of his ego in the face of the ethical complexities of his actions, his inability to mesh his self image and the image the world has of him with his knowledge of who he really has become. This is why he endlessly debates those questions of truth and concealment. Or it could be seen as a quasi-mystical merging of his ego with the natural world, a transcendence beyond the minutiae of existence with its trivialities of image and moral codes toward a state of understanding that acknowledges man's contiguity and continuity with the natural world. One thinks of similar scenes in Moby Dick where Ishmael seems to become part of the ocean world of the whaler or in a modern novel, Moon's apotheosis in the jungles of the Amazon in Peter Matthiessen's At Play in the Fields of the Lord. (103) This is also suggested by his emotional connection with the things in nature he experiences, the smell of birds making him retch (p.347) and the sight of salmon swimming upstream making him cry. (p.360)

There is also a sense that Owen is becoming God-like as his vision on the island implies. He believes the power of his deception is like the power of Bible stories. "The power of command over reality consisted in being party to its nature and possessing the knowledge exclusively."(p.360) He is the only person on earth who knows his true whereabouts and he thus controls reality by that knowledge. When he revisits the house on the island he looks out (103) Moon in the jungle experiences many of the things Owen experiences and is beset with a similar paranoia and megalomania. The novel ends with him believing he is the "only man beneath the eye of Heaven", something that in a way Owen will also come to believe. Peter Matthiessen, At Play in the Fields of the Lord (London: Flamingo, 1988), p.373.
of the window and sees "innumerable misshapen discs stretched in limitless perspective to an expanded horizon." (p.362) What may the first time have been a trick of the light or memory is now a surreal, science fiction-like vision, as if he were inhabiting an alien galaxy. It is a vision of the infinity of nature and existence, again with what can only be called mystical overtones. He is resistant, the woman is now a "crab-wrench" and "hard-hearted" (p.361) and he regrets lying. But he realises he cannot "undo the deception" and he cannot avoid a "thin ghost" of a wife. (p.362)

For Owen it is now too late to return, "he was a new man with a new fortune." (p.362) This, as I have argued, could be seen in existential terms, the achievement of authenticity, or in mystical terms, the achievement of some sort of spiritual apotheosis. The possibility of multiple readings of these passages has tended to defy definitive critical readings, most reviewers contenting themselves with describing this second part as a gripping narrative and a "great mystic journey" or a "mystical vision of the ordinary life", (104) although Robert Adams, a little perversely, claims to have seen no "transcendental overtones" in the novel. (105)

Most critics have tended to conclude that Owen is not up to the quest he embarks upon. For Mark Edmondson, Owen is forced to rely on his own spiritual resources and finds himself bankrupt, he has no "inner life" to combat the temptation to fall into disbelief. (106) Similarly for Robert Solotaroff, Owen has physical courage but does not develop the moral courage needed to succeed and falls into thinking he can "simulate the style of heroic stoicism." (107) Solotaroff goes on to propose a distinctly religious interpretation of the novel. Owen, listening to the religious broadcasts, rejects them and thus "denies himself the religious support that could have saved him." (108) However, as I have been arguing, I do not believe that the text is dismissing Owen's madness and suicide in wholly negative terms.

(107) Solotaroff p.165.  
(108) Ibid., p.168.
In only the most conventional terms is his experience a failure, in terms of self-knowledge and on a mystical level as a spiritual transcendence Owen's journey is decidedly positive. In a sense he is shown triumphing over the hypocrisies and corruption of the society he has fled.

Owen's descent into madness has been accompanied by the broadcasts from the African missionary station to which he has been listening. These act as both part of his internal self-rationalisations and as a commentary on his predicament. One particular line, "A false balance is abomination to the Lord ... but a just weight is His delight" (p. 222) hints at his moral and spiritual dilemma. His life up to his present deception has been a false balance, and his redemption will be a just weight of moral conscience and understanding and repentance of his action and his life and quite literally the weight that he will use to drown himself.

In the first extended broadcast the "grimly English religious lady" (p. 230) preaches about covenant and rebellion and it is from this sermon that Owen begins to develop his sense of rebellion. Prophetically she says, "To be in rebellion ... is to be alone. It is to be insane. For all reality belongs to God." (p. 231) Owen's reactions are sceptical, he is an atheist amused by these at times crude manipulations of the listener's emotions. But on a deeper level the story of Owen is being recast for us and interpreted in religious terms. This rebellion is also a rebellion against what is false in the world and leads to a sort of holy madness, especially in his vision of geometric centrality with its crucifixion implications. Perhaps we are to see him as like Milton's Lucifer a heroic overreacher, a rebel who is glorious in his rebellion. He is of course also like Ahab, another overreacher driven mad by his obsession. (109)

Owen hears two more extended broadcasts from the lady and in both Bible stories are recounted by actors and he is moved to tears. Given Owen's suspicion of stories his reaction to the Bible stories may appear unusual. But he reacts to them on an emotional level because they speak to his situation. In the first he weeps for Esau, robbed of his birthright by the schemes of Jacob and Rebekah (p. 285) When the lady comments on the story she concludes (109) Phillips p. 498.

348.
that we must be on Jacob's side here because Jacob is on the side of the strong God and we can only love a strong God and not a weak one. (pp. 286-287) Although he is compelled to agree that a weak God would not be worthy of love he is disturbed by the implications of her pronouncements. "They were talking to Africa, engaging primary process." But he realises the women was "absolutely right". (p. 287) Owen has picked up on the real meaning of the women's interpretation of the Bible story. A strong God is the God that Africa should accept and the primary process that has been engaged is the process of development and engagement and rebellion that involves violence and ruthlessness rather than the weakness of negotiation, compromise and gradualism. The message is that only the strong can succeed, a classic imperialist ideology which of course does not sound too bizarre coming from the mouth of a white coloniser, albeit a coloniser in the name of religion. So in this religious text Owen gleans a political truth that for all his association with Thorne and Strickland he had not been able to make. It is a realisation that his romantic vision of the little man triumphant like Lindbergh, figured in his own mind by his Silas Marner-like childhood is not possible in a world ruled by a strong God and an implacable Nature.

The second story of the apostles fearing for their lives on a stormy Gennesaret is even more closely related to his situation. He too is tossed on storm waters, seemingly abandoned by God. He cries through his laughter at the sadness of the African actor's cry, "Lord save me." (p. 321) We cannot help concluding that this is because he too hopes for salvation, he has been moved by this "pointless, foolish, unconvincing" story. (p. 321)

Owen's symbiotic identification with these broadcasts culminates at the very end of his voyage, shortly before his death when he hears the lady recite verses from *The Book of Job*. The final verse is, "Thick clouds are a covering to Him that He seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of Heaven." His reaction is that, "things had found him out, down to the deepest level of his dreams." (p. 369) God sees through the clouds to his deepest dreams and thoughts,
his lie is uncovered as is the hypocrisy of his life. (110) Apart from being an indication of
the paranoia of his madness it also points to his "loss of reality, never quite retrievable once
your share in it was put aside."(p.369) This I take to be an acknowledgement of the loss of
reality Owen has suffered in his relationship with the natural world, "The appearance of stars
was a deception" is his comment. The world is no longer as it once was, ordinary reality is
overthrown. This links his situation to those of a tragic hero whose fate unhinges the world
from its orbit. (111)

In his descent into madness he has befriended a blind radio ham calling himself Mad Max.
He scares Max away (p.382) because of his obsessive need to communicate and his prying
into Max's affairs. Owen fails in this final human connection partly because of his
obsessiveness but also partly because he is no longer constrained by the social falsities and
hypocrisies, the broadcasting procedures, that we live by. Max is symbolically blind as well
as physically and he represents the ordinary human desire not to confront the personal which
Owen has lived by but now has transcended because of his experiences.

He decides that there is no way to escape the lie he has created. He will make himself an
"honest man" by ending his life. He regrets his wife and daughter but, "... the lie had broken
the covenants. He had made himself unworthy of his own predicament and the truth was no
longer his to convey."(p.384) He hesitates, thinking, "Living ... affords the only truth there
is"(p.384) but deciding to live feels false, "He would always be ashamed." This time he
deliberately steps overboard and in another religious reference he thinks that here it "is
deeper than Gennesaret." But he will not walk on water. In the final battle between truth and
lying Owen takes what he believes is a decision that is truthful, because to continue to live
would be a lie. At the same time that part of him that craves public acceptance believes that
the act will make him an honest man once again. That the boat will be found ironically

(110) Solotaroff p.167.

(111) For instance, Hamlet, "The time is out of joint ..." and the state of Lear's Kingdom in
King Lear.
confounds this belief. It is also the final act of Owen's psychological disintegration, his immersion in the natural world, his solitude, despite the radio contacts, all contribute to his loss of identity for which the inevitable next step is physical death. At the end he is alone in the watery natural world, at once finally merged with that world and a martyr to its implacable nature.

The other major action of the novel is the making of the film, an almost late twentieth century corollary of any major event and one reminiscent of DeLillo's use of the making of a film in Americana and The Names. But this metafictional aspect is used less to comment on the practice of producing art than to introduce the character of Strickland. If the Brownes represent the spirit of the eighties, Strickland is a product of the sixties. He has been almost entirely characterised as a negative figure, an "artist of disease" in Robert Solotaroff's judgement. (112) Solotaroff claims that Strickland gets what he deserves at the novel's end when the film is destroyed and he is beaten up. Robert Adams, in fact, claims that the author goes after him "with a particular measure of sadistic vengeance." (113) However, I would tend to agree with Louis Menand that it is important, "for us to feel that there is something genuine about him", because as the artist figure and one linked to his creator by the same initials, he is also a truth-teller. (114)

We first see him in a country that is presumably Nicaragua, near the end of the making of a documentary on the political situation there. But Strickland's left-wing reputation is belied by his cynicism and bitterness. We see him working on the Central American footage which we are told will have a "left-liberal coloration", but "it would also contain a few home truths for the private delectation of that tiny band of perceptual athletes whom Strickland regarded as his core audience."(p.113) Just what these home truths are we are not told, but given his disillusioned and contemptuous attitude whilst in that country these "home truths" may not be as leftist as his general audience would believe. Strickland is not the typical sixties leftist

(112) Solotaroff p.159.  
(113) Adams p.30.  
(114) Menand p.96 and Edmondson p.43.
still clinging to the old beliefs and ideals. He is a producer for a buyer and must merchandise his wares. In a later scene in the novel he shows his film to a PBS producer who likes it because it is, "Very subtle. Un-American" and who then tells him, "Truth is beauty."(p.324) Ironically Strickland must humiliate himself to continue in his profession and there are also hints of the commercial viability of art even art that is "Un-American" and "against the temper of the times."(p.325) It would seem that anything can be bought except, as we will learn, a film about Owen's deception. Such a film is not commercial because it contradicts too many American myths about the integrity of American heroes.

What we very quickly learn about Strickland is his vast cynicism. It is this cynicism that makes us suspect the hidden meaning of his leftist films. At the nightclub in Nicaragua he is told by an acquaintance, "You're embittered ... Temperamentally you belong with the Contras."(p.15) The women he will make a failed pass at later in the night is appalled by his cynicism about Government ministers and asks him, "Who do you really represent down here?"(p.19) In Strickland's opinion this leftist government is corrupt and greedy. It is perhaps a passing reference to the sort of government Stone himself believes would emerge after the revolution he described in A Flag for Sunrise. In this he shares something of V.S. Naipaul's post-decolonisation cynicism about the true worth of the new regimes, a point made by the more politically right-wing Naipaul in novels like A Bend in the River and Guerillas. As Strickland thinks of a character he meets in Finland, a left-wing journalist, "she faced down all the ironies of the Third World", (pp.93-94) and this may well be Stone's comment on the defenders of post-revolutionary Third World governments. Later back in New York watching rushes of the film he expresses neither anger nor sadness at the corruption and murder he has filmed. The dead bodies fascinate him, they are "cool" and the interviews with people whom he sees as having no discretion make him laugh. Quoting Shakespeare he thinks, "What a piece of work is man."(pp.30-31) We are in no doubt that Strickland is embittered and cynical.

At one point he thinks, "It was the only way to get things done and loneliness was an illusion. He had surrounded himself with a requisite silence and within it he could thrive.
Outside was the swarm, the birds and the confusion."(p.82) One gets the sense here that Strickland's cynical front is partly a protection against the chaos of the world and that he is a solitary and unhappy man. He uses it to produce his films but it is not a happy deal.

Strickland's character, like Owen's, has been shaped by his experiences in Vietnam. Like many of Stone's characters from Converse and Hicks in Dog Soldiers onwards his Vietnam past haunts him. He is most famous for the film he made in Vietnam, "LZ Bravo". "During the filming bad things had happened to him, and although it contained some of his best work he did not care to be reminded of it."(p.77) He had been tied to a stake in a tunnel that the National Liberation Front were currently using and spent a "long night" there. It had been Americans, "tunnel-rats" who had tied him up because of his reputation as someone who was against the war. Strickland's comment is that he can take comfort from his experience because, "I was doing my job. Follow truth too closely by the heels, it kicks you in the teeth."(p.261) Later we learn that he wears an amulet depicting a man tied to a stake with a vulture eating his eye.(p.305) That he wears the amulet indicates the profound effect his Vietnam experience has had on him. The keeping of such a memento of that terrifying and humiliating experience points to his self-hatred and loathing. In effect he hates himself as much as he hates all the various poseurs and frauds he sets out to uncover.

Like Owen, Strickland also feels a sense of universal loss. This is expressed in terms that can be seen as having apocalyptic overtones. A nightclub he visits suggests the end of the century, "the destruction of someone's world."(p.79) Later he passes the sites of New York's two World Fairs on the way to the airport. They are now detritus on the side of the road, the two symbols of technological innovation and utopia, the Trylon and Perisphere, "melted down, in effect, for weaponry." Whilst the Fair had been on, "one by one, nations whose pavilions had stood along the main concourse had passed under enemy occupation or even out of existence."(p.84) This works as an effective metaphor for the transitoriness of the structures of human endeavour and the destruction of the modernist impulse to utopia and progress, destroyed by the holocaust of war. Around the 1964 Fair, "Vietnam had been gathering", they were "obviously bad luck."(p.84) The Vietnam theme is again introduced to
reinforce the point that human hope is destroyed by the impulse to war. Strickland's cynicism and ruthlessness would thus seem to be the inevitable outcome of this entropic progression from hope to despair, its personal expression, as enacted in his transformation from idealist radical to cynical opportunist.

The central image that Strickland has of himself and which he uses to ward off the chaos of solitude and self-hatred is his vision of himself as the teller of truths. That is how he explains his nightmarish Vietnam experience, he has followed truth too closely. In those first scenes in Central America, after Rachel has rejected him and we have been notified of his vast cynicism he drunkenly tells the lift operator who cannot speak English, "I work in the service of truth ... which is nowhere welcome. Understand what I mean?" (p.22) This is the motivation for his increasing determination to film Owen's part in the race, he wants to deconstruct the image of Owen as all-American hero. He is working directly against the attempts of Duffy and through him Thorne to present Owen as the "appearance of normalcy."

Strickland's first impressions of the Brownes are partly given through Pamela's reactions to them. Her low-life sarcasm mirrors his equally contemptuous opinions. Pamela exclaims, "This is like the nuclear family, right? Mommy and Daddy and Sis." (p.114) Her opinion of Maggie is obscene, "I love the kid ... I’d like to lick her", (p.116) and this comment serves to reinforce the contempt they both have for the Brownes' clothes, opinions and lifestyle. Strickland's joke when he first sees their house is, "George Washington slept here." (p.133) The implication is that the Brownes represent all those Republican virtues that Strickland is most cynical about.

It is this hostile attitude that is behind his plan to make the film an attack on Republican values. He wants to uncover the tawdry nature of the all-American naval hero. His assistant, Hersey knows exactly what he intends and asks him when he first sees the Brownes, "Real class ... How we gonna fuck 'em?" He tells Hersey that, "My subjects often fuck themselves" and then wonders how he can use the camera to reveal the self absorption of the Brownes. (p.134) When he films Owen talking he is "trying to uncover him." (p.139) He shows tape of Browne, "somewhat heroically at the helm" with Fanelli and Crawford's
hostile comments as the sound accompaniment amidst general amusement. (p.182) Even if he
dies the humour will not be lost he tells Hersey. He doesn't care what happens to Owen, "I
want the picture ... That's all I want." But he isn't simply "fucking him" as Hersey insists,
"This guy, this family, they say something about how it is now", he says. (p.183) For all his
cynicism and his indifference at this point to Owen's fate Strickland is after more than a joke
on the Brownes and their ilk. He is the truth-teller who will reveal something about the way
we are through the Brownes.

What Browne represents for Strickland and what Duffy misses is that Owen is the
representative man, a victim like the other "soft, wet people of the world." He was, "out there
for the insulted and injured, the losers and the lost." (p.184) This shows Strickland's bitter
view of his fellow man and yet captures something of Owen's nature and meaning in the
novel. He is something of a martyr and will be betrayed not only by Thorne but by his wife
and Strickland. It also hints at Strickland's own nature. He asks himself whether he knows
Owen as well as he thinks he does and if he does, why does he know him so well? (p.184)
The implication is that there is something of the victim and martyr in Strickland. This
interpretation has already been prepared for in an earlier scene where Strickland and Hersey's
girlfriend, Jean-Marie have argued about the ethics of filming the Brownes without their
knowledge. He tells her he is the clock to his subject's town when he is filming his subjects
and her reply is a warning to Strickland and a hint to the reader of what is to come, "'You
think you're the clock ... Someday, man, someone's gonna be the clock on you.'"(pp.160-161)

As the time for Owen's departure draws near he begins to feel sympathy for Owen. He
realises he was given a bad table at the restaurant because his physiognomy, "was unlike that
of a winner, Manhattan-style." (p.172) When he is farewelling Owen he feels the "blade of
some intense, elusive emotion" which may be pride, he thinks because he has "occupied
Browne's space." (p.199) But it may also be a growing respect and sympathy for him which is
perhaps behind his desire to give him a parting gift and his attempt, the only attempt made
apart from Buzz Ward's to ask him not to go.

In part two Strickland's function in the novel changes. He is no longer simply the cynical
truth-teller, he is now the debaucher and corrupter of Anne. As one reviewer noted Anne also undergoes a "fall". (115) In one sense their affair develops the martyr theme, Owen is betrayed by his wife as she begins an affair with the man who means to "fuck him up". In a way what Anne does seems almost inevitable given the text's recounting of her psychological turmoil in the wake of Owen's absence. She succumbs to her loneliness and fear. In the scene where she and the film crew visit the Naval Academy we follow her almost panicky reactions to the people she meets. She is no longer as accepting of everything as she once was. She expresses anger at the anti-war demonstrators again, this time to Maggie,(p.237) but in the face of the patriotic and Christian couple they have dinner with she has feelings that amount to contempt. She imagines them praying together to see if their mixed colour marriage would be blessed.(p.239) And she becomes "disproportionately angry" at Conley's sanctimonious and ultra-patriotic remarks on the Challenger disaster and Ronald Reagan's risible poetic eulogy.(p.241) She seeks reassurance from Buzz who urges her not to lose her nerve.(p.246)

We are told later that she decides to give up drinking (116) and tries to take up religion.(pp.278-279) She is beset by fears, "She found her only security in dread, as though her fear was his ransom."(p.279) But she also has "unbidden fantasies" which disturb her and she dreams of "sailing alone".(p.280) There is a sense that his absence both causes her concern and fear but is also liberating her, opening her mind to options she has never considered. She thinks of Strickland, not with desire but rather with a mixture of pity and contempt. She realises that it is not only Owen who is under threat, "What had appeared to be a race was war ... Ashore she was beset, outmaneuvered, of questionable morale."(p.293)

When Strickland first embraces her the experience is told through her consciousness and she very nearly hits him rather than succumbing.(p.298) He is at first almost flip and casual about what has commenced, "'What happens to everybody will happen to us'", whilst she is

(115) Edmondson p.44.

beset by guilt, "Her remorse felt like mourning." (p.306) They both agree that they do not believe in the future. (p.307) At first their relationship seems to mirror Anne's with Owen, she is the good wife, or as Strickland says of it in a moment of bitterness, "You've been playing household nun for that guy." (p.329) She cuts her hair and dresses for him in a certain way that he likes (p.342) and at his urging has committed sexual acts she finds "very unfamiliar." (p.304) The friend they meet at Ballys in Atlantic City talks about the women drawn to the strong and the female finding "completion in the male." (p.343) As these male chauvinist assertions imply, Strickland is the strong one here and Anne is drawn to him. She participates, seemingly without regret, in his seedy, louche world, represented by the gambling halls of Atlantic City. She imagines a future as "a blowsy middle-aged reveller." (p.343)

There are, however, already intimations that this power structure will eventually be reversed. Soon after the affair has started he tells Pamela much to her surprise, that he is tired of "seeing people fuck-up". She tells him he looks happier and guesses that he is "fuckin' her". (pp.313-314) This scene indicates his weakness, he has changed and is happy because she has had a profound effect on him. At the point where he is putting Owen down to his submissive lover he is fearful, "All at once he was afraid of losing her." (p.330) He can no longer be casual about the relationship ending. "It had never mattered all that much before. He had always watched women cure themselves of him with the detachment of a philosopher." (p.337) He wishes to inflict some wound that "could make her into a creature more like himself." (p.356) At the Winslow Homer show he is made aware of the inadequacy of his art and wishes to "eliminate the human factor." (p.367) His previous strong sense of himself as possessing a mission and an art has been undermined by his doubts about the relationship. His original plan to "fuck-up" the Brownes has now blown up in his face, it is they through Anne who are destroying his ego and identity.

Anne too feels as if she is losing something, "not only consciousness but identity", her odyssey in this respect echoing Owen's. She had dreamt of Owen and is "panic-stricken at the presence of the impossible man beside her." (p.367) It is at this point that we realise she will
leave him, thus proving herself the stronger. The final scenes of the relationship are almost predictable. At first he is incredulous, then begins to beg and accuse her of cowardice. He must save her from, "Mediocrity with that asshole. Like some stupid fatassed Navy wife."(p.379) He becomes possessive and hits her.(p.380) His last assertion that he loves her evinces from her only the thought that these are, "Vain words, a sad little song."(p.381) In the end the way she disposes of Strickland is quite brutal, she makes her decision for pragmatic reasons, because she can handle Owen and she cannot handle him with his "sensitive artistic soul."(p.381)

If we see the relationship between Anne and Strickland as a struggle between two people then clearly Anne is the victor and rather than being the victim she has proven stronger than Strickland despite his cynicism. If we are to see them as representing opposing ideologies or ethical codes then again Anne's Republican toughness triumphs over Strickland's ambivalent leftism. But in the structure of the novel this struggle seems irrelevant when contrasted to Owen's epic journey. Robert Solotaroff claims too much for the relationship when he states that they are propelled into "psychic terrains that are almost as frightening to them ..." as those experienced by Owen. (117) Christopher Caldwell argues that it is a "running postmodern counterpoint" to Owen's "quixotic" journey. (118) These interpretations read too much into sections that for the most part function to pause the action of Owen's tale. As in A Flag for Sunrise Stone intersperses more measured and ruminative passages between the gripping thriller-like pace of the main action. Their other function is to set up a situation at the novel's end where they engage in a struggle for Owen's memory and reputation.

These final events - Anne's phone call to her father, the bashing and robbing of Strickland and the stealing of the sound from his studio - literally destroy Strickland. The argument they have before these events are set in train reveals their differing attitudes towards Owen's

(117) Solotaroff p.172.

actions. It is as if their positions on Owen have been reversed. Although Anne partly blames herself for talking him into being a "goddam hero" (p.389) she thinks he "would have lied to us."(p.391) She is thus willing to ascribe base motives to Owen's actions. She believes the film will simply be a "square-up", another example of Strickland's cynical attitude toward the family.(p.392) Strickland on the other hand has reversed his cynical attitude toward Owen:

"Everybody trims, Anne. Everybody fakes it ... In a way he was a true hero ... Not as some hyped-up overachiever but as an ordinary man ...

You should be proud of him. He wasn't a great sailor. But he was an honest man in the end."(p.391)

He wants to make the film to show this about Owen, "Any audience that sees my film will understand what I've said ... I will compel them to understand."(p.392)

This exchange is central to the novel. It is, in effect, the ideological voice of the novel. Owen has faked it like the rest of us and is thus an ordinary hero and in the end by killing himself he has been an honest man. He has retained his humanity and integrity by both succumbing to and overcoming the fakery of life. And Strickland the truth-teller - "I really am an artist," he tells her (p.391) - will inform the world of this through his film. Anne is the one who wants to cover it up and despite our sympathy for her in her confusion and sense of betrayal we feel that she is not being true or loyal in the deepest sense to Owen and his memory. Our sympathies are switched in this scene. Strickland's subsequent fate, initiated by Anne, transforms him into a martyr for Owen's memory and the truth. Anne comes to stand for the fakery and hypocrisy of a society that dismisses Owen as a failure. She becomes her father's daughter.

Strickland is willing to be unscrupulous in the cause of truth, copying the logs and taking the unexposed film with him when he flees back to New York.(p.393) Discussing the film with Pamela he is still as cynical as always, telling he that the "logs are astonishing" because Owen has quoted Melville.(p.396) But Strickland has changed, he had never "sought to be understood before" and "Regret and longing ached in his throat."(p.399) After Anne the film is all that he has left. The last image of him is pathetic, in his studio after discovering the
sound has been stolen. He thinks of salvaging the film from what is left but despairs, "He might spend a lifetime ... He would fail ... There would never again be the old nonchalance of the hand." (p.403) The experience has fatally changed Strickland, his old armour against the world, his cynical nonchalance has been destroyed. Despite his cynicism he has been one of the novel's seekers after truth and like Owen on the ocean he has been done to metaphoric death by forces greater and ultimately more cynical than he.

In the novel's coda, after the drama of Strickland's fate we see Anne attempting to come to terms with Owen's death. We know that she has mourned Owen, her visit to the Nona where she feels his "living presence" on the boat and the tears she sheds on the flight home (pp.394-395) show this. She is resigned to something emerging about Owen but he is not to be "pitied, philosophized about." (p.406) She has been absolved by Buzz Ward for whom "Loyalty was honor itself ..." (p.406) But she finds it hard to believe that Owen is dead and cannot now believe that the note with the romantic quotation from Romeo and Juliet that she did not give Owen is believable. It no longer has a meaning for her because, "Sex was absurd. Love was absurd." (p.406)

She has determined to expiate family honour by sailing herself in a race. (p.409) This is a little ridiculous and points to the strain throughout the novel of the eccentricity of the Brownes, "flakes" according to Harry Thorne. But we are also meant to believe that it will, as for Owen, be a journey of self-discovery. She believes she might find him and explain herself. For her, "The ocean encompassed everything, and everything could be understood in terms of it. Everything true about it was true of life in general." (p.409) At this point we have returned to the mysticism of Owen's final days. The image she has of him closely resembles that vision of himself he had on Invisibility. "She was pursued by a nonsensical nightmare image of him pinned to the horizon, outside of time and motion, suspended undead over the sea." (p.406) He is again the overreacher and transcender, not the ordinary, honest hero of Strickland's version, but the Christ-like martyr. In this image he surely shares some of the ideological significance of Justin in A Flag for Sunrise, Geraldine in A Hall of Mirrors and
Lu Anne in Children of Light. He is Stone's representation of the person crucified by the evil of the political world.

As an antidote to this vision we are offered the reactions of a fourth character to Owen's death. This is his daughter, Maggie, who is bitter about her father and calls him a liar. In the first scene between them he had ended up yelling outside her locked door, shouting at her not to use, "that kind of language to me."(p.24) He later reflects that she is no longer a "dutiful and well-behaved child" and he worries about drugs and wildness at the school she attends, "He could not bear the thought of his daughter's pain ..."(p.25) A later attempt to communicate with her and arrange time alone is met with hostility and incomprehension.(p.148) They do not communicate at all. The night before he leaves he comes up to her room to say goodbye and talk to her because it will be too chaotic the next day. He goes up feeling he owes her further explanation but his first move is to criticise her for eating in bed. Then he gives her a cliched pep talk, "Help your mother as best you can. Keep yourself out of trouble and study hard. I'm relying on you."(p.186) She will not come to see him off and after a lame attempt to "stand up for convention", he accepts her excuse because, "it would make things easier for both of them."(p.186) Thus we are not surprised when she refuses to speak to him when he asks to speak to her over the radio telephone.(p.244)

What I believe emerges from these exchanges is not simply a conservative man dealing with a surly teenager. By refusing to be part of the lie that Anne and all those around him acquiesce in, she can be seen as a character who sees through the aura of valour and achievement that surrounds Owen. She responds to him only as a father and not as Owen Browne, hero. What is important for her are the normal problems and intricacies of the relationship between a daughter and a father. When he gives her the conventional speech, one of the many poses he has been adopting for public and private consumption, her reaction is to refuse to go. The conventional pose of his speech is revealed as false and inhuman, it does not communicate because it is not meant to communicate, it is meant to be part of a
self-image. Her continued refusal to take part in the farce of his adventure is testimony to her determination to maintain the integrity of her relationship with her father. Their relationship may be deeply flawed but it is at least honest. That is why her reaction to the exposure of Owen is so bitter and resentful.

But Anne speaks for the author, I believe, when she defends Owen and tries to explain his actions to her daughter:

"One day ... I hope you'll understand the kind of man your father was.

He risked his life. He risked his sanity. He experienced everything. Very few men have ever done what he did. Very few men test themselves that way."(p.408)

This can be seen as a fitting epitaph and Maggie's reaction, contempt and "exasperation at her mother's self-deception" (p.408) is the natural reaction of a confused and "guileless creature". Thus her reaction is simply the emotional and adolescent reaction of a daughter who deep down loves her father and at present cannot forgive him for dying.

As a truth-teller and nay-sayer Maggie fulfills a similar role to Strickland and Pamela, characters who undercut the conventions and hypocrisies of the Brownes and the society they represent. Maggie becomes the sort of truth-teller about the values of adult society that Huckleberry Finn was. But Maggie and Pamela are minor characters and do not play a large role in the ideological structure of the novel. Strickland, in part one and at the end, plays a much larger role as truth-teller. But he too is undercut by his cynicism and his self-disgust. In a sense he is too involved in the events, as witnessed by his seduction of Anne, to be the objective moral observer who would truly tell the truth about the society that he is so opposed to. He cannot function as Nick Carraway does in The Great Gatsby because the ideology of the text would appear to be implicated in the moral relativism and ambiguity of the society it is attacking. Nick Carraway, the stern moral critic of the American rich, is a far cry from the always implicated Strickland who is repulsed by the American dream whilst at the same time being terribly seduced by it.

It is in the role of these nay-sayers that I would locate the aesthetic rift in the novel which
reveals its ideological confusions. It is also located in the attitude of the text towards the central character. Is he the reactionary bourgeois Reaganite of Strickland's first version or the incompetent sailor that everybody else seems to believe, the man too arrogant and stupid to realise the immensity of his folly? He fits John Leonard's description of him, "Owen is empty when he goes to sea, and there he finds emptiness." (119) And if this is the case the novel not only presents a version of the world where despair, anomie and emptiness predominates but also predicates this as the fate of Owen, the everyman. Or is Owen the hero that Anne and Strickland in different ways believe him to be? I think that this is what we are supposed to believe; whatever the doubts of the first part, the second part's central and most powerful image is of the lone sailor battling nature and heroically failing in the attempt to conquer it. But the contradictory attitude awakens a niggling doubt, is Owen the hero he is meant to be? Mark Edmondson believes that, "By using Browne, Stone barred his novel from reaching an authentically tragic dimension." (120)

The novel could be read as an extended suicide note by Owen, planned from the beginning, a spectacular way to end one's life. Perhaps his anomic and discontent can only be relieved by death, and deciding to attempt a feat he knows he cannot achieve in a boat he suspects may be flawed, is a way to flirt with suicide without the ignominy of the act itself. What one is finally left with is a feeling that Owen as tragic hero finally does not work.

In A Flag for Sunrise, as I have argued, the aporia in a novel about revolution is the class struggle and the Tecanian people, those in whose name the revolution is made. These things are replaced by Stone's political liberalism and a mystical Gnosticism, that dimension of evil that Justin and Father Egan triumph over. Whilst there is no such dimension of universal evil in Outerbridge Reach there is still that element of mysticism, particularly in the transformation of Owen into Christ figure and martyr. The novel takes the atomised and despairing individual and makes a tragic hero out of him whilst at the same time portraying contemporary American society as a society that must be escaped, one marked by the

corruption, hypocrisy and moral torpor that is linked with the Reagan Presidency. But this
critique is almost cursory, the Hylan sub-plot emerging less as an indictment of
contemporary capitalism than as one more story of the successful self-made man, this time in
the form of Harry Thorne. And this is finally how we see Owen; as the self-made man who
almost succeeds, whose own self-destructive impulse brings him down. The novel presents a
man who can be seen as the embodiment of Reaganite values. It ends up being a novel that
asserts rather than undermines those values.

Stone's fiction has always been about men and women in extreme situations, faced with
ethical or political dilemmas, making choices that will doom them. In a line from Rheinhardt
to Owen Browne and Strickland his characters have engaged with the world, but ultimately
been alone with their personal demons, alcohol, fear, despair and so on. There is a stoicism
about his characters, exemplified by Owen's voyage and Strickland's decision not to give up
his film in this novel, that connects once more with Hemingway. A central element of
Hemingway's "men without women" in their adventures in the essentially male activities of
war, hunting and sport is a sense of stoical endurance in a world without certainties or easy
answers. I believe this connects with Stone's worldview in its repeated privileging of the
religious or mystical over the political. The political may serve as the context for his fiction
but it is a mystical vision that impels the ideology of the narrative. Stone has said:

I feel a very deep connection to the existentialist tradition of God as
an absence - not a meaningless void, but a negative presence we live
in terms of. I have the sense of a transcendent plane from which I'm
barred ...(121)

Hemingway is a more secular writer than Stone, but the plight of his characters in their
heroic situations is also marked by the idea that one must succeed or fail in the context of a
world without the guaranteed presence of God. Hemingway is in that existentialist tradition
which often places its protagonists in extreme situations. The Occupation, for instance, is a

(121) Woods p.48.
context and theme of both Camus' *The Plague* and Sartre's *Roads to Freedom* trilogy.

Stone was a young man in the fifties when existentialism was one of the main currents of intellectual thought and this may explain his interest in it. But his version of existentialism resembles more that version associated with Paul Tillich and other religious writers influenced by existentialism than it does with the atheistic Sartre. (122) It is an apparently godless universe, for Stone. Certainly the "absent presence" of God has been a major theme in both *A Flag for Sunrise* and *Outerbridge Reach*. The story of Owen Browne, then, is much more than an adventure of the sea.

In *A Flag for Sunrise* a mystical worldview compensates for the political despair and sense of helplessness that haunts the text. In *Outerbridge Reach* moral disgust seems to have replaced the despair and the sense of cosmic evil in the earlier novel. But it is a moral disgust that is betrayed by the novel's fascination with the very attitudes it seeks to satirise. It is a short step from berating the softness of Americans and their self interest to creating a character who transcends his society in an act of individual heroism that is a version of the capitalist spirit of individualist endeavour.

In its ambitious attitude toward heroism and its interest in the deception at the heart of Owen's story rather than any conventional celebration of the intrepid human spirit it partakes of the temper of the postmodern times, privileging the cynical over the idealistic. But, in one sense, it is an anti-postmodern novel, one that returns to the great modernist themes of the individual against nature and the glorification of the individual over the masses. As I have argued, it remains essentially a novel that examines the fate of a man coping with a world where God is a "negative presence". It is finally a privileging of the spiritual over the political.

(122) John Macquarrie's book, *Existentialism* serves as a good introduction to these strands of existential thought.
Conclusion

It has been one of the principal arguments of this thesis that the writers I examine are concerned in their writing with a political analysis of their society and have written from a standpoint that is informed by a political sensibility. In this they are very different from those American postmodernists who are interested primarily in literary disruption, the idea of innovation as being central to the writing process, and from the "traditional" realists who have made the social and domestic traumas of American life their subject matter.

As I described in my opening chapter Russell Banks, Don DeLillo and Robert Stone write in an era where the contemporary episteme can be described as the postmodern; a period where the high modernism of the first part of this century in response to the vastly changed conditions of the post-1973 world, is carried on by other means. These "other means" involve a political and aesthetic consciousness that is centrally concerned with ideas of spectacle, apocalypse, relativism and spatiality, pluralism and a sense of optimism related to the opening up of the possibilities of this new age epitomised by the new technologies of communication. However, as I have argued, these ideas are actually the expression of the ambiguous nature of late capitalism, its contradictory all-powerful control of all aspects of the modern world and the in-built anarchy and precariousness of its power as revealed by Mandel in his depiction of the post-1973 economic malaise of the late capitalist system.

As Mandel describes it, the "neo-fatalist ideology of the immutable nature of the late capitalist social order" is the ideological prop of the system. This ideology is central in the cultural and intellectual worldview of late capitalism. It is evident in Fredric Jameson's attempt in his many works on the subject to propose a Marxist interpretation of postmodernism using Mandel's concept of late capitalism. His project is implicated in that ideology and in its fatalist view of the immense communicational network of the modern world can itself be seen as an artefact of postmodernism, just as much as the Bonaventure Hotel and Warhol's "Diamond Dust Shoes".
The novels I analyse in the later chapters are likewise, to some extent, imbued with the idea of the "immutable nature of the late capitalist social order". Whilst they also display many of the other characteristics of postmodernism that I have delineated in my opening chapter, it has been this postmodern fatalism that has been the central component of my argument.

Of the three writers I examine it is in Russell Banks's fiction that I find the most successful resistance to this ideology. His fashioning of an amalgam of postmodern style and political realism allows for the subversion of readerly expectations and the production of texts that challenge some of the society's preconceptions about class, race and America's role in the world. In The Book of Jamaica and Affliction the individual experiences of those novels' protagonists tell us much about the politics of race and class and the metonymic effect of the narratives allows both novels to be read in ways that relate individual experience to collective history. Yet the pessimism apparent in his work, one thinks of the fate of Wade and the unnamed narrator of the earlier novel, works against his stated objective of changing the world through his fiction.

Don DeLillo, as an exemplary postmodern novelist, "reads" the literary and cultural tradition he writes within in order to re-invent it and inscribe it with a postmodern consciousness. The Names rewrites the international novel of Henry James and others as a tale of modern alienation and Libra rewrites the classic historical novel as an attempt to explain the "loss of a manageable reality" of post-assassination America. The mystification at the centre of The Names is the mysterious abecedarian cult and along with the novel's obsession with language and codes this works against its depiction of the politics of the international world of communications and terror. Whilst Libra enacts a sense of historical fatalism in its blending of metahistorical comment and the biography of the man who became the "dupe of history" for all the forces behind the assassination. This stands in direct contrast to Lukacs's idea of the historical novel pointing to the possibilities of change and collective action.
Robert Stone is less concerned with postmodern gestures of narrative subversion, preferring to write in the tradition of the high modernism of Conrad, Hemingway and Fitzgerald. *A Flag for Sunrise* has as the centre of its narrative the most political of subject matters, a revolution. Yet the novel is less about the politics of revolution than it is a cosmic vision of Gnostic evil. A vision which compensates for its ideological silences, its failure to engage with the Tecanians and the causes and course of their revolution. In *Outerbridge Reach* the novel's satire of Reaganism and indictment of American morality in the 1980s ends up muddled by the mysticism at the centre of Stone's political liberalism. In both these novels despair and a sense of inevitable failure is the feeling that colours the action. Ultimately it is a religious explanation that is offered for Holliwell and Owen's shortcomings, the political is sidelined.

Thus the result of my enquiry into the question of whether or not political fiction is possible in the historical context of postmodernism finds only a limited success in the works of the three writers I have examined.
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