MONSTROUS LIMINALITY; OR, THE UNCANNY STRANGERS OF SECULARIZED MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT

As modernity began to rapidly change and influence European culture, many nineteenth and twentieth-century writers and intellectuals struggled to identify themselves with this modern paradoxical context. As a result, the modern stranger was conjured up out of the uncanny depths of secularized modernity. Although a subject whose makeup is continually shifting, the modern stranger still exists as a strong allegory for secularized modernity, particularly because of its unsolidified and liminal characteristics. Along with its *doppelgänger* the monster, the stranger reflects not only uncanny otherness but the horrors and anxiety of realizing the potential imperfections and weaknesses of the individual, society, and their utopian imaginings. My project investigates the paradoxical, utopian and negative-utopian makeup of the modern stranger as an outcome of secularizing and modernizing changes in what is typically regarded as Western, predominately European, Judeo-Christian culture and history, beginning with the advent of modernity. By examining the liminal sphere located between the secular and sacred that I argue has characterized modernity itself, the study showcases the transformation of the stranger from something external into a figure far more liminal, which is forced to traverse uncanny space in an attempt to find new meanings for an age.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

My study reads the transformation of the figure of the stranger in the literature of the modern age in terms of liminality. I argue that in modernity, the sacred and the profane are no longer understood as binaries but are liminal and constituted in a playful, nuanced, and increasingly non-dialectical relationship with each other. In my readings, I show the explanatory potential of focusing on the resacralizing – in a paradoxical and liminal manner – of traditionally sacred concepts such as 'messianic' time and the 'utopian,' and the conflicts that emerged as a result of secularized modernity's denial of its own hybridization. I understand resacralization as the movement, or dance, between the secularizing and sacralizing facets of modernity, which ultimately keep it in a liminal state.

This approach to modern literature shows how the modern stranger deals with the dangers of failing to be re-assimilated into mainstream society and is caught in a fixed or permanent state of liminality, a state that can ultimately lead to boredom, alienation, nihilism, and failure. These 'monstrous' aspects of liminality can also be rewarding in that they confront both traditional and contemporary viewpoints, enabling new and fresh perspectives suspended between imagination and reality, past and future, difficult and paradoxical avenues that makes the uncanny stranger an important figure in secularized modernity.

As a 'spectral monster' that has a paradoxical and liminal relationship to both the sacred and the secular, the figure of the modern stranger has played a role in both adapting and shaping a culturally determined understanding of the self and the other. I

argue that with the advent of modernity, the stranger, the monster, and the spectre became interconnected. Haunting the edges of reason while also being absorbed into 'normal' society, all three, together with the cyborg, manifest the vulnerability of an age that is fearful of the return of the repressed. Yet these figures can also become re-appropriated as positive symbols, able to navigate between the dangerous and chaotic elements that threaten society while serving as precarious and ironic symbols of hope or sustainability.

My study traces the modern stranger back to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and then examines the development of the figure in paradigmatic arenas such as the modern metropolis and more contemporary liminal arenas such as cyberspace and social media. The stranger is shown to navigate not only the sacred void but also modernization and technological change. For Charles Baudelaire as well as for many post-WWI expressionists, the fragmented artificiality of the modern city streets was thought to be appositely chaotic and even violent surroundings for modern artists cultivating their identities. The characters that inhabit the modern city in Baudelaire' poems, or in William Gibson's Sprawl novels, are shown to become uncanny allegories of modernity as they attain a transcendent connection to the metropolis' uncanny fragmentation, often through the many subcultures found on the city's streets, which open up possibilities of renewal and re-sacralization.

This project not only focuses on liminal spaces, between the material and immaterial, but also on liminal moods and feelings such as boredom, alienation, sickness and failure, and how a liminal and even ironic outlook can transform these such widely held negative feelings into revolutionary or resacralized concepts. Although the turn of

the nineteenth century was met with technological wonder and amazement, the years leading to WWI were also defined by chaos, uncertainty, and conflicting ideologies. While warfare was expected to solidify both boundaries and the identities, for the young soldiers coming of age during the war, it seemed to reemphasize the ambiguity, liminal, and violent nature of the modern world. Robert Musil's novel *The Man Without Qualities*, Max Beckmann's painting *The Night*, and Fritz Lang's film *M* examine the violence and sickness of war leaking into the postwar era. The murderers depicted in all three works become uncanny representations of their sick societies and therefore become difficult to judge by citizens equally fascinated, repulsed, and responsible. However, there are simultaneously attempts to locate an ironic strength in the very same sicknesses and weaknesses. On the eve of WWI, Zeno Cosini in Italo Svevo's seminal novel *Zeno's Conscience* comes to the conclusion that the poisons and diseases of modernity can become moments of resacralization. The stranger's use of irony ultimately acts as a counterviolence to violence. Through irony, the stranger is able to deal with post-WWI society and modernity itself, exposing modernity's violent tendencies through self-reflectivity, both internal and societal, and thus creating a liminal space of violence and nonviolence, of action and inaction.

The modern stranger as liminal spectre and monster is also a gender transgressing symbol. I examine posthuman and feminist works such as Haraway's cyborg thesis and Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa", which look to invert or reject the uncanny 'monstrousness' usually attached to the female gender, either as a way to reimagine the female body (Haraway), or go beyond or see through the deception established from the uncanny fear men have of women (Cixous). Acker adopts a more liminal and cautious

understanding in her vision of both Medusa and the cyborg in regard to gender. Acker rejects any representations of beauty, instead opts to retain their original monstrous terror. By focusing on a shared monstrousness, Acker blurs gender binaries, opening up a more liminal perspective by connecting the modern stranger to God and the sacred, not as something perfect and beautiful, but as something monstrous, distorted, and out of place. In Acker's work, the stranger presents a more cautious and liminal vision of cities, which can be spaces of dreams and possibility but simultaneously places that deny the very same utopian elements they seem to cultivate.

The cyborg is a different sort of liminal, posthuman entity that exists at the threshold of human and machine. In "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," Donna Haraway famously uses the cyborg as a symbol of a posthuman utopian vision, destroying any illusions of the unitary self and blurring the lines of subjective and objective. While the figure of the cyborg challenges the Oedipal and Christian narratives of Western society, it is also influenced by the very narratives it wishes to dissolve, such as the hybrid nature of Jesus as both human and divine in Christian thought.

If the cyborg is the technological transformation of flesh to metal, cyberspace dissolves this relationship altogether, establishing something more abstract and immaterial. The cyberpunk novels of William Gibson and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* films symbolically connect the sacred with cyberspace by allowing for a transcending of humanity through the expansion of bodily and societal limitations. While the dangers of the Internet are never ignored in these works, it is predominately seen as limitless.

The more the internet becomes a reality in everyday life, the more dystopian

become its depictions. In David Egger's novel *The Circle*, the omnipresence of the Internet is characterized as totalitarian, creating a world where strangers are no longer allowed to exist. American author Tao Lin likens the liminal world of the Internet, especially social media, to drug use. Lin sees its paradoxical disposition as something that can create interaction, excitement and an altering of reality, but can also lead to a perpetual state of alienation and boredom.

Looking at utopia in an ironic manner, however, opens up a discussion of whether it is possible for violence to have any positive or even utopian qualities, which ultimately gives rise to ambiguous and difficult conversations, such as Ernst Bloch's iconoclastic reinterpretation of utopia as a spirit and Walter Benjamin's argument for a revolutionary, law-destroying divine violence. Modernity's obsession with radical renewal could potentially lead to a predicament that holds humanity in a perpetual state of apocalyptic repetition, the topic of Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz.*

In many ways, the modern stranger as a figure of literature and the cultural imagination has become more complicated and challenging in the contemporary age, both clashing with and encompassing Sara Ahmed's notion of 'affect aliens,' people who go beyond simply the psychological or even spiritual inability to blend in and out of society. However, while the stranger may be altering once again, I contend that defining or essentializing the figure could result in the creation of other sets of binaries, and thereby dissolve the purpose and productiveness of both strangeness and liminality.

I: LITERATURE REVIEW

An age or society would then be secular or not, in virtue of the conditions of experience of and search for the spiritual

- Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*

Unlike an alien or foreigner, the stranger is not simply a newcomer, a person temporarily out of place. He is an eternal wanderer, homeless always and everywhere, without hope of ever 'arriving'

- Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*

We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge-and with good reason. We have never sought ourselves-how could it happen that we should ever find ourselves? It has rightly been said: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"…So we are necessarily strangers to ourselves, we do not comprehend ourselves, we have to misunderstand ourselves, for us the law "Each is furthest from himself applies to all eternity-we are not "men of knowledge" with respect to ourselves

- Friedrich Nietzsche*, On the Genealogy of Morals*

The monster ensures in time, and for our theoretical knowledge, a continuity that, for our everyday experience, floods, volcanoes, and subsiding continents confuse in space. The other consequence is that the signs of continuity throughout such a history can no longer be of any order other than that of resemblance…Thus, against the background of the continuum, the monster provides an account, as though in caricature, of the genesis of differences, and the fossil recalls, in the uncertainty of its resemblances, the first buddings of identity.

- Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

At almost every point, I have to stand between alternative possibilities of existence, to be completely at home in neither and to take no definitive stand against either. Since thinking presupposes receptiveness to new possibilities, this position is fruitful for thought; but it is difficult and dangerous in life, which again and again demands decisions and thus the exclusion of alternatives.

- Paul Tillich, *On the Boundary*

Prior to his death, Walter Benjamin (1940/2007) penned an essay that presents a theory of history as being defined by a continuous series of disruptions that alter the past and future through the rapturous present, what he claims "as a model of Messianic time" that "comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgment" (269). Created from the ruins of such an event namely the French Revolution, nineteenth-century European society was forced to deal with the idea of the modern - the now - in an entirely new and secularized fashion. The process or transformation was anything but fluid as the ideas of the previous 'non-modern' world still endured, despite being juxtaposed with the influx of new social, political, and personal thought that was sweeping across Europe. As

modernity began to rapidly change and influence European culture, many nineteenth and twentieth-century writers and intellectuals struggled to identify themselves with this modern paradoxical context. As a result, the modern stranger was conjured up out of the uncanny depths of secularized modernity.

Many of the writings during this period focused on the contrasts and paradoxes that contributed to the creation and evolution of the modern stranger. Although a subject whose makeup is continually shifting, the modern stranger still exists as a strong allegory for secularized modernity, particularly because of its unsolidified and liminal characteristics. Along with its *doppelgänger* the monster, the stranger reflects not only uncanny otherness but the horrors and anxiety of realizing the potential imperfections and weaknesses of the individual, society, and their utopian imaginings. Nonetheless, it must be mentioned that the modern stranger is not merely a marginalized figure. In continuing with its liminal nature, the modern stranger is nonetheless also a privileged character. Just as their alienating experiences vary, so does their privilege, ranging from gender, race, class, and geography; the privilege of knowledge, the privilege of having opportunity, the privilege to blend in and out of society at will, to wrestle with freedom, secularism, and the sacred, or simply the privilege to be bored. Yet, the circumnavigating of these two paradoxical perspectives, of privilege and marginalization, once again allows the stranger during modernity to be an individual that goes beyond binaural classifications, while paradoxically being caught in them, thereby being both inside and outside modernity, both remote and included. My project investigates the paradoxical, utopian and negative-utopian makeup of the modern stranger as an outcome of secularizing and modernizing

changes in what is typically regarded as Western, predominately European, Judeo-Christian culture and history, beginning with the advent of modernity.

I understand that terms such as 'the West' and 'Judeo-Christian culture'[1] can be problematic and tautological concepts, especially in regard to defining modernity, culture, and the socio-political, particularly since both are made up of various and distinct societies and interpretations. Cultural theorist and philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah point out in his fascinating article "There is no such thing as western civilisation" (2016) that the term 'The West' has multiple meanings and connotations throughout history. As a result, establishing an essence of western culture or civilization on the bases of a false set of collective characteristics and qualities is highly problematic, as accepting such a term allocates a certain superiority that "can look simply like a euphemism for white". While I do agree with Appiah's argument that there is no such thing as "a precious golden nugget" that links ancient civilizations such as Greece and Rome to contemporary Europe and North America, I argue that the term 'the West', as erroneous as it is in defining it as a certain homogeneous entity, is still a useful term when discussing 19th-century imperial and technological knowledge creation, and consequently my project. Most notably, Appiah states that the notion of 'the West' does not emerge until the late nineteenth century, expanding during the twentieth under the guidance of imperialism, (I would add technological and secular advancements to that), a time frame that ultimately coincides with the advent of secularized modernity in the early nineteenth century. It may

[1] While the concept of a Judeo-Christian tradition is highly contested and debated (see *Is there a Judeo-Christian Tradition?: A European Perspective* (2016) for both a historical account of the term's origin and an extensive discussion of relativeness), a strong underlining link not often discussed is the effect and complex relationship that secularism has had on these two religious traditions.

very well be that it was during this time that beginning with Europe, the West first established itself as a sort of collective entity, which simply looked to a deceitful Hegelian-like lineage in order to establish itself as a historical movement of progress and liberalism founded on Christian ethics and a belief in individual rights of agency and freedom. And while Appiah is accurate in addressing that it was not just Christianity that molded Europe but a combination of multiple cultural and religious societies such as paganism and Islam, Christendom has dominated what many regard 'the west' in recent history.

Thus, a binary essentialism of 'The West' as either a founder of "exalted intellectual and artistic achievements" or a dispraising term reflecting an "arsenic" nugget of racism, imperialism, and subjugation (Appiah), ultimately created the idea of the West whether artificial or not. Thus the removal of the concept becomes as problematic as its implantation, for as Stefan Kubiak (2017) writes, by removing the term, "[t]he subjugation and colonization of the African, Asian and American peoples and imposing foreign control upon them suddenly loses the agent", while simultaneously ignoring that European and American societies have eventually established "certain cultural codes that readers educated in a particular culture are able to decipher immediately" (2017) amongst themselves.

Moreover, concepts such as secular and secularism are also not exclusively Western**,** despite many seeing it as an originary and defining characteristic of Western societies. Even Charles Taylor (1998), who is one of the more recent scholars to advocate a direct connection between Christianity and secularism, argues that although "there is truth in the claim that secularism has Christian roots…it is wrong to think that this limits

the application of its formulae to post-Christian societies (31). Secularism has become a defining, even if misconstrued, concept that has been used to separate what is largely considered as Europe and the Americas from the rest of the world, in order to maintain the division of self and other, while many of these 'others', such as the religious challengers of secularism in the Middle East, use the same differentiation to solidify the same problematic binary on their own terms (Asad *Formations*, 2). Secularism, as with the notion of the West, has never lost its colonial origins in the Muslim world (Nasr 69). Nevertheless, at the same time, it would be unwise to overlook the direct cultural significance and influence that both secularism and modernity play in what I have described as secularized modernity. In this regard, I am not examining the idea of secularism through a political sense as in the separation of church and state, but rather as a philosophical or existential mood that is distinctly connected with modernity. As a result, the focus of this project will be on what is commonly considered historically Christian societies' complex connection with secularism rather than a discussion of the concept itself. I do not examine Christianity in a theological lens but rather as a cultural category that has had a profound influence on western traditions, norms, and symbols, and equally, its effect on paradoxically deconstructing those very same representations.

Beginning with nineteenth century Europe, I will explore the conflicts and paradoxes of a secular culture created from the liminal spirit of modernity's own 'empty' space and its uncanny interrelation with the modern stranger. By arguing that an outsider criticizes modernity from within modernity's own liminal space, I should be able to show: 1) how the concept of the modern stranger emerged in the late 18th and early 19th century, as a result of the liminality created by secularized modernity, where

technological possibilities and secular reinterpretations begin to overtake traditionally held sacred realms; 2) how the modern stranger moved from being a confined member of the social underground to becoming a more prominent figure of alterity that has slowly spread into the mainstream; 3) the impact the modern stranger has had on cultural identity and the concept of self and other within social environments, from the modern metropolis to more liminal contemporary arenas, such as social media and communities where identities become further fragmented; 4) the potential of resacralizing sacred and utopian elements and the tensions that arise through this paradoxical and secular reinterpretation of sacred concepts such as the 'messianic' and 'utopian'; and finally, 5) the modern stranger and secularized modernity's relationship to the monstrous that is found in both its utopian and anti-utopian origins. I examine how these secular/sacred binaries engage in a dialectical, yet non-essential, connection with one another by investigating the ways in which the modern stranger addresses the process of secularization, and how the stranger's situation in liminal space can be seen as a form of resacralization in the modern world.

I contend that, in reference to the modern stranger, defining or essentializing the figure could result in the creation of other sets of binaries, dissolving the purpose and productiveness of liminality, even the commonly used negative concept of boredom and alienation, which itself could be viewed as a constructive element of change. My project will attempt to tackle the potential triumphs and difficulties that arise with an idea of utopia that is based on ideas of lack, estrangement, boredom, and abjection. Modern alienation and disillusionment, which was a main focal point of early and late modernism, has not vanished in current society and still creates further fragmentation between the self

and other, especially as a result of technological advancements in social interactions. In a world that has seen many social movements, subcultures, and what Victor Turner calls 'anti-structures', the question of how the modern stranger inhabits itself within these "anti-structural communities" becomes increasingly important in the development of identity, or non-identity, in the contemporary world. The term anti-structure community is derived from the work of Victor Turner (1969/1995), in describing communities that challenge the dominant structural order of society. As Turner argues, these communities break "in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority." Although secular and temporal movements, these anti-structures retain a sacred element: "[i]t is almost everywhere held to be sacred or "holy," possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency" (128). Nevertheless, once these communities become established in of themselves, they "return to structure revitalized by their experience of *communitas*" (ibid. 129). Both, the structure/anti-structure and secular/resacralized practices are relevant in my study of modernity and its paradoxical and liminal quality of going beyond yet retaining its limitations.

My work is located in an interdisciplinary field of Humanities research that could be described as "Secularized Modernity" and is grounded in a combination of modern cultural history and literary criticism. It is predominantly situated in a post-humanist approach to sociocultural anthropology, sociology, history, critical theory, psychoanalysis, theology, and most importantly, literary analysis, which will allow me to critically assess traditional beliefs about faith, identity, and truths commonly held in modern Western

cultural and social history. More importantly, it allows for a discourse in liminality that is able to oscillate between socially constructed binaries, criticisms, and strategies between culture and literature more broadly. Under this framework, history and sociocultural anthropology provide important methodological approaches for my work, given that culture and society have influenced our understanding of human experience and the formation of identity. Historical and anthropological approaches are germane to understanding the conception of the modern stranger established by secularized modernity. A sociological approach will likewise be useful in analyzing social behaviour in relation to the order and disorder of society, while critical theory is essential in establishing the modern stranger's critique of the social order and customs, and how a disruption in society may bring about social change and liberation within this modern social structure. In order to understand the unconscious desires, fears, and anxieties of the modern stranger, it is important to include a psychoanalytic approach, especially in regard to the uncanny. Religious studies is likewise an important facet in my work in that it provides methodologies for the difficult relationship between the sacred and the secular, locating notions of God, faith, and belief in contemporary contexts of secularized modernity. Finally, at its core, my project is structured around literary criticism and analysis since the modern stranger first emerged in the world through modernist literature, and also because, as François Cusset (2003/2008) indicates in his historical account of the rise of the American English department, literature is often regarded as the best medium in gaining a perspective of the other and, likewise, the perfect vehicle to integrate multiple fields together. Through the exploration of the human condition, literature has helped us to make sense of the ambiguities of the modern world and consequently, my

project will analyze the effects of the secular and the sacred has on the stranger by means of modern literary fiction. Paul Tillich argues that in order to express the complex relationship between the sacred and secularized modernity, "we must first point to the places where the awareness of the predicament…in our period is most sharply expressed. These places are the great art, literature, and partly at least, the philosophy of our time" (*Essential* 5-6). The importance of literature goes beyond an examination of the stranger within the art form, seeking to understand how literature helped change or shape liminality in modern culture and society.

BACKGROUND & PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

1. The Secular, the Sacred, and Resacralization

In order to understand the socio-cultural climate that the modern stranger finds itself in, it is necessary to uncover a process of secularization in modernity, which I will be positioning around a Weberian concept of secularization as a result of disillusionment or disenchantment. More recently secularization is no longer seen as a straightforward process, nor is the secular viewed as necessarily being a binary to the religious. Prominent secular or post-secular scholars (Taylor (2007), Asad, (2001, 2003) Connolly (2010), Casanova (2010)) argue, in one form or another, that the secular seems to have a strong relationship with religion and especially the sacred. Originally, the secular-religious dichotomy, advocated and popularized by thinkers such as sociologist Emile Durkheim (192/1975), conceived of the profane sphere as completely separate from religious influence. However, more recently the two are no longer seen as binaries but rather as having a peripheral but nonetheless, dialectical relationship. For instance, anthropologist Talal Asad (2003) goes beyond the typical dichotomies such as

sacred/profane, reason/imagination, and symbol/allegory that "pervade modern secular discourse" (*Formations* 26). Asad claims that the secular is not a substitute or "a mask for religion" (ibid.), and yet, is also not independent from it; or, in other words, the secular is the "Siamese twin" of religion ("Modern Classic" 221). As he maintains, since "the secular is so much part of our modern life, it is not easy to grasp it directly" and therefore, "best pursued through its shadows" (*Formations* 16). Even for Mircea Eliade (1957/1959), who argues more along the lines of the profane and sacred as opposites, the two are not purely caught in their contrasting binaries, at least in terms of lived experience, since the behaviour of the religious individual and the non-religious individual are similarly based upon myth and symbolism (*Sacred* 204).

Although religion as a practice does require ritual and tradition, there is still a cognitive, psychological, or existential essence to it that cannot be removed in the modern age. Taylor famously argues that in our secular age, God has become marginalized, distant, and absent, resulting in a more liminal 'providential deism' and the 'disenfleshment' of religion. The modern secular, especially in traditionally Judeo-Christian societies, tends to push the sacred into the internal world of the individual. Although resulting in somewhat different conclusions, both Giorgio Agamben (2005) and Alain Badiou (2003) talk of a fracture with Jewish history in the writings of Saint Paul, creating a path for modern humanism. To some critics, Paul's reading of the Old Testament makes him possibly history's first deconstructionist (Hart in Manolopoulos 75;Weisberg xvi), while the deconstruction of Christianity is simply part of the continuation of its own movement (Nancy 2005/2008), resulting from its own self-distortion. When debating the idea of secularism as an early beginning of disenfleshment,

scholars often overlook this separation that St. Paul created in *Galatians*. The removal of historical rituals that stand between God's covenant with humanity, created a rupture in what Eliade argues as the passageway or bridge between the profane and sacred, God and human (*Sacred* 182) in Christian societies. Eliade argues that the desacralization of modern humanity is a result of Judeo-Christian secularization process, which became epitomized by Friedrich Nietzsche's proclamation that 'God is dead':

> Nietzsche's proclamation was new for the Western, Judeo-Christian world, but the death of God is an extremely old phenomenon in the history of religions – of course, with this difference: that the disappearance of the High God gives birth to a more vivid and more dramatic, though inferior, pantheon – whereas in Nietzsche's conception, after the death of the Judeo-Christian God, man has to live by himself –alone, in a radically desacralized world (*Quest* 48).

However, there seems to be no final step to this process that Eliade speaks of. Although it seems society is desacralizing, historically secularization has led to new forms of religious organizations, as with the Protestation Reformation, but more importantly to this study, has also allowed for a resacralization of secular space, opening up new possibilities of the sacred that are centered more on an individual's personally constructed morals and tenets than dogmatic tradition. No longer are traditionally and religious established rituals necessary to directly connect with the sacred, but instead, faith develops internal, personal, yet at the same time, is still grounded in historical and cultural remnants. The secularizing of modernity seems to routinely create a new or resacralizing practice within its inherent liminal space, and therefore, the act of desacralizing is misleading.

Asad (2003) suggests that this epistemological turn is a result of post-Enlightenment European thought in which the sacred and faith "came to be constituted as

a mysterious, mythic thing, the focus of moral and administrative disciplines" (33) resulting in the removal of any kind of habitual character. Therefore, this notion of religion established by Enlightenment thought helped to establish a classification of religion later asserted by Tillich: "[b]eing religious means asking passionately the question of meaning of our existence and being willing to receive answers, even if the answers hurt…it is the state of being concerned about one's own being and being universally" (*Essential*1). Taking this explanation into consideration, the idea of being religious has shifted in Western modernity to something essential, universal, and beyond tradition, which seems to be only a way of expressing one's religious spirit. The notion that the religious is something everyone experiences regardless of practice or belief is analogous with Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytical thesis in *This Incredible Need to Believe* (2006/2009) in that religion is not an illusionary practice but rather the place where one forms one's own identity through a natural and psychological need to believe. By way of the secular, the psychoanalytic examination of the inner self for Kristeva, allows for "the *access to the sacred* that Christianity made possible" (ix).

The tension between the sacred as a form of cultural ritual and tradition versus the idea of an existential and universal psychological desire for faith has opened up a liminal space between traditional ritualistic and cultural aspects of the religious and secularized modernity, thus creating more ambiguous cognitive and metaphysical outlook on faith. To be clear, what I refer to as resacralization is not exclusively sacred, at least in a traditional sense, but rather a simultaneous process or dance between the secularizing and sacralizing facets of modernity, which ultimately keep it in a liminal state. Moreover,

unlike most understandings of postsecularism,[2] resacralization does not operate in solidifying binaries of religious and secular but a process of blurring binaries. At least in terms popularized by Jürgen Habermas (2005/2008), postsecular societies are ones in which religious individuals and non-believers engage in a practice of "complementary learning", while resacralization is not necessarily about religion but the sacred.[3]

2. Modernity, Liminality, and the Uncanny

Like the secular, modernity itself is an ambiguous term and defining it can be equally as challenging. Generally, it is either thought of as an ongoing project (Habermas 1985/1990; Giddens 1990; Bauman 1991), or an age that concluded in the mid to late twentieth century, defined by ideology, its pursuit of progress, and ultimately its failure to deliver (Lyotard 1979/1984; Baudrillard 1976/1993. Nevertheless, in order to consolidate my focus in defining modernity, I shall go back to Baudelaire's original and paradoxical meaning of *modernité*, coined in "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863/2010), as a fleeting and ephemeral experience or strange feeling of modern life that is in flux with "the eternal and the immutable", and how this sensation has had a profound effect on the relationship between past, present, and future (12-13). Michel Foucault (1984) intones, "Baudelairean modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it" (41). Modernity is much more than a time period characterized by rational discourse, rapid industrialization, and technological advancement. It is an investigational,

[2] Many scholars (McLennan 2009; Bader 2012; Beckford 2012) have questioned both the meaning and usefulness of the term.
[3] In differentiating between the sacred and religion I follow Kristeva's understanding of the sacred being "[n]ot religion or its opposite, atheistic negation, but the experience that beliefs both shelter and exploit, at the crossroads of sexuality and thought, body and meaning" (Clement and Kristeva 1).

yet tentative attitude that facilitates a certain sense of freedom, only obtained through a transformation formed in uncanny or liminal space. Yet, as the postmoderns correctly argued, it was likewise a monstrous age of imperialism, systematic violence, racism, hubris, patriarchy, and many false utopian promises that had been disguised as unfortunate consequences in modernity's unquenching thirst for progress and innovation. However, the critique of modernity is not postmodern in essence but was born with modernity itself and therefore, cannot be generalized as an age of rationalism and contemporization, as a focus on irrationality and absurdity was developed in the same sequence. As Bauman contends, "postmodernism is modernity coming to terms with its own impossibility" (272), a sentiment I share and development by arguing that the characteristics of postmodernity are in fact fashioned in modernity, especially in regard to the perspective of modern stranger.

For Anthony Giddens, one of the most crucial aspects of modernity is the *disembedding* of time and space, meaning "the "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (21). Accordingly, modernity's delicate, and liminal character, not only distinguishes it from any age which preceded it but allows it to linger perhaps even beyond its own culmination. Linda Hutcheon (2003) develops this relationship further than Giddens, using a more liminal and uncanny interpretation. For her, postmodernism's connection with modernity is paradoxical in that it is "neither a simple and radical break from it nor a straightforward continuity with it: it is both and neither" (18). Likewise, I do use the term postmodern in certain instances. Since modernity is a continuing process, what has been labeled as postmodernity does have its own developed characteristics. Similarly, in

respect to postmodernism, I essentially agree with Arthur Asa Berger's (2003) claim that "[p]ostmodernism has the essential double meaning: the continuation of modernism and its transcendence" (58), though even this view links it to modernity's secularization/resacralization practice. Whether modernity has continued, replaced by postmodernity, or whether the binary of modern/postmodern itself has been exhausted, one of modernity's main enduring contributions is its liminal and uncanny spirit.

Based on these arguments my central premise of modernity is that its liminal makeup and lingering characteristics result in an age where space and time no longer coincide or are confined in boundaries, thereby leaving modernity to be defined by an uncanny and liminal structure. Turner's notion of *communitas* and anti-structures is directly tied his concept of liminality, as liminal *communitas* are a collection of liminal *personae* immersed or caught in the same liminal process. While it was Arnold van Gennep (1909/1960) who first introduced the concept of liminality, it was Turner (1967/2011) who focused and expanded the thought on van Gennep's 'sacred' middle state located between the phases of separation and reaggregation within a ritual passage. Turner refers to the liminal as a state of being 'in between", or a 'threshold' and a point of limit. It is a temporal state of marginalization and ambiguity, between profane and sacredness in which one's identity dissolves but is also in a state of "becoming" (*Forest* 94). For Turner (1978), liminality is a highly important aspect of the ritual process, not just for the individual but "all phases of decisive cultural change" (2), for it is during the liminal phase that the individual must prepare for an uncertain future.

However, there is a possibility that a person fails to be incorporated or reassimilated into normal society and may be caught within a fixed or permanent state of

liminality (Turner, *Dramas* 261). Here, Turner focuses on religious vocations such as the Christian monastic life or the notion of pilgrimages that are shared by many of the world's religions, where the religious or sacred passage is a spiritual or symbolic state that continues throughout one's life:

> "The Christian is a stranger to the world, a pilgrim, a traveller, with no place rest his head." Transition has here become a permanent condition. Nowhere has this institutionalization of liminality been more clearly marked and defined than in the monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions." (*Ritual* 107)

This notion of a permanent state of liminality that once seemed to be a condition for the strictly religious or sacred realm is now seen as a secular condition, which has become consequence of modernity itself (Szakolczai 2000).

I will examine liminality in a secularized modern context in comparison to the classical anthropological understanding found in the works of Turner, in an attempt to understand how the concept changes with modernity and if it still contains a sacred element in a secularized world as it did in small tribal societies. Most importantly, a discussion of liminality's positive and negative elements in modern society and its strangers, a liminal figure itself, is germane to my work. In this regard, Agnes Horvath (2013), going beyond Turner's definition which strictly focuses on small tribal societies, notes that liminality is in fact a strong aspect of the modern age and that "the term can be applied to concrete historical events, and *should* be applied, as offering a vital means for historical and sociological understandings" (2). Like Szakolczai, Horvath has a pessimistic view toward the liminal, arguing that the liminal in modern society is an extremely dangerous and problematic concept that destroys unity, order, and a "reversal of the self-evidence of reality" (4). Although the skepticism that both Szakolczai and Horvath share of modern society becoming too liminal, and thereby too chaotic and

unstable, is understandable, these 'dangerous' aspects of liminality can also be rewarding in that they confront traditional and commonly held viewpoints, enabling new and fresh perspectives suspended between imagination and reality.

Turner's liminal phase between the seen and unseen, evokes an unsettling eeriness of something strange but familiar. It is here that Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny has a direct link to liminality, since it operates in the same sphere of limits, abnormality, and strangeness, often associated with liminal experiences or marginality and thresholds (Royle vii). As stated by Turner, in this state the entity is

> betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. (*Ritual* 95)

In his essay "*Das Unheimliche*" ("The Uncanny") (1919/1955) Sigmund Freud expands on Ernst Jentsch's use of the term *unheimlich*, of being a product of intellectual uncertainty. Fear and anxiety arise when the person is confronted with something strange or alien. Freud, on the other hand, defines the *unheimlich* as something that is familiar and agreeable, yet also unfamiliar and hidden. According to Freud, the reason the uncanny terrifying is because it brings to light the fears and anxieties that we have previously come into contact with but have repressed. Being both familiar and alien, the uncanny leaves an impression of discomfort and anxiety in the subject due to the paradoxical feeling of being simultaneously fascinated and repulsed. Since the uncanny is what "ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light" (130), this cognitive dissonance is a result of the 'other' being contained within the self, thus dissolving the subject-object distinction. By referencing Mary Douglas' *Purity and*

Danger (1966), Turner has shown that the liminal *persona* is "regarded as polluting to those who have never been 'inoculated' against them" (*Forest*, 97). Thus liminal figures represent an uncanny fear or danger of polluting normal society.

Moreover, the uncanny seems to be a by-product of a teleological, secularized modern world. Mladen Dolar (1991), Terry Castle (1995), and Anthony Vidler (1992) all argue that the invention of the uncanny is directly related to both secularization and modernity. According to Dolar, prior to modernity, the premodern uncanny, if we can call it that, was something that existed solely for the world of religion and spirituality, "largely covered (and veiled) by the area of the sacred and untouchable" (7); however, it is secularized in the modern age, becoming the paradoxical mark of modernity by encompassing the ambiguity and uncertainty entrenched in the modern mind. The uncanny arose from the Enlightenment and modernity's "psychic and cultural transformations", its "aggressively rationalist imperatives…[which] also produced, like a kind of toxic side effect, a new human experience of strangeness, anxiety, bafflement, and intellectual impasse" (Castle 8). As with liminal space, the uncanny is not unified or harmonious but is a continuous alienated and ambiguous state caught in a tension with the boundaries of self and other.

3. The Modern Stranger

By the nineteenth century, many critical observers were left in a bedlam of uncertainty, disenchantment, alienation, which led to the rise of the hyper-conscious stranger or outsider, an individual who was simultaneously both modern and anti-modern. Western modernity had altered the perception of the stranger, as Georg Simmel (1908/1964) first argues, as "someone who is able to leave as quickly as he arrived, and

replaced it with someone who was able to exist and function among the rest of society" (402). Immersed in the paradoxes of modernity but also critical of its rational limitations, the modern outsider challenged the laws of society, nature and the so-called objective truths coupled to instrumental reason (ibid. 403-5). With the ascent of the modern stranger, the paradoxical role of being both immersed and removed from society allowed contemporary individuals to confront the issues that were related to secularism, modernity, and urbanization and also critique the normalization of modern city life. The modern stranger is a member of society because they lived in and were absorbed by the everyday banality of city life, contributing to both the population and even the economic aspects of modern life. However, they are removed or felt socially removed from society because either their thoughts or ideologies (or lack thereof) were contrary to the majority or they were marginalized by their 'otherness'. The modern stranger, therefore, crosses borders which are not geographical, but liminal, metaphysical, emotional, and psychological.

In *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991) Zygmunt Bauman reasons that modernity, which he deems to have originated during seventeenth century Europe but has now become globalized, is a social construction that looks to impose intellectual, social, and political order through rationality. However, when society becomes fashioned into familiar and manageable classes and structures, Bauman claims that there are always individuals and sub-cultures that cannot be managed or controlled. The result then is not a world of chaos and terror, but instead one of ambivalence and alienation, as the notion of 'strangerhood' becomes a universal condition of modernity and individuality. Modernity's attempt to remove all uncertainty and ambivalence in society through

rational thought seems to have a reverse effect. Echoing Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer's thesis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/1982) that rationality's attempt to overcome nature and mythology only led back into a world of mythology, Bauman states that ambivalence and alienation seems to lie inside modernity's core.

Extending the work of Simmel and Jacques Derrida, Bauman introduces the metaphorical subject 'the stranger'. Accordingly, the stranger or society's 'undecidables', borrowing Derrida's term, are uncanny and "true hybrids" that are "unclassified" within society (148). By being someone who is present yet removed, or familiar and at the same time unfamiliar, the stranger "does not fall into society's social order by living outside of social borders" and "therefore becomes an object of fear and a threat to society" (ibid. 150). Moreover, as a result, "[t]he stranger undermines the spatial ordering of the world" and "disturbs the resonance between physical and psychical distance…he is *physically close* while remaining *spiritually* remote" (ibid.).

By using Bauman's concept of the stranger in correlation with Simmel's, I plan on showing how modernity and the uncanny are the underlining main source of the figure of the stranger/outsider. However, although I base much of my work on Bauman's analysis, I critically deviate from his thesis in that I argue that the modern stranger is not necessarily "*spiritually remote*" as Bauman argues but rather, finds ways to uncannily resacralize itself within the liminalness of secularized modernity. John D. Caputo argues in "Hospitality and the Trouble With God" (2011) that there is an explicit connection between the stranger and God in that "[t]he stranger is both a venerable figure and dangerous. The stranger is maddening, like God. Undecidable, like God" (86). I agree with Caputo's assessment of a God who goes against "the tendency of theology to think

in terms of the divine order, and of God as the source of order" (83). The concept of God is rather "something out of order… trouble, as a source of disruption and interruption" and his "thinking of God as the source of irregularity and disordered and displaced orders…" (ibid. 83-4). However, I consider this concept of God, as "something out of order", directly tied to both the unleashing of the uncanny in secularism and secularized modernity itself, when humanity must accept its liminal role as both creator/created and where God is made out of our image rather than us out of His.

In *Strangers to Ourselves* (1988/1991), Julia Kristeva's notion of the stranger being contained within the self, "the hidden face of our identity" (1), is important in linking the stranger and the uncanny. She argues that through the other, we are able to see our own otherness since, according to Kristeva, we are all strangers to ourselves. Here, Kristeva's applies, what she claims to be, Christianity's greatest legacy of self-questioning (*This Incredible* viii-ix) to the idea of the stranger. By recognizing each other through our weakness, our own 'strangerhood', we thereby remove the uncanny fear of the foreigner. With Kristeva's argument, we can see the uncanniness of the other invading the self, as the way one feels towards a stranger, reflects what we unconsciously feel about ourselves**.** In this sense, Kristeva points out the modern shift of the psychoanalytic stranger, which encompasses everyone, as becoming a liminal experience of both encountering, and likewise, being a stranger. It is this paradoxical and liminal situation that has allowed for a new perspective of 'strangeness', where the self is not solidified or established by the other, or foreigner, but rather by self-estrangement. By doing so, Kristeva argues that the ingrained negative attitude toward strangers and

foreigners is removed in favour of a more fluid and ambiguous understanding of the terms:

> Let us not seek to solidify, to turn the otherness of the foreigner into a thing. Let us merely touch it, brush by it, without giving it permanent structure. Simply sketching out its perpetual motion through some of its variegated aspects spread out before our eyes today, even some of its former, changing representations scattered throughout history. Let us also lighten that otherness by constantly coming back to it-but more and more swiftly. Let us escape its hatred, its burden, fleeing them not through leveling and forgetting, but through the *harmonious* repetition of the differences it implies and spreads. (3)

Through maintaining a "fleeing eternity or…perpetual transience" (ibid. 4), the stranger resides in a place of liminality that allows for both the linking together and the presenting of differences, which subsequently leads to a strange form of freedom or happiness.

As secularized modernity continues to push us further into liminal space, it runs the risk of also leaving the stranger in a fixed or permanent state of liminality (Turner *Dramas* 261). The *liminal personae* are either involuntary or voluntary, existentially or physically, set "apart from the behavior of status-occupying, role-playing members of that system" (ibid., 233). However, this fixed state is problematic: if everything is constantly in flux, then constant change itself remains the same, and the source of excitement in liminal space becomes a boring routine in of itself. "Individuals are forced to invent more and more sophisticated and ultimately perverse forms of entertainment in a mad search after experience, in the wish to surpass in excitement the boredom of the hectic existence in a permanent state of liminality" (Szakolczai 229). I will focus on ways through which, if possible, the modern stranger can use alienation as a positive force; comparable to the way Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1984,1980/1987) have taken a similar tactic with Jacques Lacan's (1977) definition of desire as a lack. Alienation, like desire, has the possibility to be utopian, productive, and even courageous. The 'tragic joy' that

Nietzsche (1888/1911) discussed is a necessary tool for the stranger. It could be used as a weapon to fight the boredom of life, purity, or social structure, albeit paradoxically, since one can only experience this beauty by submersing oneself in the mundane horror and unclean liminal space in order to experience the beauty of the sacred aspects that are found within it.

As a danger to social structures, the stranger paradoxically becomes the central figure of utopian thought. A major portion of this project, which is tied to the sacred and the secular, is the idea of the messianic or 'messianic time' and its relationship with utopia. Based on the work of Ernst Bloch (1918/2000), I show how the undecidablity of the stranger can become a form of re-sacralization and itself a utopian element for social change, even among anti-structures. In an attempt to remove the negative connotations that come with a blueprint understanding of utopia, Bloch's understanding of the term is never static. It is not a final ending place but a dialectical process or a 'spirit' that manifests itself out of the darkness of the present world (201). Utopia, according to Bloch, is inherent in the unhappiness, despair, and frustration in the present world, in which "[h]ope is in the darkness itself" (201). Bloch's use of utopia is imperative for our culture as the notion of alienation and disillusionment is not absent from our current society, especially since the struggle concerning religion and secularization has created its own outsiders, not from a Marxist perspective.

4. Modern Monsters and Haunting Spectres

Notions of liminality, the uncanny, and the modern stranger are directly tied to the concept of monstrosity and therefore, a significant and central aspect to my work. An etymological study of the word monster exposes a double meaning; one strain deriving

from the Latin (to reveal or show), the other *monstrum* (to warn), which has been traditionally viewed as representing a divine omen or portent of an unexpected misfortune (Biles 3; Frueh 26). Like the stranger, the uncanny shift of the monster from the Middle Ages to modernity is a movement towards liminality. The monster transforms from being outside the borders of what is traditionally regarded as human to a presence that is located at its threshold, and as a result, it challenges what we consider human, along with our notions of what is monstrous, impure, and ugly. As such, it is a compelling representation of both the nature/artificial divide of posthuman gender blurring and particularly, as symbolic of the abject female body, which like the monster, violates boundaries and threatens the social stability (Kristeva 1980/1982). To this effect, Rosi Braidotti (2011) appropriately emphasizes the monster's liminality character describing it as representation of "the in-between, the mixed, the ambivalent", located "between the sacred and the profane. The peculiarity of the organic monster is that she is both Same and Other. The monster is neither a total stranger nor completely familiar. He exists in an in-between zone" (216). By representing what is both liminal and structural to human identity, the monstrous other for Braidotti's "helps us understand the paradox of "difference"" (ibid). Braidotti not only acknowledges a sacred/profane element to the liminal monster but likewise a gender transgressive symbol, where the altering of pronouns is a result of seeing the monster as "a process without a stable object" (ibid. 243).

With secularized modernity, the monstrous becomes a symbol of the loss of both spirituality and traditional values in the new technological age and likewise a representation of our existential displacement in such a morally ambiguous and liminal

universe. Although the monster is conjured up in early modernity in order to differentiate between a world of progress from a world of superstition, the modern form of the monstrous is ultimately found in secularized modernity itself, in its notions of progress: "The monster…threatens modernity, in that it originates in modernity, but reflects the limits of it" (N. Scott 2). The monster of modernity shows the vulnerability of an age that is fearful of the return of the repressed, and as a result, the monstrous has also become a reappropriated positive symbol within modernity, one that goes beyond the dangerous representation of chaos and peril that threatens society, to a precarious and ironic symbol of hope and even sustainability.

In relation to monstrosity, the notion of the spectre also gains new significance during modernity, especially through the hauntological work of Derrida (1993). While also haunting us on the edges of reason, the spectre becomes ever closer to the theme of monstrosity the more the fragmented self dissipates further away from the physical world and body, making the monster and spectre almost interchangeable in modernity's liminal space. The liminal metaphor of the spectre is a haunting image of the present that also disrupts time. While the spectre foreshadows through haunting repetition, limiting our knowable future, it also sideshadows by offering us numerous presents. In writing, sideshadowing is used to produce a sensation of the "something else". Unlike foreshadowing that comes from the future, "it casts a shadow "from the side"…from other possibilities…Sideshadows conjure the ghostly presence of might-have-beens or might-bes" (Morson 118). In light of this, as with the monster, the spectre acts as a warning through foreshadowing but also acts as a messianic and divine spirit of utopian potential.

DISSERTATION SUMMARY

The opening chapter of my dissertation argues that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818/1999) is the ideal text in outlining secularized modernity and the monstrosity that lurks within it, demonstrating the paradoxes and ambivalences of modernity that have challenged us ever since its publication. Through this reading, I trace how the novel constitutes the emergence and development of the modern uncanny and liminal stranger as a response to the dissolving of collective binaries in the secularizing Western world and the ever-increasing fragmentation of modern society, from its once strongly held morals to the deconstruction of the internal and external self. *Frankenstein* is witnessing the rise of a paradoxical world where, although humanity is given the freedom to create with autonomous and enthusiastic purposefulness, in actuality, our existence contains no real plan or blueprint. I argue that *Frankenstein* is the exemplar of the modern stranger and the liminal condition that the modern individual has endured, and therefore, acts as a foundation to the philosophy and ideas found in the following of the chapters.

The second chapter examines two of the most influential philosopher-poets of secularized modernity, Charles Baudelaire and Giacomo Leopardi, who helped define and influence our views of the modern condition through the expansion of the notion of the monstrous that was laid out in *Frankenstein*. Through the poetry and philosophical writings of Baudelaire and Leopardi, I examine the rise of nihilism and boredom in an intensifying urban age and the beginning of a resacralization process that created a secularized modern form of the sacred from the ashes of the mythos of Christology. Leopardi and Baudelaire looked for meaning in the ashes and ruins of the previous age,

while simultaneously being cautious of the terrifying new epoch of the secular 'hell' that was forming around them.

Chapter three focuses on the historical event of the First World War that brought the liminality, absurdity, and most importantly, the violence of modern warfare into the lives of the everyday individual, resulting in the modern stranger becoming a figure more grounded in everyday life. Here the monster of modernity is transformed into an incurable sickness that has infested society but also results in an ironic and paradoxical form of utopia. By focusing on Italo Svevo's *Zeno's Conscience* (1923/2001), Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* (1978/1995), Fritz Lang's *M* (1931/2004), and Walter M. Miller's *The Canticle of Leibowitz* (1959/2007), I show how both the modern stranger and the modern monster are thrust back into postwar society.

The fourth chapter thrusts us into the post-WWII age of the spectacle and the age ruled by social media. I link the liminal concept of boredom to the continuing effects of secularized modernity. Although a sentiment that is obviously not exclusive to modernity, the modern age generates more ambiguity and fragmentation in its comprehension of boredom than previous periods. By examining the various forms of boredom in relation to the films of Michelangelo Antonioni, the writings of author Tao Lin, and the philosophical works of Sara Ahmed, I examine how these different forms of boredom tend to blend into one another when outlining the modern experience of the stranger, with the concepts of mood and boredom attempting to redefine the modern stranger for contemporary modernity.

In chapter five I look at the tensions of self and other through online communities and social media, and how this is creating new forms of fragmentation. The Internet is a

new form of liminal or third space[4] created in virtual environments and is quickly becoming the preferred means of social interaction, yet also has many interesting philosophical and existential implications, which can result in certain resacralizing or utopian elements. This chapter focuses on early literary and film depictions of cyberspace found in the science fiction genre of cyberpunk, most notably in the novels William Gibson and Japanese filmmaker Mamoru Oshii's anime series *Ghost in the Shell*. While also examining Dave Egger's novel *The Circle* (2013), I discuss how the notion of cyberspace has changed the more this technology has become entrenched in our lives. I explore the changing landscape of identity, as the lines between human and machine become more obscure with both therapeutic and threatening consequences that accompany an increasing production of, and reliance on online identities in social media.

The final chapter looks at the modern stranger in regard to gender and post-humanism. Gender binaries have been used throughout history to establish a male dominated and patriarchal society with characteristics as superior and inferior, tackling the uncanny fear of self and other. This chapter returns to Shelley's *Frankenstein* and shows its influence on Donna Haraway's cyborgian feminism, and Hélène Cixous' reimagining of the mythical figure of Medusa in relation to ideas such as gender,

[44] The term 'Third Space' was first introduced by cultural and post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1990). According to Bhabha, the third space is a liminal space of cultural hybridity, "which gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (211). While the term is largely used in post-colonial studies, the concept is largely missing from studies on internet and cyberculture. According to Masoud Kosari and Abbas Amoori (2018) however, the term does have a place in studies of cyberspace since it "necessitates redefining society and social interactions,"while "[t]he increasing expansion of the borderline spaces, better called *interpenetration*, necessitates further complications of the mental and conceptual spaces" (185).

sexuality, the monstrous, and abyssal resacralization. Along these theorists, I examine the novels *Don Quixote, which was a dream* (1986) and *Empire of the Senseless* (1988) by Kathy Acker, in her attempt to deconstruct gender binaries and the language that upholds them through the feminist act of writing herself, while simultaneously and paradoxically, acknowledging that she is still liminally confined to them.

The intention of this dissertation is to examine the liminal sphere located between the secular and sacred that I argue has characterized modernity itself. This space has consequently altered the makeup of the stranger from something external, into a figure far more liminal, which is forced to traverse this uncanny space in an attempt to find new meanings for an age that is struggling to maintain any.

II: FRANKENSTEIN AND THE 'BIRTH' OF SECULARIZED MODERNITY

"There is something at work in my soul which I do not understand" (Robert Walton)
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1831)

The spirit, the specter are not the same thing, and we will have to sharpen this difference; but as for what they have in common, one does not know what it is, what it is presently – This Thing is absent
- Jacques Derrida, *Specter of Marx*

The sight of the burning tree inspires a vision of the majesty of the day which lights the world without setting fire to it at the same time
- Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Just as primitive man believed himself to stand face to face with demons and believed that could he but know their names he would become their master, so is contemporary man faced by this incomprehensible, which disorders his calculations. "If I can but grasp it, if I can but cognise it", so he thinks, "I can make it my servant."
- Karl Jaspers, *Man In The Modern Age*

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the nineteenth century was a significant period of transition within Europe, as the accruing of contemporary history's revolutionary, secular, and modernizing ideals were beginning to be integrated into quotidian life. The signature distinction of this time is intrinsically tied to the implementation of the dominant modern principles of reason, progress, and social change, which were all grounded in a consciousness or 'soul' of individualism and autonomy. Yet, this amalgam of modern, and often opposing, principles produced a problematic and paradoxical condition for many modern individuals, who were caught between two existing worlds: the one of the traditional past and the modern one that was being implemented. It was this conflicted and tumultuous age that was the backdrop to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818/1831)[5], a novel that primarily lays out the psychological and

[5] Although originally published in 1818 (1999), Mary Shelley revised the novel in 1831 (2003). There are several delicate, yet significant differences between these two editions

spiritual paradigm, of not only the emerging modern and secular world during the early nineteenth century, but also one that lingers and continues to uncannily haunt modernity. From the incessant 'Frankenstein complex', to our tensions between ambiguity and knowledge; from our uncanny fear of self and other, to the concept of the stranger increasingly alienated from society, Nature, and a silent God, Shelley's novel illuminated a shadowy interweaving counterpart to the prevailing ideals of the early modern epoch - a 'monster' of modernity that should not exist, but nonetheless does, throwing a shadow and haunting humanity along its journey of progress. Due to Shelley's elucidation of these modern struggles and by being one of the first illustrations of modernity's abject space, a liminal zone encompassing both fascination and repulsion, I argue that, although a process, the rising questions and complications of secularized modernity was epitomized within the pages of Shelley's seminal novel.

It should be noted that this is not just another reading of *Frankenstein*, a novel that has been analyzed in academic circles for countless years, but an analysis that contextualizes *Frankenstein* within the imminent rational and secularizing modern world as an indication of the paradoxes and ambivalences of modernity. Through this reading, I argue that the novel constitutes the literary emergence and development of the modern, uncanny, and liminal stranger caught in the intensifying malaise of secularized modernity. Nonetheless, important scholarly work on the subject is highly relevant to my own research on the topic and will be used to support this claim. For example, Fred Botting's

in regard to style, structure, and plot, the most prominent being Victor's apparent ability to exercise freewill and agency in the 1818 edition, while in 1831 edition, he seems to be a victim of Fate and Chance. All citations where the text is the same will be from the 1831 edition. For a detailed and interesting study on the differences between the two editions, see Anne K. Mellor, "Revising Frankenstein" in *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988).

deconstructive analysis of Shelley's novel in *Making Monstrous: Frankenstein, Criticism Theory* (1991) is essential in showing the novel's multiplicitous spirit, arguing that every textual interpretation that tries to centralize or unify the novel's meaning, ultimately fails or contradicts itself. Botting's reading of *Frankenstein* is situated in the extremes between Victor Frankenstein and his Creature; the former stands for a fixed identity, totalitarianism, and authority, while the Creature represents an unstable difference and otherness (139). While I agree with Botting that these two representations of identity exist within the novel, I do not feel that a dualistic separation between the characters is justified, but rather that both simultaneously represent fixed and fluid identities in their own right. The Creature can be as demanding and totalitarian as Victor Frankenstein, while Victor's hope of progress places him in an undertaking of discovering unfixed possibilities, a mission that David Foster Wallace (2013) describes as "selfless" and "messianic" (133). Another important aspect of Botting's work is his interpretation of the monstrous as a manifestation of the turbulent political climate of the time, commenced with the French Revolution. While this is a significant aspect of my own research, I expand on this idea by arguing the French Revolution was just as essential to the secularization process and the age's religious and spiritual discontent as it was to the political spectrum, culminating in the novel's ambiguous and liminal stance on both areas.

Lee Sterrenburg's work is similarly important in that it also looks at the political and psychological fallout that the French Revolution had on Shelley's work. In "Mary Shelley's Monster: Politics and Psyche in *Frankenstein*" (1979), Sterrenburg argues that despite her dedication of the novel to her father, Shelley mainly critiques and parodies William Godwin's radical utopian politics. Originally influenced by her father and

husband Percy Shelley's radical and utopian political ideals, Shelley slowly abandoned these in favour of a more anti-revolutionary position, culminating in the political ambivalence that exists within the novel. This theory goes fairly against Anne K. Mellor's claim that the two editions show a radical change between them. Mellor's *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988) is a biographical and feminist analysis or Shelley's work. Mellor's analysis explores how the all-male creation myth highlights the "hierarchical power-systems both within the nuclear family and in the society at large", the real monsters of the story (217). Although Mellor's analysis itemizes the way that Shelley's life influences the majority of her work and presents many compelling arguments regarding hierarchical power-systems, her analysis of *Frankenstein* at times undermines the novel's premise regarding the ambiguity encompassed within modernity and the fear that comes with contesting that ambiguity, particularly when concerning Mellor's study of the edited novel's ending over that of Mary Shelley's unpublished original.

Mellor's main argument in the chapter "Revising Frankenstein" is that Shelley altered the meaning and spiritual core of the novel in the 1831 edition to coincide with her radically new philosophical and political views at the time; views that had become far more pessimistic and melancholic once she "had lost faith in the possibility that a generous, loving, and nurturant response to both human and physical nature might create a world without monsters" (176). However, I argue that the attempt, even if futile, to suppress the uncanny at the end of the novel and the inevitability of a modern world *with* monsters exist in both editions. The two editions should not be seen as distinctive or opposites, but instead, more like shadows of one another. They both ask the question of

whether secular knowledge and agency are able to steer human history consciously towards scientific and linear progress, or whether freedom has simply left us in a world dictated by chaos and chance. If we examine the two editions of *Frankenstein* together, Shelley seems to argue that both Chance and Fate are somewhat paradoxically interlocked with one another.

Frankenstein is by no means is an outdated tale that represented an early modern and transitional society that no longer exists. As with modernity, our current age's fragmented identity is symbolically tied to the Creature's physical facade of scattered limbs assembled together. Society in late modernity continues to be caught within a social narrative in, which stems from multiple storytellers, perspectives, and sources of knowledge that still resembles a hybrid creature uncannily akin to the one Victor Frankenstein created in the darkest corners of his laboratory. As Richard J. Dunn (1974) argues, "*Frankenstein* is concerned with a fragmenting society in which communication remains incomplete" (416). More importantly, reaching a multitude of theories such as Marxism, (Moretti 1982, Michie, 1990), along with disciplines such as environmental studies (Curtin 2005, Hammond 2004), psychoanalysis (J. Berman 1990, Marsh 2009), and especially regarding racial (Malchow, 1993, Piper 2007, Young 2008), feminist (Yousef 2002, Hoeveler 2003) and gender studies, (Thornburg 1987, Mellor 1988), *Frankenstein* remains not only a prophetic warning, but a modern myth that relentlessly renews its influence in our disjointed and continuously 'becoming' artificial-reality. As Jon Turney argues in *Frankenstein's Footsteps: Science, Genetics and Popular Culture* (1998), Shelley's "story about finding the secret of life became one of the most important myths of modernity", adding that "now that the secrets of life are ours for the taking we

need to ask what role that myth will play in the collective debate about how to make use of them" (2-3). In this regard, *Frankenstein* seriously encompasses Marshall Berman's (1982) paradoxical disposition of modernism: "to be fully modern is to be anti-modern" (14) in such a highly developed and felicitous manner. Shelley's modern Prometheus[6] has become the creation story of the modern era, our mythos that captures and illuminates our modern experience of struggling to belong in a secular and alienating world where responsibility ultimately rests in the individual. Yet, *Frankenstein* is an uncanny or paradoxical creation myth, since the apocalyptical end to the older traditional world is entirely intertwined with the birth of the new monstrous one, and as a result, provides us with a prototype of the modern stranger that encapsulates a world that creates far more questions than answers.

FRANKENSTEIN AND SECULARIZATION

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* points to a problematic and paradoxical characteristic of modernity: with the arrival of the French Revolution, humanity's attempt

6 The symbol of Prometheus as both the modern individual and myth is not only used in *Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley's husband, Percy Shelley, published *Prometheus Unbound* in 1820. Despite the reactionary failures of the French Revolution, Percy's Prometheus personifies the ideal spirit of rebellion and heroic struggle, contrasting Mary Shelley's ambiguous usage of the Greek myth with a more optimistic view of human progress. Franz Kafka's parable "Prometheus" (1918/1971) uses the myth to address the problematic question of existence. After outlining the four different versions of the myth, he writes, "[t]here remains the inexplicable mass of rock. The legend tries to explain the inexplicable. As it comes out of the substratum of truth it has in turn to end in the inexplicable" (432). In a similar absurdist vein, Giacamo Leopardi's take on the Prometheus myth, "The Wager of Prometheus" (1824/1983) in *Moral Tales*, shows Prometheus as a gambler and troublemaker. In Leopardi's tale, Prometheus takes a contest between the gods for the greatest creation too seriously, only to eventually give up on humanity after witnessing its destructive Nature. Although both Leopardi and Mary Shelley portray Prometheus as a risk taker, the distinctions between the two Prometheus' highlight the differences between both writers' philosophies, which shall be further outlined in the next chapter.

to free itself from Destiny still leaves it in the hands of Chance, where human control outside of the hands of God is no more realistic.[7] By 1818, the enthusiasm of the French Revolution was slowly subsiding, while its most famous original critique, Edmund's Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790/1999), was gaining popularity outside of conservative circles with free thinking individuals like Mary Shelly, who began to side with Burke's reproach of reason as a universal and objective standard (Sterrenburg 1979). Caught within this tension, Shelley's novel takes a liminal stance as it "seems to both construct and undermine the possibility of authority: it operates within but subverts and leaves open the binary limits it confronts" (Botting 1991, 152). *Frankenstein* builds and deconstructs simultaneously the teleological narrative of modernity by addressing the ambiguous situation of its age, which was caught between a "monster of a constitution" (Burke 196) in anarchy and destruction and the utopian spirit of humanity's ability to ambitiously change the world for the better. The novel's moral and socio-political stance is a liminal hybrid positioned within this void, between two contrasting views of utopian and revolutionary change: one of fear, and one of optimism. Yet, despite the growing criticism of romanticizing the historic event as utopian, Burke's attack on the French Revolution was unable to stop the lasting ideological, social, and spiritual effects the French Revolution had upon European society.

As Albert Camus claims in *The Rebel* (1951/1991), after the storming of the Bastille and the subsequent "guillotining [of] God on January 21, 1793" (39), freedom and progress have taken over the area of the sacred by reducing God "to the theoretical

[7] Although the outcomes may be similar, fate and destiny are not the same as chance. As Saxena and Dixit (2001) point out fate and "[d]estiny implies something foreordained or a predetermined course of events", whereas "[c]hance means something that happens unpredictability without discernable human intention or observable cause" (36).

existence of a moral principle" (132), thereby making the newly acquired values of Nation, Liberty, and Reason, the new authoritative religious forces on earth. The French Revolution and the ensuing destruction of the monarchy, created a gap or void between God and humanity with the killing of the King, God's voice or bridge from earth to heaven, leaving the Republic on its own without any of God's moral laws (39). The violent Jacobin chapter of the French Revolution aspired to serve as "the bearer of the messianic mission of the hopes of the moderns" (Cristaudo 256), making it the defining moment when Jacob's ladder would be deconstructed and rebuilt, no longer as a passage between heaven and earth, but between humanity and its ambitions. Located within this unsettled social, political, and spiritual environment, and unable to situate itself amongst contrasting ideologies, *Frankenstein* "molds them into a unique third" and "asks what it is like to be labeled, defined, and even physically distorted by a political stereotype" (Sterrenburg 166).

This move towards secularized modernity not only leads to an unnerving political and moral malaise, but a spiritual void also begins to accumulate due to a state of fleeting impulses and a blurring of traditionally held dualities previously cemented into the social and cultural structure. This thrusts certain modern individuals, exemplified in the novel by both Frankenstein and the Creature, into a state of liminality and stranger-hood, not merely due to the political situation but also because of the spiritual and moral traditions that were held up by the strict and hierarchical structure of the great chain of being. Shelley's world of *Frankenstein* lacks a God, at least one that is pure or omnipotent, and it is also noteworthy to mention that in a text where creator and created play such a significant role, in both editions, God's name is usually uttered in reaction to horrible

acts[8] (Shelley 26, 58, 74, 195, 199), while Justine's unbreakable faith simply results in her tragic, yet forgotten death. The Frankensteins' servant is accused and executed for the murder of Victor's younger brother William, the Creature's first victim, and once arrested, confesses to a crime she did not commit out of fear of being excommunicated from the Church and the possibility of going to Hell. Justine's suffers from the "misery of innocence" (ibid. 89) and her sentencing further exemplifies the novel's ambiguity concerning corruption, justice, purity, Chance, and Fate. God is nowhere to help an innocent person who becomes a victim of a series of events she has no control or even knowledge of.

However, the irreligious stance of the novel does not come from a removal of religion or sacredness but instead from the secularizing/resacralizing process that lies in modernity. The novel secularizes, yet retains, the mythos of Christianity, though the allegorical aspects of the religion are blurred, inverted, or distorted. While in the creation story of "Genesis", in which Adam and Eve lose their innocence from their acquired ability to recognize the difference between good and evil, Shelley, on the other hand, reverses this by bestowing the loss of innocence on Frankenstein and the Creature, and subsequently the reader, as a result of the removal or blurring of good and evil, where one cannot distinguishes between the two, especially since this problematical binary could no longer be attributed to the mysterious plan of God. In both stories, neither is unable to go

[8] The most notable one being when Victor first realizes the 'ugliness' of his creation; "Beautiful! — Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips (Shelley 58).

back to their familiar 'Edens' of innocence and ignorance and must be propelled into the future without the parental protection of their creator. *Frankenstein* takes this even further through the shock of animation that supersedes the omnibenevolence and omnipotence of a creator with modernity's shadowy secret: bland ugliness and powerlessness. With *Frankenstein*, Shelley secularizes the question of theodicy. The responsibilities formally attributed to God now lie on humanity's shoulders, yet she reminds us that the question of evil can no longer be circumvented with answers of divine mystery, since humanity has taken command of the vitality of history. The future that Shelley formed in her imaginary, and foreshadowed in reality, is one in which God has abandoned humanity in the same way the Creature was abandoned by his "natural lord and king" (Shelley 102-3). By abandoning the Creature, Frankenstein simply lives up to his role as creator and leaves his creation to its own devices.

To be fair, *Frankenstein* borrows considerably from the secularizing literary devices of the Romantic and Gothic novels that preceded it, exemplifying the 'seeds' of modernity that both traditions began to cultivate. Not only did it continue the Gothic genre's aesthetic of dark and mysterious atmospheric tales of suspense and 'supernatural' terror, more notably, concerning its sociocultural and psychological effects, the novel renews the Gothic's and Romantic's modern and liminal ritual of secularizing the scared into the uncanny, a phenomenon that manifests itself in modernity from the ashes of religion. In *Unquiet Things: Secularism In The Romantic Age* (2015) Colin Jager challenges the notion that as modernity secularizes, the presence or "noise" of religion is eliminated. Instead, Jager claims that the secular "silence" is unable to completely remove the "residue or ghost" of religion and the sacred (4), and that "within the static,

the ambient noise, the alternative frequency…we can hear the particular kind of unquiet…" (9). These noises and disturbances in secular space have often been characterized by moments of the uncanny. In *Gothic Riffs: Secularizing the Uncanny in the European Imaginary, 1780-1820* (2010), Diane Long Hoeveler, using Charles Taylor's secularizing process outlined in *A Secular Age* (2007),[9] focuses on the Gothic as a cultural practice designed, not necessarily as a reaction against secularism, "but as part of the ambivalent secularizing process itself" that was "invented to instantiate the rise of secularism" (6). According to Hoeveler, "[a]s a major component of the secularizing process, the gothic aesthetic anxiously looked both backward and forward at the same time, torn between reifying the past and anxiously embracing a future it could not quite envision" (xvii). Due to this liminal position of being caught between the ambiguous modernizing attempts of society, although a society where myth and magic still holds power over the social imaginary, the uncanny originates with the Gothic tradition (30). The Janus-faced genre stands between a feudal and religious past and a contemporary world being established on the rational principles brought forth from both the Protestant reformation and the subsequent Age of the Enlightenment. Yet, what essentially makes the Gothic genre modern, according to Hoeveler, is its preoccupation with the "just now" or the moment of immediacy, reflected in its fascination with death, the apocalypse, and alienation (11). Due to what Hoeveler identifies as gothic 'riffs', the Gothic represents

[9] Although working around Taylor's framework, Hoeveler does not agree with his argument that during the late eighteenth century there existed two binary subjectivities: the 'porous' self, who was unprotected from the "anima" or spiritual world, and the skepticism of the 'buffered' self, who effectively removed any need of the supernatural. Hoeveler rejects this binary, arguing instead of an "interaction" or "oscillation" between these subjectivities (16-17).

"the first truly modern discourses in which individuals stand in sort of existential alienation in a universe of their own largely imaginary making" (15).

If, from its early inception, the Gothic was itself a modern genre that drew out the uncanny through the secularization of the scared, and likewise, emphasized the concept of the wandering, alienated, and liminal individual, then why should we begin secularized modernity with Shelley's novel, which many critics argue as simply part of the Gothic tradition, or at the very least, immensely influenced by Romantic, Gothic literature, and even established folklore? (Haggerty 1989, Kilgour 1995, Tichelaar 2012). It must also be stated that although the Gothic genre has many similar literary devices and tropes as a whole, it cannot be classified in any exclusive way, since the 'essence' of what ties the genre together is vague or "mutable" (Goddu 266) and its meanings or interpretations fluctuate in accordance with the historical, cultural, and ideological environment in which they were created and understood (Botting 2001, 1). Still, there are multiple reasons for beginning the advent of secularized modernity and the modern stranger with Shelley's celebrated novel. First of all, despite its clear influences from and affiliations with Gothic literary conventions, it would be deceptive to simply categorize Shelley's masterpiece as part of the Gothic tradition. *Frankenstein* is a difficult novel to classify in any single genre, even transformative ones like the Romantic and Gothic, for it stands in a textual liminal space in of itself, as it redefines or goes beyond the previous commonly used Gothic and horror elements, twisting and blurring common held dichotomies, such as myth and reality, good and evil, light and dark, villain and hero, real and artificial, and even representations of the double or *doppelgänger*, far beyond any novel before it.

However, what truly distinguishes *Frankenstein* from previous Gothic novels, and what makes it a forbearer of modernism and science fiction (Reichart 1994, Stableford 1995, Donawerth 1997, Botting 2005, McMahon 2007),[10] is that it is not merely concerned with the past or simply the "just now", but instead with our paradoxical future of what is 'becoming'. The reason why Gothic literature was "anxiously embracing a future it could not quite envision," as Hoeveler argues, had to do with its adherence to past traditional dichotomies it was trying to reject, such as in Catholicism, while championing a more rationalist view of Christianity that ultimately upheld the same binaries.[11] On the other hand, by looking toward a prophetic future, *Frankenstein* is curious and troubled with the uncertain society that is forming, perhaps more so than the one it is leaving behind. It is first to envision a world where science, technology, and secular knowledge look towards and succeed in, replacing ancient beliefs, customs, and previously held social constructions. Whereas the supernatural undertaking of the Gothic was still reliant on the recognizable characteristics, symbols, and dualities found in Christianity, *Frankenstein* borrows but blurs the lines of these universally recognized moral symbols. The supernatural and the uncanny are no longer located in the feudal and religious past but instead in the conceptualization of secular knowledge and a scientific

[10] Shelley was influenced by the science of her age as much as Gothic and Romantic literature. Jasia Reichardt (1994) argues that the novel "is not a story about alchemy and magic but science, or more precisely, about natural philosophy, chemistry and galvanism" (136-137).

[11] As Hoeveler explains, although most Gothic literature was a result of Protestantism's attempt to remove the irrational elements found within medieval Catholicism, the otherness of Catholicism was still an intrinsic and uncanny component within Protestantism, leaving Gothic literature fractured between a thirst for the modern and nostalgia for the early Catholic traditions. As a result, the Gothic attempt to secularize the uncanny is a "hazy one", since these earlier beliefs hold as much power as the rational ones that looked to eliminate them (30-31).

view of progress that gave humanity its hegemonic belief in the future can be molded and controlled. Published at the cusp of the Gothic tradition, *Frankenstein* reconstructs the liminal text or bridge between the secular uncanny of the early Gothic tradition and the rising modernist one caught in a battle of the artificial and natural, which would endure well into the twentieth century. It does not contemplate the past while standing in the present as the Gothic genre formally subsisted, but rather, it resides in the modern liminal state where past, present, and future collide with one another, leaving the stranger in a very ambiguous position of struggling to find meaning or remnants of the sacred in the intensifying cold and calculated world.

The future God in *Frankenstein* is not an omnipotent being removed from our society but instead, the ambitious man, symbolized by Victor Frankenstein, who is immersed, though detached from society. Frankenstein's secularized and liminal stance of creator and created is even furthered by the act of secrecy. Whether Frankenstein should have shared his creation, his secret, with the rest of humanity, and whether his silence demonstrates an abuse of power are questions that have lingered throughout the history of the novel. His whole experiment is shrouded in mystery and secrecy from beginning to end as one secret consequently leads to another; at first to hide his controversial research and to maintain his authority and power over unearthing science's "unknown powers" and "deepest mysteries" (Shelley, 1831 49), but then continuing in order to protect his family and more importantly, modern secular society. If we examine the Augustinian understanding of secrecy, it paradoxically shifts from a divine element to one of sin, divided by the sacred/profane binary, in which "God brings about this sudden conversion away from worldly values by acting on and through the hidden, concealed

depths of man's corruption" (Vance 13). Consequently, the paradox of secrecy goes beyond a sacred and profane perspective and encompasses the idea itself, since in order for a secret to be recognized, there must also be knowledge of the concealment by another person, which simultaneously reveals and conceals the unknown information (Bellman 2).

Nevertheless, secrecy opens up the opportunity of two different worlds. The secret world actively affects the "obvious world" (Simmel 462). The second world of ambiguity that Victor witnesses through the Creature's eyes puts the 'obvious' world based on science and linear progress into serious doubt. Modernity's secret now becomes Victor's once he becomes creator: one of a liminal future that cannot be controlled by humanity even though it now has gained agency in its own history. The responsibility of secrecy falls upon Frankenstein, which forces him into concealing his creation in order to protect himself and the people he loves, even though in the end it ironically leads to his and his family's downfall. *Frankenstein*'s narrative is structured around what Freud (1900/1965) stated as the modern and "the secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind" (298), as the more religion wanes in everyday life, the more repressed we become.[12] To Frankenstein, his secret is a burden that cannot be revealed: "I avoided explanation, and maintained a continual silence concerning the wretch I had created. I had a feeling that I should be supposed mad, and this for ever chained my tongue, when I would have given the whole world to have confided the fatal secret" (Shelley 190). The Creature is kept a secret because Victor does not know what he created, opening up

[12] To further the relationship between secularization and neurosis, Freud argues "[y]ou cannot exaggerate the intensity of man's inner resolution and craving for authority. The extraordinary increase in the neuroses since the power of religion has waned may give you some indication of it" ("Future Prospects" 290).

modernity's Pandora's box. Frankenstein understands that the second liminal world hidden within modernity has a detrimental effect on the ideals that are supposedly going to take human history towards a utopia here on earth, where the world is no longer believed to be mysterious or subjected to Fate but instead controlled by the human endeavor towards utopian perfection. In the end, the real secret Frankenstein is trying to protect is that human creation is no better than God's, when modern science promised so much more.

THE HISTORICAL SHIFT OF THE MONSTROUS

For most of history, monsters have been represented as symbolic and liminal beings, often connected to both gods and strangers, as these "figures of Otherness [that] occupy the frontier zone where reason falters and fantasies flourish" (Kearney 3). The monster has always been a representational being that transcends the borders of sacred/profane, and in turn, as a representation of chaos, irrationality, and disorder, acts as a warning for both the individual and society at large. However, as liminal creatures, monsters simultaneously, and paradoxically, become symbols of a return to order once they are defeated at the hands of a heroic figure. The slaying of the monster in most quest fiction completes the rite of passage for the hero's journey, moving from the liminal phase to the phase of inclusion that ultimately restores order for both hero and society, and the realms of the sacred and profane. During the Middle Ages, the monster's sacred/profane relationship was strengthened, as was its function of being a exemplification of divine admonition, in which their deaths reinforced the glory and sacredness of God and the Catholic Church. Outside the oral tradition of fairy tales, monster lore during the Middle Ages did not really exist in literary popular culture and

was predominantly controlled by the "learned classes" (Smith 16). It was largely the saints and clergymen that took up the heroic mantle of monster slayers in medieval literature, as much of the literature and folklore of the time looked to reinterpret classic monsters symbolically through a biblical and Christian lens (Huet 89; Kearney 29; Bovey 27). Even the early oral Latin fairy and folk tales of the time were shaped by the themes of Christian doctrine, morality, and ethics (Zipes 8-9), while the presence of God was usually found in the background of most medieval fables (J. Ziolkowski 196).

Beginning with the Renaissance, monsters slowly began to be categorized much more scientifically, often seen as abnormalities surviving outside the laws and course of nature, although initially, still co-existing with its earlier theological construction (Ghadessi 19). It was Fortunio Liceti (1616) who began the long secularization process of the monster that moved it away from its divine origins as "portentous heavenly signs" (ibid. 21), grounding it in more of a physical and medical teratological classification and away from the religious, supernatural, and metaphysical realms of the Middle Ages. As European history shifted to the early modern period and the Enlightenment, the fear of the monster had transformed into curiosity, creating a far more relaxed outlook towards them as the Age of Reason began to take hold over society (Hagner 175). However, the monster and supernatural as a whole, seems to return to popular culture during the eighteenth century with the rise of the Romantic and Gothic literary movements. Although it kept the monster as a secularized figure, the Romantic and Gothic movements challenged reason not through religious means but rather through an examination of an excess of emotions and desires. The monsters in Gothic fiction frequently became a symbol of the inability to control or suppress these desires, while

also continuing its usage as a critique against the monstrous superstition that many Protestants argued Catholicism had attached to Christianity, and in doing so, retain the monster's symbolic nature as a warning. A significant change, nonetheless, is that the borders that the monster traversed on, no longer exist in far away lands that the hero must travel to, but instead are located in the shadows of the modern city and the human psyche. As with the stranger, as society approached the modern age, the topographical location of the monster is far closer than previously in history.

Despite this, the monster still retains its liminal character of being both a symbol of chaos and also a return to order. Originally, Gothic literature was generally expressed through two subgenres.[13] In 'Gothic terror', which was popularized by Ann Radcliff in novels such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794/1987) and *The Italian* (1797/1968), the monster, and all supernatural occurrences for that matter, are not slain by the hero but nonetheless retain a return to order through its elimination. Instead of the hero defeating the monster with strength and courage, the tools of reason and rationality are now used to dispel the monster as an element of superstition, and thereby, continue the symbolic representation that the monster's demise leads to a return or restoring of order. 'Gothic horror', originally materializing in Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796/2004), broke away from Radcliff's dispelling of the supernatural through reason. Although

[13] In her essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry" (1826), Ann Radcliffe first distinguishes between 'horror' and 'terror'. Horror is the fear of something tangible, exhibited through, repulsion, shock, and violence, while terror is channeled through anxiety, a fear of the unknown, and is characterized, according to Radcliff, as "uncertainty and obscurity" (150). Radcliff saw horror as inferior as it was unable to conjure up a sense of the sublime: "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (ibid.)

retaining the trope of monstrosity as a characteristic of Catholicism and the human psyche, the supernatural instances in Lewis' work go unexplained and unexamined. The supernatural for Lewis was an extension of reality, and although he himself was a skeptic, the monsters and the supernatural as a whole in his stories, reflected the hysteria, irrationality, and superstition of the many people who did believe in them (Lewis, "Postscript to *The Castle Spectre"* 198). Lewis' 'horror' novels went beyond the stories of 'terror', as they were not only a critique of Catholic mania but likened the same hysteria towards the French Revolution, social change, and the ensuing chaos it would bring. Although containing a much more tragic ending than novels in the 'terror' genre, Lewis' *The Monk* still restores a sense of order and normalcy at the novel's conclusion (Haggerty, "The Failure" 131).

The recognition of the Creature as something real, an emphasis on violence, and its apparent anti-Jacobin stance, may seem to link Shelley's *Frankenstein* firmly with the horror classification of Gothic fiction; however, as with its treatment of the uncanny and Gothic genre in general, *Frankenstein* transcends these binaries by borrowing but also subverting these classifications, residing in between both definitions of horror and terror. Shelley displays both by exercising many common horror tropes but still applying an overarching sense of an uncertainty and terror through the anxiety of an unknown future, which dictates of the story's use of fear. More importantly, unlike previous Gothic fiction, *Frankenstein* is reluctant in restoring order with the novel's conclusion. Frankenstein may very well be the first 'hero' who is unable to restore order since he fails to tame or slay the monster he created nor can he dispel it as illusionary through reason since it was created through scientific reason itself, leaving us to contemplate a liminal and unknown

future. While these reasons do separate Shelley's handling of the monster from previous Gothic fiction, her most significant act is making the Creature have its own conscience, desires, emotions, and most importantly, a voice. It is the first monster that is allowed to speak, to tell its own story, and as a result, the first monster that readers truly sympathize with. With the birth of Frankenstein's creature, Shelley begins to distance monstrosity away from an interpretation that simply sees it as an extension of evil and instead produces a reading that is far more ambiguous. With *Frankenstein*, the monstrosity contained in humans is not restricted to specific evil people or demons, but instead is something ubiquitous that lives within human, or rather male, excess and hubris.

MODERNITY'S MONSTROUS SECRET

In her "Introduction" to the 1831 edition, Shelley declares a fear "of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" (9), solidifying the novel's discernible warning against an unrelenting thirst for knowledge and human progress in divergence of God's perfect creation. However, her anxiety continues with the terrifying thought of the 'mocker's' "success" in achieving God's work (ibid), which seems to build a sense of dread more from an uncanny fear in the monstrous achievement than any attempt, or 'failure', at playing God. The uncanny fear of the novel comes from Victor's triumph, for it brings to light the anxieties surfacing as a result of humanity's progress in the modern world. The imagination, agency, and thirst for knowledge that surges through Frankenstein during the process of creation and discovery, dissipates once he is triumphant in creating life from nothing. The originally beautiful physical image of the Creature alters only when it is finally animated, resulting in an uncanny terror that illuminates itself afterwards through reflection and not during

the process; "…now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (Shelley 58). The perspective of the Creature's physical appearance changes when Victor gazes into its horrible "watery, clouded eyes" (186), and since the eyes are traditionally known as a gateway to soul,[14] the soul of humanity is no longer masked by its physical beauty but rather through eyes that reveal a horrific truth. It is through the action of reanimated life that the internal horror has projected and manifested itself onto the physical appearance of the Creature.[15]

Here again, Shelley reverses the typical dichotomy of dark (evil) and light (good). In *Frankenstein*, light symbolizes knowledge, birth, and the Enlightenment ideals, yet it becomes a threatening aspect to our existence. The Creature's eyes blend into the whiteness of the sockets, giving a lack of contrast and a terrifying sense of ambiguity. As Slavoj Žižek (1993) writes of this scene; "[t]he nontransparent, 'depthless' eye blocks out our access to the 'soul,' to the infinite abyss of the 'person,' thus turning it into a soulless monster: not simply a nonsubjective machine, but rather an uncanny subject that has not yet been submitted to the process of 'subjectivization' which confers upon it the depth of 'personality'" (240, note 2). In this instance, the eyes are rendered malevolent not because of the a typically dark and light juxtaposition that would historically define evil with good but due to a liminal and abject character that subsequently reveals an uncertain truth of the contemporary secularized world controlled by modern man. It is through the

[14] "The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. Therefore, if the light within you has turned into darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6: 22-23).

[15] The 1831 edition contained the first image of the Creature, depicting the Creature after animation. As Turnley acknowledges, the image does not really portray the Creature as having any monstrous features outside of its large stature (Image I).

eyes of the modern creation that the manifestation of the uncanny unveils the absurdity of modernity's belief in linear progress: they reveal nothing except an ambiguous future in which human agency does not translate into control. The abject Creature or monster therefore becomes the symbolic representation of this lack of control.

Shelley unearthed or brought to light the anxious modern feeling of being simultaneously fascinated and repulsed by the world forming before her eyes. Once light is cast upon secular knowledge and human potential, how can it ever remain hidden from humanity again, regardless how horrifying it may be? The modern terror witnessed during the artificial creation of life comes from a 'success' that cannot be prevented nor actively controlled, making Shelley's warning against the act of playing God to be a futile one. The conception of her story emphasizes both her fear and fascination of science and progress, as she was simultaneous attracted and disgusted with the world that was forming,[16] a sentiment that appears in both the 'rebellious' 1818 edition and the 'conservative' 1831 edition.[17] Shelley herself alludes to this when addressing the many alterations in her "Introduction" to the 1831 edition, stating that she has "changed no portion of the story, nor introduced any new ideas or circumstances…leaving the core and substance of it untouched" (10). However, according to Mellor, Shelley's

16 As Julia Kristeva explains in *Powers of Horror* (1982), "[o]ne thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims - if not its submissive and willing ones. We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger" (9). Furthermore, in terms of abject literature; "as the sense of abjection is both the abject's judge and accomplice, this is also true of the literature that confronts it" (16).

17 Anne Mellor attributes this pessimistic transformation to the turmoil that Shelley experienced in her personal life between both publications (1988, 170-76).

announcement is simply a lie that, as with Victor, disclaims any responsibility to her creation, itself a victim of Fate (1988, 176).

Although Mellor is correct in arguing that the sense of agency and moral choice does essentially evaporate in 1831, I do agree with Shelley's statement that the essence of the novel, especially regarding its uncertain moral stance and problem of agency, does not necessarily change; the ambiguity of agency simply becomes more transparent in the 1831 edition than in 1818. The freewill Victor evidently nurses in the first edition is virtually illusionary, not necessarily in terms of his ability to make individual actions or choices, but rather in that the consequences of these choices are purely left to Chance. Later in the twentieth century, Jacques Monod (1970/1972) famously argued that the scientific pursuit of knowledge disengaged the connection between humans and Nature, subsequently leaving us all in the hands of Chance and a world without intrinsic meaning. Prior to modern thought, "our ancestors…perceived the strangeness of their condition only very dimly. They did not have the reasons we have today for feeling themselves strangers in a universe upon which they opened their eyes" (Monod 29). Despite what the group he refers to as the *animists* believed, such as religions to theorists such as Hegel and Marx, for Monod the world does not contain a teleonomic principle, plan, or a harmonious construction but rather that "[p]ure chance, absolutely free but blind, …is today the *sole* conceivable hypothesis" (112-3). The novel *Frankenstein* seems to predict this same existential theory for modern individuals as a result of the ascent of the scientific pursuit, which creates and propels the modern stranger into the chaos of liminal uncertainty.

Despite Frankenstein's experiment coming to fruition, he is nonetheless subjected to a world of Chance, as the modern world is still doomed to proceed towards a world governed by the principles of scientific rationalism. Victor, as a representation of modern humanity,[18] essentially has no choice but to proceed forward, as if it is his and humanity's Fate to accelerate civilization to its fullest potential. Frankenstein may regret certain actions he has committed but he does not regret his vigor and passion for scientific discovery. When addressing Walton's men at the end of the novel, who wish to abandon their Captain as his expedition has become extremely dangerous, Frankenstein seems to once again locate the "reveries while the work was incomplete" (214), which he was unable to recall after his experiment was completed, and once again defends a scientific pursuit of knowledge and discovery despite being conscious of the consequences of his own experiments:

> Are you then so easily turned from your design? Did you not call this a glorious expedition? and wherefore was it glorious? Not because the way was smooth and placid as a southern sea, but because it was full of dangers and terror; because, at every new incident, your fortitude was to be called forth, and your courage exhibited; because danger and death surrounded, and these dangers you were to brave and overcome. For this was it a glorious, for this was it an honourable undertaking. You were hereafter to be hailed as the benefactors of your species; your name adored, as belonging to brave men who encountered death for honour and the benefit of mankind…. ye need not have come thus far, and dragged your captain to the shame of a defeat, merely to prove yourselves cowards. Be steady to your purposes, and firm as a rock (217).

Frankenstein, like the modern world, is unable to go or look back towards the past, regardless of the consequences and mistakes he has made. For Frankenstein, and many other moderns, the idea of progress is dependent on a severing of a past founded on

[18] To be clear, by humanity, Shelley is certainly addressing a patriarchal society dominated by male ambitions. This topic will be examined further in Chapter 6.

myths, while focusing on the truths of the objective world, regardless of how ugly it may turn out to be.

Nonetheless, once Frankenstein's eyes lock upon modernity's monstrosity, no matter how hard he tries to ignore it, it haunts him until his death, like an unconscious fear he is unable to repress. Similar to what Shelly said of her inability to get rid of her "hideous phantom" (9) that haunted her after the first inclining of her story came to her in a dream, the novel's ending ultimately leads to the lingering of modern liminality. *Frankenstein* has become the modern socio-cultural spectre that has haunted us ever since. In *Specters of Marx* (1993), Jacques Derrida describes the spectre as "a kind of ghost who comes back or who still risks coming back *post mortem*" (59). Derrida's description of the spectre is extremely reminiscent of Frankenstein's Creature, a liminal figure that "is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some "thing" that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other" (ibid. 5).

If we examine Mary Shelley's original ending,[19] in which the Creature is "pushing himself off", rather than the passive "borne away", which is found in the final version, the Creature's sense of agency still leads him to "be carried away by the waves"

[19] The final lines of the novel are some of the many revisions Percy Shelley contributed to the novel before its initial publication. The original being:

> He sprung from the cabin window as he said this upon an ice raft that lay close to the vessel & pushing himself off he was carried away by the waves and I soon lost sight of him in the darkness and distance (qtd. in Mellor 1988, 68)

Percy Shelley's revision:

> He sprang from the cabin window as he said this, upon the ice raft which lay close to the vessel. He was borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance (ibid).

and ultimately leads to the same outcome. Mellor argues that Percy Shelley's revision of Captain Walton losing sight of the Creature in the original to being "lost in darkness and distance," is both "a defensive maneuver to ward off anxiety and assert final authorial control over his wife's subversive creation", in an attempt to postulate "a comforting reassurance" (1988, 68). However, the revised ending reflects the liminal and existential condition of modernity in a much greater degree and also emphasizes and links both Walton and the Creature's sense of alienated perspective in one sentence. What also makes the Creature an uncanny spectre is that it is still becoming, unnamed and "lost in darkness and distance," encompassing a shadowy secret within those depthless and watery eyes.

More importantly, the ending's apparent 'comforting reassurance', leads us to an uncanny false sense of security. As Freud writes, the author of the uncanny is "betraying us to the superstitiousness which we have ostensibly surmounted; he deceives by promising to give us the sober truth, and then after all overstepping it" ("Uncanny" 250). The novel's ending lulls the reader into a false sense of security when the Creature states that it will take its own life and thereby removing itself from society, repressing the uncanny beyond the border of darkness, however the novel has already established what "ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light" (ibid 14). Therefore, placing the Creature back into the security of darkness is ineffective as a palliative outcome, especially since the story lives on to haunt us, underlining one of the main premises of the novel: the impossibility to repress the uncanny into darkness once it

has come into light. Examining the ending of Freud's essay[20], Nicholas Royle (2003) argues that the uncanny has a paradoxical role where it not only manifests itself in light but also remains uncanny within darkness, as "something constantly destined to return" (109), and similar to the ending of *Frankenstein*, it is darkness "which finally haunts his project" (110). If the Creature is uncanny because it initially represents the 'return of the repressed' in creation, it is equally uncanny in its dissolving back into darkness, in the miscarried attempt to once again repress the repressed and return us back to a dissipated past.

THE END OF THE NATURAL AND THE BEGINNING OF ARTIFICAL REALITY

The spectre in *Frankenstein* is not a supernatural entity from the past but a hybrid being representing an ambiguous future, one that moves away from Nature towards a new and artificial reality. In *Frankenstein*, the uncanny spectre materializes into a cyborg-like entity, a physical and tangible specimen signifying the transition of the spiritual and supernatural to the material, scientific, and disenchanted world. This evolution away from the supernatural does not necessarily lead to the arrival of the purely natural, nor does it remove itself from myth. It essentially means that a movement towards disenchantment or secularization paradoxically leaves us on an oscillating liminal path towards re-enchantment or re-sacralization. As David Ketterer (1997) explains, "although Frankenstein supposedly eschews the supernatural, magic, or alchemy in favor of modern science as a means of instilling life into dead tissue, the distinction between natural magic and alchemy on the one hand and natural philosophy and chemistry on the other, and that

[20] "Concerning the factors of silence, solitude and darkness, we can only say that they are actually elements in the production of that infantile anxiety from which the majority of human beings have never become quite free" (Freud, "Uncanny" 252).

between religion and science, is blurred at every surviving stage of the text" (61). Prior to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno writing of the mythological reverberation of the Age of Enlightenment in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Shelley explored the same themes in *Frankenstein*, where the ideals that looked to dispel myth simply produced their own. Here myth is no longer allocated or represented by a feudal or even the natural world but rather falls into the space of science and rationality.

The Newtonian Laws of Nature were seen as "exemplars of Reason" (Smith 41) and although they were permanent and represented God's perfection, at the same time, they also exemplified a contrasting "Christian acceptance of human imperfection, manifested in sin and suffering, disease and death, with a presumptuous conviction that nature's imperfections could be made perfect by human genius" (ibid. 53). Victor, by ways of modern science, looks to reverse Nature's fixed state and advance the refining of man through the perfecting of Nature. Shelley explicates this premise through Professor Waldman's speech, which allows Frankenstein to apprehend his "chimeras of boundless grandeur" (48) within a modern reality, something he realized, although reluctantly, that he was unable to do through the ancient proto-science of alchemy:

> 'The ancient teachers of this science,' said he, 'promised impossibilities, and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little; they know that metals cannot be transmuted, and that the elixir of life is a chimera. But these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pour over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows' (Shelley 49).

Here, the power of controlling or commanding Nature lies in replicating or mimicking it. The "unlimited powers" that the modern scientist possesses, comes not from original

creation, but through artificial reproduction. *Frankenstein* examines the equivocal boundaries between natural and artificial, machine and human in such a way that its "brilliance…is not so much to point out that artificial life and intelligence are possible, but that human life *already is this artificial* intelligence*"* (Morton 47). It is through our imaginative potential to dream and realize the unknown or the not-yet that distinguishes us as human beings from animals.

By presenting us with a negation or a lack, what currently does not exist, our imagination tens to lead us to a utilitarian belief in changing the world for the better by giving us alternative worlds that we can strive for (Dahlbom 89). *Frankenstein* unearths and examines the artificial nature of human beings, both through Frankenstein's drive of progress and also doubled through the hybrid Creature. However, our artificial potential is threatened by the natural process of life and death, and by creating life through scientific means, Frankenstein attempts to overcome the natural course of existence by cheating death; "but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (Shelley 42). Losing his mother at an early age, Frankenstein is overwhelmed with the anxiety of mortality and attempts to conquer his existential unease in order to create a new path towards a better future for humanity. Unwilling to be confined to Nature's course, or the decaying prison of the human body, Frankenstein tries to replace and take on her function of giving birth, while at the same time, commences a process that still lives with us today[21]: the possibility of cheating death.

[21] With companies such as Alcor Life Extension Foundation and The Cryonics Institute, people have started to seriously believe in the idea of 'immortality' through the scientific methods of cryonic suspension.

> Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve their's. Pursuing these reflections, I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time … renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption (ibid. 55).

Frankenstein's desire to "break through" the "ideal bounds" of the human body and Nature itself is driven by his struggle of cheating or denying death, which ultimately becomes his downfall. With the removal of God, the birth of a new being, and "a torrent of light" crashing through the traditional ignorance, Frankenstein must come to terms with the resulting amputation of an afterlife from the new modern human consciousness. Death, now being final in the modern world, leaves us with an existential void or emptiness that Frankenstein looks to refute through a complete denial of death itself (McMahon 2007). However, Frankenstein's attempt to end the uncertainty that comes with death, ironically leads to more, once again exhibiting a lack of control that human agency is unable to subvert.

Victor Frankenstein, however, is not a one-dimensional individual, and does not fully abandon nature for scientific pursuit. Principally a paradoxical character, he is as much of a Romantic, as he is a 'mad' scientist. In fact, his fascination and complete reliance on science and nature mirror one another. Victor connection's to both science and nature become an obsession, which he uses to abjure from humanity and his family. Whereas his view of his father is disheartening; "I see him now, excellent and venerable old man! His eyes wandered in vacancy, for they had lost their charm and their delight" (Shelley 201), Frankenstein looks towards Nature's cold immortality for comfort far

http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health/can-cryonic-therapy-literal-brain-freeze-allow-people-to-live-forever/article26703024/

more than the eyes of his father, which simply speak of death. Even after the death of Elizabeth, Victor only attempts to find a sanctuary in Nature, which identical to his scientific pursuits, ultimately fails him:

> What then became of me? I know not; I lost sensation, and chains and darkness were the only objects that pressed upon me. Sometimes, indeed, I dreamt that I wandered in flowery meadows and pleasant vales with the friends of my youth, but I awoke and found myself in a dungeon. Melancholy followed, but by degrees I gained a clear conception of my miseries and situation and was then released from my prison. For they had called me mad, and during many months, as I understood, a solitary cell had been my habitation (ibid. 202).

Nature, which in many respects replaced God for many Romantics of the time, is extremely indifferent toward Victor. In a similar way to how the Creature searches for its identity and meaning in relation to its creator, Victor positions his sense of meaning and sacredness in something that is completely detached from him. In *Frankenstein*, God, Nature, and Victor are all interrelated by being silent creators, and while we know that out of those three, Victor is definitely not indifferent, he is still rendered helpless since he stands or oscillates within a liminal position of creator/created, Satan/God, or rebel/lord. It is also no coincidence that the Romantic elements, especially in regard to Frankenstein's experiences with nature and love, become much more problematic as the novel progresses, juxtaposing the scientific warning with one of Romantic excess. Victor represents the nightmare of both scientific and Romantic intemperate idealism.

Through the birth of Frankenstein's Creature, this idealism is potentially superseded in the modern world with a liminal permutation between the two. The 'artificial' Creature is depicted as more passionate and human-like than Frankenstein, making the formally distinguishable binary of artificial and natural much more complicated, giving way to an uncanny world where 'artificiality' has become the new

'natural'. While modernity attempts to categorize everything into binaries such as natural and artificial, Shelley shows us that modernity paradoxically subverted these very same binaries. Following Jentsch, Freud argues the uncanny "is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one" ("The Uncanny" 233). By the early nineteenth century, Shelley was able to prophesize what Donna Haraway (1985/2004) argued in the late twentieth century: that "machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines" (11).[22] Monod suggests that the differences between the natural and artificial were always misleading to begin with and that the two can no longer be regarded as opposites, as it is impossible to differentiate between natural or artificial characteristics, even in human beings. What distinguishes the natural from the artificial is that the natural contains in-of-itself what it needs to develop, while the artificial depends on external influences and is designed for a purpose (Monod 3-4). However, what blurs this distinction for Monod, is that the teleonomy, or the apparent internal purposefulness, recognizes no difference between living and non-living organisms, therefore, the natural is dependent on external forces as much as the artificial and "endowed *with a purpose or project*, which at the same time they exhibit in their structure and carry out through their performances" (9). Taking this into account, what *Frankenstein* argues is not that modern society leaves us dislocated from Nature, which itself is alienating, but rather that what is in fact alienating is our inability to accept both our isolation, unnaturalness, and strangeness: "man must at last

[22] The relationship between *Frankenstein* and Haraway's work will be further examined in Chapter 6.

wake out of his millenary dream; and in doing so wake to his total solitude, his fundamental isolation. Now does he at last realize that, like a gypsy, he lives at the boundary of an alien world. A world that is deaf to his music, just as indifferent to his hopes as to his suffering or his crimes" (ibid 172-3). However, although Mary Shelley seems to acknowledge the connection between Nature and the artificial, the novel still seems to try to, not necessarily to deny, but nonetheless internalize this knowledge, putting it back into the uncanny darkness from which it came.

THE UNCANNY STRANGER IN A SECULAR VOID

As I have argued, *Frankenstein* is not a novel that contemplates the past while standing in the present as the Gothic genre formally subsisted, but rather, it resides in the modern liminal state where past, present, and future become something far more uncertain, leaving the stranger in a very lonely and unclear position of trying to find importance in life. The freedom given or forced onto the Creature, emulates the new found independence that humanity must face that renders the Creature to contemplate its existence: "I was dependent on none, and related to none. The path of my departure was free;' and there was none to lament my annihilation. My person was hideous, and my stature gigantic: what did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them" (131). As Northrop Frye (1983) notably argues, Shelley's novel "is a precursor…of the existential thriller, as such a book as Camus's *L'Étranger*. The whole point about the monster is not a machine, but an ordinary human being isolated from mankind by extreme ugliness" (122). Looking back, it is possible to see the Creature as simply 'ordinary' as our society becomes much more oriented around the liminal, but at the time

it was something entirely new; it was the birth of the modern stranger that continues to preoccupy our existence. Unlike Victor, whose existential crisis revolves around the ominous cloud of death, the Creature's existential malaise is situated within the menacing idea of modern life, existence, and problematic notion of freedom. The Creature is an uncanny representation of the modern individual born with the burden of freedom, lacking any form of an established identity and tradition to tie oneself to. With no nation or family to belong to, the Creature is forced into a series of newfound questions that it struggles to find answers for. Marginalized from society, the Creature as stranger, must become a voyeur; a fly on the wall that observes without being seen but is still nonetheless there. Being a modern liminal figure, Victor's *doppelgänger* cannot be fully absent and must exist. As he explains to Frankenstein, "I admired virtue and good feelings and loved the gentle manners and amiable qualities of my cottagers, but I was shut out from intercourse with them, except through means which I obtained by stealth, when I was unseen and unknown, and which rather increased than satisfied the desire I had of becoming one among my fellows" (Shelley 124). The Creature's melancholic alienation sweeps in like a plague to the people around him. At the moment right before Frankenstein confronts the Creature on the mountain for the first time since it was created in the laboratory, the path up the mountain instantly becomes lonely and desolate as Shelley's links the Creature and Frankenstein by painting the estranged spirit of the modern condition:

> The ascent is precipitous, but the path is cut into continual and short windings, which enable you to surmount the perpendicularity of the mountain. It is a scene terrifically desolate. In a thousand spots the traces of the winter avalanche may be perceived, where trees lie broken and strewed on the ground, some entirely destroyed, others bent, leaning upon the jutting rocks of the mountain or transversely upon other trees. The path, as you ascend higher, is intersected by

> ravines of snow, down which stones continually roll from above; one of them is particularly dangerous, as the slightest sound, such as even speaking in a loud voice, produces a concussion of air sufficient to draw destruction upon the head of the speaker. The pines are not tall or luxuriant, but they are sombre and add an air of severity to the scene. I looked on the valley beneath; vast mists were rising from the rivers which ran through it and curling in thick wreaths around the opposite mountains, whose summits were hid in the uniform clouds, while rain poured from the dark sky and added to the melancholy impression I received from the objects around me. Alas! Why does man boast of sensibilities superior to those apparent in the brute; it only renders them more necessary beings. If our impulses were confined to hunger, thirst, and desire, we might be nearly free; but now we are moved by every wind that blows and a chance word or scene that that word may convey to us (100).

Although both Frankenstein and the Creature are stuck in between the realms of Chance and Fate, the main difference between their liminal positions is that Frankenstein oscillates between the extremes of science and Nature, compliance and rebellion, while the Creature is a product of them and subsequently, is trapped in between them, unable to move. While Frankenstein oscillates between the either/or, the Creature does not live by the either/or binary but the hyphenation between it where even a correlation with John Milton's rebellious Satan is lost: "Satan has his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and abhorred" (ibid. 133).[23] Even the allusions of Christ ultimately fail, as the Creature, 'God's favourite son', is neither redeemed nor saves anyone at the end of the novel. For Jerrold E. Hogle (1998), the Creature represents 'the *absolutely* Other', the other's other or the more specifically, a more liminal other, repositioning the Creature from the uncanny towards the abject:

> The creature is a 'monster' in that it/he embodies and distances all that a society refuses to name — all the betwixt-and-between, even ambisexual, cross-class, and cross-cultural conditions of life that Western culture "abjects", as Kristeva would put it — . . . It/he is "*the absolutely* Other" . . . pointing immediately, as we have just seen, to intermixed and repressed states of being, the divisibility of the body,

[23] 1818 edition: "Yet even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am quite alone" (242).

> 'thrown-down' social groups, class struggles, gender-confusions, birth-moments, and death-drives . . . as well as to a cacophony of ideological and intertextual differences. All the while, though, he/it both re-presents each of these alterities and keeps them at a great remove by being quasi-human yet strictly artificial (Hogle 185-7).

Interrelated with the uncanny, as both concepts revolve around the paradoxical, the liminal, and the confrontation with the other, the abject is distinct in that it is "more violent" than the uncanny and "is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory" (Kristeva 5).[24] According to Hogle, abjection becomes a more significant characteristic after the publication of *Frankenstein* due to the fact that the eighteenth-century Gothic "provides the symbolic means for that very construction of "self" versus "archaic other" (179), while "*Frankenstein* offers the Gothic ghost of the counterfeit in its most achieved, complex, and influential form up to 1818, using what is most fundamental in the Gothic to alter and deepen (rather than simply reverse) it" (203). Frankenstein's Creature is uncanny because

[24] Although, Julia Kristeva argues that abjection is "[e]ssentially different from "uncanniness,"" (5), there is a strong correlation in terms of their connection to modernity and the secular. With Christianity, the abjection of the self, the "recognition of the want" (ibid), was absorbed by religious scared rite and the "ultimate proof of humility before God" (ibid). While religious abjection solidifies or "purifies" (ibid. 7) the subject at one point, boarder, or limit, the secular abject places the subject in a place of ambiguity or liminality, further breaking down the binary distinctions between self and other. Similarly, the uncanny seems to be a by-product of a teleological and secularized modern world. Mladen Dolar, 1991; Terry Castle, 1995: Anthony Vidler, (1992) all argue that the invention of the uncanny is directly related to secularization and modernity. Prior to modernity, the supernatural was something that existed solely to the world of religion and spirituality; however, this spectrality becomes secularized in the modern age and transforms into the uncanny, becoming the paradoxical mark of modernity by encompassing the ambiguity and uncertainty entrench in the modern mind. The uncanny arose from out of the Enlightenment and modernity's "psychic and cultural transformations", its "aggressively rationalist imperatives…(which) also produced, like a kind of toxic side effect, a new human experience of strangeness, anxiety, bafflement, and intellectual impasse" (Castle, 8). As with liminal or abject space, the uncanny also is not unified or harmonious but is a continuous alienated and ambiguous state caught in a tension with the boundaries of self and other.

it is a foreign other but nonetheless indicates a monstrous familiarity with the human subject: "God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance" (Shelley 133); however, it paradoxically also embodies the abject since it is inauthentic, genderless,[25] and leads to disgust and horror. Like the abject, the Creature "disturbs identity, system, order" and "does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4). It is a symbol of a world "where meaning collapses" (ibid 2) and results in the creation of the modern secularized stranger, a liminal character that unlike the rebel who is at odds with society, is an individual that was born displaced from both rebellion and submission.

Another aspect *Frankenstein* inimitably separates itself from previous literature, especially the Gothic genre, is by creating far more existential and moral ambiguity between the protagonist and its *doppelgänger*, to the point where binaries such as good and evil blur and no longer serve any purpose. Although Frankenstein's *doppelgänger* represents the monstrosity within him and human nature, he does not necessarily represent the naturally evil, dark aspect of the self, but rather a secularized and ambiguous un-evil monstrosity**,** one that lies between the binaries of good and bad, which is found in humanity, modernity, and the quest for secular knowledge. This in turn raises more questions than answers, such as the infamous and unresolvable question that has resonated with the tale until today: 'who is in fact the real monster?' Yet, to choose one entirely misses the point of the novel. As Reichardt maintains, "only a human being or humanoid can be a true monster…the essential condition for a monster is that the human characteristics it possesses must not be changed too far" (139). This goes as much for the

[25] The concept of abjection in relation to *Frankenstein* and gender will be discussed in Chapter 6.

monstrous attributes as it does for the benevolent ones, making Victor as much as the Creature's double as it is Frankenstein's. The humanism displayed by the Creature, as much as its monstrosity, shows that the dialectical essence of humanity vacillates between our experiences and actions. Therefore, the projection of blame cannot solely fall on the shoulders of Frankenstein, for the Creature is rejected by everyone in the novel, not just Victor, making the responsibility not just of its creator but everyone's, including the De Lacey family and even the Creature itself.

With the insertion of the character of Captain Walton, *Frankenstein* even goes beyond the simple blurring of the *doppelgänger* as merely being a double of the protagonist. By creating a third 'double' or *doppelgänger*, Shelley creates a universality of the double or shadow motif, which further encompasses the other into the self. In addition to all three characters being explorers, wanderers, and isolated individuals in their own right, both the Creature and Frankenstein can only reveal their stories and secrets to Walton and it is he who is able to channel this modern feeling to others through his writings. Through Captain Walton's letters, the modern and liminal spectre lives on haunting society in a frightening manner, resulting in the inevitability of truth turning into myth and vice versa. As Lee Sterrenburg argues, beginning with *Frankenstein*,

> …we are presented with the confessional of isolated protagonists who are, at least symbolically, reenacting heroic and messianic quests from a previous revolutionary age. Political themes are translated into private and psychological terms. The messianic struggles of the hero are presented subjectively, in an autobiographical confession we cannot fully trust, and surrounded by equally subjective editors, interlocutors, and interpreters, whose presence further complicates our hope of finding a simple ideological meaning. The identity of the demonic forces is no longer clear. The specter haunting Europe is no longer the monster Jacobin. The messianic impulse remains, but its political content has been called into question (145-6).

Despite the progressive uncertainty of the messianic spectre, we still can learn from it; we can learn from what is haunting us. Walton abandons his quest because he was able to see the uncanny and abject horror of his pursuit through Victor's story and through the manifestation of the Creature itself. Although Walton's abandonment of his exploration of the North Pole does not end modern history's relentless pursuit of secular knowledge and discovery, it still advances an optimistic perspective because it allows us, if not to correct our mistakes, at the very least to realize them. Yet, even in in this regard, the liminal essence of *Frankenstein* holds power, for Shelley is unwilling to lay all the cards on the table, as the story once again ends ambiguously. Regardless of the fact that Walton saves himself and his crew from the unknown, will his sister Margaret, and subsequently the reader, believe his story or will it be simply dismissed as nonsensical science fiction?

III: LEOPARDI AND BAUDELAIRE: KINDRED SPIRITS OF THE MODERN STRANGER

The ancient covenant is in pieces; man knows at last that he is alone in the universe's unfeeling immensity, out of which he emerged only by chance. His destiny is nowhere spelled out, nor is his duty. The kingdom above or the darkness below: it is for him to choose
-Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity*

Ah! qu'aimes-tu donc, extraordinaire étranger?
J'aime les nuages… les nuages qui passent… là-bas… là-bas… les merveilleux nuages!
Well then! What do you love, extraordinary stranger?
I love the clouds … the passing clouds … over there … over there … the marvelous clouds!]
- Charles Baudelaire, "*L'Étranger"* ("The Stranger")

Che fai tu, luna, in ciel? dimmi, che fai,
Silenziosa luna?
Sorgi la sera, e vai,
Contemplando i deserti; indi ti posi.
Ancor non sei tu paga
Di riandare i sempiterni calli?
(*What are you doing, moon, up in the sky;*
What are you doing, tell me, silent moon?
You rise at night and go,
observing the deserts. Then you set.
Aren't you tired
Of plying eternal byways?)
- Giacomo Leopardi, "*Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia*" ("Night Song of A Wandering Sheppard in Asia")

I'm a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will
- Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

INTRODUCTION

While *Frankenstein* was being published in 1818, in the small provincial Italian town of Recanati located in the central province of Macerata, the Italian poet, philologist, and literary critic, Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837), was developing his own related, although unique, opinions regarding the monster of modernity. Although they never met, Shelley herself resided in various parts of Italy during this time (1818-1823), continuing to focus on the premise of the dark and problematic side to imagination and desire explored in *Frankenstein* with her second novel, the historical romance *Valperga*: *or, The*

Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca (1923)[26]. Unlike in *Frankenstein*, the 'monster' of *Valperga* is no longer ambiguous in nature but is clearly destructive with no utopian character (Blumberg 76), and in a sense, Shelley's second novel restores morality back to its dualistic beginnings of good and evil that her first novel infamously challenged. What Leopardi and shortly after, French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) brought to the prevailing modern conundrum is a further plunging into the uncanny nature of modernity, in an effort to truly understand its paradoxes and alienating factors in its most complex and contradictory aspects, thereby advancing the liminalizing of the dialectical binaries that were thought to structure and unify morality, time, and the character of modernity itself.

There is no longer an attempt to repress the uncanny monster; the poets believed that one must now heroically stare directly into its ambiguous eyes and not run away in horror, as Victor Frankenstein had, who struggled to suppress the idea of cosmicism[27] back into the void he had let it escape from. By confronting this cosmic horror directly, Leopardi and Baudelaire believe that it was the only genuine, although paradoxical, way to locate any remnants of Beauty or meaning contained within a calculating and unsympathetic modern world. They sought meaning in the modern void rather than resent any real or imaginary creators for humanity's predicament. This chapter, which centres on the poet-philosophers Leopardi and his kindred spirit Baudelaire, examines the

[26] As Daniel E. White (1997) points out, "while there is neither evidence nor likelihood that Shelley read Leopardi while she was in Italy, in many respects *Valperga* was a production of the same cultural climate in which authors such as Leopardi… voiced opposition to past and present histories of foreign domination in Italy" (8).
[27] Cosmicism is the literary philosophy established by the American author H P Lovecraft, which argues that in the face of no identifiable divine presence in the world, humanity has become fleeting and insignificant in regard to the cosmos.

advancing secularization of modern life, in which the mystery and myth of modernity founded on a reliance of reason that was assessed in *Frankenstein*, dissipates further into the hellish realm of monstrosity, illusion, and artificiality.

In *Frankenstein,* Mary Shelley had presented to the world a difficult problem or question regarding the idea of progress*,* whereas Baudelaire and Leopardi try to provide us with a difficult answer. What we see in Leopardi and Baudelaire is that the battle between Nature and the spirit and the effects of this struggle, led them to step beyond the scientific aspect of secularized modernity. Instead, their emphasis is not on a menacing though preventable future based on science, but on the repetitive and cyclical past and present that have already become our future. The modern situation forces them to explore the pains of unhappiness that come with existential boredom, the problem of desire as a secular form of hell, a complete renunciation of the myth of progress, and moreover, the poet or artist's role within secularized modernity, consequently making them two of the most truly original thinkers of the modern era. There is also a shift in regard to the alienating factors of modernity: the Creature's existential anguish came from being removed from society, whereas anguish for Leopardi and Baudelaire no longer originates from being detached from society but, from being immersed in it. While Leopardi is slightly detached from the advent of modernity since he was living in rural Italy for much of his life, acting essentially as a pansophical modern stranger, Baudelaire pushes these ideas into the modern urban streets of Paris, the location the modern stranger must escape to in order to live and breathe. With Baudelaire, the stranger no longer removes themself from society but instead plummets into it, bringing us closer to Simmel's definition of the stranger as someone "who comes today and stays tomorrow" (402).

I will continue to address the concept of the monster or spectre of modernity that lives within a messianic or utopian notion of time, which becomes more liminal in regard to Leopardi and Baudelaire. In Leopardi's writings, the idea of the monster or the monstrous became a recurring theme that according to Fabio Frosini (2016), represented a "paradox of existence" (113) that had a twofold meaning. First, the monstrous was seen by Leopardi as an aberration from Nature and secondly, as something that reflects foreign values and principles that belong to a different era or place (ibid. 107). Leopardi's liminal view of the monstrous therefore encompasses both the rising modern world that deviates from Nature but likewise, the ideals that no longer have a place in the contemporary age yet still exist (ibid.). Originally, Leopardi became famous or infamous, for his pessimism (Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Croce,)[28], a label obtained through the anti-philosophical ideas found in his *Operette Morali* (*Moral Tales*) (1824/1983) and in the various aphorisms found in the *Pensieri* (*Thoughts*) (1845/1981). The neo-Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci argued that Leopardi was in a continuous state of uncertainty because of his inability to transcend his pessimism (*Prison Letters* 236). Nevertheless, in spite or even due to Leopardi's nihilism, Gramsci recognizes the liminal and modern character of

[28] Schopenhauer wrote that Leopardi presented the "mockery and wretchedness of this existence… yet with such a multiplicity of forms and applications, with such a wealth of imagery, that he never wearies us, but, on the contrary, has a diverting and simulating effect" (588).
Nietzsche was influenced by Leopardi and shared many ideas, such as an interest in the Copernican revolution and an admiration with ancient Greek civilization, along with ambivalent feelings towards reason and abhorrence for religion (Rosengarten 162-63). Nonetheless, Nietzsche criticized Leopardi as a 'suprahistorical' thinker, who according to him only saw the nausea and decline in humanity (*Untimely Mediations* 66). Nietzsche would regard this type of pessimism as 'weak pessimism' and his own as 'pessimism of strength' (*Birth of Tragedy* 3-4).
Although Benedetto Croce (1923/1935) praises Leopardi as a great poet, he completely rejects Leopardi as a thinker and philosopher due to Leopardi's pessimism and outsiderness (98-99).

Leopardi's work, arguing that "[i]n Leopardi one finds, in an extremely dramatic form, the crisis of transition towards modern man; the critical abandonment of the old transcendental conception but not as yet the finding of the new moral and intellectual *ubi consistam* which would give the same certainty as the jettisoned faith" (236). To be certain, Leopardi's writings are crowded with cynical and melancholic opinions and observations. However, more recently, scholars have been reluctant to continue to label Leopardi as an outright pessimist and are beginning to see a certain optimism in the Italian's work, even in regard to his later, more negative writings. Cesare Luporini (1947/1993), who did categorize Leopardi as a nihilist, was nevertheless one of the first to argue strongly in favour of a progressive reading of Leopardi's work that saw the Italian poet as a moralist thinker whose ideas were closer to the socio-political ideals of the French Revolution than originally perceived (48-9).

Luporini's progressive and rationalist reading of Leopardi induced a more positive view of Leopardi, including the analyses of Walter Binni (1947/1978) and Antonio Negri (1985/2010, 1987/2015). Nonetheless, although Negri follows Luporini and Binni in not identifying him as a pessimist, he does go against their notion of Leopardi as a progressive thinker. According to Negri, Leopardi "is not really a progressive but a libertarian in flight. Leopardi builds on disenchantment with progress and on the joy of liberation" (*Diary*, 26). Negri restrains himself from the progressive label because it advocates a dialectical movement that is in contrast with both Leopardi's anti-dialectical and anti-idealist arguments and likewise, his notion of time. Negri's book on the Italian poet, *Lenta Ginestra* (*Flower of the Desert*) (1987/2015), focuses on Leopardi's materialist ontology and largely goes against much of the previous Leopardi

scholarship. He argues that with Leopardi there is a radical break from the mechanistic and physicalism of the Enlightenment, whereas Leopardi's materialism is critical or post-critical, "living", and "asserts a negative solution to the problem of the dialectic, with extraordinary force" (*Desert* 94). As Timothy S. Murphy (2015) states in the "Translator's Introduction", Negri sees Leopardi as a fascinating "precursor to Nietzsche" due to his "untimeliness" (*xiv*). Living within the untimely or crisis of modernity, Negri's Leopardi provides a new path or alternative response to it, thereby giving the Italian poet an atemporal and paradoxical messianic character in his writings that make them still significant in our own contemporary modernity.

Leopardi was also a great influence on the work of Walter Benjamin, who acts as a post-historical link between the two poets. Benjamin's life-long project, *Passagen-Werk* (*Arcades* Project) (1999), is an assortment of strategically scattered quotes collected from various authors, further emphasized with Benjamin's own evaluations. Leopardi's *Zibaldone* (1898/1981), meaning miscellany, shows many similarities with Benjamin's work and in a way even acted as an inspiration for the German philosopher's own project.[29] Even before Luporini and Negri, Benjamin was one of the first to refute the pessimistic label carried by Leopardi's legacy and asserts that there is a revolutionary and heroic aspect to the Italian poet's work, referring to him as a "paradoxical pragmatist" and "ironic angel" (Rennie 140 n46).

The influence of Baudelaire is more transparent in Benjamin's writing, as it is an easy assertion to say that Baudelaire is the centre piece that the *Passagen-Werk* formed

[29] Benjamin never read the *Zibaldone* but did read translations of Leopardi's *Pensieri* (Rennie, 140 n46), which was a posthumously published book of aphorisms that were drawn from the pages of *Zibaldone* (Negri, *Flower* 190).

itself around. Benjamin continued his deep fascination of Baudelaire by writing various essays that confirms the French poet as a truly modern writer completely submersed in a struggle against modernity and commodification that was emerging in mid-nineteenth century Paris. Benjamin's use of Baudelaire in his materialist assessment of nineteenth century Paris has been extremely important in progressing Baudelairean studies by altering many previous perceptions of Baudelaire as a tasteless decadent and a scandalous or immoral poet. Benjamin also does not view Baudelaire through a Freudian lens as Leo Bersani (1977) does, whose poetic reading of Baudelaire's work argues that the *jouissance* of narcissism leads to self–shattering. Nor does he partake in a psychoanalytic approach that renders Baudelaire as a poetic or late-Romantic idle dreamer, an argument later advocated by Jean-Paul Sartre in his book *Baudelaire* (1947/1950).

With Benjamin, Baudelaire becomes more situated in the realm of modernity and is seen as transitional thinker who was not inactive but instead was someone who "battled the crowd − with the impotent rage of someone fighting the rain or wind" (*Writer* 176, 210), the shock experience of urban living at the centre of his work. According to Susan Blood (1997), post-Benjamin scholarship of Baudelaire has broadly been divided into two spheres: the historicist criticism that focuses on Baudelaire's work in context to the socio-political changes and thought that occurred in the mid-19th century, exemplified by the work of Richard Burton (1991) and Marshall Berman (1988); and the allegorical strain of Baudelairean scholarship associated with Hans Robert Jauß (1982), Paul de Man (1969/1971), and Blood herself, which takes, albeit in different directions[30], a more

[30] Blood argues that Jauß' allegoreisis is a reader response that merges the aesthetic and poetic; however, de Man's use of allegory splits these two elements favours a more language-oriented conception of allegory (17). Blood, on the other hand, supports a more

aesthetic approach to socio-historical question, since allegory "involves a disturbance of historical categories" (ibid. 14). However, as Joseph Acquisto (2015) points out, an exclusive reading of Baudelaire that focuses on modernity largely misses the "theologico-esthetic worldview" (57) of the French poet. Likewise, classifying Benjamin's analysis of Baudelaire as purely materialist misses the theological aspect of Benjamin's own work.

Despite the slight pigeonholing of Baudelaire into an either/or classification by some academics, Baudelaire is nevertheless widely known as the poet who encompasses all the complexities of modernity, regardless whether through an allegorical, historical, or psychoanalytic reading of his work. As argued by Michel Foucault (1984), "Baudelairean modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it" (41). He continues, "[m]odern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets, and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity…compels him to face the task of producing himself" (42). This rupture that has occurred in history forces the individual not to find an historical self within past illusions but instead to create or cultivate oneself, what Foucault calls "heroization" (ibid), which becomes the prevailing new form of re-sacralization for the modern world. For instance, German critic Benjamin Fondane (1947), champions a secularized theological experience as the main component of Baudelaire's work. Fondane structures the viewpoint of Baudelaire on the metaphysical anxieties that manifest in the urban

complex and composite model of Baudelairean allegory than Jauß's or de Man's, in which "the repetition of the allegory makes it both less readable and more aesthetically powerful. All this boils down to saying that a radical mode of allegory may be cut off from the symbolic synthesis of meaning and representation and still involve the aesthetic and the phenomenal in some way" (20).

nightmare of modernity, especially in regard to the French poet's concept of boredom, rather than a materialist perspective.

In the work of Ulrich Baer (2000), we see that much of Baudelaire's work contains a synthesis of the metaphysical and materialist assessment of modernity. Baer argues that Baudelaire is the first modern poet due to his synching of the disparity between immaturity and sophistication that captured the shock-like trauma and experiences of modernity (4). Moreover, his discussion of the stranger in Baudelaire's prose poem of the same name is very important in linking the concepts of the modern poet and the modern stranger within a liminal space outside of meaning, yet as someone who is also dependent on locating it. As Baer contends, "L'Étranger" ("The Stranger") is a poem about searching for new beginnings, "freedom and disinterestedness" (57). It is a poem containing "neither a story nor an argument" (ibid 58) but does comprise of a stranger that is "the prototypical modern poet who resists the logic of exchange and profit without pretending that art remains wholly outside that logic" (ibid 59). Here we see with Baudelaire, as with Leopardi, the approach to poetry and philosophy is also grounded on a liminal space that encompasses both an existential and spiritual platform as much as a materialist one, which epitomizes the character of both the modern stranger and modernity itself.

In the essay "Vacant Holidays: The Theological Remainder in Leopardi, Baudelaire, and Benjamin" (2006), J. M. Baker, Jr. explores the complex secular and theological relationship between the three thinkers through a study of holiday and leisure time in their works. Baker describes the holiday in liminal terms, as "a space on the calendar once reversed for ritual recollection, but a space that has since lost its

ceremonial function and declined into leisure time" (1190). The vacancy or void of holiday and leisure time "admits a potentially new meaning: it is the remembrance of not only of what once was but what of what lost its chance to be in the great deluge of progress" (ibid. 1214). More importantly, Baker describes the theological spirit in their works with a passage from one of Benjamin's letters, where he explains "the relation of his work to theology as like that of a blotter to ink: from the point of view of the blotter he would gladly forget what was written there, and nevertheless it was saturated with it. Theology in this sense is the remainder that involuntarily returns even when one wishes it away" (ibid. 1190).

My work wrestles this complex relationship of the secular and the sacred by grounding my study on the spirit of secularized modernity as a whole, while engaging deeper in the subjects of the modern stranger, liminality, and the resacralization of the modern age through the paradoxical means of Kierkegaardian 'repetition', and subsequently the concepts of *noia* and e*nnui*. I argue that Leopardi and Baudelaire do not try to recede from imagination and illusion; nor do they simply accept them as ultimately fatal. They plunge into both the internal and external voids in an attempt to define individuals, and to remarkably find a new paradoxical form of imagining and even the resacralizing of modern society, through its own fragmentation.

THE MONSTROSITY OF THE LIMINALIZING SPACE OF SECUALR MODERNITY

Leopardi's unceasing shift in his philosophy began with his correspondences with the liberal intellectual Pietro Giordani, resulting in a political and religious break from his family's conservative ideals that in turn led to Leopardi's unsuccessful attempt to flee Recanati and his father's domineering character in 1818. The following year, Leopardi

contracted a severe eye disease from extensive reading that would alter the way he viewed the world (Rosengarten 121) and together with a development of scoliosis, these physical ailments seemed to push him towards seeing the hidden dark shadow of instrumental Reason. Many of his contemporary critics, including Alessandro Manzoni and Niccolò Tommaseo, believed his pessimistic thoughts simply were a reaction to his diseases, famously epitomized as 'I am hunchbacked, therefore there is no God' (Origo 222), which Leopardi considered highly offensive to his philosophical work.[31] What these critics neglected to understand was that, like Frankenstein's Creature, Leopardi's 'monstrosity' and his strangeness allowed him to see past the utopian images of progress that modernity and its adherents promised. He acknowledged the monstrosity found within modernity. In fact, Leopardi actually regards the monster as a liminal essence that balances the "perfection" of the human spirit. Fabio Frosini contends that

> …the notion of monster/monstrous is the chain that links 'real' and 'imaginary' because on the one hand it is the 'image' of a real error – mankind's abandonment of nature – and, on the other, the result of a miscalculation that makes a mere partial viewpoint absolute. If the second moment is applied to the comprehension of the first, the result is that every monster must be considered as something *perfect*, including the 'monstrous' separation of human race from nature. The institution of what is 'relative' thus corresponds with the origin of history, and monstrosity appears as (and therefore is) the identification mark of humanity" (1).

Therefore, we see how for Leopardi, the monstrous is contained within modernity since it abhors Nature, but also for maintaining certain habits and ideas that contradict any modern or progressive thinking and governing.

[31] In response to a German critic who panned him in a similar vein, Leopardi laments: "[b]efore dying, I wish to protest against this invention of weakness and vulgarity, and beg my readers to try to controvert my remarks and my arguments, rather than accuse my ill-health" (cited in Origo 265 (*Epistolario*, VI, 24 May 1832)).

Leopardi sees monstrosity as an essential product of human nature and evolution: "L'esistenza, per sua natura ed essenza propria e generale, è un'imperfezione, un'irregolarità, una mostruosità" (*Zib*1095) ("[e]xistence, by its nature and essence and generally, is an imperfection, an irregularity, a monstrosity") (*Z* 1822). While humans are naturally perfect specimens in nature, it is because of this perfection that humanity is allowed to become imperfect and monstrous "come quelle macchine o quei lavorii compitissimi e perfettissimi, che per esser tali, sono minutamente lavorati, e quindi delicatissimi, e per la somma delicatezza più facilmente degli altri si guastano, e perdono l'essere e l'uso loro" (*Zib* 829**)** ("like those most refined and perfect machines or devices which, in order for them to be such, are intricately tooled, and hence most delicate, and on account of their supreme delicacy more easily break down than others, and lose their essence and use") (*Z* 1201). As Victor Frankenstein realizes after creating his Creature, outside of Nature, our quest for perfection, our messianic insistence that the future is utopian, paradoxically makes us imperfect and monstrous. Moreover, our desire to cheat death and to remove human suffering, to go beyond nature, is what ultimately makes or allows humans to acknowledge our monstrosity.

As with Leopardi, in Baudelaire's poetry there is no spiritual journey upwards to a better place, just as there is no discernable progress of modernity. Instead his poetry contains images portrayed as a fragmented journey of repetition, memories, boredom, wonders, fleeting dreams, and endless nightmares. His hell is not a future place only seen when one dies but a present one; a hell where death becomes more of an escape than the beginning of a horrific afterlife. In his introductory poem in *The Flowers of Evil* entitled "Au Lecteur" ("To the Reader"), Baudelaire criticizes his audience as hypocrites (6),

accepting false illusions of progress and perfection, and unwilling to accept that we are simply puppets, as "[c]'est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent!/ Aux objets répugnants nous trouvons des appas;/Chaque jour vers l'Enfer nous descendons d'un pas,/ Sans horreur, à travers des ténèbres qui puent" ("the Devil pulls on all our strings!/ In most repugnant objects we find charms; Each day we're one step further into Hell,/Content to move across the sinking pit") (4;5). However, as Jonathan Culler (2008) argues, in the poem "L'Irrémédiable" ("The Irremediable"), Baudelaire casts doubt on the notion of Satan being an external entity that controls our actions: "Emblèmes nets, tableau parfait/D'une fortune irremediable/Qui donne à penser que le Diable/Fait toujours bien tout ce qu'il fait!" ("Pure emblems, a perfect tableau/ Of an irremediable evil,/ Which makes us think that the Devil/Does what he chooses to do!) (ibid. 160;161). Culler argues that the phrase "makes us think" creates ambiguity of what is truly responsible for this evil *(*xxxiv). In both the Christian tradition and in *Flowers of Evil,* the Devil is "an agent or personification whose ability to act is essential" (xxxvi), though for Baudelaire, acting out our 'evil' temptations, is a manifestation of our psychological and uncanny desires (xxxvii). In the *Flowers of Evil*, evil and the devil are symbolic representations of the human ability to act and to choose, which is at the same time continuous and irremediable, and human action can only guide us closer and closer to hell.

Despite its secular underpinning, modernity is a spiritual journey and undertaking in Baudelaire's eyes, because it gives us the ability "to explore the forbidden realm of *evil*" and allows the artist to transform banal reality through the imaginary "where ephemerality and eternity are one" (Calinescu 54). Although Baudelaire separates the poems in his famous work into two sections, Spleen and Ideal, the poems do not

necessarily separate these two concepts, but instead blend them into one another, they become essentially the same, as one could not exist without the other**:** "je ne conçois guère (mon cerveau serait- il un miroir ensorcelé?) un type de Beauté où il ny ait pas du *Malheur*" (*Journaux* 22) ("I can scarcely conceive (is my brain become a witch's mirror?) a type of Beauty which has nothing to do with Sorrow") (*Intimate Journals* 43-4). For Baudelaire, this Sorrow is an uncanny strangeness that allows one to acknowledge something as beautiful:

> *Le beau est toujours bizarre*. Je ne veux pas dire qu'il soit volontairement, froidement bizarre, car dans ce cas il serait un monstre sorti des rails de la vie. e dis qu'il contient toujours un peu de bizarrerie, de bizarrerie naïve, non voulue, inconsciente, et que c'est cette bizarrerie qui le fait être particulièrement le Beau. C'est son immatriculation, sa caractéristique. (*Curiosités* 216)
>
> Beauty always has an element of strangeness. I do not mean a deliberate cold form of strangeness, for in that case it would be a monstrous thing that had jumped the rails of life. But I do mean that it always contains a certain degree of strangeness, of simple, unintended, unconscious strangeness, and that this form of strangeness is what gives it the right to be called beauty. It is its hallmark, its special characteristic. (*Selected Writings* 119)

Here, Baudelaire points to a paradoxical sense of beauty: it can only exist when a form a strangeness shades it, becomes one with it. What is interesting is that Baudelaire peculiarly claims this relationship is not a 'monstrous' and disjointed experience, even though for Baudelaire, the monstrous is an uncanny result of joining together two opposites or the fusing of "divergent perspectives" (M. Scott 71). As with his concept of evil, monstrosity seems to have a double connotation for Baudelaire; as an undesirable experience in regard to *ennui*, but also as a creative practice belonging to the liminal

realm of art and imagination[32]. He directly connects monstrous to beauty and sacredness in the poem "Hymn to Beauty" ("Hymne à la Beauté)",[33] even suggesting a correlation between monstrosity and God in "Mademoiselle Bistouri".[34] It is why many of the women in his poems are often regarded as monstrous, not necessarily as a criticism but almost as a sign of admiration and accomplishment (Stephens 146). Therefore, despite what Baudelaire claims in the previous passage, monstrosity, strangeness, beauty, and the divine all seem to be interconnected for him.

This paradoxical relationship must be why Baudelaire struggled with these uncanny feelings throughout his life, forever pulled between the "deux postulations simultanées" (*Journaux* 62) ("two simultaneous allegiances"), between the God and Satan that exist within everyone (*Intimate Journals* 73). He does not try to answer a mystery but sees this as a fact or detail, an entanglement due to the consequences of modernity and disenchantment. It is not that those are opposites in the sense that one needs the other to exist; rather, they both are virtually the same thing. The positions of both good and evil are presented allegorically through his depictions of urban life while exploring the newly paved boulevards of nineteenth century Paris. It becomes a place where the lines between Heaven and Hell, dream and nightmare begin to blur, where

[32] "La nature est laide, et je préfère les monstres de ma fantaisie à la trivialité positive" (*Curiosités* 263) ["Nature is ugly, and I prefer the monsters of my imagination to the triteness of actuality"] (*BLC* 180).
[33] "Que tu viennes du ciel ou de l'enfer, qu'importe, Ô Beauté! monstre énorme, effrayant, ingénu!" ["What difference, then, from heaven or from hell, O Beauty, monstrous in simplicity?"] (*Flowers* 44; 45).
[34] "Ô Créateur ! peut-il exister des monstres aux yeux de Celui-là seul qui sait pourquoi ils existent, comment ils se sont faits et comment ils auraient pu ne pas se faire?" (*Spleen* 204) ["O Creator, can there be monsters in the eyes of Him who alone knows why they exist, how they *came into being*, how they might *not have come into being*?"] (*Paris* 93)

demons and angels soar to such an intensity that the poet and reader cannot tell them apart, making the distinction between these realms no longer substantial.

For both Leopardi and Baudelaire, the removal of humanity from the natural definitely revolves around the artificial. Leopardi eventually comes to the conclusion that all life is artificial, even Nature, which gifted us illusions that give life meaning. The illusions of modernity are not able to hold up to the ancient illusions that connected both human and Nature. In Leopardi's poetry, the moon is often seen as a final representation of enchantment and sacredness, standing alone at night, projecting "the shadow of its absence" (Calvino 24) that "allows for a certain interdeterminacy and openness to illusion" (Galassi xx). In this instance, Baudelaire's philosophy is slightly different. He sees Nature in humanity as something disgusting and evil and the artificial that separates us from it as something good and beautiful. The absence of stars in Baudelaire's poetry reaches its culmination in "Le Crépuscule du soir" ("Dusk") (Buck-Morss 193), as they fail to equal the artificial light brought on by the city's illumination, which gives power to the prostitution that "blazes in the streets" (*Flowers* 193). The beauty of modern life must be found within artificial reality for Baudelaire, and that is why the majority of his work focuses on the modern city**.** What Baudelaire and Leopardi acknowledge, in a greater degree than we saw with Shelley, is that the artificiality of humanity and even Nature itself furthers the destruction of the dialectical synthesis between nature and unnatural: reality and illusion. This monstrous artificiality, unnaturalness, or being out of place is far more entertaining and adventurous for Baudelaire than the modern monster that is *ennui*, once again expressing monstrosity's paradox: "Quelles bizarreries ne trouve-t-on pas dans une grande ville, quand on sait se promener et regarder? La vie fourmille de

monstres innocents" (*Spleen* 204) ("The strange things one encounters in a city when no one knows how to move around it and look! Life is teeming with innocent monsters") (*Paris* 93).

As Benjamin points out of the Baudelaire poems "Tu mettrais l'univers entier" ("You'd entertain the universe…") and "L'Avertisseur" ("The Cautioner"), Baudelaire "has lost himself to the spell of the eyes which do not return his glance, and submits to their sway without illusions" ("Motifs" 190). The ambiguous eyes that resemble "a mirror-like blankness" (ibid) do not cause terror for Baudelaire as they did for Frankenstein when he first gazed into the watery eyes of the Creature. Instead, it is staring into the eyes that were "illuminés ainsi que des boutiques" (*Flowers* 52) ("illuminated like boutiques") (ibid. 53), which plunge him further into an enchanted state. For Baudelaire, a secularized modern hell is the only possible place for the re-sacralization of the modern world. What matters to Baudelaire is our engagement in our own heavens or hells that exist within both the depths of modernity and our psyche. In the poem "Le Voyage" ("Voyages"), Beauty is found in both moral binaries but only when diving into the new and unknown: "[v]erse-nous ton poison pour qu'il nous réconforte!/Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,/Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?/Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!" ("[s]erve us your poison, sir, to treat us well!/ Minds burning, we know what we have to do,/ And plunge to depths of Heaven or of Hell,/ To fathom the Unknown, and find the *new*!") (ibid. 292; 293). The 'new' does not only relate to the contemporary, novel, and fleeting elements of modernity but likewise a form of creation of the self that exists within each individual.

THE MODERN DANTES: WANDERERS OF A MODERN AND LIMINALIZING HELL

Another notable connection between the two poet-philosophers conceivably stems from their relationship with the works of the celebrated Italian poet Dante Alighieri. What both Leopardi and Baudelaire took from Dante was an acknowledgement of the limits of reason, something that was far more substantial to them after the Enlightenment and French Revolution, alongside a blending of mythic and religious themes with present and historical reality (Barricelli 74). More importantly, both sought to describe a secularized allegorical interpretation of Dante's *La Divina Commedia* (*The Divine Comedy*) (1320/1998), or to be more specific, his *Inferno*. While the thought of bringing heaven to earth was being championed by the materialists and modern utopians, Baudelaire and Leopardi saw fit to look for the hell, or monstrosity, that came with it. This tradition, starting with Leopardi and Baudelaire, continued well into twentieth century modernism with the works of Samuel Beckett, Eliot, Joyce, and Virgina Woolf, as many moderns saw Dante to be "eminently modern in sensibility and in manner" (Hiddleston 78).[35] Leopardi, Baudelaire, as well as Frankenstein's Creature, share an affinity of being modern Dantes, and their alienation from travelling in an unknown world is all encompassing. Throughout their journeys within secular hell as *flâneurs* or voyeurs, they are left ultimately alone with neither a Virgil to guide them, nor having a concept of absolute and lasting Beauty in Beatrice as a goal to reach.[36] In "La Tromonto

[35] Moreover, Erich Auerbach claims in his famous book *Dante: Poet of the Secular World* (1929/1961) that this extremely religious poet, paved the way for imagination for the secular world through Mimesis.

[36] In "Le Peintre de la vie modern" ["The Painter of Modern Life"] (1863), Baudelaire explains that modern beauty is something that is unstable and always in flux. Beauty itself is made up of dual components; "un élément éternel, invariable… et d'un élément

Della Luna" ("the Setting of the Moon"), Leopardi describes the wanderer within secular modernity:

> Van l'ombre e le sembianze/Dei dilettosi inganni; e vengon meno/Le lontane speranze,/Ove s'appoggia la mortal natura./Abbandonata, oscura/Resta la vita. In lei porgendo il guardo,/Cerca il confuso viatore invano/Del cammin lungo che avanzar si sente/Meta o ragione; e vede/Che a se l'umana sede,/Esso a lei veramente è fatto estrano
>
> (The shadows/And the shapes of glad illusions/Flee, and distant hopes,/That prop up our moral/nature up, give way./Life is forlorn, lightless./Looking ahead, the wayward traveler/Searches unavailing/for goal or reason on the long/road he senses lies ahead,/and sees that man's home truly has become/alien to him, and he to it.) (*Canti* 282; 283)

This poem was written while Leopardi was caught in the threshold of his forming secular thoughts and his religious upbringing (*Canti* 480), where his soon to be annihilated Christian beliefs were juxtaposed with an idea of death as oblivion and nothingness (Rosengarten 150). Dante at least had a Hell that served justice and provided order but modern hell was a place of nothingness and boredom, to such a point that Leopardi tells the spectre of Dante in "A Angelo Mai" ("To Angelo Mai") (1820) "Beato te che il fato/A viver non dannò fra tanto orrore" ("You were lucky fate did not condemn you to live among these horrors") (*Canti* 18; 19). Leopardi describes traditional Hell as a sanctuary from our world, from our modern notion of hell: "Eran calde le tue ceneri sante,/Non domito nemico/Della fortuna, al cui sdegno e dolore/

relatif, circonstanciel" (*L'art* 54) ["an eternal, invariable element… and a relative, circumstantial element,"] ("Painter" 3) and although it does contain an element that is constant and universal, it is only through the second element that humans are able to recognize beauty, for the first eternal and infinite constituent of beauty would be "indigestible, inappreciable" **(***L'art* 54**)** ["beyond our powers of digestion or appreciation" without the second ("Painter" 3). Furthermore, Leopardi's poem "*A Sylvia*" ["To Sylvia"] and Baudelaire's "À une passante" ["To a women passer by"], arguably the poets' most famous poems, are about the inevitability of unobtainable or unrequited love.

Fu più l'averno che la terra amico./L'averno: e qual non è parte migliore/Di questa nostra?" ("Your holy ashes still were warm,/undefeated enemy of fortune,/to those whose disdain and pain/ hell was friendlier than earth./ Yes, even hell: for what place isn't preferable to ours?") (ibid. 32; 33). The world is forever condemned and "somiglia a un vero inferno" (*Zib* 115) ("resembles hell itself") due to the implementation of reason over imagination (*Z* 113).

The influence of Dante on Baudelaire's own work has been well documented, especially by the twentieth century moderns and equally by Walter Benjamin throughout his *Passagen-Werk* (233-4,247, 251, 267, 271, 275, 289, 295, 305, 324, 363), even though the degree of Dante's direct influence on the French poet is debatable.[37] Barbey d'Aurevilly labeled Baudelaire as a "deformed Dante" (Rainey 157), regarding him as "a modern and atheist" version of the Italian poet, born as a result "of a fallen age" (Rainey 157, n. 4), while, later, T.S. Eliot emphasized Baudelaire's modern qualities by referring to Baudelaire as the "fragmentary Dante" (*Selected Essays* 336) and as a Christian and a Classist "born out of his due time" (*Essays Ancient and Modern* 72). Although Baudelaire focused on sin, morality, and spiritual death, as did Dante, the structures of the worlds in which they exist differed prominently. Whereas Dante's spiritual universe was divided clearly and separately into Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, in Baudelaire's world, the division between each realm is far more ambiguous. Morality has become uncannily unhinged and displaced in the modern world, becoming a place where good and evil have, copulated, giving birth to a new liminal form of thought that existed between ancient moral boundaries. Modernity and secularism culminate in a hellish

[37] See "Baudelaire's Knowledge and Use of Dante" by James S. Patty.

existential boredom for the stranger, resulting from the limitlessness of desire and the inability to cure it. Replacing a religious or mythological place where sins are punished, hell has become a psychological response to the ascending secularized world that forces individuals to place their dependence of abstract concepts such as happiness and joy onto material and physical pleasures and desires that ultimately leave one in a state of perpetual weariness. Modernity is characterized by its boredom, which itself is connected to a negation of lived experience and action, two fundamental attributes needed for the pursuit of linear progress.

Although, not exactly the same thing, both Baudelaire's usage of *ennui* and Leopardi's treatment of *noia* can be roughly translated as a mixture of both melancholia and boredom. Moreover, both are ailments that cannot be alleviated as a result of a forever present and reoccurring sense of consciousness that comes from a desire of living a happy or joyous life in a secular world based on pleasure. Each individual, according to Leopardi, is given the two-edged gift of self-love from Nature. This is the reason why every person seeks out good, which is nothing more than the search for pleasure, and since desire is superior to pleasure, pleasure can only satisfy desire in fleeting moments (*Z* 333). Our desire for the infinite happiness, keeps desire in the realm of impossibility because infinite desire cannot be satisfied by pleasure, thus "tutti i piaceri debbono esser misti di dispiacere" (*Zib*135) ("all pleasures must be mingled with displeasure") (*Z* 130). We can see that the relationship between pleasure and desire for Leopardi, which is comparable to Jacques Lacan's (1977) psychoanalytic relationship between being, desire,

and lack[38], does not actually lead to happiness because it lacks any positive qualities. Fundamentally, it is only "privazione" (*Zib* 818) ("privation") (*Z* 1136). While Leopardi's conception of pleasure and desire is temporal and therefore an indication of consciousness, it likewise implies a succession or chain of signifiers that both Lacan and Freud argue that make up the unconscious (Rennie 199-200). Both Lacan and Lepoardi see desire and lack fundamentally bound together in an endless series of unfulfilled pleasure seeking. For Lacan, desire "is caught in the rails of metonymy, eternally extending toward the desire for something else" (*Écrits* 431). The metonymic desire is never satisfied but always deferred, flowing from one to another (ibid. 379). Therefore, desire is a liminal process with no beginning or end. In the case of Leopardi, the modern citizen is becoming spiritually empty and "è tormentato da un desiderio infinito del piacere" (*Zib* 247) ("is tormented by an infinite desire for pleasure") (*Z* 229). Similar to Lacan's psychoanalytic description, Leopardi philosophical understanding of pleasure, which for him is everything that we desire, is never existing in the present moment, but merely successive hints or an "idea del futuro" (*Zib* 306) ("idea of the future") (*Z* 290). Although desire for pleasure is innate in human beings, for the modern individual that is alienated from nature, happiness is not possible after having acquired knowledge of "le illusioni e il niente di…piaceri naturali (*Zib* 57) ("the emptiness of things and the illusoriness and nothingness…of natural pleasures") (*Z* 63). As a result, *noia* psychologically envelops the self once the individual acknowledges the futility of trying to satisfy infinite desire.

[38] In "The Ego in Freud's Theory" Lacan argues that "[d]esire is a relation to being to lack. The lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists" (223).

Noia is an existential pain brought on by reason and uniformity, even from a uniformity of pleasure, and essentially engrained within homogeneity itself (ibid. 1085), making it "la passione la più contraria e lontana alla natura" (*Zib* 732) ("the passion most contrary to and farthest from nature") (*Z* 952). Conversely, it is Leopardi's concept of *noia*, which continuously emerges throughout the *Zibaldone* that led to his shift in seeing Nature as evil. *Noia* is what allows reason to destroy the illusions created by Nature, and therefore, is essential in what removes humans from Nature. Since human nature is finite, it is unable to satisfy our pleasure and desire, which is ultimately infinite, thus giving us eternal sorrow in exchange for fleeting happiness. As Leopardi maintains,

> La noia è manifestamente un male, e l'annoiarsi una infelicità. Or che cosa è la noia? Niun male nè dolore particolare, (anzi l'idea e la natura della noia esclude la presenza di qualsivoglia particolar male o dolore), ma la semplice vita pienamente sentita, provata, conosciuta, pienamente presente all'individuo, ed occupantelo. Dunque la vita è semplicemente un male: e il non vivere, o il viver meno, sì per estensione che per intensione è semplicemente un bene, o un minor male, ovvero preferibile per se ed assolutamente alla vita ec. (*Zib* 1061)
>
> (Boredom is clearly an ill, and the experience of boredom brings unhappiness. Now what is boredom? No particular ill or suffering (in fact the idea and nature of boredom excludes the presence of any particular ill or suffering) but simply life itself fully felt, experienced, recognized, life fully present to the individual and taking him over it's everywhere, it saturates an individual. Life therefore is simply an ill: and not to live, or to live less; whether in duration or in intensity, is simply a good, or lesser ill, rather absolutely and in itself preferable to life, etc.) (*Z* 1719)

Noia is virus-like, a self-creating and self-feeding emotion based on nothingness that spreads and contaminates wherever it goes: "La noia è la più sterile delle passioni umane. Com'ella è figlia della nullità, così è madre del nulla: giacchè non solo è sterile per se, ma rende tale tutto ciò a cui si mesce o avvicina ec." (*Zib* 656) ("[b]oredom is the most sterile of human passions. Born of nothingness, it gives life to nothing. Not only is it sterile in itself, it also makes whatever it mingles with, whatever it draws close to, sterile,

etc.") (*Z* 818). Since *noia* is a never-ending feeling even worse than despair, Leopardi acknowledges a heroic quality in being able to inhibit its liminality on daily basis (ibid. 186), thereby making it the most tragic, yet inspiring emotion since it places the human spirit, although fragile and uncertain due to modernity, as more important than the rest of the universe (Svendsen 58). While many things may have led to Leopardi's theory of pleasure and *noia*, such as his ailments and strict upbringing, the existential disillusionment and moral indifference that was encircling modernity induced an creative outlook on the world that would linger within the modern age.

Ennui too was a result of a spiritual malaise in the modern world; however, Baudelaire emphasizes its development as a by-product of over-stimulation even more than Leopardi. Baudelaire saw *ennui*, which he also refers to as Spleen, as the greatest flaw of the modern age if not utilized properly. In "To the Reader", boredom is seen as humanity's greatest weakness; "[c]'est l'Ennui! L'oeil chargé d'un pleur involontaire,/Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka./Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,/-Hypocrite lecteur, - mon semblable, - mon frère!" ("He is Ennui! - with tear-filled eye he drams/Of scaffolds, as he puffs his water-pipe./Reader, you know this dainty monster too;/-Hypocrite reader,-fellowman,-my twin!") (*Flowers* 6; 7). Fondane argues that the theological malaise Baudelaire is trapped in is the "boredom of the cosmos" (63), the boredom that represents all modern civilization, stimulating us to blindly proceed through the void. Although the abyss and *ennui* are existentially bound and should be a concern for all individuals, it is the stranger that forces herself to gaze into it and not to turn away, something Baudelaire accuses his readers of being incapable of at the beginning of his most famous work. Baudelaire's 'introduction' to *The Flowers of Evil* brings all of

humanity into the same modern world where boredom has made urban society take on a state of insomnia. Elund Summers-Bremner argues in her intriguing book *Insomnia: A Cultural History* (2008) that modernity "like insomnia" is "akin to having a mental itch one cannot reach, a state of conscious enjoyment one can imagine but cannot get to. And insomnia, while frequently companioned by anxiety and conflict, is reliably an experience of boredom" (75). Not only does Summers-Bremner relate boredom to insomnia, she argues that modernity and insomnia are uncannily interrelated because they "show how unknown we can be to ourselves, and unknowable things often seem to come from outside" (ibid. 31-32). However, this liminal and almost unnatural state is where the Stranger feels natural and thrives in. Navigating in the realm of boredom, in the unknown, is where the Stranger begins to finally know itself.

Baudelaire's prose poem "Chacun sa chimere" ("to each his own Chimera"**)** shows how each individual has a monster that imprisons and guides them without knowing, "poussés par un invincible besoin de marcher" (*Spleen* 46) ("impelled by an imperious need to advance") (*Paris* 112); however, "s'enfonça dans l'atmosphère de l'horizon" ("lost in the air of the horizon") (ibid.) the poet is weighed down by "Indifférence" (ibid.) ("Indifference"), and finding the mystery of each person's monster becomes a pointless endeavor for him. Baudelaire's capital "I" indifference results in his alienation from a world that solely believes in an aimless sort of progress, where the purpose of the movement is simply movement itself. The idea of alienation from indifference later became an important theme for modernists such as T.S. Eliot and Robert Frost who were influenced by their predecessors of the *fin de siècle* (Gray 2005, 11), where alienation is derived from the paradoxical notion of being detached from a

world with entrenched meaning and yet still having a direct, albeit a self-protective relation to that world (Jaeggi 150). Addressing Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, Susan Buck-Morss (1991) claims,

> …natural history as prehistoric and modernity as Hell – the nineteenth-century origins of the most recent historical phenomena, when named as reincarnations of the most archaic, open themselves up to critical understanding. Both images contain the same conceptual elements – history and nature, myth and transitoriness – but in configurations so different that their meanings pull in opposite directions. If after a century the original arcades appear prehistoric, it is because of the extremely rapid changes which industrial technology has wrought upon the urban landscape. But the experience of time brought about by this rapid change has been precisely the opposite: hellish repetition (184).

Nonetheless, *ennui* is still a feeling that the modern artist or stranger must embrace to understand the world and ourselves within it. Like the uncanny, *ennui* and *noia* have manifested themselves to us through secularized modernity, revealing to us a monstrous aspect of society that is no longer subjugated. In showing us the hellish truth of the boredom and repetition of modern capitalist life, *ennui* becomes almost a revolutionary aspect of modernity. Benjamin wanted to use the *Passagen-Werk* to show how the contemporaries of nineteenth century Paris, which he felt mirrored his own age, experienced their age as exhausting, disillusioning, and boring, where in spite of the massive movement towards technology, secularism, and the reshaping of the city that usually defines the characteristics of progress, nothing new seemed to be emerging. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848/2005), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels state that the "[c]onstant revolutionizing of production" found in capitalism and modernity, leads to the disenchantment of everyday life and corrosion of sacrality, in which "all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned" (7). Both modernity and capitalism do an effective job of exploiting our ability to both live in repetition, yet simultaneously give us

illusionary-like instances of new. With every product bought or every new boulevard created, the same repetitive joy is once again experienced as new. However, as the illusion begins to fade for some or the repetition becomes one of emptiness, the receptiveness of modern life slowly leads the individual into a state of existential boredom and malaise. Marx (1844/2007) characterized the alienation of the worker from the "*product of his labour"* as an 'alien God', where the more one puts into it, the less it belongs to them (*Manuscripts* 70). Conjuring an image akin to Frankenstein's Creature, capital for Marx, is the prevailing and alienating power over labour that assumes the form of an isolated and animated "mechanical monster", demonically possessed to 'work' through this alterity (*Capital* 302, 503).

In this regard, we can see that this vision of history is in many ways akin to Søren Kierkegaard's concept of *Gjentagelsen* (repetition), which means "to take again" (A. Lewis 79). Conceptually, recollection (*Erindringen*) and repetition are paradoxically the same movement, merely in opposite directions; one moves backwards where the latter moves forwards; one might be seen as inauthentic, while the other can be regarded as authentic movement. If modernity becomes an existence of simply recollecting, the individual may fall into a mundane, "meaningless noise" (Kierkegaard 149). Unlike Marx, Kierkegaard however does not only see a negative stance in recurring alienation, but also recognizes it as something that can be positive and spiritual. Whereas recollection looks backwards, repetition is an action, 'to take back again'; therefore the action becomes something new and always moving forward. Repetition can become a spiritual or sacred struggle as in being born again, where "in the moment of despair a change takes place…and freedom takes on a religious expression, by which repetition appears as

atonement" (ibid. 320). Engaging with this paradox, repetition becomes an indication of spiritual intelligence and strength for Kierkegaard:

> The person who has not circumnavigated life before beginning life will never live; the person who circumnavigated it but became satiated had a poor constitution; the person who chose repetition - he lives…Indeed, what would life be if there were no repetition? Who could want to be a tablet on which time writes something new every instant or to be a memorial volume of the past?...If God Himself had not willed repetition, the world would not have come into existence…Therefore, world continues, and it continues because it is a repetition. Repetition - that is actuality and the earnestness of existence (132-3).

Kierkegaard places both a liminal and religious element to repetition[39] in a similar way to Baudelaire's use of the new, in that it is a type of restoration or cultivation of the self. In a psychoanalytic sense, "[t]rue repetition is a desire for a getting back of the Other, restoration of the God relationship. It is desire for the transcendent Other but, paradoxically, desire for restoration of a relationship that one cannot recollect from actuality" (McCarthy 91). True repetition is a movement forward, where one is the same yet also becomes another.[40]

[39]"…it is: transcendent, a religious movement by virtue of the absurd – when the borderline of the wonderous is reached, eternity is the true repetition" (Kierkegaard 305).

[40] Kierkegaard's repetition shares some affinity with Nietzsche concept of the eternal recurrence/return:

"Your whole life, like a sandglass, will always be reversed and will ever run out again, - a long minute of time will elapse until all those conditions out of which you were evolved return in the wheel of the cosmic process. And then you will find every pain and every pleasure, every friend and every enemy, every hope and every error, every blade of grass and every ray of sunshine once more, and the whole fabric of things which make up your life. This ring in which you are but a grain will glitter afresh forever. And in every one of these cycles of human life there will be one hour where, for the first time one man, and then many, will perceive the mighty thought of the eternal recurrence of all things:- and for mankind this is always the hour of Noon" ("Eternal" 250).

Although both concepts share a paradoxical movement forward out of nihilism, one of the main differences between the two concepts, as Anna Strelis Soderquist (2016) points out, is that while Nietzsche's idea is more of a thought experiment or "an exercise of the imagination, Kierkegaard's repetition must be an exercise in practice" (39).

It is with this perspective that makes such pessimistic and paradoxical thinkers such as Baudelaire and Leopardi important to modern thought, secularization, and even the paradoxical notion of the resacralization. For one, they dived deep into the monstrosity of modern life, in order to pull out the paradoxical fragments of beauty and sacredness that are intertwined with it. Their plight living in liminal modernity could be summed up by a famous quote often attributed to Gramsci: '[t]he challenge of modernity is to live without illusions and without becoming disillusioned'. Although perhaps discouraging, while others were attempting to secularize the notion of heaven on earth, they felt it necessary to acknowledge and examine the secularized hell that is so closely tied to heaven, by questioning not only the rational, technological, and capitalist aspects of modernity, but also the false historical, spiritual, and religious ones that came with it. Nevertheless, Baudelaire and Leopardi exhibited an uncanny positivity, akin to Nietzsche's sense of affirmation or 'tragic joy'[41], where tragedy is the experiencing of modern life. This paradoxical joy at the heart of their melancholic views is their challenge to appreciate liminal and secularized modernity for what it was. Through an acceptance of the paradoxical beauty found in ordinary and harsh modern experience, the poets look to dissuade any illusionary optimism of progress that refuses to stare in the eyes of its own monstrosity or fails to embrace the modern condition of estrangement and alienation. Failing to do so would ironically result in an age of spiritual bankruptcy.

[41] "The saying of Yea to life, including even its most strange and most terrible problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibleness in the *sacrifice* of its highest types—this is what I called Dionysian, this is what I divined as the bridge leading to the psychology of the *tragic* poet. Not in order to escape from terror and pity, not to purify one's self of a dangerous passion by discharging it with vehemence … but to be far beyond terror and pity and to be the eternal lust of Becoming itself—that lust which also involves the *lust of destruction*" ("Twilight" 120).

Consequently, long before Camus' *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (*Myth of Sisyphus*) (1942), Baudelaire and Leopardi strove to envision a smile on the individual that is faced with the uncanny absurdity of the modern age, even if it was only an ironic one, merely for the reason that freedom needs to be free of illusions, if not completely, then at least of the un-nurturing ones.

A RUPTURE IN HISTORY AND THE ILLUSION OF PROGRESS

Modernity lives and breathes in a paradox of time. Born from a rupture in history and fostered on past ruins, it not only gazes towards the future, it continuously is being haunted by its ahistorical spectres. [42] Whereas the future can be considered to be utopian in that it contains a wealth of unknown possibilities, the disenchantment and demystification of modernity, paradoxically developed from a fear of the unknown,[43] can itself become a problematic roadblock built into progress itself. While most of their contemporaries continued to insist on a myth of constant societal growth, Leopardi and Baudelaire were beginning to see through the dream of modernity and the veil of progress that was cast over the eyes of society, realizing that what many considered to be reality, was essentially artificial in nature. And yet, although the two acknowledge that there is a definite rupture in history with the advent of modernity, neither necessarily sees this disruption in history correlating to any real sort of progress.

[42] Frankenstein's Creature can be seen as epitomizing this notion of a modern ahistorical spectre.

[43] Adorno and Horkheimer argue, "Man imagines himself free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown. That determines the course or demythologization, of enlightenment, which compounds the animate with the inanimate just as myth compounds the inanimate with the animate. Enlightenment is mythic fear turned radical. The pure immanence of positivism, its ultimate product, is no more than a so to speak universal taboo. Nothing at all may remain outside, because the mere idea of outsiderness is the very source of fear" (16).

Leopardi saw this distinct rupture between what he deemed ancient and modern civilization as an irreversible separation. According to him, we must not consider modernity "come una semplice continuazione dell'antica, come un progresso della medesima" ("as a continuation of ancient civilization, as its progression"), but rather, "queste due civiltà, avendo essenziali differenze tra loro, sono, e debbono essere considerate come due civiltà diverse, o vogliamo dire due diverse e distinte specie di civiltà, ambedue realmente complete in se stesse" (*Zib* 1094) ("[t]hese two civilizations, which are essentially different, are and must be considered as two separate civilizations, or rather two different and distinct species of civilization, each actually complete in itself") (*Z* 1820-1). This contrast between the ancients and the moderns, spurred on by the Copernican and French revolutions, was a prevailing theme in Leopardi's work, and although it seems he tends to assign a superiority to the ancients and the classics, especially in his early, more nostalgic poems, the melancholic, yet necessary demise of the classical age is always prominent in his writings and would further continue and expand throughout his life's work. Furthermore, Leopardi believed that an admiration of classical poetry should result in the love of one's contemporary age, since classical poets were themselves writing about their own present time and not partaking in some anachronistic practice (Rennie 135). One of the very first *canti* written by Leopardi, the Dantesque poem "L'appressamento della morte" ("The Approach of Death") (1816), echoed the tyranny and horrors of the *Inferno*, yet one that reflected his own modern age rather than Dante's Italy of the fourteenth century (Rosengarten 142). As Leopardi laments in another poem dedicated to Dante, he sees historic ruins as spectres that should spur us on in the future: **"**Mira queste ruine/E le carte e le tele e i marmi e I templi;/Pensa

qual terra premi; e se destarti/Non può la luce di cotanti esempli,/Che stai? lévati e parti" ("Look at these ruins,/these pages, canvases, these stones and temples./Think what earth you walk on. And if the light/of these examples fails to inspire you,/what are you waiting for? Arise and go") (*Canti* 26, 27).

Leopardi's Italy seems to embody the turmoil and alienation of secularized modernity, completely caught in an illusion of progress and an undefined future.[44] In "Dialogo di un Venditore D'almanacchi e di un Passeggere" ("A Dialogue of an Almanac-seller and passer-by") (1832), the setting of Leopardi's narrative takes place in a modern European city and tells us of a fleeting conversation between an almanac seller on the street and a modern *flâneur*-like character. The passer-by questions the seller's belief that the future should always be better than the past simply for the fact that the future has yet to come and thereby contains many possibilities. But as the passer-by and Leopardi himself contend, this optimism in the future is based on an illusion of the unknown and that deeming the future better because it relies on an outlook that the past is simply not good enough, leads to a paradoxical position that if the past is never good enough how could the future ever be? The seller admits he is only willing to re-live his life as a different person, which Leopardi shows as modern existence's greatest flaw: reducing existence from repetition to pure novelty. By trying to evade the past, humanity has paradoxically continued on a cyclical path of reoccurring desire. For Leopardi, nothing is novel; everything is old; everything repeats**.**

[44] Interestingly, Mary Shelley saw the liminality of Italy as a result of being a fragmented set of nation states as its greatest hope, since it had not yet formed a 'nation' and therefore still contained in itself a possibility of creating something new. As Tilottama Rajan (1998) explains, Shelley saw that "the sickness of contemporary Italy was also its potential" (30-1).

Despite history being cyclical for Leopardi, he was never a supporter of a restoration of the past, especially a civilization dominated by a Christian God. Leopardi endeavored to search out modern and secular knowledge at all costs, believing that any nostalgic sentiment towards the past kept modernity rooted in its current existential predicament. This development of thought leaves Leopardi with an extremely paradoxical view of modernity, yet his disillusionment resulting from the "sovrumani silenzi, e profondissima quïete" ("superhuman silences, and depthless clam") (*Canti* 106; 107) found within modernity directed him to an anti-Platonic and relativist stance concerning life that eventually led him to proclaim God's death[45], even before Nietzsche

[45] "…è chiaro che la distruzione delle idee innate distrugge il principio della bontà, bellezza, perfezione assoluta, e de' loro contrarii. Vale a dire di una perfezione ec. la quale abbia un fondamento, una ragione, una forma anteriore alla esistenza dei soggetti che la contengono, e quindi eterna, immutabile, necessaria, primordiale ed esistente prima dei detti soggetti, e indipendente da loro. Or dov'esiste questa ragione, questa forma? e in che consiste? e come la possiamo noi conoscere o sapere, se ogn'idea ci deriva dalle sensazioni relative ai soli oggetti esistenti? Supporre il bello e il buono assoluto, è tornare alle idee di Platone, e risuscitare le idee innate dopo averle distrutte, giacchè tolte queste, non v'è altra possibile ragione per cui le cose debbano assolutamente e astrattamente e necessariamente essere così o così, buone queste e cattive quelle, indipendentemente da ogni volontà, da ogni accidente, da ogni cosa di fatto, che in realtà è la sola ragione del tutto, e quindi sempre e solamente relativa, e quindi tutto non è buono, bello, vero, cattivo, brutto, falso, se non relativamente; e quindi la convenienza delle cose fra loro è relative…In somma il principio delle cose, e di Dio stesso, è il nulla…Certo è che distrutte le forme Platoniche preesistenti alle cose, è distrutto Iddio" (*Zib* 483-4).
["… it is clear that the destruction of innate ideas destroys the principle of absolute goodness, beauty, perfection, and of their contraries. That is to say, the principle of a perfection, etc., that has a foundation, a logic, a form prior to the existence of the objects which contain it, and hence is eternal, immutable, necessary, primordial and existing before the said objects, and independent of them. But where does this logic, this form exist? And what does it consist of? And how can we recognize or know it, if we derive every idea from sensations relating only to existing objects? To assume absolute good and absolute beauty is to return to ideas of Plato, and to revive innate ideas after having destroyed them, since once they are removed, there is no other possible *reason* why things should absolutely and abstractly and necessarily be thus or thus, with these good and those bad, independently of every will, of every accident, of *every concrete*

famously did.[46] In many of his poems, Leopardi places himself in a liminal position within time, space, and society, unable to find complete solace in past wisdom, the present reality, or the 'promising' future ahead of him; "Non io d'Olimpo o di Cocito i sordi/regi, o la terra indegna,/e non la notte moribondo appello;/non te, dell'atra morte ultimo raggio,/conscia futura etá" ("I call not on the heedless kings of Olympus or Cocytus,/ nor on unworthy earth, nor the night before I die;/ and not you, conscious future generation,/ last hope of lightest death") (*Canti* 64; 65). As Fabio A. Camilletti (2017) claims, "Leopardi's style confirms this impression of immediacy, as if it aimed to capture a fading and indefinable sensation…in which no chronological progression can be detected, nor any further analysis possible" (Camilletti 23).

What the ancients had over the moderns, according to Leopardi, and the essential difference that defines this historical rupture that is modernity, was the ancients' ability to nurture strong and life-giving illusions, while in the modern age, these illusions have become ultimately empty and baseless due to the absolute implementation of both reason and truth over Nature. By stressing the idea of illusion, Leopardi rejects the mythologizing of human history and develops an animosity towards the notion of Christian perfection that, has been secularized, and in turn resacralized, into modern

circumstance, which in reality is the sole reason for everything, and is therefore always and only relative. Hence everything is not good, beautiful, true, bad, ugly, false except relatively, and hence the propriety of things with respect to one another is relative… … In short the principle of things, and indeed of God is nothingness…What is certain is that once the Platonic forms preexisting things are destroyed, God, too, is destroyed" (*Z* 368-369)

[46] Although Nietzsche was an admirer of Leopardi, calling him one of the four "masters of prose" (*Gay Science* 146), he could not have known of the reference to God's destruction, since *Zibaldone* was not published until after Nietzsche's death. However, Nietzsche's ridiculed madman, whom Nietzsche gives his famous quote to (*Zarathursta* 59; *Gay Science* 181), ended up being an apt voice to paraphrase Leopardi.

society's concept of progress. As a result, Nature/God turns into something imperfect at the expense of the illusion of humanity's perfection (*Z* 235). In developing an attitude of secularization that is inadvertently similar to Charles Taylor's, Leopardi argues that Christianity helped destroy these classical illusions through a championing of Reason over Nature, the same conception the Age of Enlightenment had ironically used to destroy the illusions that had been shaped by Christianity. As it was later for Nietzsche, Christianity is a primary cause of nihilism in the modern world. The problematic combination that came with Christianity's influence of searching for happiness from a world outside of our own and scientific reason's emphasis on demystifying the natural world that surrounds us, has led humanity into a liminal state in which our world has become remarkably unhomely for us: "Non è egli un paradosso" ("Is it not a paradox,") Leopardi argues, "che la Religion Cristiana in gran parte sia stata la fonte dell'ateismo, o generalmente, della incredulità religiosa? Eppure io così la penso. L'uomo naturalmente non è incredulo, perchè non ragiona molto, e non cura gran fatto delle cagioni delle cose" (*Zib* 432) ("that the Christian Religion has in large part been the source of atheism or more generally of religious unbelief? Yet I think this is the case. Man is not naturally incredulous because he does not reason much and does not care a great deal about the causes of thing") (*Z* 502). This historical process leaves modern Europe in a continuous liminal position in which the re-enchantment brought on by the Enlightenment, which paradoxically co-exists with its rationalizing and disenchanting element, puts society in a problematic situation where it is in a constantly oscillating between enchantment and disenchantment: past, present, and future.

For Leopardi, the modern world, in comparison to the traditional, is akin to adults growing up from their childish past; however, he laments our inability to fear the supernatural as we did previously as children:

> Lascio stare il timore e lo spavento proprio di quell'età (per mancanza di esperienza e sapere, e per forza d'immaginazione ancor vergine e fresca): timor di pericoli di ogni sorta, timore di vanità e chimere…timor delle larve, sogni, cadaveri, strepiti notturni…. L'idea degli spettri, quel timore spirituale, soprannaturale, sacro, e di un altro mondo, che ci agitava frequentemente in quell'età, aveva un non so che di sì formidabile e smanioso, che non può esser paragonato con verun altro sentimento dispiacevole dell'uomo. Nemmeno il timor dell'inferno in un moribondo, credo che possa essere così intimamente terribile. Perchè la ragione e l'esperienza rendono inaccessibili a qualunque sorta di sentimento, quell'ultima e profondissima parte e radice dell'animo e del cuor nostro, alla quale penetrano e arrivano, e la quale scuotono e invadono le sensazioni fanciullesche o primitive, e in ispecie il detto timore. (Zib 305-6)
>
> (To say nothing of the fear and terror typical of that age (due to a lack of experience or knowledge, and to the power of our imagination, still fresh and virgin): fear of dangers of every kind; fear of figments and chimeras…fear of ghosts, dreams, dead bodies, noises in the night…The idea of specters, that spiritual, supernatural, sacred, otherworldly fear, which frequently gripped us at the age, had something so dreadful and frenzied about it that it cannot be compared to any other pleasurable feeling felt by human beings. For childhood or primitive sensations, and this fear in particular, reach, assail, penetrate, and overwhelm the ultimate and deepest part and root of our mind and heart, which reason and experience render inaccessible to any kind of feeling.) (*Z* 289-90)

Although the modern world has predominately extinguished its sense of supernatural fear, it has to deal with a new and subtle kind of terror. '*Terrore*' for Leopardi, takes on an uncanny aspect in the modern world that "determines an ambiguous feeling of surprise and shock" (Camilletti 126), since it "e molto più avvilitiva dell'animo e sospensiva dell'uso della ragione" (*Zib* 822) ("is far more likely to cause the use of reason to be suspended") (*Z* 1160). This uncanny and monstrous terror is a form of fear that results from the post-Enlightenment. Reason thrusts us towards a terror brought on by an acceptance of a greater insignificance, a fear that even goes beyond the boundaries of the

courageous individual or trailblazer. Leopardi contends that, while the courageous or wise man "non teme mai…sempre essere atterrito" (*Zib* 822) ("is never afraid…he can always be terror-struck") (*Z* 1160.). With fear, one can still be led by imagination and spirited action, whereas with terror, the individual becomes paralyzed. We see this distinction of fear and terror also in *Frankenstein*: Victor's fear of death propels him to create life but the terror witnessed afterwards paralyzes him from action for a large portion of the remainder the novel.

Leopardi similarly rejects the utopian enthusiasm of modernity's rational ideologies, arguing those are inauthentic forms of life. In the poem "La Ginestra O, Il Fiore Del Deserto" ("The Broom, or the Flower of the Wilderness") Leopardi disparages the idea of progress seeing it as regressive: "Qui mira e qui ti specchia,/secol superbo e sciocco,/che il calle insino allora/dal risorto pensier segnato innanti/abbandonasti, e vòlti addietro i passi,/del ritornar ti vanti,/e procedere il chiami" ("Look here and see yourself reflected, proud and foolish century,/ who gave up the way forward/ indicated by resurgent thought,/ and having changed course,/ boast of turning back/ and call it progress") (*Canti* 290, 291). In regard to spiritual evolution, Leopardi argues it stems from what we do not know; "nel disimparare" (*Zib* 1104) ("in unlearning") (*Z* 1832). What the scientific method has shown us is that in actuality, we do not understand the laws of Nature. The more we discover, the more we realize that we "saper sempre meno" (*Zib* 1104) ("know less and less") (*Z* 1823), and "l'apice del sapere umano e della filosofia consiste a conoscere la di lei propria inutilità" (*Zib* 211) ("the peak of human knowledge or philosophy is to recognize its own uselessness") (*Z* 195). Leopardi argues that the need to discover brought on by scientific process, the rational ideals of the

Enlightenment, and the French Revolution, although reliable, had nonetheless weakened and challenged our profound notions of faith and meaning, leaving us with an insurmountable void to battle due to the deterministic and materialistic features of modernity, while still trying to satisfy the need for spiritual fulfillment. Leopardi does not completely refute the idea of progress, advocating the notions of the social constructs designed by humans such as civilization that ultimately led to the constructions of cities. It is only when it is recognized as linear progress or historical optimism that progress, as an all-encompassing project, begins to fail.

BATTLING THE STORM THAT IS MODERNITY IN THE STREETS OF PARIS

A similar anti-utopian shift can be seen in the writings of Charles Baudelaire. The optimism of revolution and progress's creative spirit found in "Aux Bourgeois" ("To the Bourgeois)" (1846) slowly dissipates in his writings after the 1850's (M. Berman 138). In essays such as "De l'idée modern du progrès appliquée aux beaux-arts" ("On the Modern Idea of Progress as Applied to the Fine Arts") (1855) and throughout his later journal entries, Baudelaire moves towards the notion of the absurdity of infinite human progress: "[l]a croyance au progrès est une doctrine de paresseux" ("[t]he belief in Progress is a doctrine for idlers") for "Il ne peut y avoir de progrès (vrai, c'est-à-dire moral) que dans l'individu et par l'individu lui-même" (*Journaux* 60) ("[t]here cannot be any progress (true progress, that is to say, moral) except within the individual and by the individual himself") (*Intimate Journals* 71-2). Here, Baudelaire's concern is with an internal and spiritual rather than an external or socio-political perspective of advancement, rejecting any illusionary ideas of progress based on modernity's teleological, scientific, materialist, and technological innovations that have become for him, dazzling spectacles used to

cover up the dark void existing within modernity's attractive façade. Baudelaire's writings begin to question humanity's messianic belief in unending progress and seriously consider whether this belief is humanity's greatest downfall:

> Je laisse de côté la question de savoir si, délicatisant l'humanité en proportion des jouissances nouvelles qu'il lui apporte, le progrès indéfini ne serait pas sa plus ingénieuse et sa plus cruelle torture ; si, procédant par une opiniâtre négation de lui-même, il ne serait pas un mode de suicide incessamment renouvelé, et si, enfermé dans le cercle de feu de la logique divine, il ne ressemblerait pas au scorpion qui se perce lui-même avec sa terrible queue, cet éternel desideratum qui fait son éternel désespoir? (*L'art* 220)
>
> (I am leaving out of the account the question whether, in making humanity more sensitive in proportion as it adds to the sum of possible enjoyment, unending progress would not be humanity's most ingenious and cruel form of torture; whether by this process, which is a stubborn negation of itself, progress would be a constantly renewed form of suicide, and whether, imprisoned within the flaming circle of divine logic, progress this eternal *desideratum*, which is humanity's eternal despair, would not be like the scorpion that stings itself with its own tail.) (*Selected Writings* 122)

Instead of containing any substantial growth, the historical process outlined by Baudelaire is self-defeating and a representation of the decline in human history, especially in regard to the moral and spiritual being. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, progress for Baudelaire was "a continuous decline which was such that every moment was inferior to the one that preceded it" (168). For Sartre, Baudelaire's pessimistic experience of modernity and his abhorrence of the idea of positive and effective progress was a circumstance of his age that "snatched him away from the contemplation of the past and compelled him to turn his eyes towards the future. In this way he was made to live his age backwards; and in such a situation he felt as clumsy and embarrassed as a man who was being made to walk backwards" (ibid.). Sartre seems to depict Baudelaire in a similar vein as Benjamin's analytic account of Paul Klee's drawing "Angelus Novus"

(1920),[47] as someone swept backwards against the wind of progress. Yet, this description goes against the poet's emblematic liminal stance on life that juxtaposes binaries in order to fully experience the present-day. Baudelaire was unable to gaze in one direction for too long and was far more Janus-faced than Sartre wants to admit. Progress and modernity were simply constant change for Baudelaire and although change signifies something new, he understood that it also encompasses something that has been lost or has decayed. In Baudelaire's famous poem "Le Cygne" (The Swan), faced with the urban restitution of Paris, the poet gazes into the face of progress, ripping away its utopian façade: "Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie/N'a bougé! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,/Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie/Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs" ("Paris may change, but in my melancholy mood/ Nothing has budged! New places, blocks, scaffoldings,/Old neighbourhoods, are allegorical for me,/And my dear memories are heavier than stone") (*Flowers* 174; 175), only to conclude that "À quiconque a perdu ce qui ne se retrouve/Jamais, jamais!" ("[o]f all those who have lost something they may not find/ Ever, ever again!") (ibid. 176;177). While Baudelaire is confronted with a physical and structural change of Paris, his thoughts flow towards the people, liminal figures that are captives but also historical

[47] Benjamin writes of Klee's painting:

> A Klee painting named Angelus Novus shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress ("Theses" 257-8).

exiles and outcasts. From Ovid, to Andromache, to an African "negress" (ibid), and the poem's allegorical swan, Baudelaire's historical journey of change is paradoxically caught in its static motion. According to Richard Terdiman (1993) "[t]he process of memory carries an uncanny danger, which emerges in the paradigm of dispossession that organizes Baudelaire's poem. For the exiles of "Le Cygne," for the dispossessed, memory stages not recovery but *deficiency*…memory figures the inauthenticity of presentness, the traumatic persistence of an irreversible experience of loss" (108). While all 'progress' signifies loss to Baudelaire, being a captive of memory and nostalgia is equally as damaging to the internal self, since both a total belief in progress and a clutching of the past imprisons the individual into a false sense of reality.

The poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*) (1857/2008) depict much more than historical outsiders. They are littered with uncanny characters of his present time. For Baudelaire, the strange characters that inhabitant the modern city, such as gamblers, prostitutes, alcoholics, and drug addicts, his true heroes of modern life, become the uncanny allegories of modernity. Although the uncanny is best elucidated in literature, it was the metropolis that allowed it to surface into the public realm of everyday experience, looming through the void in urban space; a space ideal for the stranger who is alienated, estranged, and experiences homesickness due to the modern condition, which allows the uncanny to surface within the self and most notably in modern and avant-garde art (Vidler, 5-13).[48] Baudelaire's allegorical use of his heroes of modern life was a violent

[48] In *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992), Anthony Vidler claims that space is inheritably inherently uncanny since

> [s]pace, in the contemporary discourse, as in lived experience, has taken on an almost palpable existence. Its contours, boundaries, and geographies are called upon to stand in for all the contested realms of identity….space is assumed to hide,

means to destroy the modern myths that encased him, as "[t]he images disclosed behind this façade became emblems of his own inner life" **(**Buck–Morss 182). Along with using allegory as a subtle weapon against his capitalist age, Baudelaire uses it as a means of reading the world in order to understand the emotional and psychological aspects of the inner person through plunging oneself into the physical world. The reason why Baudelaire's heroes of modern life are uncanny is because they should not exist in a utilitarian and Bourgeois-utopian world built upon the idea of progress. The backdrop of many of his poems, are the newly constructed long and wide boulevards that were being developed in Paris during the time Baudelaire was writing. Commissioned by Napoleon III, Georges-Eugène Haussmann, also known as Baron Haussmann, set out to reconstruct and modernize Paris between 1853 and 1870, in an attempt to clear out slums, create "breathing space", and facilitate the traffic flow towards the centre of the city (M. Berman 150). In the process of leveling and destroying the old medieval city, Haussmann's renovation of Paris destroyed many arcades, the favourite home of the Baudelairian *flâneur*, which consisted of shopping malls made of glass and steel that had been created before the Second Empire while Baudelaire was growing up as a child. The arcades represented to Baudelaire the dream of modernity and the possibilities and wonders that it could provide. With the destruction of these arcades and his childhood fantasies, along with the failed revolution of 1848, Baudelaire quickly learned that

> in its darkest recesses and forgotten margins, all the objects of fear and phobia that have returned with such insistence to haunt the imaginations of those who have tried to stake out spaces to protect their health and happiness… In every case 'light space' is invaded by the figure of 'dark space', on the level of the body in the form of epidemic and uncontrollable disease, and on the level of the city in the person of the homeless (167-8).

modernity was a fleeting dream of destruction, failure, repetition, and boredom. The metropolis was a modern image of the chaotic flux of sensation into which the bourgeois rational dream world was beginning to be dissolved (Ferguson 19, 31). However, thanks to the new modern reconstruction of Paris witnessed by Baudelaire, society was able see these marginalized figures now more than ever, as the boulevards created more social contact between people of different classes.

Baudelaire's prose poem "Les yeux des pauvres" ("Eyes of the Poor") perfectly captures this confrontation and we are able to see how these new boulevards forced people to confront and deal with the image of the poor because they were no longer segregated in the underprivileged quarters of Paris, a monster that modernity could not cover up. "The Eyes of the Poor" showcases Baudelaire's social consciousness and critique of what Benjamin calls 'high capitalism.' It is one of the poems that asserts Baudelaire "as one of the great urban writers" (M. Berman 147). The narrator of the poem takes us back to a memory, which we discover is the cause of the hatred he feels towards the woman he once loved. The memory takes place in a café at the corner of the new boulevard. The narrator describes the scene in the café with dream-like quality, containing "nappes éblouissantes des miroirs" ("dazzling mirror pools") and "les nymphes et les déesses" (*Spleen* 122) "nymphs and goddess" (*Paris* 52). A poor family walks up to the window, spell-bound by the beauty they witness inside. At this moment, the narrator feels both guilt and shame and looks at his lover expecting her to feel the same thing. When she replies, "Ces gens-là me sont insupportables avec leurs yeux ouverts comme des portes cochères ! Ne pourriez-vous pas prier le maître du café de les éloigner d'ici?" (*Spleen* 123) ("I cannot bear those people with their eyes out on stalks!

Tell the waiter to get rid of them"), (*Paris* 53) the narrator realizes that his dream of "deux âmes désormais n'en feraient plus qu'une" (*Spleen* 121) "two souls would be as one" (*Paris* 52), died along with that dream. The new boulevard not only creates an environment of "splendeurs inachevées" (*Spleen* 121) "unfinished splendor" (*Paris* 52) in the modern city but also has brought the poor family to the window of the café, and consequently face to face with the young bourgeois couple. As a result, both the dream of progress and the feeling of guilt and shame begin to crack through the recently paved boulevards of Paris (M. Berman 152). While the woman continues to repress these feelings or rather is unable to see them with her own prejudice eyes, the narrator is no longer able to ignore them, which leads to both his bitterness towards her and his questioning of himself. Whereas he originally saw her eyes as beautiful, in the end, they become a symbol of the inability to communicate, and represent "a shift from love to hate, from fantasy to reality, from closeness to alienation" (Rice 35). The movement or breakdown in their relationship pushes the narrator to acknowledge that it is the woman he loves whose eyes are truly poor.

Although this poem does show the class division and inequalities that occur in the capitalist hub, it also shows Baudelaire's tendency to blur the lines between reality and dream. The tale is told through the memory of a couple inside the modern café, where the modern bourgeois reality is described by Baudelaire in dream-like fashion. The line between dream and reality becomes instantly blurred. When the narrator looks outside of his dream and into the harsh reality of the 'eyes of the poor', he realizes that this 'utopian' experience is just a bourgeois modern dream but also that this dream, and the dream of eternal love, are illusions and do not truly exist. On the other hand, the poor family on the

other side of the glass window is standing within the harsh reality of modernity yet looking into the modernist dream living inside the café, believing in all its wonders. Baudelaire therefore, creates a liminal world where both parties are caught within reality and dream simultaneously, encompassing the fragility of both. The narrator is first recalling a memory, in the same the way one recalls a dream. However in this dream, he sees the failure of the modern one and recognizes that we repress what makes us feel uncomfortable in our own skin. The narrator acknowledges his strangeness, locating the dark aspects that exist within both his dreams and his reality. Although he has seen the death of the modern dream and likewise, modern love, he nonetheless furthers his understanding of both his internal and external worlds as being interconnected, albeit fractured.

While Baudelaire is often seen as a precursor for the decadence of the nineteenth century *fin de* siècle, he, as with Leopardi, also foreshadow the fragmented, opposing, and chaotic beginning of the next century that will plunge the world into its 'greatest' war yet, and bring the modern stranger into a whole new realm of liminality and violence.

IV: VIOLENCE, THE GREAT WAR, AND THE MODERN STRANGER

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.
- Matthew 10:44

La salute non analizza se stessa e neppur si guar- da nello specchio. Solo noi malati sappiamo qualche cosa di noi stessi.
(*Health doesn't analyze itself, nor does it look at itself in the mirror. Only we sick people know something about ourselves*)
- Italo Svevo (*Zeno's Conscience*)

Let us remain soldiers even after the war…for this is not war against an eternal enemy, as the newspapers and our honorable politicians say, nor of one race against another; it is a European civil war, a war against the inner invisible enemy of the European spirit.
- Franz Marc

"When the world was in darkness and wretchedness, it could believe in perfection and yearn for it. But when the world became bright with reason and riches, it began to sense the narrowness of the needle's eye, and that rankled for a world no longer willing to believe or yearn"
- Walter M. Miller Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

INTRODUCTION

Three men, resembling military soldiers and officers, are torturing a man, raping his wife, and holding their small child captive in a small attic. The executioners look calm and unemotional, as if mad scientists of pain and torture performing a sensible experiment. A dog is seen howling away for help but is ultimately unheard, as a phonograph plays hiding the screams of the helpless victims. The noise of technological modernity, of the city, is drowning out the violence that is taking place. This violent and grotesque scene is an illustration of Max Beckmann's post-WWI Expressionist painting *The Night* (1919). The work, which was not only influenced by the terrors of WWI but also by the outbreak of the November Revolution of 1918 in Germany, exemplifies a life ruled by violence, chaos, and murder. There is no purpose to the suffering shown in this painting, only senseless and meaningless violence, executed from a source of perpetual

boredom if anything else. In the painting's background lie another man and woman: the next victims or curious voyeurs? The answer is uncertain, but nonetheless, the painting implicates the viewer's scopophiliac attraction to violence with the horrific scene. Even the face on the child being carried away seems to have conflicted emotions. Clutching onto one of the murders, the child's eyes seem to express a dejected state but the smirk on its face gives away a hint of pleasure. In the background is a window, which seems to be the victims' only way of escape. However, one of the killers is about to close the blinds, signifying that modern society has little time left before it is able to detect, or even more frightening, finally consents to the horror that has entered it. The moonlight shinning in bears a resemblance to a detached eye looking in on this ghastly scene, and despite the fact that the blinds are closing, it has already witnessed and observed enough; the viewer has not just but rather was a part of the scene, and therefore, lives in its memory. The painting is not a genuine account of a specific attack, but instead represents all of humanity caught in a vicious maelstrom of monstrosity and violence.

After the First World War, the modern stranger begins to become a more prominent figure in the literary and visual art world, but more importantly, starts to move from its individualistic and outsider beginnings and more into the collective sphere. Prior to WWI, modern strangers only manifested themselves in a handful of works by novelists, poets, and philosophers, and therefore, was still a peripheral and uncanny character in secularized modernity. After the war, the philosophical and intellectual landscape of modernity changed, ushering in innovative or transformed avant-garde and literary movements such as Expressionism or the 'Lost Generation' of the 1920s. These literary and art movements epitomized the returning soldier of the trenches that embodied this

new chaotic and ambiguous mindset, alongside the monster of modernity. These themes would once again manifest after WWII with the existentialism of Camus, Celine, de Beauvoir and others, and further into late modernity, when the concept of the modern stranger would be more properly defined in works of philosophy and critical theory by thinkers such as Zygmund Bauman (1991), and Julia Kristeva (1991). The relationship between war and the modern stranger put greater emphasis on violence as an essential characteristic of secularized and liminal modernity, and can be seen as an examination of why in contemporary film and literature, the modern stranger is usually represented as the violent anti-hero. World War I created an upheaval like no other and along with its postwar peace settlement, resulting in a global revolution (Sondhaus 2011), not just geographically and politically but also psychologically and artistically.

This chapter will predominantly focus on the time period in and around WWI, emphasizing the development and rise of the modern stranger during the early twentieth century culture and its continued foregrounding of the relationship between monstrosity and violence. In exploring these theories, I center my study on the modernism of the early twentieth century; through avant-garde art movements such as Expressionism and Futurism, primarily focusing on the significant painter Max Beckmann and filmmaker Fritz Lang. Moreover, the literature of Erich Maria Remarque, Robert Musil, , and Italo Svevo will also be addressed to examine the indirect influence of the modern stranger on these themes of violence, irony, utopia, and the paradoxical connection between them. Elizabeth Ziolkowski's "Svevo's *Uomo Senza Qualità*: Musil and Modernism in Italy" compares and contrasts two of Svevo's and Musil's most celebrated characters, Ulrich and Zeno, who have been historical linked as being 'men without qualities'. Both Ulrich

and Zeno are both attractive, ironic, intelligent men, who are "open to a range of perspectives, never committing…to just one" (89), even morally ambiguous ones (94). While the men do contain qualities, just indistinct ones, they are contrasted against the 'men with qualities' that falsely believe that they possess control over their lives, a trait that ultimately leads to their hubris and failure.

As Ziolkowski proclaims, "[b]oth narratives suggest that the only genuine choice in the modern world is to be a man without qualities, a reflection of the crisis experienced during modernity in general and also of the crisis during the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, where identity was especially in flux" (95). Notwithstanding the comparisons, Ziolkowski argues that the continuous and strong link between Zeno and Ulrich has a lot to do with the strong Austro-Italian literary relations of the time, especially since the term i*netti* (inept, passive, weak) that typically emphasizes Svevo's characters, is not necessarily the best to describe Urlich (84). Nonetheless, I will build on the connections between the two, through a more comprehensive examination of irony, violence, and liminality**.** Naomi Lebowitz (1978) also distinguishes the two by arguing that "the presence of historical contemplation in Musil's novel is stirred to a high allegorical pitch", while "Zeno, still bound by sociability and his psychology, lives in historical comfort, despite all that rages around him (204). Therefore, while both are modern strangers caught in the same historical and liminal time period, the two operate in different inside/outside thresholds though bounded by the same chaos. While Ulrich is situated in the Eye of a hurricane, Zeno sits in the in the Eye of the storm looking outwards.

Although, this chapter focuses primarily on pre-WWII work, Walter M. Miller Jr.'s science fiction novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz* will also be discussed alongside the

notion of divine violence, repetition, and messianic time, outlined by the works of Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, and Giorgio Agamben. By doing so, I hope to shed light on the development and the difficulties of the modern stranger within secularized modernity upon the monstrousness of violence and war entering into the collective conscience of society, and whether it is possible to define violence as messianic or is the modern era simply caught in a cycle of destruction?

THE GREAT WAR, IRONY, & DARK UTOPIAS

The Great War and Modern Memory by Paul Fussell (1975) examines the literature of World War I, studying the various myths, writing styles, and consciousness that had been transformed as a result of the war. Although it was the Romantics that first revolutionized irony from a literary device into a new form of consciousness of seeing the contradictions of everyday life, twentieth century romantic irony went further by focusing on the ambiguity of modern life by taking a more versatile, critical, and existential form, forming a perspective that would dominate most of early to mid-twentieth century art and literature (Berg 53-56). As Fussell argues, the modern use of irony began to change after WWI as many of the meta-narratives of the nineteenth century began to crumble under the weight of modern warfare. The ascendancy of irony in the 1920s according to Fussell and Susanne Christine Puissant (2009) is directly associated with the outbreak of WWI, which ushered in a world of irony that completely altered both literature and the modern consciousness Modris Eksteins' remarkable book *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (1989) studies the cultural history of World War I and its aftermath. Eksteins also places WWI as the threshold of the changing ideological landscape but his study of the war is inserted between an examination of the disordered

society waiting to shatter and the postwar era looking to reassemble it itself. Eksteins' book is extremely useful in constructing a correlation between the modern stranger, liminality, and WWI, as he defines the solider battling in the liminal chaos of No Man's Land as the representation of the new modernist era that is built on a paradoxical and ironic utopia grounded on hopelessness and faith. Eksteins declares the soldier "not just a harbinger but the very agent of the modern aesthetic, the progenitor of destruction but also the embodiment of the future" (213).

In regard to this sentiment, I will also explore how new modern forms of irony stimulated by thinkers such as Leopardi and Baudelaire discussed in the previous chapter, were able to reshape and resacralize the utopian spirit and its relation to violence. By the twentieth century, the monster of modernity had mutated into a disease, an uncanny sickness epitomized by violence that had been spreading throughout the world. While the Creature in *Frankenstein* personified monstrosity in its totality, especially for its creator, who falsely believed that the monster was something external from him, monstrosity becomes consciously acknowledged as part of humanity, yet something that is still foreign and invading. Rendering it a human sickness implied that it could be cured, a perspective that further allows for the monster to be something external and alien even though it belongs to the human self, and therefore, is still able to be removed. However, the 'solution' was as problematic as it was simple, and in the face of remedies conducted through modern science and psychoanalysis that looked to cure society, an ironic reading of post-WWI life challenged the rational binaries of sickness/health. Almost a century earlier, Kierkegaard (1841/1989) rightfully saw irony, as he did with despair, residing on a liminal plane between sickness and health, positivity and negativity, faith and

incredulity, and the divine and secular.[49] This existential battle would become the stranger's most enduring war within the secularized modernity of the twentieth century, where a cure for this sickness could only emerge from a "mastery over irony" through a process of "diving into the sea of irony, not in order to stay there, of course, but in order to come out healthy, happy and buoyant" (Kierkegaard, *Irony* 326, 327). Faced with the outbreak and aftermath of the First World War, many saw that looking into both societal sickness and the self's monstrosity was the best way to overcome its power over us, in an ironic and liminal space between the impulse of the utopian spirit and succumbing to nihilism, boredom, and dread. Shelley, Leopardi, and Baudelaire's monstrous modernity had finally exploded onto mass society.

Though the ironist may laugh at the absurdity of what the world holds sacred, irony does not necessarily negate through laughter but is rather "[t]he said and unsaid working together to create something new" (Hutcheon, *Edge* 61). In Hutcheon's seminal book *Irony's Edge* (1994/2003), she defines irony in liminal, oscillating terms, where "meaning is *simultaneously* doubled (or multiple)" (58), and not a rejection of the literal. Since irony is saying opposing meanings at once, the ironist is never truly removed from the sacred while uttering the profane but balances on the edge of the secular and sacred binary. Irony, especially modern irony, exists in liminality, between "the space between face and mask" (Hermans 79) and even has the utopian ability to open up "new space, literally between opposing meanings, where new things can happen" (Hutcheon, *Double*

[49] "Irony is healthiness insofar as it rescues the soul from the snares of relativity; it is a sickness insofar as it cannot bear the absolute except in the form of nothing, but this sickness is an endemic disease that only a few individuals catch and from which fewer recover" (Kierkegaard, *Irony* 77-8).

31). D. C. Muecke (1969) similarly argues that there is a transcendent element to modern irony, creating a liminal space between the spiritual and moral spheres of heaven and hell. Containing both a complete sense of freedom and an element of destruction, modern irony blurs the lines of "above" and "below" and thereby creates a void or "bottomless pit" in the realm of ethics and morality (Muecke 229-30). Yet, located in the darkness of this black hole, a new concept of utopia is able to develop after the First World War, indebted to the works of German philosopher Ernst Bloch and his paradoxical vision of utopia.

Published in the immediate aftermath of WWI, Ernst Bloch's *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918/2000) moves away from the blueprint form of utopia that has become analogous with totalitarian thought, in favour of a more radical and iconoclastic usage based upon a strong and critical form of irony. Influenced by two major events of the early twentieth century, WWI and the Russian Revolution, Bloch's notion of utopian hope is born "in the darkness itself" (201). Utopia, according to Bloch, is inherent in the unhappiness, despair, and frustration found in the present; This internal darkness manifests itself from what is missing in each individual and it is in this internal darkness where the 'spirit of utopia' offers us hope that precisely fuels or inspires our movement towards a better future. Bloch argues that it is through the 'something missing' within our present world, the lack or blind spot, which subsequently shows us a better future by imagining or attempting to fill what is absent in our present. Therefore, the lived experience of the present is utopian in itself, given that it exposes what is lacking in our present world by showing us an opposite or an alternate vision of the future outside of one curated by linear progress. Here Bloch distances himself from Hegel, and even Marx, in favour of the subjectivity found in the philosophy of both Kant and Kierkegaard. He supports Kant's pursuit of the

secret of ourselves; a process of ongoing deepening or self-encounter, for it is in this self-encounter where the utopian spirit is created through an absence (ibid. 3; 187). Nonetheless, Bloch does not completely dismiss Hegel but rather believes in a synthesis of both Kant's and Hegel's philosophy or as he expresses in the phrase "Kant burning through Hegel" (ibid. 187), where the spirit of utopia contained within each individual channels itself into the external world or the "the world of the soul" (ibid. 3).

Together with Ernst Bloch's iconoclastic utopian theory, I will examine anthropologist Maurice Bloch's re-evaluation of liminality, which states that two different thresholds of violence define one's rite of passage. In *Prey Into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience* (1992), Maurice Bloch further expands the liminal structure by magnifying the theme of violence that Van Gennep and Turner only allude in their liminal theories. Bloch claims that for Van Gennep and Turner, violence is only found in the initial transcendent stage of passage from the everyday world into the liminal second stage, where he claims the "native vitality" of the person is "symbolically vanquished" (37); however, for Bloch, violence becomes a double passage that reoccurs in the last stage of the religious ritual as well, where the individual reintegrates herself back into the mundane world without cancelling the transcendental, making violence for Bloch, "a result of the attempt to create the transcendental in religion and politics" (7). Finally, this dialectical oscillation consisting of utopia and violence culminates in the question of mystic violence and divine violence. The problem is first raised by Walter Benjamin in "Critique of Violence" (1921/1986), in which he defines and structures the various discretions concerning violence and law. The difference between mythic and divine violence for Benjamin is that "mythic violence is lawmaking, divine violence is

law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythic violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood" (ibid. 297). With mythical violence, Benjamin claims it is impossible to separate violence from law, in that "violence…is either lawmaking or law-preserving" (ibid. 287). In contrast to mythical violence is what Benjamin regards as divine violence, which exists outside of the legal sphere and is a violence of 'pure means', or means without ends. To differentiate the two, Benjamin uses the examples of the political strike as mythic law and the general strike as divine law. The political strike looks to change law in the existing social structure, therefore is still lawmaking, while the general strike is revolutionary and looks to destroy state power and existing social order, thereby making it more anarchist in nature (ibid. 291-2). Benjamin's resacralized notion of divine violence resembles that of God's because it both protects the sacredness of human life and is beyond the realm of human law. Benjamin's equivocal concept of divine law is nonetheless problematic, as the ambiguity in what Benjamin constitutes as divine law is subject to various interpretations, including ones that can lead to horrible consequences.

Benjamin's notion of divine violence is closely tied to his idea of 'messianic time', which is in contrast to the "homogeneous, empty time" of human history ("Theses" 261). While the secular time of progress is empty and repetitious, messianic time, the "time of the now" (ibid. 263), is a monadic and momentary time that shatters the repetition of history and connects past, present, and future. This moment seems to be where both messianic time and divine violence intersect with one another to become whole (Butler,

Parting 218). Judith Butler (2012) reaffirms Benjamin's argument in her assessment of "Critique of Violence", by asserting that

> [t]his sacred or divine sense of life is also allied with the anarchistic, with that which is beyond or outside of principle… the anarchism or destruction that Benjamin refers to here is to be understood neither as another kind of political state nor as an alternative to positive law. Rather, it constantly recurs as the condition of positive law and as its necessary limit. It does not portend an epoch yet to come, but underlies legal violence of all kinds, constituting the potential for destruction that underwrites every act by which the subject is bound by law (85-6).

Benjamin's concepts of the messianic and divine violence have likewise been very influential in the work of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. For Agamben (2005), messianic time is not necessarily removed from secular time but

> is that part of secular time which undergoes an entirely transformative contraction… This is not the line of chronological time (which was representable but unthinkable), nor the instant of its end (which was just as unthinkable); nor is it a segment cut from chronological time; rather, it is operational time pressing within the chronological time, working and transforming it from within; it is the time we need to make time end: the time that is left us [*il tempo che ci resta*] (*The Time that Remains* 64, 67-8).

In regard to divine violence, Agamben (1995/1998) expands on Benjamin's theory by interjecting his own concept of sovereign violence and the figure of the *homo sace*r. Although not exactly the same, there is a liminal correlation between the two because

> sovereign violence, like divine violence, cannot be wholly reduced to either one of the two forms of violence whose dialectic the essay undertook to define. This does not mean that sovereign violence can be confused with divine violence. The definition of divine violence becomes easier, in fact, precisely when it is put in relation with the state of exception. Sovereign violence opens a zone of indistinction between law and nature, outside and inside, violence and law. And yet the sovereign is precisely the one who maintains the possibility of deciding on the two to the very degree that he renders them indistinguishable from each other (*Sacer* 64).

Agamben's sovereign, who is both inside and outside the law, acts as the liminal link between the divine violence and the political, for "the sovereign is the point of indistinction between violence and law, the threshold on which violence passes over into

law and law passes over into violence" (ibid. 32). The protagonist of Agamben's study, is the abstruse Roman figure *homo sacer* (sacred man), who was a criminal that was both excluded from and included in law, as he could be both killed by anyone, yet could not be sacrificed because he was considered sacred. Here the sacred oscillates between the pure and impure, which creates a liminal and ambiguous atmosphere where the impure is made from the pure, and vice versa (ibid. 77). Since the sacred man is outside both divine and profane law, it allows for the possibility of the *homo sacer* to become the threshold where sovereign violence and law are able to interconnect. Agamben concludes that with the indistinctness of the sacred, this stranger has entered the collective society in that "we are all virtually *homines sacri*" (ibid. 115). Despite his post-911 critics (Žižek 2002, Butler 2004; Connolly 2005; Kalyvas 2007) concerned with the apolitical, totalistic and universalism of his claim, by stating "virtually", Agamben is pointing to the possibility or potential of the *homo sacer* existing within everyone, as a hovering spectre of the modern age political and secular age. Agamben's stranger is a reflection of modernity's liminality, as someone that is "from the remote past who brings into focus a disturbing element in our political present – and points towards a possible future" (de la Durantaye 211). Yet, both the opportunity and problem lie in that the possibility that exists in statelessness is not actually defined, and as a result can manifest itself in violent extremes or even in an impasse.

From this perspective, Benjamin's ambiguity in completely outlining the idea of divine violence has also led to a problematic discussion of what represents violence that could be defined as sacred. For instance, Derrida (1990/1992) argues that the uncertainty of Benjamin's essay and ambiguity surrounding the secularized concept of divine

violence could lead to the 'temptation' to regard the Nazi final solution as divine violence. On the other hand, Slovenian theorist Slavoj Žižek (2009) ultimately disagrees with Derrida's assessment, arguing that Nazism simply represented mythical violence as he infamously claims "the problem with Hitler was that *he was not violent enough*, that his violence was not 'essential' enough. Nazism was not radical enough, it did not dare to disturb the basic structure of the modern capitalist social space (which is why it had to focus on destroying an invented external enemy, Jews)" (151). Although Žižek may be right in a traditional understanding of Hitler and Nazism as fascist and nationalist forces, the compelling recent work of Timothy Snyder (2016) has challenged this conventional assessment by arguing that Hitler's plan was to completely destroy the existing social structure through the final solution by creating a liminal world based on chaos and violence. According to Synder, Hitler was a "biological anarchist" (52) who sought to destroy ideas such as the State, nationalism, capitalism, communism, and monotheism by eliminating what he believed to be the artificial culture or 'non-race' of the Jewish people, deeming them a universal enemy that created the new artificial world that surrounded him. At the very least, Synder's new assessment of the final solution and WWII creates a new discourse on the subject that still makes Derrida's deconstructive criticism of Benjamin's essay a valid one and encourages certain understandings of the destructive forces of the present.

THE STRANGER IN NO MAN'S LAND

Max Beckmann once said that the purpose of painting, especially after the war, was to show humanity their horrible fate (Elger 209), a fate maybe unknown to the general populace, but to the WWI solider, it was a doom that was ever present in

everyday modern life**.** *The Night* moves beyond time by encompassing the Europe's past, present, and future of violence; the past through the imagery of the WWI solider, who still shows the wounds from battle; the present is depicted by the violence that is currently happening, while the future is shown through the hint of pleasure we are subconsciously gaining that is being carried off with the child. Beckmann went to war with patriotic enthusiasm, as did many young men all across Europe who quickly enlisted to serve their countries; however, once he experienced the violence and horror of modern warfare, he suffered a nervous breakdown and was invalided out of the military (Beckett 26). Like many artists of his day, Beckmann ingenuously believed that the war would be both a coming of age ritual process and a positive inspiration for his artistic work. In some sense, Beckmann was half right. The war failed him in his ritual process towards manhood, a failure that would see him fleetingly place that sacredness into the god-like character and "social and political utopianism" of the artist (Clair112). The sentiment would not last, as he would eventually mock himself as a messianic figure in *Selbstbildnis als Clown* (*Self-portrait of a Clown*) (1921)[50], as the war ultimately left him spiritually in the liminal planes of the WWI battlefield. Nonetheless, the experience of modern trench warfare, although not the courageous and heroic experience the young German artist expected, significantly influenced his work through the haunting nightmares that remained. Suffering from the traumatic 'shell shock' (PTSD), Beckmann's new 'attraction' to violence seemed to be a search for an identity, as a way

[50] The description of the painting in the book *The Great Parade* (2004) argues that "[h]ere the prophet is revealed as buffoon, the guide as martyr. Beckmann's image as himself as clown is presented in a pose borrowed from gothic renderings of the mocking of Christ…for reality is impervious to utopianism; the artist is condemned to be the ephemeral dissipater in his own inexorable ennui" (Clair 112).

of “exorcising something within himself” (Beckett 21-2). The “strange, and fatalistic feeling of safety” that surrounded him on that first day (Beckmann163) dissipated day by day as the excitement of warfare gave way to the monotony of violence. The First World War was originally thought as a meliorist war of progress, but ironically became the culmination of modernity’s technological utopian values failing (Fussell 8), becoming a blatant example of the return to barbarism that Leopardi had warned of. Although Expressionism retained its focus on the individual, the war nonetheless turned it from a private, egocentric art movement to one that encompassed a social and revolutionary atmosphere (Elger 205). Beckmann’s works, like many postwar Expressionist art, now examined humanity as made of strangers, helplessly caught in a changing world of technological violence and absurdity. (ibid. 211). The WWI solider entered a war that began traditionally on horseback though quickly transformed into a modern horror of trenches, tanks, planes, Zeppelins, and gasmasks, while its aftermath marked the end of many European Empires. As with the French Revolution, WWI was an irredeemable break from history, which exposed the monster lurking along the borders of optimism, rationalism, and scientific discovery.

Notwithstanding the pivotal change in modern warfare, the war may have not ushered in a new age but rather was the illuminating event of the chaotic modern world that led up to it. Philipp Blom (2008) argues that the time period between 1900-1914 was far less optimistic, enthusiastic, and naïve of the monster of modernity than many like to believe. It was an age characterized by velocity and the vertigo that came with the exhilarating and frightening nature of the modern age (Blom 2). Although the turn of the century was met with technological wonder and amazement, the years leading to WWI

were also defined by a multitude of theories clashing against the bedrock of positivism, leading to feelings of uncertainty, while the rational was challenged by Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious and the modernist and avant-garde art movements (ibid. 403-6). In response, young men like Beckmann were trying to solidify their identities and reestablish the gender binaries, battling the rising suffragette movement with the traditional idea of masculine courage (ibid. 398-400). Soldiers looked to complete their rite of passage to manhood through warfare and patriotism and conclude their sacred journey by coming out of the war as masculine heroes. But the war seemed to just reemphasize the ambiguity, liminal, and violent nature of the modern world for these young men.

The soldiers that were 'lucky' to survive and return to civilian life became extremely alienated and detached from their fellow citizens, unable to re-assimilate into regular society. In essence, post-war soldiers became a unified though unorganized front, as there seemed to be more of an affinity through isolation and existential anguish among each other than to their nation states. In spirit, the soldiers remained in No Man's Land long after the war. The liminal battlefield located between the two trenches of rival nations or empires, ended up embodying a group that would forever be referred to as 'the lost generation'. British officer and author Charles Edmund Carrington argued that the soldiers returning from war shared a "secret bond" that "could never be communicated" (cited in Leed 12, 13). The unsettling image of No Man's Land and "the unknown world beyond it" **(**Leed 14-15) became something that was eternal for Carrington and most soldiers. Caught between two binary trenches, the violent space of No Man's Land is where the soldiers became modern strangers. If war was a rite of passage for these young

men, it was one where they remained liminal, unable to fulfill the third and final reaggregation phase of the passage to manhood. Despite being driven into that void by their respective countries, the nationalism that was enforced in the trenches became suspended in No Man's Land. At that moment, they become strangers to the reasons of the conflict, leaving them with the struggle to survive and constantly toeing the line between life and death. By 1916 the fraternization between fronts, exemplified by the Christmas truce of 1914, had dissipated. Soldiers were no longer under the illusionary perception of being heroes. Instead they lost their identities and individuality and became nameless and unknown, completely alienated from their commanding officers. For the soldier caught in No Man's Land, the war had lost its original cause and the lines of heroism become blurred or essentially destroyed, a sentiment that quickly seeped into the trenches, which no longer held any distinction from No Man's Land as the war went on. British artist and solider Paul Nash perfectly captures this uncanny space in his painting *The Void* (1918) as he depicts the hellish desolation of war, where the lines between trench and No Man's land are virtually erased by all the carnage.

While Britain fought to preserve balance, order, and social values, for Germany, the war was touted as a spiritual conflict, a chance to change the world and to liberate it from a reality that had been fashioned up to that point, a reason why many German artists fully backed the war when it originally began (Eksteins 118-9). If the war originated as a spiritual conflict for many, it continued as such once it was finished, taking on a new identity as the war progressed. Historian Modris Eksteins examines how Remarque's novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* (*All Quiet on the Western Front*) (1929/1984) created both a spiritual affiliation between soldiers and a reactionary attempt to destroy that

connection. *All Quiet*, which follows German solider Paul Bäumer and his fellow combatants' passage from students to killing machines, is a novel more about the post-war disillusionment of the individuals in the trenches, even though it focuses on the experiences and events of the war that ultimately ruined them.[51] By 1916, many believed the war would be endless (Fussell 71), and although the conflict did end two years later, in many regards, those soldiers were quite accurate. As Eksteins argues of Remarque's novel, "[o]nly the fraternity of death remains, the comradeship of the fated" (281). Upon its release, the book was an accomplishment and enjoyed great success. It unified the spirit of the soldiers through the mutual horror they suffered, regardless of what side they fought on, to which war veteran and poet Herbert Read acknowledged it as "the Bible of the common soldier" (ibid. 286). With *All Quiet*, Remarque was able to describe the war and the soldier's experience of it better than any historian or politician, since the new horrors of trench life, the actual experienced war, was something completely foreign to the outside observer.

The novel exemplifies this theme at the point when Paul returns home on leave and feels estranged from his family, unable to get rid of this "*Befangenheit*" ("sense of strangeness") that overcomes him and the "Schritt" ("distance") and "Schleier" ("veil") that exists between him and the rest of society (*Im Westen* 138; *All Quiet* 160). While on leave, he is ultimately excluded from a war discussion, and his experiences are dismissed by his old head-master as merely individual or subjective (ibid. 142; 167). He is accused of being unable of seeing the bigger picture. Here, Paul is removed from a war he faces at

[51] The postwar consciousness of the novel was missed by many critics, which ultimately led Remarque to write a sequel *Der Weg zurück* (*The Road Back*) (1831) that clearly addressed the sentiment of the 'lost generation' (Eksteins 283).

every waking moment, furthering his alienation from society, which sadly leads to his acknowledgment that the only home he has left is on the front with his fellow soldiers, with both friend and enemy. Only a few hundred miles away, the world of 'normal' society becomes completely alien and strange for Paul, while the war slowly became strangely familiar. As a result, the novel's destruction of national boundaries, and subsequently, blame and fault, became extremely problematic for many nationalists, politicians, and traditionalists, who tried to reinforce these divisions and binaries and reaffirm the war guilt of their former enemies, which ultimately led to numerous critical attacks by various journalists and politicians (*Rites* 293-9). Carl Gustav Jung (1946/2014) argues that the war did not end with the battles of 1914-18 but continued on to embody the other, the uncanny, and the unconscious of human psyche still lingering in a liminal battle (2-3). The hollow-spiritual war would continue to endure in the soldier; however, once they were returned to ordinary society, there was no liminal void to exercise these demons in, leaving them in a difficult position of understanding the fragility of life but at the same time, also the complete meaninglessness of it.

TRENCHES, VIOLENCE, AND THE CITY

Remarque's *All Quiet* and Beckmann's *The Night* reflect on the continuing violence in soldiers' everyday lives; however, Beckmann allocates or transmits the violence of postwar consciousness specifically inside the modern urban space. *The Night* carefully indicates how the violence of the war has entered the city's streets, home, and private lives of Europeans, though the painting could even be interpreted as arguing that it was the chaotic and artificial city that had entered the war. Commenting on his first day at the front, Beckmann uncannily connects its spectacle to city space: "[u]nforgettable

and strange. In all those holes and sharp trenches. Those ghostly passageways and artificial forests and houses…strangle unreal cities, like lunar mountains" (163). While No Man's Land represents the spiritual battle and the liminal void embodied by each individual solider, the trenches uncannily represent the chaotic urban space of the modern city. The association of trenches with city streets has been well documented, from the British armies that allocated English street names to their channels (Fussell 42-3; Gilbert x; Pike 286), to the trenches' structure and atmosphere reflecting each country's culture (Fussell 44-5). Although it may have been done to give the trench a sense of home, the ambiance of modern warfare was closer to urban life than the soldier originally thought. Like the congested city, the trenches were made of twisting corridors and labyrinth-like streets and tunnels that a 'man without a map'[52] can easily become lost in. Just as Baudelaire brought the uncanny from the Parisian underworld out into the consciousness of its citizens, "the war signaled an unavoidable shift from conceiving the underground as a distinct space, either hidden in a world of metaphors or a separate physical realm, to accepting it as a dominant feature of everyday life" (Pike 301). While the majority of people were well removed from the war, WWI lessened the distinction between warzone and normal society. Although nowhere near the extent of WWII, violence entered the cities like never before, as demonstrated with the German Zeppelin raids over London.

[52] I am evoking the structure of feeling the city that James Donald explores in *Imagining the Modern City* (1999): for him, the city does not consist of the objective/subjective binaries. He rather sees it far more "abstractly conceptual and intensely personal", something that links all cities together: "[i]t is *the* city, not *a* city"(x). This, along with Donald's interesting view of city exploration is similar to the morally ambiguous WWI solider caught in No Man's Land, where the experience of city dwelling is like the film *Moetsukita chizu* [*The Man Without a Map*] (1968). Based Abe's novel of the same name [*The Ruined* Map] (1967/2011) the film follows a detective who cannot solve a case because he does not know what the case actually is anymore.

Not only did the trenches have an uncanny relation to the modern city, constructing a "parody" of them (Fussell 43), but they also reflected the conspicuous fast-paced and ferocious atmosphere of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century metropolis. While the Crimean war gave Europe a glimpse of a modern and meaningless war, by the time of WWI, the technological age had already cemented itself, and the notion that warfare could remain traditional, pure, and even spiritual, was now impossible. Years before the war, the Futurists had already amalgamated human and machine in their revolutionary and utopian ideal. Their 'artificial optimism' (Poggi 2009) celebrated technology through symbols of cars, machines, and cities, containing a resacralized spirituality in which the machine was able to transcend the desires and limitations of the human body and mind (Poggi 241). The horrific aftermath of the war did little to discourage most Futurists, even reinforcing their attitudes, despite the war altering the perception on a grand scale in regard to the relationship between human and machine. Despite having its critics from its inception, futurism had a profound influence on the pre-WWI avant-garde art movements across Europe. It was after the war that the first phase of Futurism began to decline, largely due to their utopian vision of violence (Bondanella & Bondanella 242), the synergizing of human and machine, and the its newfound affiliation with Italian fascism. English painter Wyndham Lewis critiqued the Futurism's romanticism of machines as simply melodramatic or misguided (Ray 338; Rabaté 36). His depiction of war in *A Battery Shelled* (1919), presents soldiers as dehumanized killing machines, depicting the 'cult of machine' in far grimmer and circumstances, while removing the glamour of violence that found in Futurism in favour of representing warfare "as an ordinary affair" (Mao 251). The sentiment of Futurism's

'Extended Man' would continue to be critiqued in postwar films such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927/2002) and Charlie Chaplin' *Modern Times* (1936/2010), which showed humans as becoming virtually enslaved by advancing technology. Shelley's cyborgian nightmare and anxiety of humanity obtaining too much knowledge fulfilled its prophecy after the turn of the century in the modern city and culminated horrifically with WWI, two sentiments that Robert Musil's novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1943/1967) (*The Man Without Qualities*) (1995) further explores.

The novel's protagonist, a modern stranger and ex-soldier named Ulrich, is an intellectual and alienated individual, caught in a time of rising uncertainty, largely due to a world of increasingly divided ideologies and illusions. Musil, who began writing the uncompleted novel in 1921, sets the story's beginning in 1913 Vienna and opens with the line "[ü]ber dem Atlantik befand sich ein barometrisches Minimum" (9) ("[a] barometric low hung over the Atlantic") (3), foreshadowing the war that was hanging over, what Musil represents, as an increasingly divided Europe that was ignorant of the violence that was fast approaching. The novel's beginning also shows how this technological violence had already emerged before the war from the city streets. The chaotic hustle and bustle of the modern city closely resembles the structure of both a machine and chaotic modern warfare:

> Autos schossen aus schmalen, tiefen Straßen in die Seichtigkeit heller Plätze. Fußgängerdunkelheit bildete wolkige Schnüre. Wo kräftigere Striche der Geschwindigkeit quer durch ihre lockere Eile fuhren, verdickten sie sich, rieselten nachher rascher und hatten nach wenigen Schwingungen wieder ihren gleichmäßigen Puls. Hunderte Töne waren zu einem drahtigen Geräusch ineinander verwunden, aus dem einzelne Spitzen vorstanden, längs dessen schneidige Kanten liefen und sich wieder einebneten, von dem klare Töne absplitterten und verflogen. (*Der Mann* 9)

> (Automobiles shot out of deep, narrow streets into the shallows of bright squares. Dark clusters of pedestrians formed cloudlike strings. Where more powerful lines of speed cut across their casual haste they clotted up, then trickled on faster and, after a few oscillations, resumed their steady rhythm. Hundreds of noises wove themselves into a wiry texture of sound with barbs protruding here and there, smart edges running along it and subsiding again, with clear notes splintering off and dissipating.) (*Qualities* 3)

This tumultuous scene ends with a fatal car crash, thereby foretelling the violence of the impending war, but more importantly, the spectacle it creates and the question of guilt and responsibility it leaves the reader with:

> Diese beiden hielten nun plötzlich ihren Schritt an, weil sie vor sich einen Auflauf bemerkten. Schon einen Augenblick vorher war etwas aus der Reihe gesprungen, eine quer schlagende Bewegung; etwas hatte sich gedreht, war seitwärts gerutscht, ein schwerer, jäh gebremster Lastwagen war es, wie sich jetzt zeigte, wo er, mit einem Rad auf der Bordschwelle, gestrandet dastand. Wie die Bienen um das Flugloch hatten sich im Nu Menschen um einen kleinen Fleck angesetzt, den sie in ihrer Mitte freiließen. Von seinem Wagen herabgekommen, stand der Lenker darin, grau wie Packpapier, und erklärte
> mit groben Gebärden den Unglücksfall. Die Blicke der Hinzukommenden richteten sich auf ihn und sanken dann vorsichtig in die Tiefe des Lochs, wo man einen Mann, der wie tot dalag, an die Schwelle des Gehsteigs gebettet hatte. Er war. durch seine eigene Unachtsamkeit zu Schaden gekommen, wie allgemein zugegeben wurde. Abwechselnd knieten Leute bei ihm nieder, um etwas mit ihm anzufangen; man öffnete seinen Rock und schloß ihn wieder, man versuchte ihn aufzurichten oder im Gegenteil, ihn wieder hinzulegen; eigentlich wollte niemand etwas anderes damit, als die Zeit ausfüllen, bis mit der Rettungsgesellschaft sachkundige und befugte Hilfe käme. (*Der Mann* 10-1)

> (The pair now came to a sudden stop when they saw a rapidly gathering crowd in front of them. Just a moment earlier something there had broken ranks; falling sideways with a crash, something had spun around and come to a skidding halt – a heavy truck, as it turned out, which had braked so sharply that it was now stranded with one wheel on the curb. Like bees clustering around the entrance to their hive people had instantly surrounded a small spot on the pavement, which they left open in their midst. In it stood the truck driver, gray as packing paper, clumsily waving his arms as her tried to explain the accident. The glances of the of the newcomers turned to him, then warily dropped to the bottom of the hole where the man lay there as if dead had been bedded against the curb. It was by his own carelessness that he had come to grief, as everyone agreed. People took turns kneeling beside him, vaguely wanting to help; unbuttoning his jacket, then closing it again; trying to prop him up, then laying him down again. They were really

> only marking time while waiting for the ambulance to bring someone who would know what to do and have the right to do it). (*Qualities* 4-5)

The role of responsibility keeps being passed on, only to finally rest on the deceased victim, because in actuality, no one knows whom to blame. Later, Musil broadens the violent spectacle of modern culture and the problem of guilt with the story of Christian Moosbrugger, a condemned man on trial for the murder and raping of a prostitute. Ulrich, like many other people in Vienna, becomes completely fascinated with Moosbrugger, a seemingly gentle and friendly man who commits a grizzly and shocking murder. The character Clarisse takes her fascination with the murderer past a mere interest to something far more obsessive and unhealthy, where "Anziehung und Abstoßung mischten sich darin zu einem sonderbaren Bann" (144) "[a]ttraction and repulsion blended into a peculiar spell" (152). Because of his liminal disposition in society, as a result of his rebellious act against order, Clarisse places a heroic, even revolutionary quality upon him. Therefore, Moosbrugger represents not just Ulrich's *doppelgänger* but also modern society's uncanny and irrational underbelly and liminal disposition; Moosbrugger, like Frankenstein's Creature, becomes the novel's uncanny other or stranger. Suffering from hallucinations, Moosbrugger is unable to distinguish illusion from reality, inside and outside, and therefore, cannot establish a fixed identity, "war das wie helles Wasser zu beiden Seiten einer durchsichtigen Glaswand" (239) "like clear water on both sides of a transparent sheet of glass" (258). As Stefan Jonsson (1996) states, "Moosbrugger signals the end of character, an extreme example of a person who is no longer one, the opposite of order, stability, unity, coherence, and reliability. He is an incarnation of all conceivable terrifying qualities that a community would like to imagine

that it has under control" (51). Through his presence, the notions of criminal and victim blur to similar effects as in *Frankenstein*.

As in the opening scene of the novel, in which the accident's onlookers look to project blame upon either the victim or chance, Moosbrugger, who lacks any moral understanding, is now seen as the victim by many; a victim of the modern experience. He becomes problematic scapegoat, as society projects its monstrosity on to the murderer, though paradoxically reflecting a sense of victimhood back towards the same society. Ulrich sees a correlation between society and the ambiguous darkness within Moosbrugger as a collective entity: "Das war deutlich Irrsinn, und ebenso deutlich bloß ein verzerrter Zusammenhang unsrer eignen Elemente des Seins. Zerstückt und durchdunkelt war es; aber Ulrich fiel irgendwie ein: wenn die Menschheit als Ganzes träumen könnte, müßte Moosbrugger entstehn" (76). "[t]his was clearly madness, and just as clearly it was no more than a distortion of our own elements of being. Cracked and obscure it was; it somehow occurred to Ulrich that if mankind can dream as a whole, that dream would be Moosbrugger" (76-77). Not only does Musil address society's enchantment towards violence, he likewise leaves us to contemplate whether Moosebrugger is a victim of the modern experience, simply a symbol of the modern experience, or both.

The question remains unanswered, for when Moosbrugger is sentenced to death, Ulrich and the rest of society are able to push him and what he represents back into the unconscious**.** Nonetheless, Moosbrugger, whose story is interspersed throughout the novel, plays a vital part in *Qualities*, where the sickness of a society is not an end but rather a path to healing a civilization (Payne 114). With the Moosbrugger question, Musil

presents modern society with the problematic impasse between free will and responsibility, which essentially leaves us betwixted in the moral space of Frankenstein – caught between causation and Chance. Philip Payne (1988) claims in his study of Musil, that through Moosburger, the author addresses the question of whether freedom is an illusion or not. Payne argues that Musil does in fact acknowledge the verity of free will as something containing "both fact and mystery" (131). However, Moosbrugger is also a product of his environment, an allegory of "society's collective dream", which "suffers from the same unresolved tensions between fragmentation and unity" (Piser 10). It is because of this uncanny representation of society that the media and citizens of Vienna overstate the monstrousness of Moosbrugger in order to portray him "as the ultimate other" (ibid.) rather than seeing him as the uncanny other. Musil uses the Moosbrugger affair as a symbol of the fascination with violence and chaos that turn-of-the-century Vienna, and as an extension Europe, was engulfed in.

WWI did little to exasperate the societal unconscious desire or interest for violence. Depictions in art and cinema, especially in Germany, became much more violent in postwar Europe, not just with Expressionist painters like Beckmann and his contemporary Otto Dix, but also with new film directors. Along with his famous silent dystopian film *Metropolis*, Lang's thriller *M* (1931/2002) stands out as one of the filmmaker's greatest achievements. Written by his wife Thea von Harbou, *M* is a film about a serial killer who preys on little children and whose terror stretches across the streets of Berlin, its homes, the police department, and even the criminal underworld. Lang, who was greatly influenced by the Expressionist paintings of the modern city,

channels the same sensations of fear, violence, and city space on to the screen.[53] For most of the film, the pathological killer is only visible as a shadow; a haunting spectre bringing fear to the city streets. As an unknown creature that could strike at any moment, the spectre rules the streets through fear and violence, affecting the everyday lives of citizens, police, and even criminals (Wunrow). Lang's technique of not showing the killer dislocates the shadow from the rest of humanity, though when his physical form is finally revealed, he is no longer the monstrous entity of the beginning of the film but simply a sick, pathetic, and scared human being. In actuality, this becomes a far more monstrous scene, as Lang removes the illusion of the supernatural other and reveals that the evil plaguing the city is simply a normal person. Moreover, it points to the metropolis as a liminal space between human and inhuman; between connectivity and the ability to be dehumanized within the chaotic crowd. Musil's and Lang's killers share a liminal strangeness. Both have fractured identities with both society and themselves. Moosbrugger inability to differentiate between external and internal reality (Jonsson 52), is similar to how society is unable to distinguish him as either victim or monster; sane or insane. This same ambiguity shows up at the end of *M*, shortly after Lang transforms the killer from a spectre into a human. Unlike Moosbrugger, whose crime only came to light for society after he had been arrested, Lang's serial killer Beckert is not a 'monster' locked away, whose situation can be intellectually pondered or fetishized, but rather a prevailing problem in the streets of Berlin, where the uncanny fear and violence that the killer represents cannot be repressed into a cage as with Moosbrugger. Lang reveals the killer's name quite early in the film, but the name Hans Beckert still lacks any concrete

[53] The serial killer's first victim has the last name of Beckmann.

identity or any tangible relationship with the shadow that haunts the city of Berlin. Through most of the film, Beckert's identity, for both him and society, is tied to the haunting spectre and not the tangible person.

The physical Beckert is even dislocated from the shadow himself, to a point where the shadow haunts the killer: "It's there all the time, driving me out to wander the streets, following me, silently, but I can feel it there. It's me, pursuing myself. I want to escape, to escape from myself! But it's impossible" (*M* 1:42:55 – 1:43: 25). Lang depicts the serial killer not necessarily as an evil other, evoking violence on the good of the city, but as representing an illness, a disease of modernity that exists within society. Like, Moosbrugger, Beckert portrays himself as both victim and perpetrator. His defense is that he is as much as a victim of the spectre as the rest of society: "I can't help myself! I have no control over this evil thing that's inside of me, the fire, the voices, the torment!…Who knows what it's like to be me?" (ibid. 1:42:25 - 1:44:33). Maria Tartar (1995) has stated that by the film's end, Beckert transforms from a "cold-blooded murderer to abject victim" (161). Alternatively, Stephen Brockmann argues in *A Critical History of German Film* (2010) that Lang makes it difficult to completely sympathize with Beckert, or with either the criminal underworld or the police, who exercise their own rational sense of judgment, leaving "its viewers profoundly unsettled with no easy answers" (126). Brockmann presents a strong argument, in that Lang makes it quite equivocal, since it is never revealed, as to whether if any "capital punishment, imprisonment, or institutionalization in a psychiatric ward" is the best sentence at attaining justice, especially since neither choice is able to expunge any of the crimes committed (ibid.). Moreover, like Moosbrugger, Beckert is the uncanny representation of his society and is therefore unable

to be truly judged by a society that is both fascinated and responsible for him. The ending of *M* is terrifying and unnerving because it leaves both the individual and society once again in a liminal state with no one to turn to, and no real sense of order or judgment to cling to. "Who knows what it's like to be me?" becomes the mantra that can epitomize all of modernity

SICKENSS AND IRONY: ZENO'S IRONIC UTOPIA

The world after 1918, cast from its illusions, was facing a very grim reality; yet out of this chaos, new forms of utopia still managed to smolder hope in the modern era by paradoxically diving into its terror rather than ignoring it. Chaos turned utopia, or at least the hope of it, continues secularized modernity's act of resacralization within its uncanny and liminal nature, between what is said and unsaid. Restoring of irony leads a utopian viewpoint that essentially rises from the ashes of violence, and also one based on the internal darkness of the modern stranger. The returning soldiers of the Expressionist movement began a paradoxical messianic drive that was biopolitical but strictly formed through an internal void. However, this resacralizing messianic spirit was not just a characteristic of the Expressionist art movement. Lisa Marie Anderson (2011) uses the term "Expressionist Messianism" to build upon the study of expressionism and the messianic (Sokel 1959; Vietta & Kemper 1997) by arguing that the messianic spirit not just found in a branch of, but a representation of all of Expressionism[54], but more importantly, also the configuration modern age as well. For her, the "reconstruction of

[54] By Expressionism, Anderson follows the claim by expressionists such as Walter Rheiner (1919) and Iwan Goll (1921) that it is more of a worldview [*weltanschauung*] (12) or a "designation of an attitude (*Gesinnung*) rather than an artistic configuration" (13).

Jewish and Christian Messianic is a part of all modernism" and "expressionism as a whole represents modern era" (10, 11). I agree with Anderson's comprehensive definition of the messianic which I have attempted to outline in this work, in that messianism "is not always characterized by an outward turn to the socio-political, but sometimes involves the process strictly internal too the artist or human being" and that it signifies, "a particular constellation within the Modernist reworkings of the sacred" (11). As with the modern stranger, post-WWI messianism in particular, operates in an internal/external paradox of self and other, between the spiritual becoming of the individual and the world at large.

The postwar Expressionists quickly located themselves and their mission in the city, for the "sickness, crime and sin" (ibid. 168) that the city shared with the war allowed for a space that embodied the struggles they had experienced on the front. The anti-bourgeois and metropolitan fascination seemed to once again give the modern stranger the early urban spark that was originally unearthed in the *Flowers of Evil.* Returning from the war, Beckmann channels the creative spirit that he expected to gain from the war back to the modern city streets that symbolically spawned modernity's violence. In the spirit of Baudelaire, Beckmann argued that the rightful place of the artist is in the city and in its crowds:

> But right now, perhaps more than before the war, I need to be with people. In the city. That is just where we belong these days. We must be a part of all the misery that's coming. We have to surrender our heart and our nerves, we must abandon ourselves to the horrible cries of pain of a deluded people. Right now we have to get as close to the people as possible. It's the only course of action that might give some purpose to our superfluous and selfish existence–that we give people a picture of their fate. And we can only do that if we love humanity.
>
> Actually it's stupid to love humanity, nothing but a heap of egoism (and we are a part of it too). But I love it anyway. I love its meanness, its banality, its

> dullness, its cheap contentment, and its oh-so-very-rare heroism. But spite of this, every single person is a unique event, as if he had just fallen from Orion (184).

In this passage, Beckmann admits to the inanity of hope in a world of nothingness but he nonetheless still opts for choosing to see its beauty and sacredness through an ironic perspective. The contradictory axioms of WWI such as 'the Great War' and 'The War to End All Wars' allowed for effortless ironic criticism from many postwar writers and artists who had fought in the trenches. The anti-modern element of modernity could no longer be suppressed, allowing for an intensification of modernity's 'waste'*:* ambivalence and chaos (Bauman 1991). As Fussell states, "[t]he irony which memory associates with the events, little as well as great, of the First World War has become an inseparable element of the general vision of war in our time" (33). Irony was one of the few possible ways for soldiers to cope with or protect themselves from the meaninglessness of modern warfare, and also an outlet to critique the violence engrained in liminal modernity.

In Italo Svevo's third and final novel *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923/2015) (*Zeno's Conscience*) (2000), the author constructs an ironic position encompassing themes of identity, sickness, science, and progress through the eyes of an elderly stranger reminiscing about his past life and experiences. Svevo, a "master ironist" (Moloney 311), produces a protagonist in Zeno Cosini, who becomes a modern twist or ironic use of Stoic philosophy. Reflection and meditation are mirrored through a lens of the psychoanalytic practice of free association, resulting in an ironist conclusion that is both a positive and negative assessment of modern science. There is an insurmountable division for Svevo, between his partiality towards "depth psychology" and the psychoanalytic principle of curing disorders (ibid. 312). Through his own introspection, Zeno's irony comes to its most devastating, yet utopian conclusion in the closing of the book, when he

imagines a superbomb exploding at the centre of the earth. Besides foreshadowing events that would take place during the world's second 'great' war, Zeno transforms the destruction of the world as the only possible way to remove the sickness from humanity:

> Forse traverso una catastrofe inaudita prodotta dagli ordigni ritornerem alla salute. Quando i gas velenosi non basteranno più, un uomo fatto come tutti gli altri, nel segreto di una stanza di questo mondo, inventerà un esplosivo incomparabile, in confronto al quale gli esplosivi attualmente esistent saranno considerati quali innocui giocattoli. Ed un altro uomo fatto anche lui come tutti gli altri, ma degli altri un po' più ammalato, ruberà tale esplosivo e s'arrampicherà al centro della terra per porlo nel punto ove il suo effetto potrà essere il massimo. Ci sarà un'esplosione enorme che nessuno udrà e la
> terra ritornata alla forma di nebulosa errerà nei cieli priva di parassiti e di malattie. (*La coscienza* 480-1)
>
> Perhaps, through an unheard-of catastrophe produced by devices, we will return to health. When poison gases no longer suffice, an ordinary man, in the secrecy of a room in this world, will invent an incomparable explosive, compared to which the explosives currently in existence will be considered harmless toys. And another man, also ordinary, but a bit sicker than others, will steal this explosive and will climb up to the center of the earth, to set it on the spot where it can have maximum effect. There will be an enormous explosion that no one will hear, and the earth, once again a nebula, will wander through the heavens, freed of parasites and sickness (*Zeno* 436-7).

Zeno is not advocating a senseless destruction of the world but in its inevitability, sees it as the only way to free humanity from its inherent sickness, as an apocalyptic remedy for a fractured and unsettled modernity. Living on the brink of WWI, Zeno affirms the material victory of the not necessarily the weak, but the 'the man with ambiguous qualities', or as James Joyce's brother Stanislaus argues, a weakness that has nothing to do with ineptness but instead a detached skepticism that allows for "the obtuseness of critics" (cited in Lebowitz 208). After gaining self-consciousness of his 'weaknesses', Zeno begins to understand where truth and strength truly lie for him. Brian Moloney (1972), argues that Zeno's irony exists within his own self-deception, for like many moderns, "Zeno has to pay a price for his hope: that price is self-deception….It may well

be that we have no freedom, that our behaviour patterns are predetermined, but it may well be too that our illusions are our protective devices" (318). Throughout the novel, Zeno is able to build and simultaneously cast-off his own illusions with his use of irony, which allows him to make sense of the absurd world surrounding him.

Throughout his confessions, we see that Zeno's ironic disposition towards himself is a result of placing a sort of perfection on certain people around him, which leads him to both inaction and a lack of responsibility. His "[s]elf-deprecating Irony is designed to exculpate him, by making him appear to be the buffoon or blunderer who has in no way been responsible for what has happened, the perpetual victim either of circumstances or his own good intentions" (ibid 312). However, as he grows older, Zeno is able to realize that all the people in his life that he thought to be stronger or better than him were actually just as weak or strange. Once he is able to see the sickness in that image, he begins to feel more comfortable within his own self. Zeno now begins to realize that the perfect image of health he has sought after his whole life has been merely an illusion based on utilitarian and rationalist ideas about progress. In contrast to a world built upon specialization, Zeno's inability to be interested in one idea or profession alienates him from family and society. As with Musil's Ulrich, his "openness to all perspectives creates the potential for moral ambiguity" (Schwartz 94), which leads to a metaphor of humanity where sickness exists at every position:

> ad un capo della quale sta la malattia di Basedow che implica il generosissimo, folle consumo della forza vitale ad un ritmo precipitoso, il battito di un cuore sfrenato, e all'altro stanno gli organismi immiseriti per avarizia organica, destinati a perire di una malattia che sembrerebbe di esaurimento ed è invece di poltronaggine. Il giusto medio fra le due malattie si trova al centro e viene designato impropriamente come la salute che non che una sosta. E fra il centro ed un'estremità – quella di Basedow – stanno tutti coloro ch'esasperano e consumano la vita in grandi desiderii. ambizioni, godimenti e anche lavoro,

> dall'altra quelli che non gettano sul piatto della vita che delle briciole e risparmiano preparando quegli abietti longevi che appariscono quale un peso per la società. Pare che questo peso sia anch'esso necessario. Lasocietà procede perché i Basedowiani la sospingono, e non precipita perché gli altri la trattengono. Io sono convinto che volendo costruire una società, si poteva farlo più semplicemente, ma è fatta così, col gozzo ad uno dei suoi capi e l'edema all'altro, e non c'è rimedio. In mezzo stanno coloro che hanno incipiente o gozzo o edema e su tutta la linea, in tutta l'umanità, la salute assoluta manca. (*La coscienza* 358)
>
> (At one end is Basedow's disease, which implies the generous, mad consumption of vital force at a precipitous pace, the pounding of an uncurbed heart. At the other end are the organisms depressed through organic avarice, destined to die of a disease that would appear to be exhaustion but which is, on the contrary, sloth. The golden mean between the two diseases is found in the center and is improperly defined as health, which is only a way station. And between the center and one extreme – the Basedow one – are all those who exacerbate and consume life in great desires, ambitions, pleasures, and also work; along the other half of the line, those who, on the scales of life, throw only crumbs and save, becoming those long-lived wretches who seem to burden on society. It seems this burden, too, is necessary. Society proceeds because the Basedowians push it, and it doesn't crash because the others hold it back. I am convinced that anyone wishing to construct a society could do so more simply, but this is the way it's been made, with goiter at one end and edema at the other, and there's no help for it. In the middle are those who have either incipient goiter or incipient edema, and along the entire line, in all mankind, absolute heath is missing.) (*Zeno* 316)

As critics have argued (Saccone 66; Minghelli 196), *Zeno's Conscience* is a novel about the sickness and disease found in modernity. In the previous quote, Zeno's dream sees humanity being pulled between two extreme diseases. On side there is what Zeno regards as the Basedowians, who push society toward a future of technology and science, while its religious and conservative counterpart pulls it back in order to keep things from collapsing. Not only does sickness reside in both extremes, but also in a life of the stranger living betwixt and between them, making sickness exist "along the entire line" and therefore, removing the notion of perfect health for all of humanity. Therefore, strangerness is still a sickness according to Zeno, but is also something unique that allows him to distinguish and understand the absurdities and illness of modern society, rather

than being unaware of them. If initially Zeno was a stranger because he rejected the values and ideas that were conjured up in the modern world, which made him subjectively sick, he nonetheless continues to remain a stranger by not only accepting this sickness, but also taking pleasure in it.

Zeno refuses to define life as strictly progressive, and instead describes it as something in constant motion. In order for one to appreciate it, they must be in a constant motion themselves: Già credo che in qualunque punto dell'universo ci si stabilisca si finisce coll'inquinarsi. Bisogna moversi. La vita ha dei veleni, ma poi anche degli altri veleni che servono di contravveleni. Solo correndo si può sottrarsi ai primi e giovarsi degli altri" (*La coscienza* 359) ("I already believe that at any point of the universe where you are settled, you end up being infected. You have to keep moving. Life has poisons, but also some other poisons that serve as antidotes. Only by running can you elude the former and take advantage of the latter") (*Zeno* 317). Zeno's deluded and self-conscious world ends up being a microcosm of the world that surrounds him, and only when he acknowledges this does he begin to turn his attention from his own small world to the vast one that surrounds him. Zeno comes to recognize that humanity can only conquer the world by conquering itself. He comes to this conclusion once he is able to conquer, or at least understand, his own fears and sicknesses as well as those that reflect the characteristics of a world he once deemed as strong. The novel's final chapter sees Zeno connect the inner world and outer world through the outbreak of World War I, as the absurdity of humanity now comes crashing against the absurdity of his own world. The only antidote for this poisonous world, outside of its pure annihilation, is paradoxically found within, as other poisons, such as self-consciousness, allow the individual to explore

the beauty and originality of life. As with Beckmann turning violence, demons, and nightmares into captivating works of art that question the modern world's thirst for violence, the poisons and diseases of modernity ironically become moments of resacralization for Zeno, and a possible element for transcending oneself beyond the same poisons. In the early twentieth century, irony acts as a replacement for spirituality and sacredness in secularized modernity, based on the analogous character of divine God-like language and irony (Berg 54; Booth 737). As with the clouds in Baudelaire's "The Stranger" that show us what is absent or lacking in the present world, this ironic spirit allows us to imagine a better future by trying to fill in what is absent and wrong in modern society. As with Zeno's Basedowian utopia, Blochian utopia begins in the darkness and must manifest internally, within the individual, beginning as something spiritual and subjective before it is able to spread across the collective.

However, creating a utopian vision based on the ephemeral and fragmented aspects of the modern stranger and an ironic use of despair can be problematic. Even though Bloch's view is not a cynical one, if despair is necessary in realizing hope and a spirit or vision of utopia, then a utopian world will always be paradoxical since it must continuously be flawed. How can we achieve the best possible world when we are reliant on not just a flawed world that lacks something, but also one that needs to reach total darkness and desolation, in order to see it? A continuous process of the utopian spirit must consist of a state of despair and as a result, motion can paradoxically become stagnation. An ironic utopian vision based on the gaze of the modern stranger, transitory, ironic, and even malicious, may have saved the utopian spirit for the modern age but nonetheless can lead to questions that recognize it as ultimately self-defeating. What does

this alternative and modern notion of utopia say about the violent ways that one will use to engage with it, in order to realize their imaginings? This problematic tension may have been why Baudelaire, Leopardi, Beckmann, and Svevo through Zeno, distanced themselves from ever coming to terms with utopian progress. In the poem the "L'Albatros" ("Albatross"), Baudelaire captures the essence of what he felt utopian ideals amount to. Whereas the albatross flies powerfully and gracefully in the sky, on land, in the space of lived experience, it transforms into an awkward and clumsy animal that becomes easily susceptible to human violence.

DIVINE VIOLENCE & MESSIANIC TIME IN MILLER'S *LEIBOWITZ*

It may be one thing to situate a utopian 'spirit' in despair, but utopian and revolutionary ideals tend to become an excuse for violence. The relationships between the two became so strong that after witnessing the atrocities of WWII, Karl Popper (1950) ultimately declared that the two were inseparable. However, if modern society cannot remove violence from its existence, is it truly wrong to attempt a resacralization of it? In consideration of Maurice Bloch's notion of rebounding violence, the outsider not only consumes the world left behind but also expends the liminal violence of the rite of passage. Bloch's theory of violence creates a more cyclical journey instead of the individual following on a complete linear departure from their original starting point. It is at this stage of 'rebounding violence' that Bloch argues the religious turns into the political, and the individual must recognize the collective and the other (6). It is "symbolism of rebounding violence, which at bottom is concerned with the universal social, political, intellectual and emotional problem of human fluidity" (ibid. 98).

Although Bloch's study focuses on the religious ritual outside of modern Western culture, his theory can be applied to secularized modernity and the process of resacralization, especially as he claims that this idea of rebounding violence is "quasi-universal" (1), since it attempts to solve the intrinsic impasse of the human condition, that is "how human beings can be the constituent elements of permanent institutional structures" (19). For Maurice Bloch the idea of 'rebounding violence' allows the human to become political. These ruminations on a form of violence that remain with the individual allows them a transformed vivacity because the second stage of violence becomes something external. This notion of the other differentiates the first violent stage from that of the second in a rite of passage, in that the second stage includes an "alien" or "external" validity. The rebounding violence manifests after the ritual is completed either as "symbolic construction of a permanent order", outward as a military conquest, or finally, culturally inwards towards people of a lower class (81). According to Bloch, the individual therefore retains a spiritual and violent facet of the past, and in turn creates new ones during the violent liminal phase. Therefore, the question arises: how do we extrapolate this 'intrinsic' violence into everyday life? These biopolitical and spiritual elements of violence become the core of messianic time and of the problematic dilemma of divine vs. mythic violence. The messianic drive of modernity may very well be why Paul de Man (1971) characterizes modernity as being obsessed with "radical renewal" and "new beginnings" (150, 152). This obsession could potentially lead to a predicament that holds humanity in a perpetual state of negative liminality, a series of repetitious violence of destruction and rebirth, and apocalyptic repetition.

In contrast, Agamben, paraphrasing Gianni Carchia, argues that messianic time cannot be apocalyptic since the "messianic is not the end of time, but *the time of the end*…the time that remains between time and its end" (*All that Remains* 62; Carchia, 144). Here, Agamben incorrectly argues that "[t]he apocalyptic is situated on the last day", because the apocalyptic can likewise be viewed the same way that Agamben views messianic time, as "the time that remains between time and its end" (ibid). In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Miller blurs the lines between messianic and apocalyptic time, while divine violence can be either seen as remaining in its ambiguous state or not existing at all. Situated in an environment of a post-apocalyptic world, *Canticle* focuses on the Abbey of Saint Leibowitz, which duplicates and archives the scientific and cultural knowledge of the pre-apocalyptic twentieth century, hoping that humanity can once again learn and progress through experience and knowledge. What makes Miller's apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic work so distinctive is that the novel is separated into three new yet familiar epochs, each spanning 600 years: "*Fiat Homo*" (Medieval/Dark Ages), "*Fiat Lux*" (Renaissance/Enlightenment), "*Fiat Voluntas Tua*" (Industrial Age/Modernity). The book ends with a new apocalypse that either represents the messianic coming through an act of divine violence or the continuous apocalyptical cycle of destruction and rebirth with no end in sight. Similar to Benjamin and Agamben, Miller's messianic time exists in conjunction with the empty, homogeneous time that is waiting to manifest itself. This is shown through the character of the nomadic Jewish wanderer, who Miller alludes to as living through all three epochs, just under different names Although it is never stated whether or not it is the same man throughout the whole novel, the fact that the three men look familiar, seemingly know information from past epochs that would be impossible

otherwise. Moreover, in the second epoch, this wandering nomad regards himself as immortal and is seemingly waiting for the messiah.[55] Living in secular time, the wanderer waits for the messianic moment to uncannily manifest itself as either disastrous or illuminating; it either continues the cycle or breaks it. As Ralph C. Wood (2001) explains, *Canticle* "is not apocalyptic merely because it concerns the final culmination of things in an atomic holocaust. Rather it is an *apocalypsis* in the literal sense: an "unveiling," a revelation of the deeply destructive urges at work in late modern life", which is able to "unveil and bring to light what is otherwise hidden - not only the causes of our culture's deep self-destructiveness but also its cure" (27, 29).

The novel's open ending leaves us with two possibilities of hope: the first possibility comes from the monastery leaving the planet before the end of the world with all the knowledge it has accumulated in the last one thousand years or so. This offers a glimmer of hope as humanity looks to reestablish itself far away from Earth, in an attempt to break the apocalyptic cycle. However, humanity escaping this Earth in search of another does not allow humanity to escape from itself. With the monastery bringing with it all the knowledge that arguably led to its destruction, what makes this attempt to escape the cycle any different than previous ones? As the Abbot Zerchi asks God/himself: "Listen, are we helpless? Are we doomed to do it again and again and again? Have we no choice but to play the Phoenix in an unending sequence of rise and fall? Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Carthage, Rome, the Empires of Charlemagne and the Turk…*Are we doomed to it, Lord, chained to the pendulum of our own mad*

[55] The character refers to himself as Lazarus, who Jesus raised from the dead, and is also alluded to the mythical figure of the wandering Jew, a Medieval Christian folklore of a Jewish man who is cursed by Jesus with immortality when he is unwilling to help Jesus while carrying the cross.

clockwork, helpless to halt its swing?" (*Canticle* 266-7). This possibility of escape does not exclude the disillusionment that may come with the failure of realizing the messianic moment. After WWI, the Expressionists' understanding of violence as a sense of renewal, faith, and hope quickly faded to disillusionment, which essentially ended their messianic vision and the movement itself (Anderson 176-7). Somewhat similarly, Futurism's love of the artificial came to its ironic apex when the prewar ideology of man over machine changed into a divination of machine under fascism. Hollow and artificial Catholic messianic symbols were secularized into futurist art under fascism, and as a result, destroyed its original ideology, while its revolutionary movement of speed slowed under its political alignments (Poggi 244-5). The notion of waiting for a messianic moment in time or forcing it through an confusing notion of divine violence has recently led Žižek (2016) to give us a sobering message: "This, perhaps, is the most depressing lesson of horror and suffering: there is nothing to be learned from it. The only way out of the vicious circle of this depression is to change the terrain towards concrete social and economic analysis" (42). Redemptive violence is a myth based on artificially constructed binaries of good and evil, and instead increases violence through the amplifying and exchanging of irrational fears.

The novel's second messianic possibility exists in the character of Rachel. Rachel is the conjoined dead twin of the poor tomato farmer Mrs. Grales, who is constantly seeking Rachel's baptism that the Abbott Zerchi is hesitant to perform. During the climactic new apocalyptic, Mrs. Grales' death comes the birth of Rachel, who exhibits a new child-like personality upon re-animation. Ironically, the radiation that will eventually eliminate humanity is what brings Rachel to life, which gives her a transcendent, divine,

and eternal quality. Rachel becomes a particularly symbolic representation of the modern stranger or even *homo sacer*, for she is beyond human, both pure and impure, neither dead nor living: "Who, then, was Rachel? And What?" (*Canticle* 334). Rachel, animated from the nuclear fallout, is born out of the darkness and violence of our world but becomes a true messianic figure when she rejects Zerchi's baptism. She does not require either the old world's religion or scientific discovery. Even when she gives the Eucharist to Abbott Zerchi, it is for his salvation rather than hers and as a result, breaks away from the previous cyclical world. "As a creature neither conceived in sin nor having had any occasion for sin" (Wood 40), Rachel represents "a promise of resurrection" (*Canticle* 336), a messianic figure that is a "dispenser rather than a receiver of grace" (Wood 40). Miller seems to be reversing Bloch's spirit of utopia in that society's collective violence and darkness is manifested within the individual rather than the other way around. *Canticle*'s ending still leaves us with an uncanny monster created out of scientific destruction and violence, although she is born out of the "Immaculate Conception" (*Canticle* 279) and is removed from the original sin of the society that created her, allowing us a new form of hope. Rachel therefore, becomes the new uncanny creature without having to deal with the patriarchal, imposing, and detrimental figure of a Frankenstein, and at least at some level she is free to cultivate herself on the liminal world that is made up of the ruins of the past but is also on renewed ground.

The book must end there for the utopian character to exist. Just as Musil's *Man Without Qualities,* which has critics divided on whether a finished novel would have produced a utopian vision of a different outcome to history or simply end in the historical failure of WWI (Grill 162), the book ends in liminality, with an ambiguous,

sideshadowing possibility rather than having an either/or utopian or anti-utopian vision. By sitting between the said and unsaid, Miller gives humanity the free will to ultimately choose for itself. Through the monster/spectre Rachel who ends the novel standing over the ashes of a failed world, Miller ultimately leaves us with the ironic hope to transcend the past through the 'monstrous', though still acknowledging that humans may very well choose a cyclical repetition of violence and 'monstrosity'. De Man is correct in diagnosing modernity's obsession with new beginnings, even violent ones; yet, in a liminal and fragmented world of conflicting perspectives and moral ambiguities, it seems that the two are inseparable. Reminiscent of Baudelaire's albatross, Musil's Ulrich aptly argues, "Roheit und Liebe nicht weiter von einander entfernt seien als der eine Flügel eines großen bunten stummen Vogels vom ändern" (29) ("brutality and love are no farther apart than one wing of big, colorful, silent bird is from the other") (25).

As we have seen, the stranger is often associated with dread, violence, and a fear of the unknown; frequently represented by a shadowy figure lurking in alley ways, the dark corners of city streets, and our unconscious imagination. Yet, the modern stranger more often than not offers us an ironic and paradoxical perspective that challenges the violence of modernity through a counter or "rehearsal of violence" that "opens up a space for the critique and resignification of accepted cultural practices" (Sanyal 30). The modern stranger's use of irony as a counterviolence to violence itself, allows us to expose modernity's violent tendencies through self-reflectivity, both internal and societal, creating a liminal space of violence and nonviolence, of action and inaction.

V: BOREDOM – AN INFINITE EPILOGUE TO THE MODERN STRANGER

Boredom is an experience of modernity, of modern temporality
- Elizabeth Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity*

At first boredom drove me to despair, but then, as it increased instead of diminishing, habit little by little made it less frightening to me and more susceptible to patience. My patience with boredom finally became really heroic
- Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*

Boredom is the threshold to great deeds. - Now it would be important to know: What is the dialectical antithesis to boredom?
- Walter Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk*

A utopia cannot, by definition, include boredom, but the 'utopia' we are living in is boring
- Lars Fr. H. Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*

INTRODUCTION

Action films, predominantly "characterized by propensity for spectacular action, a narrative structure involving fights, chases, and explosions, and in addition to the deployment of state-of-the-art special effects, an emphasis in performance on physical feats and stunts" (Neale 48), have become a cornerstone of not just Hollywood but in films across the world (Artz 196), usually dominating the highest grossing films of the year. Action, as a film genre, is a relatively new phenomenon, evolving around the 1980s, when its entertainment factor was fixated typically on glorifying violence (Kendrick 83). Up until it then, action was simply an umbrella term conveying "a sense of movement, of velocity, of thrills" (ibid. 82), a fundamental element that is found in most, if not all films (ibid. 83). Action, therefore, is a result of 'something happening' in a story; the more something happens, the more the narrative is established and the less boring we tend to find the film, novel, or show. Consequently, the more we tend to view movies as entertainment rather than art, as embarking on 'a thrill ride!', the more action we require

within them. Yet, in regard to the films of Michelangelo Antonioni, words such as 'action' 'adventure,' and 'violence' become radically different and take on new meaning. Ironically, these new meanings are intertwined with one of action's antitheses; boredom.

What is boredom? Answering this question is both extremely important and challenging, since the word has a lot of weight today, yet it is still an extremely vague mood. Its usage is gravely dependent on subjective feelings and opinions, notwithstanding its shifting definitions throughout time. Boredom's equivocal nature has been examined and debated by philosophers in some aspect or other for centuries. From Isocrates to Plutarch; from Pascal to Schopenhauer, Leopardi, Baudelaire and Nietzsche; from Kierkegaard to Russell, to Heidegger, Satre, Camus, and Eric Fromm, the topic has been endlessly debated, yet it has never been pinned down to any sort of clear designation. Despite the subject's apparent exhaustion, it has not diminished in contemporary discussions (Svendsen 2005; Toohey 2011; Schneider 2016), although one might ask if boredom is still a significant problem in our society. Is it even possible to be bored anymore, since socio-technological advancements have given us the opportunity, or at least the illusion, to escape boredom whenever possible? Asking such questions of boredom might be considered gratuitous in comparison to more troubling societal questions that we are currently facing, yet as I have established, especially in regard to the modern stranger, uncanny and liminal struggles that may haunt us from the shadows may point to larger problems that exist in society. In this concluding chapter, I would like to reexamine this 'exhausted' concept that was touched upon when discussing Baudelaire and Leopardi in Chapter 2. There, I discussed how boredom (*ennui* and *noia*) for the two poet-philosophers is an intrinsic and melancholic characteristic of modernity itself. The

world for them was an incessant theatre of dreams and illusions that in turn plays out as a repetitious boredom bordering on tragedy. As argued by Baudelaire and Leopardi, boredom was not an ailment that could be easily cured or forgotten, but was something that was entrenched in, even intrinsic to the human spirit. It was a forever present and reoccurring sense of consciousness that comes from a both a desire of living and, as Luce Irigaray (1977/1985) maintains, an impulse for death (115). The connection between boredom and secularized modernity is apparent through the fact that it has been largely discussed in philosophy and literature since the advent of modernity to our present day; nonetheless, it would be imprudent to think that it is a mood that is precisely restricted to the modern age.

Instead of distinguishing boredom into categories or binaries, I am arguing that the modern age actually creates a more ambiguous and fragmented understanding of boredom as an uncanny and liminal state of in-betweenness and displacement that shares the burden of being part of the encompassing and significant aspects that define secularized modernity. I shall encounter this enigma by examining the films of Antonioni and the writings of contemporary American author Tao Lin, from post-war 'ennui' to contemporary 'boredom'. Antonioni's masterful existential 'trilogy' of *L'Avventura* (1960), *La Notte* (1961), and *L'Eclisse* (1962), along with the appendage *Il Deserto Rosso* (*The Red Desert*) (1964) are connected not only through actress Monica Vitti but likewise through the examination of an alienated society located in a postwar Italy/Europe, where the lingering horrors of WWII were mixed with the 'economic miracle', resulting in an apathetic hangover that underscores the contemplative triviality of secularized modernity and the difficulties of interconnecting with one another in said

world. Lin tackles the same themes of alienation and boredom as Antonioni. Although his novel *Taipei* (2013) partly takes place in the Taiwanese capital, Lin's stories are predominantly located in contemporary America and focus on a generation that is ingrained in a technological world where communication is dominated by social media and technology. Both artists assess similar themes that simultaneously express the various types of boredom and show how these tend to also blend into one another, defining the modern experience of the stranger. Boring is never a positive attribute one would assign to a film or novel, yet both Antonioni and Lin force the reader and viewer into a state of boredom, to fully experience the sensation, and as a result, connect the audience and characters in innovate ways. Notwithstanding that both exclude any spiritual or transcendental aspects from their work, it is through this void or exclusion that they paradoxically move towards the threshold of sacredness. By adding the work of Sara Ahmed, I shall also discuss how mood and boredom in the twenty-first century are still tied to a tradition or spirit of the modern stranger, yet look to re-imagine the figure for an every changing modernity.

THE DIFFICULT TASK OF DEFINING BOREDOM

One of the challenges of analyzing boredom stems from the issue that boredom, and moods themselves, are ambiguous and are "usually described as ambient, vague, diffuse, hazy, and intangible" feelings we tend to fall into, rather than obtain (Ahmed, "Mood" 13). In *A Philosophy of Boredom* (2005), Lars Svendsen asserts that "moods, generally speaking, are seldom intentional subjects as far as we are concerned – they are precisely something one finds oneself in, not something one consciously looks at," even more so with boredom, which is a "mood that is typified by a lack of quality that makes it

more elusive than most other moods", to the point where one might not even know they are actually bored or have any direct reason for their boredom (14). Ambiguity has not stopped individuals from trying to understand the different types of boredom one may encounter in life. One of the most famous and often cited twentieth century theories of mood and boredom comes from Martin Heidegger's lecture-course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929-30). Heidegger sees mood (*Stimmung*) as something that is defined from our attunement towards the world and is "not something merely at hand. They themselves are precisely a fundamental manner and fundamental way of being, indeed of being-there" (67). In regard to boredom, Heidegger also characterizes its liminal nature by describing it as "*a silent fog in the abysses of Dasein*" (77), although he does compartmentalize its ambiguous essence into three different forms, each becoming more 'profound' or deeper. The first form of boredom Heidegger discusses is when an individual is bored *by something*, as in waiting for something, which is a type of boredom that depends on the spatiotemporal situation, and not the individual's place in the world. The second form is when one is bored *with something*, and although this form is less intense than the first and may not be acknowledged by the individual at the time, it is more lasting and troubling because it is essentially about being bored with the ways we alleviate boredom. Lastly, and most importantly, is what Heidegger refers to as "profound boredom", a feeling of emptiness where all things are enveloped in indifference and seem to lose their meanings. This form of boredom is immeasurable and endless and is not confined to certain situations. Profound boredom is "being held in limbo," where unlike the other two, it is the fundamental attunement of the modern age (164). Boredom as indifference may seem to fall under what Heidegger categorizes as a

lack of attunement, however, since "we are never without an attunement", a lack of attunement is still an attunement but one that is uncanny since it "remains concealed or hidden from us" but is nonetheless present (68).

As Heidegger argues, boredom becomes a 'telling refusal' where a lack of possibilities enables an understanding that this (non)attunement points to our very existence and also our own possibilities. Heidegger's concept of a 'lack of attunement' is reasonably very ambiguous, since its basis is of a liminal understanding. Sara Ahmed defines Heidegger's lack or non-attunement as an experience of "how we can be in a world with others where we are not in a responsive relation, where we do not tend to 'pick up' on how they feel" ("Mood" 18). Ahmed appropriately likens this vague attunement of "not being in harmony" to that of the stranger in that "[s]trangers…appear at the edges of a room, dimly perceived, or not quite perceived, lurking in the shadows" (ibid.). The link between the two is prominent enough that one may even argue that without some sort of modern understanding of boredom as emptiness, the concept of the modern stranger, and modernity itself, could not even exist.

This does not mean that there was no understanding of an existential boredom until secularized modernity. Christianity, for example, understood *acedia*, a form of spiritual boredom or apathy of the soul, as a significant problem of the Middle Ages. The sentiment reappears in modernity with thinkers such as Kierkegaard who famously asserts that "boredom is the root of all evil" (*Either/Or* 285), while Baudelaire, as does Walter Benjamin (*Arcades Project,* "Convolute D"), links *ennui* as a secular and modern form of *acedia*, referring to it as "the malady of Monks" (*Intimate Journals* 42). In mapping out a complicated history of boredom, Patricia Meyer Spacks (1995), however,

maintains that there is a delicate distinction between boredom and *ennui*/*acedia*. To begin with, Spacks states that the English word 'bore' did not exist until the late seventeenth century, while 'boredom' was not widely used until the early beginnings of nineteenth century modernity (8). Spacks determines a continuing shift of boredom due to secularization and a collapse of the Christian worldview (11), resulting in a "change from a moralistic to a sociological view of boredom" (21). Following Seán Desmond Healy's (1984) division of boredom into 'simple' and 'hyper'**,** Spacks examines how boredom breaks away from the French *ennui* that was used until then: "Boredom" according to Spacks "was not (is not) the same as ennui, more closely related to acedia. Ennui implies a judgment of the universe; boredom, a response to the immediate' (12). Spacks goes on to argue that "[e]nnui belongs to those with a sense of sublime potential, those who feel themselves superior to their environment… If only because it seems more dignified, many people would rather suffer ennui than boredom, despite its presumably greater misery" (ibid.). Spacks' analysis is a crucial addition to the long history of work on boredom, yet her linguistic interpretation tends to eliminate the ambiguous nature of the word's meaning. Although useful, there is a problem when trying to compartmentalize boredom into various categories because boredom operates in the realm of liminality. Seeing that words such as *ennui* and *noia* in their native languages of French and Italian retain boredom's ambiguity and multifaceted definitions, it is difficult to preserve the nineteenth century uses of the words boredom and *ennui* as the defining differences between them, since the meanings of these words alter depending on context. Explicitly separating boredom from *ennui* is also problematic, since it was also in the nineteenth century that Baudelaire reinvented the word *ennui* by connecting boredom with

melancholy, thereby changing it into something far more existential than its meaning during the Middle Ages. Furthermore, since the word boredom is virtually the only word we presently use for the mood in the English language, could it not be argued that the word 'boredom' has now gained the same liminalness and ambiguity that *ennui* and *noia* retained in their native languages?

Nonetheless, these divisions, or lack thereof, in boredom are still continuously debated. In B*oredom: A Lively History* (2011), Peter Toohey, working from Spacks and Healy, separates boredom into the binaries of simple and existential; however, the separation is actually a ruse, as he essentially argues that existential boredom is a myth of modern society in that it is not really boredom at all but part of depression. Like Spacks, Toohey argues that for nineteenth and twentieth century writers, existential boredom is "described as a kind of 'emptiness' resulting from the sufferer's seeing him- or herself as isolated from others", where "such individuals are living in a secularized world where religion no longer offers solace. They inhabit a fragmented and divided world where regional and even personal loyalties have been lost" (196). In contrast, Toohey claims that our current society is one in "which tradition and community have disappeared" (ibid). Toohey deceptively solves the problem of ambiguity in boredom by shifting existential boredom into another ambiguous term - depression, though he fails to acknowledge any connection between the two[56]. Neither does Toohey examine any correlation between hopelessness, permanent liminality, and boredom (Szakolczai 2000;

[56] In contrast, Reinhard Kuhn (1979) argues that the dissimilar types of boredom…are often confused with ennui because they can never be completely divorced from it. They do contain certain elements of ennui, they often coexist with ennui, and they sometimes even bring about ennui" (9). More recently, Michael Raposa (1999) reestablishes the relationship between the two by defining ennui as "boredom colored by melancholy" (34).

Thomassen 2016) and how these relate to secularized modernity**.** For instance, in *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between*, Bjørn Thomassen claims that "[t]he incitation of constant and instant liminal experience that so characterizes cultural life in our contemporary period easily turns into nullifying boredom, senselessness and normative nihilism" (2). A more interesting re-examining of boredom comes from Sianne Ngai (2005) with her concept of 'stuplimity', what she describes as "a concatenation of boredom and astonishment – a bringing together of what "dulls" and what "irritates" or agitates; sharp, sudden excitation and prolonged desensitization, exhaustion, or fatigue" (271). According to Ngai, the paradoxical fusion of boredom and sublime "holds opposing affects together" (ibid.), and although she does set up a binary, she nonetheless keeps boredom in a more ambiguous and liminal light. Keeping with the more recent examination of boredom, Ngai places the shift in boredom as part of the of the secularization process of the modern age in that it removes the sacred transcendence of the sublime in favour of repetition or "a series of fatigues or minor exhaustions, rather than a single, major blow to the imagination" (272).

The major separation between boredom and existential boredom seems to exist for many scholars (Spacks, Toohey, Ngai, and Elizabeth Goodstein (2005)) because it is a historically specific experience. Even though boredom is not exclusively a modern characteristic, with the advent of secularized modernity it does gain a shifting importance as it moves from a metaphysical problem to a psychological one and from the individual to the masses. As Elizabeth Goodstein writes, it "is not that boredom as such is the key to theorizing modernity, but rather the problems of theorizing boredom are the problems of theorizing modern experience more generally" (407). Although I agree with these

arguments, due to boredom's liminal essence, and since the sacred can equally exist in the profane world, I do not necessarily believe that these occurrences result in a clear dislocation between boredom and ennui, or a total removal of the sacred, as Toohey and Ngai suggest. As Mladen Dolar argues of boredom's liminal companion, the uncanny, the scared or spiritual aspects are not necessarily removed but instead distilled into profane existence, remaining hidden in society's shadows but not complexly absent. Either as a part of the spiritual or as a psychological understanding, sacredness has become a spectre with secularized modernity or what Tillich (1965/1987) describes as 'sacred emptiness' or the 'sacred void'. In a world where God is absent (non-existent) and religious traditions and symbols have lost meaning, a void or empty space has occurred that defines our contemporary world entrenched in ennui/boredom. Yet paradoxically, it is the same space where the sacred resacralizes into new ideas.

THE (IN)ACTION FILMS OF MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI

Speaking of Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, philosopher Thorsten Botz-Bornstein (2007) describes the director's use of action in his films as "no action" or rather "[t]he kind of action that cannot be seen" (6). This uncanny form of action that Tarkovsky implemented was highly influenced by the works of Antonioni. Beginning with his 1960 breakthrough film *L'Avventura* (*The Adventure*), Antonioni deconstructed the concept of both action and plot and marked both a stylistic shift that better captured the psychological elements of modern ennui than his previous films had. This lack of plot and slow pacing in his films may estrange many viewers, but this is precisely why his films succeed in capturing the film's subject matter of alienation and boredom in a much

more captivating and satisfying way. The dissolving of action, its inaction, is what constructs the action of the film.

As Seymour Chatman (1985) argues, anxiety in Antonioni's films "occurs in visual details of plot, behavior, and composition so veiled and subtle that Antonioni risks making the audience impatient and bored" (66); however, by bringing the audience into the same physiological and emotional state of the characters, the more boring the film becomes, the more interesting it turns out to be. For example, *L'Avventura* is about a young woman's (Anna) disappearance during a boat trip in the Mediterranean with her lover (Sandro), best friend (Claudia), and a group of friends. While searching for the vanished woman, Sandro and Claudia become attracted to one another, yet at the same time, this 'plot' has little to do with what the film is about; it is neither a murder-mystery nor really a romantic love story. This groundbreaking film lacks any real plot or focus and instead is pulled along by the human situation or inner turmoil and relationships (or lack of) of the film's main and peripheral characters. The 'adventure' that the characters embark on is internal, "an emotional adventure…a physiological and moral adventure which makes them act different to the established conventions and criteria of a now outmoded world" (Antonioni in Chatman & Duncan 71). Action in Antonioni's films establishes revolutionary ideas through invisible and uncanny conduct; action is recognized through the characters' emotions in a modern age where people have become "spiritually adrift" (Chatman & Duncan 71) and fearing the "moral unknown" (Antonioni 33).

By distancing the film's meaning from narrative plot and thereby dissolving the narrative itself, "Antonioni's camera often lingers on *temps morts* or dead time, where the

central element in the camera's focus is the light or the tone of objects" and "invites viewers to collaborate in the film's creation of meaning, which remains, however, far from arbitrary" (Carlorosi 61, 63). Doing so makes Antonioni a master of deconstructing the MacGuffin distinct from that of Alfred Hitchcock, who used objects as false plot motivators in order to establish the plot, while Antonioni uses the plot itself as a MacGuffin, and as a result, undermines the narrative itself rather than using it to establish one. In this regard, while greatly influenced by the filmmaker, Antonioni can likewise be seen as an 'anti-Hitchcock'. Instead of using the MacGuffin to create suspense, his usage gradually removes any suspense in the film (Chatman & Duncan 75), leaving the audience pondering an unsolved crime, or whether there was any crime to begin with. As the film progresses, Anna is slowly forgotten, and her disappearance becomes less important to both the characters in the film and the audience watching it. This allows Antonioni to show the inner turmoil of human relationships and of the self and other, not through dialogue or narration but instead through the cinematic image and 'inaction' between characters.

The inaction or slow movement of both plot and Antonioni's camera, what David Bordwell (2005) describes as "dedramatization" (152), replicates the boredom and alienation of Antonioni's characters. Antonioni uses dedramatization to great effect as the more 'boring' the film becomes, the more interestingly both his film and characters develop. Unlike his contemporary Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960), who used the exhaustion of the spectacle to reach similar themes, Antonioni explores ennui through tediousness, as the more time passes with 'nothing' happening, the more we feel connected to the characters' state of anxiety and alienation. It is no wonder Antonioni's

work is shrouded in ambiguity. His characters lack traditional film development but are rather used as cinematic devices latched onto their surrounding landscapes, allowing for symbolic expressions and explorations of the philosophical dilemmas and questions that humans endure within the confines of modernity. In *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* (1998), Gilberto Perez argues that "[p]lace rather than action, situation rather than event, is Antonioni's chief concern" (370). Even this form of symbolic alienation is hard to pin down in Antonioni's films, since it is done predominantly through landscapes that offer differing, often contradicting, interpretations. For example, the volcanic Island of Lisca Bianca that is the setting for Anna's disappearance near the beginning of the film and the image of Mount Etna that makes up the foreground of the film's final shot bookend *L'Avventura* with landscapes that simultaneously reflect beauty, terror, infertile violence, and a sensuousness that exists within the human condition; though like the volcanoes themselves, they remain dormant or silent within us.

As stated, one of Spacks' defining distinctions between boredom and ennui is how boredom does not place the individual above or superior to their environment. The deserted and lonely settings and landscapes in Antonioni's films mirror the characters' psyche, blurring the characters into the landscapes that surround them. Antonioni achieves this by using far shots, giving us a dislocated and alienated "stance of critical detachment" (Perez 90), and thereby linking "the idle periods of everyday banality" and the 'dehumanizing' of both the characters and landscapes (Delezue, *Cinema* 5). Gilberto Perez brilliantly aligns Antonioni's camera with the perspective of the stranger:

> The paths of strangers in Antonioni, the paths of the stranger that is his camera, are an unsettling relativistic geometry mapping the space and time of modern life, a web of lines of orientation and disorientation that come together at unexpected meeting points and drift apart in directions unforeseen. (382)

Describing the scene in *L'Eclisse*, where Monica Vitti's character Vittoria stares out of her window only for her gaze to come upon a stranger watching her from his window, Perez describes how all the strangers' gazes (Vittoria, the stranger watching her, the camera, and the audience) create "the effect…of our suddenly seeing ourselves as the world distantly sees us" (379). This is taken to its limits at the end of the film, when all the humans completely disappear from the film's final shots, although the removal of characters does not necessarily diminish their presence**.** In *L'Avventura*, Anna's disappearance is foreshadowed even when she is in the film through her attitude. The little time she is on screen, Antonioni makes it transparent that Anna is both emotionally and spiritually absent. We instantly see that Anna wishes to be alone and is bored with herself, her friends, and her relationship with Sandro. Anna even announces her "*noia*" with the whole trip and leaves to swim on her own (0:14:20). When everyone joins her, Anna lies about a shark swimming around that ends the fun. Although she states to Claudia that she did not know why she made up such a story, Anna's malaise suggests that she is wishing for either some kind of excitement or possibly even death to extinguish her anguish. The main thing that separates Anna from her friends is not necessarily her *ennui* but the fact she acknowledges and to some extent embraces it. Yet, once Anna disappears, she becomes the film's spectre that haunts the rest of the cast, especially Sandro and Claudia.

In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985/1989), Deleuze argues that "in *The Adventure*, the vanished woman causes an indeterminable gaze to weigh on the couple - which gives them the continual feeling of being spied on, and which explains the lack of co-ordination of their objective movements, when they flee whilst pretending to look for

her" (8). However, Anna's haunts the others through the ennui and existential boredom that infects both Sandro and Claudia, who appeared cheerful prior to her disappearance, then slowly become alienated and bored with modern life and its relationships.

Paradoxically, by making his characters fade into their environments, Antonioni simultaneously dislocates the viewer from the same environment or space. Even if boredom is a "response to the immediate" as Spacks claims, in film and literature, artists still tend to place their characters above the environment (Lundin 240, n31). A paradoxical combination of Antonioni's dislocation and absorption leads us back to a connection with *ennui*, where the individual is both part of the immediate and the infinite, placing humanity in an exterior/interior state of a liminal environment. This is especially evident in *Red Desert*, a film whose landscapes are dominated by grand images of industrialization and technology, a symbolic image of human achievement and modernity over Nature. The factories represent the world the characters have been absorbed into, but one that at the same time signifies humans' ability to produce their own environments: "I think the complex horizon filled with factories is much more beautiful, even esthetically, than the uniform green line of the pine forest. Because behind the factories, you sense the presence of human beings. They're alive" (Antonioni 1964, 00: 03:38 – 00:03:57). Antonioni now points to a world where the sublime has been technologized and produced by humanity instead of God or Nature. Antonioni's changing landscapes juxtapose humanity's natural and artificial characters, symbolizing both what we cannot escape and what we can modify within ourselves.

Antonioni's films may dwell on the theme of a sacred void within a modern

technologizing world[57], but he does not place blame on it. Antonioni's themes of boredom and alienation are a reflection of our ambiguous and liminal world, where a nostalgic view of the past and tradition collides with optimism for the future, leaving us with the inability for action and communication. In a statement released during Cannes in 1960, Antonioni argued that

> we make use of an aging morality, of outworn myths, of ancient conventions. And we do this in full consciousness of what we are doing. Why do we respect such a morality? The conclusion which my characters reach is not that of moral anarchy. They arrive, at best, at a sort of reciprocal pity. That too, you will tell me, is old. But what else is there left to us?" (Antonioni 144).

For Antonioni, the temporal-liminal enigma of secularized modernity has resulted in the inability to properly communicate with one another and has also become a catalyst of alienation and boredom. The result is an indication of the frailty of modern love, one of secularized modernity's last standing habitats of secularized sacredness. The fleeting moments of connection in *L'Avventura* and *L'Eclisse* may ostensibly point to a difficulty or even inability of achieving modern love and communication for extended periods of time, leaving us with a sense of "solipsism" (Brunette 47), where the "failures of human connection emphasize the death impulse found in boredom" (Paliwoda 166). Although the genuine connection between the two modern strangers Giuliana and Corrado in *Red Desert* does in fact dispute this idea of solipsism as an explicit theme of Antonioni's films, and despite both characters finally meeting someone who may truly understand their strangerhood, this relationship does not lead to any form of sustainable happiness or

[57] Speaking of *Red Desert,* Cooper and Skrade (1970) claim that he "cannot conceive of a more powerful, gripping, unrelenting illustration and experience of Tillich's analysis of the sources and reality of contemporary man's dilemma than Antonioni's [film]", in that the individual's "place does not know him anymore" (8,9).

love, since it is difficult for even a substantial connection in liminal space to solidify into promising or utopic resolutions.

DIGITAL BOREDOM

Bertrand Russell commented in *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930/2015) that "[w]e are less bored than our ancestors were, but we are more afraid of boredom. We have come to know, or rather to believe, that boredom is not part of the natural lot of man, but can be avoided by a sufficiently vigorous pursuit of excitement" (37). This fear of boredom has been exacerbated since Russell's statement rather than alleviated, even leaving us with a fear of becoming bored with what we use to alleviate boredom, which could result in a transition from simple boredom into a profound, more existential boredom. This is where the writings of Tao Lin can be situated, with stories that carry the torch of the modern stranger living in ennui in much the same vein as Antonioni did with his films. Despite using a different medium, Lin's work seems to continue and develop these lingering themes of boredom, unhappiness, and the hardships of communication. Lin takes his contemporary generation and links them to the early modernist existentialists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who are suffering from a form of ennui and meaninglessness that manifests itself in the bombardment and totalizing discourse of information rather than an onslaught of the modernist spectacle. His themes rest on millennial boredom and laziness told through 'plotless' and detached narratives that can unquestionably result in a hypnotic and frustrating reading experience. In focusing on the boredom of daily activities, Lin's 'Kmart realism' shadows Jean Paul

Sartre's famous novel *Nausea* (1938)[58], what many consider the cornerstone novel of existential sickness and boredom. Although Sartre's first novel is possibly a significant inspiration for Lin's work, Lin advances Sartre's novel by focusing on modern strangers rather than outsiders. Whereas Sartre's protagonist Antoine Roquentin is mainly a recluse in the mold of Fyodor Dostoevsky's Underground Man, someone who abhors the contact of others, Lin's characters are highly social beings; contemporary *flâneurs* that are both engaged yet, simultaneously, feel removed from their physical and digital surroundings, which in many cases become hard to distinguish from one another. Due to its permanent liminal characteristics, cyberspace no longer has the ability to dislocate someone from the physical world, since being in a state of dislocation has become commonplace.

While Lin's early work, such as *Eeeee Eee Eeee* (2007), *Shoplifting from American Apparel* (2009), or his short story collection *Bed* (2007), showcase a promising talent in modern literature, his last novel *Taipei* (2013) establishes him as one of the great voices of contemporary America. *Taipei*, like most of Lin's writings, focuses on the current generation born into Internet culture, social media, and smart phones, immersed in tools that, at least initially, cast away boredom at will. It also emphasizes the struggle for meaning in a modern age while containing the lingering discontent of generations past. Lin however, shows how monotonous alleviating boredom can become, pointing to an

[58] Lin's most obvious Sartrian allusion of boredom and absurdity may come in the short story "Love Is a Thing on Sale for More Money Than There Exists" from *Bed:Stories* (2007), although a lot more playful:

> People began to quit their jobs. They saw that their lives were small and threatened, and so they tried to cherish more, to calm down and appreciate things for once. But in the end, bored in their homes, they just became depressed and susceptible to head colds. They filled their apartments with pets, but then neglected to name them. They became nauseous and unbelieving. They did not believe that they themselves were nauseous, but that it was someone else who was nauseous—that it was all, somehow, a trick. A fun joke. (10)

uncanny unhappiness that we should not be feeling anymore. As the main tool we use when trying to hastily end boredom, and with our ability to accesses it at any place and any time, the Internet has led many people to assume that we have ended, or at least reduced the amount of boredom we have to endure (Mann 115). Lin's portrayal of characters constantly reaching for social media is never far away from the "bored expression" (*Taipei* 5, 8, 27, 29, 138, 157, 170) that dominates their emotions. Lin likens the world of social media to drug use, something that can create excitement and an altering of reality but can also lead us into a perpetual liminal state, back into boredom if overused, as his characters live constantly within a social media or drug induced tedium.

The Internet, or more specifically, the language of social media, seamlessly blends into ordinary life as words such as "unfriendable" (ibid. 15) interchange between online life and ordinary life. This alters even what his main protagonist Paul, who is strongly based on Lin himself, believes an intimate and physical relationship should be: something that is simply just around or being on in the background; something that is always there and used but not necessarily something to be fully engaged with. Paul continuously associates his life and humans with computers, compares the lights of the city to GIF files, and obsesses over a girl's Facebook page but never shows the same obsession with the physical girl herself. In Paul's Internet life, conversations are to be stored and returned to later, or possibly never, all the while spending his day doing prescription drugs and "refreshing Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, Gmail in a continuous cycle—with an ongoing, affectless, humorless realization" (ibid. 76), thereby making the two indistinguishable. The Internet easily blends into Paul's life and does not need to be extensively referred to since it is always there. As Paul himself states, "technology

seemed more likely to permanently eliminate life by uncontrollably fulfilling its only function: to indiscriminately convert matter, animate or inanimate, into computerized matter, for the sole purpose, it seemed, of increased functioning, until the universe was one computer." (ibid. 166-7). By being omnipresent but also "an abstraction undetectable in concrete reality" (ibid. 167), technology, dominated by the Internet, is able to subversively control one's perception or attitude towards life, without allowing for any sacred space. While floating in the background, virtually unseen, the Internet is not something you necessarily need to activate, like the jacking in and out as described in William Gibson's cyberpunk novels. There is no action; there is no immersing yourself in it and then getting out.

Boredom takes on a similar liminal stance for Paul and his social group, in that its continuous presence makes it seem it is not even there; when it completely surrounds you, boredom becomes something hard to acknowledge:

> Paul became aware of himself staring, "transfixed," at the center of the screen, with increasing intensity and no thoughts. He focused on resisting whatever force was preventing him from moving his head or neck or eyeballs until finally—suddenly, it seemed—he calmly turned his head a little and asked if Erin was bored.
> "I don't know. Are you?"
> "I can't tell," said Paul. "Are you?"
> "Maybe a little. Do you want to go?"
> "Yeah," said Paul, and slowly stood. (Ibid. 214)

Boredom also seems to be a result of too much information and a lack of mystery. Everything is out in the open in Paul and his friends' lives; nothing is secretive from his love life to his drug use, but unlike Frankenstein, who was horrified by learning the truth, Paul's group is simply bored. Paul and Erin may have a relationship of full disclosure but in the end fail to communicate meaningfully and also lack a mysteriousness to be excited

about; there is never anything they could learn from each other in the future of their relationship. And although total disclosure allows them to understand more about themselves and their future, as Brian Williems (2015) says of the novel, "[t]he enumeration of possible futures closes down future possibilities" (232). Echoing Leopardi, since the possibility to a better future is always in the cards, the present becomes worthless, and as a result so does the future, therefore keeping Paul in a continuous process of permanent liminality and boredom. However, as with Antonioni, Lin does not seem to portray social media (technology) as the cause of his generation's ills but rather more of a catalyst in understanding the void left by modern existence.

This critique does not come from an outsider, from an older individual who cannot understand modern technology. Like all modern strangers, the critique comes from within, from someone born into its world. This is the reason why as much as boredom and even a breakdown of communication is allocated to social media use, Lin does not shy away from showing us that Paul and Erin's 'digital' relationship also flourishes in both communication and creativity as much as it seems to be damaged by it. The problem comes from the fact that young people like Paul and Erin are not allowed to be bored, where the fear of boredom has forced them to constantly seek entertainment, which eventually leaves them exhausted with the concept of constantly trying to entertain themselves. While seeing his reflection in his computer screen, Paul links humanity and technology together within a liminal space, as a place of both utopian imaginary and a place of the secular void:

> He minimized Safari and saw his face, which seemed bored and depressed, his default expression. He maximized Safari and imagined millions of windows, positioned to appear like one window. He closed his eyes and thought of the backs of his eyelids as computer screens; both could display anything imaginable,

> so had infinite depth, but as physical surfaces were nearly depthless. (Lin, *Taipei* 170)

It is a profound boredom that allows Paul to witness a lack that in turn serves as a thirst for desire. Paradoxically, it also serves as knowledge that desire is perpetually unquenchable, thereby leaving Paul in a state of inaction and boredom. According to Ahmed in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), since '[h]appiness is an expectation of what follows" and "[t]he very expectation of happiness gives us a specific image of the future", it actually "provides the emotional setting for disappointment" (29), especially if we continually wait for happiness or if we continuously feel that the future is lost for us.

The fear of the future, of modern boredom's 'immortality' (Goodstein 6), pulls Paul into the 'past', possibly in an attempt to find remnants of the sacred**.** His family's Taiwanese culture and his racial background are a part of, yet also detached from his identity, since Paul is very much a modern American product. Lin seamlessly brings the modern stranger into his protagonist through a liminal interpretation of Paul's social, racial, and geographical character. Paul lives in a world where the traditional myths have fractured and crumbled but like Antonioni's films, are still spectres haunting us in the background. He is being pulled apart from the present/future of his current life of friends, drugs, social media that defines his contemporary New York existence, along with the cultural and traditional values of his parents, represented by Taipei, which, although it does not directly speak to him, nonetheless preoccupies him continuously. Paul is caught in a liminal sphere of past/future and tradition/advancement, where falling back into tradition paradoxically allows him the illusions of new sensations. This is something that Antonioni's characters are unable to achieve because tradition for them is repetition of their daily lives. As for Paul, who lives a stereotypical New York lifestyle, in order to

"feel "out of character,"" in a world that is itself out of character, or to experience "blandly otherworldly excitement" (Lin, *Taipei* 41), which a modern stranger such as Paul needs, he must go visit his parents in Taipei, the only place where he is able to feel this uncanny displacement. Visibly belonging yet socially estranged, Paul begins to experience the uncanny when he visits Taiwan, as Taipei is able to "disrupt the out-of-control formation of some incomprehensible worldview" (Lin, *Taipei*164**).** Although he used to never leave his parents' or uncle's apartment on previous visits, he begins to "internalize" and view the 'foreign' Taiwanese capital in subsequent trips as "less like a city than its own world, which he could leisurely explore …for years, or maybe indefinitely" (ibid). In Taipei, his displacement is far more uncanny than it is continual, as life is for him in New York, allowing Paul to experience some sort of sacred or utopian perspective removed from social media and the Internet, yet linked through exploring the physical city itself. While back in New York and looking at the movies that he and his new wife Erin filmed there, "Taipei seemed gothic and lunar…with the spare activity and structural density of a fully colonized moon that had been abandoned and was being recolonized; its science-fictional qualities seemed less advanced than ancient, haunted, of a future dark age" (ibid. 240). Taipei is able to reveal uncanny truths not only about his own life but also about his relationship with his casual friend turned wife.

Yet a modern stranger in liminalness cannot simply fall back into tradition as a solution, especially with customs that no longer fit the fleetingness of the modern world. For example, Paul and Erin bring their "New York' life of computers, social media, and drug use to Taiwan, something he tended to exclude on previous visits. Even though these are not exclusive to New York, and very well exist in modern Taiwan, Paul is no

longer able to coagulate his spatio-temporal binaries, as his New York life and Taiwanese life become the same. The illusion has only lasted so long for Paul, until he comes to terms, as Adorno (1991) once claimed, with the notion that "distant places are no longer – as they still were for Baudelaire's *ennui* – different places" (191). Additionally, Paul and Erin subscribe to the old tradition of marriage simply because it is still customary for a relationship to end there in our society, not necessarily out of a want or desire. A marriage ceremony is supposed to complete the rite of passage from child/adolescence into maturity and adulthood, yet Erin and Paul's relationship is grounded too much on a liminal plane for it to succeed in such a way. Their relationship, which is originally 'solid' or working in its liminalness, does not change after marriage, yet it is the expectation that something should and it failing to do so that proves to be the demise of their relationship. Lin argues that although revisiting the past and tradition can lead one to experience emotions and feelings that seem uncanny and therefore exciting, nevertheless, relying on or conforming to traditions and customs that no longer speak to our needs, without at least a reimagining of them, can no longer advance or save us from our liminal existence, and as a result, assists the modern stranger in a "default expression" of *ennui*.

A HEROIC LACK OF ATTUNEMENT

As we see with the work of Lin, Antonioni's expressions of modern malaise still remain significant problems in contemporary and modern times. It is true that stories about bored well-to-do white people, as in Antonioni's films, are not as attractive as once perceived, especially in world where far more significant social injustices have become more present. But that argument would be misleading, especially if we ignore the ironic and spiritual spark that exists within those stories. William Pamerleau (2011) recognizes

what Tillich regarded as "sacred emptiness" in Antonioni's films, where the absence of God, the spiritual, or rather the "awareness of the loss of meaning" (47). The scared void epitomized by existential boredom, identifies a moral or existential problem or void that essentially becomes spiritually substantial in the modern world (ibid. 5-6). Although stating a materialist argument, Henri Lefebvre's (1974/1991) claim that "space is never empty: it always embodies a meaning" (154), nonetheless applies to Tillich's ironic and paradoxical understanding of empty space because even nothing must contain something. Metaphorically, we can compare Tillich's view of empty space with a quantum theory of empty space in that it is not really empty but bursting with energy (Habegger 92). The idea of sacred emptiness is acknowledging that there is a sacred spark or energy in emptiness; energy in boredom.

Antonioni's films are also important because they predominantly deal with female protagonists and therefore 'female' boredom, especially in the *Red Desert*, which highlights what Ahmed (2010) and Betty Friedan (1963)[59] claim as the 1960s myth of the happy housewife. Even prior to the optimistic economic boom of the postwar years, women were not allowed to be happy, let alone bored, and therefore, their boredom would not be taken seriously, which for women was unfairly connected to "selfishness as opposed to the benevolence that engages one in meaningful action" (Spacks x**).** For the most part, historically boredom or *ennui* was considered as an unacceptable trait for a woman to possess, commonly disregarded as superficial or lacking any self-reflection or

[59] In the revolutionary book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Friedan unearths "the problem with no name", a unspoken and widespread ennui that housewives endured during the postwar years that consisted of a "strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States" (57).

soulful weight (Pease 22-3). Where male *ennui* was regarded as soulful and "ennoblingly individualized", women faced a double standard as boredom for them was a symptom for the lack of self (ibid 23). Yet, in spite of this, it was the upper class women of the eighteenth century, most notably in Britain, that transformed boredom into a literary endeavor, as "boredom haunts the margins of much women's fiction" (Spacks 70). This however did nothing to transform the misconception of bored women throughout modernity. By the nineteenth and early twentieth century, boredom became predominantly generalized as an upper class woman's problem or experience, either romanticized or portrayed as a mental illness (Pease 25). The doctors and psychologists of the time blamed these discontents with women's inability to cope with modernity (ibid. 30), when the problem was simply because they were not allowed to partake in it. Even when the newly educated New Woman rose in society at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, modernist texts rarely showed women struggling for independence in the workplace but instead portrayed as bored characters stuck at the typist desk and lacking agency (ibid. 21).

This is a reason why women have been frequently overshadowed by men as modern strangers or outsiders in both literature and film, despite continuously being "affect aliens" (Ahmed, *Happiness* 49). In 1888, British writer Amy Levy argued, "[t]he female club-lounger, the *flâneuse* of St James Street, latch-key in pocket and eye-glasses on the nose, remains a creature of the imagination" (cited in Elkin 11), largely due to the fact that women were not allowed the freedom and independence to access public space in the same way as men (Wolff 34-5). Levy's statement is somewhat ironic because the *flâneuse*, although perhaps "invisible" (Wolff 1985/1990; Gleber 1999), did exist. The

rise of the shopping malls allowed the women to experience the art of *flânerie* in public space (Wilson 101), while George Sand (born Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin), who dressed as a man in order to experience the freedom of modern urban space, the quintessential space of modernity, offers a more radical example of the *flâneuse*. Deborah Parsons (2000) claims that women were able to bring something different to the act of flânerie:

> A female observer corresponding to the social figure of the *flâneur* can be found in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when women were achieving greater liberation as walkers and observers in the public spaces of the city…Whereas Benjamin's *flâneur* increasingly becomes a metaphor for observation, retreating from the city streets once the arcades are destroyed to a place of scopic authority yet static detachment, women were entering the city with fresh eyes, observing it from within. It is with this social influx of women as empirical observers into the city street that aesthetic, urban perception as a specifically masculine phenomenon and privilege is challenged. (6)

While traditionally modern strangers or boredom with 'weight' has been a dominated by the male perspective, authors such as Virginia Woolf, or filmmakers such as Agnès Varda and Chantal Akerman, continued to challenge and push the boundaries of patriarchal society by focusing on the women strangers of modernity.

Antonioni's bored female characters carry with them the soulful and individualistic *ennui* that was wrongly only associated with men, and while a feminist critique of boredom exists in these films, Antonioni does not divide boredom into male or female but instead uses these women characters to represent the bored individual, the 'everyman' so to speak, of secularized modernity. Regardless of whether Antonioni's films were intentionally feminist or not[60], the heroines played by Monica Vitti helped

[60] As Peter Brunette argues, Antonioni "genuinely seems to have mixed feelings towards men as men, toward the male way of being in the world. (Or do we read the films this

change the dynamics of how women can be portrayed in films by both shedding light on a growing, unspoken problem for women but likewise how that problems connects to everyone. This brings us to the question of 'can it be revolutionary or heroic to be bored or unhappy?" Predominantly, boredom is described as a negative mood or experience, usually referring to a lack of something: spiritual sacredness, meaning, or simply entertainment/enjoyment. All forms of boredom contain their own nuisances; however, all seem to be defined as a mood or disposition that was measured as negative. From the sinful, evil, or as a slothful device of the devil that characterized *acedia,* to the contemporary nihilism that is attached to modern equivalent, boredom seems to lack any positive elements. The fact that boredom or 'not being in the mood' is so closely tied to evil or nihilistic predispositions compels us to render it as a negative and unfortunate, though necessary 'side effect' of modern secular life, similar to the way Durkheim (1897/1975) aligns suicide with the "free inquiry" of Protestantism. Nonetheless, boredom can still be seen as a catalyst for change, creativity, and progress. A psychological study in 2011 showed that "[p]eople who feel bored experience that their current situation is meaningless and are motivated to reestablish a sense of meaningfulness" (van Tilburg & Igou 1790), and therefore attempt to escape from. Ironically, escapism lies in the similar liminal realm as boredom, and likewise, shares a negative and passive undertone to it, as it is often seen as an immature stance of being unable to cope with reality. If boredom is an over-dwelling on reality, and escape a rejection, a combination of the two can be seen as a movement in liminal space that is

way because feminism has altered our interpretive frame? Certainly our reading of *L'avventura*'s gender dynamics would have been different in 1960)". However, Brunette goes on to say that even "[w]hen men become the central characters…the critique becomes subtler and more conflicted, but it does not disappear" (34).

able to create a realm of possibility, both permanent and temporary. In his study of escapism, Ty-Fu Tuan (1998) states that escapism allows us to do "something extraordinary, namely "see" what is not there. Seeing what is not there lies at the foundation of all human culture" (6). As with liminality, both boredom and escapism can therefore be positive elements in one's life, though can become problematic if either is prolonged or perpetual, resulting in unhappiness.

Despite having reservations of producing "a heroic model of the unhappy revolutionary" (*Happiness* 169), Ahmed does see a politicized notion of unhappiness and the stranger, which seem to be intrinsically related:

> The history of the word *unhappy* might teach us about the unhappiness of the history of happiness. In its earliest uses, unhappy meant "causing misfortune or trouble." Only later, did it come to mean "miserable in lot or circumstances" or "wretched in mind." The word wretched also has a suggestive genealogy, coming from wretch, referring to a stranger, exile, or banished person. The wretch is not only the one driven out of his or her native country but is also defined as one who is "sunk in deep distress, sorrow, misfortune, or poverty," "a miserable, unhappy, or unfortunate person," "a poor or hapless being," and even "a vile, sorry, or despicable person." Can we rewrite the history of happiness from the point of view of the wretch? If we listen to those who are cast as wretched, perhaps their wretchedness would no longer belong to them. The sorrow of the stranger might give us a different angle on happiness not because it teaches us what it is like or must be like to be a stranger, but because it might estrange us from the very happiness of the familiar. (ibid. 17)

The 'sorrow of the stranger', living in a liminal or sacred void allows us an alternative view or shadow of modernity even while modernity itself was establishing. The same spectre that has haunted secularized modernity, that haunts the ending of *Frankenstein* through ambiguity, has remained, although mutated, altered, or adapted to the uncertainty and liminalness that is modernity. Ahmed gets closer to the idea of boredom and even inaction when discussing moods, specifically the concept of non-attunement in her essay "Not In the Mood" (2014). In the face of a fictional public mood of happiness and

nationhood, Ahmed claims "[n]ot to be made happy is to refuse the promise of this conversion" and to "withdraw from the situation" or "not being in the mood for happiness becomes a political action" (28). Once again, Ahmed brings in the concept of the stranger, the person who is out of place or alienated from their surrounding environment, however one that has shifted with the consequences of modernity, becoming radicalized. Ahmed may have concentrated her analysis of the stranger to simply indicate migrants, queers, and women, what she regards as "affect aliens", a definition that goes beyond the modern stranger. However, Ahmed's work channels the same essence of the monstrous, uncanny, and liminality that has defined the concept of the modern stranger throughout secularized modernity.

There is a correlation between Ahmed's relationship between non-attunement, the stranger, and political action, and Adorno's arguments of boredom and political indifference. Although I am not entirely convinced of Adorno's argument that "[w]henever behaviour in spare time is truly autonomous, determined by free people for themselves, boredom rarely figures"**,** since it is arguable if truly autonomous time is even achievable, and that no matter how free people are, repetition is unavoidable, as is the boredom that will ultimately be a part of it**,** I do agree that boredom and political apathy can be closely related (192). On the other hand, in *Happiness* Ahmed warns us against viewing unhappiness as a heroic stance because it can lead to indifference (169), but neither inaction nor boredom necessarily means 'doing nothing', just as not selecting a side does not automatically result in indifference. The liminal space between an attitude of 'you are with us or against us' can be considered a political action in itself. The inaction of not standing for a national anthem by black American athletes, for example,

becomes a political action that while stems from violence and treatment of black Americans, eventually works as a protest by exposing the singing of the national anthem before sporting events as a boring symbol of a the recurrent, illusionary, and repetitive mythos of a happy and united nation. The ironic statement is not necessarily against the *idea* of a united and happy nation but what the currently belief of a united and happy nation is. People may argue that nothing is held sacred anymore and tradition no longer matters but protests such as these are not against the secularized sacredness of nationhood, but a protest against a failing illusion of sacredness; in a way, sacredness can only be challenged by sacredness itself.

Boredom is an essential and ineradicable aspect of modern life, especially since contemporary ways of evading it, through tools such as the internet and social media, have paradoxically also allowed for its perpetualization. It therefore depends on how we navigate and channel the liminal mood of boredom, both internally and externally, while likewise being cautious circumnavigating through the fascinating new digital technologies, which are liminal in themselves.

VI: THE SACREDNESS OF DIGITAL LIMINALITY

"And where does the newborn go from here? The net is vast and infinite" (Major Motoko Kusanagi)
- *Ghost in the Shell* (1995)

Men seldom moved their bodies; all unrest was concentrated in the soul
- "The Machine Stops", E.M. Forster

"'If God made anything better, he kept it for himself.'" (Peter Riviera)
- *Neuromancer*, William Gibson

There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together. Producing-machines, desiring-machines everywhere, schizophrenic machines, all of species life: the self and the non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever.
- *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze & Guattari,

INTRODUCTION

Werner Herzog's documentary *Lo and Behold, Reveries of the Connected World* (2016) begins with computer scientist and internet pioneer Leonard Kleinrock taking us through what Herzog states as "ground zero of one of the biggest revolutions we as humans are experiencing…the birthplace of the internet" (0:00.56 – 0:01:05). Opening the door to the small computer lab, Kleinrock looks into the camera and claims, "[w]e are now entering a sacred location…it's a holy place" (ibid. 0:01:34 – 0:01:38). This sacred space, preserved, or rather re-assembled to its 1969 aesthetic, is a secular shrine venerating the advent of the sacred and liminal space of our contemporary world - the threshold between reality and virtuality; between the physical and the digital worlds that is the Internet. Many scholars and academics have labeled, both positively and negatively, the internet or virtual space as liminal (Madge and O'Conner 2005; Yang 2006; Pimenova 2009; Holt 2011), in that it dissolves various boarders but also signifies the main source of a shift of uncertainty in how we define the human. Cyberspace uncannily blurs the lines of what is alien and what is familiar in an entirely new way, especially in

regard to the human consciousness. While the cyborg is the technological transformation of 'meat' to metal or the breakdown of such binaries, cyberspace dissolves this material relationship altogether, establishing something more abstract and immaterial.

In a similar sense, the Internet has even replaced God as our source of a spiritual mechanism. The self-proclaimed technopagan Mark Pesce believes that "computers can be as sacred as we are, because they can embody our communication with each other and with the entities — the divine parts of ourselves — that we invoke in that space" (cited in Davis 176). William Indick similarly claims in *The Digital God: How Technology Will Reshape Spirituality* (2015),

> [t]he internet has already been compared to God. Like the monotheistic God, it is abstract and distant; yet, simultaneously, it can be personalized and contextualized into the present. In its own way, the internet shares with God the same divine qualities of omniscience, omnipresence, and possibly even omnipotence. It is quite possible that the internet will give rise to a new form of spiritual perception … a Digital God. (206)

This new 'Digital God' is paradoxical because unlike spiritual insight, which is internal, the new sacred space is an "external sensation…a place where everyone is perpetually "online." For many people, being connected to the Internet at every moment has become a psychological necessity, an existential lifeline" (ibid.). Seeing God within the Internet is part of the ongoing process of secularization/resacralization that largely epitomizes modernity. In "The Internet as a Metaphor for God?" (2000), Charles Henderson states that "[i]f the Internet is coming to be seen as a metaphor for God, it is not because the new metaphor dropped magically from heaven, but by the same process through which most religious symbols have been born: naturally out of the everyday experience of real people" (80). Oliver Krueger (2004) uses Thomas Luckmann's individual and modernity induced theme of "invisible religion" to argue that the Internet can act as a provider but

also a mirror of religion, as "the Internet reveals not only the developments of institutionalized religions like Christianity but also, in an extensive way, of the individual constellations of Thomas Luckmann's *invisible religion* or the so-called individual "patchwork-religions" in Europe, North and South America, and Japan" (184). The Internet is not an entity of mythical perfection and flawlessness as God has been perceived by traditional monotheistic religions but instead can be seen as an even more liminal representation of *Frankenstein*'s Creature, a reflection that conceptualizes the fractured modern human existence. Cyberspace, therefore, seems to further challenge the idea of the unitary self by dissolving the binary of both self and other, alongside the self and self, in that unlike the cyborg that is still confined to the idea of the corporeal, cyberspace predominately removes or at least manipulates the use of the physical body. Yet, although we seem to have a complex situation where individual and community are intertwined online, we have also seen an intensification of surveillance and loss of privacy as a consequence.

The Internet has further infringed on our private space, more than any metropolis could ever imagine. Whereas one lost one's privacy in a city simply during social interactions, the Internet haunts us like a spectre by recording and remembering everything about us, making social and public life a continuous experimentation and spectacle that never ends, all this despite the internet's paradoxical anonymity, thus making it just as secretive and mysterious as it is revealing. As a result, the Internet Age seems to have placed us deeper in a realm of permanent liminality. Arpad Szakolczai designates this liminal "condition when any of the phases in this sequence becomes frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame. This can happen both with individuals

undergoing an 'initiation rite' and with groups who are participating in a collective ritual, 'a social drama'" (212). Szakolczai uses the example of monks living in monasteries who continuously perform rites for a "performance which will only be given in the next world" (ibid.). The most unlikely of the different forms of permanent liminality is when "[t]he stage of preparation can be played endlessly while the performance is postponed forever". Szakolczai points out that the opposite is also true in that "[o]ne can also imagine situations in which it is the performance that is being staged endlessly, and all the actors become pinned down or identified by their roles" (214). Szakolczai seems to find this state "less believable" even though he acknowledges that in *Ulysses* (1922), James Joyce uses the individual who is "worn out by the duty of permanent performance" as "archetype for the modern condition" (ibid). Joyce's representation seems more in line with the modern stranger of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, since his two main characters in the novel were outsiders to the rest of their social environment rather than part of the norm; however, the notion of a permanent performance being staged endlessly as an archetype seems to be more indicative of the current Internet Age.

This chapter focuses on the literary interpretations of cyberspace, the symbolic space of the Internet, from incarnations of cyberpunk, beginning with Gibson's Sprawl trilogy and the Ghost in the Shell series to more current and 'realistic' depictions of social media and online life in literature such as *The Circle* (2013) by Dave Eggers. What we notice is that there is, at least initially, a continuation of similar themes of secularization/resacralization. However, there seems to be more of a negative shift in how we ultimately view the Internet, the more entrenched it becomes in our reality. Both the concept of the Internet as a resacralized source of the divine and that of the modern

stranger were resurrected and intertwined in the early nineteen eighties through the fascinating literary and film movement of cyberpunk. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982/2007), *Neuromancer* (1984), and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995/1998) are three of the most widely known cyberpunk works and can be seen a sort of 'holy trinity' of the science fiction subgenre. What these three major works have in common is that they are all influenced by noir crime fiction, they describe worlds in which the divisions between West and East in one way or another are beginning to break down, they deal with the uncanny relationship between humans and technology and self, and finally, they all in some way deal with the concept of the modern stranger. However, since the main topic on the chapter is the Internet and cyberspace, I will concentrate on William Gibson's 'Sprawl' trilogy (*Neuromancer*, *Count Zero* (1986), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988)) and the *Ghost in the Shell* series.

The dystopian settings of these two future universes take place in similar, post-WW-III, balkanized worlds, where the United States has fractured into various sections or urban city-states and where Japan has become the strongest and most stable economic nation in the world. More importantly, they are worlds in which these nation states are continuously subjugated by corporations and more importantly, pervasive technology, where both cybernetic implants and artificial intelligence culminate in the creation of cyberspace. With all the similarities these stories share, they ironically differ from one another by focusing on contrasting perspectives of a similar world. While *Ghost in the Shell* follows a group of individuals that try to uphold the Law, the Sprawl novels concentrate on the Underworld of crime and the personalities that navigate within it. The

Sprawl novels'[61] emphasis is on one of the fracture sections of the Unites States known as the Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis, a 'sprawling' mega-city that encompasses most of the eastern American Seaboard. The Sprawl's influence on the novel is overshadowing. While only *Count Zero*'s setting is located there, as Tom Henthorne (2011**)** argues, it "serves as an emblem" for Gibson's concept of the universal cityscape and his fictional world as a whole, since the "entire world seems to be developing a sprawling monoculture that incorporates into itself elements from most of the industrialized world" (114). Several critics (McHale 1992; G. Miller, Jr. 2016; Rapatzikou 2004) reference Foucault's *heterotopia*[62] when describing both cyberpunk and the Sprawl, rightly directing us away from seeing Gibson's world as simply dystopian, including Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2006), who makes convincing claims of seeing it as a *heterotopia* since it "simultaneously represents, contests, and inverts public spaces and places" (52). This is also emblematic of the main characters that Gibson centres his stories on, as its criminals, mercenaries, hackers, and drug addicts have almost a physical and even a transcendent connection to the Sprawl's fragmentation either through cyberspace or the sub-cultures found within the city's streets. The Sprawl becomes an overarching symbol of the fragmented self of the modern stranger, and not just of the world that constantly surrounds them.

[61] This chapter will focus on the three novels, although the Sprawl universe was introduced as early as 1981 in some of Gibson's short stories that were later complied in the collection *Burning Chrome* (1986).

[62] Foucault (1970/2005) argued that unlike utopias' characterization of being a space that is an ordered and a coherent whole, heterotopia is a state organized "in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a
common locus beneath them all". These are disturbing and disquieting textual spaces "because they secretly undermine language… dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences (xix)

The setting of *Ghost in the Shell*, on the other hand, predominately centres on the economically and nationally sound country of Japan, mostly through the perspective of the members of Section 9, an anti-terrorist and intelligence department that is led by the series' main protagonist, the cyborg Major Motoko Kusanagi. Section 9 was established in order to stop the criminal cyber-hackers that Gibson's novels tend to romanticize. However, their independence from government supervision likewise removes them from the nation state and establishes them within their own liminalness. Although it can be argued that the two stories examine two different sides of the same cyberpunk coin, it is through the use of the Internet that the two worlds traverse one another, as cyberspace acts as a liminal space where one is able to gain control that one normally would not have held but is also a space where that freedom can be regulated and controlled, allowing for both perspectives to intersect with one another, thereby continuously blurring the lines between restriction and liberation.

Mike Featherstone and Rogers Burrows (1996) define cyberspace as "an information space in which data is configured in such a way as to give the operator the illusion of control, movement and access to information, in which he/she can be linked together with a large number of users via a puppet-like simulation which operates in a feedback loop to the operator" (2). In regard to cyberpunk, Featherstone and Burrows emphasize the relationship between human and technology:

> The term cyberpunk refers to the body of fiction built around the work of William Gibson and other writers, who have constructed visions of the future worlds of cyberspaces, with all their vast range of technological developments and power struggles. It sketches out the dark side of the technological-fix visions of the future, with a wide range of post-human forms which have both theoretical and practical implications; theoretically, in influencing those who are trying to reconstruct the social theory of the present and near future, and practically, in terms of those (largely young people) who are keen to devise experimental

> lifestyles and subcultures which aim to live out and bring about selected aspects of the cyberspace/cyberpunk constellation. (3)

This "illusion of control" seems to become even more common and significant theme in contemporary literature regarding cyberspace than it does with the early depictions in cyberpunk. Although cyberpunk does concentrate on "the dark side of the technological-fix", it is as much about its utopian and resacralized aspects as it is of its technophobic ones. According to William Covino (1998), cyberpunk exercises an uncanny association of the sacred and profane as it contains "an impulse that locates magico-religious behavior in the secular realm" even though "it also represents the implicitly sacrilegious attitude of the sociocultural rebel" (41), though, as I have argued, these two are not as mutually exclusive as once thought. Silvio Gaggi argues in "The Cyborg and the Net" (2003) that

> [n]ovels like *Neuromancer* and films like *Ghost in the Shell* contain examples of such entities [having a will of their own different from their creators] – Wintermute and Neuromancer in *Neuromancer*, the "Puppet Master" in *Ghost in the Shell*. Such entities present themselves as hostile forces, though in the end, as is the case in these instances, they may reveal themselves to be quasi-religious higher beings, the next stage in an evolutionary process towards a higher form of consciousness." (135)

Similarly, Frank McConnell (2009) connects religious spiritualism with Gibson by arguing that the novel *Neuromancer* is a "gnostic skewing of the *Divine Comedy*" (149), thereby continuing secularizing/resacralizing the tradition of the modern stranger that was laid out by Baudelaire and Leopardi in the early nineteenth century. This liminal perspicacity of secular/sacred process with regards to technological media, interestingly enough, was carried out by nineteenth century Evangelical Christians in Antebellum America. In John Lardas Modern's absorbing work *Secularism in Antebellum America* (2011), he examines the resacralization process behind the evangelical passion of media

technology and communication networks: "[t]he difference that new media technologies and semiotic strategies made in recasting the production, distribution, and reception of evangelical words was substantial in making secularism a metaphysical solvent"(9). As Modern describes, the secularizing religious movement believed in a "system" of evangelical media that was crucial in regards viewing religion as a "personal concern" (65). By incorporating scared Biblical text with not just ordinary life, but secular reason and technological progress of mass media, the evangelical Christians of Antebellum America saw this paradoxical mixing of sacred and secular as "true religion", which "revolved around voluntary attention and systematicity" (11). Sacrality, therefore, was merged with a semiotic belief of technological progress, social connectivity, and media circulation. Evangelical secularism, as with cyberpunk depictions of cyberspace, saw the transitory power of technological media as an "[e]nd to bondage" and the beginning of individual freedom and belief (112).

The central difference between cyberpunk and previous works regarding resacralization and the modern stranger, therefore, is not necessarily a breaking away from Judeo-Christian teachings, since cyberpunk is laden with its symbolism, but due to cyberpunk establishing itself within a world of post-globalization. Cyberpunk amalgamates Christian mythos with other religious and sacred imageries. This is why the Internet plays such a powerful and important role in cyberpunk, as Ronald Cole-Turner writes in "Science, Technology, and the Mission of Theology" (2001): "for many, the Internet is not merely the key symbol of globalization; it is its driving force…we must recognize that the Internet links but does not homogenize or reduce cultures to a common global culture…it brings the diversity of the world to consciousness" (147). Especially

when it still encompasses an element of science fiction, cyberspace was a hybrid utopia of interconnecting knowledge and values, having the uncanny ability to blur borders and binaries and still being the perfect representation of both society and the individual in a liminal modern age. This immaterial, even spiritual value of globalization is differentiated from the more dystopian, physical or material aspects of globalization found within the technological cities and the dehumanizing multinational corporations that control these cyberpunk worlds.

Cyberpunk depictions of technology and cyberspace are as much about autonomy as they are about control and addiction. As Chun points out, cyberpunk is more than fiction dealing with the technological fetishism of society. Equally, it is about self and other, as its "global vision…stems from its conflation of racial otherness with localness" (29). Chun states that the cyberpunk classics like *Neuromancer* and the *Ghost in the Shell* film embody a sense of "high-tech orientalism", which "enables a form of passing—invariably portrayed as the denial of a body rather than the donning of another—that relies on the other as disembodied representation" (177-8), leading to a process of self-alienation but also a source of sexual fetishizing. Both novels, according to Chun, orientalize the other, Japan in *Neuromancer* and Hong Kong in the case of *Ghost in the Shell*, which thereby configures the Internet as a space of escape from these locations. As Chun argues, "cyberspace allows for piracy and autonomy" and "allows the hacker to assume the privilege of the imperial subject" (187-8). Chun's assessment, which does well in arguing for cyberspace as a space of control over the colonized other, however, overreaches with its Orientalizing claims, especially in regard to *Ghost in the Shell*. Since director Mamoru Oshii chose Hong Kong as the main inspiration for his unnamed Asian

metropolis because he felt it represented an optical representation of information, making it a perfect visual companion to the invisible cyberspace, Chun argues that Oshii fetishizes Hong Kong as a city of data, seeing it as a disorienting city with no past and future. However, Oshii was also heavily influenced by the cities of Europe, particularity Eastern Europe, especially for the second film of the series, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004) and his live-action film *Avalon* (2001), which takes place in a comparable universe (Hanson 161). Therefore, Oshii's films, like other cyberpunk works, portray a sense of futuristic universalism and even normalness through their depictions of urbanism, while containing the idea of being a tourist or alien within this normalness. Although these cyberpunk works address the concept of the other, they ultimately destroy these binaries to establish a more post-globalized and "culturally ambiguous" (Dorman 43) philosophy of self/other than critics such as Chun acknowledge.

Relatedly, Andrew Ross (1991) famously critiques cyberpunk as a genre that fanaticizes the male, "white middle-class conception of inner city life" (146) and that "cyberpunk was a tale about the respective psychogeographies of country (suburb) and city" (147). According to Ross, cyberpunk's "main claim to postmodernity lay in its treatment of the less geographically distinct realm of space and time that was now available through information technologies, the cartographic coordinates of technosimulated space that have no fixed geographic referent in the physical landscape" (ibid.). Despite this critique, there is a direct link to the global cities that span Gibson's and Oshii's work, and their unique visions of the Internet that cannot be ignored, in that both seem to tear down boundaries in favour of a universalism. Samuel R. Delany (1994) rightly sees Ross' critique as suggesting "the wearing away of the rural/urban divide" as

"[t]he microtechnology, that in cyberpunk, connects the streets to the multinational structures of information in cyberspace also connects the middle-class country to the middle-class city" (cited in Dery198). While Chun and Ross's arguments examine the act of racial, class, and gender displacement in cyberpunk, the major emphasis of the chapter is the act of displacement in regard to resacralization and in relation to the modern stranger within cyberspace.

HYBRID RELIGIONS OF CYBERPUNK

The Sprawl trilogy and the *Ghost in the Shell* series are witnesses of cyberpunk's liminal world of cyberspace, which, although it removes the physical property of the city, nonetheless retains, and in fact, supersedes its uncanny and liminal characteristics of fractured and technological space. The genre's assessment of progress takes a similar approach to *Frankenstein*, in that social evolution, most notably technology, is far too complex to designate any indication of linear progress. Although technology is ever present and dominates these future worlds, they are also continuously haunted by it: "In stories and films like *Neuromancer*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Blade Runner*, spectral entities unleashed by the modern machine haunt dark cities teeming with nocturnal life. The future they evoke is obscure and unknown, totally unlike well-illuminated destinies guaranteed by the predictable march of progress" (Greenspan 76). Yet in this case, the worlds in cyberpunk fiction are liminal in their totality. Traditional boundaries are broken down on every level in worlds where humans are machines, technologies are human, and corporations appear to be both: "Power … meant corporate power. The zaibatsus, the multinationals that shaped the course of human history, had transcended old barriers. Viewed as organisms, they had attained a kind of immortality" (*Neuromancer* 203). This

is not to say that cyberpunk's defining theme is centered on a negative perspective of the technological progress of humanity, for at times it also argues that it is its uncanny salvation. If corporations are liminal and therefore immortal, the humans in cyberpunk seem to be fairly influenced by them and also look towards the liminal in order to gain immortality. That being said, what is most interesting in regard to the topic of this study is that these tales of futuristic underworlds of crime, deceit, and technology alternatively consist of themes regarding the sacred and human connection. It is these human qualities of resacralization, such as human connection, which tend to be at odds with their technocratic world that propel most of the outsiders forward into a cybernetic world, and not only a sense of the power and money that control or define their societies.

Cyberpunk may seem to be anti-religious, especially in regard to Christianity. However, this is a symptom of its anti-authoritarian character rather than any abhorrence towards anything of a religious nature. To be certain, Christianity as an organized religion is continuously portrayed negatively in Gibson's Sprawl novels whenever mentioned. However, its symbolism formidably survives, which seems to be a common theme in a lot of cyberpunk, despite Samuel R. Smith's (2003) arguing that cyberpunk never portrays Christianity in a positive light (245).[63] For instance, *Neuromance*r both revitalizes Christianity's apocalyptic focus (Di Tomasso 482) and its messianic mission, while also addressing the Christian dualism of body and mind presented through the AIs Wintermute and Neuromancer: "Wintermute was hive mind, decision maker, effecting change in the world outside. Neuromancer was personality. Neuromancer was immortality" (269). The division between the two AIs also indicates a semblance to the

[63] For example, other cyberpunk films such as *Blade Runner* and *The Matrix* series are extremely transparent when using positive Christian metaphors and allusions.

hybridity of Christ, in that Wintermute elicits a God-like entity especially through its omnipresence, though it needs to merge with Neuromancer in order to establish a personality and unite with humanity through a resurrection of sorts.[64] Gibson warps these biblical metaphors in a similar way as Shelley does in *Frankenstein*. Wintermute ironically references the biblical God when he sarcastically asks the novel's main protagonist Case if it should appear to him in the matrix like a "burning bush" (*Neuromancer* 169), or when it tells Case "I am that which knoweth not the word" (ibid. 173), symbolizing a fractured God. If God's word, through scripture, is complete and final, Wintermute acknowledges that without Neuromancer, it is incomplete and really no different from humans: a fractured god that is unable to fully understand itself. Neuromancer, on the other hand, through individuality, is likened to Milton's Satan. When Wintermute is able to finally integrate with Neuromancer at the end of the novel, despite the latter's unwillingness, it claims a sense of unity, of completeness through otherness: "I'm the matrix, Case." Case laughed. "Where's that get you?" "Nowhere. Everywhere. I'm the sum total of the works, the whole show." (ibid. 269). When Case asks, somewhat ironically, if this means it is God, the newly amalgamated digital deity responds, "Things aren't different. Things are things." (ibid. 270). Case expects something to change[65]; he expects something different even though he is only able to appreciate Wintermute-Neuromancer in a familiar or traditional Western religious understanding. However, the Wintermute-Neuromancer entity understands that nothing

[64] "I die soon, in one sense. As does Wintermute" (*Neuromancer* 259)
[65] "I got no idea at all what'll happen if Wintermute wins, but it'll *change* something!" (*Neuromancer* 260).

has changed and it is simply continuing a secularizing-resacralizing process that motors throughout secularized modernity.

Even in a Japanese anime like *The Ghost in the Shell*, Christian references are extremely prominent and are an important aspect of both films' philosophy, as director Mamoru Oshii was greatly influenced by the religion and often includes many references in his films (Ruh 43). This is most evident with the many biblical passages that the characters quote throughout both films. The most important occurs when the first film's complex villain, The Puppet Master, quotes Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:12[66] to the series main protagonist Major Motoko Kusanagi, insinuating that, although powerful, both Major and The Puppet Master are incomplete, what they know is partial. However, like a possible Wintermute-Neuromancer merging, once they unite, they will be whole and all-knowing. At the end of the film, the Major-Puppet Master creation references the Corinthians' passage that precedes it[67] to Major's partner BatÙ, completing both the biblical quote but more importantly, acknowledging that the fusion of the two into cyberspace transcended them to a higher spiritual level of consciousness. In *Innocence,* BatÙ's "guardian angel" (1:09:45) no longer needs a shell to host her ghost, similarly to Jesus, who no longer needed his human body after rising from the dead.

However, Christianity's vital, yet understated role in cyberpunk only tells us half the story. When examining the divine/human hybridity of Christology in cyberpunk, it is

[66] "For now we see through a glass, darkly" (*Ghost in the Shell* 0:32:39 – 0:32:40).
[67] "The natural childhood and manhood of this life are analogous to the spiritual childhood of this life and the spiritual manhood of the life to come."
"When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child. Now that I am a man, I have no more use for childish ways" (*Ghost in the Shell* 1:16:48 – 1:17:00).

evident that it is more complicated than simple references to Christian thought and mythos. For one thing, in *Ghost in the Shell* and *Neuromancer* there is a reluctance of one of the entities that must merge with the other, essentially because one of the beings is the other to the other's self. The fusion of the two in both instances does not seem to be two halves of one thing uniting in perfection but is far more symbiotic as two 'others' uniting into hybridity. This is also reflected in the most prominent religion in the Sprawl novels, most notably in *Count Zero*, being Vodou. In comparing Vodou to Christianity and Scientology, the matrix cowboy Beauvoir likens it to the streets because it re-focuses life back towards the physical and material world instead of otherworldly phenomena. The sacred must live within the Earth and community:

> "Vodou isn't like that," Beauvoir said. "It isn't concerned with notions of salvation and transcendence. What it's about is getting things done. You follow me? In our system, there are many gods, spirits. Part of one big family, with all the virtues, all the vices. There's a ritual tradition of communal manifestation, understand? Vodou says, there's God, sure, Gran Met, but He's big, too big and too far away to worry Himself if your ass is poor, or you can't get laid. Come on, man, you know how this works, it's *street* religion, came out of a dirt-poor place a million years ago. Vodou's like the street." (76-7).

Gibson's vision of the urban streets is similar to Baudelaire's poetry and Lang's *M*, depicting it as a complex fragmented space, consisting of different individual lanes that intersect with one another, a "patchwork" (*Neuromancer* 48, 103, 176) that determines its own liminal understanding. Beauvoir is effectively linking religion and the sacred to the streets in a similar perspective as Michel de Certeau's (1980) view of "the city". Referencing Certeau, Scott Bukatman (1993) argues that "[c]yberpunk narratives construct trickster tactics within the 'machineries' of cybernetic culture" (212).

One viewpoint is created by the strategists consisting of institutional bodies who have a synoptic view of the city as a unified whole. The city dweller, on the other hand, is

far more tactical and is never completely controlled by the strategies of these organizations**.** On a literal level, the Vodou disciples and the corporations create this division in the actual physical city. However, this conflict is also noticeable in how they deal with the sacred and God. For Beauvoir, trying to find God or transcending into one is impossible or at the very least, a futile endeavor. To them, the matrix or 'God' represents "the world" (*Count Zero* 114). As we find out in *Count Zero*, the Wintermute-Neuromancer AI that united in *Neuromancer* has fragmented into many different Vodou deities and was not "the whole show" as it stated it was; their unification simply led to even further distortion and fragmentation. But Gibson's use of multiplicity is what separates his work from the binary structures that de Certeau engages in, as the lines between tactics and strategists in regard to the scared use of space are not clearly defined. It is the notion of hybridity that made Vodou have a lasting impression on Gibson and why it is such a powerful and essential theme of his Sprawl novels. After reading an article on Haiti's Vodou's beliefs, Gibson was greatly affected when learning that it was a hybrid faith made up of West African ancestral religions and Roman Catholicism, in which theologies intersect and saints and ancestral gods unite, resulting in a third religion, a religion of international diversity or "spiritual collage" (Olsen 305). Vodou becomes the trilogy's most important religious symbol, not only because it is "an outlaw religion, created by those whom the dominated society marginalized" (ibid.), a perfect representation for the cyber cowboys that dominate his stories, but moreover, because supposedly, it is a liminal religion that transcends boundaries and borders, especially in a fictional world where nations, and therefore traditions, do not seem to exist anymore, surpassed by the matrix, which goes beyond any illusionary borders that are remaining.

Ghost in the Shell similarly extracts the idea that a fragmented world is defined by its greatest technological accomplishment, that is, the Internet. In this futuristic world, society has become heavily balkanized. Even what has been the United States is no longer united but fractured into various sections. On the other hand, Japan's borders remain intact: an island unified, yet seemingly isolated from the rest of the world. Still, in a world dominated by cyberspace, Japan's notion of strongly defined borders is also highly illusionary. Within the future society of *Ghost in the Shell*, "recognizable Japanese urban characteristics are difficult to distinguish among the intricate sprawl of multiple languages of ethnicities" (Dorman 43). This use of multiculturalism goes beyond the notion of immigration and merging cultures that is common inside a global city space. The merging in cyberspace of Major Kusanagi, a Japanese cyborg, and The Puppet Master, an American sentient computer, bypasses any designated national or cultural boundaries. No matter how much Japan deems itself to be secluded, the Puppet Master's infiltration of Japanese cyberspace, and subsequently the Major, liquefies the once considered strong boundaries of the nation-state that Japan believes are still intact. In fact, even the idea that the Puppet Master is American and the Major is Japanese is equally dissolved. Likewise, in the second film, BatÙ becomes almost a quoting apparatus, frequently referencing various religious and cultural traditions, from the Bible to Buddhism, from Weber and Descartes to Saito Ryokuu, indicating that knowledge and culture have become universal, intersecting, and globalized, predominantly due to the Internet Age. More so than during the advent of modernity, everyday life continuously becomes more liminal and culturally ambiguous, as both the cyborg and cyberspace go beyond notions of race, culture, and knowledge.

GOD IS (IN) CYBERSPACE

Despite the fact that Gibson's novels portray a world where Nature is dead, leaving "a bleak future where humans can be cloned, cryogenically frozen, or surgically manipulated to resemble computers" (Stiles 186), technology actually plays a far more multifaceted role in cyberpunk, offering just as many possibilities of freedom and notions of the sacred as it does of corporate control or secularization. Gibson's novels are not simply cautionary tales about a possible future where the escaping of reality has taken over most people's lives but rather explore how one will navigate and find meaning in such a world. This is done by continuously alluding to cyberspace as a religious space of salvation and transcendence of the spirit, removed from the human body (what the hackers consider 'meat').[68] In *On Belief (Thinking In Action)* (2001), Žižek states that "in cyberspace, we return to the bodily immediacy, but to an uncanny, virtual immediacy" an thereby linking it to a type of "spiritualized materialism" found in Gnosticism (54). The movement towards a "higher" BODILY reality, a proto-reality of shadowy ghosts and undead entities", ultimately leaves us to digest the idea that through the removal of a corporal body, we must realize that such a body must have never existed in the first place and that "our bodily self-experience was always–already that of an imaginary constituted entity" (ibid. 55). However, the characters in the Sprawl novels are endlessly oscillating between both bodily entities. The physical body that is a cage of the self, and the cyber-

[68] The concepts of 'meatware' or 'wetware' are used in cyberpunk literature to define both an organic computer system, such as the human brain, and humans in general. Gibson uses the term 'meat' in the *Neuromancer*, as the term wetware was not used in cyberpunk literature until Michael Swanwick's *Vacuum Flowers* (1987/2016), and not popularized until Rudy Rucker's novel *Wetware* (1988) (Rucker 2016).

body that lacks any corporeal restraints of the self, are constantly being exchanged whenever the hacker jacks in and out of the Matrix.

For the cyber hacker Case, the restriction from cyberspace and the subsequent imprisonment to one's body is likened to Adam and Eve's banishment from the Garden of Eden, where in both cases they are punished for breaking the one rule: the theft of knowledge.

> He's made the classic mistake, the one he's sworn he'd never make. He stole from his employers…Strapped to a bed in a Memphis hotel, his talent burning out micron by micron, he hallucinated for thirty hours. The damage was minute, subtle, and utterly effective. For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh. (*Neuromancer* 6)

In a world where knowledge is power, the multifaceted character Case equally represents Adam and Eve, but also Prometheus, or in modern terms, both Frankenstein and his Creature. Even more so than cybernetic implants, which are still just a technological extension of the physical body, cyberspace is an infinite realm of possibility, described as a "colorless void" (ibid. 5) or "endless beach" (ibid. 258), and it acts as a palpable and recognizable afterlife that allows hackers like Case to transcend from 'meat' to immortal beings like the AIs that live within it. Case, seeing a vision of his dead girlfriend Linda Lee when he jacks at the end of the novel, also alludes to cyberspace as a technological afterlife. Moreover, the idea of God as either living in or actually being cyberspace, which is expressed first in *Neuromancer*, becomes more blatant in *Count Zero*: "Specifically, the Finn said, the Wig had become convinced that God lived in cyberspace, or perhaps that cyberspace was God, or some new manifestation of same. The Wig's ventures into theology tended to be marked by major paradigm shifts, true leaps of faith"

(121). This concept is unambiguously mentioned again in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* but in a far more liminal understanding:

> "That the matrix is God?" "In a manner of speaking, although it would be more accurate, in terms of the mythform, to say that the matrix has a God, since this being's omniscience and omnipotence are assumed to be limited to the matrix." "If it has limits, it isn't omnipotent." "Exactly. Notice that the mythform doesn't credit the being with immortality, as would ordinarily be the case in belief systems positing a supreme being, at least in terms of your particular culture. Cyberspace exists, insofar as it can be said to exist, by virtue of human agency" (129).

The last of the Sprawl novels suggests that cyberspace is a god, not because it can transcend humanity into something that can reach its limits, but because it has the power to propel humans to further expand their limits.

In *Ghost in the Shell* there seems to be a divergence between the cyborgian body and the 'ghost' or 'soul' that they contain within them, which is a human aspect that seems to be impossible to clone or replicate and allows them to retain an awareness of both individuality and humanity, a penetrating conflict that the series' philosophy bases itself on. Nevertheless, the notion of cyberspace seems to be a liminal sphere caught between these two binaries, for although it is an extension of the technological aspect of the cyborg, the ghost is often associated and found within cyberspace rather than within the mechanized body (Endo 233). Major Motoko Kusanagi conceptually dives into cyberspace and virtually co-exists within it, making the ghost something far more than a spirit being incased in a cyborgian shell. This atypical connection or relationship between the ghost and cyberspace, however, does make Major existentially question her own self and humanity, as she asks her partner BatÙ: "What if a cyber-brain could possibly generate its own ghost, create a soul all by itself? And if it did, just what would be the importance of being human then?" (*Ghost in the Shell* 0:42:53 -0:43:01). Major's ghost is

all that is left of her human self, and if a ghost could be generated artificially, as one could a human body, where does that leave humanity? A similar question is also raised if someone's cyber-brain is hacked, as the Puppet Master does, or the Laughing Man is able to do in the *Stand Alone Complex* series*,* where essentially they are able to hack one's ghost or soul. In *Innocence*, the cyber-hacker Kim suggests that mind and soul are no different since both are interconnected with the matrix: "Humans are nothing but the thread from which the dream of life is woven. If dreams, consciousness, even ghosts are no more than rifts and warps in the uniform weave of the matrix" (1:11:00 – 1:11:11).

There is a sense of amalgamating to form a unitary self in both Gibson's novels and in *Ghost in the Shell*, however in different ways. The unification of Wintermute and Neuromancer once again leads to further fragmentation, while in the case of Major and Puppet Master, the amalgamation is to achieve more of a concept of the unitary self, but one that still does not seem to be fixed within a single shell. However, cyberspace does have a more optimistic or God-like position in *Ghost in the Shell* than in the Sprawl trilogy. Whereas Gibson ultimately flirts with the idea of transcendence in cyberspace, it also seems to be slightly Sisyphean as a form of resacralization in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. In Oshii's *Ghost* films, Major is able to transcend herself past the physical body, gaining both omnipotence and omniscience; a soul in a computer program[69]. Although it borrows heavily from Western and Christian ideals, the notion of the soul in the series goes beyond these traditions in that the spirit is not confined to one 'shell' but it is able to travel or coexist with another in a single vessel (Hasegawa 136), allowing it an even more

[69] "She's gone. Somewhere beyond that 'rift in the uniform weave of the matrix.' She's definitely alive. Merging somewhere on the vast net, or with the entire domain" (*Innocence* 1:13:14 – 1:13:28).

liminal freedom than Gibson's novels. Whereas cyberspace has limits in the Sprawl novels, being simply an extension of human capabilities, the Internet is "vast and limitless" (*Ghost in the Shell* 1:17:35 -1:17:37) for Major. Like God, Major tells BatÙ "Always remember… Whenever you enter the Net, I'll be by your side" (*Innocence* 1:32:00 – 1:32:09). Cyberspace can be a spiritual place, like when one prays to a God or a liminal space existing between heaven and earth. This is not to say that cyberspace in these cyberpunk works does not consist of dangers, as both have to deal with the serious threat of cyber hackers, although most of the time these cyber hackers tend to be far more multifaceted than traditional villains. As Pesce (1995) states, [a]ny discussion of cyberspace is a discussion about believing; if cyberspace is the imagination, then cyberspace contains what we believe it contains, nothing more, nothing less. Put another way, the only things we take into cyberspace are our preconceptions. These preconceptions can come in the form of prejudices, tastes, or even spiritual beliefs" (287). Possibly due to the technology's infancy, cyberspace in cyberpunk tends to take on the uncanny role of being a secular place of the sacred; either as a spiritual place to reach humanity's limits, or one that can even to outstrip them.

STRANGERS IN CYBERSPACE

The matrix in cyberpunk is a habitation for liminal characters and modern strangers alike. The emblematic removal of the physical body in cyberspace, a symbolic representation of the instability of the unitary self, allows it to be a perfect place where the alienated and powerless modern stranger can become powerful and controlling; a liminal space where one can challenge both the boundaries and authority of the overshadowing culture. In the spirit of Baudelaire's *flâneur* or the hard-boiled detective,

who, as Benjamin argued, shared a sort of metaphorical relationship,[70] the cyberpunk criminal 'hackers' or 'cowboys' are active observers that describe the uncanny reality of their liminal surroundings. Their backdrop is the globalized technological metropolis, where the reason, order, and law that run through the futuristic city streets are juxtaposed to the uncanny shadow that it casts on its disenfranchised 'low-lifes', drug addicts, criminals, and cyborgs[71]. As Lance Olsen (1995) describes in relation to Gibson's work, it provides a variable utopian space for societal outsiders:

> … the definition of cyberspace, the virtual area that manifests Gibson's idea of termite art, a realm on the others side of the computer keyboard…that both exists and does not exist, opens up in expectation, chance, burning bushes, voodoo gods…a zone where anything can happen, everything is possible, all fences are down, the dead can dance, the living can die…A narratological region that continually chews away at its own boundaries and hence the reader's, problematizing everything from place to gender, identity to its own position in the "world". Cyberspace is the symbolic territory of termite art. (296)

Cyberpunk's cyberspace is both a representation of the alienated Western individual of modernity and a reflection of the physical world around them, but equally, it offers itself as a place where alienation can thrive as a positive element. In the first *Ghost in the Shell* film, Major originally both allocates and contrasts the comforting alienation of being underwater. Similar to cyberspace, Major feels an optimistic alienation, where the feelings of being fearful, cold, and alone allow for feelings of hope. Within her cybernetic body, Major still feels "confined, only free to expand…within boundaries" (*Ghost in the Shell* 0:32:20 – 0:32:25), whereas the alienating aspect of cyberspace comes from its vast and endless opportunities, something she ultimately chooses. What

[70] See Walter Benjamin's "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939/2007).
[71] Among other sources, Acker uses Gibson's *Neuromancer* as a basis in creating the characters in *Empire of the Senseless*, as a disenfranchised cyborg subculture of the future (Clune 116; Houen 181)

cyberspace offers the modern stranger in cyberpunk fiction is a place where alienation and fragmentation are embraced as part of a continuous process of becoming rather than a form of alienation that occurs when the unitary self is unachievable. Case, for example, rejects the Wintermute-Nuromancer's proposal of living in cyberspace without the constraints of the physical body. It seems Case is unwilling to except an either/or binary of meat and cyberspace and finally comes to terms with the fact that "*cyberspace is not the end of the human body*" (Pesce 285). With a total removal of the physical flesh, cyberspace lacks the liminal sphere of alienation, and therefore, the possibility of resacralizing, for "the concrete is always presented through manifestation rather than through evocation" (ibid**.**). In the technological, fragmented world, life exists somewhere between the worlds of reality and cyberspace. After Case rejects the 'heaven' of cyberspace, this liminal state is metaphorically used to describe the transitional point of jacking out. It is at this moment where Case is in between cyberspace and reality that Gibson perfectly illustrates his and even our own world:

> There was a gray place, an impression of fine screens shifting, moire, degrees of half tone generated by a very simple graphics program. There was a long hold on a view through chainlink, gulls frozen above dark water. There were voices. There was a plain of black mirror, that tilted, and he was quicksilver, a bead of mercury, skittering down, striking the angles of an invisible maze, fragmenting, flowing together, sliding again.... (*Neuromancer* 244).

While society's fragmentation is constantly being battled by a progression from transcendence into wholeness, ironically Gibson uses liminal language to describe Case's genuine moment of clarity, a phase when he is caught between the meat and the digital.

It was unproblematic for Gibson and Oshii to view the Internet as both liminal and optimistic in the early nineteen-eighties and even nineties, as it still was a form of technology that was more or less undetermined. Like much groundbreaking science

fiction, *Neuromancer* was both highly prophetic and erroneous in its vision of the future. Gibson's concept of the Internet is not necessarily what we have today in that it may not be the "consensual hallucination" (ibid. 5) that we jack all our senses into, as he described it, although advances in virtual reality and AI may still prove him to be more accurate than once thought. It is nonetheless something that is omnipresent in our society[72]. We are all interconnected through it, and theoretically, it is a construct that we store our memories and experiences on. In another sense, it may be far more liminal than Gibson imagined, as we do not jack in and out of cyberspace, but instead, it has become something that never goes away in our lives. We are continuously 'jacked in' even if we are not directly engaging with it. The Internet has become too canny in many ways, as it uninterruptedly lives alongside our reality, and as a result, is far more colourless than Gibson's literary interpretation. Due to the fact that the current generation has been born only knowing the Internet, a world in which an aspect of themselves lives constantly in cyberspace, the worlds of *das Heimliche* and *Unheimliche* tend to overlap.

Although she was centering on the uncanny as a sexual threat, Cixous argues in "Fictions and its Phantoms" (1976/2011) for an instance of overlap between the canny and uncanny that the Internet seems to share, in that "the word joins itself again, and *das Heimliche* and *Unheimliche* join together, pair up…" (20). Due to its permanent liminal characteristics, cyberspace no longer has the ability to dislocate someone from the physical world, since being in a state of dislocation has become commonplace. Life online has become more of a reality for many people than the reality of their physical world, which has increasingly become much more illusionary. When people spend the

[72] "Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation" (*Neuromancer* 51).

majority of their time in liminal cyberspace, a sense of perpetual or permanent liminality or an endless performance can overcome the individual. Many individuals are using the Internet to experiment with their identity, either by imagining themselves as completely different people living a different life, even possibly in a different world, to presenting their 'real' self as something they may not actually be offline. What the Internet Age has done is that it has transformed the notion of the self, essentially removing it from the physical body. By being an omnipresent and an undetectable reality, technology dominated by the Internet, is able to subversively control one's perception or attitude towards life without allowing for any sacred space.

CYBERSPACE: HEAVEN OR HELL?

There seems to be a major shift in works that deal with cyberspace from the eighties and nineties to more contemporary literature. One is the obvious shift from science-fiction to a fiction far more grounded in reality that evidently came about from the Internet playing a much more significant role in our lives. The other is that there seems to be a genuine shift from enthusiasm, or at the very least a reserved optimism, to a far more pessimistic interpretation of cyber-culture. This is evident in the most recent live action *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) film, in which cyberspace is viewed much more negatively at the film's conclusion than the original anime film, in which even Major refuses the amalgamation with the film's Puppet Master-esque villain on those same dystopic grounds. The negative aspects of the Internet were always present: hacking, security, privacy; however, these threats have become more realized in an individual's life, thereby altering these terrorizations from peripheral to commonplace. Although there are still some romantic depictions of hackers as being anti-capitalist anti-heroes, as in the

show *Mr. Robot* (2015 -), Internet culture and the 'cowboys' that ride amongst it have become something ominous and alarming in a lot of contemporary literature and film[73]. Moreover, more and more contemporary authors are writing about the shortcomings and consequences of the Information Age and Social Media. In Gibson's cyberpunk universe, as in our own contemporary world, information is everything, but unlike our current reality, for Gibson's worlds, information remains largely secretive.

A world without secrets has the ability to govern itself perfectly, as Dave Eggers' *The Circle* argues, or rather the multinational technology company that provides the book's title. Eggers' novel tends to borrow heavily from what now have become cliché tropes of prototypical totalitarian dystopian novels such as *1984* (1949/1961) and *Brave New World* (1932/2007). Nonetheless, there are some fundamental changes in this dystopian society that make it resemble contemporary reality more closely than science fiction. The lack of individualism and privacy does not necessarily result from tyrannical thought control or social and biological engineering by a government or society, but rather by the people themselves. Yes, The Circle is a powerful Internet-based corporation in the mold of Google or Facebook. However, their power resides in giving the people the technological full disclosure that they desire, rather than through any serious form of propaganda, brainwashing, or torture. The Circle is represented as more of a community that, although it is walled off from the outside world, creates the apparatus for how

[73] *Super Sad True Love Story* by Gary Shteyngart (2010), Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013), Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2011), Nikesh Shukla's *Meatspace* (2014), Tim Maughan's *Infinite Detail* (2019), and Lin's *Taipei* are just some of the novels that showcase a rising skepticism of not just the actualization of cyber threats that hackers produce, but our dependence on our online, socially mediated lives. Likewise, many episodes of the popular television series *Black Mirror* (2011-) often examine the dark side to humanity's relationship with the Internet and technology as a whole.

people communicate throughout the world. Through the narrator, the protagonist Mae Holland describes her binaural opinions between the Circle and the rest of society: "[o]utside the walls of the Circle, all was noise and struggle, failure and filth. But here, all had been perfected. The best people had made the best systems and the best systems had reaped funds, unlimited funds that made possible this, the best place to work. And it was natural that it was so, Mae thought. Who else but utopians could make utopia?" (Eggers 31). The Circle's goal is to communicate its utopian values to the rest of the world via the Internet; to integrate or make a whole of the fragmented and disconnected world outside; to make the world as 'perfect' as the community of the Circle. The Circle's logo, a giant C, represents the incompleteness or fractured state of modern life as one of its founder's argues, but also the company's goal to connect it through the information highway, "[s]o any information that eludes us, anything that's not accessible, prevents us from being perfect" (ibid. 289). The project begins when politicians' lives become completely online and therefore accountable at all times. This mission soon spreads to everyone. The Big Brother of the past is no longer needed; people will watch themselves, confirming the transition from the panoptical gaze to that of the cyborgian (Vidler 1992; Willet 1996). Unlike Vidler, who argues that the cyborgian gaze is based upon fragmented and "refracted lines" (160), Eggers' take on the cyborgian gaze is far more totalitarian. We have become a society of the AIs once feared; we have become the new Wintermutes and Puppet Masters. Not joining means you are hiding something, and therefore, according to the people of the Circle, stealing something from the rest of society. Not joining in means you do not belong and therefore are shamed, a major concern for Mae, and the Circle itself, when she first joins the community. Mae quickly

finds out that fitting in and communicating with everyone about oneself is far more important than the actual work she is doing. As the uncanny has been removed from cyberspace, secrets have become either monotonous in our reality, or, as in *The Circle*, regarded as dangerous.

The removal of the uncanny in cyberspace seems to also remove the element of the sacred from it, but not necessarily the religiousness fundamentalism. Some of The Circle's most zealous and faithful followers see it as a movement that is fulfilling the established Christian crusade of regaining a wholeness that was previously lost in the Fall:

> "You connected it all. You found a way to save all the souls. This is what we were doing in the church—we tried to get them all. How to save them all? This has been the work of missionaries for millennia…Now all humans will have the eyes of God. You know this passage? 'All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of God.' Something like that. You know your Bible?" Seeing the blank looks on the faces of Mae and Francis, he scoffed and took a long pull from his drink. "Now we're all God. Every one of us will soon be able to see, and cast judgment upon, every other. We'll see what He sees. We'll articulate His judgment. We'll channel His wrath and deliver His forgiveness. On a constant and global level. All religion has been waiting for this, when every human is a direct and immediate messenger of God's will. (Eggers 398-9)

The secularizing process of modernity's mission to replace God is complete. Mae and her collogues at the Circle react by ridiculing the fan, making him the reverse of Nietzsche's madman, one who comes, not to tell us that we have killed God, but that we have instead reestablished God.[74] Although Mae thought him to be ridiculous, the opening line of the

[74] Although not exclusive to cyberspace, the recent forming of "The Way of the Future" by Silicon Valley pioneer Anthony Levandowski, a new church/religion that worships artificial intelligence, shows that this concept is not as implausible as one may think. Levandowski argues that "[w]hat is going to be created will effectively be a god", while insisting that "[t]he church is how we spread the word, the gospel. If you believe [in it], start a conversation with someone else and help them understand the same things" (Harris, "Inside").

novel, “MY GOD, MAE thought. It’s heaven” (ibid. 1) shows subconsciously that she believes the sentiment to be true at some level. The hybridity, liminality, and uncanniness that once defined the sacred aspects of cyberspace have now been eliminated. The Internet is no longer a space of infinite possibilities but a space of closed perfection and regulation and has become a tool to conceal the liminal aspects of life that in its inception it validated. Although outlandish at times, a novel like *The Circle* is not alone in seeing the Internet Age as a new forming dystopia. The expression of individuality that cyberspace and social media once garnered is beginning to transform into something regulated, ubiquitous, and homogeneous, and as a result, begins to lose any liminal and utopian spirit.

VII: STRANGE GENDER AND POST-HUMANISM

You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing

- Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of Medusa"

The body is not a site on which a construction takes place; it is a destruction on the occasion of which a subject is formed

- Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*

The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity

- Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist- Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century"

"She decided that since she was setting out on the greatest adventure any person can take, that of the Holy Grail, she ought to have a name (identity). She had to name herself"

- Kathy Acker, *Don Quixote, which was a dream*

INTRODUCTION

The history of the modern stranger has been dominated, much like history, by the masculine gaze. Things slowly began to change after WWII when the rise of second wave feminism erected out of the chaotic world like *Canticle*'s Rachel, looking to create social change out of the ashes left over. Simone de Beauvoir's groundbreaking *Le Deuxième Sexe* (*The Second Sex*) (1949/1989) was the first to wage war against the biological determinism of Freud's declaration that "[a]natomy is destiny" (46), which governed and enforced gender roles in a patriarchal society. Not only did critiques of the patriarchy arise through more self-reflective men like Antonioni, by the 1960s, the ascent of gender studies went further to challenge the phallocentric stance of society. While Antonioni's critical representations are essentially limited since they themselves are still confined to the perspective of the male gaze, the works of intellectuals such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, redefined gender classifications on their own terms. Donna Haraway pushed or blurred the boundaries even further by integrating the

liminal and uncanny cyborg with the rising post-gender and technocratic world, questioning the biological or natural principles of both the body and gender. Haraway looks to the biotechnological age to deconstruct the natural artificial, the human/machine, masculine/feminine binaries in an attempt to help usher in a rising post-gender world, through reinventing gender, politics, and identity. Regardless of technology's negative aspects, Haraway understands that we are not able to look backwards, since technology is part of our lives whether we want it to be or not. Her "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1985/2004) looks towards a hybrid utopian vision that is able to exist in the present world by locating the beauty within the monstrous aspects of the present. As Jeanine Thweatt-Bates (2012) argues,

> [p]osthuman has become a way of naming the unknown, possible, (perhaps) future, altered identity of human beings, as we incorporate various technologies into our human bodies and selves. It therefore functions as an umbrella term, covering a span of related concepts: genetically enhanced persons, artificial persons or androids, uploaded consciousness, cyborgs and chimeras (mechanical or genetic hybrids). Thus, the posthuman is not any one particular thing; it is an act of projection, of speculation about who we are as human beings, and who we might become. Posthuman is inherently plural, a disturbing ambivalence. (1)

In order for the cyborg to witness its utopian characteristics, it must not be seen as something to be feared but rather to be embraced. As Rod Giblett (2008) argues, "[w]hereas we can refuse to be Terminators, we are already cyborgs" (148). Haraway's cyborg represents an open-mindedness and flexible device for an egoless and genderless world that dissolves hegemonic binaries and oppression. The cyborg represents the entity that is fully connected but removed from the outside world, blurring the lines of subjective and objective and re-imagining the Oedipal and Christian narratives of Western society.

Nonetheless, this new movement in feminist studies is channeling or elaborating on what already exists in the modern stranger, as argued from the beginning of this work, in that being an uncanny individual in liminal modernity positions the stranger in a paradoxical situation where secularization and resacralization incessantly orbit around one another. Many of the liminal and uncanny factors of the modern stranger found in Frankenstein were discussed in the opening chapter. However, I reserved the discussion of gender specifically for this section, which assesses the question within the subject of the modern stranger at its 'parturition'. Despite lacking any really strong female characters, Shelley's novel may very well be the origin of gender and post-humanist critique of the male dominated secularized world. Critics such as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) argue, the novel embodies "woman's helpless alienation in a male society" (247), while "the repression of women and, specifically, of female sexuality contributes to the novel's monstrousness. Victor's refusal to create a female reveals the erogeneity of the science of that first creation" (Cottom 69). However, the main struggle concerning gender in the novel has more to do with authorship and language. Cecilia A. Feilla (2008) claims there is a direct connection between the Creature's liminality and hybridity and Shelley as a female author:

> Mary Shelley presents the women writer as self-possessed…rather than imitating or rejecting men's writing, she accepts her position, her text and her creature as monster and thus founds a place for women's writing in the liminal space of the monstrous. Like a Romantic daemon, the monster exists within the in-between, an intermediary between human and divine worlds, angel and devil, and, in the case of *Frankenstein*, opens a breach in the canon of literature through which the monsters were let in. (171)

Language, monstrosity, and post-humanism are all tied to gender in Frankenstein through a female author and her literary and symbolic creations. The Creature, as modern stranger,

uncannily points to not only the hybridity of the modern world, but also the material and social constructs of both the body and gender. *Frankenstein* has influenced gender theorists to take the monstrous, abject qualities of the female body and resacralize them within the confines of secularized modernity. Critics such as Anne Kull (2001; 2003; 2016), Elaine Graham (2002), and Thweatt-Bates ascertain a theological and sacred notion to Haraway's anti-essentialist cyborg, alongside with the essay's feminist argument According to Thweatt-Bates,

> [t]he theological conclusions generated by [the] appreciation of the cyborg's embeddedness within material creation are significant, and provide a foundation for an ethics of relationship that is radically inclusive, positing as it does hybrid kinship with both the "natural" and the "technological" creatures we inhabit the world with. These theological engagements with the cyborg, therefore, turn to the ecotheological implications of the cyborg's hybridity, materiality, and interconnectedness. (142)

Like many things in secularized modernity, post-humanism may seem to be at first anti-religious and secular but it paradoxically allows for the return of the sacred, for "[s]o long as religious motifs continue to inform visions of technological sublime then discourses of transcendence and re-enchantment must be directly confronted as part of an enduring symbolic of representation" (Graham 16). Existing in liminal space, the post-humanist cyborg blurs the boundaries of the sacred and profane through the distorting of human/machine and male/female dichotomies, by undressing natural identity symbols while simultaneously establishing technological new ones.

A flowing link between Frankenstein's Creature and the Haraway's cyborg is Hélène Cixous' of Medusa (Clayton 136-7), which seems to connect the cyborg and

Medusa in the liminal space of the abyss.[75] Just as Shelley gave a revolutionary voice to the Creature, in "The Laugh of Medusa" (1975/1976), Cixous bestows Medusa with a voice, in order to speak against the illusions and myths regarding the female that have been created by men in an attempt to control them through fear. By re-examining the myth of Medusa, Cixous wants us to invert the uncanny monstrousness of the female gender to understand that it is merely a deception developed from the uncanny fear men have of women who have historically "riveted [women] between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss" (885). Although society has displaced women into the liminal sphere of the monstrous and the unknown, Cixous, like Haraway looks to an uncanny process of "extend[ing] ourselves without ever reaching an end" (878). Cixous removes the horrifying fear that has enveloped the myth of Medusa and has replaced it with the ironic laugh of the (post)modern stranger: "Rewriting the horrifying Medusa of a mascuilst mythology, Cixous creates a laughing Medusa who, in the role of the hysteric, resists the male view of her sexuality in becoming incomprehensible, unclassifiable, as one finds her only "in the divide" (Aneja 58). Questioning these myths by looking "at the Medusa straight on", women will we see through the veil of the masculine veil and realize that "she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (Cixous "Medusa" 885). Important to this study of postgender and posthumanism is the correlation between the posthuman and concept of the abyss. Through the lens Paul Tillich's theological understanding of the abyss, alongside more secular ideas of the concept from thinkers

[75] Although Medusa is never mentioned in *Frankenstein*, in the posthumous poem "On the Medusa of Leonardo Da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery", Percy Shelly captures a similar revolutionary beauty in Medusa's monstrous gaze as Cixous does. Both Mary Shelley and her husband use the symbol of "monstrous…eyes, whose strength lies in seeing as much as in being seen" (Clayton 132).

such as Luce Irigaray, Diane Elam, Linda M. G. Zerilli, I will look to establish a connecting point of the modern stranger discussed up to now with the more posthuman, postgender, and (post)modern version found in the latter half of twentieth century feminist writings.

After establishing the connection between language, gender, liminal post-humanism, and the abyss, I will analyze these interconnecting ideas in two works by Kathy Acker: *Don Quixote, which was a dream* (1986) and *Empire of the Senseless* (1988). The liminal act of resacralization, although not initially transparent, is an important aspect of Acker's writing, as is the notion of hybridity. Not only is it visible in language and genre, as Acker's novels consist of a rewriting or appropriation of various famous novels, alongside a style that jumps from fiction to the autobiographical, to essay, to journal, but hybridity and liminality are also focal points in regard to many of her characters. In both *Empire* and especially *Don Quixote*, "dichotomies like male/female, white/black, human/animal, master/slave do not exist as such but collide in a carnivalesque universe" (González 116). In these novels, Acker simultaneously believes in and critiques the ability to create one's own language and identity outside the boundaries of gender, while also attempting the modern stranger's inadvertent task of finding the sacred in a world of liminality.

FROM SHELLEY'S 'HIDEOUS PROGENY' TO HARAWAY'S CYBORG

Mary Shelley indicates that gender was an underlining issue in both *Frankenstein*'s narrative and authorship, responding "to the question, so frequently asked [her]" she states, "[h]ow I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?" (5). Although Shelley was praised for her groundbreaking novel,

judging from the interrogative questioning, the novel's subject matter was deemed to be inappropriate, or at the very least shocking, for any woman to be writing during the nineteenth century. The issue of gender as an absence is an integral theme in the novel. Leaving out the female voice is a deliberate act that recognizes and critiques women's status in society, both public and private, even going to the lengths of stripping away women's traditional role of child-bearers. Mother figures are non-existent, both for Victor and his Creature, while most of the female characters are marginalized, ignored, or simply disposed of.[76] Victor not only seeks to replace God with the discovery of immorality but likewise, by creating life without a female counterpart, seeks to establish a world operated peerlessly by man. Victor's misogynist inclinations become apparent through his rationalizing of not creating a partner for the Creature that is essentially based on his opinion that a female creature would be far more horrifying: "…she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness" (Shelley 170).

This is not to suggest that the novel entirely lacks a female voice. As Victor is the author or creator of the Creature, Shelley is the creator of her own "hideous progeny" (10), the novel itself. It is through authorship that the female voice continues to exist. As Barbara Johnson (1992) maintains, in *Frankenstein* "the monstrousness of selfhood is intimately embedded within the question of female autobiography" (10). Shelley correlates imaginative creation and the notion of the female genius with that of

[76] Although, the character Safie may be the exception to this argument. See ""They Will Prove the Truth of My Tale": Safie's Letters as the Feminist Core of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*" (1991) by Joyce Zonana.

monstrosity and the demonic symbolism through the Creature.[77] While the female voice is not wholly transparent in the male-dominated plot, Shelley paradoxically enforces it through composition, thereby exposing the dread of the 'monstrous' female gender as an uncanny feature that clouds the novel, rather than unveiling it in a more unequivocal manner:

> Like the monster, woman in a patriarchal society is defined as an absence, an enigma, mystery, or crime, or she is allowed to be a presence only so that she can be defined as a lack, a mutilated body that must be repressed to enable men to join the symbolic order and maintain their mastery…Her difference places her outside culture, and her abominable presence places her within it. Mary Shelley, because she writes from this paradoxical position, has been accused of artistic failure…But her representation of the liminal position of women -- and the relation of that position to sexual categories of a patriarchal culture -- is precisely her achievement (Hodges 162-3).

It is through the connection of the two hideous progenies that Shelley is able to address gender and the patriarchal society. The Creature's realization of its ugliness, or rather the ugliness projected on to it by a male dominated society,[78] correlates to the female identity/body in that women tend to see themselves as monstrous and unnatural because that is how society views them, due to the impossibility of living up to existing

[77] Feilla expands on this notion, arguing that during Shelley's time "women either *possess* (male) genius and thus are monsters or *are possessed* by genius (divine spirits)…Moreover, the description of the creature as a *daemon* throughout the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* further underscores its associations with the figure of genius…Belonging neither to the world of humans nor of the gods, daemons were outside the pale of human limitations – moral, physical, social or legal – and were generally considered to be neither good nor bad, neither moral nor immoral" (168-70).

[78] Freud's projection theory and the theory of the Oedipus complex has been adapted and expanded by a feminist psychoanalyst critique. In her book, *The Interpretation of the Flesh: Freud and Femininity*, Teresa Brennan (1992) argues that women sometimes take on the physical and psychological manifestations of men's projected femininity where "[t]he desire of the other, in short, embodies an image and attention that can enhance or diminish one's capacities" (226).

conventional associations with purity (Gilbert & Gubar 240). Patriarchal history has positioned women as the goddess or vamp but never as an equal, which ultimately situates them within an abject void. When faced with the possibilities of a potential female creature's ability to reinvent social norms, Victor Frankenstein only sees the impending danger the female represents and disposes of the dismembered female body parts. By doing so, he solidifies the boundaries of the patriarchal and structured society, leaving the female body abject, fragmented, and incomplete. The correlation between cultural boundaries and that of the physical body are metaphorically found ubiquitously in civilization for "the human body is always treated as an image of society" (Douglas, *Natural* 74). Similar to cultural and social bodies that create boundaries to keep out what is "out of place", the physical body likewise produces margins, in order to produce a division between dirt and purity since "boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (Douglas, *Purity* 82). Contamination exists where there are ambiguities and contradictions in social systems as well as within ambiguities of the corporeal body, though sex 'pollution' does not tend to "flourish" within male organized societies (ibid 143).[79] The completion of the female counterpart leaves too many uncertainties for Frankenstein, and consequently, he fears that he is unable to control the

[79] Building on Douglas' pollution boundaries, Judith Butler uses her work in relation to homosexuality:

> Since anal and oral sex among men clearly establishes certain kinds of bodily permeabilities unsanctioned by the hegemonic order, male homosexuality would, within such a hegemonic point of view, constitute a site of danger and pollution, prior to and regardless of the cultural presence of AIDS. Similarly, the "polluted" status of lesbians, regardless of their low-risk status with respect to AIDS, brings into relief the dangers of their bodily exchanges. Significantly, being "outside" the hegemonic order does not signify being "in" a state of filthy and untidy nature. Paradoxically, homosexuality is almost always conceived within the homophobic signifying economy as both uncivilized and unnatural. (*Gender Trouble* 168)

discharges from the margins of the body and society, the dirt that threatens order and control. Both sexes in the novel are victims of their own pre-ordained gender: the female characters are casualties because of their passivity; the male characters suffer due to their excessive determination.

The only character that encompasses both genders is the Creature whose feminine gender representationally presides alongside the masculine traits inherited by Frankenstein, which intensifies its liminal, post-gender cyborgian stature. The cyborg fittingly incorporates an ambiguous notion of gender whose cyborgian and liminal nature, challenges the aspects of the masculinity/femininity binary, ultimately destroying any illusions of the unitary self. If Frankenstein's Creature is "pre-sexual", it does not account for the basis of its identity although "that is not to say that sexual aberration is missing from Shelley's definition of monstrosity: simply, sexuality is always a part of the other identifying traits" (Halberstam 42). Despite this, in an attempt to become 'normalized', the Creature pleads with Frankenstein to repair society's shattered gender binary that continues to exist within it: "You must create a female for me with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being" (147). Here we can see Bruno Latour's (1991/1993) argument that although secularized modernity continuously maintains a world apportioned into binaries, it still refuses to acknowledge society's cumulative "hybridization", which ironically increases as a result of this "purification" (11-12). Since society is comprised of a collective of both human and non-humans, representing society in a series of binaries, such as natural/artificial, it paradoxically clashes against modernity's constant attempt to rationalize everything. As Latour contends,

> By rendering mixtures unthinkable, by emptying, sweeping, cleaning and purifying the arena that is opened in the central space…the moderns allowed the practice of mediation to recombine all possible monsters without letting them have any effect on the social fabric, or even any contact with it. Bizarre as these monsters may be, they posed no problem because they did not exist publicly and because their monstrous consequences remained untraceable. What the premoderns have always ruled out the moderns can allow, since the social order never turns out to correspond, point for point, with the natural order. (42)

Frankenstein's Creature wishes to destroy its hybrid and liminal characteristics through the creation of a female counterpart, thereby reaffirming modernity's neat binary.

By attempting to purify society through the destruction of the female companion, Victor in reality solidifies the hybridization and taboo, unwilling to create an opposite binary for the Creature and as a result, retains and coagulates the Creature's liminal nature. The Creature's female companion remains dismembered and dispensable, while the Creature itself still exists as an illusionary whole but fundamentally remains as a stitched up hybrid of body parts. The Creature, the female companion, and even *Frankenstein* as a text, all express this artificial uncanny fragmentation or mutilation of the body (Favert 1992; Salotto 1994) that is often credited to Haraway's cyborg. As Julie Clarke (2002) points out "[b]oth Frankenstein's monster and the cyborg solicit the uncanniness associated with body mutilation and fragmentation" (39), while Margret Owens (2005) sees the Creature as "the most enduring nightmare of that age" and a fundamental illustration and exploration of the fragmented body that would lead to fascination of the dismembered body found in twentieth century avant-garde art (12), as seen in Beckmann's *The* Night. This results in a predicament where secularized modernity's act of purification is paradoxically in conflict with its tendency to resacralize itself within its perpetual liminal space.

Jane Bennett (2016) sees Latour's concept of hybridization "as a modern form of magic and a potential site of enchantment", since "the essence of such magic was mobility and morphing transformations from one state, space, or form to another" (98). Although I agree with her statement, the same can be said of the sacred, and since Latour's thesis resolves around a constant purification, his sense of hybridization fits more within a secular society that tends to continuously search for the sacred, and as a result, the concept of the cyborg can also be considered an element of resacralization in the modern world. The cyborg that was born in Shelley's novel in order to transgress forbidden borders "has become more difficult to repress in modern society where "the proliferation of monsters is indeed getting completely out of control. The processes of purification, which in Latour's opinion have always been illusory, can no longer disguise the fact" (Lykke 17).

Nevertheless, Frankenstein's Creature as cyborg is seriously questioned by Donna Haraway in her canonical "Cyborg" essay. Haraway defines the cyborg as "a creature in a post-gender world" that is able to break down rigid binaries, but according to her, goes beyond Frankenstein's Creature since "the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense" and "[u]nlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden;... the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos" ("Cyborg" 9). To Haraway, a cyborg is only a cyborg once it extinguishes its historical weight, its unwinnable Oedipal battle and its hope for unity. Apprehensive of, or in contradiction to the idea of reproduction and (re)birth that are part of the network of what she refers to as "informatics of domination" (ibid. 22, 30), Haraway's cyborg looks to go beyond the

creator/created dichotomy and even the anti-technological reading that many originally attributed to Shelley's novel. Thweatt-Bates explains that there seems to be division between the common portrayal of "cyborgs and other posthuman hybrids…as figures of the monstrous, moral abominations resulting from the transgression of ontological boundaries" and the heroic "defiance of categorical identities" that "is the source of powerful action" (ibid. 24-5). Haraway's postgender cyborg is therefore closer to Frankenstein's Creature than Haraway would permit, as it exists between the liminal plain of both characterizations of the cyborg. The two liminal symbols also share a convincing connection as being "outside the pale of human limitations" (Feilla 170), particularly because *Frankenstein* is not the anti-technological novel many have labeled it as, and that the Creature, as Gilbert and Gubar claim, "may really be a female in disguise"(237) The three texts[80] the Creature gains its knowledge from link the Creature's plight with that of women's through "the unattainable glamour of male heroism", along with "all the masculine intricacies" that have been denied to them due to their 'monstrous' births (ibid 238). Furthermore, Susan Stryker (1994/2006) takes the Creature's liminal gendering even further by connecting the monstrousness of Shelley's literary Creature to that of a transgender, whose "embodiment, like the embodiment of the monster, places its subject in an unassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship to a Nature in which it must nevertheless exist", a condition Stryker argue that ultimately leads to rage (248). Still, Stryker does not see the two related simply by a comparable problematic struggle of identity but likewise sees an optimistic and utopian element of constructing one's identity that "exceeds and refutes the purpose of the master" between the Creature and the

[80] Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Plutarch's *Lives*, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Werther.*

transgender (ibid.). For Cathrine Waldby (2004) this is where both the cyborg and Frankenstein's Creature are interchangeable in that both are "ways to think about human becoming. To reject them is to reject possible human futures, to refuse to engage with the consequences of shifting modes of embodiment, reproduction, and living process" (36).

It is correct that in the story the Creature aspires to "organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity" (Haraway 9), but ultimately its desire is never realized, and it remains a liminal entity even when its fictional male creator dies. The Creature's search for reproduction and redemption is never fulfilled and is altogether abandoned at the novel's end, ushering the spectre of the cyborg that preternaturally 'birthed' a culture of cyborgian hybridity. This entity would have to go through transition, for the process of hybridization can be considered as cyborgian as its outcome, and as a result, one cannot appraise the first cyborg[81] in the same way as the contemporary cyborg, for it has been assembled slowly over time

A SPIRAL DANCE IN THE ABYSS

In jettisoning the past, Haraway's cyborg world nevertheless retains the aspect of resacralization of the female gender through the uncanny, the hybrid, and the monstrous. Haraway admits that the cyborg is the uncanny *doppelgänger* to the goddess, standing against but also alongside the image of the spiritual deity. The difference between the two is that the cyborg's paradoxical 'perfection' is closer to the artificial and monstrous than the idealistic or beautiful natural perfection of the goddess. Initially, the cyborg may seem to lack or reject the spiritual or sacredness of the natural body by accepting the

[81] While it is debatable what the first cyborg or prototype truly is, I agree with the many scholars (Russ 1995; Gray, Mentor, & Figueroa-Sarriera 1995; Fuller 2003; Botting 2013) that argue that due to the biological and technological orientation of the Creature, Shelley's novel contains the first cyborg.

artificial into it Even though Haraway chooses the cyborg over the 'sacred' goddess, , she does acknowledge that they are both "bound in the spiral dance" ("Cyborg" 39).

Could this spiral dance in which both are entangled be in the liminal abyss of the resacralization? For instance, the cyborg's transgression of boundaries and "regeneration" (ibid.) of the body forces one to expand "the spiritual practice of listening to and caring for one's own body" (Mercedes &Thweatt-Bates 73). The cyborg merely develops the technological and spiritual hybridity of bodies, and the more one understands that the cyborg uncannily resembles our natural bodies, the simpler it is to see the spiritual potential of the cyborg's "broken boundaries" that are able to "recraft the world" (ibid. 77). As a technological stranger, the cyborg pushes the boundaries of sacred/secular by relocating, though not necessarily negating transcendence, beyond traditional hierarchical and horizontal constructs into a "nonbinary model of interrelation" (Braidotti 205). Haraway's cyborg, therefore, does not reject transcendence but rather essentialism (ibid. 83) and "totalizing narratives of ultimate resolution and closure" (Graham 211). The spiral dance[82] between the goddess and cyborg, becomes a "transgressive boundary crossing" between the disembodied soul and "embodied reality" (ibid. "Posthuman"67), creating a liminal coil between two liminal figures, one sacred and one profane.

The cyborg likewise opens up possibilities in regard to gender that were once restricted due to its strangeness. Just as the cyborg lives in the posthuman abyss between human and machine, it likewise lives in the abyss between genders. Through the rejection of biological reproduction, the cyborg uncannily and paradoxically opens up a space for

[82] Following Van Genep's classification of the rite of passage, Omofolalabo Soyinka Ajayi (1994) states the importance of dancing as a liminal journey of "uniting the spiritual with the earthly" (187).

(re)birth of societal resacralization. Likewise, by reimagining the 'goddess' of second wave feminism, Haraway does not necessarily discard the ascribed spirituality and the sacredness but rather seems to remodel it for the technological contemporary world that no longer wishes to command gender essentialism. Through a rebirth, the cyborg therefore allows for what Judith Butler claims as the "passive medium" of the body, to once again occur (*Gender* 165), allowing for it to inscribe a post-gender and anti-Oedipal culture or society on to it. Butler connects this *tabula rasa* of the body to the Christian and Cartesian notion of the body as "inert matter" or as a "profane void" (ibid.) that can allow for a liminal space of resacralizing. We see this secularized sacredness in Butler's approach to the ritual of gender performance, where she understands Turner's theory of ritual performance almost in a Kierkegaardian terms of repetition, being both "a reenactment and re-experiencing" (178). By emphasizing the repeating facet of Turner's concept of the sacred ritual, Bulter liminalizes the theory by stressing the profane, therefore allowing us to see ritual as both a "transgressive and normative performance" (McKenzie 222).

Equally, Haraway's techno-feminist cyborg does not entirely dissolve the Judeo-Christian narratives of Western society that it challenges, where it seems to still be, at least symbolically, interconnected. Thweatt-Bates points out that there is a divine/human hybridity that exists within Christology that survives in the complex relationship between the posthumanism and spirituality of Haraway's cyborg thesis. The cyborg is neither essentially secular nor sacred, for the secular, cyborg dances with both the goddess and

the "'Catholic sacramentality",[83] in Haraway's work, "a perspective in which the material becomes the sacred" (Thweatt-Bates 82). The cyborg, therefore, disrupts the boundaries of the sacred and secular as it does with nature and technology, and gender. By never confining to themselves to either binary, this disruption forces the cyborg to live in the midst these often violent borders. Kull (2003) for instance, sees a connection between Tillich's argument for "place of the mythos of technology" (240) and Haraway's cyborg. In comparing Tillich's vision of 'the technical city' and the cyborg, Kull sees both as being modern symbols in understanding "our time, our technologies, and ourselves" (ibid. 241). Modern technology, for Tillich, seems to rest with the liminal space of the abyss and ambiguity, between the creative human spirit of autonomy that propels us further in becoming, and the soulless and lifeless technological structure that looks to remove that freedom. Yet for Tillich, paradoxically the divine and scared are located liminally and symbolically in "the ground and abyss of being" (*Essential* 147), where in the creative and destructive ambiguity of the holy void, every form disappears and emerges between these boundaries. Boundaries are not just for crossing but are spaces to oscillate and exist upon. 'Living on the boundaries' of the abyss, although difficult, allows for both the sanctioning of, but likewise, the rupturing of the consisting language and culture "to create new events of divine presence" (Gudmarsdottir 22, 59). As Eugene Taylor (2009)

[83] Like her cyborg, Haraway herself is caught in a spiral dance of the sacred and profane. While claiming she is "a committed atheist and anti-Catholic"(*Reader* 334), she still acknowledges the influence that her Catholic upbringing has had on her work: "But I am also deeply formed by theology, and particularly by Roman Catholic theology and practice. I learned it. I studied it. It is deep in my bones" (ibid. 333). In *Manifestly Haraway* (2016), although reiterating her hatred for the Catholic Church, Haraway likes to see herself "as a secular Catholic" (267-9).
Relatedly, using Butler's understanding of gender as performance, Alison Webster (1998) similarly argues that the Christian faith has become something you perform and create rather than something you obtain in the modern world.

argues, Tillich vision of "the abyss is a realm of creative chaos that transcends values. It is transmoral. It is mystic illumination-the holy void, the tolerance of ambiguity, the, attraction to the gray areas of life because of their hidden possibilities" (237). While academics (Daly 1973/1985; Ulanov 1999/2005; Althaus-Reid 2000; Gudmarsdottir 2016) have pointed out some aspect of the untidy relationship of Tillich's theology and that of gender, sexuality, and the feminine[84], the notion of the abyss itself is nonetheless a strong element in feminist thought.

Feminism "opens unto the abyss" (Elam 24) and is about "keeping sexual difference…open as the space of radical uncertainty" (ibid. 55), and in this sense the abyss should been seen as a symbolic representation of the infinite, of the unreachability of the limits. Diane Elam (1994) defines the liminality of the female abyss, as a space of creation and destruction, of support and rupture:

> On the one hand, the abyss fills up with representations of women. What it means to be or act as a woman is continually more determined…On the other hand, however, the abyssal operation is infinite. The very filling up leaves one "full of abyss." The series of images in the *mise en abyme* is without end; each additional image changes all the others in the series without ever completely filling up the abyss, which gets deeper with each additional determination. (Elam 29-30)

For Irigaray (1987/1993), the abyss exists in the space between men and women.[85] Irigaray argues in maintaining this otherness, otherwise the possibility of coasting back

[84] Exloring his ideas of abyssal boundaries, Ann Belford Ulanov notes that in his extensive work on the subject, gender is never discussed, however, she does argue that"[l]atent in Tillich's doctrine of symbols is the meeting, mixing and exchanging of masculine and feminine modes of being" (232)

[85] "Between man and woman a strangeness must subsist that corresponds to the fact that they dwell in different worlds. Perceiving such a difference is more difficult than perceiving biological or social differences. It remains invisible, as subjectivity itself, but, without respecting it, we cannot meet each other as humans" *(Key Writings* xii).

towards the image of the woman in terms of the language and gaze of the man returns.[86] For women to become subjects and free individuals outside of the patriarchal construct, Irigaray expresses the need for the female divine: "If women have no God, they are unable either to communicate or commune with one another. They need…an infinite if they are to share a little" (*Sexes* 62). The lack of the female divine "paralyzes the infinite of becoming a woman" (ibid.). This female divine that Irigaray calls for goes beyond a notion of feminine and motherhood that have become part the male hegemonic definition of the female. This new female divine, incorporates the infinite and ambiguity of being a woman, and consequently, a woman's potential to become a subject of her own. While it may be possible for one to transcend the self through the encountering of the other, the female subject must begin with cultivating the self in order to return to the self. Therefore, Irigaray sees the divine in similar terms as Bloch's spirit of Utopia, in that it needs the self needs to burn through the other, simultaneously being inside and outside the boundaries of the abyss.

In more secular terms, although still allied with the idea of resacralization, in *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (2005), Zerilli takes Hannah Arendt's theory of "the abyss of freedom" and applies it to feminism's call for social revolution. For Arendt 'the abyss of freedom' is when there is a moment of pause or a "legendary hiatus between end and beginning, between a no-longer and a not-yet" (205). Zerilli, as we have seen with other intellectuals, perceives the abyssal liminal space as a liberating realm of transcendence and becoming, in an attempt to locate and recapture what she and Arendt

[86] "To include the other in my universe prevents meeting with the other, whereas safeguarding the obscurity and the silence that the other remains for me aids in discovering proximity" (ibid. 29).

call feminism's "lost treasure", the radical imaginary of political, social, and thereby gender, freedom. Zerilli's demand for "[a] freedom-centered feminism" that "would strive to bring about transformation in normative concepts of gender without returning to the classical notion of freedom as sovereignty"(180), looks to escape and go beyond an idea of autonomy and equality that is still situated in patriarchal etymology**.**

Haraway's spiral dance traverses the same abyssal tensions of finite and infinite, between the imaginary and the realistic. Living on the boarders of the abyss between profane cyborgian and sacred goddess symbolism, the cyborg both maintains and destroys Western and Christian symbiotic elements and thus creating a more complex relationship of the two. The 'sacramentality' in Haraway's work is an uncanny residue that allows for reforming, becoming, and resacralizing the notions of gender and the body. Through the liminal gaze of the stranger, the cyborg transverses the liminal space of utopian dreams and dystopian nightmares. The infinite possibilities that the technological 'female divine' generates must do so in the uncertain hope of technological autonomy, while ultimately still battling the patriarchal and capitalist society it exists in:

> The disruption of boundaries that the cyborg myth foregrounds is always, and necessarily, ambiguous with respect to its promise. And this ambiguity signals a kind of playful daring of the cyborg. Haraway's cyborg signals not a collapse into some variant of a return but an advance into the zone of greatest danger. Haraway's wager is that the cyborg can find the weak points, the points that offer grid of technological domination. (Kull "Technonature"243)

The cyborg as stranger, inevitability must move through this liminal chaotic zone of uncertainty and danger, however, empowered by Medua's ironic gaze of a monstrous beauty, the posthuman and androgynous cyborgian looks to unfasten new ways in understanding the symbolic qualities of gender and the body, while navigating through its own abyssal vanguard; its'no (wo)man's land'.

CYBORGS, DOGS, AND ABORTIONS: THE ABJECT OF GENDER IN KATHY ACKER'S *DON QUIXTOE* (1986) AND *EMPIRE OF THE SENSELESS* (1988)

The (post)modern strangers that exist in Kathy Acker's novels not only belong to the fringes of society; anarchist punks, feminists, transvestites, and even pirates, but they also belong to the fringes of reality and fiction. From cyborgs to anthropomorphic and shapeshifting dogs, Acker constantly blurs both the gender and natural/artificial lines of humanity's dichotomy. Moreover, they are characters that are existentially homeless, struggling with a constant search for a better place for "[e]ven freaks need homes, countries, language, communication" (*Don Quixote* 202). She speaks through her female protagonist in *Don Quixote*, stating, "[i]t is for you, freaks my loves, I am writing and it is about you" (ibid.). Language plays an integral part in shaping both reality and fiction and Acker uses fiction as a means to reverse the myths of reality. Alex Houen (2012**)** claims that "[i]n writing herself other, Acker frequently questions the fictionality of her allobiographies by tempering her creativity with plagiarism. Rather than simply willing wholesale belief in her fictional world, then, she often suspends the fictionality in order to consider how the writing relates to contexts of power" (176). However, Acker takes an innovative approach in "writing herself other" by playing with gender binaries through language, inducing a desire to capture a post-gender society. Rather than tackling a new world in similar language, Acker challenges the old world with new language, trying to escape the history of "books" and "nature" (*Don* 14). Renowned novels and stories originally about male development or perseverance are reinterpreted by Acker's use of a female voice and female struggle. By placing women in celebrated men's roles, Acker blurs gender binaries rather than upholding them, more so than the recognized lens of the marginalized other could. In order to achieve this, she must battle with the socio-political

phallocentric language by simultaneously reversing it, yet still being a part of it: "she was both a woman therefore she couldn't feel love and a knight in search of Love. She had had to become a knight, for she could solve this problem only by becoming partly male" (*Don* 29).

Don Quixote is a non-linear, surrealist tale, about an originally nameless woman, who after having to cope with the ordeal of an abortion, sets out on a series of imaginary adventures that span between social-political and philosophical ponderings, dreams, and even madness. Searching endlessly for love and freedom, Don Quixote strives to transform herself beyond what a patriarchal and capitalist America is able to offer her. Acker's virtually androgynous reinterpretation of Miguel de Cervantes' famous character repurposes the myth of the quixotic knight in the secularized modern world of nihilistic and capitalist urges. It also allows for a woman to take on the role of the hero and knight that takes on the symbolic enemies of society instead of the illusionary ones of de Cervantes' tale (Worthington 245). Although it may seem an impossibility to accomplish in a consumer and nihilistic society, the "night-knight" (*Don* 10) of Acker's *Don Quixote* foolishly searches for her "Holy Grail" (Ibid. 9): love. Don Quixote pursues a form of love in which a woman is a subject and not an object, for according to her, "objects can't love" (ibid. 28). This quest for ultimate love that Don Quixote embarks on is a utopian pursuit for a love that is not produced and controlled my men.

Like most liminal journeys of the modern stranger, Don Quixote's quest is not only shrouded "in language that veers wildly between the sacred and the profane" (O'Donnell 528) but also language that is violent or abhorrent. As a female character, she is especially a witness and victim of the language of sexual violence. By embracing "the

traditional oedipal narrative structure and the misogynist violence inherent in it" Acker is able "to explore that structure for sites of feminine agency" (Worthington 244), where violence opens up the liminal world of resacralization and becoming through a form of anguish. The originally nameless protagonist of Acker's *Don Quixote* is 'born again' after she goes through the procedure of an abortion. It is paradoxically through death that she is able to live again. Her death and subsequent rebirth allow her the freedom and ability to resist the social confines of the female and her maternal role as a woman, what Ellen G. Friedman (1989) describes as "a precondition for surrendering the constructed self" (42). Don Quixote's abortion places her on the road to secular 'knighthood' because it allows her to become a "hole-ly" (*Don* 13) subject but still allowing for the transcendent act of reclaiming her body, thereby 'aborting' her past identity. By naming herself, Don Quixote has the opportunity to become her own creator and authority over her identity**.** Here, Don Quixote takes the symbolic power God had gifted to Adam in her own hands. In the creation story of *Genesis*, God gives Adam the power and authority over the creatures around him, including Eve, through the act of naming (Schimmel 1989; Leonard 1990; Thwaites 2017) since "by naming the world we impose a pattern and a meaning which allows us to manipulate the world" (Spender 163). In order to take back the power over her own life, identity, and body, away from the external monstrousness placed on her by the male gaze and a phallocentric society, Don Quixote must name herself.

In "The Laugh of Medus", Cixous argues that "[b]y writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display-the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to

be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions" (880). A comparable revolutionary Medusa briefly appears in Acker's novel. Unlike Cervantes' protagonist who is symbolic of Medusa's slayer Perseus, Acker's Don Quixote is closer linked with Medusa. As "[her snakes writhe around nails varnished by the Blood of Jesus Christ" (*Don Quixote* 28), virtually appropriating or resacralizing the power of the messianic, Medusa quickly interchanges with Don Quixote as a formidable force of the feminine. In the face of man, represented as a dog, Medusa shouts: "I'm your desire's object, dog, because I can't be a subject…. What you name 'love', I name 'nothingness'…as long as you cling to a dualistic reality, which is a reality molded by power, women will not exist with you…When you love us, you hate us, because we have to deny you" (ibid.). This "dualistic reality" that Medusa argues women are trapped in reinforces the gender hierarchy, places the female gender as other, and relegates the feminine to the realm of animals. Nonetheless, Acker's representation of man as dog uncannily places them on an equal plane, maintaining that the animal or monstrous qualities, if they exist in humanity, represent a hybridity that exist in both genders**.** Acker's Medusa reflects the abject back towards the social order, exposing its fragmentation, hybridity, and more importantly, its hypocrisy. Acker's Medusa is more liminal than Cixous' however, in that while its gaze reflects the monstrousness back on male dominated society and therefore keeping it in context of Cixous' revolutionary interpretation, Acker does not inverse Medusa as a representation of beauty like Cixous does. Instead, Acker retains her monstrousness terror, as an uncanny gaze reflected back to patriarchal society and thus rejecting Cixous' female essentialism and ubiquitousness.

Analogously, one of the novel's main protagonists in *The Empire of the Senseless* is the mixed-race cyborg named Abhor. Abhor is an outcast, a "construct cunt" (*Empire* 37) that represents a liminal or symbolic "site of gender conflict" (Pitchford 98). Abhor's tragic Oedipal story of being raped by her father is told by her male lover Thivai, at the beginning of the novel through his language, and not hers. Acker is not subtle in naming her protagonist; disgust and violence have labeled her, while her identity has been fashioned by language that is not her own, a language that creates a myth that confines one to the monstrosity they have been historically labeled as. While raping her, Abhor's father gives her sacred power by calling her his God but instantly removes it from her by referring to himself as God's creator and asserts that he both "made" and is "making" her[87]. Abhor's father takes away her power by being in control of her body, in order to punish her for believing that she was the one in control of it and her sexuality. By creating God, he thereby controls her past, present, and future identity. Because of this and her mother's passivity, Abhor is disgusted by the word mother (15) and cannot help but see all heterosexual love as resembling rape to some degree. While it is a misconception that Andrea Dworkin or Catherine Macinnon state that 'all heterosexual love is rape'[88], Dworkin (1987/2007) does argue that "[*v*]*iolation* is a synonym for intercourse"(163), while MacKinnon (1989) claims that in a patriarchal society heterosexuality "institutionalizes male sexual dominance and female sexual submission"

[87] "I Know you're mine!!!…I made you!!!...I'm making you…My father explained again, 'I am fucking God and I made God" (*Empire* 15).

[88] Dworkin rejects this interpretation of her work stating, "[w]hat I think is that sex must not put women in a subordinate position. It must be reciprocal and not an act of aggression from a man looking only to satisfy himself. That's my point" (cited in Kelso 89). Moreover, in *Intercourse*, she also argues that sex is also "a communion, a sharing, mutual possession of an enormous mystery, and therefore "has the intensity and magnificence of violent feeling transformed into tenderness" (81).

(113). While all heterosexual love is not rape, as Irigaray argues, it outside the realm of transcendence: “when a male lover loses himself in the depths of the beloved woman’s sensual pleasure, he swells within her as in an abyss, an unfathomable depth. Both of them are lost, each in the other, on the wrong side, or the other side, of transcendence” (194). This lack of autonomy similarly forces Don Quixote to experience lesbian sex for she argues “when I make love to a woman or myself, I’m controlling the body. Loving a woman is controlling. Whereas, when I make love to a man, I’m the opposite” (127). This inability or lack of control in society is at its most abject when it is endorsed during an act of love between two people.

Paradoxically, it is this abjection that spurs Don Quixote’s quest to find this ‘taboo’ or impossible notion of love. When it comes to the abject, Kristeva and Bulter both emphasize the necessity of trauma both internally and externally, between self/other; subject/object, as it uncannily discloses what is hidden or repulsive of the self just as much as it does with society. As Butler argues, “[t]he “abject” designates that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered “Other” (*Gender* 168). This appears as an expulsion of alien elements, but the alien is effectively established through this expulsion. The construction of the ““not me” as the abject establishes boundaries which are also the first contours of the subject” (ibid. 169). Through abjection, the destruction or blurring of boundaries allows for the abject subject to create individual and newly formed boundaries of the self. As Abhor’s lover argues, “GET RID OF MEANING. YOUR MIND IS A NIGHTMARE THAT HAS BEEN EATING YOU: NOW EAT YOUR MIND” (*Empire* 38). Although Thivai’s message is accurate, he is also a significant part of the constructed “meaning” that is causing these

nightmares. Abhor only begins to gain her freedom when she goes off on her own adventure without Thivai, when she is able to gaze into the abject monstrousness and write her own story.

ACKER'S RESACRLIZATION OF THE SYMBOLIC

The problem that Acker and her gender defying protagonists face is that despite the fact that they deconstruct the language and boundaries of society, they are still confined to using the language and binaries given to them. As Acker states in the epigraph to the second part of *Don Quixote*, "[b]eing dead, Don Quixote could no longer speak. Being born into and part of a male world, she had no speech of her own. All she could do was read male texts which weren't hers" (39). This has led many of her critics (Friedman; Muth 2011; Hume 2001) to question Acker's linguistic goal, even calling her work "a triumphal failure" (Redding 301) or at the very least, problematic in that her work "attests to a prior system of order still very much operational" (Hume 486). Acker herself acknowledges this through the voice of Abhor:

> Ten years ago it seemed possible to destroy language through language: to destroy language which normalizes and controls by cutting that language. Nonsense would attack the empire-making (empirical) empire of language, the prisons of meaning. But this nonsense, since it depended on sense, simply pointed back to the normalizing institutions (*Empire* 134).

Ultimately, it is difficult to think one can simply 'get rid of meaning' or separate language from its connotation, especially through the medium of literature. Acker's imaginative utopia clashes against constructed reality, resulting in Acker and her protagonists collapsing under the weight of their utopian values being resisted against and eventually pushed down on them. For instance, Abhor shares many attributes with Haraway's conception of the cyborg; however, she does not reach any 'utopian' status

because of it. Technology has not changed her standing as a male object or a commodity but has instead strengthened it. The blurring of natural and artificial has not dissolved Abhor's Oedipal constructed past since it is consonant with the capitalistic society that surrounds her. With *Don Quixote*, the protagonist's rebirth does not culminate in equality in the outside world and as the novel progresses, Don Quixote, like Cervantes' character, is swayed back to reality at the end, and the genderless identifying of the character slowly fades back towards gender specific pronouns**.**

However, to deem Acker and subsequently, her protagonists' mission as a failure misses the entire hybrid and liminal scope of the novels, especially since both *Don Quixote* and *Empire* acknowledge this 'failure' to some degree. Her novels take place in the liminal sphere of utopian dream and harsh reality, resulting in the character's constant oscillation and alienation both internally and externally. Acker's Don Quixote evokes the spirit of Cervantes' original character, who himself was displaced and alienated from the world around him; however, the chief distinction is that although Acker's Don Quixote, and for the matter Abhor, are displaced, they are modern strangers and not just marginalized others because they are uncanny and symbolic representations of the fragmented and liminal society that created and house them**.** New York is a paradoxical place that represents both the ability to find one's identity and simultaneously, a city that is able to deny it. New York with "its neon and street lights" that give "out an artificial polluted light" (*Don* 18), allows for an artificially constructed emptiness where one's expectations can be born. But, as Cristina Garrigós González (1996) points out, *Don Quixote* "is a novel about love and violence, but it is also about the power of a city, New York, over a woman" (114). One of the novel's outcasts discourages Don Quixote when

she realizes that the city is a hellish capitalist space, which only amplified the strangeness or abnormality that she felt from the home she previously ran away from (*Don* 115). Don Quixote's quest to find love is therefore even more absurd "in the materialistic, machist and sexist world in which we live. A city like New York represents all the western values carried to an extreme" (González 116).

Equally, the landscape of *Empire*'s dystopian Paris is itself hellish, suffering from disease, capitalist nihilism, crime, and poverty, while the Algerian revolution that sought to bring about a transformation in the end "changed nothing" (110). Abhor recognizes her liminal and fragmented identity being reflected by the city: "…in this Paris death and life were fucking. Just like my father gave birth to me and wanted to kill me. In Paris, death smelled like life and vice-versa, especially in human beings" (ibid. 82). For a male outcast, like Thivai, Paris is still "[t]he true city of dreams… a city in which a person could do anything" (ibid 147). On the other hand, for Abhor, the city is far more uncanny in its utopian spirit. Abhor sees herself stuck between the otherness of both men and women, leaving her with a fragmented and liminal identity. The men that controlled the city, "the dead", were never seen, while the women, "the mutants", were the only ones visible: "The urban areas of the Western world were now composed of dead and mutants. I was confused to the point of psychosis because I wasn't sure what I was" (*Empire* 110). Unable to locate her identity in these binaries, her liminal existence once again brings up gender ambiguity, an ambiguity that is reflected in the glass buildings of the Parisian cityscape:

> Since I was a mutant from outer space who was living in exile in Paris, Paris looked as if it was made up of glass. Glass cuts through the flesh. Paris was a bloody city. Rectangular blocks of mirrored glass intersected tall buildings of black glass about a quarter way down their lengths…Under the bank, there was a

> building of opaque grey glass which was nameless. 'nameless' meant 'useful'; there was no end to the depth of the building." (ibid 110)

Paris' violent nature, which cuts symbolically through the physical body, unveils the indistinctness of both the body and the city. Although one could become anything within this emptiness, Acker conveys emptiness as an uncertainty and seriously questions whether any utopian reflections can grow from it. Abhor doubts the notion of being 'useful' as being a distinguishing feature of utopia, since usefulness is a sign of a commodity culture and objectification. According to Henri Lefebvre (1991), space is never neutral nor is it an empty container waiting to be filled by social human activity. Space in a capitalist and phallocentric society is always produced from the ideologies that control it. Lefebvre argues, "the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action" and "in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (26). However, these spaces for Lefebvre, produce more than a means of control. They also have "strange effects" (97), which seem to blur the lines between the external and inner world of the individual. Lefebvre states, "[t]he space of the dream is strange and alien, yet at the same time as close to us as is possible" but nonetheless "it still has a sensual-sensory character. It is a theatrical space even more than a quotidian or poetic one: a putting into images of oneself, for oneself" (208-209).

The space of the dream is analogous to the space of the city, strange and alien but also recognizable due to its recurring elements. Acker's novels exist within physical and imaginative space yet are forced to operate and "adhere to the oedipal rules in an endeavor to examine the narrative possibilities for empowerment in death" (Worthington 244). By obeying at the same time as resisting these narratives, Acker's modern strangers exist in a liminal zone of reality and dream, horror and beauty. Just as "[h]er father's

transgression introduces her to a complexity in the world, which is both more painful and more truthful" (Conte 16), the city also offers a similar backdrop for a world of experience and suffering that releases harsh reality from dream or illusion, and vice versa.

Despite Acker's association of utopian thinking with the act of suffering, the torment her characters go through does not necessarily bring any sort of transcendence or any elucidation**.** Just as her characters' liminal identities do not bring about equality of the sexes, suffering likewise does not result in a utopian outcome. Instead, she problematizes the idea of suffering as a tool of transcendence. Throughout *Don Quixote*, Acker associates Catholicism with madness because of its belief that surrendering to suffering is the pathway to being healed. Although Don Quixote, like a Jesus figure, is attracted to 'sinners' and loves others who suffer, thereby linking suffering and her quest for love, the characters are not healed by this suffering but instead continue to endure more. Suffering is not a requirement to reach a different plane of spiritual consciousness but is something one must go through simply because to love and to be human is grounded in suffering. Her conversation with God at the end of the novel allows her to realize that a quest in search of any idealism was doomed from the beginning. The genderless God[89] she encounters is a self-proclaimed "mealy mouthed hypocrite, dishonest… 'whore'", who points out Its monstrous imperfections and tells the 'night' to look inwards: "God continued condemning Him- or Herself: "So now that you know I'm imperfect, night, that you can't turn to Me: turn to yourself (*Don* 207). The "Me" that God refers to, seems to be the idealistic and essential representation of God or love that Don Quixote chases after, which she acknowledges is impossible after she understands

[89] "God continued condemning Him- or Herself: "So now that you know I'm imperfect, night, that you can't turn to Me: turn to yourself

that she actually *is* made in God's monstrous and fragmented image. In this sense, she maintains the Christian doctrine of God's omnipresence but deconstructs the idealism that has held God as superior and perfect.

Acker does not just deconstruct the sacred into the secular but reconstructs and resacralizes it through the sacred self and the liminal act of becoming. Suffering and torment does not lead to a healed or unified self but continue in reaffirming estrangement from the fractured self. While the transcendence that exists in the beginning of the novel is one of gender, at the end Don Quixote's transcendence is one of perception that makes the quest of essentialism, her "sickness" (18) fade away. Don Quixote neither fulfills nor abandons her quest, nor does she wake up from her dream and back into reality. In the end, she awakens to a hybrid of the two, invoking Baudelaire's axiom of "[b]e drunk always" (73).[90] Don Quixote breaks another set of chains and once again begins her life anew: "I thought about God for one more minute and forgot it. I closed my eyes, head drooping, like a person drunk for so long she no longer knows she's drunk, and then drunk, awoke to the world which lay before me" (*Don* 207). The message of *Don Quixote* might be summed up by Acker herself when speaking about creating your own values: "[p]eople are searching for their centers (be they centers of pleasure, pain, whatever) but really, in a way, it's a search for "God"" (*Last Interview* 147). Don Quixote's search ends with finding God, but that ultimately leads to her realizing the ugly truth that perfect love, with another human or even God, does not really exist and that it is a complicated, flawed, and monstrous emotion. Yet despite Don Quixote repetitious cycle of failures in her quest

[90] "Be drunk always. Nothing else matters; there are no other subjects. Not to feel the grime weight of Time breaking your backs and bending you double, you must get drunk and stay drunk" (73).

for love, her utopian spirit is not diminished. The utopian fragments and residue from her quest still linger but reformed outside the realm of ideals, residing in a hybrid but symbolic place. For example, Don Quixote romanticizes the notion of the musician Prince, an artist famous for blurring the lines of gender, race, and morality, as being the perfect president of the United States of America (ibid. 21). Furthermore, despite what may be seen as failure, Don Quixote and Acker may have been triumphant in what Cixious maintains as to "writing her self", although in a more liminal understanding of what constitutes the female self, and therefore, arriving much closer to Haraway's claim to "live on the boundaries, to write without the founding myth of original wholeness" ("Cyborg" 33).

In *Empire***,** Abhor correspondingly ends the novel in an ambiguous state. Abhor learns to ride a motorcycle, which acts as both a gender abolishing act and a mode of personal freedom. Not only does Abhor reject the Oedipal and capitalist culture surrounding her, she also refuses to join its antagonistic other in Thivai's terrorism or the typical rebellious outfit of the motorcycle gang (Horn 142). By refusing to be a slave to Thivai's violent cause or to join a gang consisting solely of men, she substitutes these options with her own cause: that is, becoming her own gang and as a result, allowing her hope despite not knowing what it is besides its existing within disgust:

> "I stood there, there in the sunlight, and thought that I didn't as yet know what I wanted. I now fully knew what I didn't want and whom I hated. That was something.
>
> And then I thought that, one day, maybe, there I'd *[sic]* be a human society in a world which is beautiful, a society which wasn't just disgust. (*Empire* 227)

Since she is unable to put utopian ideals into words, Acker moves away from trying to blur binary divisions through language in exchange for symbolic representations. Tattoos

become the underlining symbol of the novel due to their "ambiguous social value" (ibid. 130). According to Acker they are the "most positive thing in the book" since "it concerns taking over, doing your own sign-making…The meeting of body and, well, the spirit" (Friedman, "Conversation" 17-18). Abhor maintains this when claiming that early Christian tattoos were seen as stigmata indicating exile and tribal identity (*Empire* 130). Acker uses the tattoo's sacred and "defamatory" (ibid.) essence as the liminal and resacralized symbol of the stranger, for it instantaneously represents the sacred/profane, masculine/feminine, dream/taboo hybridity of modern secularized life that can only be expressed through symbolic and liminal representations; representations that she can live within. In *On Revolution* (1963), Arendt suggests that the best way to navigate through the abyss of freedom is to locate a freedom that is a "visible, tangible reality" (33), or it is at risk of collapsing under itself. To write oneself female, is to exist in the abyssal and liminal space between iconoclastic ambiguity and tangible reality.

CONCLUSION: SPECTRAL MONSTERS AND MODERN STRANGERS

In the beginning there is ruin. Ruin is what remains or returns as the spectre from the moment one first looks at oneself and a figuration is eclipsed. The figure, the face, then sees its visibility being eaten away
- Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*

Monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return.
- Jeffery Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)"

The phantom is therefore also a metapsychological fact: what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others.
- Nicholas Abraham, "Notes on the Phantom"

Thus strangely are our souls constructed, and by such slight ligaments are we bound to prosperity or ruin. (Victor Frankenstein)
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

SPECTRES AND MONSTERS

Monstrosity has been discussed, and relatedly Shelley's Creature, throughout this dissertation as a sort of hauntological theme or thread across many of the modern stranger figures discussed. This haunting quality is why, when examining *Frankenstein* in the opening chapter, I allocated the Creature, modernity's first mythological monster, more to Derrida's concept of the spectre than that of monstrosity. In most cases, the philosophical uses of the spectre and monster is not always distinguishable, but I believe they exist within the same liminal and preternatural plane. The differences, if any, and similarities between the two can conceivably be as subtle and equivocal as Derrida's estimation of spirit and spectre[91]. Historically, it was corporeal and ethereal divisions that chiefly distinguished monsters and spectres from one another. Where the monster

[91] "The spirit, the specter are not the same thing, and we will have to sharpen this difference; but as for what they have in common, one does not know what it is, what it is presently. It is something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it is, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence" (*Specters* 5).

exemplified something that is alive and physical, the spectre was an imaginary, supernatural representation of the return of the dead. "A Specter, or Apparition," argues Catholic demonologist Pierre Le Loyer in his *Treatise of Specters* (1586), "is an Imagination of a Substance without a Bodie, the which presenteth itself sensibly unto men, against the order and course of Nature, and maketh them afraid" (1).[92] This distinction between the two did not drastically alter during the Gothic era. Gothic monsters represent "violence, sadism, and unsavory appetite" that live on the edges of reason, whereas Gothic spectres are predominately seen as representations of the human imagination or illusionary supernaturalism that ultimately become discredited as fabrications (Brittan 30). While one entity appears to question reason from its own liminal surroundings, the other exists to eventually restore order and reason through the dispelling of superstition. It is with F*rankenstein* that these binaural, though delicate distinctions, become radically intertwined, giving us a modern experiment that results in creating the first spectral-monster that, as we have seen, both haunts and embodies secularized modernity and its uncanny strangers. Consequently, I would like to bring the discussion back to *Frankenstein*, monstrosity, and the spectral, in an attempt to 'return to the dead', as it were.

One way to argue the Creature, and accordingly, the modern stranger, is both monster and spectre is to say that it goes through its own liminal *Bildungsroman*, advancing from a teratological to a hauntological entity, originating with the monstrous and unnatural birth that eventually culminates with the spectral after the Creature's development and assumed death. However, this reading can be somewhat misleading

92 The first time the word 'specter' appeared in English was actually in the 1605 English translation of Le Loyer's treatise by Zacharie Jones (Chesters 146, n. 18)

since it depicts a linear progress or transformation from monster to spectre, which can be problematic for two reasons. First, the Creature in *Frankenstein* is continuously both a spectre and monster from birth, something even Victor Frankenstein addresses: "I then reflected, and the thought made me shiver, that the creature whom I had left in my apartment might still be there, alive, and walking about. I dreaded to behold this monster.... I threw the door forcibly open, as children are accustomed to do when they expect a spectre to stand in waiting for them on the other side; but nothing appeared" (88). Secondly, this interpretation in isolation puts the spectral on a higher or superior spectrum than that of the monstrous, indicating a movement of progress or transcendence from one to the other. Rather, Shelley's revolutionary influence on the subjects is achieved by making the two interchangeable by formulating the spectre into flesh, something also Derrida (1994/2005) acknowledges by arguing, "Mary Shelley brought our attention to the anagram that makes the spectre in respect visible again" (288). By making the spectre corporal, Shelley paradoxically brings the spectre into the monstrous and vice versa, thereby symbolically bringing it from the realm of superstition into the uncanny and liminal edges of reason to stand alongside its uncanny cousin. It is with *Frankenstein* that both the spectre and monster are spoken and listened to,[93] and more importantly, also possibly respected.[94]

Returning to Derrida's language concerning the monster and spectre, it is obvious that they share many fundamental characteristics. Both operate in uncanny territories of

[93] "He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet" (*Specters* 221).
[94] "Respect for the spectre, as Mary Shelley would say" (Derrida, *Politics* 73).

liminality, exploring the unknown and indefinable, and thereby are seen as symbolic warnings or threats that continuously haunt us. More importantly, they are also entities we may be able to see but which nonetheless, through an abject absence, interrogate and question the notion of the self, otherness, and the concept of being present. To Derrida (1992/1995) and other scholars such as Jeffery Cohen (1996), monsters are fully realized and alive, and if they exist within our imaginaries, they do so predominately within a realm, though not limited to, of hybridity. Spectres, on the other hand, seem to be even more liminal to Derrida, in that they seem to go beyond the "hybridization" of monstrosity (*Points* 386). A spectre is something that is neither present nor real, but nonetheless, is still able to intersect itself into our present and real worlds. Although ghostly in nature, spectres still to some degree, exist within the visible, corporal, and material world, presenting themselves as an image of individuals from our past.

The fundamental difference between the two may very well be centered on a negligible variation of paradox, where the spectre operates in disjunction, residing within the neither/nor category while the hybrid monster exists within the conjunction of the both and the same. However, if examined closely, there does not seem to be much degree of separation between the two uncanny forces, yet, although contemplated prior in an interview in 1990 (*Points*), Derrida never really brings up monsters in *Specters'* hauntological narrative, although many others (Shildrick 2002; Ganteau 2015) have written on the obvious connection. The purely monstrous is thus, for Derrida, an impossibility.

Derrida must have seen Shelley's Creature as more in line with the spectre than monstrosity, especially since true monstrousness for Derrida is unable to sustain itself,

while his reluctance to connect the two could be accorded to the fact that monsters lose their monstrosity, potency, and strength over us, once they are perceived or recognized as monsters (*Points* 386) and as a result, vanquished. Regardless of its initial monstrosity and abjection, the uncanny monster, even though it helps alter culture, slowly dilutes itself into a canny familiarity, into the very thing it threatened.[95] This is what Derrida calls "the movement of culture" (ibid. 387), a relationship akin to the secularization/resacralization process. Ironically, the Creature is always regarded as a monster by the humans it interacts with, a projection that the monster itself is forced to embody, yet this does not remove the threat it poses to us. What the monster is never given by Victor is an identity. If to name something is to have power over it, the Creature may very well have retained its power over Victor because it was never named and as a result, remained unknown and haunting even to its creator, despite it being perceived by Frankenstein and as a result, itself, as a monster. Still, notwithstanding, the Creature never loses its hauntological threat and therefore, is never tamed.[96]

SPECTRES AND PHANTOMS

One discernible reason for the omission of the monster in *Specters* is that Derrida's spectre is largely tied to his definition of messianic time. The spectre is neither past nor future for Derrida, and consequently, allows the "spectral moment" to "no longer belong to time" (*Specters* xix). Since the spectre is simultaneously *revenant* and *arrivant*,

[95] "…from the moment they enter into culture, the movement of acculturation, precisely, of domestication, of normalization has already begun" (Derrida, *Points* 386).
[96] This reading focuses of Shelley's novel, however, through popular culture, such as the Universal 'Frankenstein' films (1931-39), the Creature/Monster slowly becomes tamed. While James Whale's 1931 film does not name the Creature, this is something that developed over time, it does begin to diminish the Creature's intelligence, empathy, and individualism, and as a result, its uncanniness.

the past is just as ambiguous or unknown as the future, and therefore, "must carry beyond present life" (ibid.). Time for Derrida, as it did with Benjamin, is a crucial aspect of the messianic, and there seems to be a difference between the 'monstrous moment' and that of the 'messianic moment' that the spectre embodies. While the monster does represent an *arrivant*, a warning or threat of a possible future[97], and even a questioning of humanity's traditional values, Derrida ironically does not seem to allocate any sort of past, and therefore any messianic character, to it. The spectre is messianic in that it disrupts time, epitomized by Derrida's use of the *Hamlet* quote, "time is out of joint", thereby blurring the lines between past, present, and future. The spectre is simultaneously an inheritance from the past and future, which precedes any experience "beyond the living present in general" (*Specters* xix). Time, for Derrida, is a series of "modalized presents" (ibid), therefore, messianic time cannot exist in the present but rather outside of it. The monstrous moment, on the other hand, seems to exist in instances, in the abruption of time directly associated with the present-future but not the past-present-future of disjointed time.

Frankenstein itself, both in structure and genre, also refuses to be confined to a certain moment in time but nonetheless captures a moment where time has been disrupted; it simultaneously captures the monstrous living in the messianic. Derrida must have accepted a spectral element in Shelley's Creature specifically due to it being a hybridization of dead body parts. Frankenstein's Creature also contains a history and past and represents 'a return of the dead' just as much as the spectre does, simply one that is more fragmented, uncanny, and subconscious. Even though it is not originally weighed

[97] "A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future" **(**ibid. 387)

down by it, at least until it develops an obsession with its creator, the Creature still carries the dead with it at birth in ways that may not be so easily recognized or decipherable as the image of a spectre, but conveys a culturally miscellaneous past nonetheless. If the spectre is an image of an individual that translates it to the collective, the monster is an image of the collective that channels itself unknowingly in the individual; to borrow Bloch's utopian symbolism, one is Kant burning through Hegel, while the other is Hegel burning through Kant.

However, for Cohen, all monsters, not just Shelley's, are "a cultural body" even in origin (4), as the monster is part of a larger cultural perspective and is neither born nor exists entirely in isolation. To say *Frankenstein*'s Creature is free of history and is therefore completely free to cultivate itself (Gilbert & Gubar 1979; Armitt 2012) is a half-truth. Because it is made up of parts and not a solitary body, the Creature is not tied to anything specific, as in a spectre of communism, the French Revolution, or messianism, and therefore is autonomous to some extent, but it nonetheless carries the ruins of the past that haunt it in secrecy and silence.

Accordingly, we could argue that it is haunting in a language that is far more reminiscent of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's psychoanalytic concept of the 'transgenerational phantom'[98] than Derrida's spectre. Abraham first raised the issue in "Notes on the Phantom" (1975/1994), before further developing the concept of cryptonymy during his collaboration with Torok. Abraham and Torok's phantom may be

[98] The transgenerational phantom is a phenomenon where horrifying secrets are silently passed down from past generations to their offspring through the unconscious. However, as Rand maintains, "[a]spects of this concept have the potential to illuminate the genesis of social institutions and may provide a new perspective for inquiring into the psychological roots of cultural patterns and political ideology" (Editor's Note, *The Shell* 169).

more applicable to *Frankenstein*'s Creature for a few reasons. A side, though overarching argument entangled in this idea is that the notion of phantasmagorical goes beyond an illustration of the fantastic but also refers to "a bizarre or fantastic combination, collection, or assemblage" (Merriam-Webster)[99], efficiently summing up the Creature's multifarious makeup. Moreover, in the "Introduction" to Abraham and Torok's *The Shell and the Kernel* (1987/1994), Nicholas T. Rand (1994) describes the phantom as an "unfelt mourning, unassimilated trauma, the unwitting psychical inheritance of someone else's secrets — drive a wedge between us and our society" (22). Similar to Derrida's spectre, the phantom is a product of displacement and moreover, a symbol of the return of the dead.[100] Yet, despite these eerily similarities to Derrida's spectre, Colin Davis (2007) maintains that the main separation for Abraham and Torok's phantom to that of Derrida's specter lies in the problem of secrecy:

> The crucial difference between the two…is to be found in the status of the secret. The secrets of Abraham and Torok's lying phantoms are unspeakable in the restricted sense of being a subject of shame and prohibition. It is not at all that they cannot be spoken; on the contrary, they can and should be put into words so that the phantom and its noxious effects on the living can be exorcised. For Derrida the ghost and its secrets are unspeakable in a quite different sense. Abraham and Torok seek to return the ghost to the order of knowledge; Derrida wants to avoid any such restoration and to encounter what is strange, unheard, other, about the ghost…The secret is not unspeakable because it is taboo, but because it cannot (yet) be articulated in the languages available to us. The ghost pushes at the boundaries of language and thought." (13)

While discussing secrecy in Chapter 1, I mentioned how secrecy lies between two liminal worlds, and how the responsibility of modernity's monstrous secret sits on the shoulders of *Frankenstein*'s human creator. The Creature may very well be Victor's, as well as our

[99] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/phantasmagoria
[100] "…the phantom which returns to haunt bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other" (Abraham 175).

spectre, however in regard to the Creature, the unconscious and historical secret resides silently within The Creature's own body. Frankenstein instantly acknowledges the secret of secularized modernity's monstrous ambiguity when he witnesses the spectre's "watery eyes". However, this secret ambiguity, this transgenerational phantom, haunts the Creature unknowingly from within. While it tries to cultivate itself in a rising secularized, 'technological', and unrestricted world, the sacred past haunts the Creature soundlessly. The Creature's attempt to exorcise this phantom of the abyss through resacralization is extinguished when Frankenstein refuses its wish for love and companionship, ensuing the Creature's permanent state within liminality. Ultimately, it may have always been a false hope since even the Creature acknowledges this outcome would not exorcise its monstrosity but rather would solidify it: "It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another" (Shelley 148). The Creature wishes for a binaural utopia of monstrosity and strangerhood, completely removed from the rest of normal society, though it is fated to manifest itself through secularized modernity's movement of culture, as a monster, phantom, spectre, and modern stranger.

ADDRESSING THE MONSTER IN THE SPECTERAL ROOM

Derrida's hauntology has taken precedent over Abraham and Torok's cryptonymy in contemporary criticism, and if Davis' distinction is correct, it may be that Derrida's deconstruction theory is more influential due to its "rehabilitation of ghosts" (Davis 8) and on its insistence that we should in fact let the dead speak and not exorcise them. This, however, does not explain why Derrida is extremely silent on Abraham and Torok's theory. Not only being friends with Abraham, Derrida was very much informed about

their theory since he wrote the foreword to *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (1977), the first time that Abraham and Torok collaborated on the subject.[101] Unlike Davis, Zoltán Dragon (2005) does not see much difference between their works, arguing that the two hauntological "trends…do not exclude each other" (257). Dragon goes on to argue that Derrida's spectre is in fact haunted by Abraham and Torok's silent phantom:

> Derrida thus incorporates the pivotal concepts of cryptonymy, and utilizes them to a deconstructive end – thus silencing the psychoanalytic background or inheritance. This forms an uncanny kernel in his own discourse that gains its final formulation…in his program of *hauntology*, being present via its very absence. Thus, the very program of hauntology or spectropoetics is already haunted by a silent and effective phantom, whose effect is the transmission of the Derridean crypt on and on. (269)

I bring this up in order to re-address the monster that is hiding in Derrida's spectre/messianic theory. By saying Shelley is the first to make the spectre visible, Derrida must downplay the monstrousness within Frankenstein's Creature, and subsequently, his own secular idea of messianism. Derrida (1967) does not shy away from connecting the monster to deconstructionism (*Of Grammatology* 5), conceivably even "connecting it "to the critique of a tradition deformed by a humanist view" (Johnson, "Last" 261). Though, by questionably ignoring the *revenant* characteristics of the monster, Derrida, like Victor Frankenstein, does seem to "turn his eyes away"[102] from the monstrous act that leads to the ruin and instead, focuses on the ruins that make up the spectre/messianic. In this sense, for Derrida, the spectre as spectator undermines the actor

[101] The only time Derrida mentions them is when he references his foreword, "Fors" in *Specters of Marx,* but not their actual work.

[102] "I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the business of childbearing--but also with a glance toward those who, in a company from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away in the face of the as yet unnamable, which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the non-species in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity" (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 370).

that is monster, since actions can themselves be monstrous, as seen with both *Frankenstein*'s Creature and its creator, and can be difficult to extrapolate from one another.

From this perspective, it would be akin to Ernst Bloch removing the horrors of WWI from his utopian spirit. Although the horrors of the Great War, or any horrific event, are not something anyone would encourage, it would be impossible to build Bloch's utopian spirit without the monstrous event. Yet, as mentioned in Chapter 3, we run into problems when we base our utopian and secularized messianism around such horrific events of destruction. Derrida cannot "domesticate" (*Points* 386) his monsters just as he understood we could not exorcise our phantoms and spectres**.** In evaluating Eliade's traditional idea that monsters are a threat to the religious and sacred order, Timothy K. Beal (2002) blurs these divine binaries of sacred and monstrous, arguing that "what [monsters] often reveal is a divinity or a sacredness that is like many of our religions and like many of ourselves, caught in 'endless, irreducible tensions between order and chaos, orientation and disorientation, self and other, foundation and abyss. Religion is never without its monsters" (10). Like the uncanny that it is so closely associated with "the *monstrum* is a message that breaks into this world from the realm of the divine" (ibid. 7). The monster might very well be the human liminal kernel that balances the flawlessness of the human spirit, as Leopardi believed.

Consequently, the modern stranger can be the true spectral-monster or s*pect-actor*, and therefore its uncanny role in secular messianism becomes challenging. Even though it is born on the ruins of the sacred and attempts in various ways to resacralize the spiritual gaps that secularized modernity instigated, it either may not be the most ideal

archetype of the messianic, something it probably does not desire to be associated with anyway, or more appropriately, we need to finally address the uncanny and chilling warning (because that is what both monsters and spectres do) that our messianic impulses, both as individuals and collectives, can sometimes in fact be monstrous.

ADAPTATION AND THE FUTURE OF THE MODERN STRANGER - A CODA

The uncanny spectres of modernity have left a liminal underpinning to our contemporary world, while its cultural monsters are still being challenged. Like humans themselves, traditions and cultures, whether being a well-established or a loosely connected concept, need to adapt to the changing world. Just as Baudelaire, who despised the destruction of the Arcades and the Paris he knew and loved, adapted his poetry to find beauty in the new 'ugliness' of the modern metropolis, traditions should also adapt. While, Adorno's argument that "those who want to adapt must learn increasingly to curb their imagination" (*Culture* 192), rings true to some degree, adaptation does not necessarily mean conforming to societal conventions and expectations. Society also needs to adapt to involve strangers, whose feelings of boredom, alienation, ennui, and marginalization are largely ignored or dismissed. Inclusion is an important aspect of the modern stranger, as despite a close relation, strangers are not necessarily outsiders; they have not rejected or abandoned modern society but rather have chosen to be immersed within it, becoming an intrinsic part of secularized modernity itself, even if it means residing in the uncanny shadows and voids that modernity has created within itself. Baudelaire's *flâneur,* for example, is the quintessential symbol of being both simultaneously physically and spiritually engaged and detached within modern society, though this modern/anti-modern sentiment is likewise realized in Acker's

experimentation of language as being a part of, yet instantaneously disconnected from the society she lives in. The absence of a complete rejection of both traditional and modern societal norms and customs, despite one's disinclination towards them, leaves the modern stranger almost in a love-hate relationship with secularized modernity and its discontents. This liminal perspective allows them to criticize, from within; a panoptical gaze that allows for a re-imagining or a resacralizing of the past, creating a viewpoint that is extremely beneficial and valuable to any society, if listened to. Yet, we must ask ourselves, does further adapting the modern stranger to society put an end to the concept of modern stranger, and moreover, should it be the goal of a society to end strangerhood once and for all? There is a danger of excessive liminality, to be sure, though there is a greater danger in removing the liminality of the stranger. Making the outlook of the stranger the new status quo dissolves the constructive aspects that made the modern stranger such a valuable figure in both defining, redefining, and resacralizing secularized modernity in the first place; consequently, it is imperative to listen to the voices of modern strangers while they adapt to society, something always attempted, though ultimately never truly achieved.

Yet, despite retaining a common uncanny strangeness the same spiritual and physiological principle, the contemporary stranger has changed into more of a visible and geographical entity that make up a big part of what Ahmad (2014) refers to as affect aliens. In many ways, the modern stranger has become more complicated and challenging, as its more traditional definition of binaural and fully marginalized 'outsider' seems to be in conflict with Simmel's more modern and liminal meaning, encompassing people who go beyond simply the psychological or even spiritual inability to blend in and out of

society as with the modern stranger. This raises questions as to whether modernity is truly over or is it simply continuing in its altering process. If modernity is possibly over, it may very well be because the stranger has altered; modernity's monster, its spectre, its resacralizing spirit, may have finally transformed beyond what modernity entails, and thus ultimately changing it into something new. Or are we still caught in liminal modernity since many aspects of our recent past seem to be repeating. Are the spectres of the totalitarianism and fascism of the twentieth century being renewed, or equally, the chaotic colliding of alternate ideas that existed at the turn of the century, as presented in Musil's *Qualities*, where meaning and truth are constantly being questioned. It remains to be seen if we have completely exhausted modernity, and as a result, the idea of the stranger, or has modernity itself become the spectre. Yet, whether still in modernity's changing course or not, and whether if its 'modern' or beyond, the uncanny stranger must nonetheless resist the urge to faithfully conform to any new status quo or binary, even ones based on them. The liminality of the stranger is too important to lose if we expect to acclimatize to an ever-evolving society in nourishing and introspective ways – strangerness should be always protected, not abolished.

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