

Karagouni, Villy (2012) *Voices of dissent: Interpenetrations of aesthetics and socio-politics in three modernist case-studies*. PhDthesis.

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/3713/>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Voices of Dissent: Interpenetrations of Aesthetics and Socio-politics in Three Modernist Case-Studies

Villy Karagouni

PhD

University of Glasgow

School of Critical Studies

Department of English Literature

May 2012

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Acknowledgments	5
Introduction: Theoretical Backgrounds and Foregrounds	6
Chapter One: Dos Passos's <i>Manhattan Transfer</i>	34
Chapter Two: Jean Rhys's <i>Voyage in the Dark</i>	79
Chapter Three: Samuel Beckett's <i>Murphy</i>	126
Post-Scriptum: On the Importance of Theory and the Retrieval of Dissent in Modernist Literature	171
Bibliography	176

Abstract

This thesis explores the interpenetrations of aesthetic and socio-political issues in three modernist novels by John Dos Passos, Jean Rhys, and Samuel Beckett. It aims to argue for the importance of theory and the retrieval of voices of dissent in contemporary modernist studies. Theodor Adorno's aesthetic theory, Raymond Williams's cultural critique, and the contemporary conceptualizations of Jacques Rancière, Isobel Armstrong, and Jean-Michel Rabaté are applied to the primary texts in an attempt to uncover dissenting qualities at both a textual and contextual level. In this process, the thesis also addresses the ways in which each text and author can be seen to challenge the socio-literary landscape of their time. One of the premises upon which this study has been predicated is that the particularities of modernist form can be reconsidered and reappraised with the help provided by theorists who remind us of the political import and even the radicalism of literary aesthetics. Numerous texts could be refreshingly reassessed in contemporary modernist studies, if approached from reconciliatory angles that acknowledge the value of contradiction as an intrinsic feature of critique in the process of reevaluating the socio-political relevance of modernist aesthetics. In particular, the retrieval of voices of dissent against the social, economic, and political contexts of modernist narratives is indispensable to the attempt to envisage and nurture a socially responsive and responsible modernist studies in the twenty-first century. In the three chapters of this dissertation, *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage in the Dark*, and *Murphy* are seen to critique the status quo within modern capitalist metropolises and give dissent a variety of voices. The overarching aim of this thesis is to account for the elements that compose this variety. At the same time, all three of the case-studies have been approached from analytical perspectives that recognize and emphasize not only the necessity, but also the radical limitations and failures of dissent. These limitations and failures are often seen to be enciphered in the interpenetrations between the texts' aesthetics and socio-politics, as well as conditioned by the textual and semantic effects of contradiction. Within a newly envisaged, socially responsive and responsible modernist aesthetic, the radicalism of critique can be illuminated by the radicalism of aesthetic frameworks. It is my hope that the analyses undertaken in this thesis,

along with the aesthetic and critical theories that have assisted them, can be seen to partake of such contemporary concerns.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply indebted to my supervisors Bryony Randall and Alex Benchimol for their sustained guidance, insightfulness, helpfulness, and dependability throughout the composition of this thesis. I would like to extend my gratitude to each and every one, from within the University of Glasgow as well as from my personal life, who has given me feedback and broadened my intellectual horizon in a multitude of ways throughout the last three years. The inspiration and support I have received from my dear parents are behind every step that led to the completion of this thesis.

Introduction: Theoretical Backgrounds and Foregrounds

1. Overarching Concerns and Thematic Continuities in the Primary Texts

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, literary theory and criticism's renewed attention to a socially charged aesthetics, to the idea of approaching literary form from perspectives attuned to ideology critique, was being addressed and reinstated by several contemporary theorists.¹ Marjorie Levinson in her 2004 essay 'What is New Formalism?' addresses the main tendencies included in the New Formalism label; she identifies both an effort to upgrade literary form to a position of sovereign rule, as it were, and a less militant view according to which it is crucial that form be regarded as performing synergistically with content.² Along these lines, the axiom according to which 'close reading' is not an end in itself but a means that enables scholarship to do justice to a work's 'complexity'—i.e. the intricate fusion of features of form and features of content—is newly emphasized:

[t]hat complexity (a leitmotif throughout New Formalism) which is attributed to the artwork and recoverable only through a learned submission to its myriad textual prompts, explains the deep challenge that the artwork poses to ideology, or to the flattening, routinizing, absorptive effects associated with ideological regimes.³

¹ Works by Marjorie Levinson, Isobel Armstrong, Jean-Michel Rabaté, and Jacques Rancière, all written and/or published in the 2000s, engage with the subject of an alleged return to viewing literary aesthetics as socio-politically charged and even radical. Levinson locates this theoretical trend within what she defines as New Formalism; in contemplating theory's future role, Rabaté points towards a reconciliatory approach between close engagement with the aesthetics of the text and acknowledgment of the text's mimetic properties that testify to the sociohistorical conditions in which it was produced; Rancière defines literary politics and elaborates on its role within contemporary culture by theorizing an expanded notion of the aesthetic, able to radicalize our perception; and Armstrong offers her vision of a 'radical' aesthetic whose cognitive/critical dimension does not exist in spite of affect but is in fact inseparable from it.

² Marjorie Levinson, 'What is New Formalism?', *PMLA*, Volume 122, Number 2, March 2007, pp. 558–569.

³ Ibid, p. 560. I need to clarify at this point that my understanding of the term 'complexity' with regard to literary works is aligned with the one Levinson attributes to the 'activist', as opposed to the 'normative', formalists. To summarize Levinson, 'normative' formalists consider contradictions to be faults in literary works and distinguishable from the quality of complexity. 'Activist' formalists, on their part, regard complexity as

It is this dual emphasis on ‘complexity’ (a complexity recoverable through attentive close reading) and ‘challenge’ (a challenge testifying to the fact that literary form actually does literary politics) that underscores the ongoing need for contemporary literary scholarship to rethink form contrapuntally and synergistically with content and that ultimately shapes the general methodological principles of my research. My literary analyses aim to suggest that, in the texts in question, the relationship between aesthetics and sociopolitical critique is not merely one of intricate interpenetration but also laden with, and grounded in, irresolvable contradiction.⁴ I will show how particular aesthetic traits of my case-studies can be seen to corroborate and confirm, ironize and problematize their social critique, thus highlighting the connection between formal and critical aspects within a literary text as one of characteristic intricacy. The primary texts that will be explored in this thesis are: John Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer*, in the first chapter; Jean Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark*, in the second chapter; and Samuel Beckett’s *Murphy* in the third chapter.⁵ I explore the contradictions born of the conflicted relationship between, on one hand, the inevitable reflection of the social and ideological landscape from which each textual world emerged—i.e. that of modern capitalist metropolises—and, on the other, the critique of that landscape via the politics of literary aesthetics. The pivotal role of contradiction in this dissertation and the will to trace it in case-studies of literary modernism has been largely inspired

inseparable from (or even synonymous with) contradiction: ‘On their reading, contradiction arises from the dialectical situation of the work both “in itself” or regarded as a gesturally or institutionally integral structure *and* as it exists in dynamic exchange with its diverse environments. Far from discrediting the artwork as an instance of false consciousness, contradiction authenticates it’. (Levinson, 568)

⁴ My understanding of the term ‘ideology’ is Althusserian insofar as I emphasize its dual function: according to Althusser, ideology both ‘interpellates individuals as subjects’ and subjects them to its rule. For Althusser, ideology extends to all aspects of individual and social life, attempting to exert its control by ironing out contradiction and paradox and therefore working towards imposing sameness and conformity. However, as Raymond Williams observes in *Writing in Society*, ideology’s power is not impermeable. The forces that can penetrate it—that can critique it—are theory, on the one hand, and literature, on the other. See Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971) and Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society* (London and New York: Verso, 1983), pp. 207-208. I will address Williams’s understanding of literature’s potential resistance to ideology later on in this Introduction.

⁵ John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (London: Penguin Books, 2000 [1925]); Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (London: Penguin Books, 2000 [1934]); Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York: Grove Press, 1957 [1938]). *Voyage in the Dark* will henceforth be abbreviated into *Voyage*.

by the Frankfurt School and, in particular, the social and aesthetic theory of Theodor Adorno, as well as by the British Cultural Studies perspective offered by Raymond Williams. In this introduction I discuss the particular strands of Frankfurt School socio-aesthetic theory and Cultural Studies that constitute part of the theoretical foundation of my literary analyses. However, greater emphasis will be placed upon contemporary theoretical formulations by Jacques Rancière, Isobel Armstrong, and Jean-Michel Rabaté; the aspects of their thought spotlighted here will be applied to the close readings undertaken in the following chapters.

The case-studies are presented by order of publication. Dos Passos, Rhys, and Beckett naturally differ in their approaches to, and navigations of, voices of dissent in each of their respective novels here discussed. The dissertation as a whole aims at retrieving and situating these dissenting voices within a modernist studies that seeks to be socio-politically sensitive and relevant. *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage*, and *Murphy* work well alongside each other to assist this aim. In Dos Passos's novel, dissent is polyphonic: the third person narration illuminates wildly different instantiations of dissent that range from political radicalism to quiet, internalized unrest to the ramblings of street orators. In Rhys's novel, dissent is monophonic: the first person narration offers access to Anna's voice of affect and memory—to the notes of critique that she hits. In Beckett's novel, the unidentified narrator provides critical accompaniment to Murphy's radical voice; the result is an often dissonant duet between Murphy's dissent and the narrator's critique of it.

Rather than explain why I did not opt for any other constellation of modernist texts—an engagement which would have merited a separate research project—I hope to adumbrate the reasons why the particular texts I chose usefully illustrate my theoretical foundations and overarching arguments, as well as the continuities between these two. In order to be able to offer sufficient examples of close reading in each of my case studies and to show the complex ways in which aesthetics and ideology critique intersect and interpenetrate with one another, I chose to focus on no more than three texts. All three texts in question here give voice to dissent, difference, and otherness specifically vis-à-vis metropolitan capitalist society in the first third of the twentieth century.

Manhattan Transfer addresses Manhattan primarily in the 1920s;⁶ *Voyage* is based on autobiographical material referring to London in the 1910s, although Rhys gave literary shape to this material in the 1930s; finally, *Murphy* is set in a well-detailed 1930s London, with only a few minor episodes taking place in Dublin and Cork. All three novels delve into the profound alienation and/or unease of their protagonists within the dehumanizing, mechanizing, and ultimately irrepressible energies of modern capitalist metropolises; in all three, such a state of affairs is both reflected and stridently critiqued.

Manhattan Transfer's numerous characters embody differing forms of dissent, ranging from the skeptical to the radical, against the socioeconomic structures of Manhattan in the 1920s. The marginalized, conflicted, or even crushed individual becomes a vehicle of otherness and is thrown into sharp relief against the all-dominating, all-pervading Machine: the modern capitalist metropolis. Dos Passos's technique embraces cutting-edge technological advancement; extensive use of montage in *Manhattan Transfer* creates a disconnected world that cannot cohere, where individuals are merely puppets and the metropolis-machine is pulling their strings. The metropolis-machine crushes individual agency, leaving Dos Passos's characters unable to take control of their lives. The logic of American finance and profiteering, success and fame is seen to subsume dissent, testifying to the power of the modern capitalist system to absorb even the forces that oppose and resist it. Behind the machinations of the metropolis/machine is the mechanical, crushing hand of modernity. Dos Passos makes us see, feel, and perceive the injustice of the capitalist system and the need for a radical change, yet ultimately the novel is a carrier not only of radical critique but also of the realization that as necessary as dissent and resistance are, the system manages to assimilate them. Running like a fissure through *Manhattan Transfer*'s grid of aesthetics and socio-politics is the question of how to sustain dissenting energies in a capitalist environment. It is a question of vital interest to the radically minded Dos Passos of the 1920s, who idealized individuality and independence of thought and action.

⁶ For the major part, the novel refers to 1920s Manhattan; it does, however, offer scenes from, or referring to, earlier in the century.

The author's skepticism regarding the fate of dissent, as manifested in *Manhattan Transfer*, can be related to his doubts regarding collectivity, as expressed in his personal life.

The otherness of Rhys's protagonist in *Voyage* is manifold. It is inflected by gender, as Anna faces hardships endemic to women within patriarchal societal structures. It is also inflected by cultural origin, as she finds herself unable to reconcile her Caribbean roots—and past—with the London environment and society of the present. It is, finally, an otherness related to her socio-economic status; in her struggle to make a living, she finds herself in disreputable and finally desperate conditions. From these three levels of otherness, Anna manages to articulate her dissent using a language of affect that relentlessly exposes gender and social stereotypes, racism, socio-cultural alienation, poverty, and despair as characterizing aspects of the marginalized other's existence in the modern capitalist metropolis. She is deeply and painfully aware of the irrepressibility of the energies operative in capitalist society, as she sees and feels them swallow up her difference, her loneliness, her despair, and her critique. Otherness is given a voice of critical import and vulnerability; a voice that can somehow be heard through the sociopolitical structures that threaten to confine it.

Murphy's status as a marginalized other is manifested in several ways in Beckett's eponymous novel. The issue of individual choice is mired in paradox, as Murphy's deliberately antisocial and nonconformist character finds itself constricted by his all-too-human limitations. The narrator declares that all of the characters that people *Murphy* are puppet-like, except Murphy himself: 'All the puppets in this book whinge sooner or later, except Murphy, who is not a puppet'.⁷ This argument is alternately affirmed and negated in the course of the novel, for while Murphy chooses, on principle, to oppose and segregate himself from societal norms and values, he is ultimately unable to completely forswear the outside world for the world of his mind. Given that the issue of individual choice is caught in a web of contradiction in *Murphy*, I argue that it is via his uncompromising rejection of normative, instrumental rationality, which constitutes a foundational principle of modern capitalist society, that Murphy can be distinguished from and even contrasted with the other characters in the

⁷ *Murphy*, p. 122.

novel—in short, the puppets. Murphy, as will be seen, is a sworn enemy of the ‘quid pro quo’ logic—the logic of equal exchange. Hostile to capitalist values and societal norms, he prefers instead to retreat into the world of his mind; and even though his actual decision to work at a psychiatric clinic evidences his entrance into the world of everyday labour (in betrayal of his principles), his subsequent idealization of institutionalized insanity and ‘at-homeness’ with it are clearly in line with his dissent against any form of establishment, authority, and normative rationality. One of the focal points in my third chapter is the conflicting way in which Murphy’s whimsical dissent is portrayed and treated within the novel; congruently, the constrictions of dissent within the modern capitalist social setting will be explored.

In general, each and all of the chapters of this dissertation will be attending to, retrieving, and analyzing dissent and its limitations, with the significant aid of theory. All three novels show, in a variety of ways, instances of dissent against the bleak state of affairs in modern capitalist metropolises, bringing into focus the marginalization, containment, and suppression of resistance within the metropolitan environment. This is why the portrayal of Dublin, for instance, in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* would have been unsuitable for my kind of argumentation: for all of its confounding, polyvalent, modernized energies, Dublin is not portrayed as an insatiable, unstoppable machine that crushes individual agency and choice as is the case in *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage*, and *Murphy*.⁸ To borrow Marxist cultural geographer David Harvey’s expression, ‘the urbanization of consciousness’ that occurs in *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage*, and *Murphy* is an all-encompassing one, whereby the individual is not under the spell of the forces of capitalist modernity anymore, but rather under their rule. In *Ulysses* we can still find the phantasmagoric, albeit often troublingly multifarious, quality that the great kaleidoscope of metropolitan society confers on individual perspective and experience; the authority of the individual glance and thought to give shape to its surrounding world has not yet

⁸ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin Books, 2000 [1922]). In my reading of *Ulysses* I see ‘the urbanization of consciousness’ in the city of Dublin to be inseparable from a sense of wonder. Individual consciousness may be deeply perturbed and troubled due to the energies of modernity, as becomes obvious in the case of Leopold Bloom, yet the novel also marvels at the kaleidoscopic, manifold reality—which those same energies generate. This sense of wonder is, I argue, lost in the worlds of *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage*, and *Murphy* where the forces of modernity are clearly shown to be injurious to the individual.

dwindled. In 'The Urbanization of Consciousness' chapter, from *The Urban Experience*, Harvey writes:

The city is the high point of human achievement [...] But it is also the site of squalid human failure, the lightning rod of the profoundest human discontents, and the arena of social and political conflict. [...] The capitalist city is the arena of the most intense social and political confusion at the same time as it is a monumental testimony to and a moving force within the dialectics of capitalism's uneven development.⁹

In *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage*, and *Murphy* the modern capitalist cityscape possesses a consciousness all of its own, a consciousness at once trans- and inhuman, which is seen to thwart otherness, difference, and dissent; to repress the potentially fruitful conflict of opposing forces. Dissent is acknowledged in all three novels, in ways that this thesis has set out to foreground, attending along the way to the particular aesthetics of this dissent—i.e. the manner and stylistics in which it is presented and articulated in each text. A common symbolic and thematic thread in all three case-studies, the modern metropolis emerges as 'the site of squalid human failure' described by Harvey above, in that it forestalls the fruitfulness and sustainability of dissent.

In *Manhattan Transfer* the authority of individual perspective and experience gives way under the irrepressible power of the metropolis-machine that assimilates, defuses, crushes, or (in the glimmer of hope that Jimmy Herf's grand exit provides) simply displaces everything that defies it. Individual consciousness appears thwarted by the abstract consciousness of the metropolis in every turn. The character of Joe Harland emblemizes the machine's authority to turn a man into a mere plaything. Nameless orators and mad prophets voice their ominous dissent, without being listened to by anyone. And Jimmy's awareness of precisely what is wrong in the socio-economico-political status quo unshackles his mind but not his hands. Pervasive as the instantiations of dissent are throughout the novel, the sense of powerlessness before the forces of modernity persists and haunts.

In *Voyage* Anna displays a striking awareness of the connection between her personal failure and the ills of modern capitalist society. She instinctively recognizes patriarchal and capitalist

⁹ See David Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 229-255 (p. 229).

structures as the shackles that bind and weigh her down. Moreover, as a socio-cultural other, Anna can tap into the radically non-urbanized energies and mentalities she became acquainted with (and enchanted by) back in Dominica. Through the language of affect and memory she uncovers the oppressiveness of the idea of Englishness; an idea born of imperialist mindsets and practices and therefore inseparable from the construction of the capitalist metropolis. London's social environment and structures are shown to be damaging to Anna's otherness and dissent alike; by the end of the novel she will have been broken and condemned (not enabled) to 'starting all over again'.¹⁰

For *Murphy*'s part, socio-ideological dissidence assumes a more playful guise, as the narrator's sarcasm and witticisms permeate the novel, lending a colourful quality to the protagonist's resistance. Yet, Murphy is unmistakably a dissenter; the only character in the novel described as 'not a puppet'.¹¹ I would argue that even though the conspicuous narrator exposes Murphy's belief system as illusory and misguided, he does not delegitimize it. The novel maintains a paradoxical balance between critiquing the status quo and undermining that very critique. The injurious, dehumanizing effects of capitalist modernity, represented by metropolitan London, are often rendered in darkly humorous, cuttingly sarcastic tones, while Murphy emerges as a paradoxical, antisocial outsider who refuses to be a 'puppet' like the others; as much an emblem of failure as of resistance. The conflict between modern capitalist society—'the big world'—and Murphy's 'little world' is thrown into sharp relief but remains, at least in Beckett's novel, unresolved.¹²

¹⁰ *Voyage*, p. 159. It is significant to note that, in her original ending, Rhys wanted to leave little doubt as to the Anna's death. Considered too bleak by Rhys's editors, however, that ending was changed by Rhys into a more ambiguous one that, still, leaves little room for hope.

¹¹ *Murphy*, p. 122.

¹² It is significant (as well as riveting) that Beckett's first published novel should present the outside world in recognizable, mundane terms, far removed from the sparse, dystopian backgrounds against which his later characters exist. The London background—'the big world'—plays a pivotal role in *Murphy* as it constitutes the antithesis to Murphy's ideal and dissenting world. The capitalist metropolis stands for conformity, functionality, profiteering, and instrumental rationality; Murphy's 'little world' embraces solipsism, little tactics that oppose the capitalist economic system, and scorn of every bourgeois value imaginable. The 'big world'/'little world' juxtaposition, and the latter term's priority over the former's, is thematized and overtly articulated in the novel: "I am not of the big world, I am of the little world" was an old refrain with Murphy, and a conviction, two convictions, the negative first'. *Ibid*, p. 178.

These introductory observations are meant to suggest that each of the novels addressed here provides evidence of the conflicting forces at work within modern capitalist metropolises. The necessity of resistance and its limits are equally foregrounded. Solutions are not provided; yet, the irrepressible power of capitalist modernity is painted in such somber colours that the reader is almost prompted to consider ways to overcome impasses such as the ones facing the protagonists of *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage*, and *Murphy*; and ways to restore faith in the power of the individual to shape the world while also being shaped by it. Moreover, what I call aesthetics of dissent, in reference to the differing ways in which ideological resistance is stylized and voiced in each case-study, inevitably conjures up a discussion of modernist aesthetics per se. In this dissertation I hope to show the relevance of my definition of aesthetics of dissent—as operative in *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage*, and *Murphy*—for twenty-first century modernist studies; to partake in a larger argument for a more socially responsive canon of literary modernism. Besides, the estrangement and marginalization of forces of discontent and resistance towards capitalist modernity is arguably as urgently topical today as it was in the first third of the twentieth century (naturally, with differing cause-and-effect dynamics at work). It would be of interest to juxtapose three late modernist texts in which forces of dissent are made to reckon with their limitations, in the clearly hostile modern metropolitan context.

Crucially, the aesthetics of dissent that I identify in *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage*, and *Murphy*, work to preserve, rather than iron out, the concepts of ambiguity, conflict, and contradiction. The relation of these concepts to the function of critique is particularly significant. All three novels are riddled with antinomies which in this thesis are regarded as integral, rather than defective, parts of their aesthetics and their critique; they are seen to support the belief—traceable back to Frankfurt School—in the subversive potential of contradiction in literature, a potential which will be specifically addressed later in this Introduction. The discussion of the contradictions that permeate the three case-studies cannot but involve the relation of each text's aesthetic and critical traits to the personal and socio-ideological backgrounds of their authors. Significantly, each author can be seen to challenge the prevailing tendencies of their time in British and American literary history, i.e. from the mid-1920s up to the late 1930s. Dos Passos combines vigorous and cutting-edge aesthetic experimentation with

strident sociopolitical critique, bypassing equally the hermeticism of art for art's sake and the didacticism of socialist realism (even though he can be seen to use strategies of both genres). He engages with new technologies, as evidenced by the pivotal role and critical import of the cinematic technique of montage throughout *Manhattan Transfer*; in his montage aesthetic, as I argue in my first chapter, the critique of capitalism and the resignation to its forces become enmeshed. Rhys, on her part, resists the call to polemical literature that resonates in literary Britain of the 1930s, as well as the dominance of male-centered, emotion-shunning rationality within modernist circles.¹³ *Voyage* is heavily reliant on autobiographical material, while the language of affect used by its protagonist becomes, as already noted, the vehicle of critique—far removed from a purportedly ‘soft’, feminine communicativeness devoid of a cognitive, analytical quality. Finally, Beckett too circumvents the callings to polemical literature in 1930s Britain.¹⁴ From the perspective of an advocate of committed literature, the panoply of aesthetic techniques used by Beckett would be critiqued for obscuring his novel's radical content; the close readings undertaken in my third chapter aim to retrieve this radical content while foregrounding its inseparability from the author's aesthetic tricks.

2. The Role of Theory in the Retrieval of Modernist Dissent

I will now focus on the theoretical background of this research in order to justify its analytical perspectives and overall lines of argumentation. Within the British Cultural Studies tradition, Raymond Williams centralizes the significance of contradiction in modernist literature as evidenced

¹³ On this, see Isobel Armstrong's chapter entitled ‘Textual Harassment: the Ideology of Close Reading, or how Close is Close?’ in *The Radical Aesthetic*, pp. 86-107. Further discussion on this subject is undertaken later on in this Introduction and in my second chapter. *The Radical Aesthetic* (Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell, 2000). For detailed accounts of committed literature in 1930s Britain, see: Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation; Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London, Sydney, Toronto: The Bodley Head, 1976); Bernard Bergonzi, *Reading the Thirties: Texts and Contexts* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1978); George Orwell, ‘Inside the Whale’ in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (London, England: Penguin Books, 2001 [1940]).

¹⁴ See David Weisberg's account of the literary climate in 1930s Britain and Beckett's reaction to it in *Chronicles of Disorder: Samuel Beckett and the Cultural Politics of the Modern Novel* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).

by the intricate relationship between ideology reflection and ideology critique in the literary text and by the latter's 'relative autonomy'. 'There are few greater contradictions', he maintains in *Writing in Society*, 'than those of modernist literature, and especially the contradiction now expressed as literary language'.¹⁵ Williams is here referring specifically to the contradiction that emerges in his view of modernist literary language as being both socially bound and 'self-generating'. In his view, the language of literary modernism both responds to 'the general social processes of language' and creates 'its own internal idea of literary language; a process of composition centred wholly in its own self-generating system of literary signs'.¹⁶ Williams also discusses another level of contradiction that pertains to literature at large, and is influenced by Althusser's definition of the concept of ideology. According to the theoretical-literary model following from Althusserian thought (as interpreted, here, by Williams) the relationship of literature to ideology is as follows:

[L]iterature is not just a carrier of ideology, as in most forms of reflection theory. It is inescapably ideological, but its specific relative autonomy is that it is a form of writing, a form of practice, in which ideology both exists and is or can be internally distanced and questioned. Thus the value of literature is precisely that it is one of the areas where the grip of ideology is or can be loosened, because although it cannot escape ideological construction, the point of its literariness is that it is a continual questioning of it internally.¹⁷

The above specification of the contradictions found at the heart of modernist literature and literature at large animates this dissertation's approach to the case-studies in question. It is at this point that Adorno's formulations—themselves grounded in the import of contradiction and the critical potential of formally experimental literature—can throw more light upon modernist literary language as a locus of 'immanent critique'. In my selection of texts I bring into focus the conflicted relationship between their potential for 'immanent critique', which can be understood as a means of 'exploding bourgeois thought from inside', to use Craig Calhoun's expression, and the self-criticism they can be

¹⁵ *Writing in Society*, p. 224

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.208.

seen to carry with regard to the limitations of such a critique.¹⁸ Calhoun in *Critical Social Theory* offers a lucid account of Adorno's understanding of 'immanent critique' as inherently subversive towards ideology's purported sovereignty. In his *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno asserts that '[w]hat is social in art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions'.¹⁹ Authentic, autonomous art's character is never overtly social, according to Adorno; it is inherently social:

Social struggles and the relations of classes are imprinted in the structure of artworks; by contrast, the political positions deliberately adopted by artworks are epiphenomena and usually impinge on the elaboration of works and thus, ultimately, on their social truth content.²⁰

This thesis is predicated on the will to demonstrate, via its case-studies, how literary analysis can be further enriched by delving into the intricate relationship between a text's social critique, as inherent in its aesthetics, and the social critique disseminated by the text's own self-criticism. To this end, the following chapters will all devote special attention to the point(s) at which each text brings to light its own limitations and irresolvable contradictions regarding the potential of social dissent. Adorno, who believes in the socially subversive potential of 'authentic', 'autonomous' art, does not overtly acknowledge such limitations:

[...] art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art. By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as 'socially useful', it criticizes society by merely existing, for which puritans of all stripes condemn it.²¹

In this study, the subversive potential of the texts' social critique will be affirmed as inseparable from their aesthetics; however, the radical contradiction I acknowledge as operative within each textual world will be often seen to problematize critique by highlighting its constrictions. Moreover, Adorno

¹⁸ Calhoun addresses the concept of 'immanent critique' as understood by Adorno, and stresses the ineradicable link of such a critique to the retrieval of tensions and complexities from historical eras, events, and texts. See Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference* (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 23-24.

¹⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004 [1970]), p. 297.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 303.

²¹ Ibid, p. 296.

openly privileges the difficulty, the hermetic quality of modernist literary art (in *Aesthetic Theory*, Kafka and the later Beckett are two of his eminent examples). This research does not attribute the radical social critique of *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage*, or *Murphy* to the intransigent difficulty of modernist aesthetic form, but instead strives to trace the critical value of contradiction in which aesthetic and thematic aspects can be seen to be enmeshed. It is by dint of contradiction—not in spite of it—that the texts studied in this thesis can be seen to address the ill logic (or even the illogic, one may venture suggesting) propelling modern metropolitan societies. It is also by dint of contradiction that the texts can be seen to founder on their own limitations.

Moving on to contemporary theoretical ground, the observations of Jean-Michel Rabaté in *The Future of Theory*, published in 2002, suggest theoretical continuities with the aspects of Williams and Adorno's thought just addressed. In the last chapter of *The Future of Theory* entitled 'Theory Not of Literature But as Literature'²² Rabaté remarks that:

[...] monuments of modernism tend to include the theory of their production in such a way that it will not be visible any more, or even acknowledged by the author. Can one generalize this predicament, or is it only due to specifically modernist tactics and agendas?²³

Rather than argue for, or question, the modernist novel's purported monopoly on the state of affairs just delineated, I simply acknowledge my intention to explore, in the following chapters, the ways in which my chosen texts can be seen to exemplify Rabaté's view. Through *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage*, and *Murphy* the differing types of signification and knowledge that literary form can impart—the differing ways in which theory can be implicated into the modernist novel and become entangled with its literariness—can be posited and discussed. On his part, Rabaté concludes his chapter by asserting that

Theory [...] cannot avoid being enmeshed in the letter of the text, in partly untranslatable signifiers, in the intractable entangled network of private and historical allusions without which

²² Rabaté's emphases. *The Future of Theory* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2002).

²³ Ibid, p. 134.

literature would not open up on to *mathesis singularis*, in other words, to theorizing in particular.²⁴

It needs to be clarified that at the beginning of his chapter Rabaté had raised the question of whether one should ‘trust mimesis and look to literature for a simple reflection of reality, following the old image of a mirror dragged along the way [...] or [...] stress the relative autonomy of the work of art and concentrate on its formal properties’; he had wondered whether ‘the two wishes [could] be reconciled’.²⁵ The ‘relative autonomy’ he ascribes to the second part of the binary opposition that he calls into question is key, since it suggests that even if we chose to reject the mimetic, reflective side of literature and narrowed our focus on aesthetics alone, art’s autonomy could not be anything more than ‘relative’. Rabaté’s choice of phrasing summons Williams’s theoretical configurations discussed earlier, whereby literary art was defined as relatively autonomous in its being inescapably ideological (mimesis of the social status quo) and critical at the same time (questioning of the social status quo). By the end of his chapter, then, Rabaté has asserted the necessity of keeping our analytical eye fixed on the literariness of the text not at the expense of but in order to uncover its cognitive, ideological, critical, and in a word theoretical dimensions. The acknowledgment of this necessity permeates the kind of literary analysis this research undertakes, whereby the ‘most general questions’ asked by theory, on one hand, and the literariness of the texts themselves, on the other, are seen as mutually informing categories. In contemplating the future of theory, Rabaté essentially posits the need to retrieve it from the literary—in particular, the modernist—vessels in which it is contained; and for such a retrieval to occur, the reflection and the critique of societal structures are the ‘two wishes’ that ‘need to be reconciled’ and considered contrapuntally.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 140.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 119.

3. Towards an Aesthetics of Dissent

To further account for the centrality, in this research, of aesthetics as a locus where theory and literariness, the cognitive/ideological and ‘the letter of the text’, continuously interpenetrate, I now turn to Isobel Armstrong and Jacques Rancière; two contemporary theorists who expand the notion of aesthetics by showing—in differing ways each—how and why it is able to rearrange our ways of perception and radicalize our thought. Rancière theorizes an expanded concept of aesthetics that sees it not as strictly applicable to works of art but as being indissolubly linked to the ways in which we perceive everything around us as well as the ways in which our perceptions are then enunciated. Such a wide understanding of aesthetics is clearly congruous with Rancière’s belief that aesthetics, quite bluntly, does politics. Both art and politics constitute, according to Rancière, ways to organize, structure, perceive, and assess sensory and conceptual experience—ways, in other words, to distribute the sensible. As Rancière observes in the interview for the English edition of *The Politics of Aesthetics*,

[...] an aesthetic politics always defines itself by a certain recasting of the distribution of the sensible, a reconfiguration of the given perceptual forms [...] The dream of a suitable political work of art is in fact the dream of disrupting the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable without having to use the terms of a message as a vehicle.²⁶

Clearly, Rancière’s aesthetics acquires its political character not via a manifest political engagement but instead via its ability to reconfigure the ways in which we see, talk about, and think of, the world around us; its ability, in all, to renew and revolutionize our ‘given perceptual forms’. He insists as much on the absurdity of the attempt to separate aesthetics from politics as he does on the necessity of understanding that aesthetics does its very own kind of politics: ‘the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics [...] intermix in any case; politics has its aesthetics and aesthetics has its politics. But there is no formula for an appropriate correlation’.²⁷ The politics of literature, in fact, are literature-specific: ‘literature as literature is involved in this partition of the visible and the sayable, in

²⁶ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), p. 63.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 62.

this intertwining of being, doing, and saying that frames a polemical common world'.²⁸ The phrase 'literature as literature' harkens back to Raymond Williams's discussion of 'literariness' via which literature both is, and challenges, ideology.²⁹

Rancière enriches Williams's idea of 'literariness' by emphasizing the need for literary politics to be endemic to literary forms, as opposed to worldly politics. In the following excerpt from 'Dissenting Words: A Conversation with Jacques Rancière' he situates dissent at the very heart of politics and alludes to his expanded understanding of what politics is and by whom it can be done:

The essence of the political is dissensus; but dissensus is not the opposition of interests and opinions. It is a gap in the sensible: the political persists as long as there is a dissensus about the givens of a particular situation, of what is seen and what might be said, on the question of who is qualified to see or say what is given.³⁰

Insofar, then, as aesthetics carries such a 'dissensus' regarding the givenness of social situations, insofar as it challenges our preconceptions about who is or should be given a voice, such an aesthetics is political. It needs to be stressed, however, that the politics of literature, as Rancière understands it, refers to a struggle of literary 'signs' as opposed to one of 'wills and interests'; the latter clearly being the case in the arena of worldly politics.³¹ For Rancière it is imperative to theorize an expanded notion of what politics and political dissensus are, as well as to differentiate between real-life politics and the politics of literature: in order to perform as a polemical agent vis-à-vis the social status quo, literature needs to do its own socio-politics. In my readings of *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage*, and *Murphy* I hope to show the scope and import of the politics performed by their literary aesthetics, as well as the contradictions and limitations in which politics and aesthetics become enmeshed. Rancière does allude to these limitations without evacuating aesthetics of its critical potential:

²⁸ Jacques Rancière, 'The Politics of Literature', *SubStance*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Issue 103 (2004), pp. 10-24 (p.10).

²⁹ *Writing in Society*, pp. 207-208.

³⁰ Jacques Rancière and Davide Panagia, 'Dissenting Words: An Interview with Jacques Rancière', *Diacritics* No.30, Vol.2 (Summer 2000), pp. 113-126 (p. 124).

³¹ 'The Politics of Literature', pp. 19-20.

There is a limit at which the forms of novelistic micrology establish a mode of individuation that comes to challenge political subjectivization. There is also, however, an entire field of play where their modes of individuation and their means of linking sequences contribute to liberating political possibilities by undoing the formatting of reality produced by state-controlled media, by undoing the relations between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable.³²

Here Rancière professes his faith in the literary genre of the novel in particular as a locus where the given-ness of any particular social status quo can be called into question, and new suggestions on what can be seen, said, and thought of come into light; in all, his is a faith in literature's ability to reconstruct and alter our ways of perception. This challenging of the givenness of the social world, always mediated and achieved through literary aesthetics, will be seen at work in the case-studies of this dissertation.

In his magnified vision of aesthetics Rancière is aligned with Isobel Armstrong, who also emphasizes the role of the aesthetic in giving shape to human experience.³³ After addressing what she discerns as Terry Eagleton's problematic mistrust of the category of the aesthetic, whereby the aesthetic is practically equated with ideology in all of its inescapable rigidity, she goes on to delineate a possible answer that revolves around a liberating kind of reunion of the aesthetic with the political.³⁴ In answer to what she perceives and addresses as a widespread pessimism towards the liberating potential inherent in aesthetics, she asserts that we need to:

[R]etheorize a flagrantly emancipatory, unapologetically radical aesthetic. This would refuse the conservative reading of the aesthetic as that which stands over and against the political as disinterested Beauty, called in nevertheless to assuage the violence of a system it leaves untouched, and retrieve the radical traditions and possibilities with which the idea of the aesthetic has always been associated. I would regard with dismay a politics which subtracts the aesthetic and refuses it cultural meaning and possibility.³⁵

³² *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 65.

³³ See, in particular, Armstrong's discussion of John Dewey's aesthetics, where she maintains that the constant flux of experience calls for a constant reconsideration of form and aesthetics and calls for a new understanding of aesthetics as integrally related to both cognition and affect. Her broad definition of aesthetic form as an agent that, above all else, gives shape to, and radicalizes, our perception of human experience, resonates throughout her book. Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 164-167.

³⁴ For Armstrong's reading of Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, see *The Radical Aesthetic*, and in particular pp. 28-34.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 30.

Armstrong clearly articulates the imperative to re-politicize aesthetics. She breathes new, radical life into the category of aesthetic form by acknowledging and reinstating its inherent potential to confront and oppose the social status quo; moreover, she argues that formal mediation reanimates and transforms perception and knowledge. In agreement with Gillian Rose's radical re-reading of the concept of Hegelian mediation, whereby mediation 'tolerates difference and non-closure' as opposed to integrating everything within its seamless totality, Armstrong remarks:

Mediation transforms categories and remakes language. This is a social, not a private act. The struggle for the sign, the negotiation of codes and signifying systems, are now familiar concepts to us. But I mean that artwork can be a space where linguistic experiment changes meaning by questioning categories, the prerequisite of knowledge.³⁶

In other words, the absence of aesthetic distancing carries the danger of defusing the subversive potential inherent in literary experimentation—of obscuring the transformative potential it carries vis-à-vis what Rancière would refer to as 'our given perceptual forms'. Aesthetic mediation and the grasping of the cognitive/ideological aspect of the work of art thus become inextricably linked for Armstrong—a pivotal connection in her theory of the radical aesthetic: '[...] why should one prefer mediation rather than postmodern immediacy as a model of the aesthetic? Because immediacy has no way of grasping itself, no way of knowing about itself'. This self-awareness attributed by Armstrong to aesthetic mediation can be taken to allude to the Frankfurt School's immanent critique and also, very significantly for the wider arguments animating this research, to the critical/cognitive import of literature: 'mediation creates a space for coming to know and knowing about that coming to know, a space inevitably of fracture rather than connection, agonistic, but a space all the same'.³⁷ In lines of argument that prove to be crucially pertinent to my approach to Rhys's *Voyage* in particular, Armstrong dispels the impoverishing binary logic which distinguishes between aspects of knowledge and aspects of affect in literary works, and calls for reconciliatory analyses that acknowledge the cognitive character of affect itself:

³⁶ Ibid, p. 60.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 62.

Artwork is saturated in affect, for which we have no (or few) terms of analysis. A major consequence of abandoning the classical binaries of the aesthetic, as I should like to do, is that the traditional distinction between affect, or the emotions, and knowledge, is dissolved. Indeed, it is necessary to include affect under the sign of cognition and enable it to be comprehended in the definition of knowledge.³⁸

Thus informed and inspired, my analysis of *Voyage* will map out the ways in which Rhys's aesthetics of affect is, at the same time, an aesthetics of dissent and resistance. Armstrong's radicalization of the category of the aesthetic- - a radicalization based upon the re-inscription of the cognitive into the affective dimension but overall centered on the liberating political potential of aesthetics- - pertains to my analyses of *Manhattan Transfer* and *Murphy* as well.

Furthermore, Armstrong's emphasis on aesthetic mediation—a certain aesthetic distancing—as a prerequisite upon which the critical and cognitive aspects of literary works actually depend, compares interestingly to Adorno's formulations in *Aesthetic Theory*. Adorno's general position according to which 'form is the locus of social content', complemented by assertions that '[n]othing social in art is immediately social, not even when this is its aim', is aligned with Armstrong's theorizations.³⁹ However, where Armstrong's newly envisaged radical aesthetic carries the promise of emancipation, Adorno's visions of the aesthetic get tinged by pessimism:

Abstaining from praxis, art becomes the schema of social praxis: Every authentic artwork is internally revolutionary. However, whereas society reaches into art and disappears there by means of the identity of forces and relations, even the most advanced art has, conversely, the tendency toward social integration. Yet [...] this integration does not bring the blessings of justice in the form of retrospective confirmation. More often, reception wears away what constitutes the work's determinate negation of society. Works are usually critical in the era in which they appear; later they are neutralized, not least because of changed social relations. Neutralization is the social price of aesthetic autonomy.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid, p. 59.

³⁹ *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 296.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 299

And yet, as Terry Eagleton has insightfully remarked, '[t]here are, perhaps, two different Adornos, the one somewhat more defeatist than the other.' Adorno's faith in the aesthetic as 'a paradigm, rather than a displacement of emancipatory political thought', to use Eagleton's expression again, cannot separate itself from the sobering acknowledgment of the neutralizing energies of modern capitalist society vis-à-vis the radicalism of the aesthetic.⁴¹ The neutralization of modernist art in particular is addressed by Williams who, instead of attributing this phenomenon to modernist works' 'aesthetic autonomy', chooses to emphasize the role of social dynamics: 'What has quite rapidly happened is that Modernism quickly lost its anti-bourgeois stance, and achieved comfortable integration into the new international capitalism.' For Williams it is modern capitalist structures, rather than modernist art's autonomy, that have a catastrophic effect on the radical potential of aesthetic form. The result is that '[t]he painfully acquired techniques of significant *disconnection*', 'the isolated, estranged images of alienation and loss, the narrative discontinuities', in all, modernism's once radical aesthetic forms, 'have become the new but fixed forms of our present moment'.⁴² For Adorno, it is primarily by dint of aesthetic autonomy that the critical edge of artworks cannot be safeguarded against social changes and integration into the literary canon. Adorno's evident pessimism concerning the preservation of art's radicalism in the future invites the question of whether, and how, radicalism can be sustained. To find possible answers to such a question, a reconsideration of art's relation to what Adorno referred to as 'social praxis' may be in order. It is here that Armstrong can intervene, since this reconsideration is one of her key theoretical concerns in her vision of a new, radical aesthetic. For Armstrong, however, who theorizes the radical potential of the aesthetic independently of concepts of authenticity or autonomy, the emancipatory potential of the aesthetic cannot be defused unless it is allowed to; unless it remains un-retrieved. Like Adorno, Armstrong believes that the critical edge and political import of the aesthetic is inherent in its structures and not superadded to it; she transcends, however, his pessimism regarding the 'neutralization' of artistic subversiveness by the particular way in which she reconnects aesthetics to radical praxis. Like Rancière, she offers an expanded notion of the aesthetic

⁴¹ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (USA, UK, Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), p. 360.

⁴² Raymond Williams, *Politics of Modernism* (New York and London: Verso, 1989), p. 35.

as a way of framing and shaping everything experienced within the social world—not only reflecting, containing, or even critiquing, but actively framing and shaping it. She invests literary analysis and interpretation with the ability to retrieve the diachronically revolutionary nature of aesthetics by attending to the specifically literary kind of knowledge that it imparts, without losing sight of its ability to question, challenge, and reshape our given categories of perception, cognition, and thought. Reconceived in this manner, the aesthetic is actively reconnected to social praxis, and new faith is placed on its potential to combat the neutralizing energies of capitalist structures.

4. Modernism, High Modernism, and Late Modernism: Conceptualizations and Implications

With the emphasis of this study being on a modernist aesthetics engaged in a relationship of polyvalent interpenetration with socio-politics, I need, at this point, to address an issue which arises from my comparison of Armstrong to Adorno. This issue concerns a departure from notions of authenticity and absolute autonomy— - notions strongly associated with the dubious political ideologies of high modernism, as Whitworth reminds us in his edited volume, *Modernism*. The volume's last section, 'Late Modernism', associates high modernist writing with the production of 'autonomous art-works' and highlights late modernism's distinct role: 'Late Modernism [...] takes cognizance of high modernism's disastrous flirtation with authoritarianism; it continues high modernism with the benefit of Adorno's critiques'.⁴³ In this light, the term 'high modernist' appears to be incongruous with the overarching aim of this dissertation, which is to oppose deep-seated canonical mindsets that disregard the radical socio-politics of modernist literature. 'Late modernist', on the other hand, seems to be a more apt description for *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage in the Dark*, and *Murphy*. Anthony Mellors, whose *Late Modernist Poetics* essay is included in Whitworth's volume, argues that 'late modernists were disenchanted by the political consequences of high

⁴³ Whitworth's own commentary. In *Modernism*, ed. Michael Whitworth (USA, UK, Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 272-296 (p. 281).

modernist culture'⁴⁴ and insists that it is more important to focus on late modernism's ideological shift away from the concepts of aesthetic autonomy and ideological authoritarianism alike, than attempt to chronologize and periodize.⁴⁵ *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage*, and *Murphy* can all help illuminate this particular 'ideological shift'. Furthermore, high modernism is associated with a strong tendency to discriminate between 'high' and 'low' culture, as well as with an 'insistence on authorial power', to use Robert Scholes's expression.⁴⁶ The question of the bourgeois subject and its place in modernist literature also arises in this context. Of course, such reductive binaries as the ones just mentioned are contestable, and they are actually being opposed in modernist studies' present moment, as *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate* amply demonstrates.⁴⁷ In his Introduction to this collection of essays, Dr. Stephen Ross relates the question of modernism's radicalism to its canonization: '[t]he particular affective and intellectual contexts that made [modernism's] pronouncements so challenging were stripped as modernism gained the cultural clout that hardened its claims into inviolable rules'.⁴⁸ He goes on to address the complications that arise when modernism is read and assessed through the lens of theory, reminding us that modernist literature has often been considered to be complicit with the forces of modernity.⁴⁹ Yet, at the heart of contemporary modernist studies, he situates the need to reconnect modernism and theory in such a way as to draw new emphasis on the links, rather than the antagonisms, between them:

[C]ritique [...] remains the core of the affinities between modernism and theory. [...] These affiliations are not accidental; they point toward a common critical orientation to modernity, an

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 285.

⁴⁵ See Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 19-34. Extract from this essay included in Whitworth's *Modernism*, pp. 281-286 (p. 285).

⁴⁶ See Robert Scholes, *Paradox of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 103.

⁴⁷ *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate*, ed. Stephen Ross (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁴⁸ See Stephen Ross, 'Introduction: The Missing Link' in *Modernism and Theory*, pp. 1-15 (pp. 7-8). Ross also challenges the purported divide between a radical avant-garde and a bourgeois modernism.

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 9-11.

unwillingness to accept what is, and always to challenge what is in the name of something better.⁵⁰

Concurring with Ross's vision of twenty-first century modernist studies, this dissertation employs theory in its attempt to retrieve voices of dissent so as to reinstate late modernist literary aesthetics as an agent of critique in the face of the forces of modernity. In this manner, the idea of modernist literature as a canonical, politically conservative (at best), and complacent reflection of the established order will be challenged.

In the introduction to Williams's *Politics of Modernism*, Tony Pinkney highlights an essential link between the avant-garde and the modernist text: both resist ideology 'in its Althusserian version' i.e. the repressive, all-encompassing social discourse that seeks to smooth over contradiction and paradox.⁵¹ This resistance to the oppressively harmonizing intentions of Althusserian ideology is a central concern in this dissertation, where the contradictions informing the case-studies in question are viewed as critical aspects of their aesthetics of dissent. In *Manhattan Transfer* Dos Passos engages with a kind of aesthetic experimentation that defies categorization either as art-becoming-life or art-for-art's-sake. His fascination with the popular cultural medium of the cinema, manifested in the pivotal role of montage in *Manhattan Transfer*, is an endorsement of technological innovation that, when taken together with the working class sensibilities and ideas of social dissent that permeate the novel in its entirety, suggests a reconciliation between sociopolitical polemic and aesthetics as well as between 'high' and 'low' culture.

Rhys's *Voyage* is likewise defiant vis-à-vis binaries and descriptive categories. Rhys is not often discussed in the context of modernist literature's most eminent figures; her most famous work is the postmodern masterpiece *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a work that amply lends itself to postcolonial readings.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 12-13.

⁵¹ Tony Pinkney, Introduction to Raymond Williams's *Politics of Modernism*, pp. 1-27 (p. 21).

⁵² This is not to suggest that Rhys's work has not been awarded sufficient attention; the novelist has recently been embraced by British literary studies. For instance, on the 8th of July 2010, a conference dedicated to the work of Jean Rhys was organized by Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, and King's College, London. This conference acknowledged, and set out to rectify, the relative marginality of Rhys's work within British literary

The socio-politics of *Voyage*, on the other hand, have not been sufficiently attended to. According to this thesis, the novel is saturated with affect which, far from de-politicizing the novel, actually becomes the carrier of critique and dissent. It is a novel which not only reconciles aesthetics with sociopolitical polemic but also dispels the opposition—the persisting antithesis—between Hard/Rational/Masculine discourse, on one hand, and Soft/Affective/Feminine discourse, on the other. In my second chapter I explore in detail the ways in which Rhys’s politicized aesthetics in *Voyage* can be seen to challenge this oppositional logic; at this point, I will briefly outline its parameters.

Armstrong in *The Radical Aesthetic*, Scholes in *Paradoxy of Modernism*, and Huyssen in *After the Great Divide* are prime examples of thinkers whose cultural criticism engages with, and questions, the binaries just delineated. Armstrong, as noted earlier, is especially intent on demolishing the thought/affect and the cognate rational-male/emotional-female binary oppositions within her larger argument for a new, radical aesthetic. Scholes concludes *Paradoxy of Modernism* by observing that

[u]nder the instruction of the Modernist critics and writers of manifestos, we have been led to believe that works of art and literature must be either High or Low, Old or New, Hard or Soft, serious or trivial, popular or elite, creative or formulaic. But when we unravel the paradox of Modernism, we find that this is not the way things actually are. The interesting and durable works of the period we call modern are mixtures of these qualities [...]⁵³

I fully endorse this correlation between the diachronic interest of literary works and their being embedded in paradoxical unions of categories traditionally thought of as antithetical. As for *After the Great Divide*, it is premised upon re-examining and calling into question the great opposition between high and mass culture. Huyssen offers forceful and convincing re-readings of the Frankfurt School’s (and especially Adorno’s) cultural theory in order to challenge the high/low cultural divide; to this end, the association of modernism with masculine energies and mass culture with feminine qualities is

studies: ‘Since her death thirty years ago, Rhys’s reputation and influence has grown but there has been no British conference dedicated to her work’, as the King’s College website puts it. It should also be mentioned that the same website refers to *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) as ‘[Rhys’s] most famous work’. <<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/humanities/depts/english/events/rhys.html>> (September 2011) [date of access]

⁵³ *Paradoxy of Modernism*, p. 278.

also called into question.⁵⁴ Engaging with the issue of patriarchy as embedded within the structures of the modern capitalist metropolis and having as its protagonist a young woman critiquing capitalist patriarchy through the language of affect, *Voyage* evidently pertains to the ‘great divide’ between the hard/rational/masculine and the soft/affective/feminine. The novel uses a woman’s discourse of affect to challenge masculinist capitalist rationality, thus obviously pitting the one side of the divide against the other; and yet, such a challenge can be seen to bridge the opposites by showing that affect does partake in the cognitive, the rational, and the critical.

For its part, *Murphy* is also a textual locus whereby opposing notions and categories coexist, mired in challenging but deeply uncomfortable contradiction. As already mentioned, the anticapitalist critique the novel disseminates becomes entangled with its aesthetics of self-critical self-reflexivity. Sarcasm and parody are amply used as critical weapons that confound the reader’s expectations. Uncompromising regarding its artistry and saturated in playful experimentation, *Murphy* goes to great lengths to foreground itself as artifice. The idea of authorial authority is overtly problematized as the narrator asserts his power by intervening to offer anything from support to humorous commentary to cutting criticism; in so doing, he also draws attention to himself as a construct, and therefore to the novel’s overall artificiality.⁵⁵ Moreover, to determine the implications that arise from a text which both advances sociopolitical critique and showcases its limitations is one of the greatest challenges set forth by *Murphy*. Interestingly, the novel also addresses the opposition between high and low culture by playing upon the genre of the popular detective novel and anticipating, in the process, postmodern literary practices. *Murphy* is akin to typical detective stories involving pursuit, as the titular character is being searched for by several others, each with their own convoluted motives. The genre is, however, parodied through Beckett’s predilection for inconsistent characters, critique of normative

⁵⁴ See in particular the chapters entitled ‘Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner’ and ‘Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other’. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 16-43 and 44-62, respectively.

⁵⁵ For a fascinating account of the centrality of the Eliot-inspired ‘objective correlative’ in High Modernism and its connection to the idea of the authority of the modernist author, see *Paradoxy of Modernism*, pp. 102-103 in particular.

rationality, and depiction of surreal events and situations. This is a playful questioning, rather than an unsettling, of the high/low culture opposition.

In all, each of the three novels engages with contradiction and the binary logic of opposition in differing ways and to differing degrees; and all three of them will be seen to challenge the concept of high modernism which, by definition, distinguishes itself from lower forms of culture. More importantly, however, they will be seen to unsettle the (always already problematic) dichotomy between perceptions of disinterested and politicized modernist aesthetics. They will also be seen to forge a dialogic relationship between the radicalism of aesthetics and the radicalism of politics. It should be emphasized once again that this is a dialogue mired in contradiction—far removed from the smoothness of perfect correspondence. The texts in question will be seen to subvert the perceived boundaries between High and Low, Affective and Cognitive, Rational and Emotional, Rational and Irrational, Hard and Soft, Social and Private, Social and Asocial, Aesthetics and Politics— a subversion indissolubly linked with the radical contradictions in which these three texts are grounded.

As Calhoun reminds us in his reconsideration of Frankfurt School theory

[f]or the first-generation Frankfurt theorists [...] critical theory depended on a dialectical analysis of the contradictions internal to every epoch, or social formation, or situation, or text. An immanent critique was particularly effective as a historically specific critique.⁵⁶

This emphasis on and reappraisal of contradiction and paradox, textual as well as contextual, in modernist texts in particular, is pivotal to this study's thesis. Despite its problematic privileging of 'high' over 'mass' culture, Frankfurt School theory was itself oriented towards 'exploding bourgeois thought from inside', as Calhoun puts it, in reference to Adorno in particular.⁵⁷ The Frankfurt School's conceptualization of immanent critique can be seen to translate in the domain of literary theory and analysis as a radical questioning of 'the idea that works of art or literature should be interpreted in terms of seamless singularity of purpose or smooth fit with the patterns of the age,

⁵⁶ *Critical Social Theory*, p. 23.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

seeking instead tensions and projects that pushed beyond the immediately manifest'.⁵⁸ This validation of the cultural import of contradiction as closely linked with the workings of immanent critique can be discerned in my case studies, where the values of the bourgeoisie are critiqued from within the bourgeois order's own categories.

Establishing a crucial link between Frankfurt School and British Cultural Studies, Douglas Kellner observes that 'both the earlier forerunners of British cultural studies, especially Raymond Williams, and the theorists of the Frankfurt School, see high culture as a force of resistance to capitalist modernity' and warn strongly against the 'detrimental effects of abstracting culture from its sociopolitical context'.⁵⁹ Again, even though the qualification 'high' in reference to 'culture' cannot be accepted in the context of the defiance of such oppositions suggested in my case-studies, the gist of Kellner's argument can be retained. As also noted by Levinson, it is precisely the abstraction of cultural artifacts from the sociopolitical landscape surrounding and informing them that can hinder their criticism of capitalist modernity, and ward off the unstinting challenge they can disseminate against the irrepressible energies of the capitalist status quo. It is also noteworthy that, in opposition to the elitism of the Frankfurt School, Kellner reasserts the critical abilities of the audience/readers. His view of audience/readers as 'active'⁶⁰ agents who may accordingly activate a work's sociopolitical import is congruent with my overarching thesis concerning the subversive, socially explosive energies disseminated by the novels concerned in this study. It is also a view that can be derived from Rancière's and Armstrong's expanded notions of the aesthetic as a radical force that rearranges our perceptual forms and disrupts the idea of the unquestionable givenness of social reality. Of course the aesthetic cannot perform in such a manner without the reader's 'active' collaboration. As the following example used by Rancière demonstrates, even though the sociopolitical import of the aesthetic is uncontestable, the way it is interpreted may take any sociopolitical nuance. Rancière

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Douglas Kellner, 'The Frankfurt School and British Cultural Studies: The Missed Articulation' (February 2009) [date of access]. <<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/kellner.html>>, pp. 5 and 6, respectively.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 13

briefly refers to Dos Passos to illustrate the lack of criteria to establish a clear-cut correspondence between the aesthetic and critical aspects of literary texts: Dos Passos, argues Rancière, ‘represent[s] a shattered reality: fragmented stories of erratic individual destinies that translate, by their illogicality, the logic of the capitalist order’.⁶¹ He is quick to add, however, that

[n]ovelistic fragmentation’ may lend [itself] just as well to describing the chaos of the capitalist world from the point of view of class struggle as to describing, from a nihilistic point of view, the chaos of a world where class struggle is itself but one element in the Dionysian chaos.⁶²

The socio-politics of literary aesthetics exist in any case; the aesthetic is radical always already, but the angles from which its radicalism will be approached and retrieved cannot be predetermined. Or, in Rancière’s words, ‘[...] there is no criterion for establishing a correspondence between aesthetic virtue and political virtue. There are only choices’.⁶³

There are only choices; readings; interpretations. It seems that contemporary modernist literary scholarship can enrich and deepen its critical scope by allowing the influence of contemporary theory to manifest itself in the study of texts whose radical aesthetics and socio-politics have not hitherto been accounted for in sufficient ways. In this Introduction I have attempted to map out certain strands of cultural theory that reinvest the category of the aesthetic with radical potential and possibility; that bring forth the interpenetrations of modernist technique and socio-ideological landscape; that reevaluate the role of contradiction in literary texts in its multivalent effects; and, finally, that reconnect literature with its ability to affect the way we look at the seething social, political, and economic terrain we traverse today. I have also outlined my approach to each of the texts I have selected. In the chapters to follow, close readings will attempt to illustrate what has here been posited in theory. Each chapter aims to throw into relief the dialogue between the

⁶¹ *The Politics of Aesthetics*. p. 61.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

aforementioned theorists and the texts themselves. It is at once the hope and the aim of this study to suggest the significance of such a dialogue for contemporary modernist studies.

Chapter One: Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*

1. Introduction: Dos Passos and the American Left in the 1920s

According to Michael Whitworth, one of the predominant characteristics of the modernist literary text is its awareness of 'a division between the social and the personal self [...]'.¹ If we take 'division' to suggest the separation and disconnection of individual consciousness from the social energies surrounding it, then the above formulation cannot be seen to apply to John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*.² If, however, we focus on that same word's connotations of radical tension, conflict, alienation, and struggle, and if we regard them as descriptive of the relationship between individuality and the capitalist system in early twentieth century metropolitan society, then we are moving closer to locating *Manhattan Transfer*'s subject matter. Dos Passos as an author engaged with aesthetic experimentation and Dos Passos as a radical social critic/historian meet in *Manhattan Transfer* in intriguing, intricate, and contradictory ways that will be explored in this chapter.³ The novel both reflects and critiques the effects of twentieth century capitalism upon the social and the personal self; moreover, it forges and displays an interpenetrative relationship between literary aesthetics and voices of dissent against the forces of modernity. I begin by exploring Dos Passos's association with the American Radical Left of the Twenties, since it offers a contextual framework for the retrieval of *Manhattan Transfer*'s rhetoric of dissent.

¹ *Modernism*, ed. Michael H. Whitworth (USA, UK, Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2007). Introduction, pp. 3-60 (p. 13).

² John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (London: Penguin Books, 2000 [1925]). The novel will be abbreviated into *MT* for the rest of this chapter, when used for direct quotations.

³ On the relationship between Dos Passos as historian and Dos Passos as literary author, see 'Statement of Belief', written by Dos Passos in September 1928. In *John Dos Passos: The Major Nonfictional Prose*, ed. Donald Pizer (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), p. 115. Excerpt: 'The only excuse for a novelist, aside from the entertainment and vicarious living his books give the people who read them, is as a sort of second-class historian of the age he lives in. The "reality" he misses by writing about imaginary people, he gains by being able to build a reality more nearly out of his own factual experience than a plain historian or biographer can'. (Dos Passos's italics) *The Major Nonfictional Prose* will henceforth be abbreviated as *TMNP*.

Alfred Kazin, quoted in the introduction to the 2000 Penguin edition of *Manhattan Transfer*, maintains that '[Dos Passos] was always more “agin the system” than for anything in particular except personal freedom and the “working class stiffs” whom he tended to romanticize’.⁴ The Twenties find Dos Passos not only ideologically, but practically and actively aligned with the radical Left, since he had already associated himself with syndicalist and anarchist groups and causes. At the same time, however, he was disillusioned and disappointed due to the sociopolitical turmoil surrounding the First Red Scare and the issues crippling the radical Left, coming not only from the American government but from within the Left’s own ranks as well.⁵ Undoubtedly, at the time he was living in New York preparing and writing *Manhattan Transfer* (1923-1924), his sympathies lay with the workers, the anarchists, the syndicalists.⁶ Referring to the period from the late Teens up to 1925—the year when *Manhattan Transfer* was published—Seth Moglen suggests that ‘[p]erhaps the most striking feature of [Dos Passos’s] political outlook at the time is the remarkably wide range of his sympathies, which extended across the entire anticapitalist spectrum’.⁷ With his Marxist sensibilities still unfaltering at the time he is writing *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos offers in this novel a kind of social critique that does not lend itself to appropriation by official ideologies, let alone political parties; a critique evidently anticapitalist, yet non-partisan. Moreover, in Dos Passos’s case, Marxist sensibilities do not entail faith in collectivity. Against the profound alienation and socioeconomic inequities depicted in *Manhattan Transfer* as the injurious effects of capitalist modernity, Dos Passos’s nostalgia for individual independence, for individual freedom of thought and

⁴ Alfred Kazin, *An American Procession: Major American Writers, 1830-1930* (Cambridge and Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 381.

⁵ For an account of the formation of Dos Passos’s socio-political consciousness in the late 1910s and early 1920s, see Seth Moglen, *Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 99-108. Moglen discusses the effect of the first Red Scare and internal conflict on New York’s radical Left as well as on the novelist’s views (and disposition).

⁶ Dos Passos’s alignment with radical socio-political forces in the 1920s is emblemized by his passionate involvement in the Sacco and Vanzetti case (1926-1927). Moreover, Dos Passos was to revisit the theme of ‘labor strife in the 1920s, and most particularly, [...] the case of Sacco and Vanzetti’ when writing *U.S.A.* See Townsend Ludington, *John Dos Passos: A Twentieth Century Odyssey* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980), pp. 246-249 (p. 246).

⁷ Moglen, p. 103.

action, is thrown into relief. *Manhattan Transfer* is, therefore, informed by rather contradictory ideals. To shed more light on this matter, it would be useful to consider the conflict that occurred between Dos Passos and Mike Gold, the editor of the *New Masses*, concerning the relationship between literature and politics.

This conflict is germane to the argumentation undertaken in this chapter, as it foregrounds the conflation of aesthetic experimentation and radical Left sensibility in Dos Passos's literary work around the time the *New Masses* was started (1926). As has been documented by John Patrick Diggins and Janet Galligani Casey, the magazine's editor favoured a straightforwardly proletarian literature and rejected aesthetic experimentalism which, to him, was indicative of, and subservient to, the ways of the bourgeoisie.⁸ In his review of *Manhattan Transfer* in 1926, Gold acknowledges certain virtues in the novel and overall presents it in a favourable light but at the same time he does not restrain his criticism of what he regarded as the weaknesses of its author. Gold clearly appreciates *Manhattan Transfer*'s indictment of 'American commercialism' and its instances of 'social rebellion and proletarian consciousness'; however, he disapproves of what he considers to be the novel's overall effect: '[t]here are pages of keen social rebellion and proletarian consciousness in this novel, but the mass effect is that the dilemma of the young idealist in America is insoluble', he maintains and, a few lines later, adds:

The hero of [Dos Passos's] book [...] is a baffled young middle-class idealist. This protagonist is tortured by American commercialism, and always seeks some escape. But Dos Passos does not know how to help him; and the result is not tragedy, which may be clean and great, but bewilderment, which is smaller.⁹

⁸ For discussion of Mike Gold's views as expressed in the *New Masses* and the contrast of his literary ideals with those of Dos Passos see John Patrick Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (New York and London: W.W.Norton & Company, 1973), pp. 147, 148, 157 and Janet Galligani Casey, *Dos Passos and the Ideology of the Feminine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.31-34.

⁹ All of Gold's quotations are from his review of *MT*, published in *New Masses* (August 1926, pp. 25-26). In *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Barry Maine (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 72-74 (p. 74).

In lieu of skepticism and frustration, Gold wants to see concrete, clear proletarian literature sending out concrete, clear messages.¹⁰ Apart from the dichotomy that Gold establishes between committed and simply ‘baffled’ literature, there is another significant issue that arises here—the issue of the novel’s protagonist. I address this issue later on in this chapter, when I argue that the novel’s protagonist is not Jimmy Herf, as Gold argues, but the metropolis of Manhattan.

At this point, I will move on to look at the way Gold and Dos Passos crossed swords with each other in the pages of the *New Masses*, also in 1926, with the former attacking the latter as a ‘bourgeois intellectual’. In ‘The New Masses I’d Like’ Dos Passos defends his stance by explaining how a relative distance between the author and the laborers’ world is necessary for the sake of honesty; for an author belongs to ‘the great semi-parasitic class that includes all the trades that deal with words’ and should not pretend to be one of the proletarians instead.¹¹ Furthermore, he reclaims ‘introspection and doubt’ as positive values, directly opposing Gold’s negative view of them.¹² This latter fact is particularly germane to *Manhattan Transfer*, because it prepares the ground for the kind of critique the novel is infused with—non partisan, independent—but also suggests that Gold as a reader would have been unable to grasp Dos Passos’s anticapitalist rhetoric in its more subtle guises. Significantly, in his discussion of the climate surrounding the start of the *New Masses* in 1926, Rich Hancuff observes that the ideological collision between the two men in reference to the content of the magazine essentially reflects their opposing views regarding ‘the role of the artist in the emergent cultures of labor unrest and proletarian revolution’¹³ and points at the conjunction of stances in the case of Dos Passos: ‘Dos Passos places the writer outside the laborers’ world, where things are “really going on,” yet posits the writer as the agent who will be able to enter that world, recover the truth of

¹⁰ Townsend Ludington also comments on Gold’s reception of Dos Passos. See *John Dos Passos: A Twentieth Century Odyssey*, p. 245.

¹¹ For Dos Passos’s reference to Gold calling him ‘a bourgeois intellectual’ as well as for his response in the form of ‘The New Masses I’d Like’ see *TMNP* pp. 81-82 (p.81).

¹² *Ibid*, p. 82.

¹³ Rich Hancuff, ‘John Dos Passos, Mike Gold, and the Birth of the New Masses’, *Reconstruction*, 8.1 (2008). Web. July 2011 <<http://www.reconstruction.eserver.org/081/hancuff.shtml>> from the ‘abstract’ section.

it, and mold a plan to change it.’¹⁴ Against this background, then, it can be said that, for Dos Passos in the Twenties, a writer can combine direct, committed involvement and distanced, objective observation; a combination that Gold could not envisage or accept.

When Rancière discusses, in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, politically sensitized artists in the Twenties, he specifically mentions Dos Passos along the following lines:

A progressive or revolutionary painter or novelist in the 1920s [...] will generally choose a chaotic form in order to show that the reigning order is just as much a disorder. Like Dos Passos, he will represent a shattered reality: fragmented stories of erratic individual destinies that translate, by their illogicality, the logic of the capitalist order.¹⁵

Dos Passos in *Manhattan Transfer* is preoccupied with showcasing how this ‘logic of the capitalist order’ referenced by Rancière is ultimately not only illogical but, plainly, ill-injurious, dangerous—as can be seen from its very effects upon individual characters throughout the novel. The idea that Dos Passos’s ‘chaotic’ aesthetic forms are a language in which to express, specifically, the chaotic ‘reigning order’ of modern capitalism, as opposed to a generalized, nihilistic, depoliticized sense of disorder, forms the pivot of the reading of *Manhattan Transfer* undertaken in this chapter. However, I do not propose that the correlation of *Manhattan Transfer*’s anticapitalist critique to its aesthetics could ever be straightforward or unproblematic. Rancière refines his observation just quoted above by maintaining that: ‘[n]ovelistic fragmentation [...] lend[s] [itself] just as well to describing the chaos of the capitalist world from the point of view of class struggle as to describing, from a nihilistic point of view, the chaos of a world where class struggle is itself but one element in the Dionysian chaos’.¹⁶ Following Rancière, I do not look for a relationship of perfect correspondence between aesthetics and politics in my reading of *Manhattan Transfer*. I do, however, propose that there seems to be a correlation, a kind of correspondence, between this tangled, complicated, multivalent relationship of

¹⁴ Ibid, point 6.

¹⁵ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), ‘Interview for the English Edition’, p. 61.

¹⁶ Ibid.

aesthetics and politics adumbrated here by Rancière, on the one hand, and the limitations of the critique that *Manhattan Transfer* can be seen to impart, on the other. My reading of the novel is informed by the idea that to retrieve its radical critique is to focus on this critique's cutting and blunted edges alike; on its forcefulness as well as its limitations. I will now turn to a discussion of the use and significance of montage in *Manhattan Transfer*; a technique which I regard as part of the novel's critical arsenal at its most strident.

2. Interpenetrations of Montage and Critique in *Manhattan Transfer*

A well-documented influence on Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* and *USA*, noted by critics and the novelist himself, the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein conceived of montage as a technique not exclusive to cinema, but equally applicable to literary writing.¹⁷ Dos Passos himself, in an introduction he gave to a reading of his works in 1960, looks back to the time he was preparing his sixth novel and acknowledges his familiarity with Einstein's ideas: 'Somewhere along the line I had been impressed by Eisenstein's documentary films like the *Cruiser Potemkin*. Eisenstein used to say that his master in montage was Griffith of the *Birth of a Nation* fame. Montage was the word used in those days to describe the juxtaposition of contrasting scenes in motion pictures. I took to montage to try to make the narrative stand up off the page.'¹⁸ *Manhattan Transfer* is a novel populated by—or crowded with, one might say—dozens of characters, with the narrative jumping disjointedly from one story to the next, mimicking the cinematographic technique and creating the vividness and intensity that Dos Passos clearly intended to achieve: the stories indeed seem to 'stand up off the page'. The narrative style at large, with the juxtaposition of numerous storylines and characters, creates an effect of disjointed multiplicity. This disjointed multiplicity is inextricably linked with the theme of alienation that runs through the novel; together, they are crucial parts of Dos Passos's anticapitalist critique.

¹⁷ For examples of the applicability of montage to literature, see Eisenstein's analyses of (mostly realist) novelistic fiction in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. by Jay Leyda (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Yovanovich, 1977 [1949]).

¹⁸ *TMNP*, p. 240.

An example from the text itself will help to illustrate these connections. In the ‘Steamroller’ chapter, Jimmy Herf’s uncle expresses the wish that his nephew work for him and his big firm. In trying to convince the sixteen year old Jimmy of the benefits of such a professional prospect, uncle Jeff reveals the materialist ideas he espouses: ‘The wealthiest and the most successful men in the country eat lunch up here [...] And don’t forget this, if a man’s a success in New York, he’s a success!’ But it is through the eyes of Jimmy that the novel seems to suggest that a whole ideology, rather than merely a career opportunity, is actually being advertised to, then rejected by, the teenage boy. Jimmy initially accepts his uncle’s offer but, while making his way out of the building lodging his uncle’s firm, looks at the people going in and out of the revolving doors; the image of endless commotion he witnesses is immediately juxtaposed with that of ‘Jimmy fed in a tape in and out the revolving doors, noon and night and morning, the revolving doors grinding out his years like sausage meat. All of a sudden his muscles stiffen. Uncle Jeff and his office can go plumb to hell’ (*MT*, p. 115). The revolving doors, the literal passage to the firm’s interior, can also be seen as a figurative passage to a world ruled by capitalist ideology, where the drive to succeed and become wealthy is an absolute imperative. Jimmy imagines the revolving doors as a kind of death trap treating ‘his years’ as nothing more than ‘sausage meat’—alienating him from his own self. Here, the juxtaposition of the current scene Jimmy is actually witnessing with one that he is envisioning is charged with a mixture of pity and terror with regard to the imagined fate of a worker in a capitalist firm. Jimmy’s final rejection of his uncle’s offer to make him a businessman further secures the anticapitalist sentiment of this vignette, while also creating a vivid and memorable narrative effect.

The radical effects of montage and image juxtaposition are also evident in the next vignette, which closes both the ‘Steamroller’ chapter and the First Section of *Manhattan Transfer*. The vignette featuring Jimmy and his uncle is followed by one featuring Bud Korpenning, the ‘Bowery bum’—jobless, wandering, and starving. In a manner clearly indicative of his significance to Dos Passos’s narrative, Bud’s character is introduced in the very first page of the novel’s First Section and featured in at least one vignette from each of the chapters, while his suicide is the bleak coda on which this section also closes. By the time despair drives him to suicide, Bud has been seen looking

for jobs, starving, wandering the hostile streets, encountering humiliation and deceit.¹⁹ He too wants to be at ‘the center of things’²⁰ but the opportunities available to him are simply not enough to provide him with sufficient money or food. It is highly significant that, while having his first meal in Manhattan, Bud is advised by the man behind the counter to ‘git a shave and a haircut [...] It’s looks that count in this city.’ Bud, with a mixture of naivety and dignified pride, replies: ‘I kin work all right. I’m a good worker’ (*MT*, p. 16). It becomes obvious that Bud is a stranger to the mentalities and prerequisites that define Manhattan – mentalities and prerequisites upon which his chances of finding a job and, eventually, to survive, apparently depend. Dos Passos gives us the fragments of Bud’s heart-wrenching story with a sympathy spared of melodramatic embellishments. He situates Bud’s failure within a metropolitan setting foreign to him; a setting whose rules he is clearly and tragically unaware of. Bud comes to Manhattan determined to find a job from Upstate New York, depending on his being ‘a good worker’ and the crucial importance of ‘looks’ is a factor he could not have taken into account. His use value as a good worker cannot counteract his ‘foreignness’ to the metropolitan setting. He meets with cruelty and injustice before he chooses to meet with death; a death which is presented as a passing interruption of the flow of normal activity in the busy metropolis.²¹

What is significant, in terms of montage and radical critique, is that Bud’s suicide directly succeeds a vignette featuring the teenage Jimmy contemplating future alienation and his uncle, the emblem of business mentality and success. Jimmy gets offered the chance to be a successful, wealthy member of the metropolitan business elite; the chance to become, like his uncle, one of the proponents

¹⁹ See *MT*, pp. 67-68, for an example of the cruelty Bud encounters while looking for a job in Manhattan.

²⁰ The phrase ‘the center of things’, in reference to Broadway, is repeated throughout the novel. Bud himself uses it twice. The first time is upon his arrival in Manhattan: ‘How do I get to Broadway?...I want to get to the center of things’ (*MT* p. 16). The second time is when he asks a butcherboy where exactly he can go to find himself a job: ‘Is that kinder the center of things?’ (*MT* p. 34). The same phrase is used by Ellen in the penultimate chapter of *MT*, when we find her working for a periodical. She is using it to describe the impression the readers should get from a character featured in the periodical’s stories: ‘Of course what you want to do is make every reader feel Johnny on the spot in the center of things’ (*MT* p. 330). Whether a working class, down and out character or a fictional character in a popular magazine intended to divert the middle classes, the aim is the same: to be in the center of things.

²¹ Bud’s dead body is found and collected by the captain and crew of a tugboat; he is nothing more than a ‘thing’: ‘After a tussle they landed a long black thing on the deck’ (*MT*, p. 120).

of capitalist ideology. Jimmy's terrifying epiphany regarding the crushing of his own selfhood by the machine-world of business, leads him to reject the offer, as has already been noted. Jimmy's precocious, intuitive recoil from the isolation that active, everyday participation in the world of American business and finance entails, at least to him, can be seen as part of the profound skepticism and quiet rebellion that will be seen to characterize the adult Jimmy until the very end of the book. It seems fitting, both stylistically and thematically, that Jimmy is placed, in the closing pages of the novel's first section, between the world of successful business and the world of derelicts like Bud. However, this intermediary position is far from being neutral, reconciliatory or diplomatic: for Jimmy, like Dos Passos himself, not only rejects the logic of American Finance but moreover feels aligned to those destroyed by it. The epiphanic moment whereby young Jimmy senses the destructive powers of the capitalist system is a moment that will shape his character and overall conduct; his adulthood will also be marked by apprehension and strong feelings of frustration vis-à-vis the system. Juxtaposing the vignette of Jimmy and Uncle Jeff with the vignette of Bud, Dos Passos's use of montage allows us to consider them comparatively. The juxtaposition highlights profound concerns in the face of a sociopolitical situation characterized by the accumulation of money in the hands of the lucky few, like the businessmen of Uncle Jeff's ilk, and the devastation of the derelicts who, like Bud, roam the streets hungry, vulnerable, and penniless.

Furthermore, a connection can be established between the chapter's title, 'Steamroller', and Dos Passos's use of the same word to refer, in his essay 'The New Masses I'd Like',²² to an abstract concept of particular import regarding the critique offered in *Manhattan Transfer*: 'In these terribly crucial years when the pressure is rising and rising in the boiler of the great imperial steamroller of American finance that's going to try to grind down even further the United States and the world, being clear-sighted is a life and death matter'.²³ Here Dos Passos is using the word 'steamroller' as a

²² 'The New Masses I'd Like', published in *New Masses*, 1 (June 1926), p. 20. In *TMNP*, pp. 81-82. This essay was written by Dos Passos in response to Mike Gold's accusatory comments on what the latter perceived to be a bourgeois attitude on the novelist's part. It was published in 1926, only a year after the publication of *MT*, which suggests an ideological continuity between its content and that of *MT*, if we consider not only the chronology but also the fact that Dos Passos's ideology stayed on the radical side of the Left throughout the 1920s.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 82.

metaphor for the great, oppressive force ‘American Finance’ exerts. It is certainly revealing that Dos Passos should address the ideology of American business and finance in a chapter bearing this title, and that he should choose to create juxtaposition between the vignette exposing such ideology and the one featuring Bud and his eventual demise. If we examine the prefatory segment of this chapter, we can see the merging of sociopolitical critique and modernist technique even more clearly.²⁴ In it, Dos Passos is describing dusk, darkness, falling over the city: ‘Dark presses tight the steaming asphalt city, crushes the fretwork of windows and lettered signs and chimneys [...]’. These lines convey an acute feeling of ominous pressure to the reader; ‘the steaming asphalt city’ has already been pressed into shape, yet the ‘dark’ is pressing it again, and further, with a crushing force. City images are rendered in breathless parataxis and almost frantic juxtaposition: ‘[...] and watertanks and ventilators and fireescapes and moldings and patterns and corrugations and eyes and hands and neckties [...]’; it is as if all these things are pressed tightly together, leaving no space, no room to breathe. Then the crushing power of darkness becomes manifest again: ‘Night crushes bright milk out of arclights, squeezes the sullen blocks until they drip red, yellow, green into streets resounding with feet’ (*MT*, p. 108). Here Dos Passos’s description arguably transcends the literal. A figurative darkness, a somber oppressive force, emerges out of his words; his description conveys feelings of oppression and claustrophobia. I argue that this figurative darkness and oppressive force can be associated with the figurative meanings of the word ‘steamroller’. A heavy machine used to make roads by smoothing the asphalt into proper shape, the steamroller has also figurative meanings attached to it, according to *Oxford English Dictionary*:

2. fig. a. To crush or break down, as with a steamroller; to ride roughshod over; to overwhelm or squash. Freq. in *pol.* contexts. [...]
- b. to push (a measure or bill) *through* (a legislative assembly, committee, etc) by forcibly overriding opposition. [...]
- c. to force (someone) *into* (a course of action, situation, etc) [...]²⁵

²⁴ I consider the prefatory segments, usually featuring experimental language and often discarding punctuation, to be of great importance to the creation of the particular blend of technique and critique achieved in *MT*. More of these segments will be analyzed later in this chapter.

²⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 602.

Obviously it is the first amongst these figurative meanings that applies to Dos Passos's reference to 'the pressure' that is 'rising and rising in the boiler of the great imperial steamroller of American finance' in 'The New Masses I'd Like' essay. I would argue that it is the same idea of 'pressure' as a squashing, crushing, overwhelming force that we see at work in the prefatory segment of the 'Steamroller' chapter, and that becomes associated with darkness, oppression, and suffocation. In the image of 'the steaming asphalt city', the literal and the figurative meanings of the word 'steamroller' are fused, doubling the sense of pressure that is being conveyed: the asphalt has already been pressed by the literal steamroller before being pressed 'tight' by the 'dark'.

For the radical Dos Passos of the Twenties it is the capitalist system, concretized in the logic of American business and finance, that can be seen as a 'dark', overwhelming, and ultimately destructive force—an idea he was to explore more intensively (and overtly) in the *USA* trilogy.²⁶ In the 'Steamroller' chapter of *Manhattan Transfer*, Jimmy's epiphany allows him to envisage the pressure of the American logic of business and finance and, if not exactly to identify it as such in his sixteenth year of age, to intuitively grasp its destructive potential ('the revolving doors grinding out his years like sausage meat'). Later in his life, Jimmy is definitely able to specify the sociopolitical contours of this 'overpowering force', as will be seen in subsequent sections of this chapter. The 'Steamroller' chapter and its prefatory segment, especially when considered in conjunction with 'The New Masses I'd Like' essay, create the impression that the urban landscape is ruled—or created, even—by the darkly irrepressible forces and energies of the capitalist system; these forces and energies shape and ultimately pressure the city and its citizens into submission, just as asphalt is molded into road by the heavy, crushing power of a literal steamroller. It therefore seems a challenging process for individual citizens to survive with their souls, or even bodies, intact under the crushing influence of the logic of American finance and its corollaries—the obsession with money, success, and image. These corollaries are shown to be inescapable in the metropolis of Manhattan. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of Bud's final end—a story of failure—with Uncle Jeff's rhetoric of success and Jimmy's epiphanic decision not

²⁶ John Dos Passos, *U.S.A.* (New York: The Library of America, 1996 [1930, 1932, and 1933 for *The 42nd Parallel*, 1919, and *The Big Money*, respectively]).

to serve the logic of the capitalist system after all, is an example of the contrast—dependent on the use of montage—between success and failure; a contrast that plays a pivotal role in *Manhattan Transfer*.

Another example of Dos Passos's fusion of the technique of juxtaposition and radical critique can be found in the prefatory segment of 'Longlegged Jack of the Isthmus', in the Second Section of the novel. The chapter features Joe Harland, the ex-Wall Street maverick who has failed and is now completely 'down and out',²⁷ and Ellen Thatcher, an actress quickly rising to fame and getting increasingly assimilated into the world of show business, ambition, and success. The failure/success contrast is hard to miss within the chapter, as it emerges from the snippets of the desolate, undignified lifestyle of Joe Harland being juxtaposed with the glamorous, thrilling (yet not untroubled) one of Ellen. If we focus on the prefatory segment, however, we find an example of juxtaposition that is not based on characterization and that creates an unsettling, almost dizzying effect in its succession of images. The prefatory segment juxtaposes—in elliptical language ridden with a sense of urgency and unrest—the 'selling out' of a shop in Union Square with the carefree dancing of a couple, then finally with the marching of the Salvation Army band down Fourteenth Street. The phrases 'WE HAVE MADE A TERRIBLE MISTAKE. Must vacate.' are repeated, like a mantra, three times throughout the segment. This creates a generalized sense of urgency and anxiety about the 'MISTAKE' that has been made and the 'vacat[ing]' action that needs to be taken. In the segment's opening lines, Dos Passos's word placement leaves no room for ambiguity: 'Selling out. Must vacate'. There is a shop selling out—a hint at the economic demise awaiting any but the most powerful and antagonistic forces within the capitalist market. By being positioned in-between the image of the army parade, on one hand—which may be taken to have connotations of war, or patriotism at the very least—and, on the other, the image of a failing small business, the image of the couple dancing provides not so much an element of naïve insouciance as an ominous feeling; it is almost as if the couple is dancing while the walls are closing in on them. Additionally, by being positioning in between these images, the couple's apparently untroubled enjoyment appears to be out of place, impudent, and irresponsible. 'They dance

²⁷*MT*, p. 149. This is Joe Harland's own choice of phrase to describe his situation to an old acquaintance. The latter has seen the former in his glory days, when he used to rule Wall Street, and becomes deeply unnerved at the sight of the present Joe Harland, who is trying to borrow some money off him.

with their mouths full'; it could be a proof of inappropriate, out-of-place behaviour, or perhaps an indication of their urgency to forget their troubles by losing themselves in the dance (All quotes from *MT*, p. 136).

Working class people and powerful bankers are shown side by side again in the prefatory segment of 'Revolving Doors': 'Like sap at the first frost at five o'clock men and women begin to drain gradually out of the tall buildings downtown, grayfaced throngs flood subways and tubes, vanish underground' while '[a]t midnight [...] Bankers blearyeyed from secret conferences hear the hooting of the tugs as they are let out of side doors by lightningbug watchmen [...]' (*MT*, p. 276). Exhaustion and lifelessness are attributed to working class people ('greyfaced') and bankers ('blearyeyed') alike. Even though the two groups are radically different in terms of socioeconomic status and lifestyle, the juxtaposition of their work-related moments conveys not only contrast but also an ever so slight sense of propinquity. In this light, the calculated use of image juxtaposition and the meaningful order in which the images are embedded in the text can be regarded as constitutive of *Manhattan Transfer's* sociopolitical critique. Discussing his novelistic vision at the time of writing *Manhattan Transfer*, an older (and politically transformed) Dos Passos refers to the novel as 'a simultaneous chronicle' and defines this concept as follows:

[...] A novel full of snapshots of life like a documentary film. [...] In this sort of novel the story is really the skeleton on which some slice of history the novelist has seen enacted before his own eyes is brought back to life. [...] I felt that everything should go in: popular songs, political aspirations and prejudices, ideals, hopes, delusions, crackpot notions, clippings out of the daily newspapers.²⁸

According to this excerpt, taken from Dos Passos's introduction to a reading from his own works given at Carleton College on the 30th of November 1960,²⁹ as well as other nonfictional documents from the 1960s, the author made a conscious aesthetic decision to use the most disparate elements in order to construct his portrayal of the city and the social world of Manhattan. The result of his novelistic vision was a 'documentary'-like text, combining socio-political history and the minutiae of

²⁸ *TMNP*, p. 239.

²⁹ These details accompany the title of Dos Passos's talk, 'Contemporary Chronicles'. Ibid, p. 238.

everyday life. His use of the principle of montage was deliberate and the cinematic inspiration behind his technique was acknowledged. It is worth suggesting at this point, however, that the correlation between montage and radical critique proposed in this chapter is an idea that the older Dos Passos would have found unpalatable; by the 1960s, the author had been transformed into a true Conservative.³⁰

To return to the radical Dos Passos of the mid-1920s, however, the ideological implications of his use of montage in *Manhattan Transfer* will now be further explored in relation to what could be referred to as the novel's characterizing atmosphere of disjointed multiplicity. It is at this point that Charles Taylor's observations, as expounded in his analyses of the 'Epiphanies of Modernism', can be seen to illuminate my understanding of Dos Passos's usage of montage in *Manhattan Transfer*. Although Taylor is specifically referring to the techniques of fragmentation and juxtaposition in modernist poetry, namely Pound's *Cantos*, I believe that his remarks encourage an expansive view of the critical import of montage that can be seen to apply to Dos Passos's novel. As Taylor puts it, 'what the fragments make present is something for which we have no words, something we couldn't simply grab onto while letting the fragments drop'; by extension, '[i]n juxtaposing thoughts, fragments, images, we reach somehow between them and thus beyond them'.³¹ As has just been noted, the 'snapshots of life' used by Dos Passos are composed of the most disparate, variegated elements. Rather than extracting meaning out of each element in itself, it is by juxtaposing various elements that access is gained to meanings that lie, somehow, 'between' and 'beyond' them. Jimmy's world is far removed from Bud's; the world of business, fame, and success provides a sharp contrast

³⁰ It is interesting to note that the conservative Dos Passos of the 1960s insists that the relationship between his early novels and the cinematic techniques of Griffith and Eisenstein had been one of 'entirely technique. It had nothing whatever to do with content'. ('An Interview with John Dos Passos', *TMNP*, p. 288) It must be emphasized, however, that the young, radical Dos Passos of the 1920s is an entirely different person and author. Of course, it remains debatable whether the 1920s version of Dos Passos would have openly contradicted his older incarnation with regards to the interpenetrative relationship between the technique of montage and socio-political critique in *Manhattan Transfer*. Beyond any notions of authorial intentionality, this chapter explores the aforementioned relationship as evidenced by the text itself. See 'An Interview with John Dos Passos' (1968), pp. 276-292.

³¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 473.

to a life marked by failure. And yet, placing fragments of these worlds side by side, in textual intimacy, can enable not only a perception of elements in terms of radical opposition to each other, but also a discernment of aspects of connection and even affinity. In other words, it is as if the images, the thoughts, and the fragments considered by themselves—in isolation—can merely show what can be immediately grasped. Through the technique of juxtaposition, however, dimensions and nuances otherwise or heretofore unseen can be accessed and explored. This rather epiphanic conceptualization and application of montage in *Manhattan Transfer* can be seen to complement the technique's function as a vehicle of critique: the disjointed multiplicity that defines the novel reflects issues of social fragmentation and isolation within the kaleidoscopic world of the metropolis that glides upon surfaces; but the unknown depths beneath and beyond the surfaces are reached via juxtaposition. It is thus that the characters that populate *Manhattan Transfer*—the fragments of individual destinies—are seen to be connected by their subjection to the energies of a capitalist metropolis that, far from being the mere background against which the characters rise and develop, emerges instead as the inhuman—and inhumane—protagonist. In the next section I will explore Dos Passos's critique of mechanization through the particular way in which he conceives of, and portrays, the modern capitalist metropolis of Manhattan as a machine injurious to individual agency and inimical to dissent.

3. The Agency of the Metropolis-Machine: Implications regarding Individual Agency and the Prospect of Dissent

This section will consider the agency of the modern capitalist metropolis in *Manhattan Transfer*. Dos Passos does not portray the ills of urban life in general, but is rather specifically concerned with the ill effects of America's mass-moneyed business culture, materialistic values, and obsession with socioeconomic success. These characteristics may apply, to greater or lesser extent, to early twentieth-century urbanized environments in general but, undeniably, they become especially pronounced, and

even all-dominating, in a capitalist economy and society.³² Several critics have argued that the city is *Manhattan Transfer*'s real protagonist. In the argument advanced in this study, however, it is important to replace the general term, 'city', with the specificity of the phrase 'modern capitalist metropolis'. In 1981, Robert Rosen argues that 'Dos Passos presents a broad cross section of characters, each receding to the background as the city itself emerges as the novel's protagonist'; almost a decade later, David Seed echoes this same idea.³³ Back in 1974, Marshall McLuhan had approached the issue from a different angle. He writes that Dos Passos's Manhattan functions as 'a phantasmagoric backdrop for [Dos Passos's characters'] frustrations and defeats. The city is felt as alien, meaningless'.³⁴ The phantasmagoric element is important indeed, as it is constitutive of the city's irresistible charm and pull, and the 'frustrations and defeats' of individual characters are a definite theme within the novel. However, the approach to *Manhattan Transfer* undertaken in this study contests the dynamics between the metropolis and individual characters' destinies as described by McLuhan in the above quote: far from being a background element, far from functioning as mere scenery or 'backdrop', the city is actually in the novel's very forefront. Some of Dos Passos's characters lose their dignity, their ability to act and react, and even their life to the relentless demands Manhattan places on them; the city, in other words, has an agency—and a menacing one at that.

Besides Bud Kopperning, Joe Harland and Stan Emery also exemplify bleak destinies, directly influenced by the metropolitan energies. The magnificent sense of freedom a modern capitalist metropolis like Manhattan in the 1920s can disseminate, with the opportunities it provides for rapid, spectacular success, quickly turns sour for Joe. On a surface level, the modern capitalist metropolis is

³² Clearly, urbanization is a crucial prerequisite but not the equivalent of modern capitalism; it could function as a foundation for capitalist and communist regimes alike.

³³ See Robert Rosen, *John Dos Passos: Politics and the Writer* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, c.1981), p. 42 and David Seed, *Cinematic Fictions* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), especially pp. 132-136, in the 'John Dos Passos and the Art of Montage' chapter.

³⁴ Marshall MacLuhan, 'John Dos Passos: Technique vs. Sensibility' in *Dos Passos: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Andrew Hook (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 154.

bursting with promise and possibility.³⁵ It is the unpredictability and treacherousness of its great power, however, that is shown through Joe. Joe used to be one of the most powerful, wealthy and influential men on Wall Street but his downfall came quickly and unexpectedly. Joe's sudden failure deprives him of the freedom to live in a dignified way. Once the epitome of success and wealth, but now reliant on alcohol, poor, and desolate, Joe's destiny seems to have been determined not by his own will and actions but, rather, by the mysterious powers of the metropolis. Success in Manhattan seems to be not so much arbitrary as capricious; not so much a matter of luck as a product of the city's own agency. When it comes to Stan Emery, one could argue that he generates his own disaster. The counter-argument undertaken here, however, sees Stan's decay and eventual demise to be actually predicated upon the specific forces and energies of Manhattan. Originating from a privileged, affluent background, Stan becomes an alcoholic and, in a display of desperate nonchalance, revolts against the success imperative in Manhattan: '[w]hy the hell does everybody want to succeed? I'd like to meet somebody who wanted to fail. That's the only sublime thing' (*MT*, p. 163). The pursuit of fame and wealth is rejected by Stan as an absurdity. In this rejection, however, Stan does not find freedom from convention and conformity. Instead, he finds out that he can escape neither the city nor himself; the two are too inextricably linked. The 'Rollercoaster' chapter includes Stan's final moments before committing suicide. Stan gets thrown out of a pub and into the city streets, his mind 'like a mechanical piano' jumping between song lyrics and drunken thoughts. It is the prefatory segment of *Manhattan Transfer*'s second chapter—'Metropolis' from section one—that is repeated in-between Stan's last thoughts, and therefore seems to hold particular significance for understanding his demise:

There was Babylon and Nineveh, they were built of brick. Athens was goldmarble columns. Rome was held up on broad arches of rubble. In Constantinople the minarets flame like great candles round the Golden Horn...O there's one more river to cross. Steel, glass, tile, concrete will be the materials of the skyscrapers. Crammed on the narrow island the millionwindowed buildings will jut, glittering pyramid on pyramid, white cloudsheads piled above a thunderstorm... [...] Kerist I wish I was a skyscraper. [...] Skyscrapers go up like flames, in flames, flames. [...] Don't like the smell in this place in the City of New York, County of New York, State of New York. [...] (*MT*, pp. 229-230)

³⁵ See the prefatory segment of the 'Dollars' chapter, in which an old man is asking a young one why do immigrants come to Manhattan. The young man replies that '[i]t's the land of opportoony [sic]'. *MT*, p. 54.

The prefatory segment of the 'Metropolis' chapter is here reproduced almost verbatim; the only difference is the addition of one lyric line, 'O there's one more river to cross', which comes from the song Stan sings, repeatedly, during his last outburst of drunkenness.³⁶ The reference to ancient, historical metropolises is followed by a description of Manhattan's skyscrapers. Stan's wish to be a skyscraper could be understood as a wish to be at one with the metropolis; to be as cold, impenetrable, imperious, and seemingly invincible as Manhattan's most emblematic buildings. The image of the skyscraper can be seen to encapsulate the essence of the modern capitalist metropolis. Rapidly, however, Stan's thoughts change in tone as he makes the point that even skyscrapers can be destroyed: they 'go up like flames, in flames, flames'. It is interesting that this particular idea should be in Stan's mind moments before the character's final act of self-destruction and, moreover, that he should declare his dislike for 'the smell' not just of 'this place', i.e. his own home, but 'this place in the City of New York, County of New York, State of New York.' In this way, Stan's despair and self-destruction seem to be associated with the emblems of the modern capitalist metropolis and the possibility of their destruction. The emblems and energies of the metropolis are tormenting Stan, who is only able to escape this torment through death. As for Joe, neither his success nor his failure is shown to be attributable to his own will and action; the metropolis seems to capriciously generate each and both. Both Joe and Stan, in all, show how individual will and action are insignificant, compared to the agency of the metropolis that, in Joe's case, is responsible for success and failure and, in Stan's case, is an overwhelming, haunting force that cannot be resisted or escaped, unless through death.

The characters of Ellen and Jimmy will now be considered, in an attempt to further argue for the modern capitalist metropolis as *Manhattan Transfer's* real protagonist. Ellen becomes a striking model of 'mechanization as a process extending into all areas of experience', as Seed has put it in reference to Dos Passos's 'attitude to the machine' in the 1920s, adding that the author 'saw the cities

³⁶ 'For I am a bachelor and I live all alone/And there's one more river to cross/One more river to Jordan/One more river to cross' (*MT*, p. 228); 'The animals went in two by two/The elephant and the kangaroo/There's one more river to Jordan/One more river to cross' (*ibid*, p. 229). The 'One more river to cross' lyric line can be seen as a point of connection to the next chapter, entitled 'One More River to Jordan'.

of this change as being particularly the cities'.³⁷ Such advanced mechanization is a characterizing trait of modern life in capitalist societies, and Ellen is seen to embody it to the detriment of her humaneness and happiness. The adult Ellen is portrayed throughout *Manhattan Transfer* as a mechanical doll—an automaton, who performs the necessary actions to get her through each day. She is typically shown in a state of controlled, frozen unease, as in the following scene where she finds refuge from her outraged first husband. Her sense of excitement, freedom and comfort ('Ellen ran about the room like a child kicking her heels and clapping her hands.') seems to last only a few moments; then:

She drew her knees up to her chin and sat thinking. From the street she could hear the occasional rumble of a truck. In the kitchens below her room a sound of clattering had begun. From all around came a growing rumble of traffic beginning. She felt hungry and alone. The bed was a raft on which she was marooned alone, always alone, afloat on a growling ocean. A shudder went down her spine. She drew her knees up closer to her chin. (*MT*, pp. 156-157)

In a taxi on her way to a restaurant to meet James Baldwin:

[t]he minutes hung about her neck leaden as hours. She sat up on the edge of the seat, her fists so tightly clenched that she could feel through her gloves her sharp nails digging into the palms of her hands. [...] The traffic stopped again, the brakes of the taxi shrieked, she was thrown forward on the seat. She leaned back with her eyes closed, the blood throbbing in her temples. All her nerves were sharp steel jangled wires cutting into her. (*MT*, pp. 333-334)

A little later, while having dinner in the restaurant:

Ellen felt herself sitting with her ankles crossed, rigid as a porcelain figure under her clothes, everything about her seemed to be growing hard and enameled, the air bluestreaked with cigarettes smoke, was turning to glass. (*MT*, p. 335)

Ellen appears to be at one with Manhattan's energies, in the sense that she literally embodies—carries in her own body—the tension, the stress, and the unrest created by the hectic rhythms of metropolitan life. Above anything else she embodies mechanization—a quintessentially capitalist phenomenon that, far from being limited to areas of production and technological progress, can in fact be seen to affect

³⁷ Seed, p. 145.

human attitudes and mentalities. In the above excerpts, Ellen's movements are constricted, tense; almost spasmodic ('A shudder went through her spine'; 'her fists so tightly clenched'; 'the blood throbbing in her temples'). A tremendous amount of nervous energy seems to be trapped inside of her, without any means of escape; her outward appearance remains one of stasis ('rigid as a porcelain figure'; 'growing hard and enameled') while her inner self seems to be in a state of perpetual restlessness and perturbation.

Towards the end of the novel, Ellen does not make a decision to be with Baldwin- - for human beings do not possess the agency to make decisions in Manhattan. She simply resigns to the fate that has been presented her. The following excerpt emphasizes not only her mechanization but her self-awareness as well:

Mechanically she squeezed the hand that helped her into the cab.

'Elaine,' he said shakily, 'life is going to mean something to me now...God if you knew how empty life had been for so many years. I've been like a tin mechanical toy, all hollow inside.'

'No let's not talk about mechanical toys,' she said in a strangled voice. (*MT*, p. 336)

Through repetition ('mechanically'; 'tin mechanical toy'; 'mechanical toys') the theme is clearly established. For her part, Ellen is shown to have a solid grasp of her situation; a grasp that is all the more tragic because of her unwillingness to confront it ('No let's not talk about mechanical toys'). Ellen's machine-like qualities, indications of which had been present from the beginning of her adult life, completely take over after her only true love, Stan, marries another woman and soon after commits suicide. The last scene featuring her shows her again in a taxi, immediately after the occurrence of an accident in which a shop girl gets horribly burnt. Instead of attributing her sense of unease, agitation, and nervousness to this specific event, Ellen is clearly aware of the fact that it is a perennial aspect of her existence:

She sits back in the corner of the taxi with her eyes closed. Relax, she must let herself relax more. Ridiculous to go round always keyed up so that everything is like chalk shrieking on a blackboard. [...] It's like a busted mechanical toy the way my mind goes brrr all the time. [...] (*MT*, p. 356)

Apparently, even though she knows that ‘she must let herself relax more’, Ellen seems unable to control her nervous energy. Moreover, she is equally unable to control her mind, for it seems to possess a mechanical will all of its own. She acknowledges the fact that her mind is malfunctioning (‘like a busted mechanical toy’), yet she remains incapable of fixing it, as it were. Increasingly estranged from emotion, perpetually nervous, and devoid of agency, Ellen lives perfunctorily and not as an active, developing individual; in all, she is the perfect vehicle to convey the alarming extent of the effects of the mechanization of capitalist society on human character. The imperious dynamism of the metropolis both numbs and innervates her; her agency is lost and her heart becomes the mechanical heart of Manhattan.

In contrast to Ellen, whose humanity appears to be consistently subsumed and mechanized by the metropolis, Jimmy resists the force of the machine and envisages moments of subversive conduct. (It is not accidental, I believe, that those moments of subversion are only imagined; for, as has been stressed, it is not possible to act out one’s will and ideas in Dos Passos’s *Manhattan*.) In the ‘Skyscraper’ chapter, Jimmy Herf, having just quit his job as a newspaper journalist, is seen wandering through the streets of Manhattan where the plethora of advertising slogans for services and products claiming to ‘meet the demands of spring’ in the city further perturb his already agitated consciousness:

With every deep breath Herf breathed in rumble and grind and painted phrases until he began to swell, felt himself stumbling big and vague, staggering like a pillar of smoke above the April streets, looking into the windows of machineshops, buttonfactories, tenementhouses, felt of the grime of bedlinen and the smooth whir of lathes, wrote cusswords on typewriters between the stenographer’s fingers, mixed up the pricetags in departmentstores. Inside he fizzled like sodawater into sweet April syrups, strawberry, sarsaparilla, chocolate, cherry, vanilla dripping foam through the mild gasolineblue air. He dropped sickeningly fortyfour stories, crashed. [...] He shrank until he was of the smallness of dust, picking his way over crags and boulders in the roaring gutter, climbing straws, skirting motoroil lakes. (*MT*, pp. 316-317)

Jimmy is clearly overwhelmed by the energies and the ‘demands’ made on the part of Manhattan’s market society. It is as if his sense of selfhood gives way under the weight—and the sheer quantity—of the material things that surround him; the abundance of shops, houses, colours, and flavours seems to have a hallucinatory effect. The saturation of the city with advertising slogans, with dozens of

authoritative sounding phrases complete with news story fragments that haunt Jimmy—reminding him of the job he has just given up—hijacks, as it were, his individual consciousness and fills it with the energies of the capitalist city; disorder, unrest, frantic pace, breathlessness. His consciousness is controlled by the consciousness of market capitalism; it is the city, not the citizen, who possesses the faculty of agency in *Manhattan Transfer*. Something extreme is taking place here; his consciousness is temporarily hijacked, occupied even, by the collective consciousness of the metropolis. And yet, Dos Passos turns this moment of dissolution of selfhood on its head by transforming it into an imagined but nonetheless radical act of subversion. Jimmy's experience of the hustle and bustle of Spring in Manhattan involves sensations of oppression and unease that culminate in the loss of his sense of individuality, rendered in the imagined thought-image of Jimmy's death and subsequent shrinking into dust: 'wrote cusswords on typewriters between the stenographer's fingers, mixed up the pricetags in departmentstores'. He may be prey to the powers of the machine, yet he imagines himself performing small incendiary acts. The moment of resistance, however, is brief and only exists in the sphere of the imaginary. After all, it was generated by the overwhelming powers of the city itself, and it seems fitting that it should be contained by it. And so Jimmy's rebellion remains quiet, remains controlled, and fizzles inside of him—'inside he fizzled like sodawater'—a phrase that could be taken to also allude to the failure, the dying away of the subversive moment experienced/imagined here by Jimmy. Significantly, the hallucination moves on to an image of Jimmy falling and crashing, then finally being reduced to nothing but a mote. Certainly, any urban environment could have had deeply unsettling effects on an already troubled consciousness. However, Dos Passos goes to great lengths to present marketized Manhattan as an oppressive, crushing force—a 'steamroller', a machine—which can control individual agency; render it as insignificant as a mere particle of dust.

In the next vignette featuring Jimmy in 'Skyscraper' the link to capitalism becomes more overt. This is a point in the novel when Jimmy's sense of Ellen's inaccessibility, of her distance from him, is strikingly conveyed through the image of a skyscraper:

All these April nights combing the streets alone a skyscraper has obsessed him, a grooved building jutting up with uncountable bright windows falling onto him out of a scudding sky. Typewriters rain continual nickelplated confetti in his ears. Faces of Follies girls, glorified by

Ziegfeld, smile and beckon to him from the windows. Ellie in a gold dress, Ellie made of thin gold foil absolutely lifelike beckoning from every window. (*MT*, p. 327)

Here is another example of Jimmy having a vision/hallucination that conveys, this time, not only his bewilderment, unease, and apprehension towards the capitalist metropolis and its overwhelming energies—as in his hallucinatory experience described above—but, additionally, an acute sense of foreignness, of otherness, in relation to them. For Jimmy is unable to find an entrance to the object—the building—of his obsession. The skyscraper is an obvious symbol of Manhattan’s commanding, imperious modernity and of capitalism itself; it does fascinate Jimmy and yet it cannot be accessed, cannot be entered by him: ‘And he walks round blocks and blocks looking for the door of the humming tinselwindowed skyscraper, round blocks and blocks and still no door’ (*ibid*). He has a vision of Ellen as a figure that has entered the skyscraper, thus separating herself from him. This indicates not merely a physical, but also an ideological separation. Jimmy’s character is consistently skeptical and at times even rebellious—albeit in a quiet, contained manner—in the face of the society of consumerism and spectacle in which he has to live. It is Ellen who has been assimilated in that gilded world and whose individuality and humaneness has been lost to it (‘Ellie made of thin gold foil absolutely lifelike’). Jimmy can roam ‘through the city of scrambled alphabets, through the city of gilt letter signs’ (*MT*, p. 315) by day, and he can roam the city in the ‘black moonless night’ (*MT*, p. 327), but cannot be a part of it; to the interior of the skyscraper, he has no access. To him, Manhattan itself is essentially akin to a skyscraper—a wall of glass, impenetrable, and coldly imperious. In spite of his love for Ellen and despair over losing her, he critically assesses the radical limitation of individual choice in Manhattan; he realizes that his unalienable rights, which were alluded to at the beginning of the vignette (‘Pursuit of happiness, unalienable pursuit...right to life liberty and...’), are lost.

These rights, continues Jimmy, are replaced by ‘...one of two unalienable alternatives: go away in a dirty soft shirt or stay in a clean Arrow collar. But what’s the use of spending your whole life fleeing the City of Destruction? What about your unalienable right, Thirteen Provinces?’ (*ibid*) There is a clear allusion, here, to the thirteen colonies in North America that gained their

independence in the American Revolution and became the United States. The configuration of images and ideas presented here through Jimmy, then, has political undertones. He considers independence to be a real, 'unalienable' right of his, and a quintessentially American one at that, yet comes to the painful realization that he actually cannot exercise it. Manhattan, 'the City of Destruction', has destroyed his independence and left him with a dilemma: to either escape, or stay and become an Arrow Collar Man—a symbol of the consumerist, spectacular culture of the capitalist metropolis.³⁸ These are options only in name, seeing as they are imposed—by the city—on Jimmy as his only alternatives, rather than being a matter of free, independent, and individual choice. Jimmy's skepticism and critical resistance towards the metropolis's authoritative energies is incompatible with Ellen's submission to the metropolis's demands. She is the one inside the skyscraper, remote from Jimmy's worldview. In these terms, Jimmy's fascination with the skyscraper could be accounted for through his fascination with Ellen rather than with what the skyscraper actually symbolizes. He is too aware of the power of capitalist culture to transform human beings into doll-like automatons, to deprive them of their right to think and act as independent individuals, to not be critical of it, and finally to not revolt against it.

The usurpation of individual agency by the metropolis is inseparable from the containment and assimilation of dissent. Through the illustrations provided by the characters of Joe Harland, Stan Emery, Jimmy Herf, and Ellen Thatcher, it has been argued thus far that in *Manhattan Transfer* capitalist culture has the agency to marginalize and exclude its skeptics and dissidents; to capriciously catapult its citizens from failure to success and vice versa; to operate on a basis of a manifestly inequitable distribution of wealth; to overwhelm and haunt individual consciousness; to mechanize, automatize, and dehumanize. The assimilation of dissenting forces of resistance by the capitalist system is a highly significant issue that arises from Dos Passos's depiction of the relation between individuality and society in *Manhattan Transfer*.

³⁸ On 'The Arrow Collar Man' as a figure symbolic of the materialistic, advertising, and spectacular culture of the 1920s in America (and in New York/Broadway in particular) see Carole Turbin, "Fashioning the American Man: The Arrow Collar Man, 1907-1931", in *Gender and History*, Vol.14, Issue 3 (November 2002), pp. 470-491. Accessed online via the Wiley Online Library.

One of the characters who help to illustrate this issue is Congo, arguably one of the novel's most likeable and animated characters. Congo is introduced in the First Section of the novel as a jobless, penniless immigrant who arrives in Manhattan on a boat with his friend Emile. In the 'Went to the Animals' Fair' chapter of the Second Section, Congo, who is now working as a bartender, momentarily becomes the mouthpiece of a nihilistic type of anarchist ideology. Talking to Jimmy and Ellen, he gives a laconic, radical, and incisive commentary on the reasons behind the First World War:

You know why they have this here war...So that workingmen all over wont make big revolution...Too busy fighting. So Guillaume and Viviani and l'Empereur d'Autriche and Krupp and Rothschild and Morgan they say let's have a war...You know the first thing they do? They shoot Jaures, because he socialiste. The socialists are traitors to the International but all de same... (MT, p. 208)

In this vignette, Congo candidly proclaims himself an anarchist: 'Moi je suis anarchiste vous comprenez monsieur' ('You understand, sir, I am an anarchist') (ibid, my translation). Then, in the excerpt quoted above, he puts across a view sympathetic to syndicalism and socialism, without concealing his disillusionment with both what he perceives to be the errors of socialism ('traitors to the International') and, most importantly, with the supposed necessity of the War and the noble intentions of statesmen. It is hard not to notice in Congo the mark of Dos Passos's own beliefs in the Twenties. According to his biographer Ludington, the author

was more in agreement, however, with the anarchistic spirit of the Spanish writer Pio Baroja, whom he had admired for many years, with the Jeffersonian social theories of Albert Jay Nock [...] for whom the enemy was the state; and with the economic theories of Thorstein Veblen, who [...] in *The Engineers and the Price System* described how engineers and technicians, properly organized, could effect a revolution in the leadership of production.³⁹

It is quite striking that these influences and affiliations mentioned here should appear, undoubtedly in a compressed and rough form, in Congo's discourse. It is equally striking, however, that in the Third Section of the novel Congo has been transformed into a wealthy businessman. By not including in the narrative the events and situations that led to this extreme change, Dos Passos suggests its

³⁹ Ludington, p. 244.

arbitrariness; an arbitrariness that speaks for itself and invites us to draw our own conclusions. Reversing the pattern of Joe Harland, Congo is catapulted from destitution into success and wealth. Before coming face to face with his transformation in the Third Section, Jimmy and Ellen had known Congo as a working class man expounding radical views. When they meet him again (which is also when the readers do so), they meet a new man, whose business card reads ‘MARQUIS DES COULOMMIERS: IMPORTS’ (*MT*, p. 271). Apparently, since his arrival in Manhattan, Congo’s radical ideas have been assimilated by business culture. And since the novel does not offer concrete reasons to explain why such a transformation should have occurred, it is easy for the capitalist metropolis to emerge once again as the string-pulling—and capricious—agent. Congo’s radical convictions seem to have been swept away by the flow of capital; dissent has been comfortably assimilated by forces apparently greater than its own.

Another character who is transformed by the whimsical dynamism of Manhattan is Gus McNiel. In the second chapter of the novel, he is the milkman who gets injured in the Eleventh Avenue railroad tracks. With the help of George Baldwin, he gets a large amount of money in compensation. Emblematic of upper class mobility, Gus gets involved in politics and becomes a powerful, rich, and influential public figure. His ability to manipulate the political machine of Manhattan is obvious in the ‘Rejoicing City That Dwelt Carelessly’ chapter, where Baldwin expresses his doubts about the prospect of starting a political career. McNiel addresses Baldwin’s doubts by stating: ‘You just leave that to me...George you’re elected already’ (*MT*, p. 261). It is as if McNiel’s past as a poor working class man has vanished without a trace. He is fully aware, now, of the extent of his influence within the political terrain. Money gave him access to the socio-political elite of Manhattan and conferred real power on him. In all, McNiel’s transformation makes him the perfect embodiment of the capricious agency of the metropolis.

All of the above examples of Dos Passos’s characterization in *Manhattan Transfer* suggest that individual thought, emotion, will, and action give way to the agency of the novel’s true protagonist. It is not only by realizing Dos Passos’s characters are decisively determined by the energies of Manhattan that we can perceive of the latter as the novel’s protagonist; the passivity of

individual characters and the proportionally increased agency of Manhattan are also conveyed by the way the narrative jumps from story to story, allowing us only glimpses into, and discontinuous impressions of, the characters' thoughts, feelings and actions. In this manner, the indissoluble link between Dos Passos's aesthetic decisions and his sociopolitical critique becomes apparent. The lack of in-depth characterization and the fragmented, fast-paced narrative throughout the novel mirror the fragmentation and hectic rhythm of life in capitalist societies, where depth and individuality are rendered meaningless, as it is only appearances and surfaces, only wealth and success, that can matter. In *Manhattan Transfer* Dos Passos has been shown to indict mechanization by illustrating its adverse effects: extreme fragmentation of the social fabric; isolation; assimilation of dissent; inequality and injustice; corruption; the apotheosis of money and image at the expense of more humane qualities. The modern capitalist metropolis is seen not merely to preside over but actually to generate this state of affairs. The true protagonist of Dos Passos's novel is, thus, a seemingly undefeatable machine. However, Dos Passos in the Twenties is still convinced of the subversive potential of radical critique and action. Amplifying my overarching theoretical arguments from the introductory chapter, I believe that Dos Passos's choice not to convey anticapitalist messages directly—i.e. in an unmediated manner—but to use aesthetics as their vehicle instead, does not obfuscate the content of his critique, or its stridency. It does, however, entangle the novel in contradiction, the nature of which I will now explore. The revaluation of contradiction in literary works as a trait testifying to intricacy and the emphasis on the cognitive/critical dimension of aesthetics, as laid out in my Introduction, will be seen to inform the following argument.

Manhattan Transfer is mired in contradiction because its portrayal of a clearly deterministic world in which individual characters are robbed of their independence, freedom, dissent, and even humanity, is combined with a critique of such determinism. In fact, determinism is an effect of ideology, in the Althusserian sense of the term used in this study. It is the effects of capitalist ideology that are both reflected and critiqued in *Manhattan Transfer*, exemplifying Williams's theoretical model whereby

[l]iterature is not just a carrier of ideology, as in most forms of reflection theory. It is inescapably ideological, but its specific relative autonomy is that it is a form of writing, a form of practice, in which ideology both exists and is or can be loosened, because although it cannot

escape ideological construction, the point of its literariness is that it is a continual questioning of it internally.⁴⁰

In *Manhattan Transfer*, the inability of the characters to exercise freedom of thought and action, their subjugation to the powers of the Metropolis-Machine, recalls Althusser's writings on ideology as an all-encompassing and all-regulating force:

When we speak of ideology we should know that ideology slides into all human activity, that it is identical with the "lived" experience of human existence itself: that is why the form in which we are "made to see" ideology in great novels has as its content the "lived" experience of individuals.

Interestingly, Althusser's rather claustrophobic worldview allows for an acknowledgment of literary art as having 'a certain *specific relationship* with knowledge [...]'. Discussing the genre of the novel, the Marxist theorist maintains that authors such as Balzac and Solzhenitsyn cannot provide us with 'any *knowledge* of the world they describe, they only make us "see", "perceive" or feel the reality of the ideology of that world'.⁴¹ Therefore, even if it is not 'knowledge in the strict sense' that literary works can impart (it is rather self evident that they do not provide scientific knowledge) they are related, nonetheless, to the cognitive dimension by showing the real effects of ideology in the novelistic world. Of course, when viewed alongside Adorno's or Williams's formulations, which explicitly assign to 'literariness' an ideology-defying role, Althusser's ideas on literary art may seem comparatively limiting. This passing reference to Althusser's theory on ideology—and its application to literature—merely seeks to further emphasize ideology as all-permeating and inescapable, and literature as a form of art that renders visible, perceptible, and felt, the effects of ideology; both views being germane to the analysis of *Manhattan Transfer* undertaken in this chapter.

⁴⁰ Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society*, p. 208.

⁴¹ Louis Althusser, 'A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspré', trans. by Ben Brewster. In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company), pp. 1480-1483 (p. 1481).

4. Apocalyptic Visions: Radical Contradiction, Radical Critique

Comparing the work of Joyce to that of Dos Passos, Richard Lehan observes that '[i]n Joyce, the city becomes a state of mind; in Dos Passos, the city becomes a mechanical force'.⁴² Unlike Joyce's Dublin, which is shaped by individual consciousness, Dos Passos's *Manhattan* affects human subjectivity while remaining unaffected by it. Where Joyce presents individual consciousness as a kind of anchor in the midst of urban chaos, Dos Passos's anchor seems to be the sociopolitical critique that carries the seeds of belief in the possibility of a different fate for individuality and personal freedom under a radically different socioeconomic order. And this almost desperate belief that things could have been different is congruent with the sense of radical unease and conflict that permeates *Manhattan Transfer*, suggesting a refusal to accept the way things are. Ultimately, Dos Passos does not purport to offer any solutions to the usurpation of individual agency by Manhattan. However, the exposure per se of the effects of the ideology of metropolitan capitalism upon individuality is definitive, stark, and socio-politically relevant. Life in Manhattan will go on, relentlessly and mechanically, irrespective of its citizens' dissent; the novel is not ambiguous regarding this. Yet, Dos Passos allows dissent to come forward and be heard; zooms in on it, even if briefly and fragmentarily. Perhaps one of the greatest contradictions in *Manhattan Transfer* is that its critique retains its subversive character while also upholding an acknowledgment of its own limitations. I will now foreground the apocalyptic attributes of the novel in order to discuss how they interpenetrate with the workings of its critique and how they relate to contradiction.

Seth Moglen has said that he chose to study the early Dos Passos as an example of 'more established and more privileged writers who also shared the intuition that the socioeconomic forces breeding a crisis of alienation might, indeed, be resisted, and that Americans might grieve their losses in ways that would enable them to retrieve what seemed everywhere to be imperiled'.⁴³ If not the actual possibility of such retrieval, then certainly the belief in the vital importance of resisting the

⁴² Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998), p. 241.

⁴³ Moglen, p. 10.

destructive energies of the early twentieth century capitalist metropolis emerges from the pages of *Manhattan Transfer*; a paradoxical, uneasy emergence, considering the deterministic universe it describes. Malcolm Bradbury's account of the American novel in the Twenties is pertinent in this respect:

The American novel of the Twenties is extremely attentive to the feel of the modern, and to its unease. It is haunted by apocalyptic anxieties, troubled with a deep cultural unease, and displays a decadent dismay in the face of the material world and the political order. It none the less hungers to make the world re-cohere, either by reaching behind the present to a recovered pastoral world, or to some timeless moment set beyond the contingency of modern time, or by attempting to make form itself an expression of culture as possibility.⁴⁴

Many of these elements accurately describe the concerns *Manhattan Transfer* has so far been seen to be engaged with in this chapter. The sense of 'unease' in the face of 'the modern' permeates the novel in its entirety and deeply affects primary and secondary characters alike, while Dos Passos's alarm at the lay of the land in material and sociopolitical terms is felt in spite of his radical techniques of aesthetic distancing. It is what Bradbury refers to as the 'apocalyptic' element, and the use of form as 'an expression of culture as possibility', that I would like to engage with at this point in my analysis of Dos Passos's novel, so as to further discuss the interpenetration of aesthetic experimentation and social critique.

Apart from a generalized sense of impending doom associated with the injustice and crushing power of capitalist society that has been felt, for example, in the oppressive force described in the prefatory segment of 'Steamroller' and in the hopelessness conveyed by Bud's story, *Manhattan Transfer* is shot through with Biblical references and specific allusions to imminent catastrophe. These 'apocalyptic' elements can be regarded as a constitutive and constituting part of Dos Passos's critique of Manhattan as the center of social, economic, and political corruption in American capitalism. To begin with, the prefatory segment of 'Metropolis' refers to the Biblical cities of Babylon and Nineveh, both of them associated with corruption that led to their eventual destruction by God. Babylon and Nineveh are juxtaposed with contemporary metropolises of a long history,

⁴⁴ Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Mar. 1983), p. 62.

namely Athens and Constantinople, before the island of Manhattan gets introduced into the picture: 'Steel, glass, tile, concrete will be the materials of the skyscrapers. Crammed on the narrow island the millionwindowed buildings will jut glittering, pyramid on pyramid like the whit cloudhead above a thunderstorm' (*MT*, p. 23). From as early as the prefatory segment of the second chapter it is implied, via association, that Manhattan is connected to the depravity and potential destruction of ancient Biblical and historical cities.

In 'One More River to Jordan' the chapter title, prefatory segment, and one particular vignette in the main body of the text unite in their apocalyptic allusions. The title clearly invokes the difficult journey that, according to the Hebrew Bible, Israelites had to undertake in order to reach freedom in the land promised to them by God. By specifying that there is only 'One More River' left to cross until the land of freedom is reached, Dos Passos is perhaps making a cryptic reference to the possibility of liberation from the confines of capitalism, from a life ruled by oppression and slavery. The fact that the vignette featuring Biblical references in the chapter is the one featuring Martin, the anti-capitalist radical, could be seen to corroborate this last argument. Martin's character only appears twice in the whole novel—a structural choice, on Dos Passos's part, that conveys the marginalization and endangerment of radical thought within the metropolis. Nevertheless, Martin's significance as a brief yet radical voicing of dissent in the face of the status quo cannot be disputed. Jimmy and Ellen admire him and name their little boy after him; even after Martin's rather violent drunken outburst, Jimmy admits that he likes him (*MT*, p. 324). Martin is introduced in 'One More River to Jordan', his rhetoric bearing both a sharp anticapitalist edge and apocalyptic undertones: 'But good God hasn't a man some right? No, this industrial civilization forces us to seek a complete readjustment of government and social life...'; 'The result has been to put more power in the hands of a few men than there has been in the history of the world since the horrible slave civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia...' (*MT*, p. 239). It thus appears to be the case that Dos Passos makes the Biblical allusions of the chapter's title more explicit through Martin's discourse. Martin is arguing that different, more equitable economic and political landscapes do exist; that the river to Jordan/freedom may be crossed if radical action is taken up: 'The only way of bucking the interests is for working

people, the proletariat, producers and consumers, anything you want to call them, to form unions and finally get so well organized that they can take over the whole government' (ibid). Martin's rhetoric introduces belief in the people's, and especially the working classes', power to not merely challenge but overthrow the capitalist order.

Significantly, however, and despite being deeply sympathetic to Martin's ideals in the early twenties, Dos Passos refrains from glamorizing or mythologizing either Martin or his worldview: the second and last time he shows this character is in a moment of severe crisis, whereby he mistrusts his friends (possibly as a result of having already experienced people's mockery on account of his ideologies) and even threatens to take his own life (*MT*, pp. 323-324). In spite of admiring Martin, Jimmy and Helen are unable to respond to his rhetoric in a practical way, in their everyday lives. Overall, Martin's character is clearly marginalized within the text—an aesthetic choice that reflects the marginalization of dissent in capitalist society. By looking at the prefatory segment of 'One More River to Jordan', we see that Dos Passos has included perhaps the most overt emblem of anticapitalist rhetoric in the whole novel, and yet, as the vehicle of such rhetoric, he has chosen an anonymous man 'shouting from a soapbox at Second Avenue and Houston in front of the Cosmopolitan Café'. The reader may feel inclined either to reject this man's speech because, after all, he is merely a self-appointed orator on a soapbox, a voice in the desert that resounds without being noticed by anyone; or, instead, to choose to ignore appearances and unsophisticated locution alike and focus on the content of the man's speech:

They squeeze us dry friends...feller workers, slaves I'd oughter say...they take our work and our ideers and our women...They build their Plaza Hotels and their millionaire's clubs and their million dollar theayters and their battleships and what do they leave us?...They leave us shopsickness an the rickets and a lot of dirty streets full of garbage cans...You look pale you fellers...You need blood...Why don't you get some blood in your veins?...Back in Russia the poor people...not so much poorer'n we are...believe in wampires, things come suck your blood at night...That's what Capitalism is, a wampire that sucks your blood...day...and...night. (*MT*, p. 232)

This figure, anonymous as all the figures featured in the prefatory segments, describes the desolate society that Manhattan has created for the working classes and proceeds to name the enemy:

Capitalism. Rather than being a mere caricature, this passing figure seems to be setting the tone for Martin's anticapitalist rhetoric in the main text, which, while not as extreme, is defined by the same underlying awareness and sentiment. And yet, a sense of futility and disillusionment permeates the text, for nobody listens to the orator, while, on its part, Martin's rhetoric remains marginalized both within Dos Passos's text and within the sociopolitical landscape of that time. The prospect of change in this state of affairs seems to be perpetually elusive; even though it is clearly imaginable and imagined, it always remains 'One More River' away.

The theme of apocalypse is revisited in the last chapter of *Manhattan Transfer*. The sixth vignette of 'The Burthen of Nineveh' features a homeless man who deliriously talks of the imminent destruction of a corrupted Manhattan by God. A self-proclaimed 'tramp', he is mentally unstable, as the two Union boys, Skinny and Joe, have established (when he is not addressing the boys he is talking to either angel Gabriel or himself). It could, however, be suggested that the tramp's insanity renders the message he is trying to communicate all the more effective, as he can be seen to subscribe to the mad prophet archetype. 'A voice in the desert', as it were, dismissed as merely crazy by the Union boys (similar to the soapbox orator in the prefatory segment to 'One More River to Jordan', whose message goes by ignored), the tramp is convinced of the imminent destruction that awaits Manhattan on account of the corruption that rules it. He specifically mentions 'Babylon and Nineveh' and 'the tower of Babel', amplifying the apocalyptic imagery in the prefatory segment of chapter two and the Biblical allusions interspersed throughout the novel, in an effort to communicate a prophetic vision of incoming catastrophe:

Do you know how long God took to destroy the tower of Babel, folks? Seven minutes. Do you know how long the Lord God took to destroy Babylon and Nineveh? Seven minutes. There's more wickedness in one block in New York City than there was in a square mile in Nineveh, and how long do you think the Lord God of Sabboath will take to destroy New York City an Brooklyn an the Bronx? Seven seconds. Seven seconds... (*MT*, p. 340)

The prophet may be mad, but his words are not irrelevant in the larger context of *Manhattan Transfer*. For instance, 'wickedness' is something George Baldwin has been seen to possess in generous amounts: in the first pages of the novel, he is an aspiring lawyer pining for success and recognition,

and he gets both by winning Gus McNiel's case, seducing (and then rejecting) his wife in the process. In the second section he is already disillusioned with his 'luck and all sorts of success', as he confides in Ellen, whom he is courting rather persistently. He goes on to nonchalantly remark: 'Oh success...success...what does it mean? [...] But it isn't any fun any more. All I do is sit in the office and let the young fellows do the work. My future's all cut out for me' (*MT*, pp. 212-202). Baldwin also vehemently opposes McNiel's involvement with Labour issues and the workers' strike; he thinks that a politician cannot afford to get caught up in such nonsensical matters (*MT*, p. 190). Finally, in a display of profound disregard of the value of friendship, Baldwin ends up betraying McNiel by opting to present himself as a political candidate 'on a nonpartisan basis', i.e. as his friend's competitor; and he does not fail to inform McNiel's wife of his decision (*MT*, p. 299).

Beyond such examples of individual moral and professional corruption, however, the city of Manhattan is enveloped in a depersonalized, generalized, apocalyptic kind of depravity generated by the metropolis's imperious energies, and carrying the seeds of doom and destruction. In the face of such corruption, and considering the apocalyptic themes and imagery in the novel just been discussed, the mad prophet's assessment of the city's depravity—if not his actual prophesy—can be seen to possess a certain amount of accuracy and insight.

5. Dissent, Aesthetics, their Interpenetrations, and their Discontents: The Perspectives of Rancière and Adorno vis-à-vis *Manhattan Transfer*

Having discussed the ways in which Dos Passos is using peripheral and main characters alike as part of his larger thematic preoccupations and critique, Richard Murphy's argument that 'Dos Passos's world has no interesting or memorable characters in it [...]' appears problematic.⁴⁵ One could argue instead that even passing characters are interesting in *Manhattan Transfer*, provided they be regarded as vehicles of Dos Passos's overarching preoccupation with the fate of the individual—particularly the

⁴⁵ Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism and the Problem of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 213.

radically or rebelliously minded individual—within the immutable socioeconomic order of Manhattan. Within this argumentative framework, the undermined individuality expressed by Dos Passos's characterization should not be interpreted as a move towards collectivity, given the disillusionment with mass ideology—radical and capitalist alike—that this chapter has been tracing in the novel. It is self-evident that the collective consciousness represented by the metropolis, the consciousness which operates according to the Steamroller—the logic of business and finance—is not an alternative to the preoccupation with the individual, but part of a rigid status quo. Neither is there a chance for a turn towards a liberating collectivity, for Manhattan's citizens, as we have seen, are unable to respond to the emancipatory, radical rhetoric of the likes of Martin; they either ignore or dismiss the voice of the mad prophets amongst them.

Murphy substantiates his view of Dos Passos's characterization by arguing that the reason why the characters cannot hold our interest and attention is that they 'are all in the process of becoming automata. But so are we all, Dos Passos maintains. This is the social tragedy of our times.'⁴⁶ He regards this automatization as essential to Dos Passos's depiction of metropolitan American society in the twenties. I agree with Murphy's identification of the mechanization of existence as one of Dos Passos's essential themes in *Manhattan Transfer*, but in doing so I also accept that the loss of individual agency to the commanding energies of the metropolis does not make Dos Passos's characters any less interesting; on the contrary, it unites them all under the novel's overarching themes, adding to the latter's intensity. The figures populating Dos Passos's Manhattan are united in their discomfort, suffering, unrest or even dissent—with the latter varying significantly from character to character—towards the corruption and unfairness of capitalistic structures. From Bud Korpenning to Stan Emery, from Martin to Jimmy Herf, and from Joe Harland to Ellen, Dos Passos's characters are important not via a hypothetical thoroughness of psychological portrayal, but via their ineradicable and inescapable connection to their sociopolitical context. Rosen maintains, specifically in respect of *Manhattan Transfer*, that '[the city] tends to homogenize aspirations; people differ

⁴⁶ Ibid.

mainly in the degree to which they realize them'.⁴⁷ If the metropolis-machine, then, manages to impose practically the same aspirations on all of its citizens, and if the difference between people is mainly measured in terms of greater or lesser ability to conform to said aspirations, then the only way to assert individuality would be to refuse to subscribe to rules of social and personal conduct. In *Manhattan Transfer*, such defiant assertions of individuality seem to be assimilated into, or crushed by, the metropolis-machine; resistance needs a centre to arise from, a centre which does not exist in Manhattan, dispersed and fragmented as existence has become. Again, the kaleidoscopic technique of montage reflects this de-centering, this inability to create a resisting collectivity.

In discussing the dynamics between individual and societal forces as presented in *Manhattan Transfer* William Dow draws attention to Dos Passos's politically charged aesthetics:

Knowledge is acquired in this novel not from the modernist trademarks of a minute psychological examination of a character, or a probing through multiple points of view a limited portion of experience, but from a reportorial and engagé analysis of the relation between the individual and society. [...] simultaneity and a reliance on visual and mass-culture forms emphasize his concern with society's power to transform the individual and the individual's failure to shape society.⁴⁸

At this juncture it would be interesting to see how the politics of Dos Passos's aesthetics, in its various manifestations throughout *Manhattan Transfer*, relates to Rancière's theorization on the politics of aesthetics. To begin with, Rancière does not believe in an unproblematic correspondence between experimental techniques and sociopolitical implications. In reference to artists and novelists in the Twenties and Thirties who, like Dos Passos—and to whom, as we have seen earlier, he makes a direct reference—seek to depict the chaotic sociopolitical landscape of their time, Rancière maintains that the same aesthetic technique could be seen to carry differing sociopolitical implications:

Novelistic fragmentation or pictorial carnivalization lend themselves just as well to describing the chaos of the capitalist world from the point of view of class struggle as to describing, from a

⁴⁷ Rosen, pp. 44-45.

⁴⁸ William Dow, 'John Dos Passos, Blaise Cendrars, and the "Other" Modernism, *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol.42, No.3 (Autumn 1996) pp. 396-415 (p. 412)

nihilistic point of view, the chaos of a world in which class struggle is itself but one element in the Dionysian chaos.⁴⁹

This comment comes to complement Rancière's view—seen earlier in this chapter—of Dos Passos's technique of fragmentation as a reflection of social disintegration.⁵⁰ Perhaps this comment sheds some light on what Mike Gold detects and admonishes in *Manhattan Transfer*: the ambivalence, or even multivalence, of the political ideology that literary aesthetics can disseminate. For Gold, Dos Passos's convoluted aesthetics—at times the vehicle of critique and at times the indicator of the critique's limitations—works to obfuscate the politically radical moments in the narrative. Dos Passos's commitment to aesthetic experimentation would reach its culmination in the *USA* trilogy; however, *Manhattan Transfer* is not merely a rehearsal for Dos Passos's subsequent technical triumph, but the locus where the nascence of this particular brand of his literary aesthetics takes place. In the reading undertaken in this chapter, Dos Passos's aesthetics communicates both dissent and the failure of dissent; not by dint of subscribing to a particular political theory or practice (this latter being, as seen earlier, Gold's ideal), but by dint of the ambivalence, or multivalence, of the political message.

To return to Rancière, it could be argued that the only politics that he considers as being of significance to literature is a politics embedded in literary aesthetics; an intrinsic part of the literary work rather than a superimposition on it. In other words, sociopolitical import inheres in the work's aesthetics, if aesthetics is to be understood as a way of distributing, and re-distributing, all that is sensible.⁵¹ Adorno seems to be making an analogous point in *Aesthetic Theory*:

Social struggles and the relations of classes are imprinted in the structure of artworks; by contrast, the political positions deliberately adopted by artworks are epiphenomena and usually

⁴⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London, New York: Continuum, 2004 [2000]), p. 61.

⁵⁰ See note 15 for a reminder of the comment in question.

⁵¹ Rancière's expression 'the distribution of the sensible' refers to his expanded vision of aesthetics, discussed in my Introduction.

impinge on the elaboration of works and thus, ultimately, on their social truth content. Political opinions count for little.⁵²

This separation of political content from ‘social truth content’ is a characterizing aspect of Adorno’s aesthetic theory. According to this view, *Manhattan Transfer* does not need to overtly transmit radical views in order to be socially subversive. Moreover, Adorno opines that ‘[r]eal denunciation is probably only a capacity of form, which is overlooked by a social aesthetic that believes in themes. What is socially decisive in artworks is the content [Inhalt] that becomes eloquent through the work’s formal structures’.⁵³ Adorno’s faith in the subversive potential of aesthetics per se is useful to the aspect of this chapter’s argument that focuses on the dissenting dimension of Dos Passos’s aesthetics. In *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, Rancière makes some congruent remarks:

What the term ‘art’ designates in its singularity is the framing of a space of presentation by which the things of art are identified as such. And what links the practice of art to the question of the common is the constitution, at once material and symbolic, of a specific space-time, of a suspension with respect to the ordinary forms of sensory experience. Art is not, in the first instance, political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society’s structures, or social groups, their conflicts or identities. It is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space.⁵⁴

I take the ‘distance’ referred to here to allude to an art that, through its aesthetic form, distinguishes, rather than separates, itself from everyday politics. Rancière’s remark does seem to apply to Dos Passos’s conflicted mix of aesthetics and politics. As has been discussed earlier, Dos Passos in the Twenties brings his socialist/syndicalist sensitivities into play while defending and maintaining what he deems to be a necessary, and honest, distance from the real struggles of the laboring masses. Dos Passos values literary technique per se, not according to its relation to a specific politics—a view

⁵² Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004 [1970]), p. 303.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 301

⁵⁴ *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, p. 23.

diametrically opposed to that of Gold, who clearly insists on the subordination of aesthetics to political purposes.

6. Images of Success in the Modern Capitalist Metropolis

Dos Passos's characters, main as well as peripheral, reveal that to have the correct image/looks/appearance is indispensable to the idea of success in the modern capitalist metropolis. This particular idea is pivotal to the analysis of Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* in the following chapter. Two examples from the text will now be used to discuss, specifically, how this state of affairs affects disadvantaged individuals in the novelistic world of *Manhattan Transfer*. Firstly, there is pair of bandits who embark on a journey of armed robberies; they are presented in a rather compassionate light by Dos Passos. They are shown to live in poverty and hunger. In particular, Dutch Robertson's desperation at not being able to find a job is made obvious: '[a] colored man was sweeping off the steps. Dutch looked at him enviously; he's got a job'. (*MT*, p. 285) Dutch's awareness of his being disadvantaged becomes exacerbated by the aesthetic imperative imposed on him by society, resulting in a sense of inferiority; the following extract is from a vignette in which Dutch is prohibited from dancing with Francie at a restaurant because, apparently, he is not properly dressed:

'Mister...no dance without plover dless...' said a dapper Chinaman putting his hand on Dutch's arm.

'Waz he want?' he growled dancing on.

'I guess it's the shirt, Dutch.'

'The hell it is.' (*MT*, p. 268)

It is a small incident, yet it does indicate that to be poor and unable to afford fancy dress equals social stigmatization. We have seen how Dos Passos has propounded the idea that looks are everything in *Manhattan* through Bud's story and how Ellen, the mechanical doll, has been used throughout the novel as an example of the demise of individual agency and the absolute rule of image. The novel's

final pages forcefully render Ellen's character as utterly dependent on, and consumed by, her outward appearance. After witnessing a terrible accident in which a shop girl's face gets burnt, Ellen appears shaken. She tries to bring herself back to her usual mechanical coldness and wonders 'Why should I be so excited? [...] Just somebody's bad luck, the sort of thing that happens every day'. The clue to her agitation comes a few lines later, when she considers the hypothetical scenario of herself being 'horribly burned, disfigured for life' (*MT*, p. 356). Ellen does not have to overtly say what has been made obvious throughout the novel; namely, that not merely her success, but her whole life is dependent on her looks and image. She and the shop girl may be worlds apart in terms of social, class, and economic status, yet they are united in their helplessness in the case of calamity regarding their appearance; for Ellen, whose professional, financial, and social success is predicated on her looks, the thought of a ruined appearance is deeply unsettling.

Along these lines, it is also worth considering the brief vignette that closes the very first chapter of *Manhattan Transfer*. Here, 'a small bearded bandylegged man', an anonymous immigrant, is looking at a street advertisement. He stands still before the image of wealth and success:

It was a highbrowed cleanshaven distinguished face with arched eyebrows and a bushy neatly trimmed mustache, the face of a man who had money in the bank, poised prosperously above a crisp wing collar and an ample dark cravat. Under it in copybook writing was the signature King C. Gillette. [...] The little bearded man pushed his derby back off his sweating brow and looked for a long time into the dollarproud eyes of King C. Gillette. Then he clenched his fists, threw back his shoulders and walked into the drugstore. (*MT*, pp. 21-22)

The anonymous man decides to imitate the man-with-a-name; he understands that, in order to have a name, in order to be distinguished and important, he must first present the right image, the right face, to the world. He goes on to shave in the manner advertised in the poster, much to his family's bewilderment. His action does not simply indicate susceptibility to a well-made advertisement; on a deeper level, the wish to become like the man advertising the product symbolizes the will to escape undistinguished anonymity and gain the chance, via achieving the 'proper looks', to become wealthy and important—the quintessential dream propagated by the modern capitalist metropolis. Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* also deals with this capitalist-manufactured dream-imperative. She shows her heroine Anna to intuitively comprehend the central importance of image and looks in order to be

accepted in London's society. Through Anna's ruminations, Rhys exposes the social marginalization of the dispossessed female. Anna knows that her inability to mimic the appearance of the mannequins in the shop windows equals her exclusion from the dream and the hope of becoming a respectable, dignified, metropolitan lady.

The juxtaposition between socioeconomic success and failure permeates *Manhattan Transfer* in its entirety, as the narrative frequently leaps, in cinematic style, from a vignette featuring personal or professional failings to one showcasing fragments of fame, glamour, and prosperity. A notable contrast is created in the 'Nine Days' Wonder' chapter; the title itself refers to Ellen's success as a Broadway actress and the vignette in which she is asked how she finds it, 'being a nine days' wonder', is immediately preceded by a fragment that unfolds Joe Harland's desolate way of living after his downfall from Wall Street fame (*MT*, pp. 167-168 for Joe Harland and p. 169 for Ellen). Another example is found in 'The Burthen of Nineveh' chapter, in the vignette featuring James Merivale. Unlike his cousin Jimmy who, as seen earlier, rejects the opportunity to work his way through his uncle's firm and become a successful banker (and an emblem of capitalist ambition), James Merivale '[h]as done everything he was told all his life and flourished like a green bay tree...'.⁵⁵ In the last chapter of the novel, Dos Passos lets the reader in on James Merivale's daydreaming, which is rendered in a stream-of-consciousness, heavily fragmented style, jumping from thoughts of professional success to thoughts of failure:

Poor old Jerry never had the feeling of being in good right in on the ground floor of the Metropolitan Club... Comes of poor stock. Take Jimmy now... hasn't even that excuse, an out and out failure, a misfit from way back... [...] Still he might have made something of himself with all his advantages... dreamer, wanderlust... Greenwich Village stuff. And dad did every bit as much for him as he did for me... [...] Ten Million Dollar Failure.

Failure. Success.

Ten Million Dollar Success... Ten Years of Successful Banking... (*MT*, pp. 344-345)

It is with such briskness that James's thought changes its focus from failure to success; from contemplating his cousin's rejection of a golden opportunity to taking comfort in his own self as a

⁵⁵ This is the way Jimmy is describing his cousin to Stan. *MT* p. 164

paradigm of exploiting the same opportunity and achieving professional success in the banking business. In terms of sentence structure, the above excerpt is formulated in such a manner as to suggest that ‘failure’ and ‘success’ could be merely a full stop away from one another; this, in turn, can be seen to allude to the capriciousness of the agency of the metropolis regarding failure and success.

In spite of the suggested proximity, however, the two words—and worlds—remain direct opposites, with the sharpness and starkness of their juxtaposition perhaps only accentuating this very fact. After having thought of his unsuccessful cousin, James abandons himself into reveries of glamorous recognition: ‘[a]t the dinner of the American Bankers Association last night James Merivale, president of the Bank and Trust Company, spoke in answer to the toast “Ten Years of Progressive Banking”...’; he receives ‘thunderous applause’ (*MT*, p. 345). After he has thought about the ‘Economic Depression’, after he has tried to reassure himself that ‘[t]hat’s the thing about banking. Even in a deficit there’s money to be handled, collateral’ and, finally, after his ‘failure’ of cousin has been brought to his mind, James indulges in a vision of himself as a recognized, admired, patriotic businessman and family man (*MT*, pp. 344 and 345, respectively). The reader is confronted with these contrasting images, as one by one they enter James’s mind. Again, the impression created may be that the change from success to failure could be quick and abrupt but the technique of montage also ensures that the dividing lines separating the one from the other are thrown into sharp relief. The overall effect is one of ambiguity and polyvalence. The content of James’s daydream straightforwardly asserts that Jimmy Herf has been ‘a failure through and through’, while James has been a paragon of professional adroitness. If James is taken to be a representative of conformity to the status quo and its official ideology, according to which failure and success are straightforward notions measured by the degree of compliance to the ambition-fuelled, competitive pragmatism definitive of the capitalist economy and society, then his opinion of Jimmy can be seen to reflect the logic of the modern capitalist metropolis. And yet, the sentence structure of James’s reverie, with its staccato rhythm and one-word phrases, seems to mitigate the ideas communicated, suggesting instead that, within a capitalist economy, failure could turn into success, and vice versa, in a matter of seconds;

that the dividing lines separating the two may not always be clear-cut. Facing the transformation early twentieth century capitalism brings on the level of values and ideals—a transformation magnified in the context of the metropolis-par-excellence that is Manhattan—James obviously embraces and personifies the ideal of flamboyant success revered in big business circles. He is at one with the image, the lifestyle, and the accompanying mentality that Manhattan’s agency promotes and depends on. He could not have regarded Jimmy’s critical skepticism towards the 1920s *Zeitgeist*—and more specifically towards the socioeconomic system that births that *Zeitgeist*—as anything more than foolishness.

7. In Conclusion: Escapism or Resistance?

Manhattan Transfer constantly oscillates between snapshots of capitalism and the working classes; of anonymous vagrants and businessmen/stars; of insight and ignorance; of resistance and conformity; of failure and success. In the novel’s final pages we follow Jimmy Herf into his grand exit, whereby failure in social terms is strikingly fused with the promise of freedom, rendering finally explicit an idea that had been running like a fissure throughout the whole novel; namely, that within early twentieth century capitalism what is deemed a failure in social terms could be seen to carry the seeds of individual dignity, will-to-freedom, and resistance. The novel closes on Jimmy leaving Manhattan to an unknown new destination; an ambiguous, decidedly open ended conclusion that invites differing interpretations. According to Murphy, ‘in a feeble gesture of romantic anarchy [Dos Passos] allows Jimmy Herf to escape his own particular destiny’.⁵⁶ Murphy considers Dos Passos’s early protagonists to be ‘aesthete-romantic’;⁵⁷ a characterization that can be seen to apply to Jimmy in his younger years and perhaps up to the point when his marriage falls apart, but does not account for the radical disillusionment and turbulent restlessness of his later years as depicted throughout the ‘Skyscraper’

⁵⁶ Murphy, p. 209.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 199.

chapter (as seen earlier) and ‘The Burthen of Nineveh’ (‘I’ve got to chase myself’).⁵⁸ Perhaps Jimmy is not merely escaping but finally turning into action his quiet dissent against the destiny the metropolis-machine prepared for and threw to him; a destiny he ultimately cannot accept as ‘his own’. In this light, Jimmy’s departure from Manhattan is deliberate, brave, and promising, rather than ‘feeble’ and ‘romantic’, or merely a manifestation of ‘aesthete’ affectations. In his late twenties, Jimmy is perturbed by and skeptical towards a socioeconomic order that marches and advances to the beat of success, fame, wealth, glamour, ambition, corruption, inequality, and competitiveness, with individual freedom and dignity being casually sacrificed along the way. The fact that he finally turns his back on all this can be seen as a revolutionary gesture clearly indicating both the will to and the possibility of a different social reality. It is true that Jimmy’s departure indicates that Manhattan cannot change, that its agency is irrepressible and undefeatable, and that a different destiny has to be pursued elsewhere; nevertheless, a revaluation of individuality, of the ability to choose one’s own destiny instead of conforming to the one prescribed by the status quo, is found in the closing pages of *Manhattan Transfer*, suggesting that, if nothing else, dissent cannot be completely crushed; perhaps it will go and flourish on a more accepting, more humane, more ethical ground.

Despair at the transformations brought on by early twentieth century capitalism in America informs Dos Passos’s aesthetics and rhetoric of dissent in *Manhattan Transfer*. It is a kind of despair, however, that arguably begs to be distinguished from defeatism and escapism alike. In the ‘Skyscraper’ chapter Jimmy fantasizes about the years of his early adulthood, being deported ‘as undesirable aliens’ from the country, thus alluding (surreal and humorous as the passage in question may be) to the actual deportation of communists and anarchists described earlier in the novel.⁵⁹ In the closing pages, however, there are no connotations of state-imposed deportation; Jimmy is in control of his destiny, following his own will. Throughout the novel resistance has been seen to be marginalized within or assimilated by capitalism (Congo, Martin, soapbox orator, prophet) and even evicted

⁵⁸ *MT* p. 343

⁵⁹ See pp. 262-263 for the description of the Reds being forcibly sent back to Russia. See pp. 317-318 for Jimmy fantasizing about the deportation of his ‘anarchist’ twenties.

(deportation of the Reds). The novel is replete with examples of critique of the ills of capitalist modernity. The necessity of resistance resonates throughout, and is discordant with the energies of the modern capitalist metropolis. In *Manhattan Transfer* the transformation of virtually every aspect of human life is irrepressible and includes the catastrophic demise of individuality and moral identity; for the capitalist metropolis-machine has a mechanical will and agency of its own that reifies and crushes human energies. By showing the injurious impact of metropolitan capitalism on social and individual life, Dos Passos clearly suggests the necessity of resistance. He creates a specific aesthetic politics whereby the necessity of questioning, challenging, and ultimately resisting the seemingly undefeatable forces operative within the capitalist metropolis emerges as a logical conclusion from the novel rather than an a priori ideological commitment. Herein lies a large portion of *Manhattan Transfer*'s import. The bleakness of the socio-economico-political landscape as presented by Dos Passos is indisputable. Nevertheless this chapter has aimed to show how this bleakness is inseparable from the radical critique disseminated through Dos Passos's aesthetics of dissent; a critique enveloped in equally radical contradiction.

In *Manhattan Transfer*, voices of dissent are both necessary and finite, both urgent and futile. Dos Passos's montage and kaleidoscopic point of view throw into relief both the polyphony of dissent and its fragmentation/decentering, while the passive suffering of the characters highlights the dehumanizing agency of the modern capitalist metropolis. The next chapter will focus on Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*, where dissent has only one voice, that of the marginalized protagonist, and where the aesthetics of affect and memory are reclaimed as weapons of critique against a hostile and exclusionary metropolis—London in the early twentieth century.

Chapter Two: Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*

1. Introduction

The intriguing fusion of autobiography and fiction Rhys achieves in *Voyage in the Dark* has been documented by the vast majority of literary critics that have written on her oeuvre, regardless of their methodological perspective (ethnic, racial, cultural, aesthetic, thematic, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, or various combinations of the above).¹ *Voyage*, the story of the downward spiral of a culturally displaced and socially debased young woman, is inspired by real events that occurred in Rhys's life in the 1910s.² I begin by hypothesizing that the time gap between Rhys's writing of the novel in the 1930s and the actual events that inspired it allow the author to disconnect herself from and depersonalize—to a degree—her own experiences. This distancing, at once temporal and artistic, is far removed from an aestheticization, or ossification, of personal experience; it can instead be seen to enrich and corroborate the socio-political critique achieved in the novel. Rhys looks back to, and sets her novel in, English metropolitan society of the mid-1910s, from the point of view of a literary writer in 1930s England. The latter chronology is associated with an urgent call for politically committed writing, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Rhys's resistance to English literature's politicized turn in the 1930s is pivotal to the argument pursued in this chapter.

Instead of this resistance resulting in an apolitical or asocial novel, I will seek to demonstrate, in my analysis of *Voyage*, how the novel represents a compelling example of the interpenetrations of aesthetics, ideology reproduction, and ideology critique. My view of Rhys's aesthetics in *Voyage* as

¹ The autobiographical core of *Voyage*, as well as of other works by Rhys, has been exhaustively discussed by Carole Angier. Teresa E. O'Connor has also provided an in-depth exploration of Rhys's life-world vis-à-vis her novelistic world. See Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985); also by Angier, the comprehensive *Jean Rhys: Life and Work* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990); and Teresa O'Connor, *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1986).

² Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (London, England: Penguin Books, 2000, first published by Constable [1934]). The title of the novel will be abbreviated as *Voyage* for the rest of this chapter. Notably, the only reference to the historical time of the storyline is given in a letter: 'March 26th, 1914', from Ethel to Anna's friend Laurie (*Voyage*, p. 141). The novel does not contain any other references, or even allusions to, the dimension of time.

socially charged and implicitly political will be shown to both expand on, as well as depart from, other critical approaches to the novel. This chapter will duly acknowledge the import of analyses of Rhys by critics such as Helen Carr and Judith Kegan Gardiner, both of whom highlight the political significance of the author's highly personal narrative and, particularly, the radicalism informing her exploration of the inner world of the marginalized, dispossessed female. My own departure from other Rhysian critics is arguably centred around an emphasis on the cognitive/critical dimension of what I refer to as Rhys's language of affect and memory—the kind of language which Anna, *Voyage's* protagonist, speaks, and Rhys, the author, writes. I view Anna as a vehicle for the expression of dissent in metropolitan capitalist patriarchy and for the questioning of the social and ethical status quo in London of the mid-1910s, always viewed from the perspective of the older Rhys, writing in the 1930s. It is precisely from this dual temporal perspective that Rhys arrives at the implicitly political aesthetics in which she articulates her heroine's (and her younger self's) dissent. It could be posited that temporal distantiation and the medium of literary writing facilitated Rhys's navigation through the sometimes paralysing aspects of memory and affect, and enabled the infusion of these same qualities with critical and dissenting energies. In this manner, I argue, the political was inscribed into the personal. It is the aim of this chapter to attend to the peculiar nature and delineation of Rhys's critique within a textual world at once fictional and autobiographical where the aesthetic, the personal, and the political are bound in a relationship of intricate interpenetration. Overall, this study seeks to foreground late modernist texts whose radical critique is mired in radical contradiction, due to their simultaneous reproduction and challenge of certain aspects and effects of modern metropolitan capitalism. This chapter will explore the ways in which this overarching concern can be seen to be substantiated with regard to *Voyage*, and present the novel as having been written both within and against the socio-literary context of its narrative.

2. From The Language of the Established Order to the Language of Dispossessed Dissent

Judith Kegan Gardiner offers a strongly socio-political reading of the Rhysian heroine.³ With regard

³ Alongside Gardiner, Mary Lou Emery must also be mentioned, as a critic who has delved into the socio-political dimension of the Rhysian heroine. See Mary Lou Emery, 'The Politics of Form: Jean Rhys's Social

to Rhys's work in general, she has remarked:

[Rhys] does not treat alienation as an existential fact but as the specific historical result of social polarizations about sex, class, and morality. Her heroes are women alienated from others and themselves because they are female, poor, and sexually active. They are also misdefined by a language and literary heritage that belong primarily to propertied men.⁴

Alienation here is repositioned into its social context and language, everyday and literary alike; language in the mouths of men is viewed as a means of misrepresentation of socially alienated women. In alignment with Gardiner's observation above, I see a causal link between Anna's alienation and 'social polarizations about sex, class, and morality'. In their turn, these polarizations are inseparable from the mentalities, authorized by and disseminated within, capitalist patriarchal societies. Indeed, Rhys's writing taps into the structures of capitalist patriarchy and exposes the assignment of linguistic and cultural power to men. I will, however, attempt to extend these points by exploring the specific ways in which *Voyage* speaks about and challenges this state of affairs. Gardiner argues:

[i]n a capitalist patriarchy, men and the propertied control language and the literary tradition so that women's words are not believed. Through the collapse of rhetorical opposites, symbolic incident concerning the control of language, and literary allusion, Rhys holds up to us the distorting mirror of a woman's truth about the whole of her society.⁵

The problem, in the reading of *Voyage* pursued in this chapter, is not so much 'that women's words are not believed' within the context of capitalist patriarchy which both Rhys as the author and Anna as her heroine have to face. It is that women's words are sidelined, even banished, into the realm of the non-cognitive, the irrational, the uncritical, and the visceral. My approach to *Voyage* seeks to highlight this deeply problematic view—a view especially prevalent in the literary and social world of

Vision in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol.28, No.4 (Winter 1982), pp. 418-430.

⁴ Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'Good Morning, Midnight; Good Night, Modernism', *Engagements: Postmodernism, Marxism, Politics*, Spec. Issue of *boundary 2*, Vol.11, No.1/2 (Autumn, 1982–Winter, 1983), pp. 233-251 (p. 246).

⁵ Ibid, p. 249.

the 1930s—according to which a narrative style laden with the energies of emotion and memory should necessarily be lacking in intellectual and sociopolitical relevance. I would argue that it is precisely via the language of affect and memory, a language at once true to the predicament of the heroine speaking it and to the dissenting awareness of the author writing it, that *Voyage* manages to address and question the ‘language and literary heritage’ of capitalist patriarchy.

Before closely examining what I refer to as Rhys’s (and Anna’s) ‘language of dispossessed dissent’, it needs to be emphasized that I take this language to articulate itself in opposition to its enemy and oppressor; the language of capitalist patriarchy. Helen Carr’s study of Jean Rhys is especially significant in this respect. Like Gardiner, Carr draws attention to the inextricable link between the personal and social levels of alienation in Rhys’s works. Rhys’s protagonists ‘live inner lives of psychic extremity’, Carr argues, while ‘inner turmoil is a register of their fraught position in the world. For Rhys to make sense of existences like hers meant understanding the historical and social forces which had made them what they are’.⁶ The inner world of the marginalized female is thus vindicated; it is acknowledged as indissolubly linked with, and in particular as a source of information and insight on, social issues. Moreover, Carr maintains that Rhys’s fiction extends its thematic scope beyond the issue of female marginalization by patriarchal, moneyed and propertied, culturally and socially secure males; it touches upon the marginalization of otherness in general. She observes: ‘Rhys’s protagonists are acutely aware that the social machine is kept in place by a use of language that ignores nuance, complexity, deviation, ambivalence, a language which reiterates the fetishistic phrases which preserve the status quo’.⁷ This is a particularly useful observation to keep in mind when considering the characters in *Voyage* who possess authoritative language, amongst whom Anna’s aunt, Hester, figures predominantly. In *Voyage* the dominative language which preserves the status quo at the expense of otherness is found in the mouths of women as well as men. With these remarks in mind, I would like to bring into sharper focus the language of dispossessed dissent that Rhys creates and endows her female protagonist with. Within Rhys criticism, extensive attention has

⁶ Helen Carr, *Jean Rhys* (Plymouth: Northcote House in association with the British Council, 1996), p. 85.

⁷ Ibid, p. 80.

been paid to analyzing the language of the dominant and the respectable, the language which preserves the status quo by keeping the weak in their place—at the margins of society—and the way in which the spokespersons for authority, as it were, interpret and react to the expressions of the dispossessed.⁸ By focusing on the ways the language of dispossessed dissent can actually be seen to oppose the language of the established order in *Voyage*, this chapter hopes to explore the interpenetrations between the novel's aesthetics and socio-politics from a distinctive critical angle.

3. The Language of Memory and Affect as Critical Catalyst

Anna is not simply unable to reconcile the memories of her Dominican past with her London present; she refuses to. She intuitively understands that the two worlds could never be reconciled, for they represent radically opposing worldviews and values. It is true that a significant part of the novel shows Anna abandoning herself to vivid memories of the warm, sensual, fragrant, and colourful world of the West Indies and contrasting it to the cold, barren, hostile, and grey reality of London. Beyond the sensory level, however, certain particular memories offer glimpses of critical insight into diametrically opposed attitudes towards language and its relation to power and authority. When Aunt Hester visits Anna, she quickly drops her dignified façade to reveal an unkind, intolerant nature:

‘I am not going to argue with you,’ she said. My conscience is quite clear. I always did my best for you and I never got any thanks for it. I tried to teach you to talk like a lady and behave like a lady and not like a nigger and of course I couldn’t do it. Impossible to get you away from the servants. That awful sing-song voice you had! Exactly like a nigger you talked - - and still do. Exactly like that dreadful girl Francine. When you were jabbering away together in the pantry I never could tell which of you was speaking. (*Voyage*, p. 56)

Earlier in the same chapter, Rhys exposes Hester’s blatant, overwhelming hatred of native Dominicans: ‘And never seeing a white face from one week’s end to the other and you growing up more like a nigger every day. Enough to drive anybody mad.’ (*Voyage*, p. 54) In the preceding quote, however, Aunt Hester’s racism has a very specific target: the way language is used by indigenous

⁸ For example, Carr calls attention to ‘English society’s refusal to accept difference or ambiguity’. She recognizes ‘coercive intolerance’ as ‘a constant theme in [Rhys’s] writing’. See Carr, p. 27. I will address the xenophobia of Hester’s and Ethel’s language of purported authority and respectability later in this chapter.

Dominicans. Apparently, she is disturbed by—and even appalled at—the fact that Anna seems to have adopted their linguistic mannerisms. The ideological contours of her mentality, however, at which the phrase ‘I never could tell which of you was speaking’ hints, are concretized with the help of a memory from Anna’s past. Immediately after Hester’s departure, Anna remembers:

She always hated Francine.
‘What do you talk about?’ she used to say.
‘We don’t talk about anything,’ I’d say. ‘We just talk.’
But she didn’t believe me. (*Voyage*, p. 58)

In its subtle, understated manner, Anna’s language of memory sheds light into the controlling paranoia lurking behind Hester’s linguistic mentality, whereby all subjects of language need to be properly classified and understood according to the content of their speech; and when this content is purportedly hidden, there is cause for alarm and suspicion. Hester’s inability to demystify the content of the language used by Francine and young Anna makes her feel threatened, as implied by the use of the adjective ‘dreadful’ in reference to the young servant.

Other memories reveal the truth about Anna’s love for her black servant Francine, a love far removed from notions of misbehaviour and intimately bound with ideas and sensations of warmth and gaiety: ‘Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad,’ muses Anna earlier in the novel. (*Voyage*, p. 54) This is a phrase of childlike simplicity, perhaps alluding to the way a very young Anna tries to make sense out of her experiences, feelings, and sensations. It also resembles the structure of a nursery rhyme, thus reflecting feelings of ease, relaxation, and comfort, while its syntactic repetitiveness can be seen to mimic the ‘sing-song’ quality of voice that Aunt Hester so despises in Anna. And yet it could be argued that the tone of the phrase is strangely declarative, assured, and aphoristic. It seems to convey both softness (Anna’s fondness for and idealization of ‘being black’; her regression into the happy warmth of a childhood memory) and hardness (the axiomatic, indisputable sternness in which blackness and whiteness are associated, respectively, with positive and negative qualities). In this manner, the affective and the cognitive qualities of Anna’s language come to the forefront as inextricably linked, interpenetrating elements. The particular memory—originating either in Anna’s childhood or adolescence—which triggers this contradictory

phrasing is one of Anna being ill and taken care of by Francine: ‘And the heat pressing down on you as if it were something alive. I wanted to be black. I always wanted to be black. I was happy because Francine was there [...]’ (ibid). Throughout *Voyage*, the language of memory constructs an ideal image of black identity as epitomizing warmth, sensuality, vibrancy, and colourfulness. Along the course of the novel, however, it will be revealed that blackness to Anna stands for far more than warmth and gaiety, just as whiteness stands for far more than coldness and sadness.

Early on in the novel’s narrative Rhys reveals that Anna was born and raised in the West Indies, in a family of white colonialists descended from slave-owners.⁹ Growing up in the West Indies, she felt alienated because she was not black; as a young adult in London she feels alienated once again, this time because she is not typically and ‘properly’ English. ‘Proper’ Englishness is a concept fundamental to the analysis of *Voyage* undertaken in this chapter, since it is against it that Anna emerges and understands herself as an Other. This concept is never explicitly defined in the novel; it can be extrapolated from the attitude of characters that are hostile or harmful to Anna (as will be seen in later sections) and even from the depiction of objects, as the following examples will demonstrate. This is Anna’s impression of her first visit in Walter’s house: ‘We got to his house in Green Street and it was quiet and watching and not friendly to me’ (*Voyage*, p. 31). This laconic personification of Walter’s house as unwelcoming and suspicious could be seen to allude to the owner’s subsequent rejection of Anna. The repetition of ‘and’ three times in this sentence suggests the accumulation of negativity that Anna received, as it were, from the house and, by extension, its owner (‘and it was quiet and watching and not friendly’). I would argue that a wider allusion is being made here, one that can be seen to ensue from a connection to analogous observations and feelings expressed by Anna only a few lines earlier:

There was a black table with curly legs in the hall in that house, and on it a square-faced clock, stopped at five minutes past twelve, and a plant made of rubber with shiny, bright leaves, five-pointed. I couldn’t take my eyes off it. It looked proud of itself, as if it knew that it was going on for ever and ever, as if it knew that it fitted in with the house and the street and the spiked iron railings outside. (*Voyage*, p. 30)

⁹ Anna recounts these aspects of her familial background to Walter on pp. 45-46.

This description refers to one of the houses Anna is staying at in London. Here, it is a spiky, rubber plant that Anna personifies, and her personification, as in the case of Walter's house, reveals the keenness and acuteness of her critical ability. According to Anna, the reason the plant looks so 'proud of itself' is its uninterrupted sense of belonging: 'as if it knew that it was going on for ever and ever, as if it knew that it fitted in'. This plant reminds Anna of the fact that she does not belong in England, for she does not fit in 'with the house and the street and the spiked iron railings outside'. Therefore, the house Anna resides in—at this point in the novel—and Walter's house can both be seen to encapsulate a very specific variety of Englishness that sets itself against Anna. In conjunction with the analysis of Hester earlier in this section, these examples present a bleak idea of Englishness seen through Anna's eyes: suspicious ('quiet and watching'), hostile ('not friendly to me'), self-assured ('as if it knew that it fitted in'), elitist ('proud'), and explicitly xenophobic (Hester on the native servants). Against it, Anna emerges as an inassimilable and self-aware 'Other'.

4. The Intolerance of 'Englishness': Exposed and Critiqued

So far, Anna's language of imagery, memory, and affect has been seen to express her sense of exclusion from England. Juxtaposing English coldness with Dominican warmth and gaiety and exposing racist attitudes as informed by a mixture of suspicion, pride, and fear, this language can be seen to be at once one of affect and cognition, both emotional and critical. In the previous section of this chapter it was suggested that Anna was not simply unable to reconcile Dominica with London; she was also unwilling to. I would expand on this suggestion by arguing that her critical awareness of the incongruity between the two cultures' worldviews and values, which has just been discussed, plays a vital role in this unwillingness. This argument will lead us into in-depth considerations of the idea of dispossessed dissent and the ways it is articulated in *Voyage*. I take aunt Hester, landlady Ethel, Walter, and Vincent to represent the hostile, 'cold' kind of Englishness that Anna finds herself confronted with and segregated from. It is significant that Anna never displays the faintest ambition to conform to the kind of Englishness represented by the aforementioned characters; her critical perspective precludes that possibility. For their part, Hester and Ethel overtly proclaim their 'proper'

white Englishness as normative by juxtaposing it to what they consider to be the inferior attitudes of the non-English. Hester's intolerance is particularly focussed, as has just been seen, on Dominican natives, and fuelled by her perception of blackness as savage, suspect, and threatening. Ethel's intolerance, on the other hand, extends to all foreigners:

'Well,' she said, 'that girl who did Three-Fingered Kate was a foreigner. [...] Couldn't they have got an English girl to do it?' 'Was she?' I said. 'Yes. Couldn't they have got an English girl to do it? It was just because she had this soft, dirty way that foreign girls have. [...] An English girl would have respected herself more than to let people laugh at her like that behind her back.' (*Voyage*, p. 94)

The same sentiment is presented at the beginning of Part Three, when Ethel is outraged with 'detectives calling and wanting to see my references and my certificates. [...] I was wild. Treating me as if I was a dirty foreigner' (ibid, p. 119). Interestingly, even though Anna will be seen, in the following pages, as a vehicle for Rhys's critique of the patriarchal values informing modern English society, female characters like Hester and Ethel draw attention to the idea of gender-neutral, generalized cruelty. Anna's story exposes male and female cruelty in equal—and equally disconcerting—degrees, and their common core of hypocrisy, another feature associated with Englishness in the novel, is hard to miss. To retrieve Anna's dispossessed dissent is also to dissociate her from the stereotype of the unquestioning, uncritical young girl whose cognitive ability to process the world around her is thwarted by overflowing memories and emotions. To recover her dispossessed dissent is to focus, instead, on the polyvalence of her encrypted noncompliance.

After her meeting with Hester, Anna cannot help but think of Francine again, as she represents everything that Hester is not. Hester and Francine use language in radically different ways, illustrated in the following example, recalled immediately after the aunt leaves Anna's room:

But anyhow [Francine] was a bit older than I was and when I was unwell for the first time it was she who explained to me, so that it seemed quite all right and I thought it was all in the day's work like eating or drinking. But then she went off and told Hester, and Hester came and jawed away at me, her eyes wandering all over the place. I kept saying, 'No, rather not... Yes, I see... Oh yes, of course...' But I began to feel awfully miserable, as if everything were shutting up around me and I couldn't breathe. I wanted to die. (*Voyage*, p. 59)

In this passage, Anna's recourse to memory is far more than a nostalgic daydreaming about the way things were in Dominica; it shows how Anna's inner world is differently affected by different linguistic and—by extension—social attitudes, exemplified here by Francine and Hester. Francine's language has a soothing effect on Anna, by rendering her aware of the naturalness of the situation she is experiencing for the first time. Hester, on the other hand, 'jawed away at' her, a phrasing indicating superfluous speech but also criticism and authoritativeness. Hester's language smothers Anna whereas Francine's assuages. Each linguistic attitude can therefore be seen to represent a different mentality and ethic, but it is Hester's approach that prevails and influences Anna the most; not only because it is so overwhelming, but also because it possesses an ideological authority and normativity in 1910s England that Francine's rhetoric does not. As Anna begins to feel as if she is literally suffocating, it is also Francine's 'warm and gay' approach that starts getting smothered under the authoritative and normative weight of Hester's words.

It is crucially important that the characters of Hester and Ethel are both associated with the word 'lady', and that each woman defines herself as such. When it comes to Hester, Anna reveals that she had:

[...] an English lady's voice with a sharp, cutting edge to it. Now that I've spoken you can hear that I'm a lady. I have spoken and I suppose you now realize that I'm an English gentlewoman. I have my doubts about you. Speak up and I will place you at once. Speak up, for I fear for the worst. That sort of voice. (*Voyage*, p.50)

This is the sort of voice that demands recognition of its superiority and that seeks to 'place' and indeed classify others according not only to the content but also to the style of their speech. As has been already seen, Anna dislikes Hester's tone of voice and all of its judgmental, authoritative, suffocating undertones, while she prefers and chooses to speak like Francine even if this choice and preference means that English people will regard her with superciliousness. Anna is clearly critical of Hester's character, mentality, and wider symbolic value, i.e. her 'proper', respectable Englishness; in rejecting her, she also has to reject the idea of being 'an English gentlewoman'. Her critique has to be all-encompassing. And so it is regarding Ethel too. An example of the poignancy of Rhys's (and Anna's) language of affect is evinced in the following example from Part Three, chapter one, when Anna listens to her landlady, Ethel, who tries to assert her ladylike respectability. 'A lady- - some

words have a long, thin neck that you'd like to strangle' is what Anna thinks in response to Ethel's attitude. (*Voyage*, p. 120) It could be argued that behind the shocking ferocity of the expressed emotion—the desire to kill by strangling—hides her instinctual understanding of the self-righteousness and exclusionism that certain words carry. The vigour and violence of Anna's language can be seen to both mirror and criticize the ideological violence at work when using language with elitist intent: Anna understands that the word 'lady' is used for self-aggrandizement and to the exclusion of anyone deemed disreputable. It is meant to be applied to respectable and dignified women only—or, in Ethel's case, to women who designate themselves as such—so as to set them off from their unworthy counterparts. In this light, Anna's expression is far more than a striking metaphor, far more than a violent expression of unbridled emotion; it is a protest, a declaration of dissent. For to attack the 'long, thin' neck of the word 'lady' is to also attack the elitism and socio-ethical hypocrisy that the use of the word entails—the false, unmerited sense of respectability that, in Ethel's case, it seems to confer.

Another example of Rhys exposing the exclusionary uses of language can be found amongst the several memories—from Anna's childhood and early adolescence—that surface after Hester's departure in Part One, chapter six. The following conversation between Aunt Hester and Anna is especially telling regarding the way in which each of them defines and understands language and, in this case in particular, witticism in oral speech:

'Yes, Beauty and the Beast, people used to call them,' [Hester] said. Oh, there were many stories about her. There was the young man who answered when she was annoyed at him staring at her:
 "A cat may look at a king,
 So why not I at a prettier thing?"
 [...] It's all very well to cry down those days but people were wittier then.'
 'Yes,' [Anna] said. 'Like Judge Bryant the other night at the dance when some fool put his arm across the door of the supper-room and said, 'Nobody pass who doesn't make a rhyme.'" And Judge Bryant said, as quick as lightning:
 "Let us pass
 You damned old ass."
 That was pretty quick, too, don't you think?'
 Hester said, 'There's a certain difference, but of course you can't be expected to see that.' In that voice as if she were talking to herself. (*Voyage*, p. 60)

In Anna's recollection of this conversation, two examples of witty usage of language are juxtaposed.

In spite of their common theme, those examples are revealed to be separated by a subtle, yet sharp demarcating line. This line remains unperceived by the younger Anna, but is referred to as such—and thereby drawn, as it were—by her aunt: ‘There is a certain difference, but of course you can’t be expected to see that.’ Hester’s phrasing implies that between her example and Anna’s, i.e. between her own definition and understanding of witty language and her niece’s definition and understanding, there is a vital distance. A qualitative distance, it is implied. It could be argued that this ‘difference’ Hester perceives and refers to, but whose nature she refrains from specifying, relates to the difference between an inclusive and an exclusive linguistic attitude; in politically charged terms, this would translate as a difference between elitist and democratic views and usages of language. Ironically, Hester seems to be unaware of the egalitarian principle her anecdote conjures up: the young man makes up a clever rhyme to voice his right to look ‘at a prettier thing’ just as ‘a cat may look at a king’.

The fact, however, that Hester is not as pleased with Anna’s example suggests that it might be the language style, rather than the content, that she disapproves of: ‘Let us pass/ you damned old ass’ is clearly funny, so there must be another barrier between Hester and the joke. Perhaps her disapproval lies in the relative coarseness of the language of Anna’s anecdote. Hester approves of the more sophisticated, and certainly venerating, turn of phrase the young man employs while she appears uncomfortable with Judge Bryant’s rudeness, even though his expression is both funny and appropriate within the story’s context. Hester seems to shut herself off from the candour—and the freedom—of such usages of language. For her, there is a qualitative gap between coarser and more delicate expressions of witticism. Anna, for her part, clearly regards the two examples as compatible, with both of them referring to the same topic and both of them being witty as well as ‘quick’. Rhys shows ‘a certain difference’ between closed and open mindsets through language; a difference between elitist and democratic understandings of language style and usage. Moreover, it is hard to dissociate this remembered conversation from Hester’s stern, racist, and generally elitist nature which, at this point in the novel, has been thoroughly exposed. Had Hester been one of the novel’s more sympathetic characters, Anna’s memory of her using ‘that voice as if she were talking to herself’ could have been interpreted in several different ways. However, Hester comes across as hostile; her

overall portrayal in the novel suggests that she might have just as well been literally ‘talking to herself’, for she indeed wishes to set herself—her language and mentality—off from her niece. She has been shown to strongly disapprove of Anna’s talking like Francine and here, once again, she raises a figurative wall between hers and Anna’s view and understanding of language; between normative and peripheral perspectives.

5. The Radical Affective

In the context of the larger aim of this study—the retrieval and exploration of dissent against the sociopolitical status quo, as seen in three late modernist case-studies—the attempt of this chapter to uncover the cognitive/critical implications of the language of anamnesis and affect in *Voyage* acquires particular importance. At this point I would like to address recent theoretical work by Isobel Armstrong on what she refers to as *The Radical Aesthetic* in her book of the same name.¹⁰ There are two ways in which Armstrong’s work is not merely pertinent but inspiring with regard to the animating argument of this study. Firstly, as mentioned in the Introduction, she invests new, radical life into the concept of the aesthetic by reinstating the ways in which it can be seen to be politically significant and even revolutionary. Secondly, and with special relevance to the analysis of *Voyage* undertaken in this chapter, Armstrong asserts that affect is not the antonym of intellect; the cognitive aspects of affect should be acknowledged and retrieved. She argues that: ‘a cognitive account of the emotions as mutually inclusive is the core of a remade aesthetic’. In the last subsection of her chapter entitled ‘Thinking Affect’, she concludes that ‘[i]t seems we are far from a dialectic in which social and psychic, affect and knowledge, can interact’ and draws attention to the idea that ‘the importance of language to affect, and affect to language, is another matrix of the social and cognitive emotion, for language belongs to self and culture’.¹¹ In this light, a language of affect such as the one used by Rhys in *Voyage* would be viewed as partaking in the cognitive/social dimension; as interacting with it, moreover. Armstrong’s perspective has inspired, and helped to delineate, my attempt to retrieve,

¹⁰ Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 136 and 137, respectively.

illustrate, and analyze the radicalism of Rhys's aesthetics—the dissent that lurks in her use of the language of affect and anamnesis. It has also provided theoretical support to my argument that Rhys's language and overall aesthetics of affect in *Voyage* can be regarded as a radical language and a radical aesthetics, inviting the identification and exploration of the interpenetrations of emotion with socio-political critique.

Such an approach to Rhys's language and aesthetics is congruent with a view of the author as a figure of dissent within the dominant institutions of literary production in the 1930s. Armstrong's views are pertinent here also, seeing as she has reinstated the vital (and yet underrepresented) role of emotion in literary criticism and, in particular, modernist literary criticism. In her Introduction to *The Radical Aesthetic* she characterizes 'the poverty of modernity's accounts of emotion' as 'striking' and sets out to challenge this state of affairs by:

[reading] the - - mostly male - - history of new criticism since the 1930s as a partly politically inspired but deeply gendered resistance to affect. This modernist literary critical tradition, exemplified by I. A. Richards, William Empson and de Man, had cause to invoke a "hard" rationality whenever a "soft" reading of experience, such as the somatic and affective states affiliated with the aesthetic, threatened to come too near. Fascism's manipulation of mass feeling may have been reason enough for this.¹²

It is against this widespread and, to a degree, historically justified suspicion of affect in British literary criticism in the 1930s, and specifically against the devaluation of emotion by 'modernist literary tradition' at that time, that Armstrong articulates her understanding of emotion and knowledge as communicating vehicles. And it is through these insightful observations that I will now further discuss the language of affect in *Voyage* as both a reproduction and a critique of the capitalist-patriarchal ideology of the modern metropolis. It could be argued that capitalist-patriarchal ideology in *Voyage* is presented as inescapable and all-encompassing and that it assigns to Anna the language of affect and memory because it considers it to be an appropriate way of self-expression for women in her position. According to this line of argument, the socio-political potency of Rhys's aesthetics would be diminished and the novel would be seen as a mere mirror of the underprivileged,

¹² Ibid, pp. 17 and 18, respectively.

marginalized status of women like Anna within modern metropolitan society. The argument pursued in this chapter, by contrast, strives to uncover the ways in which the status quo is not merely reflected but confronted and criticized by the oppositional, dissenting dimension of the language of affect and memory in *Voyage*. In other words, there is a radical aesthetic at work in *Voyage* that challenges both the 'hard' rationality of male-centred capitalism and the genderless language of authority- - of the established metropolitan social order. I have suggested that anamnesis and affect function collaboratively in *Voyage* by interacting with the realm of the cognitive/critical and by forming, together, the basis of Rhys's (and Anna's) language of dispossessed dissent. The next section will continue to explore Rhys's 'radical aesthetic' by identifying and focusing on one particular thematic thread in *Voyage*.

6. The Dog/Wall Thematic Thread and Its Critical Implications

The conversation between Anna and Hester that was discussed in the fourth section of this chapter took place at breakfast time. Anna must have been an adolescent then, because the prospect of her going to England was already being discussed by Aunt Hester.¹³ After breakfast, Anna continues to recall, she sat with Hester in the verandah. Anna notes how Hester's dog 'fawned on her' and simply states: 'I hate dogs', much to her aunt's astonishment. (*Voyage*, p. 61) Perhaps this astonishing declaration of an emotion so strong as hate on Anna's part could be explained in the light of her overall feelings towards her aunt's character and attitude. It could be argued that soon after Aunt Hester has set herself off from her, she awkwardly attempts to do the same: to dissociate herself from the affectionate dog and, by extension, from its owner. Interestingly, however, Anna's hatred of dogs will manifest itself again in Part Three, chapter one; that is, after she has moved in to Ethel's place. Anna's first quarrel with Ethel is succeeded by a recounting of a memory which seems to be linked to the image of a dog on the room's wall. After the row, Anna goes back to her room and establishes the link without, however, explaining it away:

¹³ 'At half-past twelve we had breakfast and Hester started talking about Cambridge. She was always talking about Cambridge. She said she was sure I should like England very much and that it would be a very good thing for me if I were to go to England.' *Voyage*, p. 59.

The white furniture, and over the bed the picture of the dog sitting up begging—*Loyal Heart*. I got into bed and lay there looking at it and thinking of that picture advertising the Biscuits Like Mother Makes, as Fresh in the Tropics as in the Motherland, Packed in Airtight Tins. (*Voyage*, p. 127)

She then describes the picture used in the advertisement as showing a little girl and a little boy in a setting of pretty colours, suggesting nothing but joy, comfort, and tidiness, up until one noticed ‘a high dark wall behind the little girl.’ As Anna still remembers, the picture also included ‘a shiny pale-blue sky, so close that if the little girl had stretched her arm up she could have touched it. (God is always near us. So cosy.)’ The message written under the picture was one of absolute contentment and unmitigated happiness: ‘The past is dear,/The future clear,/And, best of all, the present.’ And yet, Anna ends her recollection on a solemnly ominous note:

But it was the wall that mattered.
And that used to be my idea of what England was like.
‘And it is like that, too,’ I thought. (all quotes: *ibid*)

With these words Rhys concludes the first chapter of the novel’s third part. By likening England to the picture in the biscuits advertisement, Rhys directs our attention to the wider symbolism of that picture, emphasizing the connection between it and the memory-triggering picture of the dog. The dog is a traditional symbol of patience, affection, and loyalty (‘sitting up begging—*Loyal Heart*’). In the picture on the biscuit advertisement, what matters is not the pretty image of domesticated happiness but the dark wall; the insurmountable obstructions and obstacles upon which love, patience, and pleads stumble. The linking of these two images indicates the cognitive/critical aspect of the affective and mnemonic qualities of Anna’s language by suggesting that Anna is feeling that all her love, patience, and endurance are to no avail; this feeling, in its turn, is connected with the cognitive/critical sphere through the introduction of the idea of England. England, for Anna, is a place that promises happiness, sweetness, and optimism—that even advertises those qualities as easily attainable (‘if the little girl had stretched her arm up she could have touched [the sky]’)—even though, in the end, it is the ‘wall’ that matters. This is the wall that segregates Anna’s world from the world of ‘proper’, ‘tidy’,

and integrated Englishness; a world that she cannot attain, in spite of its proximity to hers. In Walter's world in particular, Anna is not the happy little girl who can touch the sky if she wants to, but the underdog—the hopeless, dispossessed young woman. In Ethel's world, Anna is the underdog once again, working as a prostitute with her landlady's blessing.

Significantly, Anna has also compared herself with a dog earlier in the novel, in the opening lines of Part Two, to suggest how Walter's rejection made her feel. In a letter to him, she writes under such overwhelming turbulence of emotion that punctuation is suspended: 'You can't possibly do this you simply don't know what you're doing if I were a dog you wouldn't do this I love you I love you I love you but you're just a god-damned rotter everybody is everybody is [...]' (*Voyage*, p. 89). It becomes troublingly clear in this excerpt that Anna uses the metaphor of the dog to highlight the humiliation and hurt she is feeling on account of Walter's rejection. It is in Part Three, chapter four, that Anna unleashes her repressed rage; she interrupts her dancing with one of the clients, in her room in Ethel's house, to finally smash the glass frame of the dog's picture:

I said 'I can't stand that damned dog any longer.'
I stopped dancing and took off my shoe and threw it at the picture. The glass smashed.
'I've wanted to do that for weeks,' I said. (*Voyage*, p. 137)

In this violent outburst, she physically unbridles her bitterness and anger against several people, all of whom are linked with the image and idea of a dog: Hester and her haughty, unloving nature; Walter, whose rejection has scarred her forever; and Ethel, whose cruel hypocrisy has yet to be seen at its absolute worst, but who has already, at this point in the storyline, been exposed as an overtly hostile character. The fact, however, that Anna's memory sequence, triggered by the picture of the dog, ends with the image of the 'high dark wall' which, as we have seen, is associated with 'England', suggests another stratum of meaning encrypted in Rhys's language. Specifically, Anna's outburst could be seen to be directed against English society at large. If England is like the picture in the biscuits advertisement, then what matters for the underdogs of society like Anna is the 'high dark wall'—the obstacles and the hardships. Anna can be seen to identify herself with those for whom the promise of a better life is like an untouchable sky; with those who realize that their patience, their begging, their

love, and their prayers cannot get through the wall that separates them from the rest of society. The picture of the dog in Ethel's house will reappear in the fourth and last part of the novel to suggest that yet another layer of meaning could be attached to it: that of 'begging' to be spared of further suffering and humiliation. A disconcerting memory comes to haunt Anna as her health rapidly deteriorates following her botched abortion. She remembers one of the clients in Ethel's house and his sexual advances towards her: 'And the clock was ticking loud, like that time when I lay looking at the dog in the picture Loyal Heart and watching his chest going in and out and I kept saying, 'Stop, stop,' but softly so that Ethel wouldn't hear' (ibid, p. 156). In this instance, Anna's identification with the 'begging' dog, who patiently hopes to be treated kindly, is strongly suggested. Her weakness is also emphasized: as a dog is dependent on its master, so Anna is dependent on the client, who can decide whether to treat her kindly or cruelly.

The wall is another recurrent and symbolically rich image in Rhys's narrative technique in *Voyage*. In the first chapter of Part Three Anna is thinking of a hypothetical scenario: going to a hotel to escape Ethel. She quickly dismisses that thought, imagining the treatment she would receive at the hotel's reception:

They'd say, of course, that they hadn't got a room if you went in without any luggage. With the hotel half-empty they'd still say that they hadn't got any room. I could imagine so well the girl at the desk saying it that I had to begin to laugh again. The damned way they look at you, and their damned voices, like high, smooth, unclimbable walls all round you, closing in on you. And nothing to be done about it, either. (*Voyage*, p. 126)

Anna knows she will be treated unfavourably on account of looking disreputable ('if you went in without any luggage'). She expects that the receptionist will remind Anna of her position by erecting 'high, smooth, unclimbable walls' with her disdainful gaze and tone of voice; the walls that separate the respectable from the disrespectable, the judges from the judged. Once again, the image of the wall becomes intimately bound with the idea of the insurmountable hindrances Anna has to face as a dispossessed female. Additionally, Anna's imagination brings in the element of scorn and discrimination to illustrate the implications of dispossession in an everyday occurrence. A few pages later, in chapter six, when Vincent visits Anna to settle her pregnancy issue and obtain his friend

Walter's letters, the image and symbolism of the wall returns. In the following excerpt Anna links the image of the wall to the impossibility of communication and rapport between her and Vincent:

'Poor little Anna,' making his voice very kind. 'I'm so damned sorry you've been having a bad time.' Making his voice very kind, but the look in his eyes was like a high, smooth, unclimbable wall. No communication possible. You have to be three-quarters mad even to attempt it. (*Voyage*, p. 147)

The wall that exists between Anna and Vincent is described in the exact same adjectives that were used in chapter three ('high, smooth, unclimbable'), emphasizing how Anna's position remains the same and how she cannot hope to climb the wall that separates her from the respectable members of society. In this excerpt, the image and symbolism of the wall is also related to the discrepancy Anna perceives between 'the look in [Vincent's] eyes' and his tone of voice. It is his eyes that betray Vincent's hypocrisy, telling Anna what he does not; namely, that any attempt on her part to establish communication would be futile. The wall is not only 'high' but 'unclimbable' too; Anna does not even stand a chance to surmount it and reach out to the other side. Significantly, however, she is able to see through that wall; attentive to the incongruity between Vincent's 'very kind' voice and the impermeable look in his eyes, she suspects his disingenuousness and his cruelty. The dog/wall thematic thread, therefore, has important critical implications in *Voyage*; it establishes a link between Anna's self-perception as subordinate, dependent, and weak, on the one hand, and her segregation from normative English society, on the other. Anna's rhetoric and thought-process subtly weave together the themes of the dog and the wall, indicating her critical awareness of the ways in which they illuminate her situation.

7. Mistrust of Language: Mistrust of Capitalist Patriarchy

I would argue that Anna, although marked by the naivety of her young age, is also suspicious; a trait revealing, in her case, not paranoia or vague, generalized dread, but acute discernment of the people and the situations she is confronted by. She is always trying to discover what is lurking behind appearances, facades, behaviours, and, in particular, words. Being not just a fictional creation but an

autobiographical version of Rhys herself, Anna shares the novelist's mistrust of language, particularly the language of capitalist and patriarchal power. It is the manifestations of this suspicion of appearances and mistrust of language that I will now turn to.

In the following interlinked examples, memory intervenes to disclose Anna's insight into the shocking ugliness behind the artificiality of appearances. Chapter seven of Part One ends with Anna receiving a letter from an as yet unidentified sender. In the opening lines of chapter eight she is haunted by a memory from her childhood in Dominica, recalling the fright experienced when she saw for the first time her uncle's false teeth:

I got up to the table where the magazine was and Uncle Bo moved and sighed and long yellow tusks like fangs came out of his mouth and protruded down to his chin—you don't scream when you are frightened because you can't and you don't move either because you can't— (*Voyage*, p. 79)

Anna is paralyzed with fright not only on account of the evident grotesqueness of the scene she beholds, but additionally on account of the exposure of falsity. In just one moment she is made to realize that things assumed to be true on account of looking as if they were true, can prove to be shockingly deceptive. Uncle Bo's false teeth make him appear like a hideous, frightening creature, suggesting the hideousness of pretence. Back in the present, Anna professes her inability to understand why reading Walter's letter conjured up that particular memory. She then discloses the contents of the letter and it transpires that Vincent has written to her on Walter's behalf to announce the latter's decision to leave her. Anna, then, comments yet again on her failure to see why she suddenly recalled her uncle's false teeth. For the reader, however, Rhys has made it easy to see why, to discern the connection; Anna's denial could be interpreted as a reflex reaction, a defence mechanism, in the face of an uncomfortably painful truth that had theretofore been concealed. Her shock at Walter's betrayal leaves her inarticulate, bereft of words to communicate her pain. The revelation she now beholds is as hideous to her as the one she had beheld back in Dominica. It is not language that is used to communicate her emotional distress; all that is needed is a deeply unsettling memory from her Dominican childhood, in which the falsity of appearances gets unceremoniously, and grotesquely, exposed, leaving her unable to speak or even move. The two main representatives of

English patriarchy in the novel, Walter and Vincent, manage to evoke a similar reaction in Anna's present.

Walter chooses to use his friend Vincent as an accomplice, sparing himself the rather unpleasant act of telling Anna he is leaving her. He hopes that Vincent's gallant talk will soften his former lover's hurt. And yet, Vincent's complacent, light-hearted words, written on behalf of his friend, prove to be an inadequate mask for cruelty. Anna is able to see through Vincent's wall of shallow appropriateness and judge what accompanies it (the flimsy consolations, the lukewarm concern) as fake and false. The shocking emotional pain she experiences does not cloud her critical judgement; it merely projects it onto a memory from her past and encrypts it into a remembered image. Both Walter and Vincent have been putting up a facade of kindness and concern for Anna. Walter, even though he does not come across as nonchalantly cruel as Vincent, is nonetheless guilty of having hidden his exploitation of Anna's naiveté behind an additional pretence, that of love. With all the masks now fallen and her worst suspicions proven true, both Anna's shock and her covert censure of falsity are wordlessly channelled through an indelible childhood memory. Anna's critical judgment of the situation could not have been articulated in words, for words are the means used by those in power, those who can hurt her. She resorts to different means to expose their cruelty.

Anna's critical judgment is, then, encrypted in her language of dispossessed dissent, waiting, as it were, to be retrieved from the affective/mnemonic frame that encloses it. Rhys's mistrust of language is inseparable from the novel's critique of the patriarchal and capitalist structuring of modern metropolitan society. Several critics have addressed Rhys's awareness of the inadequacy of words; I hope to suggest a consideration of this issue from a different theoretical angle. On the inarticulate speech of the Rhysian heroines, Kloepper remarks that '[w]omen who have no space in a male linguistic system [...] cannot adequately articulate their exclusion' and refers to this phenomenon as the female's 'linguistic alienation'.¹⁴ Angier argues that Rhys endows her heroines Marya and Julia—both from *Goodbye Mister Mackenzie*—not only with feelings but with 'thoughts about morality and law' and makes them 'ask questions about identity, appearance and reality'. As for Anna,

¹⁴ Deborah Kelly Kloepper, "'Voyage in the Dark': Jean Rhys's Masquerade for the Mother", *Contemporary Literature*, Vol.26, No.4 (Winter 1985), pp. 443-459 (pp. 447-448).

according to Angier again, '[s]he hardly reads, she never thinks. [...] She doesn't plan, reflect or reason. She is unconscious and irrational, she lives in dreams and images, hardly at all in an external world'.¹⁵ I would argue that Anna and her language can only be regarded as inarticulate, irrational, and marginal within, and by the standards of, patriarchal society. Furthermore, *Voyage* provides a plethora of examples of under-stated critical reflection on external circumstances, whereby the personal becomes a codified language for the political.¹⁶ Angier does foreground Rhys's ability to use her mistrust for words so as to go 'beneath' them: '[Rhys] wants to make us see what [Anna's experience] is like, but it all happens too quickly and deeply for words. And so, though her business is words, she goes beneath them'.¹⁷ At the same time, she spotlights Rhys's intimate imagery as the novelist's chosen technique for the communication of socio-political ideas:

[Rhys] distrusts abstract nouns like slavery and justice; she sticks to concrete images and personal feelings. [...] As long as Jean *said* things about society, or people, we could if we wished resist her; but these intense unargued images slide into our minds and stick there before we've even noticed. Her genius was to cut out everything else she did less well, and to use them. [...] Rhys distrusts words as much as Anna [...] as a means of expressing her truth, of making us [...] understand her.¹⁸

Angier establishes here an interpretive model for *Voyage* whereby the mistrust of words and the predilection for communicative imagery are two sides of the same coin: Rhys's awareness of the finitude and even treacherousness of the language used by the strong against the weak.

At this point it may be useful to emphasize the complementarity between the language of imagery (as in the excerpt where Anna describes the rubber plant in her London hotel and, shortly afterwards, Walter's house) and the language of anamnesis and affect. The latter is often used in *Voyage* as a subtly edifying accompaniment to images, as seen in the discussion above of the memory link between the images/themes of dogs and walls. The finitude of words may come across as almost

¹⁵ *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*, p. 299.

¹⁶ The spelling of the word 'understated' as 'under-stated' is deliberate, so as to suggest meanings that lie, and hide, beneath what is overtly stated; the statements lurking under the façade of words.

¹⁷ *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*, p. 299.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 311.

indisputable in *Voyage* through the extensive reliance on imagery, as well as Anna's immersion in sleep and her relative inarticulateness; nevertheless, what does get articulated, through the language of anamnesis and affect (which includes her violent gestures), cannot be ignored. *Voyage* could be essentially regarded, to use Kloefer's expression, as a text 'constituted of dreams, memories, and gaps', but Anna's recounting of memories and emotions does more than simply reflect and emphasize her dispossession within and exclusion from the patriarchal socio-linguistic realm.¹⁹ The exposure of her dispossession and exclusion could in itself be seen as an indictment of capitalist patriarchy; the mistrust of language could be regarded as a protest against the restrictive, exclusionary, patriarchal language of 'hard rationality', to use Armstrong's expression once again.

What is more, however, the language of affect and memory in Rhys's novel emerges as a subversive language; a critical weapon against the ideologies informing the capitalist/patriarchal status quo. The potentially subversive character of a language which might be considered incommunicative, meaningless, or inarticulate has been discussed by Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory* in reference to the work of Samuel Beckett, whose 'shabby, damaged world of images is the negative imprint of the administered world'.²⁰ This phrase resonates strongly with the way Rhys uses imagery in *Voyage*: as a testament to the injustice and injuriousness of the established order. Her imagery brings into light that 'negative imprint of the administered world'—in the case of *Voyage*, the imprint of capitalist patriarchy—and exposes it through the encrypted, under-stated critique of the language of affect and memory. Furthermore, discussing the place of artistic language alongside 'pure feeling' and 'ordinary knowledge', Adorno makes the following observations:

Just as art cannot be, and never was, a language of pure feeling, nor a language of the affirmation of the soul, neither is it for art to pursue the results of ordinary knowledge, as for instance in the form of social documentaries that are to function as down payments on empirical research yet to be done. The space between discursive barbarism and poetic euphemism that remains to artworks is scarcely larger than the point of indifference into which Beckett burrowed.²¹

¹⁹ Kloefer, p. 444.

²⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004 [1970]), pp. 39-40.

²¹ Ibid, p. 40.

Adorno suggests that, between a language immersed in the poetics of feeling and a language seeking to explain away the artistic using the terms of empirical knowledge, there is not much room left for a critical art to emerge. As elsewhere in *Aesthetic Theory*, he is using Beckett as an example; however, I believe that in the above excerpt his commentary amplifies my use of Armstrong's theorizations in the overall approach of this chapter to Rhys's language in *Voyage*. Namely, I have been arguing that the space/gap between the purely cognitive and the purely affective is bridged by Rhys's language in *Voyage*—a language attentive to the cognitive/critical elements that inhere in affective and mnemonic expression. Rhys is also attuned to the fleeting nature of meaning, to the way it escapes the confines of language, resisting the discursive imperative. The socio-political meaningfulness and critique of *Voyage* are embedded in her, and Anna's, attitudes towards language.

8. Unbridled Affect: Unbridled Critique

We witness in *Voyage* Anna's exposure to the whole spectrum of social hypocrisy—from the casual cruelty of Vincent to the blatant spitefulness of Ethel—that lurks under everyday encounters and communications in 1910's metropolitan England. Through Vincent in particular, Anna is made aware of the ways language is used to cover up cruelty and assert authority. The memory of her frightful discovery of Uncle Bo's false teeth is involuntarily recalled, revealing the essence of the letter even before Anna has cognitively seized it. The essence of the letter is, of course, its patronizing cruelty and falseness; its language betrays that Vincent's ultimate intention and aim is to remind Anna of her place and to keep her there. Every expression of concern and care in it appears, therefore, disingenuous. Vincent even advises Anna to start reading, because he thinks this activity can make her see things in a more rational light; that it can, presumably, teach her how to bridle her emotions:

Love is not everything—especially that sort of love—and the more people, especially girls, put it right out of their heads and do without it the better. That's my opinion. Life is chock-full of other things, my dear girl, friends and just good times and being jolly together and so on and games and books. Do you remember when we talked about books? I was sorry when you told me that you never read because, believe me, a good book like that book I was talking about can make a lot of difference to your point of view. It makes you see what is real and what is just imaginary. (*Voyage*, p. 80)

It is implied here that reading will make Anna more rational, a quality she clearly needs according to Vincent, since her passionate attachment to Walter is proving to be a troubling inconvenience. One can only imagine which book Vincent had previously recommended to Anna, but one thing seems certain: that her 'point of view' should be changed. She should be made to realize 'what is real', i.e. that girls in her position cannot afford to love gentlemen. This, Vincent implies, is Anna's reality. Her love belongs to the realm of the 'imaginary' and she must be made to see this in a rational, level-headed way. Being a girl, Vincent seems to imply, equals being too emotional; something that reading books can help rectify so that a more satisfying, more carefree life can be had. However, being a dispossessed girl—being without economic and social status—amounts to further complications. The dispossessed girl, again according to Vincent, ought to be aware of her situation and her place and not to attempt to transgress it. The wall should remain 'unclimbable'.

It could be argued that Anna's genuine love for Walter disrupts the model of the convenient—from the male's perspective—relationship whereby the female is used and shortly after replaced by another. By accepting money from Walter early on in their relationship, Anna has sealed her fate: she is dependent on him, not only emotionally, but also financially. The financial kind of dependence, Vincent's letter reminds her, is not an issue. Walter intends to keep providing for her (which, to his credit, he does until the end of the novel). Some women in Anna's position would have been happy with such an arrangement; a relationship akin to a financial transaction. Vincent tries to remind her that she could not have asked for anything more:

[Walter] will always be your friend and he wants to arrange that you should be provided for and not have to worry about money (for a time at any rate). Write and let him know you understand. Or write me—that would be better still because don't you think it would be just as well for both your sakes if you don't see Walter just now? (ibid)

This exposure of Vincent's sugar-coated cruelty is bound to corroborate Anna's distrust of words and recourse to unbridled affect which, still, can be seen to communicate her awareness of injustice—her dissent. This is evidenced in the way she is seen to unleash her rage: not verbally, but physically. Her

two fits of rage in the novel involve violent physical action. I have already discussed the second of the two; the destruction of the glass frame containing the picture of the praying dog in Ethel's house. The first incident occurs after Anna has repeatedly failed to use words to stop Walter and Vincent from mocking her. She only resorts to violence after her efforts have been ignored and the mockery sustained. The mocking is prompted by Anna's honest account of how she and Walter met:

'She's been giving you away,' Vincent said. 'She's been telling us how it all started. You dirty dog, Walter. What in God's name were you doing on the pier at Southsea?'
Walter blinked. Then he said, 'You shouldn't let Vincent pump you. He's as inquisitive as an old woman. You wouldn't think it to look at him, but he is.'
He started to laugh too.
'Shut up laughing,' I said.
I thought, 'Shut up laughing,' looking at Walter's hand hanging over the edge of the mantelpiece.
I said, 'Oh, stop laughing at me. I'm sick of it.'
'What's the joke?' I said.
They went on laughing.
I was smoking, and I put the end of my cigarette down on Walter's hand. I jammed it down hard and held it there, and he snatched his hand away and said 'Christ!' But they had stopped laughing. (*Voyage*, p. 74)

Walter and Vincent think they can get away with mocking Anna on account of her inferior social position: they are moneyed, propertied, socially secure men who can treat young dispossessed women as disposable objects. After her verbal expressions have failed to put an end to the mockery, Anna resorts to a silent and violent gesture that defies her humiliation and expresses her dissenting wrath. For one brief moment, she is the one in power. This power, symbolically reclaimed by Anna in her two gestures of violence, suggests that non-linguistic acts can communicate the desperation of dissent against subordination: her words could not 'smash' the relevance of the dog symbolism to her life, so she smashes the picture; her words could not 'put out' male dominance, so she puts out a cigarette on the hand of one of its representatives. The non-verbal violently intervenes to disrupt the dominant linguistic and ideological matrix—a symbolic blow in the face of the civilized, but deeply unjust, established order.

9. The Commodification of the Female in Capitalist Consumer Culture

Alongside the authoritative patriarchal male, the values of modern capitalism's consumer culture are also criticised in *Voyage*. These values seem to hold sway in the London that Anna comes to know, signalling a sharp contrast to her earlier life in the island of Dominica. Rhys endows her heroine with a striking, intuitive awareness of the socially constructed and constricting identities that the dispossessed female is compelled to adopt, as well as of the rigidity of the social, class, and economic structures within which those identities circulate. Rhys makes a deliberate aesthetic choice by encoding this awareness, and its socio-political implications, in the language of affect, memory, and imagery. The socio-political implications are under-stated; they lurk under the personal. Alicia Borinsky has discussed *Voyage* in terms of Anna's 'unquestioned, passive acceptance of things as they are even to the point of constituting her own appearance from the images of mannequins in display windows'.²² Even though passivity is often a defining and troubling trait of Anna's, this particular remark does not acknowledge her restricted yet sharp-edged dissent and the ways in which it insinuates itself into the text. She is indeed, as Borinsky argues, a victim of a prevalent mentality in Western metropolitan societies of the early Twentieth century; a mentality which requires women to conform to an image of aesthetic correctness and appropriateness so as to be socially accepted and valued. An unquestioning victim, however, she is not.

Borinsky has emphasized the importance of image and surface in relation to the female in *Voyage* by drawing attention to Anna's 'firmly grounded aesthetic world'.²³ She refers to women like Anna as 'petites femmes', literally translated as 'little women'; a phrase that can be seen to have derogatory connotations, depending on the context and the tone in which it is used in the French language. Borinsky seems to make use of this expression to denote this kind of disempowerment. 'Petites femmes' are, for Borinsky, women who are frail, passive, and submissive, unable to challenge a status quo that demands of them to look a certain way, or else go unnoticed. And being noticed is the requisite around which this female existence revolves and upon which survival actually depends.

²² Alicia Borinsky. 'Jean Rhys: Poses of Woman as Guest', *The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic Perspectives*, Spec. Issue of *Poetics Today*, Vol. 6, No. 1/2, (1985), pp. 229-243 (p. 240).

²³ Ibid.

Not only do they ‘dress and act for the male gaze that will, inevitably, humiliate them in the end’²⁴ but, moreover, ‘[w]ithout clothes, without the tension generated by the interest in being observed, these petites femmes would not exist. They are the aesthetic hope of the streets, an objectionable poetry produced by the weak loving chance money’.²⁵ Dependent and desperate, these women are made to realize the all-importance of aesthetic appropriateness in their efforts to get attention and financial support from powerful male figures. Seeking to uncover, in my reading of *Voyage*, the critique as well as the reproduction of ideology, I want to highlight Anna’s critical acknowledgement of, and dissent against, the reality women in her position have to face within modern metropolitan culture.

In this light, Anna can be seen to slightly but critically deviate from the unquestioning ‘petite femme’ archetype suggested by Borinsky. Early in the novel, she associates being badly dressed with being mocked, scorned, and socially rejected:

People laugh at girls who are badly dressed. Jaw, jaw, jaw...’ Beautifully dressed woman’...As if it isn’t enough that you want to be beautiful, that you want to have pretty clothes, that you want it like hell. As if that isn’t enough. But no, it’s jaw, jaw and sneer, sneer all the time. And the shop-windows sneering and smiling in your face. (*Voyage*, p. 22)

A radical contradiction permeates the novel; it arises between Anna’s desires for pretty clothes and her intuitive awareness of the ability of capitalist values to ensnare and imprison her. In this quote she pinpoints the social pressure to dress in a certain way so as to be accepted, as opposed to marginalized. Later on, however, after having been betrayed by Walter, Anna ruminates more bitterly and deeply on the hope of her aesthetic/social correctness, a hope displayed and sold in shop windows:

The clothes of most of the women who passed were like caricatures of the clothes in the shop-windows, but when they stopped to look you saw that their eyes were fixed on the future. “If I could buy this, then of course I’d be quite different.” Keep hope alive and you can do anything, and that’s the way the world goes round, that’s the way they keep the world rolling. So much

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid pp. 242-43.

hope for each person. And damned cleverly done too. But what happens if you don't hope any more, if your back is broken? What happens then? (*Voyage*, pp. 111-112)

The bleaker, starker awareness displayed here could be at least partly attributed to the fact that Anna, at this point in the narrative, has experienced Walter's and Vincent's cruelty. She now knows what it is like to be treated as a commodity, as just another object in the urban marketplace. Men have the power not only to commodify her but also to ensure that she remains in her place, as Vincent's letter has amply shown earlier.

Anna seems to grasp the socio-economic machinations that lead women to invest in their outer appearance hopes for a better future for themselves; that sell hope and ambition in the form of the right garment. There is a fissure running through Anna's 'aesthetic world', and it cuts through the seductiveness of the shop-windows. Anna has come to understand that the image of aesthetic correctness women are led to aspire to is prefabricated and imposed on them by consumer culture. In Anna's phrase 'that's the way they keep the world rolling', her cryptic phrasing does not reveal who 'they' might be. Her choice, however, of the third instead of the first person plural betrays awareness of the disparity between individuals who are powerful enough to construct images of social correctness and individuals, like herself, who are simply trying to conform to those aspirational images. 'So much hope for each person', Anna observes, and the bitter sarcasm in this phrase is to be revealed in the one that follows, 'And damned cleverly done too'. It is implied that those in power in modern capitalist society will cunningly and purposefully prefabricate ideals for women to buy and buy into, promoting aesthetic ideals that promise privileged endings. The modern capitalist metropolis is consumerist and image-obsessed; in it, a woman's worth is estimated according to her image-identity on display and for sale—a marketable and purchasable simulacrum of socio-aesthetic correctness. Such ideas, Anna's words suggest, have permeated collective social consciousness to the extent that the hope for a better life appears indistinguishable from the acquisition of material goods. Anna is, then, literally questioning, in the form of two consecutive interrogative sentences, whether such values and ideals could ever be seen as attainable by all members of society: 'But what happens if you don't hope anymore, if your back is broken? What happens then?', she wonders, implying that certain people, 'broken' people, will be excluded from the purchasable hope of integration and

success in a materialistic metropolitan society.

This is a telling example of Anna using language in a critically reflective way. The affective element is manifested in the melancholy tone of the passage and also in the implied suggestion that women like Anna—women whose ‘back is broken’—cannot hope anymore; the emotion, however, only works to underscore the critical assessment of the status quo of capitalist consumerism as rendered through Anna’s incisive reflections. Her speech here is neither inarticulate nor dreamy nor disordered; it is an example of the language of dispossessed dissent at its most potent. While Rhys stays true to her heroine’s particular situation and predicament, she does not allow the reader to assume that a dispossessed woman cannot grasp, at least intuitively, the external factors that orchestrate her dispossession. Anna’s awareness is convincing precisely because it is raw and elemental; precisely because even when it is not encoded in images, memory, and overflowing emotion but serenely articulated, it never tries to mimic the language of the strong. Rhys compromises neither her own awareness as an authorial self, nor the truthfulness of her portrayal of a younger and more vulnerable version of herself.

The paragraph that concludes Part Three is particularly telling in respect of Rhys’s understated socio-political critique. Anna has just returned from the doctor and has started waiting for the abortion to actually happen. The finest balance is achieved here, as the solemnly contemplative language hints at the deeper truth intuitively grasped by Anna: ‘Everything was always so exactly alike—that was what I could never get used to. And the cold; and the houses all exactly alike, and the streets going north, south, east, west, all exactly alike’ (*Voyage*, p. 152). Anna lets her mind be guided by the London scenery; she lets the urban setting tell her a secret: that the significance of choice, for someone like her, is nullified in a world where ‘[e]verything [is] always so exactly alike’. Even the streets are indifferent to the concept of choice; whether they are directed ‘north, south, east, west’ they are ‘all exactly alike’. On a surface level, Anna could be seen to simply compare the drab monotony of the cityscape to the rich nuance of the Caribbean landscape. Arguably, however, an under-statement is also made, on the way the ever-same thwarts choice and the possibility of change.²⁶

²⁶ The term ‘under-statement’ has been discussed in note 16.

To return to the subject of the commodification of the Rhysian heroine within modern commercial culture, Delia Caparoso Konzett, who has studied Rhys from the conceptual angle of ‘Ethnic Modernisms and their Avant-Gardes’,²⁷ has argued that her works do not showcase any faith in collectivity. Instead, ‘[i]n Rhys, [the] collective gives way to an abstract model of mass culture, a modern by-product of faceless and anonymous individuals living their lives according to the assembly-line rhythms of industrial and time-efficient production’.²⁸ Within the estranging structures of capitalist mass culture, faith in collectivity dwindles away while individuality is reduced to faceless anonymity. Vulnerable, dispossessed individuals like Anna are likely to be treated as commodities—as exchangeable goods to be used, dispensed with, and finally replaced. This is exactly what Anna experiences in her relationship with Walter. Her genuine love for him could not transform the transactional aspect of their relationship, decided upon by the propertied bourgeois male. By presenting Anna’s regression into a kept woman and prostitute, Rhys offers a cutting critique of the reification of individuality in the capitalist market and society. This reification could even be compared to slavery and I would argue that *Voyage* invites precisely such a shocking comparison.

Before Anna sleeps with Walter for the first time, she wants to talk to him about her house in Dominica, a house tainted by the history of slavery: ‘I saw an old slave-list at Constance once,’ I said. ‘It was hand-written on that paper that rolls up. Parchment, d’you call it? It was in columns—the names and the ages and what they did and then General Remarks.’ She then drifts off into her own, inner thoughts: ‘...Maillotte Boyd, aged 18, mulatto, house servant. The sins of the fathers Hester said are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation [...]’ before speaking to Walter again: ‘All those names written down,’ I said. ‘It’s funny, I’ve never forgotten it’ (all quotes from *Voyage*, pp. 45-46). There must be a reason why Anna remembers, and wants to mention to Walter, the slave list she had once discovered in her house in Dominica. There is an ominous premonition in

²⁷ ‘Ethnic Modernisms and Their Avant-Gardes’ is the title of Konzett’s Introduction (pp. 1-18) to her study. Delia Kaparoso Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Dislocation* (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

²⁸ Ibid p. 128.

Hester's words that suggests Anna's connection with the slaves; there is the implication that, since her ancestors had been slave-owners, Anna is complicit by association. Rhys hints at the dark side of Anna's wish to identify with blackness and the hint will be substantiated a couple of pages later, after Anna has slept with Walter:

‘Walter, will you put the light out? I don't like it in my eyes.’

Maillotte Boyd, aged 18. Maillotte Boyd, aged 18. ... But I like it like this. I don't want it any other way but this. (*Voyage*, p. 48; Rhys's italics)

The fact that Anna identifies herself with the slave girl at this particular point, lying down next to Walter, darkly forebodes not only her figurative enslavement to him but also her adoption of the role of the prostitute (her relationship with Walter marking this role's inception). In other words, there is a striking parallel Rhys is drawing here between slavery and prostitution, by dint of the commodification informing both practices. Rhys is essentially exposing the complicity of patriarchal and capitalist mentalities in the exploitation of dispossessed individuals, and especially women. Capitalist values, in particular, can be seen to transgress the borders of commerce and permeate social life, allowing for the treatment of people as interchangeable commodities circulating in the free market. Such an interweavement of patriarchal and capitalist mentalities is illustrated in *Voyage* when Anna's friend, Maudie, recounts her male companion's comment: ‘It's funny, he said, have you ever thought that a girl's clothes cost more than the girl inside them?’ Against these words the realist Maudie initially protests, but finally resigns to their truth, as light-heartedly as she can: ‘and then I had to laugh, because after all it's true, isn't it? People are much cheaper than things.’ Anna, however, who cannot bear this ugly truth, tells her friend to ‘shut up’ (all quotes: *ibid*, p. 40). In other words, Maudie accepts what Anna cannot: that women in their position have exchange value; they circulate in the social market just like commodities do in the marketplace. Essentially, the value of a human being, and particularly of a woman following disreputable lifestyles in a patriarchal society, is often smaller than that of an expensive object's. It would be disconcerting to think that such mentalities and attitudes might actually be encouraged and perpetuated within capitalist patriarchy. *Voyage* suggests,

perhaps, that the progress humanity has made since the abolition of slavery might not be as grand as we would like to imagine. And this is, undoubtedly, a disquieting suggestion.

10. The Personal is Critical

In the examples just discussed, we have witnessed Anna's awareness unfold in both instinctual and overtly critical guises, demonstrating her grasp on the way consumer culture operates and on her own victimization and entrapment. We have also heard her language of memory speak disquieting truths about her situation and foreboding her future predicament. I have been arguing that the language of Rhys, and Anna, is more critical than fatalistic, more dissenting than passive, suggestive of the relationship of interpenetration between the affective and the cognitive sphere. There is an aesthetic and critical continuity between Anna's solemnly contemplative analyses and her immersions in the language of anamnesis and affect. That Anna sometimes displays violent emotional and physical outbursts testifies to her visceral aversion to the hypocrisy, self-righteousness, cruelty, and intolerance she has met with at the heart of the modern capitalist society of London; an aversion she cannot always put—but which she can often encrypt—into words. Her dispossessed dissent is not fully deliberate and critical awareness is not fully aware of itself as such. It could be posited that Rhys treats Anna's lack of access to the articulate, self-aware, and authoritative language of metropolitan patriarchal societies as an opportunity to suggest different ways of expression, different channels for the articulation of dissent. Because social and linguistic power are so inextricably bound in *Voyage*, Rhys creates and uses the language of dispossessed dissent, where affect and disaffection are communicating vessels. Her heroine is not merely entrapped and paralyzed inside a solipsistic world of reverie, nostalgia, melancholia, and passivity; what she communicates is not merely her victimization and marginalization, but also her critical appraisal of the established order of patriarchy and capitalist materialism.

Another way of discussing how Rhys's language aesthetic evades the label of solipsism would be to consider it alongside Fredric Jameson's argument for the social resonance of private,

insular literary language. In one of his discussions on modern theory, literature, and ideology Jameson identifies and emphasizes the value of literature's 'subjectivized untruth'.²⁹ He addresses the phenomenon of modern literary writers entrapped in the realm of subjectivity, unable to generalize or universalize their private experiences. And yet—he argues—what could be regarded and judged as merely an aesthetic insularity of language far removed from notions of social truth is actually defined by a peculiar subtype of social relevance:

So little by little the writer is reduced to so private a speech that it is henceforth bereft of any public consequences or resonances, so that only symbolic recoding holds out the hope of saying something meaningful to a wider and more heterogeneous audience. [...] But in this wholly subjectivized untruth, the modern writer nonetheless in another sense remains profoundly true and profoundly representative: for everyone else is equally locked into his or her private language, imprisoned in those serried ranks of monads that are the ultimate result of the social fragmentation inherent in our system.³⁰

Jameson here proposes that literature's solipsist subjectivity is a mirror for the kind of society that has brought it into being. Literature's 'subjectivized untruth' becomes representative of the 'social fragmentation' brought about by the ways 'our system'—Western capitalism—operates. Jameson also suggests the possibility of enciphering literature's critical potential in its internal structures instead of opting for the manifestation of concrete socio-political ideas. In this, Jameson is aligned with fellow Marxist cultural theorist Raymond Williams. As mentioned in the Introduction, in his *Writing in Society*, Williams makes the following observations:

Literature is not just a carrier of ideology, as in most forms of reflection theory. It is inescapably ideological, but its specific relative autonomy is that it is a form of writing, a form of practice, in which ideology both exists and is or can be internally distanced and questioned. Thus the value of literature is precisely that it is one of the areas where the grip of ideology is or can be loosened, because although it cannot escape ideological construction, the point of its literariness is that it is a continual questioning of it internally.³¹

²⁹ See Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986*, Vol.2: The Syntax of History (London: Routledge, 1988).

³⁰ Ibid pp. 131-132.

³¹ Raymond Williams, 'Crisis in English Studies', in *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 208.

With Williams, Jameson posits that the use of a highly private and subjective language in literature can offer us an awareness-raising reflection of the status quo of modern capitalism, whereby rampant individualism is favoured at the expense of social collectivity and solidarity, resulting in the extreme fragmentation of, and alienation within, the social realm. Such a theoretical angle would seek to spotlight the solipsistic qualities of Rhys's/Anna's language in *Voyage* and regard them as an aesthetic vehicle for the communication of the ills of modern capitalist patriarchy: the intimate language of affect and memory would be seen as the only recourse to expression available to the marginalized female. The solipsism of Anna's expression would be viewed as a projection of her exclusion from the dominant discourse of patriarchy as well as her lack of access to more collective forms of expression; a lack of access brought about by the blatantly individualistic values and mindsets prevalent in modern capitalist societies.

Following this reference to Jameson's excerpt, two things need to be emphasized. Firstly, that the subjective solipsism of *Voyage's* aesthetics does not simply mirror the character of the society that generates it. The highly personal language of Rhys and Anna is also highly critical, specifically by showing how the language of affect and memory can defy the marginalization to which the dominant language of patriarchal rationality would have consigned it, articulating thus its own dispossessed dissent. Secondly, within the modernist canon, certain varieties of highly personal, highly subjectivized narrative style can be seen to enter the realm of the inaccessible, the esoteric, and the obscure. *Voyage*, however, with its language of staccato rhythm and stark brevity, might border on the aphoristic, but never on the inaccessible. Inaccessibility of literary language is often interpreted as elitist, however, regardless of whether one subscribes to this view or not, it may be interesting to explore, in the next section, how Rhys faces up to the idea of the glorification of modernist difficulty. This is not the only way in which Rhys sets herself apart as an author. Besides the role of the aesthetics of difficulty within modernism at large, the narrower context of British literature in the 1930s also needs to be taken into account. I will argue in the following section of the chapter that Rhys's narrative aesthetics evidences a departure both from hermetic difficulty (a characterizing trait

of a significant portion of modernist literature) and from politically engaged/committed literature (the major literary current in literary Britain in the 1930s).

11. Transgressing All Languages of Domination

In *Voyage*, Anna's marginalized Otherness and dispossessed dissent mix in thought-provoking ways. It could be argued that the language of affect in which Rhys recounts her (and Anna's) story is inextricably linked with the experience of disaffect—of social and personal alienation. Her literary aesthetics seems to be very carefully thought out and more complex than it might appear at first glance, or by comparison to the deliberate obscurity and manifest difficulty high modernism is often associated with. When it came to a writer's integration in the modernist canon, as Leonard Diepeveen observes in his study on *The Difficulties of Modernism*, simplicity was not deemed 'an effective counter to the ways in which difficulty was valorized, and it eventually became incomprehensible as a way of understanding significant aesthetic experience'.³² As already discussed, however, in *Voyage* Rhys often chooses to encrypt her meaning in or even under her words, as has been seen in her usage of the language of anamnesis and affect. To refer back to Armstrong and establish a critical link with Diepeveen, the language of affect in particular has been characteristically devalued in literary and theoretical circles as a feminine language, where the term feminine would have been used as a euphemism for insignificance and/or irrelevance: 'A long tradition associates women with the emotions and with a devalued affective experience [...]', Armstrong asserts.³³ And when she addresses the male-dominated, inimical-to-affect literary criticism of the 1930s (which, to her, is exemplified by 'close reading's two major theorists I.A. Richards and William Empson') she makes the following remarks:

A rationalist poetics, founded on the antithesis between thought and feeling which still goes largely uninvestigated in our culture, refusing the importunities of the desire of the text, acts as a screen for a more difficult and subtle problem. Sexuality, feeling and emotion are associated

³² Leonard Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 178-179.

³³ Armstrong p. 20.

with a language of affect which is deemed to be non-cognitive and non-rational. Affect falls outside what is legitimately discussable. [...] So whether you welcome or expel affect it is an inessential, extraneous element.³⁴

In opposition to such interpretive attitudes, the cognitive/critical import of affect can be seen to be reclaimed in *Voyage* and its essentiality and centrality reasserted, as well as its legitimacy as a topic re-established. In this light, the complexity of the aesthetic language of the text reveals itself in its interpenetrative relationship with socio-political critique—a critique that defies the purported and gendered polarization between the import of male difficulty and the insignificance of female simplicity. It is in this vein that Diepeveen observes that ‘[...] difficulty’s promoters often directed at nondifficult writing stereotypes frequently aimed against women: simplicity, weakness, lightness, and triviality’.³⁵

Against this context, one would not expect Rhys’s early work to receive sufficient appreciation and recognition. Within the literary landscape just described, it would have been easy to ignore or misjudge the subtle complexities of her language and encrypted critique. Perhaps it is not accidental that Rhys became established as a dominant literary figure within the high modernist canon only in the late 1960s, after she had published the difficult and multi-layered *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel that rose to critical acclaim upon its first publication.³⁶ It was as if her earlier work was deemed to provide a literary experience of lesser value, from the point of view of aesthetics and social import alike. Given the socio-historical context described by Armstrong and Diepeveen, it would not be far-fetched to imagine that Rhys’s affect-bound, encrypted critique might not have been highly esteemed amongst overtly difficult oeuvres of high modernism. Furthermore, the novel’s postcolonial concerns

³⁴ Ibid p. 87.

³⁵ Diepeveen p. 174.

³⁶ *Wide Sargasso Sea* is often read as a postmodern novel engaged with postcolonial themes. Still, the argument pursued at this point in the chapter is that the publication of a ‘difficult’ novel was decisive for Rhys’s establishment as an important author, whether it be within the Modernist or the Postmodern Canon, or both. For studies of *Wide Sargasso Sea* that address its immediate critical acclaim and recognition, see Thomas F. Staley, *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), pp. 100-120 (p. 118) and Angela Smith’s Introduction to the 1997 Penguin edition of the novel, of which she is also the editor. *Wide Sargasso Sea* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. vii-xxiii (p. x).

are another reason Furthermore, from the perspective of the advocates for ‘difficulty’ in literature as the only way to adequately render the incomprehensible turmoil of modern life, Rhys’s style could have been judged not merely as lacking in sophistication, but also as naïve and inattentive to the changes in people’s lives in the modern era. Diepeveen presents the following argument as attributable to the advocates of modernist difficulty: ‘But simplicity [...] missed the one value that was essential for a modern writer: it had nothing to do with newness, with the current conditions of modern life. Simplicity instead was enmired in naiveté and nostalgia’.³⁷ From this particular perspective, even if Rhys’s language style in *Voyage* evaded being labelled simplistic or irrelevant from an aesthetic perspective (according to the literary standards of high modernism), it could have been rejected on socio-political grounds, for its lack of involvement in the complexities of modern life (according to both the advocates for difficulty as a mirror of ‘the current conditions of modern life’ and the supporters of committed literature). I would like at this point, then, to consider Rhys’s position vis-à-vis committed literature of the 1930s—another current the novelist chose not to follow.

As Shari Benstock has remarked in *Women of the Left Bank*, Rhys’s work in the 1930s reacted ‘against the call to social and political involvement in the period’.³⁸ She further argues that ‘in a political climate that demanded social relevance in literature, [Rhys and certain other women writers] experienced difficulties in finding a reading public because their fictions seemed to exploit an entirely private, even secret, female experience’.³⁹ From the point of view of literary criticism in the 1930s, as I have argued, Rhys’s writing would have been consigned to the realm of the non-rational, the non-cognitive, the non-critical, the feminine, and, essentially, the trivial. However, one of the things Rhys achieves in *Voyage* is to present the language of affect and memory as an alternative to what Armstrong calls the “‘hard” rationality”; the sense of authority, ownership, and masculine power of the language of metropolitan patriarchy. By embedding a different kind of critical, oppositional rationality in Anna’s expression, Rhys challenges monolithic views on rationality and shows how the

³⁷ Ibid p. 182.

³⁸ Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank* (London: Virago Press, 1987), p. 424.

³⁹ Benstock p. 424. I believe that her choice of the word ‘seemed’ is pivotal in her phrasing.

language of affect and anamnesis is able to not merely communicate, but critique. Anna's expression can be seen to attain, in its dispossessed, instinctual, and unaware-of-itself dissension, its own oppositional rationality and critical edge. *Voyage* is far removed from both the labyrinthine quality of late modernist masterpieces such as *The Waves* or *Finnegans Wake* and the political commitment of British writing in the 1930s, yet its aesthetics remains complex and inextricably linked with its socio-political edge.⁴⁰ Significantly, the tone of the novel, however extensively Anna might navigate the territory of melancholy, misfortune, and even depression, never becomes maudlin or self-indulgent. (The novel's wittily humorous parts, few and far between as they might be, are arguably unforgettable, precisely because they contrast so starkly with the dark ones.)⁴¹ Referring to another novel by Rhys, *Good Morning Midnight*,⁴² Benstock has observed that she understands Rhys's 'spare, almost clinical treatment' of her female character to actually constitute 'an indictment of contemporary society all the more devastating for its understatement'.⁴³ Earlier on I deliberately broke the word 'understatement' in two, spelling it as 'under-statement' in order to call attention to the way I see Rhys achieving such 'an indictment of contemporary society': by sweeping her meanings under the words, as it were; by inscribing dissent in emotional, anamnestic expression; by encrypting, in language aesthetics, Anna's unacceptance of the status quo.

In all, Rhys's language aesthetics can be viewed as oppositional to what Deleuze and Guattari in 'What is Minor Literature?' have identified as the authoritative language 'of masters': 'There is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor. To hate all languages of masters'.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ For detailed accounts of committed literature in 1930s Britain, see: Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation; Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London, Sydney, Toronto: the Bodley Head, 1976); Bernard Bergonzi, *Reading the Thirties: Texts and Contexts* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1978); George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale' in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (London, England: Penguin Books, 2001 [1940])

⁴¹ For examples of witty humour in *Voyage*, see p. 60 for the rhyming anecdote Anna recounts when in conversation with aunt Hester and pp. 123-124 for the funny accident a client has in Ethel's place.

⁴² *Good Morning, Midnight* was published in 1939.

⁴³ Benstock p. 441

⁴⁴ In agreement with Deleuze and Guattari's quote, Rhys's *Voyage* amply displays aversion to 'all languages of masters', as well as a fixation on the language of the underdog, the dispossessed, and the socially disreputable.

Dominative language in *Voyage* can be seen to adopt several guises. As has thus far been discussed, it is found in the language of capitalist patriarchy, exemplified by the patronizing ease with which Vincent handles Anna (and women in general), and by Anna's reification in the hands of Walter. It is also found in the materialistic rhetoric of modern capitalism that harbours the threat of social marginalization and isolation if one cannot conform to its standards. And moreover, it is found in the highbrow, elitist aspect of modernist literary language. I will now turn to examine how *Voyage* challenges the authoritative language operative on yet another level: the racial-cultural one. As briefly mentioned earlier, Anna aligns herself with the language and symbolic value of native Dominican cultures. *Voyage* invites a critical reconsideration of the dominative character of the language and associated values of white Englishness by juxtaposing it with the dissenting character ascribed to the language and associated values of native Dominicans. From this interpretive angle, there is an interesting element of postcolonial dynamics in *Voyage*; a dynamics which Rhys was to lead to its culmination in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

12. Linguistic Resistance and Cultural Subversion: The Perspective of the Dispossessed

Significantly, the only linguistic expression, besides that of anamnesis and affect, not distrusted by Rhys and Anna is that of the Dominican Caribbeans. Not only does Anna side with the linguistic expression of native Caribs, she idealizes it by viewing it as colourful, sensual, vibrant, and vivid—infused with values and qualities diametrically opposed to those she ascribes to metropolitan England. As shown through Hester's self-righteous authoritativeness ('Now that I've spoken you can hear that I'm a lady [...] Speak up and I will place you at once.'), language in the mouths of respectable Englishmen and English gentlewomen seems to emblemize cultural correctness, coldness, self-righteousness, rigidity, and oppression.⁴⁵ Moreover, as already discussed, through

'What is Minor Literature?' in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. by Ferguson, Gever, Minh-ha, West, (New York and Massachusetts: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and The MIT Press, 1990), pp. 59-69 (p. 67)

⁴⁵ As seen earlier, according to Anna, Hester defines herself as 'an English gentlewoman' whose way of speaking reflects her social status and general respectability (*Voyage*, p. 50).

Hester's attitude towards the servant Francine, Rhys shows how the language of Native Caribbeans can be perceived as a socio-cultural threat to proper English values. Kloefer argues that Anna's aunt regards Francine's use of language as 'an assault upon the privileged place of meaning in traditional discourse, a threatening replica within language of cultural subversion just as Francine is a replica within culture of linguistic subversion'.⁴⁶ This observation highlights the relationship of interpenetration between the cultural and the linguistic sphere. Angier also comments on the radical discrepancy between black (Dominican) and white (English) mentalities in *Voyage* as reflected in language usage:

White people think that words mean what they say—what the words say. Jean Rhys knows they mean what they, the white people, say. Black people talk as they sing and laugh, to share their feelings; and they know that people, not words, mean things. That is the radical idea of meaning that informs *Voyage in the Dark*.⁴⁷

This view, however, appears to be problematic within the context of my argument in this chapter, for it suggests that, in *Voyage*, black people's speech becomes associated with natural and affective qualities, while white people's speech seeks to assert its cognitive authority over the meaning of words, over language itself. In this light, language in the mouths of white colonialists is an emblem of culture and cultural power; their speech denotes their privileged position because it 'mean[s] what they, the white people, say'. Following from the same argument, black people would be seen as using language in a much more disinterested manner, bound to nature and emotion. Besides implying a view of emotion as antithetical to cognition, reason, and critique, such a dualistic differentiation could also be associated with essentializing and stereotyping attitudes.⁴⁸ This chapter has been suggesting that the affective can be infused with cognitive and even radical energies, a view that invites a reconsideration of the terms through which whiteness and blackness are defined in the novel.

⁴⁶ Kloefer p. 451.

⁴⁷ Angier, 'Introduction' to the 2000 Penguin edition of *Voyage* used in this chapter, pp. x-xix (p. x).

⁴⁸ Such attitudes are not attributable to Angier's analysis, or Rhys's novel; I extrapolate them, here, for the sake of argumentation.

Anna finds herself suspended, as it were, between the culture of white Englishness and that of the Caribbean. Descended from a Creole mother, Anna is a mixture of the English and the Dominican, finding it impossible to feel like she belongs to either of the two ethnicities/races.⁴⁹ Instead, she remains trapped in a void which she fills with memories from her Caribbean past and bleak impressions of her London present. Anna's language suggests the unbridgeable gap between the idea of Dominica and the idea of London: 'Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, but I could never fit them together' (*Voyage*, pp. 7-8). Anna's attachment to Dominican values—linguistic, cultural, as well as ethical—seen through her relationship with Francine and her wish to have been black, can be explained through more than nostalgia. To begin with, this attachment has a dark, sinister side. This side has been addressed in the excerpt discussed earlier, where Anna identifies herself with a slave girl after sleeping with Walter. At this point, however, I want to highlight the connotations of resistance and dissent with which the novel surrounds the idea of blackness. This chapter has discussed the association of blackness with suspect intransigence through Hester's racist discourse, and explored Rhys's portrayal of the intolerant, phobic-of-otherness language of the established order as the backdrop against which Anna's language of dispossessed dissent came into relief.

Now I would like to bring into focus the way Anna relates the idea of dissent to Dominican culture and identity. There is a point in the narrative, at the beginning of Part Two, when Anna is lying down in illness and remembering a song. She thinks that the word she cannot remember in the song must be 'oceans', which, in turn, leads to thoughts of the Caribbean Sea:

[the word] can't be 'legions'. 'Oceans' perhaps. 'Oceans away from despair.' But it's the sea, I thought. The Caribbean Sea. 'The Caribs indigenous to this island were a warlike tribe and their resistance to white domination, though spasmodic, was fierce. As lately as the beginning of the nineteenth century they raided one of the neighbouring islands, under British rule, overpowered the garrison and kidnapped the governor, his wife and three children. They are now practically exterminated. The few hundreds that are left do not intermarry with the Negroes. Their reservation, at the northern end of the island, is known as the Carib Quarter.' They had, or used

⁴⁹ Konzett has argued that the notions of race and ethnicity are inseparable in the Rhysian world. I take this to be the case in *Voyage*, where whiteness seems to equal Englishness and blackness is indistinguishable from native Caribbean identity. See Konzett, p. 129: 'Rhys's Caribbean upbringing subjected her to a socialization in which race and ethnicity (much as in the United States) were never divorced from one another'.

to have, a king. Mopo, his name was. Here's to Mopo, King of the Caribs! But, they are now practically exterminated. 'Oceans away from despair...' (*Voyage*, p. 91)

Interestingly, the point at which Anna discusses the Dominican Caribs' resistance to British colonialism is the moment when her language of memory, for the first and only time in the novel, becomes depersonalized. Anna's language style suddenly becomes erudite, standardized, and formal—markedly dissimilar to her usual unadorned, monosyllabic, and casual diction. It is almost as if she were quoting a memorized excerpt from a history book, something which Rhys's use of quotation marks seems to be indicating. The fact that Rhys chooses to present historical facts as historical facts, instead of letting them be moulded by the subjective, whimsical language of Anna's memory, is intriguing. This shift to a standardized, impersonal diction can be seen to represent a symbolically charged gap between Anna's identity and her idea (and idealization) of Caribbean identity. The resistance of that 'warlike tribe' has gone down in history; it has been recorded in a book. At the same time, however, it is clear that such resistance belongs to the past: 'They are now practically exterminated', we learn. Moreover, the example of the Caribs' brave intransigence seems far removed, 'oceans away', from Anna's present situation. Perhaps it is against Anna's personal unhappiness (for at this point in the narrative she is suffering after Walter has left her) that the Dominican Caribs in her memory seems, indeed, to be '[o]ceans away from despair...'; and therefore, to mark this sharp contrast, their story has to be narrated in depersonalized language. Moreover, Anna's diction juxtaposes the Caribs' extermination with the idea of freedom from the confines of despair: 'But, they are now practically exterminated. 'Oceans away from despair...'. This is phrasing which could be taken to suggest death as the only way to escape despair.

However, resistance remains the focal point, and the concept Anna could be seen to measure herself against. Successful examples of resistance are recorded and remembered in history while Anna's personal troubles could never be expressed in the same standardized, intellectualized language. In reference to this part of the novel, Mary Lou Emery makes the following observations:

Anna associates her personal situation with the history of the Caribs, portraying her sense of an individual past and identity within the context of a wider social and cultural past. [...] Anna links her exploited situation with that of other oppressed people, not in slave-like submission

this time, but in resistance to it, no matter what the odds.⁵⁰

In contrast to Emery's view, I argue that it is not through identification but through juxtaposition with Anna's situation that this point in the narrative can be seen to confront the oppressive, dominative order and ideology of colonial power. Instead of suggesting, as Emery does, that Anna is associating her situation to that of resisting constituencies like, in this case, the Dominican Caribs, I argue that Rhys's heroine can be seen instead to feel alienated, by comparison, from them and the example they set. Perhaps Anna is made to realize her subjugation and exploitation within a patriarchal colonial society all the more acutely by comparison to the Caribs' victorious albeit brief resistance. I believe that the change in diction in the text indicates Anna's disconnection from what she is recounting; that, to her, the 'fierce' resistance of the Caribs is nothing but a memorized passage in a book read a long time ago, a memory that shines against the bleakness of her present.

13. The Conflicted Temporality of Exilic Critique

Identifying the ways in which the past relates to the present and vice versa in *Voyage* can throw more light on Anna's conflicted cultural and personal identity. Carr addresses Rhys's 'characteristic mingling of past and present, the fantacized and the factual' and argues that 'this interpenetration is first fully achieved in *Voyage in the Dark*'.⁵¹ This remark invites a discussion of an aesthetic trait traditionally associated with modernist literature: the presentation of inner time as antagonizing (and even gaining prevalence over) factual, standardized time—time-by-the-clock, or by-the-calendar. As Rhys herself put it in a letter quoted by Carr, in *Voyage* she tries to show that time is 'an illusion' and the way she achieves this is 'by making the past (the West Indies) very vivid—the present dreamlike (downward career of the girl)—starting of course piano and ending fortissimo'.⁵² Perhaps Rhys implies

⁵⁰ 'The Politics of Form: Jean Rhys's Social Vision in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*', p.422 (see note 3).

⁵¹ Carr, p. 84.

⁵² Quoted by Carr, *ibid*, p. 85.

that, for her heroine, the past usurps the vividness of the present throughout the novel, but it is towards the ending that real time is completely and spectacularly thwarted by the loudness, indeed the ‘fortissimo’, of Anna’s delirious imagination; an imagination conveyed in horrifying hallucinations related to her abortion.⁵³ I argue that Jean Rhys achieves the ‘mingling’ of past and present referred to by Carr by making her heroine a vehicle of painful and irresolvable conflict between her remembered past and the actuality she is experiencing in London; between her inner reality and the social reality she has to endure every day. In this line of argument, then, what is channeled through Anna is not a harmonious fusion, not even a *mélange* of opposites, but a fundamental split between the personal and the social; between inner time and real/social time. This tension is formally conveyed in *Voyage* through Anna’s recourse to her own kind of expression: the language of dispossessed dissent; of affect and memory. Past and present, memory and current social reality, resistance and failure, public and private discourse, patriarchy and the critique of patriarchy—they all intermix in the textual world of *Voyage*, but the novel’s protagonist remains painfully trapped and split between them, perpetually suspended in an in-between world marked by violent struggle of opposing situations and concepts, where the hope for reconciliation is perennially precluded.

In terms of temporality, Anna is exiled into her past and in terms of place, she is exiled into a gap, a void. The heterogeneity of cultural identity she can be seen to represent, and her exilic awareness which I will now address, are never seen in a celebratory or liberating light. This refers back to the obvious but nonetheless critical difference between a harmonious mixture and a conflict of opposites. In ‘Reflections on Exile’, Edward Said has discussed the relationship between past and current settings and situations from an exile’s point of view:

For an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old

⁵³ Anna’s hallucinations, caused by her botched abortion take up only two pages in the published version of *Voyage* (pp. 156-158 of the edition I have been referring to). As several critics have emphasized, however, in her unpublished manuscript Rhys had chosen to expand on Anna’s hallucinations (as well as provide a different ending to the novel). See, for example, O’Connor pp. 128-131.

environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally.⁵⁴

Set against this theoretical backdrop, the exilic experience Anna represents seems to differ. Discussing the exile's 'contrapuntal' kind of awareness, Said suggests that new and old elements can coexist in equal intensity and in a fertile manner. In Anna's story, however, it is the old (memories of the Caribbean) that is 'vivid, actual', whereas the new (metropolitan modern society of London), instead of being equally lifelike and intense, seems to be deadened, grey, and dull by comparison. By depicting the past as more alive than the present, Rhys stages in her novel a power struggle between the old and the new, while the antagonism and tension this power struggle entails leaves Anna torn and lost between two worlds forever incompatible with one another. For Anna, an enabling, 'contrapuntal' awareness arising out of the coexistence of 'old' and 'new' such as the one Said describes is not achievable.

In *Voyage* the melody of the past never harmonizes with that of the present; together, they form a disquieting cacophony that nevertheless cannot be silenced. Anna can be viewed as a vehicle for the uneasy, frictional, and dissonant coexistence of past and present, home and exile, old and new. The pain of displacement; the frustration of not belonging to either the 'old' or the 'new' environment; the disconcertment that ensues when the past usurps the life of the present: those are the parameters that structure the relation of past and present in *Voyage*. And yet, Said's assertion about viewing exilic experience 'not as privilege but as an alternative to the mass institutions that dominate modern life' can be seen to resonate with *Voyage*, on account of its criticism of English cultural and social structures through Anna's exilic perspective.⁵⁵ A polyvalent kind of awareness manifests itself via the heroine's language of affect and anamnesis, participates in entangled interpenetrations

⁵⁴ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', *Granta*, vol.13 (1984), pp. 159-172. In *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, pp. 357-366 (p. 366).

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 365.

between aesthetics and socio-political critique, ties itself to the language of dispossessed dissent, and defines, in all, Rhys's achievement.

This chapter explored Rhys's vision of London in the 1910s (enriched by a 1930s perspective) as a modern capitalist and patriarchal metropolis, retrieving, along the way, the language of affect and memory as a weapon of critique. From the multiplicity of perspective that was seen to define *Manhattan Transfer* in the previous chapter, the focus here was narrowed down to the almost claustrophobic intensity of a first person narrative that stood on its own, as it were, against the insurmountable 'wall' of English society. In the next chapter, marginalization is chosen as opposed to imposed. The protagonist of Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*, antisocial on principle, finds himself caught in an increasingly unstable oscillation between the social world and the world of his mind. The novel's self-reflexive aesthetics will introduce a critique of critique, with an omniscient narrator exposing both the limitations and the necessity of the protagonist's dissent against the unjust socio-economic system of London in the 1930s.

Chapter Three – Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*

1. Introduction

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Beckett's first published novel, *Murphy*,¹ has been exhaustively analyzed from a philosophical/metaphysical analytic perspective.² In line with the overarching concerns of this study, the aim of this chapter is to approach *Murphy* from an interpretive and analytic angle that seeks to uncover the interpenetration between the novel's aesthetics and what I identify as an anti-authoritarian and often anti-capitalist rhetoric. Moreover, and corresponding to the approach taken to *Manhattan Transfer* and *Voyage in the Dark* in the previous chapters, the radical complexity that defines the aforementioned interpenetration will be highlighted and its implications explored.³ I will argue that what makes *Murphy* distinguishable from just another anti-hero and, moreover, what makes the style of social realism inapplicable to *Murphy* in spite of the recognizability- - so rare in Beckett's fiction- - of the novel's urban setting is the way in which socio-political critique is conveyed. Adopting neither the Adornean position (discussed in due course in this chapter) according to which an artwork's sociopolitical import inheres in its aesthetic structures

¹ Technically, the first novel Beckett ever wrote is *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, which was rejected by publishers; it was published as late as 1993 in Great Britain, i.e. posthumously. The protagonist of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, Belacqua, is referenced in *Murphy*: in chapter five, after his attempts to find work have been met with mockery and derision, Murphy takes comfort in 'his Belacqua fantasy' (p. 78); in chapter six, the second zone in Murphy's mind is described as a realm in which 'the pleasure was contemplation [...] Here was the Belacqua bliss and others scarcely less precise' (*Murphy*, p. 111). *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*'s Belacqua, however, is a man of the world; an emblem of the bourgeois order opposed by *Murphy* and its antibourgeois and anticapitalist dissent. I hope to show in this thesis that *Murphy* vehemently opposes bourgeois mentality and values. Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York: Grove Press, 1957 [1938]; *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (London and Paris: Calder Publications, 1993).

² A few examples of philosophical/metaphysical analyses of *Murphy*: Raymond Federman's 'Murphy's Search for an Asylum' in *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965); Ethel F. Cornwell's 'Samuel Beckett: The Flight from Self' in *PMLA*, Vol.88, No.1 (Jan. 1973), pp. 41-51; James Acheson's 'Murphy's Metaphysics' in *The Beckett Studies Reader*, ed. by S. E. Gontarski (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1993), pp. 78-93.

³ As delineated in the Introduction, the notions of contradiction and intricacy/complexity in the study of aesthetic form are indissolubly linked in this thesis.

alone,⁴ nor the mantra of social realism according to which critique is rendered strictly thematically, I posit that *Murphy* – in line with *Manhattan Transfer* and *Voyage in the Dark* – can be seen to acquire its critical edge from the contradictory, multileveled relationship between its aesthetic and thematic concerns. The primary purpose of this chapter is to bring this relationship into relief by exploring its structuring complexities and their implications, both at a textual and contextual level.

Several critics have commented on the contradictory coexistence of conventionality and unconventionality in *Murphy*'s narrative world. In 2006, Rónán McDonald writes:

The oddness of its characterization and the dense eccentricity of style do not prevent [*Murphy*] from having a relatively conventional plot and structure. Conventional, that is, insofar as its structure relies on exposition, complication and denouement, in that it belongs to a recognizable tradition of the 'novel-of-ideas', in that there are recognizable characters performing determinate actions towards recognizable – if perplexing – ends. That which is conventional in the novel is, however, tremendously tied up in parody.⁵

Forty-one years earlier, Raymond Federman discussed the 'deliberate' discrepancy between *Murphy*'s 'form and content':

In spite of its dubious plot, *Murphy* remains a traditional novel. Undoubtedly the characters are intentionally presented as caricatures, to fulfill the author's primary purpose of creating a work that mocks realism and rationalism. Therefore, the novel becomes a calculated intellectual exercise that coldly mirrors the world of man while subtly revealing the fraudulence of fiction. Beckett's experiment is successful because it maintains a deliberate split between form and content.⁶

According to both McDonald and Federman, *Murphy*'s 'relatively conventional' and 'traditional' aspects are intimately bound with its 'parody[ing]' and 'mock[ing]' qualities. My departure from their critical approaches is signaled by the suggestion that the social setting is both preserved and presented

⁴ It needs to be clarified that Adorno did not attribute this quality and potential to the aesthetics of any given work; as can be seen throughout his oeuvre, (in the *Prisms* and *Notes to Literature* volumes of collected essays) and in *Aesthetic Theory* in particular (which will be used in this chapter) Adorno favours High Modernism in its most hermetic, difficult guises; it is in the intricacies and convolutions of aesthetics that socio-political import is found to be, as it were, at its most important.

⁵ Rónán McDonald, *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 74.

⁶ Raymond Federman, *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), p. 67.

in *Murphy* as more than a contrasting backdrop or offset to the novel's experimental aesthetics and that it foregrounds more than the playfulness of critique. In the wider context of this study, the representation of society in *Murphy* is regarded as indispensable to the novel's critical edge and, more specifically, to the discernment of its anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist rhetoric.

2. Sketching Binary Oppositions

Murphy is primarily set in metropolitan London in the 1930s (with only a few episodes taking place in Dublin and Cork) and what strictly constitutes the novel's action takes place in recognizable locations, such as rented rooms, parks, cafés, the streets, and a psychiatric clinic.⁷ On his part, Beckett, during his struggles to get the novel published, defiantly admitted that 'of course the narrative is hard to follow. And of course deliberately so'.⁸ Arguably, what makes *Murphy*'s narrative 'hard to follow' is not the narrative action per se—convoluted and surreal as it often is but the way in which aesthetics is manipulated to alternately advance, challenge, and even subvert what I acknowledge as the novel's socio-political critique. Beckett's 'and of course deliberately so' phrasing seems to invite, in its cryptic vehemence, an exploration of the novel's calculated intricacies; moreover, I would like to posit that the ways in which aesthetics and socio-politics can be seen to interweave in *Murphy* are analogous with the dynamic I have discussed in reference to *Manhattan Transfer* and *Voyage in the Dark*. In all three texts, such interpenetration results in critiques at once constricted and radical. In

⁷ On a biographical note, it seems that *Murphy*'s specificity when it comes to descriptions of location is traceable back to the author's own lived experience; see the chapter that Beckett's biographer, James Knowlson, has devoted on the description of Beckett's whereabouts and experiences during the years that *Murphy* was being conceived of and written. Here, the fact that Beckett himself had worked in a psychiatric clinic is also documented. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), pp. 198-229. Also, see Deirdre Bair's account of Beckett's life in London vis-à-vis the writing of *Murphy*: '[Beckett] had begun to write a story during the fall of 1934 in London. It was about a young man, a down-and-out intellectual similar to himself, who lived in the World's end with a prostitute he had picked up off the street there. During the course of the year, it gradually evolved into the novel *Murphy*'. Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (New York; Summit Books, 1990 [1978]), p. 196.

⁸ Ruby Cohn (ed), *Disjecta* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), p. 103. *Murphy* was published after considerable, prolonged efforts on Beckett's part in 1938. For a thorough account of the difficulties that surrounded *Murphy*'s publication see David Weisbeg, *Chronicles of Disorder: Samuel Beckett and the Cultural Politics of the Modern Novel* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 28-29.

alignment with the approaches to *Manhattan Transfer* and *Voyage in the Dark* undertaken in the previous two chapters, this study of *Murphy* will attempt to illuminate both the text's radicalism and the limitations of its critique.

Murphy is a novel of binary oppositions that often manifest themselves, through Murphy's character, in the form of dilemmas: the social world versus the world of one's mind; solipsism versus socio-political criticism; sanity versus insanity; reality versus fantasy; freedom versus constriction; transcendence versus finitude. To Murphy, the world of the normal, bourgeois everyday is a 'colossal fiasco' from which he longs to escape; 'Murphy's mind',⁹ on the other hand, is a shelter that provides access to freedom, solace, and serenity. Indeed, Murphy is a representative not of the 'big', but of the 'little world'; the former entails social interaction, which he eschews in favour of a solitary interaction with the realm of his mind.¹⁰ More than a social outsider, however, and more than a 'seedy solipsist', Murphy can be seen to challenge, and even subvert, the informing ideas of the established order, and capitalism in particular.¹¹ In other words, he is anti-capitalist as well as antisocial. And yet, Beckett's fiction and/or his characters have often been regarded and judged as a-social.¹² This judgment could be justifiable—and even then, only to a degree—in the context of Beckett's later work, where the social

⁹ The first phrase refers to chapter nine in which Murphy, working in a psychiatric hospital, reveals that he regards the patients 'not as banished from a system of benefits but as escaped from a colossal fiasco'. Chapter nine will be analyzed at length later on in this chapter, when I will be discussing Murphy's idealization of madness within the context of his dissent. The second phrase refers to chapter six in which the narrator intrudes into the storyline to state that '[...] the point of this story has been reached where a justification of the expression "Murphy's mind" has to be attempted.' *Murphy*, pp. 178 and 107, respectively.

¹⁰ On the pivotal role of this binary opposition in Murphy's worldview, see *Murphy*, pp. 6-7 in which the 'big world' is described as having 'died down', on account of the protagonist's reclusive ritual, 'in favour of the little'. Also see p. 178, on Murphy's 'conviction' regarding the importance and prevalence of the 'little world': "I am not of the big world, I am of the little world" was an old refrain with Murphy, and a conviction, two convictions, the negative first' (*Murphy*, p. 178). Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York: Grove Press, 1957 [1938]), p.178. The two terms will be explained later on in

¹¹ Murphy is referred to as 'a seedy solipsist' by the narrator on p. 82 (*ibid.*).

¹² See, for example, Eugene Webb, *Samuel Beckett: A Study of His Novels* (London: Peter Owen, 1970), p. 21: 'In his writings at least, Beckett shows little interest in the problems of society. Beckettian man's concern is primarily metaphysical.' See also Elizabeth Barry: 'In his early work, however, [Beckett] examines [the discourse of consensus] in a more coherent fashion, albeit often as the negative image of his own asocial protagonists'. Elizabeth Barry, *Beckett and Authority: The Uses of Cliché* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 31.

setting has dwindled away. *Murphy*'s narrative, however, includes, depicts, and comments upon the social context which its protagonist opposes; Murphy's opposition, therefore, unfolds against a tangible and well-represented opponent. The opening lines of the novel set the tone as to Murphy's will to distance himself from the everyday world, where nothing new can happen: 'The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. Murphy sat out of it, as though he were free, in a mew in West Brompton' (*Murphy*, p. 1). In one sentence, Beckett encapsulates not merely Murphy's fundamental desire, but the constrictions ('in a mew') and delusions ('as though he were free') that it entails. In his 'mew', Murphy seeks refuge and solace from a bourgeois world governed by the logic of equal exchange:

Somewhere a cuckoo-clock, having struck between twenty and thirty, became the echo of a street-cry, which now entering the mew gave *Quid pro quo!* *Quid pro quo!* Directly.

These were sights and sounds that he did not like. They detained him in the world to which they belonged, but not he, as he fondly hoped. He wondered dimly what was breaking his sunlight, what wares were being cried. Dimly, very dimly. (ibid, p. 2)

It is the world of business, the world of commerce and its 'quid pro quo' principle that threatens to disrupt Murphy's 'little world', in which he imagines himself to be free—to be exempt, somehow, from a society where everything can be exchanged for something else. It is soon revealed that Murphy engages in a strange ritual in order to fully escape the 'big world' and to access his inner realm:

He worked up the chair to its maximum rock, then relaxed. Slowly the world died down, the big world where *Quid pro quo* was cried as wares and the light never waned the same way twice; in favor of the little, as described in section six, where he could love himself. (*Murphy*, pp. 6-7)

Murphy's recoil from the 'big' in favour of the 'little world' is therefore established from the opening pages of the novel. Furthermore, in this last excerpt *Murphy*'s conspicuous, unidentified narrator makes himself known.

The narrator continues to insinuate himself into the narrative throughout the novel in a variety of ways which will be duly addressed in this chapter. At this opening juncture, Beckett programmatically reveals that Murphy's 'little' world is to be depicted in 'section six' of the novel.

Taking into account Beckett's own theories on literary aesthetics as delineated in his essays and letters preceding or coinciding with the writing of *Murphy*¹³ and considering them alongside the novel itself, I would like to suggest that self-reflexivity—the novel's drawing attention to its own devices—can be seen to fulfill a variety of purposes. The depiction of a realistic setting in metropolitan London, with its shops, rented rooms, parks, streets, and Caledonian Market, combined with the introduction of a social outsider as the protagonist, sets the context for a story anchored in principles of social realism. Self-reflexivity comes to subvert such expectations, however, by calling attention to the control exerted by the conspicuous narrator on the novel's exposition, as has just been seen, and by extension, as will be seen later on in this chapter, the arbitrary artificiality of the fictional world is exposed. Richard Begam views the self-referential narrative of *Murphy* as an overt way of subverting realist conventions: 'Another device that erodes the realist intentions of the nineteenth-century novel is the narrative aside designed to [...] remind the reader that the book is a published artifact and not a window on reality. Thus, the novel refers us to almost every stage of its production and consumption'.¹⁴ To extend this argument, it could be posited that the clearly anti-realist ramifications of self-reflexivity join *Murphy*'s aesthetics with its thematic concerns, as the narrator is seen to alternately supplement, ironize, and challenge Murphy's ideas, desires, and aspirations. In this sense, self-reflexivity in the form of the narrator's commentary is a critique of the critique of 'the big world', ensuring that Murphy's critical rhetoric is accompanied by an exposition of the constrictions, delusions, and irresolvable conflict that permeate his dissent.

Moreover, *Murphy* can be seen to overtly challenge the archetypal realist plot whereby the outsider is rejected and ultimately destroyed by a hostile society. Elizabeth Barry relates this archetype to *Murphy* in the following way:

¹³ Beckett's opinions and judgments on literature, evinced in essays and letters written between 1929 and 1937, will be discussed later in the chapter, when the issue of the literary climate prior to the writing and publication of *Murphy* will be brought up, in order to contextualize Beckett's artistic choices in his first novel.

¹⁴ Richard Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 61.

The novel [*Murphy*] also constitutes a version of a particular (tragic) form of realist novel in pitting its hero against the structures of society, and destroying him when he cannot be contained within them. Society cannot understand or incorporate Murphy's particular ruling passion, which is perfectly solitary and which seems to challenge the necessity and the naturalness of the capitalist activity going on around him.¹⁵

I concur with Barry's argument that Murphy's beliefs and actions can be seen to challenge the established status quo of metropolitan capitalism, even though his 'particular ruling passion' is to live as a 'solipsist'. Murphy represents a threat to the capitalist system of values by strongly opposing productivity, functionalism, conventionality, and law-abiding respectability. I would argue that *Murphy's* anti-capitalist rhetoric is a side-effect of the protagonist's desire and aim to escape from the 'big world' into his 'little world'; as a side-effect, in other words, of his antisocial worldview. This is the point which signals my departure from Barry's argument. In his effort to fulfill his desire and aim, Murphy arguably finds himself opposing and even revolting against the capitalist ideological principles according to which the 'big world' operates. Barry, however, describes Beckett's protagonists as 'asocial',¹⁶ and suggests, in the quotation above, that the character of Murphy is led to his destruction by the 'realist' doctrine according to which the dissenting outsider who cannot be contained within society's framework must be punished. This line of argument suggests that Murphy's character experiences a double punishment, a double destruction: within the precepts of the realist novel and within the confines of capitalist society. It also surmises that the reason for his punishment and destruction is his inability to exist socially; to cease being asocial. My own interpretation of Murphy's failure will be given later on in this chapter but at this point it is important to explore the link between his antisocial (as opposed to asocial) character and his dissenting, subversive qualities vis-à-vis the status quo.

¹⁵ Barry, p. 43.

¹⁶ See footnote 12.

3. Retrieving *Murphy*'s anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist rhetoric

After Murphy's ability to temporarily escape 'the big world [...] in favour of the little' has been revealed in chapter one, chapter three offers an explanatory illustration of Murphy's opposition to the implementation of the principles of instrumentality and functionality in everyday personal and social life. In chapter three Murphy receives his horoscope from his lover, Celia. Seeing as Celia has been urging him to earn a living, Murphy relies on the horoscope to tell him the most opportune time to find himself a profession. Before he reads the horoscope he refers to it as '[m]y life-warrant' and 'little bull of incommunication', suggesting his expectation of finding in it both foolishness and justification for his 'life' (or, perhaps, foolish justification for his life) (*Murphy*, p. 33). After having read it he calls it a '[c]orpus of deterrents', for it indeed describes a variety of obstacles in Murphy's life-path, and also, on account of Celia's despairing disapproval of the horoscope's terms, a '[s]eparation order'. Celia is despairing because, according to the horoscope, Murphy has to wait until '[t]he very first fourth to fall on a Sunday in 1936' to start looking for a job, while 'in the meantime' he is advised to stay inactive (*Murphy*, p. 34). This leads to an argument in which Murphy revolts against Celia's attempts to make an honest working man out of him: 'This love with a function gives me a pain in the neck---' he exclaims, thus clearly rejecting the instrumental logic according to which everything, even love, has to be useful by fulfilling specific, pragmatic purposes (*Murphy*, p. 36). Just as he is inherently opposed to the idea of making himself useful through finding an occupation and earning a living, he also finds Celia's functional love a painful idea to contemplate and implement. At the prospect of 'separation' from Celia, he finally agrees to comply with her wish. This concession, however, is accompanied by an ominous suggestion:

"What have I now?" he said. "I distinguish. You, my body and my mind." He paused for this monstrous proposition to be granted. Celia did not hesitate, she might never have occasion to rant him anything again. "In the mercantile gehenna," he said, "to which your words invite me, one of these will go, or two, or all. If you, then you only; if my body, then you also; if my mind, then all. Now?" (*Murphy*, p. 40)

Murphy is convinced that the realm of commercial production and productivity is one of suffering and torment (a 'gehenna') and that by entering it he is practically endangering everything he has—at least,

everything that matters to him. By declaring that it is Celia's 'words' that 'invite [him]' to enter the 'big world', he implicitly blames her in advance for the suffering and the loss that such an invitation will entail. Murphy's way of existing is fundamentally opposed to the laws of commercial production and productivity: having to justify his existence by being a functional, productive member of society equals a betrayal of his alignment with 'the little world'. In all, we see in chapter three Murphy's opposition to the world of business and commerce, as well as to their informing logic of functionality and instrumentality which trickles down to personal relationships ('love with a function'). In chapter five, however, Murphy's opposition to 'the big world' is sketched less in abstract terms and in more tangible lines, manifesting dissent against the social and economic order of metropolitan capitalism.

In chapter five, the narrator discusses Murphy's views on the implications of leading a productive existence according to capitalist society's demands for profit. It transpires that Murphy feels compelled to meet Celia's demands—which have thus far been shown to be aligned with the expectations of 'the big world'—when he realizes that his failure to do so would result in her resuming her own profession and leaving him: 'Celia said that if he did not find work at once she would have to go back to hers. Murphy knew what that meant. No more *music*' (*Murphy*, p. 76).¹⁷ Ironically, even though Celia earns a living by working as a prostitute, she is willing to continue to do so rather than be idle. At this bleak prospect, Murphy agrees to comply with her desires. In spite of his apparent compliance, however, the narrator reveals a side of Murphy which had heretofore been merely hinted at:

In the matter of a career Murphy could not help feeling that his stars had been guilty of some redundancy, and that once go-between had been ordained further specification was superfluous. For what was all working for a living but a procuring and a pimping for the money-bags, one's lecherous tyrants the money-bags, so that they might breed. (ibid)

John Fletcher has observed that 'the world of everyday labour is, we find, continually derided in [*Murphy*]' . Moreover, he suggests that:

¹⁷ 'Music' is used in *Murphy* as a euphemism for sexual activity. I will address this particular expression later in the chapter, in a discussion of the import of the narrator's intrusion in the text.

[i]n his refusal to earn his living, Murphy shows that he is even more an outsider than the eccentric Belacqua, whose responses to the characteristic situations of human life were nevertheless often the reverse of normal. Murphy's solitude is in fact complete, and quite voluntary.¹⁸

Indeed, the excerpt above offers a clear illustration of derision of 'the world of everyday labour', and it is used by Fletcher to support his point. However, to account for Murphy's 'derision' of the principles of 'the big world' through his status as an outsider alone, deliberate as it might be, is to miss the anti-capitalist undertones of his outlook. These undertones are quite manifest in the above excerpt from *Murphy*. To Murphy, as we have seen, having to earn his living so as to lead a functional, productive social existence stands for a betrayal of his own principles. The fact, however, that the excerpt in question here uses the phrase 'one's lecherous tyrants the money-bags' to characterize the ones for whose profit normal people work, suggests a vehement opposition to not just any form of society (in which case Murphy would be characterized as asocial) but, specifically, to the corrupt socio-economic structures of capitalism. It is those structures that not merely allow for but are predicated upon the unequal distribution of wealth, thus ensuring that the gap between the greedy privileged and the hard-working underprivileged remains unbridgeable. In this light, Murphy appears as someone not indifferent (as the term asocial obviously connotes) but opposed on principle to the injustices of the socio-economic structures of profit-motivated, degenerate capitalism. Murphy's reluctance to work in 'the big world' can be therefore understood as a rejection of the role of the slave to the 'tyrants' of the business world, who wish to maximize their profit and continue to 'breed' at the expense of the working class.

Up to chapter five, Celia is shown to be urging Murphy to go against his life's principles and ideals. In the following instance, Murphy expresses his acerbic mistrust of his and Celia's new landlady:

"A lady," said Murphy bitterly, "not a landlady. Thin lips and a Doric pelvis. We are P.G.s."

"All the more reason to find work," said Celia.

¹⁸ John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), pp. 52 and 53, respectively.

Everything that happened became with Celia yet another reason for Murphy's finding work.
(*Murphy*, p. 64)

Here, a thematic parallel can be drawn between the character of *Murphy* and the character of Anna in *Voyage in the Dark*, seeing as both of them express a hostile mistrust of the respectability attached to the word 'lady'. Of course, Murphy has an additional reason to be 'bitter' towards his new landlady, 'a woman of such astute rectitude that she not only refused to cook the bill for Mr. Quigley, [i.e. Murphy's source of income, heretofore] but threatened to inform that poor gentleman of how she had been tempted' (ibid). Miss Carridge in *Murphy* and Ethel in *Voyage in the Dark* can be seen as variations on the same metropolitan bourgeois archetype: that of the self-righteous, respectable 'lady'. Celia, on her part, being a prostitute, represents the diametrical opposite of this notion of ladyship, similarly to Anna, who works as a prostitute with Ethel's blessing. Most importantly, however, just like Ethel, Miss Carridge is revealed to be cruel and mean—anything but a 'lady'.¹⁹ Beckett therefore suggests that the need of the apparently respectable, propertied bourgeois to showcase their respectability (Miss Carridge indignantly refusing to 'cook the bill' and threatening to inform Mr. Quigley) might be incompatible with their true nature. In this excerpt, even though Murphy is utterly unaware of Miss Carridge's lurking cruelty, he still applies the word 'lady' to her with a certain disdain, as if it were an insult.

Celia, on her part, merely seizes the opportunity to remind Murphy of the urgency of finding a job. Only a couple of pages later, however, her views are shown to be radically changed. She was the one who urged her lover to find work in the first place. She was the one who wished '[...] to make a man out of Murphy! Yes, June to October, counting in the blockade she had almost five months' experience of Murphy, yet the image of him as a man of the world continued to beckon her on' (*Murphy*, pp. 65-66). However, she comes to understand, of her own accord, Murphy's incongruity

¹⁹ Two examples that showcase Miss Carridge's cruelty (if not villainy): her only concern when one of her tenants commits suicide is to ensure that she does not lose any money (*Murphy*, p. 136); and she lies to Celia regarding Murphy's actions, giving her false hope (ibid, p. 154).

with the world of commerce and business. The following excerpt describes Celia's radical change and realization:

She preferred sitting in the chair [...] to walking the streets (she could not disguise her gait) or wandering in the Market, where the frenzied justification of life as an end to means threw light on Murphy's prediction, that livelihood would destroy one or two or all three of his life's goods. This view, which she had always felt absurd and wished to go on feeling so, lost something of its absurdity when she collated Murphy and the Caledonian Market. (*Murphy*, pp. 66-67)

Celia finally comes to comprehend Murphy's aversion to work when she realizes that his way of existing is incongruous with the way the Market operates, with the principles behind its operation. The phrase 'the frenzied justification of life as an end to means' is pivotal here; an example of Beckett's wordplay used throughout *Murphy*, it becomes especially illuminating in the context of the marketplace regarding the anti-capitalist connotations of Murphy's character. In this excerpt, the idiomatic expression, 'a means to an end', is applied specifically to the marketplace and, therefore, the word 'means' can be seen to indicate, specifically, financial means. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

Means 12.a.pl. [= F. *moyens*] The resources at (one's) disposal for effecting some object; chiefly, (a person's) pecuniary resources viewed with regard to their degree of adequacy to (his) requirements or habits of expenditure: sometimes more explicitly *means of living, of subsistence*. In early use, sometimes more widely = "money", "wealth", *man of means*: one possessing a competency.²⁰

Wandering in the Caledonian Market, Celia becomes aware of Murphy's foreignness to the marketplace, where people try to make means so as to make a living. Their life itself is justified via money; via the possession of financial resources. However, Celia recalls Murphy's ominous prediction in chapter three according to which earning a living would destroy everything that mattered to him. Murphy practically equated earning a living with losing what he heretofore had: Celia, his body, and his mind. According to Murphy's worldview, life justifies itself; one exists for existence's sake alone. This worldview, when seen in the context of the commercial world, does not appear only

²⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 517.

alien, but also subversive. For here is a man who does not need money or material goods to justify his existence, who has been refusing to contribute to the economy, and who has been recoiling from the Markets of the world on principle.

Murphy's objection to participating in the world of commerce by earning a living is twofold: not only is he aware of his own foreignness to this world, which is of course part of 'the big world', but also, and perhaps more importantly, he portends that 'livelihood'—finding employment—will be the end of 'one or two or all three of his life's goods'. It is not accidental that a few pages later, in chapter five, Murphy's attempts to find work are described in the following terms:

This was the first time he had actually presented himself as candidate for a definite post. Up till then he had been content to expose himself vaguely in aloof able-bodied postures on the fringes of the better-attended slave-markets, or to drag from pillar to post among the agencies, a dog's life without a dog's prerogative. (*Murphy*, pp. 76-77)

It is in those figurative 'slave-markets' that Murphy has been searching for employment. Entering the commercial world means that his personal freedom needs to be sacrificed to the altar of productivity, functionality, employability, and marketability. Murphy, of course, is anything but marketable. Even if he were, however, he would merely be promoted, as it were, from 'a dog's life without a dog's prerogative' to the life of a slave. The following excerpt links Murphy's foreignness with his unemployability and unmarketability, in tragicomic terms:

The chandlers all came galloping out to see the smart boy.

"'E ain't smart," said the chandler, "not by a long chork 'e ain't."

"Nor 'e ain't a boy," said the chandler's semi-private convenience, "not to my mind 'e ain't."

"'E don't look rightly human to me," said the chandler's eldest waste product, "not rightly."

Murphy was too familiar with this attitude of derision tinged with loathing to make the further blunder of trying to abate it. (*Murphy*, p. 77)

Unaware of their own dehumanizing attitudes, the chandlery people accuse Murphy of not looking 'rightly human' in their eyes and their 'attitude of derision' is 'tinged' with irony, as well as 'loathing'. This excerpt can be seen to further corroborate the idea of Murphy as an alien, marginal

figure in the everyday world of employment; a fool amongst the men of the world. It is this fundamental, irrepressible incongruity of Murphy in relation to the normal everyday social world that Celia finally grasps, by wandering through the streets of the Caledonian Market and comparing what she sees with Murphy as she has come to know him. Murphy's profound uneasiness with the world of business, productivity, and profit is similar to that of Jimmy Herf in *Manhattan Transfer*. In fact, Murphy could be regarded as an extreme version of Jimmy (while the former aspires to exiting the social world altogether, the latter does not contemplate such a prospect). Both of them reject the commercial/business world on account of their principles, which are radically incompatible with the driving principles of 'the big world'. Both of them are aware of the inhumanity of the commercial world, which prioritizes profit at the expense of anything else. Jimmy has a vision of his years being eaten away, day by day, in his uncle's firm while Murphy knows that work brings profit only to 'one's lecherous tyrants the money-bags'.

4. Furthering Self-Reflexivity

One of the most telling illustrations of *Murphy's* anti-capitalist rhetoric merging with the literary aesthetic of self-reflexivity can be found in chapter five. In a much commented-upon scene taking place in a London teashop, Murphy's bold inventiveness awards him with more product than he pays for.²¹ The scene describes how, to use the narrator's own words, 'Murphy defrauded a vested interest every day for his lunch, to the honourable extent of paying for one cup of tea and consuming 1.83 cups approximately' (*Murphy*, p. 84). 'I ask for China and you give me Indian', he complains, and after he has received another cup, he once again plays the role of the dissatisfied customer: 'I know I am a great nuisance, but they have been too generous with the cowjuice' (*Murphy*, p. 83). The narrator intervenes to approve of Murphy's little rebellion against the rules of conduct within consumer culture, one of them being, of course, the 'quid pro quo' principle—the logic of equal exchange:

²¹ Amongst the many critical views of the scene in question, Christopher Ricks's humorously astute account figures predominantly: 'Here now is the milk-of-human-kindness comic counterpart to those gentle readers' sourness: Murphy, in the teashop, bilking and milking the management.' In *Beckett's Dying Words* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 58-59.

But no matter how the transaction were judged from the economic point of view, nothing could detract from its merit as a little triumph of tactics in the face of the most fearful odds. Only compare the belligerents. On the one hand a colossal league of plutomanic caterers, highly endowed with the ruthless cunning of the sane, having at their disposal all the most deadly weapons of the post-war recovery; on the other, a seedy solipsist and fourpence. (*Murphy*, p. 82)

This commentary clearly sets up an anti-capitalist rhetoric in the novel. The playful, lighthearted, and at times wildly humorous tone used in the scene in question is juxtaposed with the gravity of the issue Murphy's defrauding gives rise to: the power and the profiteering of 'colossal' companies at the expense of the financially underprivileged. The 'weapons' these companies are in possession of are 'deadly' and they use their 'ruthless cunning' to monopolize financial gain at the expense of the working class. It is not only the figure of Murphy—the poor, 'seedy solipsist'—who stands in contrast against those enterprises. It is also the teashop's waitress. Vera is described in a charged language that calls attention to the gaping chasm between the working class which she represents and the class of the 'slavers' represented by her employers:

She was a willing little bit of sweated labour, incapable of betraying the slogan of her slavers, that since the customer or sucker was paying for his gutrot ten times what it cost to produce and five times what it cost to fling in his face, it was only reasonable to defer to his complaints up to but not exceeding fifty per cent of his exploitation. (*Murphy*, p. 83)

Vera might be fooled by Murphy, but she is not the one who gets defrauded. She only serves as the medium so that Murphy can deal his blow, minute as it might be, to 'the colossal league of plutomanic caterers'. This excerpt clearly suggests that the customers of places run by 'slavers' are exploited as much as the 'sweated labour' working for them. The Marxist rhetoric used in this passage overtly critiques the greedy rich who exploit everyone, from their clientele who pay more than they should for their products, to the laboring hands who are slaving for them. Murphy's rebellion against the capitalists might be on the miniscule scale, yet his gesture is presented by the narrator as a potent symbol of anticapitalist dissent.

Thus far the narrator has presented Murphy as an anti-capitalist dissenter. What is more, however, the narrator goes on to address the reader directly: 'try it sometime, gentle skimmer'. In this

manner, the technique of self-reflexivity and Murphy's radical critical charge become indissolubly linked. The narrator, as Christopher Ricks, amongst other critics, has pointed out, moves from the level of anti-capitalist critique to the level of literature-related critique. Self-reflexively and sarcastically, he exposes those readers who skim-read a literary work, instead of taking the time to explore it in detail.²² In the excerpt in question the two levels of critique interpenetrate in illuminating ways so that Murphy's anti-capitalist rhetoric and the critique of the superficial consumption of literature as if it were a dispensable product are intimately bound. At both levels, it is the idea of consumption that is highlighted and its parameters that are critiqued. On one hand, the 'colossal league of plutomanic caterers' or 'slavers' make their profit out of the public's consumption of their goods for prices incongruous with the products being offered. This 'league' is connected, via Murphy's narrator, to the reader-skimmer, who consumes literature hastily and thoughtlessly. Yet, further still, the narrator suggests that the skimmer-reader behave like Murphy 'sometime'. This may lead us to think of another meaning of the adjective 'skimmer', namely, the one applicable to those who attack the law by taking something without giving something else in return; who defy, in other words, the quid-pro-quo logic. We have thus come full circle: from Murphy's dissent, to the capitalists' profiteering from the thoughtless public's consumption of commodities, to the skimmer-reader's thoughtless consumption of literature, back to Murphy's paradigm of defiance against the logic of equal exchange. It is the narrator's suggestion and wish that Murphy's defiance be projected onto, and mimicked by, *Murphy's* reader. At the level of literature-related critique via self-reflexive aesthetics, *Murphy* can be seen to produce a variety of interlinked effects: lazy, superficial, and consumerist attitudes towards reading are exposed; the narrator's semi-sarcastic, semi-playful tone towards the skimmer-reader is sharply juxtaposed with the former's prior approval of Murphy's own skimming/defrauding little tactics, suggesting that in certain cases it is acceptable, if not heroically defiant, to be a 'skimmer'; and finally, the narrator chooses to address the readers directly and sticks

²² Ibid, p. 84. For the skim-reading connotation, see Christopher Ricks, *Beckett's Dying Words* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 58-59. See also Rubin Rabinovitz, 'Samuel Beckett's Revised Aphorisms', where he suggests that Beckett's use of the 'gentle skimmer' expression comes as a subversion of the expected 'gentle reader'. Rubin Rabinovitz, 'Samuel Beckett's Revised Aphorisms', *Contemporary Literature*, Vol.36, No.2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 203-225 (p. 221).

out his razor-sharp critical tongue at them. In such ways, Beckett's readers are implicated in the world of *Murphy* where the intricate relationship of interpenetration between its levels of critique is slowly brought into relief.

The narrator's acknowledgment of the novel's readers is further illustrated, still in chapter five, at the point when he mentions the disgrace of censorship. After having exposed Murphy's fear that 'music'—the euphemism used in the novel to indicate sexual activity—would cease to exist, the narrator adds: 'This phrase is chosen with care, lest the filthy censors should lack an occasion to commit their filthy synecdoche' (*Murphy*, p. 76). Self-reflexively, the narrator brings to the readers' attention the 'filthy' issue of censorship, thus rendering them complicit in his clever tactic of resistance via the use of cryptic language. In chapter seven, the description of the love play between Miss Counihan and Wylie is immediately followed by this statement: 'The above passage is carefully calculated to deprave the cultivated reader' (*Murphy*, p. 118). Here, the reader is once again mocked; the reference to the easily corruptible, supposedly refined reader is closer in tone to the insulting connotations of the 'gentle skimmer' phrase. As for chapter six, it witnesses the narrator's grudging exposition of the zones of 'Murphy's mind': '[i]t is most unfortunate, but the point of this story has been reached where a justification of the expression "Murphy's mind" has to be attempted' (*Murphy*, p. 107). It is with this phrase that the description of the three zones of Murphy's mind begins. This description testifies to the omniscience of the narrator who apparently has unlimited access to Murphy's mind, as well as to his blasé attitude towards the task at hand. The chapter ends with the narrator offering a declaration of relief and a disclaimer regarding his future intentions: 'This painful duty having now been discharged, no further bulletins will be issued' (*Murphy*, p. 113). Throughout the novel, the narrator constantly draws attention to himself while his identity is never revealed: he could be Beckett, i.e. the author-creator; he could be an omniscient entity invented by, but distinct from Beckett himself; he could be one of the novel's characters.²³ The issue of whether this narrator can be (partly, fully, or not at all) identified with Beckett himself has been subject to critical

²³ The description of Murphy's death in chapter eleven makes it rather unlikely that the narrator should coincide with the protagonist.

speculation.²⁴ The analytic scope of this chapter does not include the issue of whether the author and the narrator can be seen to coincide; instead, my focus is on the effects produced by the self-reflexivity of the narrative as seen in the relationship between the narrator and the protagonist. It may be interesting, however, to explore the dynamics of authority operative in this relationship, in regard to Murphy's dissenting qualities.

5. Murphy versus Realist Conventions

Through the scenes evidencing the narrator's intrusiveness just discussed, narrative authority is at once questioned and asserted, grounding the novel in radical contradiction. Elizabeth Barry argues that Beckett's novels challenge 'authority *per se*' and question the role of (literary) language as a persuasive instrument.²⁵ Barry's argument attends to the complexity of *Murphy* only partially. I would like to posit that, on one hand, 'authority *per se*' is challenged primarily (if not exclusively) through the character of Murphy and through his defiance of socio-economic authority as concretized in the values, norms, and ideas of 'the big world' he so strongly opposes. On the other hand, I believe that authorial authority emerges as a discrete issue in *Murphy*; instead of exemplifying 'the violence of persuasion',²⁶ to use Barry's expression, authority on a textual level is inconsistent regarding its persuasiveness. On one level, the omniscient, opinionated, born-of-Beckett narrator asserts his authority by demonstrating his absolute control over the narrative while, on another level, he undermines it for precisely the same reason; for his voice and his perspective are exposed as capricious constructs within the world of fiction. In this second sense, the technique of the conspicuous narrator can be seen to work contrapuntally with the theme of the social outsider to point towards the limitations of realism. Barry maintains that the theme of the social outsider is generally

²⁴ See, for example, S.C. Steinberg, whose view is that the narrator cannot coincide with Samuel Beckett himself. 'The External and Internal in *Murphy*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol.18, No.2 (Apr. 1972), pp. 93-110 (p. 107).

²⁵ Barry, pp. 14-15.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 15.

characteristic of realist novels, however, she specifies that ‘Murphy’s determination to be, if anything, a kind of anti-type also diverts Beckett’s novel from any of the conventional plots associated with realist fiction’.²⁷ In this chapter I want to argue that Murphy’s position with regards to socially prescribed stereotypes and roles is too conflicted to justify viewing him simply as an ‘anti-type’. For one thing, Murphy conforms and subscribes to self-fashioned stereo-types; he would have been an ‘anti-type’ had he been able to transcend them altogether, instead of being hopelessly entrapped within them. Beckett sets Murphy as more, not less, than a social outsider: his anti-antihero is an antisocial dissenter who aspires to absolute negation of ‘the big world’ in favour of ‘the little world’. Neither a mere outcast ejected by society (for he is seen to actively reject and oppose this society) nor an asocial hermit, (the latter option being, essentially, a conflicted and unfulfilled aspiration) Murphy’s character appears to be caught up in radical, seemingly irresolvable contradiction.

It is not merely through the characterization of its protagonist that *Murphy* challenges both the formal and the ideological precepts of realist fiction. The introduction of Celia in chapter two is a blatant mockery of realist novelistic conventions, specifically, those applying to character description and readers’ expectations. If realist fiction purports to be the mirror of the real world—its faithful reflection—by providing as detailed and lifelike a description of a character as possible, Beckett subverts this idea by taking it to its extreme and turning it into caricature. The character of Celia is introduced in the novel via a table of data that describe her outer appearance in minutest detail:

Age.	Unimportant.
Head.	Small and round.
Eyes.	Green.
Complexion.	White.
Hair.	Yellow.
Features.	Mobile.
Neck.	134 ¾" .
Upper arm.	11". [...]

²⁷ Ibid, p.42.

(*Murphy*, p. 10)

This compartmentalization of Celia's description can be seen as an overt parody of realist fiction's preoccupation with detailed physical description. However, the sheer expansiveness of this table of data (it includes twenty entries) may also be seen to suggest Celia's objectification; it will be soon revealed that she works as a prostitute. As part of her profession, her physical appearance is measured and assessed by the male gaze on a daily basis and her income depends precisely on this measurement and assessment. As MacDonald has remarked with regards to Celia's character, '[...] our initial introduction to her is as a table of physical qualities, as a body broken down into its constituent parts duly measured'. However, he adds that '[t]his reification of Celia, this transformation of her into quantifiable parts, is appropriate because of the actuality she represents but also points at her profession'.²⁸ It could be argued, however, that such 'reification' is actually incongruous with Celia's character and her treatment throughout the novel, seeing as she actually emerges—and not only by comparison to the other characters—as a humane, earthy, sensitive, and dignified persona. Moreover, the conspicuous and often acerbic narrator seems to be treating her with sympathy—with gentleness even—throughout the novel. Celia is never on the receiving end of the narrator's critique, whereas the same cannot be said about Murphy, who gets his share of criticism in chapter nine. Consequently, I believe that the compartmentalization of Celia in the beginning of chapter two is not related to 'the actuality she represents' (although it is strongly suggestive of 'her profession as a prostitute') but is chiefly used to mock realist conventions. Detailed character description is reduced to a caricature, whilst realist fiction's underlying ideological assumption, namely that literary art can and should offer true, accurate, and objective reflections of the world, is openly ridiculed.

²⁸ MacDonald, p. 75.

6. Murphy, Puppets, and Psychiatric Patients: Radical Subjectivity and Radical Contradiction

The role of the narrator is pivotal with regards to the novel's critical edge. The narrator's critique of Murphy's beliefs and values is concentrated in the last third of the novel, and in particular in chapter nine, which relates Murphy's first impressions and experiences as a nurse in Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, a psychiatric clinic. Interestingly, in a letter to Thomas McGreevy, Beckett confessed that he progressively lost patience with his protagonist, as the narrative advanced. His 'treatment of Murphy', he writes, was done 'with the mixture of compassion, patience, mockery and 'tat twam asi' [sic] that I seem to have directed on him throughout, with the sympathy going so far and no further (then losing patience) as in the short statement of his mind's fantasy on itself'.²⁹ 'The short statement of his mind's fantasy on itself' refers to the explanation of the workings of Murphy's mind in chapter six which, as seen earlier, the narrator prepared us for in the very first chapter. And yet, it seems that the narrator cannot suppress a display of sympathy towards Murphy as late as in chapter seven, where he succinctly but strikingly acknowledges the latter's superiority to all the other characters in the novel: 'All the puppets in this book whinge sooner or later, except Murphy, who is not a puppet' (*Murphy*, p. 122). Therefore, prior to having certain of his ideas critiqued in chapter nine, Murphy is distinguished from the other characters on account of his not being 'a puppet'. This is significant, because not being a puppet can be seen to connote independence of thought and action, unconventionality, and defiance in the face of authority; characteristics for which Murphy is never criticized by the narrator. The narrator apparently reserves his criticism for Murphy's delusional ideas, while when it comes to the protagonist's anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist tendencies, he can be seen to not merely spare, but sympathize with him.

All the characters that people *Murphy*, apart from Murphy himself and Celia, are presented not merely as 'puppets' but as caricatures: they are utterly inconsistent (Neary, Wylie); lecherous and depraved (Miss Counihan, Ticklepenny); grotesquely mean (Miss Carridge); physically deformed

²⁹ 'On *Murphy*: Excerpt from a letter of July 17, 1936 to Thomas McGreevy. In *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. by Ruby Cohn (New York, Grove Press, 1984), p. 102. 'Tat tvam asi', which is referred to as 'Tat twam asi' in *Disjecta*, is Sanskrit for 'thou art that'. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/584066/tat-tvam-asi>>

(Miss Dew). Murphy is neither a caricature, nor a puppet; his will to autonomy and his humanity distinguish him from all the others. Even though Celia is exempt from the narrator's critique on account of her humane qualities, she is ultimately a 'puppet', just like the rest of *Murphy's* characters. She might be humane, but she does not aspire to be autonomous of 'the big world', even though her superiority to all the others means that she comes to understand Murphy's incongruity with society. According to Murphy's paradigm, therefore, to be a human being is to be not only humane, but autonomous of 'the big world', or, at the very least, to strive towards and fight for such a kind of autonomy. This is an essential quality that distinguishes Murphy from the other characters in the novel and, by extension, from the social domain, seeing as it ties in with his anti-authoritarian, anti-conformist, and, in a word, radical subjectivity. I will now turn to explore the ways in which Murphy's radical subjectivity—as has thus far been defined—is mired in radical contradiction, as the character remains suspended between the reality of his human nature and the fantasy of his 'little world'. My argument is that this contradiction reaches its climax in chapter nine and is seen to lead Murphy, and the whole novel, into a cul-de-sac in chapter eleven. The unsurpassable contradiction embodied by Murphy's character will be related to the limitations of the novel's critique, as revealed in the intricacies of the relationship between its aesthetics and its socio-politics. From these explorations, my interpretation of Murphy's failure will be delineated and substantiated.

The climactic turn in the novel's critique, from the perspective of this analysis, is marked by Murphy's entrance in the world of work. This event further grounds Murphy in radical contradiction, by highlighting the impossibility of his aspirations and by bringing his wish for absolute autonomy and segregation from the 'colossal fiasco' of the big world to its final end. In chapter five, Murphy meets Ticklepenny, 'a distinguished indigent drunken Irish bard' who has been working in the wards of a psychiatric clinic, the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. Ticklepenny confides in Murphy regarding his fear that if he continues to work in the clinic, he will lose his mind. Then, the turning point occurs:

When Ticklepenny had quite done commiserating himself, in a sniveling antiphony between the cruel necessity of going mad if he stayed and the cruel impossibility of leaving without his wages, Murphy said:

“Supposing you were to produce a substitute of my intelligence” (corrugating his brow) “and physique” (squaring the circle of his shoulders), “what then?” (*Murphy*, p. 92)

In these words, Murphy seals his fate. Ticklepenny delightedly accepts his offer and Murphy enters the world of everyday labour. In chapter nine, he is shown around the psychiatric wards. His first impressions signal his affinity with the world of mental illness, which, to Murphy, is closer to a state of happiness than anything else he has ever experienced in his life:

[the patients] caused Murphy no horror. The most easily identifiable of his immediate feelings were respect and unworthiness. Except for the manic, who was like an epitome of all the self-made plutolaters who ever triumphed over empty pockets and clean hands, the impression he received was of that self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world which he had chosen for himself as the only felicity and achieved so seldom. [...] Murphy was only too anxious to test his striking impression that here was the race of people he had long since despaired of finding. (*Murphy*, pp. 168-169)

Murphy finally discovers the ‘race of people’ whose life paradigm he has all this time been aspiring to emulate. The principles Murphy has been subscribing to have been effectively put into practice by the patients of the clinic, according to the protagonist’s enthusiastic view, at least. The patients embody his ideal: ‘that self-immersed indifference from the contingencies of the contingent world’. A fragment of scathing social criticism is inserted in the above excerpts, referring back to ‘the league of plutomanic caterers’ that has been reviled in chapter five through Murphy’s defrauding tactics. The ‘manic’ patient reminds Murphy of the ‘plutomanic’ enemy: the capitalists who worship material wealth (‘plutolaters’) by morally reprehensible means (‘triumphed over empty pockets and clean hands’ suggests that their pockets get filled with money as their hands get filthy). Apart from this notable exception, however, the rest of the patients remind Murphy of nothing but his ideal of living, the path ‘which he had chosen for himself as the only felicity and achieved so seldom’. As the chapter progresses, more is revealed about Murphy’s aspirations and, gradually, the narrator begins to expose the delusions informing them.

The chapter’s prefatory heading is illuminating in respect of the revelations that are about to occur. A telling hint is given in the form of a quote by Malraux: ‘Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde

de ne pas rechercher les siens' (For him who lives outside the world it is difficult not to seek those of his kind) (*Murphy*, p. 156; my translation). Malraux's quote addresses the outsider's need to discover kinship; to discover, that is, fellow outsiders. Indeed, Murphy is seen in this chapter to experience the sense of belonging he had been desperately longing for. Most importantly, however, this is the chapter where the narrator exposes the delusions lurking behind Murphy's aspirations. As has been seen heretofore in the novel, Murphy's preferred state of being is one completely segregated from the outside world and completely immersed in his mind's 'little world'. In chapter six the narrator informs us (grudgingly, as we have seen earlier) of the structure of Murphy's mind, with its three zones offering different kinds of pleasure. The first zone offers pleasure via 'reprisal' and the second one via 'contemplation'. However, even though '[i]n both of these zones of his private world Murphy felt sovereign and free, in the one to requite himself, in the other to move as he pleased from one unparalleled beatitude to another', it is the third zone, 'the dark', which offers him the experience of being 'a mote in its absolute freedom' (*Murphy*, pp. 111, 112, 113). This is the zone in which Murphy aspires to spend most of his time in (*ibid*, p. 113), the zone of absolute segregation from the outside world. And now, in the psychiatric clinic, he meets a whole 'race' of people who are perpetually stranded in his preferred zone; in his preferred mode of existence. The narrator, however, is merciless in his exposure of Murphy's delusional thoughts:

Nothing remained but to see what he wanted to see. Any fool can turn the blind eye, but who knows what the ostrich sees in the sand?

He would not have admitted that he needed a brotherhood. He did. In the presence of this issue (psychiatric-psychotic) between the life from which he had turned away and the life of which he had no experience, except as he hoped inchoately in himself, he could not fail to side with the latter. His first impressions (always the best), hope of better things, feeling of kindred, etc., had been in that sense. Nothing remained but to substantiate these, distorting all that threatened to belie them. It was strenuous work, but very pleasant. (*Murphy*, p. 176)

In these lines it is not merely Murphy's delusion, per se, that is exposed, as indicated by the metaphor of the ostrich burying its head in the sand. The narrator also suggests how this delusion might be seen to operate and justify itself. According to the narrator, Murphy has not partaken of the realm of absolute segregation from the outside world, 'except as he [has] hoped inchoately in himself'. Yet,

this is the realm with which he aligns himself. The only thing he needs to do, always according to the narrator, is 'to substantiate [his first impressions], distorting all that threatened to belie them'. In other words, Murphy only needs to create and believe in a false image of reality. If his impressions are threatened by reality, it is reality that needs to be modified. The narrator continues:

Thus it was necessary that every hour in the wards should increase, together with his esteem for the patients, his loathing of the text-book attitude towards them, the complacent scientific conceptualism that made contact with outer reality the index of mental well-being. Every hour did. [...] On this [scientific] basis the patients were described as "cut off" from reality, from the rudimentary blessings of the layman's reality, if not altogether [...] The function of treatment was to bridge the gulf, translate the sufferer from his own pernicious little private dunghill to the glorious world of discrete particles, where it would be his inestimable prerogative once again to wonder, love, hate, desire, rejoice and howl in a reasonable balanced manner, and comfort himself with the society of others in the same predicament. (*Murphy*, pp. 176-177)

Here, the narrator suggests it is 'necessary' that Murphy's idealization of the patients be accompanied by a commensurate disdain for the scientific approach to mental illness; in other words, for the sanctioned attitude towards mental disorder, as prescribed by the authority of psychiatric institutions.

Murphy's opposition to the various facets of the established order and their accompanying values is therefore given yet another chance to manifest itself. The confined disorder with which he comes face to face in the psychiatric clinic lures Murphy in and awakens in him a sense of kinship and belonging not with the psychiatrists, the emblems of authority and rationality who try to exert control over disorder, but with those who embody psycho-social disorder instead. Against the established order exemplified by the psychiatric institution, whereby mental illness is treated as a deviancy that needs to be confined and rectified by treatment so that reintegration into the social world can be achieved, Murphy sanctions his own view of mental illness. He revolts against the world of established, authoritative rationality which seeks to correct patterns of irrational human behaviour so that those thus misbehaving can be reintroduced to the realm of proper, normal conduct. The psychiatric clinic seeks to rehabilitate the patients, so that they can once again partake of 'the glorious world of discrete particles' where everything can be appropriately ordered and neatly classified. Murphy does not recognize any humaneness or kindness in such efforts. To him, the ability of the

rehabilitated sufferer 'to wonder, love, hate, desire, rejoice and howl in a reasonable balanced manner, and comfort himself with the society of others' is not a 'prerogative' but a 'predicament'.

All this was duly revolting to Murphy, whose experience as a physical and rational being obliged him to call sanctuary what the psychiatrists called exile and to think of the patients not as banished from a system of benefits but as escaped from a colossal fiasco. If his mind had been on the correct cash-register lines, an indefatigable apparatus for doing sums with the petty cash of current facts, then no doubt the suppression of these would have seemed a deprivation. But since it was not, since what he called his mind functioned not as an instrument but as a place, from whose unique delights precisely those current facts withheld him, was it not most natural that he should welcome their suppression, as of gyves? (*Murphy*, pp. 177-178)

This is the true 'prerogative' according to Murphy: to have 'escaped from [the] colossal fiasco' of the social world. This is his ultimate aspiration, marvelously, albeit unwittingly, put into practice by the patients. Murphy thinks the only source of discomfort for the patients comes from the realm of the normal social order, represented by the doctors and nurses who try to interfere with those stranded in the little world. Those efforts are condemned as injurious intrusions on the part of the established authority of sanity and normalcy, an authority strongly opposed by Murphy. Both the practice and the informing ideology of treatment are challenged by him whose mind is compared to a 'cash-register' and found guilty of malfunctioning, being unable to correctly calculate 'the petty cash of current facts'. Murphy's mind does not have any regard for such 'facts'; it opposes instrumental logic by refusing to operate as a mere 'instrument'. The 'correct' logic of instrumentalism, of functionality, of rational conduct, is once again challenged here. Murphy's mind, for its part, defends its right to operate incorrectly, to not be instrumentalized. If the outside world is nothing but a 'fiasco', it seems understandable indeed that Murphy should strive to not be 'withheld' by its 'facts'.

7. Murphy's Limitations and the Narrator's Exasperation

In laying out Murphy's anti-authoritarian, anti-establishment mentality vis-à-vis the psychiatric institution, in showing his alignment with those rejected by society on account of not subscribing to its standards of acceptable, normal behavior, the narrator is laying out a critique of the oppressive rationality of the established order. This, however, is merely Murphy's limited perspective. The

narrator begins to lose patience with him and seems determined to expose the aestheticization and idealization of mental disorder by a delusion-bound Murphy who, moreover, projects his own delusions upon the specificity of the situation he encounters in the clinic. This is illustrated in the following excerpt, which calls attention to the irresolvability of the contradiction Murphy embodies:

The issue therefore, as lovingly simplified and perverted by Murphy, lay between nothing less fundamental than the big world and the little world, decided by the patients in favour of the latter, revived by the psychiatrists on behalf of the former, in his own case unresolved. In fact, it was unresolved, only in fact. His vote was cast. "I am not of the big world, I am of the little world" was an old refrain with Murphy, and a conviction, two convictions, the negative first. How should he tolerate, let alone cultivate, the occasions of fiasco, having once beheld the beatific idols of his cave? In the beautiful Belgo-Latin of Arnold Geulincx: *Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis.* (*Murphy*, p. 178)

The extensive representation of 'the big world' in *Murphy* is a thoroughly uncomplimentary one, as has been seen. However, the increasing exposure of Murphy's delusional idealization of insanity can be seen to diminish, at least to a degree, his critique of the psychiatrists' authority as arbitrary, oppressive, and misinformed. For it appears that Murphy's views are misinformed; heavily influenced by his own situation of radical contradiction, whereby he remains suspended between the big and the little world, unable to fully abjure the former in favour of the latter.

Moreover, to aspire to the 'will-lessness' of the dark zone of absolute freedom, as described in chapter six, a will-lessness achieved by the patients ('*ubi nihil vales ibi nihil velis*'; where you are worth nothing, there you should want nothing), seems a contradiction in terms. It is not out of choice that the patients are left without any will; Murphy, on the contrary, is ruled by his irrepressible will to become like them. The walls of contradiction seem to be closing in on him. Also, as ironically stated by the narrator in the above excerpt, for Murphy the conflict between the two worlds was 'unresolved, only in fact'. In theory, that is, Murphy had repudiated the former and sided firmly with the latter. His strictly theoretical commitment to the little world, however, appears more and more problematic when compared to the practical, actual, and will-less commitment exemplified by the inmates of the asylum. It is this comparison, I would argue, that brings Murphy's aspirations and delusions alike to their final end, which can only be death. Before this end is reached, however, Murphy's realization of the irresolvable nature of his conflict is established:

But it was not enough to want nothing where he was worth nothing, nor even to take the further step of renouncing all that lay outside the intellectual love in which alone he could love himself, because there alone he was lovable. It had not been enough and showed no signs of being enough. These dispositions and others ancillary, pressing every available means (e.g. the rocking-chair) into their service, could sway the issue in the desired direction, but not clinch it. It continued to divide him, as witness his deplorable susceptibility to Celia, ginger, and so on. The means of clinching it were lacking. (*Murphy*, p. 179)

In this excerpt, Murphy's limitations are causally linked with his being all-too-human. Essentially, Murphy's attachment to the big world is acknowledged: 'his deplorable susceptibility to Celia, ginger, and so on'. His renunciation of the big world can only be temporary; it would only be secured if he were to 'take the further step' and forsake his attachment to the pleasures the everyday world has to offer. Murphy, however, lacks the 'means' of securing his renunciation and his failure seems to derive from his all-too-human character. Most importantly, it is 'not enough' for him to love himself in the dark zone of his mind. He still needs human interaction and human affection. It could be argued that he projects this need onto the patients, in the recognition of his feelings of kinship towards them. It is in human nature, however, to desire that such affinity be reciprocated. And such a desire, manifested in Murphy's unilateral relationship with a patient called Mister Endon, further contributes to the attachment to 'all that lay outside' himself.

The idea that Murphy's thoughts and feelings about the patients might be terribly misguided is suggested, of course, by the narrator, who is now unsparing in his critique:

The frequent expressions apparently of pain, rage, despair and in fact all the usual, to which some patients gave vent, suggesting a fly somewhere in the ointment of Microcosmos, Murphy either disregarded or muted to mean what he wanted [...] even if the patients did sometimes feel as lousy as they sometimes looked, still no aspersion was necessarily cast on the little world where Murphy presupposed them, one and all, to be having a glorious time. One had merely to ascribe their agitations, not to any flaw in their self-seclusion, but to its investment by the healers. (*Murphy*, pp. 179-180)

Clearly, the narrator has despaired of Murphy, whose anti-authoritarian tendencies seem to know no bounds. The narrator did not criticize Murphy's anti-authoritarianism when it was directed at social and economic injustices. He did not make any disparaging remarks about Murphy's aversion to the everyday world of productivity, profit, functionality, exchange logic, and instrumental rationality.

And now, in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, it is not Murphy's objection to the psychiatric institution that arouses the narrator's exasperation. The narrator seems to be calling attention to Murphy's insistence of viewing the patients as emblems of happiness and perfection. Essentially, it is the romanticizing of the patients' real suffering that seems to be the bone of contention here. Murphy can be seen to be appropriating the patients' suffering and treating it as part of his fantasy of perfection. Such an appropriation is almost hubristic in its premise. It is not Murphy's dissent, in any of the guises it adopts throughout the novel, that is exposed as misinformed or hubristic. When it comes to the idealization of insanity, however, the narrator disapproves of Murphy's being '[s]timulated by all those lives immured in mind, as he insisted on supposing [...]' (*Murphy*, p. 180). Moreover, the narrator's critical intrusions throughout chapter nine draw attention to the fact that Murphy's radical subjectivity is mired in irresolvable contradiction. This contradiction is taken to its final end in chapter eleven, where Murphy himself realizes, through an epiphanic experience, that between the reality of his human nature and the fantasy of his 'little world' there is an unbridgeable gap.

8. Murphy's Epiphany and Failure

Eventually, Murphy's idealized and romanticized view of insanity finds a specific target: a patient called Mr. Endon, marked by his peaceful apathy and complete inability to communicate with other people. Beckett writes: '[i]n short, a psychosis so limpid and imperturbable that Murphy felt drawn to it as Narcissus to his fountain' (ibid, p. 186). This simile is used in chapter nine, when Murphy's attachment to Mr. Endon begins to manifest itself: 'He was sorry for himself, very sorry, when eight o'clock came and he had to leave the wards, Mr. Endon and the lesser friends and exemplars [...]' (ibid, p. 188). The simile seems to be as apt as it is portentous, as will soon after be revealed. The ominous reference to the mythological Narcissus, who drowned because he could not resist kissing his

own reflection in the water, is anything but fortuitous.³⁰ With both his partiality to Mr. Endon and this partiality's ominous undertones having been suggested, Murphy in chapter eleven has an epiphanic experience. A game of chess ends, between Murphy and Mr. Endon, without the latter having acknowledged the former's presence in any way. This apparently induces Murphy's stupor, in which he immerses himself in nothingness:

Time did not cease, that would be asking too much, but the wheel of rounds and pauses did, as Murphy with his head among the armies continued to suck in, through all the posterns of his withered soul, the accidentless One-and-Only, conveniently called Nothing. Then this also vanished, or perhaps simply came asunder [...] and Murphy saw that Mr. Endon was missing. (*Murphy*, p. 246)

After finding Mr. Endon and bringing him back to his padded cell, Murphy gazes deeply into his patient's eyes. This marks Murphy's last encounter with Mr. Endon and with the world of the living in general. Murphy has already realized, in that last game of chess, that the nothingness embodied by Mr. Endon is the nothingness Murphy can only glimpse at. To embody it, he would have to cut himself off, completely, from the outside world. The meaning behind Murphy's aspiration to become like the patients was intimated in chapter nine: 'nothing less than a slap-up psychosis would consummate his life's strike' (*Murphy*, p. 184). And yet, Murphy cannot become mentally ill merely through aspiration. As will be seen, not even the fruit of his epiphany, unbearable as it is, will be able to turn him insane. It will, however, signal his descent into a state of profound disorder. The following scene revisits the myth of Narcissus, with Murphy

seeing himself stigmatized in those eyes that did not see him, Murphy heard words demanding so strongly to be spoken that he spoke them, right into Mr. Endon's face, Murphy who did not speak at all in the ordinary unless spoken to, and not always even then.

(Murphy) "the last at last seen of him

himself unseen by him

and of himself"

³⁰ Apparently, there are several versions of the ancient myth of Narcissus; however, the common denominator in all of them (which is also the pivotal factor with regard to Murphy's case) is that the mythological hero dies as a result of having seen his own reflection in the water. I will readdress this myth when discussing Murphy's experience of epiphany.

(Narrator) A rest.

(Murphy) “The last Mr. Murphy saw of Mr. Endon was Mr. Murphy unseen by Mr. Endon. This was also the last Murphy saw of Murphy.”

(Narrator) A rest.

(Murphy) “The relation between Mr. Murphy and Mr. Endon could not have been better summed up than by the former’s sorrow at seeing himself in the latter’s immunity from seeing anything but himself.”

(Narrator) A long rest.

(Murphy) “Mr. Murphy is a speck in Mr. Endon’s unseen.”

(Narrator) That was the whole extent of the little afflatulence. He replaced Mr. Endon’s head firmly on the pillow, rose from his knees, left the cell, and the building, without reluctance and without relief. (*Murphy*, pp. 249-250)

As the narrator explains, this experience is of such momentousness that it demands to be spoken out, to be expressed in words. And the words uttered by Murphy himself mark a surprising, albeit fugacious, transmutation: Murphy narrates what he has just experienced, referring to himself in the third person, and addressing no one in particular. This is the first and only time in the novel when Murphy becomes the narrator of his story. A striking confluence of narrative voice and narrative role is occurring here, as Murphy refers to his experience in the third person, with the detachment of a narrator other than himself, while the other narrator is still present in the text. Absolute paradox is achieved when Murphy portends his own death, which occurs a few hours after his last encounter with Mr. Endon. As a detached narrator of his own story, Murphy apparently becomes omniscient regarding his own fate.

The implications of Murphy’s momentary hijacking of the narrator’s role to relate his epiphany are as revelatory regarding the novel’s limitations, on the level of literary aesthetics, as they are regarding the unsurpassable contradiction embodied by Murphy. The myth of Narcissus is revisited when Murphy gazes into Mr. Endon’s eyes to discover nothing but his own reflection. The unbearable truth Murphy is made to finally face is shown in the image of himself reflected back at him, whereupon he realizes that unless he becomes clinically insane, like Mr. Endon, he will not be able to permanently reside in the realm of nothingness. For Murphy, of course, the realm of nothingness is also the realm of unperturbed (and perhaps narcissistic) self-love. It could be posited that Murphy’s inability to

surrender to nothingness, to the 'dark' zone of his mind, is inextricably linked with the limitations in which the novel itself is bound. I would like to suggest, however, that to argue this is different than to say that Murphy's failure mirrors the novel's failure. Federman has interpreted Murphy's failure in artistic/creative terms:

Murphy is not suffering from a lapse of memory—memory in Beckett's universe is not essential to creativity—but from a lack of creative consciousness. [...] [He] does not achieve the objective correlative of [Beckett's] French heroes. By refusing to accept the fictional predicament, Murphy fails to bypass the limits of realism, to transcend the human condition. And because he has neither gone mad nor apprehended the essential terms of creativity, he cannot remain among the lunatics.³¹

In this light, Murphy fails because of a lack of 'creative consciousness', which means that he cannot be like the later Beckettian characters, who 'claim the fiction as their own'.³² This is why Murphy 'fails to bypass the limits of realism'. For Federman, the protagonist's confusion after his last encounter with Mr. Endon testifies to his failure to create his own story: 'He tried with the men, women, children and animals that belong to even worse stories than his. In vain in all cases. He could not get a picture in his mind of any creature he had met, animal or human' (*Murphy*, pp. 252-252). For Federman, then, Murphy's failure to become a creator mirrors the limitations of the novel's aesthetics. The line of argument pursued in this chapter, however, can be best explained by looking at Murphy's post-epiphanic confusion in a different light.

The disorder experienced by Murphy after his last encounter with Mr. Endon is indicative of a failure, indeed. I would like to suggest that this failure resides not in his inability to become a creator/artist, but in his inability to either anchor himself in the outside world, or forswear it completely. After having experienced nothingness vicariously, through Mr. Endon, and found it terrifying, Murphy tries desperately to reconnect with the outside world—and fails. But then, his own mind begins to fail him. He is lost in confusion, unable to control his thoughts anymore. For a while he remains suspended, neither here nor there. He used to be able to leave the outside world at will and

³¹ Federman, p. 91.

³² Ibid, p. 91.

enjoy perfect serenity and freedom in the world of his mind. This is not possible at this point; the world of his mind, following the glimpse of true insanity, is agitated beyond control. The mishmash of involuntary mental thoughts he experiences after his epiphany suggests the loss of his grip on reality/sanity and the following lines depict the battle being waged inside Murphy's mind between insanity, represented by Mr. Endon, and sanity, represented by all the creatures he has ever known:

He saw eyeballs being scraped, first any eyeballs, then Mr. Endon's. He tried again with his father, his mother, Celia, Wylie, Neary, Cooper, Miss Dew, Miss Carridge, Nelly, the sheep, the chandlers, even Bom and Co., even Bim, even Ticklepenny and Miss Counihan, even Mr. Quigley. He tried with the men, women, children and animals that belong to even worse stories than his. In vain in all cases. He could not get a picture in his mind of any creature he had met, animal or human. Scraps of bodies, of landscapes, hands, eyes, lines and colours evoking nothing, rose and climbed out of sight before him, as though reeled upward through a spool level with his throat. It was his experience that this should be stopped, whenever possible, before the deeper coils were reached. (*Murphy*, pp. 251-252)

Murphy's repeated, despairing attempts to 'get a picture in his mind of any creature he had met, animal or human' testifies to his fear of the possibility of exiting the outside world completely. Murphy had idealized insanity and aspired to its paradigm of absolute separation from the outside, real world. He has been made to realize, however, that reaching 'the deeper coils' of mental disorder means losing his link to sanity and becoming like Mr. Endon. Thence it is that Murphy tries, albeit 'dimly', to make plans to leave the hospital. In the following lines he seems to be plotting to leave his work at the clinic and return to his life with Celia, but his thoughts are faint and blurred:

He drew up the ladder, lit the dip scone in its own grease on the floor, and tied himself up in the chair, dimly intending to have a short rock and then, if he felt any better, to dress and go, before the day staff were about [...] back to Brewery Road, to Celia, serenade, nocturne, albada. Dimly, very dimly. (*Murphy*, p. 252)

Murphy seems to realize that the outside world—the everyday world he always recoiled from—is the only thing that can now keep him connected to his sanity. Interestingly, here Beckett is using the same words and sentence structure ('dimly [...] dimly, very dimly') that he had used in the opening pages of his novel in reference to his protagonist's weak connection to the world of productivity and commerce, the world ruled by the logic of equal exchange: 'These were sights and sounds that he did

not like. They detained him in the world to which they belonged but not he, as he fondly hoped. He wondered dimly what was breaking up his sunlight, what wares were being cried. Dimly, very dimly' (*Murphy*, p. 2). At both points in the novel, Murphy's connection to the outside world is shown to be loose. However, there is a pivotal difference between the two excerpts. At the beginning of the novel the outside world was seen by Murphy as a nuisance and an intrusion into the placid pleasures only his mind could offer. Now, however, in his hour of disorientation and fear, Murphy has been trying to hang on to the realities of the outside world as a drowning man to his life jacket. In an ironic reversal, his inability to trade, once and for all, the outside world for the realm of nothingness could at this point be regarded as his last weapon against 'the deeper coils' of true insanity. Federman posits that 'Murphy's greatest disappointment occurs a few moments before his death when, after the absurd chess game with the schizophrenic Mr. Endon, he almost experiences perfect mental disorder, and yet does not grasp its potentialities'.³³ I would argue that it is precisely because Murphy momentarily seizes the real 'potentialities' of mental illness that his worldview collapses and he finds himself suspended, more vertiginously than ever before, between his mind and the real world. What Murphy fails to transcend is not realism, as suggested by Federman, but his ongoing oscillation between the world of reality and the world of his own mind.

Murphy's confusing suspension in-between these two worlds is encapsulated in his relationship with Mr. Endon. Murphy wished to be acknowledged by Mr. Endon; he longed for his presence to be recognized and his feeling of kinship to be reciprocated. The following sentence, whereby Murphy speaks as the narrator of his own story, summarizes this: 'The relation between Mr. Murphy and Mr. Endon could not have been better summed up than by the former's sorrow at seeing himself in the latter's immunity from seeing anything but himself' (*Murphy*, p. 250). Strangely enough, the qualities that drew Murphy to Mr. Endon in the first instance, always in the context of the former's idealization of insanity, are precisely those that prohibit any connection between the two of them. It is utterly contradictory to be enraptured by the perfect serenity associated with severance from the outside world, yet to wish that this severance could be temporarily broken so as to allow for

³³ Ibid, p. 90.

human contact. In the reality of mental disorder, such a thing could not have happened and such a wish could not have been granted. And this is an intolerable truth for Murphy, who thought he had discovered ‘les siens’ (‘those of his kind’) but wanted to be acknowledged, in his turn, as one of them. Severance, however, is absolute, or is not severance at all. Murphy is proven all-too-normal (and all-too-sane) for such a fate. Perhaps the contradictions embodied by Murphy could be seen to meet their conclusion, if not exactly their resolution, in his death. Death, whether accidental or premeditated,³⁴ meets Murphy before he gets the chance to return ‘back to Brewery Road, to Celia’. As the utmost manifestation and confirmation of the finitude of every human being, death can be seen to seal Murphy’s realization of his limitations—of his all-too-human nature. In all, by the time Murphy’s last night in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat has been thus concluded, both the realities of mental disorder and the delusions of Murphy’s worldview have been foregrounded. And yet, the exposure of the flaws in Murphy’s logic and of his human limitations does not delegitimize his dissent. Murphy’s view of ‘the healers’ in Magdalen Mental Mercyseat as the unworthy guardians of rationality, as the oppressors of deviancy, can still be regarded as a critique of the ideology behind the institutionalization of insanity. If Murphy’s ‘little world’, with all of its aspirations, ideals, and delusions, has been exposed as a little fiasco, the ‘colossal fiasco’ is still ‘the big world’—ruled by the advocates and establishers of normative rationality.

9. Interpenetrations of Aesthetics and Anticapitalist Critique in *Murphy*

What needs to be addressed now is the ways Murphy’s dissent and anti-capitalist critique are entangled with Beckett’s aesthetic choices. I would like to once again emphasize the argument that Murphy’s dissent throughout the novel can be discerned precisely in his interactions and negotiations with the outside world—indeed, it is not found in the realm of nothingness, i.e. of absolute separation

³⁴ Whether Murphy dies by suicide or by accident is an issue that remains deliberately unresolved in the novel. On one hand, gas could have easily been released by someone else’s mistake (the flow of gas was regulated in the w.c.). On the other, a will is found after Murphy’s death, indicating the precise manner in which the protagonist wanted his ashes to be disposed of. Of course, this hardly counts as a suicide note. Overall, while it is established that Murphy dies by gas asphyxiation, it remains unclear whether his death was self-induced or not.

from society, that later Beckettian characters will access. In contrast, then, to Federman's view, according to which Beckett's radicalism is directly proportional to the de-socialization of his protagonists, this chapter suggests that the discernible material context of *Murphy* is precisely what feeds the flames of the protagonist's dissent. The outside world is not vaguely hinted at or draped in obscurity, but found in a specific, realistically described urban setting, that of London as a 1930s capitalist metropolis; it is peopled by 'plutomanic caterers' and 'sweated labour', oppressive healers and institutionalized 'madmen'; its primary, ruling values are normative rationality, productivity, functionality, profiteering, and law-abiding, hardworking bourgeois respectability. The social realm, faded into a mere shadow in Beckett's later fiction, is here sketched in clear, sharp lines, and contested. Murphy's experience of the nothingness, whereby the social realm dwindles away and subjectivity is utterly destabilized, is merely cursory; brief glimpses that cannot be sustained. Perhaps it is not merely the narrator who loses patience with Murphy, but Beckett, who cannot yet allow his protagonist to submerge himself in the realm of nothingness, a realm from and of which his later novelistic characters speak, as opposed to being spoken for. The question is, in all, whether, and how, Murphy's limitations, as well as the import of his critique, relate to Beckettian aesthetics. To address this question, it might be useful to revisit Adorno's discussion of Beckett in *Aesthetic Theory*.

To begin with, this reference to Adorno's views on the impenetrability of aesthetics could be related to the approach to *Murphy* undertaken in this chapter. When Adorno discusses Beckett's works in *Aesthetic Theory*, he maintains that they operate at the level of total social negation; the 'ground zero', as he calls it, or the ground nothing, as it might also be referred to, of the social self:

[Beckett's] narratives, which he sardonically calls novels, no more offer objective descriptions of social reality than—as the widespread misunderstanding supposes—they present the reduction of life to basic human relationships, that minimum of existence that subsists *in extremis*. These novels do, however, touch on fundamental layers of experience *hic et nunc*, which are brought together into a paradoxical dynamic at a standstill. The narratives are marked as much by an objectively motivated loss of the object as by its correlative, the impoverishment of the subject. Beckett draws the lesson from montage and documentation, from all the attempts to free oneself from the illusion of a subjectivity that bestows meaning.³⁵

³⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (New York and London: Continuum, 2004 [1970]), p. 39. On that same page, Adorno applies the phrase 'ground zero' to Beckett's work.

This is the level at which Beckett's later fictional works operate: the referent, i.e. the social world, is lost there, and in this loss 'the subject' is also dissolved. It could be posited that the later Beckett takes the implications of the techniques of 'montage and documentation'—techniques employed, as seen in the first chapter of this study, in *Manhattan Transfer*, to suggest fragmentation and alienation in the domain of society and the inner self—to their ultimate level; the level of absolute nothingness, whereby subjectivity and meaning are either dead, or dying. It is this 'ground zero' that Beckett has allowed his narratives and characters to navigate in novels such as *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*, where the social setting is vanished, the speaking voices subvert the notion of unified subjectivity, and meaninglessness holds sway. It could be suggested, then, that prior to segregating his characters from society as we know it, prior indeed to entrusting them to the level of absolute negation of society as explained by Adorno, Beckett offers a novel which still navigates and negotiates the conflict between the outer, social world and the inner world of the mind. Moreover, the annihilation of meaning which is, again, so characterizing of Beckett's later works, is still being contested in *Murphy*, as the protagonist's desire to recoil from the social world (and its meanings) remains maddeningly entangled with his attachment to it. To adapt Adorno's phraseology to my argument, *Murphy*'s narrative world is anchored not merely in a persisting 'object' or referent, i.e. the recognizable social world, but also in 'its correlative', i.e. meaning-bestowing subjectivity, even though the limitations and failures of the protagonist's subjectivity are inevitably revealed. And even though Beckett preserves and presents a recognizable social reality in *Murphy*, he does not 'offer objective descriptions of it'. Moreover, as I argue, social reality can be seen to function as a background against which Murphy's subjectivity can be delineated and understood not merely in its conflicts but in its dissenting qualities as well.

Discussing 'the manifest annihilation of reality' in Beckett's oeuvre, Adorno posits: 'The more total society becomes, the more completely it contracts to a unanimous system, and all the more do the artworks in which this experience is sedimented become the other of this society'.³⁶ This description, so apt for Beckett's *Trilogy*, does not apply to *Murphy*, where the social world has clearly

³⁶ *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 39.

not contracted into a totalized otherness. I would argue that the pivotal event for the occurrence of this contraction is World War Two which, interestingly, leads both Adorno and Beckett (the former in his theoretical writings and the latter in his literary art) to increasingly address the loss of meaning-bestowing subjectivity (as channeled through art in particular) in a ravaged, vanishing social realm (post-war Europe being an obvious model for this). Moreover, on the question of how artworks can be seen to subvert ‘the principle of exchange’ in which ‘domination is masked’, Adorno maintains: ‘A liberated society would be beyond [...] the ends-means-rationality of utility. This is enciphered in art and is the source of art’s social explosiveness’.³⁷ A pivotal argument that permeates Adorno’s theory of aesthetics through and through, it suggests the subversive potential inherent in artistic form alone: ‘Real denunciation is probably only a capacity of form, which is overlooked by a social aesthetic that believes in themes. What is socially decisive in artworks is the content [Inhalt] that becomes eloquent through the work’s formal structures’.³⁸ In the animating argument of this chapter, however, subversive challenge towards utilitarian logic is exemplified both aesthetically and thematically in *Murphy*, for utilitarianism is one amongst several bourgeois values, all of them specifically addressed in the text, that are denounced by Beckett’s protagonist. Yet, it appears to be the case that *Murphy*’s literary aesthetics, on one hand, and its rhetoric of dissent and anti-capitalist sentiment, on the other, always work contrapuntally in the text. When the narrator critiques Murphy’s delusions, he is critiquing precisely the weaknesses and limitations of the hero’s dissent, rather than dissent at large. Seeing as *Murphy* is a novel mired in contradiction, the protagonist’s rhetoric of dissent cannot be grasped separately from its (and his) limitations.

10. Subverting High Modernism: Subverting Bourgeois Normativity?

Murphy could be viewed as a literary vessel of subversion on several different levels. I will now move on to discuss the ways in which the novel can be seen to subvert high modernist norms and bourgeois

³⁷ Ibid, p. 298.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 301.

expectations through the self-reflexivity of its language. While self-reflexivity figures predominantly in modernist art, Beckett is using it not only to defamiliarize the mundane everyday (an effect which will be addressed later on) but also to undermine the authority of *Murphy* as a novel. One might go so far as to suggest that self-reflexivity is not merely a technique; it becomes a theme. By constantly calling attention to its artificiality, *Murphy* is challenging the authority of fiction at large. This latter effect is arguably less congruous within the high modernist framework, within which the authority of the novel is often safeguarded and treasured, and more akin, perhaps, to an incipient proto-postmodern perspective contesting that inviolable quality.³⁹ *Murphy*'s playful nonconformism might seem largely unorthodox when compared to examples of undisputed authority in modernist fiction. Such is, I believe, the case in the fiction of Joyce or Woolf, to name but two eminent authors in the high modernist canon. As Elizabeth Barry has remarked, '[i]t is not just Joyce's stylistic virtuosity that Beckett eschews, but any trace of omnipotence in the narrative voice'.⁴⁰ The reader of *Ulysses* or *The Waves* is not given any reason to break the spell of the narrative voice and regard it as what it really is: a piece of work created by human intellect. *Murphy*'s reader, on the other hand, is constantly being reminded of the artificiality of fiction. Such a reminder could prove perturbing from the point of view—or, even better, from the point of readership—of the 'cultivated reader', which is actually the expression used by *Murphy*'s narrator to disparage the purported refinement of the bourgeois consumer of novels (*Murphy*, p. 118). Perhaps Beckett is implicitly suggesting that *Murphy*'s readers are faced with a choice: either to identify with a progressive kind of 'cultivation', which would entail

³⁹ Another aspect of *Murphy*'s literary aesthetics which seems to link the novel to proto-postmodern textual practices is the play on the structure of a traditional detective novel. Stripped of its often surreal content and caricatured characters, *Murphy*'s plot appears to be a mock-imitation of that of a traditional detective novel (Neary, Wylie, Miss Counihan, and Cooper are all looking for Murphy; when they finally get to him, he is dead). In postmodern art, the 'divide' between high- and low-brow cultures begins to fade, as forms of popular, mass culture are enthusiastically accepted and used (often with parodying intent). On the question of whether Postmodernism indicates a shift 'from Elite to Mass Culture', see 'Postmodernism: from Elite to Mass Culture?' in *Postmodern Arts*, ed. by Nigel Wheale (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 33-56. The 'great divide' often perceived as existing between modernist and postmodern cultural forms is famously discussed by Andreas Huyssen in *After the Great Divide* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986). With its mixture of modernist and proto-postmodern technique as well as its defiant, challenging attitude towards both, *Murphy* can be seen to contest this 'great divide'.

⁴⁰ Barry, p.31.

an acceptance of the novel's technique of self-reflexivity, or with a regressive kind of 'cultivation', which would be unwilling to forswear the authority of modernist fiction for the sake of proto-postmodern play.

Barry's study of Beckett around the concept of authority has called attention to the author's subversive use of clichéd language: 'Beckett's resistance to the expectations of the bourgeois literary product is communicated through his manipulation of its cliché, be these local, verbal expressions or larger narrative gestures.'⁴¹ I view Beckett's use of cliché in *Murphy* as a linguistic accompaniment to his protagonist's revolt against bourgeois stereotypes. Once again, thematic and aesthetic concerns in *Murphy* are involved in a relationship of critically charged interpenetration. While bourgeois norms and values are being contested by Murphy's character, there is a complementary contestation taking place at the level of language. The narrator apparently delights in the inventive distortion of pearls of popular wisdom; idiomatic phrases, aphorisms, and proverbs are manipulated in a way that still allows their original form to be discerned and familiarity is thereby given a strange twist. In his study of 'Samuel Beckett's Revised Aphorisms', Rubin Rabinovitz makes an illuminating suggestion:

Cliché is language dulled by habit, and it similarly creates the barrier that insulates us from the suffering of being. Stereotyped ideas and formulaic language obscure whatever might be glimpsed of the harsh but elusive reality that should be the goal of serious artists and thinkers.⁴²

Clichéd usage of language erects a wall between us and reality, whereas the subversion of cliché might reveal what 'habit' had hitherto obscured from us. After referencing several examples of language games in *Murphy*, Begam remarks: 'Verbal play of this kind has the larger effect of suggesting that there is nothing beyond language'.⁴³ At the same time, the reading of *Murphy* undertaken in this chapter suggests that language is merely a means, and a finite one at that. By turning the familiar and the stereotypical on its head, the novel shows how conventional usage of

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 27.

⁴² Rubin Rabinovitz, 'Samuel Beckett's Revised Aphorisms', in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol.36, No.2 (Summer 1995), pp. 203-225 (p. 218).

⁴³ Begam, p. 64.

language hinders our knowledge of, and our access to, what may lie ‘beyond’ it. Arguably, this ‘beyond’ in *Murphy* includes the possibility of transcending the ever-same, and the ever-conventional. As an obvious illustration of this argument, the novel’s opening sentence reads: ‘The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new’ (*Murphy*, p. 1) which, as pointed out by Rabinovitz, echoes the Biblical ‘there is no new thing under the sun’.⁴⁴ By using a clichéd expression to suggest the personified sun’s lack of choice and dissociation from the idea of novelty, *Murphy*’s narrator emphasizes, from the novel’s very first lines, the inescapable banality of man’s existence. In another example the narrator twists another Biblical phrasing, ‘[i]n the beginning was the Word’, into ‘in the beginning was the pun’ (*Murphy*, p. 222); the latter phrase perhaps encapsulating in a few words the centrality of wordplay throughout the novel. And when the narrator addresses the proverbial ‘gentle reader’ as ‘gentle skimmer’, it could be argued that the latter’s sensibilities are dealt a not-so-gentle blow. A generalized mistrust is thereby conveyed towards conventional language use that caters to the normative rationality of the bourgeoisie. Against an ossified language blunted by habit, *Murphy* posits the possibility of playful linguistic inventiveness and critical challenge. To distort well-known, well-renowned phrases in *Murphy* is to divest them of their conventionality and predictability; this, in my line of argument, does not glorify language as an omnipotent absolute, but shows how it can be manipulated to challenge the otherwise unquestioned conventionalities of bourgeois language.

11. *Murphy* Versus the Socio-Literary Landscape of the 1930s

This defamiliarization of the habitual everyday via the self-reflexivity of literary language can be seen to link *Murphy* to experimental literature. In the literary landscape of the 1930s, however, modernist experimentation was considered a relic of the past and the ground seemed to be set for committed literature. David Weisberg offers the following description of that socio-literary context:

Jolas’s belief that by 1938 [the year *Murphy* was finally published] “abstract” experimental literature was pointless can be justifiably interpreted as a belated confession of artistic failure; years earlier, authors such as Auden, Orwell, Malraux, Gide, and Aragon (the list goes on) had

⁴⁴ Rabinovitz, p. 211.

already decided that writers should abandon this aesthetic “daydream” and actively take a stand in their writing against fascism, capitalist imperialism, and totalitarianism.⁴⁵

Beckett never was one to ‘actively take [that] stand’ and he refused to use fiction as a vehicle for the expression of his political commitment.⁴⁶ The socio-political import of his works is conspicuously encrypted. *Murphy*, in particular, is brimming with aesthetic play, with technical experimentation and this quality might have detracted from the stridency of its critique. Weisberg relates ‘Beckett’s difficulty in finding a British publisher for his first novel’ to the context of ‘the cultural politics of the 1930s’, suggesting that ‘[i]f publishers were reluctant to publish *Murphy*, it was because [...] it seemed a remnant of the modernism of the previous decade, irrelevant to the urgently communicative, politically charged tendential writing of the thirties’.⁴⁷ From a contemporary vantage point, the call for polemical literature in the 1930s can be objectively assessed as a historically specific phenomenon, born of the particular sociopolitical conditions of that era. Bergonzi describes the 1930s as a politically volatile time: ‘For the left-wing writers of the thirties, the immediate, inescapable reality was that capitalism seemed to be collapsing, as evidenced by slump and mass unemployment and general misery in the western democracies, and the triumph of fascism’.⁴⁸ In the previous pages I discussed *Murphy*’s anticapitalist rhetoric; to do so, however, I had to first retrieve it from its hiding-place, as it were, in order to discern it within the web of the novel’s aesthetics. Today, Beckett’s noncompliance with the law of the literary and scholarly majority might be interpreted as a sign of

⁴⁵ David Weisberg, *Chronicles of Disorder: Samuel Beckett and the Cultural Politics of the Modern Novel* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 29.

⁴⁶ Beckett’s political commitment was manifest in the private sphere. His fervent involvement in the French Resistance against the Nazi regime during World War Two is well documented by his biographers. See Knowlson’s *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, pp. 297-339.

⁴⁷ Weisberg, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Bernard Bergonzi, *Reading the Thirties: Texts and Contexts* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978), p. 135.

artistic integrity. Back in 1936, however, it was arguably Beckett's choice to resist the literary callings of the era and honour his own vision that hindered *Murphy*'s publication.⁴⁹

Beckett's review of a friend's work (written in 1938, the year of *Murphy*'s publication) is particularly illuminating with regard to his insight into the specific demands put forward by the literary sects of the 1930s.⁵⁰ In this review, Beckett openly opposes politicized literature and the aesthetic constraints it places upon the author. Although he addresses poetry in particular—seeing as Devlin, the friend in question, was a poet—Beckett's remarks in this review appear to be so congruous with his perspective on literature at large that it seems apt to extend them to the territory of fiction. He speaks of a time when 'verse is most conveniently to be derided (or not) at the cart-tail of faction or convulsed on the tracks of disaffected metres or celebrating the sects, schisms and sectionuncles that have had all the poets they are likely to want in this world at least'. To this regrettable state of affairs, he opposes what he sees Devlin's work as representing: '[t]he relief of poetry free to be derided (or not) on its own terms and not in those of the politicians, antiquaries [...] and zealots'.⁵¹

In line with the above observations, Beckett deliberately and consistently refrained from subordinating the aesthetics of his literary work to the desires of 'the politicians, antiquaries [...] and zealots'. His anti-capitalist rhetoric speaks for itself, and for anyone who wants to listen, without having been coercively guided into listening. Once again, what is radically socio-political in *Murphy* is inseparable from what is uncompromisingly aesthetic. And it is thus that Beckett resisted the binary logic of the literary 1930s, according to which an author ought to choose between, to use Weisberg's expression, 'socially indifferent formalism and socially responsible writing'.⁵² According to the analysis pursued in this chapter, *Murphy* is illustrative of an effort to reconcile radical aesthetics with

⁴⁹ On *Murphy*'s publication, apart from see Weisberg, pp. 28-29, see Beckett's letters which refer to the same subject; included in *Disjekta*, pp.102-103. The second of these letters (*Disjekta*, p. 103) is written on the 13th of November 1936; it openly addresses Beckett's struggle to come to terms with publishers' unwillingness to publish *Murphy* (as well as his own unwillingness to remove sections from his book).

⁵⁰ The review in question is entitled 'Intercessions by Denis Devlin'. In *Disjekta*, pp. 91-94.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 91.

⁵² Weisberg, p. 30.

radical politics so as to preclude the possibility of considering the one independently of the other. This quality is one Beckett openly admired in other writers. In his famous essay on ‘Dante...Bruno...Vico...Joyce’ he confronts the readers who ‘are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that [they] can comprehend the one without bothering to read the other’.⁵³ ‘Gentle skimmer[s]’, perhaps.

In the study of literary works, the question of who is given a voice and what is rendered visible in the text is political by definition. As Rancière has put it, ‘[...] the political persists as long as there is a dissensus about the givens of a particular situation, of what is seen and what might be said, on the question of who is qualified to see or say what is given’.⁵⁴ Even though Murphy is spoken for, he clearly emerges as a vehicle of anti-authoritarian, anti-conformist, and anti-capitalist rhetoric. He contests society’s authority to speak through its subjects. He revolts against its qualification ‘to see or say what is given’ and to impose its normative rationality. The novel’s radical critique of the values informing and sustaining the status quo (productivity and profiteering; functionality and instrumentality; bourgeois conformity and complacency; marginalization and/or institutionalization of deviance) throws into relief the relationship of intricate interpenetration between its aesthetics and its socio-politics. Juxtaposed with the ‘colossal fiasco’ of the social world, Murphy’s realm gives rise to a vehement but constricted critique which founders, ultimately, after having repeatedly crashed at its informing, irresolvable contradictions—at its own logical limits.

In the previous two chapters, the dissenting voices of *Manhattan Transfer* and *Voyage in the Dark* were extricated from the framework of metropolitan capitalism that was seen to endanger, usurp, silence, and marginalize them. Social marginalization in *Murphy* may be chosen and idealized but, ultimately, it is the socio-economic landscape—fraught as it is with absurdity and injustice—that enables Murphy’s dissent to be formed, seen, and articulated. This dissent is neither assimilated by the irrepressible agency of the modern capitalist metropolis, nor overwhelmed by the dominant

⁵³ Beckett’s essay on ‘Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce.’ is included in *Disjecta*, pp. 19-33 (p. 26).

⁵⁴ Jacques Rancière and Davide Panagia, ‘Dissenting Words: An Interview with Jacques Rancière’, *Diacritics* No.30, Vol.2 (Summer 2000), pp. 113-126 (p. 123).

culture/society and its patriarchal structures, as was seen to be the case in *Manhattan Transfer* and *Voyage in the Dark*, respectively. In this final chapter, *Murphy*'s critical aesthetics of self-reflexivity suggests that dissent self-destructs, unable to overcome its inherent contradictions and conceits.

Post-Scriptum: On the Importance of Theory and the Retrieval of Dissent in Modernist Literature

It was under theory's figurative spell that the subject of this thesis first began to take shape. I had attended Jean-Michel Rabaté's speech (on the sixteenth of October 2008, in the University of Glasgow) on New Formalism and literary analysis (with Beckett's work being a predominant point of reference), and my research proposal, due around that time, was certainly influenced by the way in which form-related issues were approached and discussed in this academic event. Theoretical frameworks could provide guidance in one's exploration of literature's labyrinths, as it were, and instead of showing the way to the safest exit, they could enable the discovery of different levels of textual analysis and interpretation. Theory was a way to shed new light on texts that had been read before; it could help throw into relief certain aspects, specifically pertaining to the realm of socio-politics, which had not been theretofore penetrated and appraised. For instance, far from dispelling the wondrous conundrums that the literary experience of reading Beckett entailed, Adorno's critical theory helped me discern dissent in dejection and meaningfulness in meaninglessness. And yet, especially when juxtaposed with Williams's cultural critique and with the reconciliatory contemporary perspectives offered by Rabaté, Armstrong, or Rancière, Adorno's famous opposition, with committed art on one end and autonomous art on the (privileged) other, had to be reconsidered. (The critical theorist's later formulations, in *Aesthetic Theory*, by themselves suggest a more 'relative' view of art's autonomy.) As mentioned in the Introduction to this study, Rabaté's final chapter in *The Future of Theory* is entitled 'Theory not **of** Literature But **as** Literature', and investigates what it means for texts—and modernist texts, in particular—to 'include the theory of their own production'.¹ Rabaté's remarks in the conclusion of this investigation animate the overarching argument in this thesis: theory is always and inescapably entangled in the intricate web of aesthetic signification.² In the texts chosen here as case-studies, the symbiotic relationship between their aesthetic form and critical/cognitive traits was often seen to be defined by radical contradiction—a feature equated with

¹ Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Future of Theory* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. 134.

² Ibid, p. 140.

complexity rather than stylistic weakness. As seen in the Introduction, Marjorie Levinson's 'What is New Formalism?' essay addresses the possibility of viewing contradiction as fertile intricacy in literary works, at least according to the interpretive perspective of 'activist formalists'.³ It is this conceptualization of contradiction that has been adopted throughout this dissertation.

Levinson's 'What is New Formalism?', provided as attachment to the email announcing Rabaté's aforementioned speech, was clearly meant to serve as a form of introduction to it. For someone wondering why there was, back in 2007-8, a need to reconsider and reanimate formalist analysis so that it could make claim to political relevance, this essay provides ample theoretical insight. It seemed that the value of aesthetic analysis as a rigorous enterprise had to be reinstated; justified, even. One of the theorists mentioned in this essay, W. J. T. Mitchell, concluded his essay entitled 'The Commitment to Form; or, Still Crazy after All These Years' (2003) as follows:

Our disavowal of form might be worth reflecting on further, especially in a moment when the old idealist-materialist and nature-artifice distinctions that underwrote the difference between form and structure are being redefined. The modernist moment of form, whether modeled on organisms, perceptual gestalten, or structural coherence, may be behind us, but that only means that some new notion of form, and thus a new kind of formalism, lies before us.⁴

Mitchell situates the 'disavowal of form' within the binary logic of opposition and clearly hints at impoverishing outcomes. He views the irreversible passing of '[t]he modernist moment of form' as an occasion for envisaging form anew. One of the premises upon which this study has been predicated is that what could be referred to as 'the modernist moment of form' indeed could be enlighteningly reappraised (newly fertilized, as it were) with the help provided by contemporary thinkers like Rancière and Armstrong; thinkers who persist in reminding us of the political import and the inherent radicalism of literary aesthetics. A multitude of texts could be refreshingly reappraised in contemporary modernist studies, if approached from reconciliatory angles that address contradiction as an intrinsic feature of critique and reevaluate the socio-political relevance of modernist aesthetics.

³ Marjorie Levinson, 'What is New Formalism?', *PMLA*, Vol.122, No.2, March 2007, pp. 558–569.

⁴ W.J.T. Michell, 'The Commitment to Form; or, Still Crazy after All These Years', *PMLA*, Vol. 118, No. 2 (March 2003), pp. 321-325 (p. 324).

In particular, the retrieval of voices of dissent against the social, economic, and political contexts of modernist narratives is indispensable to the attempt to envisage and nurture a socially responsive and responsible modernist studies that is going to remain (or even appear newly) relevant in the twenty-first century.

In the three chapters of this dissertation, *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage in the Dark*, and *Murphy* were seen to critique the status quo within modern capitalist metropolises and give dissent a voice, or a variety of voices. At the same time, all three of the case-studies emphasized not only the necessity, but also the radical limitations and failures of dissent. These limitations and failures were often seen to be enciphered in the interpenetrations between the texts' aesthetics and socio-politics, as well as conditioned by the textual and semantic effects of contradiction. The kaleidoscopic fragmentation of *Manhattan Transfer*, achieved through montage, critiqued the compartmentalization and estrangement of individuality in Manhattan. At the same time, the use of montage testified, in and of itself, to the irresistible seductiveness of technological progress. The monophonic dissent of *Voyage in the Dark* was spoken in the language of affect and memory—the diametric opposite (or the absolute other) of the language of patriarchy and socio-cultural normativity. Even though it remained entrapped and limited, within the structural dominance of the status quo, the voice of critique still managed to make itself heard and acknowledged. Finally, the articulation of socio-political dissent in *Murphy* was accompanied by an exposition, self-reflexively provided by the conspicuous narrator, of its informing illusions, conceits, and contradictions. In the end, Jimmy Herf is as powerless, as insignificant before the metropolis-machine as the soapbox orator; Anna's sullen dissent is as impotent as her friend Maudie's light-hearted resignation; and Murphy's dissent cannot overcome its own limitations.

Beyond retrieving their voices of dissent, it was also important to acknowledge the ways in which *Manhattan Transfer*, *Voyage in the Dark*, and *Murphy* could be seen to contest, in their totality as novelistic artifacts, the socio-literary context in which they were created. In this study I have sought to argue that each novel is an 'outsider', as it were, with regard to its time and place in socio-literary history. As argued in the first chapter, even though Dos Passos in *Manhattan Transfer* clearly

takes the side of the victims of metropolitan capitalism and condemns their loss of agency and individuality, he does not refrain from spotlighting the failures of resistance, both in thought and action; one therefore understands why Mike Gold thought the novel was not sufficiently committed to changing the status quo. As discussed in the second chapter, Rhys chose to under-state her socio-political critique by encrypting it in the voice of affect and memory. In this manner, she suggested that there were other ways of articulating dissent, beyond and apart from the ‘hard rationality’ (to use Armstrong’s term once again) of the language of patriarchal and cultural normativity. The third and final chapter addressed the difficulties Beckett faced when trying to publish *Murphy* in the first half of the 1930s, and causally linked them to the dominance of committed literature in that period. In this novel, Beckett employed a recognizable, material social context not as a platform for the communication of anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian ideas, but as a constant against which both dissent and its limitations could be measured and understood.

In the process of retrieving the radicalism of each novel’s aesthetics and studying it contrapuntally with the radicalism of socio-politics, theory was an indispensable guide. Rancière’s and Armstrong’s contemporary perspectives in particular reassured me of the ongoing, urgent significance of exploring socio-politically charged aesthetics in twenty-first century literary studies. Adorno’s voice, more distanced in time, when brought together with Raymond Williams’s, served as a reminder of the suggestion that contradictions—even conundrums—rooted themselves in novelistic landscapes for a reason, or even for a plethora of reasons, some of which could be unidentifiable. It would be hubristic on the part of the researcher to aspire to resolve them. On the other hand, it would be impoverishing to not acknowledge them. The rigorous exploration of the ideological and aesthetic interpenetrations that led to such contradictions and cul-de-sacs in each novelistic landscape was to form an integral part of this dissertation. It became integral because, after multiple readings of my three case-studies, it became obvious that dissent itself was mired in irresolvable contradiction, as mentioned above. In this study I have attempted to suggest ways of understanding both the radicalism and the finitude of dissent by regarding it through the prism of aesthetic form: through the overarching, subversive symbolism of the steamroller in *Manhattan Transfer*; through the minute

epiphanies of the language of affect and anamnesis in *Voyage in the Dark*; and through *Murphy*'s self-reflexivity and self-criticism. I have attempted to emphasize the value of radical aesthetics, especially when created and posited against a socio-literary climate that called for polemical literature. Contemporary modernist studies is manifestly aware of theory's import in literary analysis, as evidenced by works such as *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate*, published in 2009, referenced in the Introduction. One of the animating aims of this dissertation is to point towards another commission which Modernist Studies could undertake, especially, it could be argued, at a time of extreme social, political, and economic inequity and turmoil. And this commission would be to further uncover textual voices of dissent and to extricate them from their aesthetic frameworks, while acknowledging the significance of the frameworks themselves as more than devices of constraint. It is not attentiveness to aesthetic form which should be held accountable for the fact that dissenting voices often remain muffled within conflicted textual worlds. Within a newly envisaged, socially responsive and responsible modernist aesthetic, the radicalism of critique is illuminated by the radicalism of the aesthetic frameworks. It is my hope that the analyses undertaken in this thesis, along with the aesthetic and critical theories that have assisted them, have been part of such overriding contemporary concerns.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Acheson, James. 'Murphy's Metaphysics'. *The Beckett Studies Reader*. Ed. S.E. Gontarski. Florida: University Press of Florida, 1993. pp. 78-93.

Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. London: Continuum, 2004 [1970].

----- *Prisms*. Trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1967.

Althusser, Louis. 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

----- 'A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspré'. Trans. by Ben Brewster. In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, pp. 1480-1483.

Angier, Carole. *Jean Rhys*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1985.

----- *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1990.

Arato, Andrew and Gebhardt, Eike (Eds). *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. New York: Continuum, 2007.

Armstrong, Isobel. *The Radical Aesthetic*. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2000.

Bair, Deirdre. *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*. New York: Summit Books, 1990 [1978].

Barry, Elizabeth. *Beckett and Authority: The Uses of Cliché*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Beckett, Samuel. *Murphy*. New York: Grove Press, 1957 [1938].

----- 'Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce.' [1929]. *Disjecta*. Ed. Ruby Cohn. New York: Grove Press, 1984, pp. 19-33.

----- 'On *Murphy*': Excerpt from a letter of July 17, 1936 to Thomas McGreevy. *Disjecta*, p. 102.

----- 'Intercessions by Denis Devlin'. *Disjecta*, pp. 91-94.

----- *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. London and Paris: Calder Publications, 1993.

Begam, Richard. *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Benstock, Shari. *Women of the Left Bank*. London: Virago Press, 1987.

Bergonzi, Bernard. *Reading the Thirties: Texts and Contexts*. London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1978.

Borinsky, Alicia. 'Jean Rhys: Poses of Woman as Guest'. *The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic Perspectives*. Spec. Issue of *Poetics Today*, Vol.6, No.1/2 (1985), pp. 229-243.

Bradbury, Malcolm. *The Modern American Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Mar.1983.

Bradbury, Malcolm and McFarlane, James (Eds). *Modernism: 1890-1930*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976.

Breuer, Rolf. 'Paradox in Beckett'. *The Modern Language Review*, Vol.88, No.3 (July 1993), pp. 559-580.

Calhoun, Craig. *Critical Social Theory*. Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Carr, Helen. *Jean Rhys*. United Kingdom: Northcote House in association with the British Council, 1996.

Cohn, Ruby (Ed). *Disjecta*. New York: Grove Press, 1984.

Cooper, John Xiros. *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Cornwell, Ethel F. 'Samuel Beckett: The Flight from Self'. *PMLA*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (Jan. 1973), pp. 41-51.

Critchley, Simon. 'Who Speaks in the Work of Samuel Beckett?'. *Yale French Studies*, No.93, The Place of Maurice Blanchot (1998), pp.114-130.

Davidson, Arnold E. *Jean Rhys*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1985.

Day, Gary (Ed). *Literature and Culture in Modern Britain Volume Two: 1930-1955*. London and New York: Longman, 1997.

Diepeveen, Leonard. *The Difficulties of Modernism*. New York and London: Routledge, 2003.

Diggins, John P. 'Visions of Chaos and Visions of Order: Dos Passos as Historian'. *American Literature*, Vol.46, No.3 (Nov. 1974), pp. 329-346.

----- *The Rise and Fall of the American Left*. New York, London: WW Norton &Co, 1973.

Dos Passos, John. *Manhattan Transfer*. London: Penguin Books, 2000 [1925].

----- *U.S.A.* New York: The Library of America, 1996.

Dow, William. 'John Dos Passos, Blaise Cendrars, and the "Other" Modernism'. *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol.42, No.3 (Autumn 1996) pp. 396-415.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. USA, UK, Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 1990.

Eisenstein, Sergei M. *Film Form*. San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Yovanovich, 1977 [1949].

Emery, Mary Lou. 'The Politics of Form: Jean Rhys's Social Vision in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*'. *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol.28, No.4 (Winter 1982), pp. 418-430.

Federman, Raymond. *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965.

Ferguson, Gever, Minh-ha, West (Eds). *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. New York and Massachusetts: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and The MIT Press, 1990.

- Fletcher, John. *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1964.
- Friedman, Melvin J. (Ed). *Samuel Beckett Now*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- Gardiner, Judith Kegan. 'Good Morning, Midnight; Good Night, Modernism'. *Engagements: Postmodernism, Marxism, Politics*. Spec. Issue of *boundary 2*, Vol.11, No.1/2, (Autumn, 1982–Winter, 1983), pp. 233-251.
- Gold, Michael. Review of *Manhattan Transfer* as published in the *New Masses* (August 1926), pp. 25-26. In *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Barry Maine. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Goldman, Jane. 'Avant-Garde'. In *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate*. Ed. Stephen Ross. London and New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 225-236.
- Harvey, David. *The Urban Experience*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989.
- Hill, Leslie. *Beckett's Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Hook, Andrew (Ed). *Dos Passos: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974.
- Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Hynes, Samuel. *The Auden Generation; Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s*. London, Sydney, Toronto: The Bodley Head, 1976).
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986*, Vol.2: The Syntax of History. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. London: Penguin Books, 2000 [1922].
- Kalaidjian, Walter. *American Culture Between the Wars: Revisionary Modernism & Postmodern Critique*. New York, Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Kellner, Douglas. 'The Frankfurt School and British Cultural Studies: The Missed Articulation'. (February 2009) [date of access] <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/kellner.html>.
- Kloepfer, Deborah Kelly. "'Voyage in the Dark': Jean Rhys's Masquerade for the Mother'. *Contemporary Literature*, Vol.26, No.4 (Winter 1985), pp. 443-459.
- Knowlson, James. *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*. London: Bloomsbury, 1996.
- Konzett, Delia Kaparoso. *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Dislocation*. New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Lehan, Richard. *The City in Literature*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998.
- Levinson, Marjorie. 'What is New Formalism?' *PMLA*, Vol. 122, No.2, March 2007, pp. 558-569.

Levy, Eric P. *Trapped in Thought: A Study of the Beckettian Mentality*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007.

Ludington, Townsend. *John Dos Passos: A Twentieth Century Odyssey*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980.

MacLuhan, Marshall. 'John Dos Passos: Technique vs. Sensibility'. In *Dos Passos: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Andrew Hook. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974.

Maine, Barry. 'Dos Passos and the Rhetoric of History'. *South Atlantic Review*. Vol.50, No.1 (Jan.1985), pp. 75-86.

----- (Ed). *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

McDonald, Rónán (Ed). *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Mitchell, W.J.T. 'The Commitment to Form; or, Still Crazy after All These Years'. *PMLA*, Vol.118, No.2 (March 2003), pp. 321-325.

Moglen, Seth. *Mourning Modernity*. Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2007.

Murphy, Richard. *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

O'Connor, Teresa F. *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1986.

Orwell, George. 'Inside the Whale'. *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*. London, England: Penguin Books, 2001 [1940].

Oxford English Dictionary. Second Edition, Vol.IX. Prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Pizer, Donald (Ed). *John Dos Passos: The Major Nonfictional Prose*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988

Dos Passos, John. 'The New Masses I'd Like'. *New Masses*, 1 (June 1926), p. 20. In Pizer (Ed), pp. 81-82.

----- 'Contemporary Chronicles'. *Carleton Miscellany*, 2 (Spring 1961), pp. 25-29. Ibid, pp. 238-240.

----- 'What Makes a Novelist'. *National Review*, 20 (16 Jan. 1968), pp. 29-32. Ibid, pp. 268-275.

----- 'An Interview with John Dos Passos'. *Idol*, 45 (Fall 1969), pp. 5-25. Ibid, pp. 276-292.

Rabaté, Jean Michel. *The Future of Theory*. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2002.

Rabinovitz, Rubin. 'Samuel Beckett's Revised Aphorisms'. *Contemporary Literature*, Vol.36, No.2 (Summer 1995), pp. 203-225.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London, New York: Continuum, 2004.

----- 'The Politics of Literature'. *SubStance*, Vol.33, No. 1, Issue 103, pp. 10-24.

----- *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*. Trans. Steven Corcoran. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009 [2004].

----- and Davide Panagia. 'Dissenting Words: An Interview with Jacques Rancière'. *Diacritics*, No.30, Vol.2 (Summer 2000), pp. 113-126.

Rhys, Jean. *Voyage in the Dark*. London: Penguin Books, 2000 [1934].

Ricks, Christopher. *Beckett's Dying Words*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Rosen, Robert. *John Dos Passos: Politics and the Writer*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, c.1981.

Ross, Stephen (Ed). *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009.

Said, Edward. 'Reflections on Exile'. *Granta*, Vol.13 (1984), pp. 159-172. In *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, pp. 357-366.

Scholes, Robert. *Paradoxy of Modernism*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006.

Seed, David. *Cinematic Fictions*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009.

Simpson, Anne B. *Territories of the Psyche: The Fiction of Jean Rhys*. New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Steinberg, S.C. 'The External and the Internal in Murphy'. *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol.18, No.2 (Apr. 1972), pp. 93-110.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Turbin, Carole. 'Fashioning the American Man: The Arrow Collar Man, 1907-1931'. *Gender and History*, Vol.14, Issue 3 (November 2002), pp. 470-491. Accessed online via the Wiley Online Library.

Webb, Eugene. *Samuel Beckett: A Study of His Novels*. London: Peter Owen, 1970.

Weisberg, David. *Chronicles of Disorder: Samuel Beckett and the Cultural Politics of the Modern Novel*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2000.

Wheale, Nigel (Ed.). *Postmodern Arts*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Whitworth, Michael H. (Ed). *Modernism*. USA, UK, Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Williams, Raymond. *Writing in Society*. London and New York: Verso, 1983.

----- *Politics of Modernism*. New York and London: Verso, 1989.

Wilson, Lucy. 'European or Caribbean: Jean Rhys and the Language of Exile'. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol.10, No.3, Women and Words (1989), pp. 68-72.

