“Before the Law” : Rethinking Censorship in Late Modernist American Fiction

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Before the law sits a gatekeeper. To this gatekeeper comes a man from the country who asks to gain entry into the law. But the gatekeeper says that he cannot grant him entry at the moment. The man thinks about it and then asks if he will be allowed to come in sometime later on. "It is possible," says the gatekeeper, "but not now."

– Franz Kafka, "Before the Law"

INTRODUCTION

The Contract

At a trial in 1857[1], Gustave Flaubert and his scandalous new novel, *Madame Bovary*, were found guilty of committing crimes against bourgeois sensibilities. In the verdict, the representatives of the law explicitly stated the official state position on the function of literature in the public sphere: Flaubert, they judged, '"merits severe blame since the mission of literature should be to beautify and enhance the spirit by elevating the intelligence and purifying morals rather than to inspire disgust for vice by offering a portrait of the disorder that may exist in society"' (qtd. in Ladenson 62). The rhetoric of the French court makes it clear that, with *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert had performed a kind of libel against humanity, poisoning the pipelines of communication with a capsulized image of reality as it "may exist," unaccompanied by a redemptive framework to 'beautify, enhance, elevate, and purify.' Flaubert was accused, essentially, of purveying a deleterious substance much like the lethal arsenic that, when consumed, destroys Emma Bovary and actualizes her spiritual damnation.

But the ruling against Flaubert is more complex than merely an issue of bad morals. Without doubt, there had been other books published and sold in the French markets to offend middle-class tastes with sexually suggestive scenery and immoral characters. Indeed, amateurish erotic literature, while considered a pestilence plaguing the Parisian underworld, did not inspire the same level of outrage, the opprobrious assault, or the desire for eradication as did Flaubert's masterful novel. What, then, made *Madame Bovary* such a dangerous entity that the law intervened to keep it out of circulation?

Dominick LaCapra, in *Flaubert on Trial*, shows that the text was implicitly viewed as "ideologically criminal in that it placed in question the very grounds of the trial by rendering radically problematic its founding assumptions" (7). LaCapra maintains that Flaubert's innovations with narrative technologies and his radical experiments with the validated forms of art indirectly earned the author his status as an 'ideological criminal. LaCapra is referring here to the unfamiliar free indirect style which, in the eyes of the law, destabilised the safe position of

[1] My quotations from the French censorship trials of the early modernist period, including Zola's response in "De la Moralite," are gathered from the translations in Elizabeth Ladenson's chapter, "Madame Bovary Goes to Hollywood," in *Dirt for Art's Sake* (2007), and in E.S. Burt's '"An Immoderate Taste for Truth' : Censoring History in Baudelaire's '*Les Bijoux*"' (1997). See also: LaCapra, Dominick. *Flaubert on Trial* (1982).

art from which comforting moral judgements could be secured by the reader. Thus, it was not Emma Bovary's adultery, blasphemy and suicide that earned the book its ban. Rather, it was that Flaubert irresponsibly failed to safely circumscribe these reckless actions within a formal structure that both reflected an authorial mind controlled by reason and presented to the reader a readymade guide to draw reassuring ethical conclusions about Emma's actions. If, as George Bernard Shaw states in his aphorism, "in the right key, one can say anything; in the wrong key nothing" (Jansen 3), then it is clear from the trial that Flaubert had spoken in the wrong key and abandoned his readers without any means to unlock redemptive meaning.

The *Madame Bovary* trial is a useful point of departure for the legal proceedings that erupted on the late modernist landscape in America, particularly the trials of *Ulysses*, *Tropic of Cancer*, and *Naked Lunch*. Flaubert's crimes anticipate the way authors from this period, including Djuna Barnes, Henry Miller and William S. Burroughs, sought unfamiliar forms of expressing the forbidden to interrogate traditionally sanctioned notions of art and to violently disrupt the very foundations upon which the laws that regulate literature are constructed. Moreover, this lineage of censorship trials reveals an effort from the practitioners of modernist aesthetics to doubt, challenge and sever the powerful knot between literature and the law.

Flaubert's failure to provide readers with a recognizable aesthetic structure – a legitimate formal context or harmonious 'key'– illustrates how the authorized views of officialdom become encoded and secured in authorized aesthetic forms. Hans Robert Jauss identifies the powerful tie between orthodox ethics and literary form: "From the point of view of the aesthetics of reception its social function in the ethical realm is equally to be understood in the modality of question and answer, problem and solution, through which it enters the horizon of the historical effect" (34). As the informing receptive framework disintegrates, answers and solutions are difficult for readers to locate and interpretive disorder prevails. For Jauss, the shift signalled by *Madame Bovary* in the function of censorship demonstrates how, in an era of radically new forms that strived to divorce themselves from the solutions of history, "a new aesthetic form can simultaneously have moral consequences, how it can give a moral question the greatest conceivable social impact" (34). In Jauss' estimation, censorship is ultimately concerned with the problem of solutions; it is a temporary answer for a disturbing question.

That Emma Bovary was eventually permitted to circulate through the streets in her scandalous, bouncing buggy must mean that a solution was discovered. Once it was situated in a

redeeming and, therefore, legalizing narrative, the text was presented and received as no longer posing a threat to the ethical function of literature in the social realm. The transmutation of discourse from speakable to unspeakable illuminates how censors in the modern era do not quite live up to their reputation as a book-burners, but rather that they operate like the gatekeeper in Kafka's parable, obstructing the text's admission until a later time ("but not now," of course) and an attendant shift in symbolic meaning. As the prosecutor Ernest Pinard declares to the court in the Flaubert trial, '"the judge is a border guard who must prevent illicit passages"' (qtd in Johnson 7). With a rhetoric eerily similar to Kafka's tale, Pinard's description of those guardians of literary "passages" indexes the complex and often indistinguishable roles of censors and authors as they arrive before the law.

However, as this study wishes to expose, the solutions that censorial authorities impose onto transgressive discourses are equally problematic and, after being reintroduced to circulation, continue to signify in unpredictable and volatile ways. As such, I take it that censorship is in the business of alchemic *change*. Censors must always assume that the text is somehow lacking and this incompletion is part of its subversive quality. Faced with this dangerous deficiency, they take it upon themselves to inscribe the text with its final meaning and bring signification to its terminal state. Thus, the case of Flaubert invites us to rethink the definition of censorship in relation to its sociohistorical role within any culture as a guardian of textual "passages" (1209) from incompletion to completion, with censors taking over as the empowered author of transmission. The trials of modernism, as will become clear in the proceeding chapters, provide strong evidence that censorship is involved in these *productive* rather than repressive energies.

As a concomitant of the industrialist forces that pervade all forms of cultural production during the modernist era, censorship can be conceived as a synchronized system of discursive machinery designed to produce 'generic' receptive frameworks to protect vulnerable consumers from corruption. That formerly banned books are often packaged together with transcripts from the court case that legalized their circulation, and display these commentaries like court-appointed instruction manuals, underscores the fact that the market is the intersection point for the creators and regulators of intellectual commodities, the vulnerable site that censorship proposes to guard. Thus, because the material production of a text is inextricably tied to the influence of proscription, censorship emerges as generative discourse that manufactures an authorized body of language as it makes it passage from the private to the public sphere.

Pinard's anxiety over the '"illicit passages"' (7) that literature may make illustrates a warning against "the dangers of textual promiscuity in the age of the feuillton" (Johnson 7). His admission refers to the idea that "public decency" will be compromised by the "mass circulation" (7) of the obscene[2] in the market. To prevent the transmission of "textual promiscuity" (7), imagined as inexpensive, mass-produced novels spreading the social and spiritual diseases, Pinard insists that the courts must intervene to ensure the fidelity of the artist to the official project of art—that is, to improve the emotional, physical and psychological well-being of the public. In the context of market influences, the legitimating narratives of the law construct a kind of vow or arrangement between the parties involved, one that both texts and readers are expected to adhere to in their colloquy. E.S. Burt identifies this configuration of responsibilities as a '"reading pact," a set of "artificial rules" that are presumed to govern reading and to have currency in the context" (Burt 20). The 'reading pact' forms an interrelation, like an indissoluble bond, between the author and the community that makes the text function. And this cooperative relationship, of course, is overseen and manipulated by the panoptic influence of law.

The reading pact[3] can be understood as an instrument wielded by those in power to control the appropriate key for expression. In his article, "On Morality," Emile Zola responds to the hypocritical powers that Pinard represents by appropriating his vocabulary, expanding the idea of the reading pact: '"The public that tolerates the bloody sewer of the courts expects novels to provide little birds and daisies as consolation. It's a contract [*un contrat*], what scandalizes in one context becomes inoffensive in the other"' (qtd in Ladensen 27). For Zola, this same contract, or pact, restricts artists to produce a *useful* good, one that generates the consolatory beautiful lies the public desires to maintain order between state powers and their subjects. The shared terminology of the contract illustrates the double-optic censorship provides and highlights the transfer and tension of power therein. The reading pact articulates the rules that govern iterability, creating a cultural space for the permissible representation of otherwise unspeakable matter. This space, because it is shared terrain, is continually negotiated, interpreted, violated and rewritten. For this reason, E.S. Burt, invoking both Zola and Pinard for her revisionist approach,

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[2] The complex relationship between censorship and the forces of mass production motivate the idea of *market censorship*, the subject of influential studies by Richard Burt, *The Administration of Aesthetics: Censorship, Political Criticism and the Public Sphere* (1994), Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation* (1990), and Allison Pease, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* (2002).

[3] From this point in the study, I will refer to the "reading pact" or the "contract" interchangeably. I am in debt to E.S. Burt's excellent essay (1997) for the idea of the reading pact, a conceptual model that informs all of the readings of censored texts in this thesis.

maintains that:

> This concern that texts be framed by a reading pact aimed at constraining their interpretation is worth considering in any discussion of censorship that wants to move from the level of pragmatics to that of theory. It leads to queries...about the state's interest as guardian and overseer of the archive in the institutionalization and enforcement of such reading pacts. It raises the issue of an ambiguity in the role played by the literary establishment, which can be seen most often acting in collusion with the state on this matter of generic purity. (20-21)

The contractual frame also prompts us to think about the ambiguous role of the public subject and where the reader fits into this equation; how they may, at once, dictate their own restraints and define their authorized subjectivity while participating in the criminal violations of extant pacts.

The idea of the contract helps challenge the myths that have traditionally defined censorship. Michael Holquist, in "Corrupt Originals," observes that the "persecutor-victim model" is the usual way that questions about censorship are posed, "transforming" this complex system "exclusively into a contest of wills" (16). The approach that treats censorship in terms of this "crude axiology, as an absolute choice between prohibition and freedom" (16), inevitably concludes that the censor is always thwarted and freedom heroically prevails, perpetuating a kind of "folk mythology" (16) that elides the realities of interdiction.

Conversely, the reading contract shows that 'victim' and 'censor' are notoriously unstable, and frequently indistinguishable, positions. It takes into consideration the negotiations, necessary collusions and potent agonism that underlie the regulations of production and consumption. The contract model reveals that the inter-dictions of censorship are "dynamic and multidirectional" (16), a reality integral to the modes that cultures employ to construct and validate knowledge. The complex technologies of censorship reveal how ideological property is an arena wherein struggles are staged between the forces that police social order and the discourses that disrupt it from within.

An examination of the rhetoric that governs these contracts and composes its constitutional body exposes fundamental issues over the conception of "the obscene" – that nebulous quality of unspeakable discourse that defies definition and yet circumscribes the entirety of the transgressive element for the society in which it allegedly erupts. The synthetic

formation of these contracts reveals that "the obscene" is the expression of an illegitimate and unspeakable discourse that is fundamentally incompatible with the contract. It is that which cannot be accommodated and, therefore, must remain unspeakable – unspeakable in the sense that it signals not only that which must *not* be said but, also, that which *cannot* be expressed in the existing terms of language. The obscene is apocryphal discourse that operates like a stumbling block to readers, forcing them to confront the recognitions and aporias within officially-sponsored codes. As this study will argue, "the obscene" is an ideological violation which breaks the pact that stabilizes values and governs the body politic.

While the reading pact provides an effective way to analyse censorship, it also presents certain analytical complications. At this point, I wish to take a closer look at the complexities and particular anxieties inherent to the rhetoric of censorship with an analysis of power-knowledge.

With the publication of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* in 1975, criticism increasingly began turning to Foucault's theory of panopticism to formulate queries about censorship systems. Robert Post identifies the instrumental role that panopticism played in the emergence of the 'new censorship'[4] that emerged in critical circles in the 1980s. According to Post, Foucault's examination of "the constitutive micromechanisms of power...the minute intersections of resistance and domination through which power is exercised" (2) was responsible for the subsequent revisions made to the ontology of censorship. Foucault debunked the myth of power as centralized and secure, or as originating from any single omnipotent source. Instead, Foucault observes that power is in constant circulation, dispersed and diffused through an elaborate social network. Annette Kuhn, in *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality*, relies on Foucaultian vocabularies when she writes:

> Censorship is not reducible to a circumscribed and predefined set of institutions and institutional activities, but is produced within an array of constantly shifting discourses, practises and apparatuses. It cannot...be regarded as either fixed or monolithic. It is an ongoing process embodying complex and often contradictory relations of power. (127)

[4] The 'new censorship' school that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s reformulated questions about censorship in terms of principles of power and market production. Influenced by the writings of Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, 'new censorship' studies "advocated a view of censorship much broader than the traditional one by insisting on that apart from institutionalized, interventionist ('regulatory') censorship, social interaction and communication is affected by 'constitutive,' or 'structural' censorship: forms of discourse regulation which influence what can be said by whom, to whom, how, and in which context" (Muller 1). For an excellent study of the history of 'new censorship' studies see: Muller, Beatte. "Censorship and Cultural Regulation: Mapping the Territory" *Censorship and Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age* (2004).

In these intricate power relations between the intersecting bodies of the state, hierarchies are stabilized by access to authorized knowledge: the powerful groups wield control over powerless subjects by regulating the access they have to the sacrosanct realm of knowledge. Thus, Foucault insists in "Power/Knowledge" that we should "base our analysis of power on the study of techniques and tactics of domination" (102).

The theme in Foucault's philosophical theory of censorship, which he triangulates as a system of domination, submission and resistance, is that power is coextensive with knowledge, manifestly "bound together in an inextricable knot" (Jansen 4) that bears a legitimating imprimatur. This knot, writes Sue Curry Jansen, is double-looped: "Power secures knowledge, but knowledge also secures power. Systems of power-knowledge contain both emancipator and repressive elements. They do not just set limits on human freedom, they also make it possible" (7). In this dynamic, censors direct the production of discourse, allowing the public access only to the knowledge that they deem will, in turn, produce a subject whose thoughts and speech reiterate and confirm the Truth of the state's message. The law works to supress those truths, the obscene knowledge, that will disrupt the operations of power.

Obscenity, like a reservoir into which all filthy tributaries empty, signifies, without identifying, those unspeakable truths which must remain unspoken. It is worth noting that, in the rhetoric of American jurisprudence, the word *obscenity* serves as a conceptual cipher, a euphemistic placeholder for those things that are too disturbing to define. Ernst and Schwartz, in "Censorship: the Search for the Obscene" (1954), examine the dictionary of legal history and discover that the terms used to define obscenity, including "filthy, immoral, improper, impure, indecent, lascivious, lewd, licentious, suggestive and vulgar" (244), to do not actually produce a definition but are synonyms which merely reiterate the word rather than clarify the concept. [5] At its theoretical core in legal terminology, obscenity is evacuated of any concrete knowledge – it is the negation of knowledge, that which must remain unknown, unsaid, unheard. It gives the lie to the philosophical 'Good Lie' and, as E.S. Burt observes, brazenly disproves the Platonic axiom at the root of all republics that "virtue is knowledge." Because of this threat, "the manifest censorship imposed by orthodox discourse" redirects discourse towards "the official way of speaking and thinking about the world" (Bourdieu 169).

[5] For in-depth studies on the history of obscenity law and legal proceedings, see Alec Craig, *Suppressed Books: A History of the Concept of Literary Obscenity* (1966); Felice Flanery Lewis, *Literature, Obscenity, and Law* (1976) and Paul Boyer, *Purity in Print* (2002).

As a result, censorship trials stage the "drama of power" (Jansen 7) intrinsic to the nature of the obscene. Furthermore, court trials serve as the smithy where contracts are forged and branded with authorization. Assembling a group of powerful social institutions in a largely pedagogic setting, the officialdoms of state, academia, science, law, and church declare the rules and regulations in a language imbued with power not only to restrict the powerless but also to "inform and instruct them" (7). The stage presented at these occasions makes visible what usually remains hidden in the shadowy wings of the theatre: the flux of power, the transmission of knowledge, and the elusive referents of the obscene. As such, trials expose the mysterious anxieties and fears that necessitate the intervention of censorship, highlighting the sacred truths that a particular culture guards with militant fervour[6].

Jansen observes this drama and concludes, with a palpable sense of despair, that subordinated subjects can only form "recipes for survival" (7) within the power-knowledge paradigm. My approach, however, complicates this idea: these trials, I believe, as highly visible spectacles, also allow dominated subjects to locate the gaps in the official version, spaces within which resistance can be mobilised. As William Burroughs writes, "any threat clearly seen and confronted loses force" (316). Indeed, as authorities are forced to put the official version into language, they lose their grasp, and subsequently their power, over controlling it. If it is true, as Holquist suggests, that the "primordial undecidability of language" and "the slippage of meaning" are what censors "abhor" and "most assiduously seek to fix" (17), then it is equally plausible that censors create potentially self-destructive opportunities – that is, inadvertently provide a glimpse of forbidden knowledge – when they must narrate the official doctrine. The irony that defines any censorship trial signals a heretofore undiscovered shift of power, one where authorities compromise their strategic position when they are forced into a paradoxical situation to speak about that which they desire to remain unspeakable: "Language," Judith Butler writes, "is compelled to repeat what it seeks to constrain, and so invariably reproduces and

[6] Mary Ann McGrail observes how the debate over censorship in America in the modern age is "almost exclusively about pornography and obscenity" (51) suggesting that sex is the major concern of censorship regimes in the U.S. For this reason, representations of sex, the permissibility of aphrodisiacal literature, deviance and vice, and the iterability of the sexual body in print are major areas of focus in my study. However, a description of the history of sexuality in America in respect to U.S. obscenity laws would far exceed the limits of this thesis. On the issue, see Marjorie Heins, *Not in front of the Children: Indecency, Censorship and the Innocence of Youth* (2002); Edward de Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere* (1993); Florence Dore, *The Novel and the Obscene: Sexual Subjects in American Modernism* (2005); Susan Mooney, *The Artistic Censoring of Sexuality: Fantasy and Judgement in the Twentieth Century Novel* (2008)

restages the very text that it seeks to silence" (249). In other words, trials are especially useful sites of study because they expose the arbiters of the power-knowledge system and their agendas, making it possible to mobilise resistance and observe closely how texts are transformed according to the strategies of power and knowledge.

But the irony does not only trap those in positions of power. The increasing shift in attention to the subatomic particles of power has made it increasingly difficult to define censorship.[7] Whereas early censorship criticism focussed on external, post-production constraints, the 'new censorship' seeks to expose the conditions that preclude speech. This *constitutive* censorship, which precedes the production of text as a "structural necessity" (Freshwater 225) subsumes under the rubric of censorship virtually every operation of language imaginable. All speech, so the argument goes, is the product of censorship; all communication is both prohibiting and always already a product of prohibition. While the argument that, in words of Stanley Fish 1994, "there's no such thing as free speech" (102) possesses a certain irrefutable logic, it may not be the "good thing" (102) that Fish believes it is. The idea that censorship is everywhere and omnipotent precipitates paralysis, immobilizes resistance strategies, and brings to a halt meaningful inquiry. If censorship is present everywhere in language, language can never be used to get outside of censorship, creating a kind of Borgesian knot of paradox that can only result in despair and critical immobility.

In this post-censorship era following the alleged 'end of censorship' brought about by verdict in the *Naked Lunch* trial, scholars assume that we have reached a spot similar to the man from the country's fate in Kafka's "Before the Law." The Law, which no longer feels the need to proscribe anything because proscription is automatically enforced prior to speech, opens the field of permissible discourse. As it was for the man of the country, we are prevented from transgressive passages through the door and into the open field not by the guardian doorkeeper but by the internalization of law. "The Law," Derrida maintains, "keeps itself without keeping itself, kept by a doorkeeper who keeps nothing, the door remaining open and open onto nothing" (356). And Massimo Cacciari, in *Icone della legge* (1895), writes, "How can we hope to 'open' if the door is already open? How can we hope to enter-the-open [*entrate-l'aperto*]...The already open [*il già-aperto*] immobilizes...because entering into what is already open is ontologically

[7] Here, I am extending Helen Freshwater's argument, in "Towards a Redefinition of Censorship" (1994), that the definition of censorship has been pushed by 'new censorship' studies to its furthest point of expression.

impossible" (qtd. in Agamben 49). At this standstill before the omnipresent law, it seems as if censorship theory can no longer be moved in any interpretive direction and, thus, is in danger of atrophying on the spot. While Pinard maintains that the judge is a sentinel that guards the border against '"illicit passages"' (Johnson 7), in the contemporary situation it appears as if there are no more borders left to cross.

The tendency to universalize censorship is present in nearly every contemporary approach to the question of interdiction. Pierre Bourdieu, in *Language and Symbolic Power*, insists that:

> Censorship [as] the structure of the field itself...governs expression, and not some legal proceeding which has been specially adapted to designate and repress the transgression of a linguistic code. This structural censorship is exercised through the medium of the field...imposed on all producers of symbolic goods, including the authorized spokesperson...and it condemns the occupants of dominated positions either to silence or to shocking outspokenness. (138)

Richard Post, responding to Bourdieu, writes that censorship is "the norm rather than the exception" and that, "It is precisely universal. It is precisely omnipresent" (4). Meanwhile, Judith Butler, in "Ruled Out: Vocabularies of the Censor" (1998), uses "foreclosure" (248) to describe an operation of restriction in place before one selects the terms for expression that "contributes to making the object it also constrains" (247). And the psychoanalytic camp[8] (Lacan, Gadamer, Lyotard) proposes that the visible level of language suppresses the taboo; that anxiety and desire are born simultaneously with the letter. For these critics, language itself is the censorious agent. At this point, censorship studies can be encapsulated by Holquist's economical phase: "Censorship *is*," he states, "one can only discriminate among its more and less repressive effects" (16).

It appears that censors are always capable of transforming refractory texts into exemplary statements or totemic symbols that confirm, even as they try to rebel, the doctrines of officialdom. As Foucault observes in his essay, "A Preface to Transgression," the act of transgression "contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being" (28). Freshwater rephrases

[8] The three texts I have in mind here are Jacques Lacan's "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud" (1957), Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960) and Jean-Francois Lyotard's *Discourse/Figure* (1971). Ironically, each writer uniquely contests Leo Strauss' theory of the exotopic text, thus prompting their explorations into the constitutively censored letter.

this sentiment, suggesting that performing the obscene does not "eliminate the frontiers it crosses, nor does it represent a release from censorious restraints" (237). This underlines the critical idea that transgression is not only complicit with the regime in power, but it is necessary for its maintenance, affirming that which must remain unspeakable. Hence, inquiries into the mechanisms of censorship may conclude that, as it is everywhere, censorship is precisely nowhere and resistance is indistinguishable from unquestioning acceptance. In the scope of this perspective, censorship loses its purchase as a methodical frame and becomes effaced as a relevant critical lens with currency and function. We may now ask: has the man from the country withered at the foot of the gatekeeper? "Has censorship been refined out of existence?...Is it advisable to push the definition of censorship any further?" (Freshwater 240).

This study offers 'the contract' as a methodological solution to the standstill. The concept highlights the fact that the rules and terms of pacts must be built out of language: "censors," Holquist writes, "intend to construct rather than prohibit. What they wish to make is a certain kind of text, one that can be read in only one way: its grammatical (or logical) form will be seamless coterminous with all its rhetorical or semiotic implications" (22). The terms of the contract itself, therefore, serve as a prevention of certain kinds of readings but also as an impetus to explore and recover the unspeakable, inevitably indicating its absences and silences in the same instance it iterates the text's speakable parameters. The lacuna of the obscene can be overridden by legitimating narratives, but they bristle and exert a destabilising influence from within the esoteric core of the text. Readers sensitive to the discourses that surround a censored text can discover the "many silences" concealed by official narrative, making it possible "to determine the different ways of not saying such things" (Foucault 27).

Revisiting a censored text through the lens provided by the reading contract that authorized its admissibility into the republic elucidates the 'afterlife,' the "new life" that it takes on "as part of the very discourse produced by the mechanism of censorship" (249). It allows readers to discover transgressive readings on the text's own terms and locate how the obscene operates within narrative technologies. The recovery of the unspeakable restores its function in society: "Just as terror, and the abjection which is its double, must be excluded from the regime of the community, so must it be sustained and assumed...in writing as its condition" (Lyotard 180). The "terror" and "abjection" of the unspeakable, the dangerous knowledge that disrupts the comfortable slumber of civilized man, can be revived through the very mechanisms that

"excluded" it from the body politic. It may be necessary to maintain the binary, but it presents alternatives and generates the play and dialogue anathematic to sacred, state-sanctioned discourses.

For Bourdieu, the recovery of transgressive discourse, which he identifies as heterodoxy, becomes a powerful tool in the hands of the "occupants of dominated positions" that have been condemned "either to silence or shocking outspokenness" (138). The obscene, a violent manifestation that unifies both "silence" and "outspokenness" in a single utterance, challenges the sacrosanct aura of *doxa*, delivering a blow to its untouchable status. The transgressive text "expand[s] the realm of the debatable" and mobilizes "deligitimating tactics in the process of legitimating itself" (Burt xvii), exposing an aporia in the logic of the pact. Bourdieu recognizes the importance in recuperating these eruptions of the unspeakable:

> The subordinate classes have an interest in pushing back the limits of *doxa* and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted; the dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of *doxa* or, short of this, of establishing in its place the necessarily imperfect substitute, *orthodoxy.* (169)

The marketplace intensifies these relations as the materiality of text—the covers, prices, prefaces, epilogues, supplementary notes, translations, articles, reviews, letters, and court transcripts—plays an important role determining and assigning value in the textual "new life" (249). The supplementary texts, like agents of the law, are designed to instruct, convince or coerce readers into handling the text in a prescribed way, essentially policing the act of reading. As Burt writes, the textual object "is transfigured by its circulation and consumption in the public sphere: literacy limitations and modes of reproduction and consumption (mass versus individual) mean that the produced object will be altered...in transmission and reception" (xix). This "transfiguration" (xix) focalizes attempts to control the unspeakable; the court trial, as a kind of delay and relay point in the circulation network, directs the change *from* one form *to* another before consumption, a change made clear in the glosses chosen to accompany controversial texts. Yet, these same supplementary texts are ultimately reflexive, pointing to the very gaps they strenuously seek to patch up.

In this thesis, the reading contract guides my exploration into two primary areas: the first

is the theatricality[9] of censored texts, the methods of performing the obscene that self-reflexively dramatize their own pact-breaking reading practises; the second is the dissolution of the literary form in the late modernist period that demonstrates an increasing dissatisfaction with the structures of literature apotheosized by the high modernist aesthetics, forms suspected of being complicit with censorship. For this approach, the original meaning of obscenity is crucial: from the Latin *obscaena,* it means "from or with filth" but is also used to signify "offstage" in dramatic works, as in "what was not fit to be seen on stage" (Davis 22). This study proposes to re-evaluate the appearance of filthy materials, once swept off-stage, that are recovered and re-staged in the innovative forms that emerge in this era. By examining the censorship trials that present readings of obscene, I aim to illuminate how each text continues to present a challenge to the law, excavating the sources of latent power to disturb, dismantle, and expand the narratives that secure order and control. Paying particular attention to academic criticism, an institution increasingly preoccupied with obtaining power as the arbiter of artistic value, this examination prompts us to question "whether regulating aesthetic production (state censorship) and regulating aesthetic consumption can be opposed, how radically prepublication censorship differs from post publication censure" (Burt xvi).

This study covers the transitional period between the major U.S. trials of *Ulysses* (1933) and *Naked Lunch* (1966), a literary era inaugurated by Judge Woolsey's legitimation of high modernist aesthetics as legal precedent and concluded with what Burroughs' lawyer, Charles Rembrar, saw as the "end of obscenity." The first chapter examines the "non case" of Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* from the standpoint of Barnes' poetics of collusion. By reading *Nightwood* through T.S. Eliot's preface and Judge John M. Woolsey's verdict in *Ulysses* trial, I will show how Barnes constructs sites of tragic pleasure within the inescapable space of cultural and sexual proscriptions.

The second chapter elaborates on the anti-literature of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* but revisualizes his aggressive assault on high modernist aesthetics through Miller's use of epistolary techniques. Situating the concept of correspondence within his "Law of Reflection," I maintain that Miller looks to letter-writing to destruct the oppressive hegemony of literature,

[9] My investigations into the theatricality of censored texts is prompted by Adam Parkes' study, *Modernism and the the Theatre of Censorship* (1997), however whereas Parkes focuses primarily on the trials of high modernism in Anglo-Saxon countries, ending his book with an account of Virginia Woolf and Radclyffe Hall, I extend his concept of trials as staged performances into the American late modernism period.

seizing the seductive potential of the epistolary to create serious erotic novels for the average reader.

In the third chapter, I offer a reading of William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* that contests the allegorical narratives forged in the Boston trials and that undergird censorship itself. Drawing on the image of the double-agent from hardboiled detective fiction, this inquiry shows how Burroughs mobilizes a strategy to deactivate the dialectical impulses of the rebellion/submission binary.

CHAPTER ONE

Go Down, Djuna: Judge Woolsey, T.S. Eliot and the "Non Case" of Barnes' *Nightwood*

> *"But to the graver permission, the king, the tsar, the emperor, who may relieve themselves on high heaven–to them they bow down–only"*
>
> *– Dr. Matthew O'Connor, "La Sonambule"*

Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* gained notoriety for what didn't happen to it. When it was published in London by Faber and Faber in 1936, and then republished in America by Harcourt Press in 1937, it was not banned or seized by the censorship systems in the U.S. or England. It is strange that a novel replete with explicit and implicit references to transvestitism, vampirism, lesbianism, male homosexuality, bestiality, incest, masturbation, that exhibits an unhygienic preoccupation with bodily "abominations" (Barnes 68), that overwhelms with Dr. Matthew O'Connor's profane and blasphemous garrulity, and that culminates in a shocking conclusion where woman and beast bow down for a sexually suggestive *pas des deux* in a chapel, should have eluded the attention of multiple censorship regimes. The artful dodge performed by Barnes' perplexing and poisonous little book has contributed to the novel's afterlife as the most curious "non case"[10] in the history of *avant-garde* Anglo-Saxon modernism. *Nightwood*'s "non case" status, however, has resulted in insufficient investigations into the effect of legitimization on Barnes' obscene architectonics, the novel's potential to subvert, transgress and shock sensibilities, and the implications of its authenticating historical context. It is the aim of this chapter to explore how *Nightwood* helps "set the aesthetic standard of legal obscenity in the same moment that it subverts the legal understanding of artistic transgression" in an effort to recuperate the "shock that has yet to be received" (Chisholm 170).

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[10] Both Leigh Gilmore (1994) and Dianne Chisholm (1997) use the term "non case" to describe lack of censure to arise surrounding the publication of Barnes' *Nightwood* in the English and American markets.

The reasons for *Nightwood*'s licit passage are still a source of controversy amongst Barnes scholars. The debate is exacerbated by the inherent difficulties that accompany any inquiry seeking concrete evidence for something that did not happen. For this reason, criticism surrounding Barnes' obscene aesthetics habitually elides the issue, ascribing *Nightwood*'s status as a "non case" to what Daniela Caselli, in *Improper Modernism*, identifies as the novel's "obscurity, unintelligibility, difficulty and impenetrability" (3). Deborah Parsons echoes Caselli, surmising offhandedly that, unlike Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*[11], a lesbian-themed novel in the traditional form and written in straightforward realist prose, it was "probably the stylistic modernist abstraction that saved it from censorship" (*Djuna Barnes* 81). The tendency to defer to *Nightwood*'s textual difficulty is problematic; it too easily settles the complex orientation of aesthetics, publication, marketing and regulation that governed the era's culture of censorship.

Moreover, it is clear from prior trials, particularly the *Ulysses* trials in 1921 and 1933, that impenetrability would not have been able to save *Nightwood* from seizure. De Grazia reports how, at one point in the first *Ulysses* trial, John Quinn, the lawyer defending the editors of *The Little Review* for publishing Joyce's scandalous "Nausicaa" episode, argued that Joyce's experimental language was ultimately too difficult for the vulnerable reader to understand. As such, *Ulysses* did not possess the "tendency to corrupt and deprave those minds open to immoral influences" (Mackey 19). The argument, however, backfired[12]. Joyce's incomprehensibility only managed to compound the crime of obscenity, providing the court with convincing evidence that *Ulysses* was the product of a deviant mind: '"Yes, it sounds to me like the ravings of a disordered mind,"' suggested one judge, '"I can't see why anyone would want to publish it!" (qtd in Ware 2). The ban was not lifted until 1933 and only because the unintelligibility inspired by Joyce's radical narrative form could be responsibly accounted for in a coherent frame. To consider Barnes' aesthetics through the lens provided by the *Ulysses* trials, it becomes clear that a legitimating interpretive scheme would have to be forged, as it was for the technical experiments of Joyce, to account for the hysterical nocturnal "ravings" (2) of Barnes' gallery of

[11] For a discussion of the obscenity trials surrounding Hall's *The Well of Loneliness,* see Ladenson, "The Well of Prussic Acid," in *Dirt for Art's Sake* (2007). Leigh Gilmore also examines the issue of why Hall's novel went to trial and Barnes' did not in her essay, "Obscenity, Modernity and Identity: Legalizing *The Well of Loneliness* and *Nightwood"* (1994).

[12] De Grazia recounts how Quinn even admits that he thought Joyce had "carried his method too far" (12), an admission that crippled the case of the defence in the *Little Review* trial of 1921.

disqualified figures before it could be permitted into circulation.

Revisiting *Nightwood*'s status as a "non case," scholars have increasingly focused on the role that T.S. Eliot played in determining the public reception of *Nightwood.* Miriam Fuchs insists that Eliot, "the high priest of Anglo-American modernism" (297), hijacked Barnes' novel, "legitimizing what previous readers had criticized as obscure or incomprehensible" (289). Fuchs reads Eliot's introduction as a "duplicitous" strategy to dissuade readers from recognizing the transgressive sexual politics of Barnes' novel, instead "construct[ing] an ideal readership, one that is likely to be receptive to his own interpretation" (292). She argues that Eliot suppresses the lesbian and bisexual narratives and centralizes Dr. Matthew O'Connor as a Tiresian prophet in order to subsume the disqualified sexual identities into "an established Western literary tradition" (292). For critics like Fuchs, Eliot colludes with the law, participating in the patriarchal regimes that seek to outlaw sources of sexual anxiety and make the "deviations" understandable by invoking scientific, medical or anthropological discourses. It is usually conceded that Eliot's prefatory remarks helped circumvent obscenity laws, but only through complicity with the hegemonic discourses seeking to contain transgressive sexualities and render them invisible.

Despite the polemical tone of these critics, the argument that Eliot's preface aims to locate *Nightwood* within a legitimizing tradition is accurate, but not in the way it is traditionally understood. To assume that Eliot was motivated merely out of homophobic trepidation is to seal off the novel from the political and cultural forces that helped determine his own strategic reading of *Nightwood*. Leigh Gilmore, attuned to the sociohistoric moment of late modernism, reconsiders Eliot's preface as "operat[ing] within a specific configuration of obscenity law, publishing and marketing practises, representations of sexuality, and artistic experimentation" (617). In this context, Eliot's evasion of the obscene can be read, "however unconscious or unintentional, to present expert testimony for a controversial book" (617). This argument, while a more reliable reading of Eliot's role in the publication of *Nightwood*, is still problematic because it positions Barnes' novel in the English market after the London trial for Hall's *The Well of Loneliness.* While in agreement with Gilmore, I wish to complicate the function of Eliot's introduction by drawing attention to a subtle, and often overlooked, component in the history of *Nightwood*'s publication: Eliot's preface *only* accompanied the 1937 American edition, not the 1936 London edition. The argument can be made that Eliot believed *Nightwood* would require specific guidance in the hands of an American reading public. An admissible

context for textual consumption would have to be determined by negotiating a "new deal in the law of letters" (Ernst vii), a contract ("deal") whose origins I locate in Judge Woolsey's verdict in the case of *United States of America v. One Book Called "Ulysses"* (1933). This landmark ruling signals a crucial divergence from England's *Hicklin* doctrine[13], the standard upon which U.S. publication laws were traditionally based, and codified into American jurisprudence an original legalizing narrative for obscene modernist aesthetics.

I take it that Eliot imposed a legitimizing narrative onto *Nightwood* in a calculated effort to subsume the obscenity in Barnes' 1937 text within a pre-existing contract that had been specifically designed to accommodate representations of sex and pornography in modernism's new forms. As Chisholm remarks, "the novel displays the prudent…impetus to mimic Joycean profanity after the lifting of the ban on *Ulysses* in 1933" (171). As such, Eliot's narrative is guided by the aegis of Woolsey's standards for obscenity, assimilating Barnes' text into a contract ratified with the imprimatur of legal authority and empowered to transmute the unspeakable into legitimate discourse. But if Eliot's pre-emptive intervention on behalf of *Nightwood* operates as I suggest, the question remains: does Barnes' text resist or 'bow down' to the imposed reading? What are the implications of the double-optic granted to *Nightwood* after it was dressed up in the robes of authority? What is to be made of Barnes' obscene aesthetics, concealed like Dr. O'Connor's nightgown beneath the bed sheets?

Moreover, I contend that obscenity participates in *Nightwood* as a constitutive part of Barnes' poetics of unproductive excess, a program that colludes, dirties and disrupts the imposition of the Woolsey/Eliot controlling narrative. *Nightwood* continually performs readings of its own torrential obscenity in highly theatrical settings, excavating transgressive knowledge from textual and physical dirt in an effort to destabilize confidence in systems of order in the same moment that it bows to them. In Barnes' view, excommunication from the canon and disqualification are both sources of delirious pleasure and despairing terror, just as tragedy is inescapable from the joys of the *pissoirs*.

In the verdict of *The United States v. One Book Called "Ulysses"* (1933), Judge Woolsey adumbrates a conception of obscenity in Joyce's novel, thus establishing a precedent by which

[13] The Hicklin doctrine entered U.S. obscenity law in United States v. Bennett in 1879, a case that defined obscenity as material that possessed the "tendency to corrupt and deprave" minds to open to immoral influences. The Hicklin doctrine was a contributing factor to the Comestock Laws that were ratified to protect the mails from the insidious influence of obscenity. See Thomas C. Mackey, "Pornography on Trial: A Handbook with Cases, Laws and Documents" (2002).

all other texts are to be measured. Woolsey says that, while he has certainly discovered the presence of obscenity in *Ulysses*, Joyce's "objective has required him incidentally to use certain words that are generally considered dirty" (xi-xii). Woolsey states that, while in common parlance these words are undoubtedly obscene, here in *Ulysses* they are situated in an extraordinary context and transformed by their surroundings into legitimate discourse. No longer qualifying as obscene in the eyes of the law, Joyce's profane vocabularies indicate a paradox: identified as "incidental," they are overridden by craft and thus, essential and ineradicable. "In this specific context," E.S. Burt writes, "words generally considered dirty are not really dirty…they have ceased to be filthy" (26). The verdict signifies that Woolsey locates a relationship between Joyce's 'dirty words' and the unfamiliar literary form that encloses them, a generative connection that can recover delimited language and make it "speakable" orthodoxy.

Judge Woolsey's ruling suggests that *Ulysses* was ultimately admitted into the America because it could be laundered by the law and recruited for similar services—that is, for maintaining the integrity of language. The vocabulary of the verdict reflects this conscription. An examination of Woolsey's rhetoric in the context of the pact is required to understand the machinery of the verdict and the agenda behind it.

E.S. Burt identifies three classes of rhetorical dirt in the verdict that reveal how Woolsey conceived of the objective directing Joyce's art.

The first variety of dirt is "honest dirt" symbolizing, for Woolsey, "the sweat exuded from the brow of the inventing artist" (26). Integral to Woolsey's verdict is the narrative he sketches of Joyce as a craftsman in contradistinction to a vicarious and irresponsible sensualist. Woolsey demonstrates that *Ulysses* reflects a "serious experiment" in a "new, if not wholly novel, literary genre" (xi), drawing his validating pact more along the lines of literary criticism rather than traditional legal letters[14]:

> Joyce has attempted — it seems to me, with astonishing success — to show how the screen of consciousness with its ever-shifting kaleidoscopic impressions carries, as it were on a plastic palimpsest, not only what is in the focus of each man's observation of the actual things about him, but also in a penumbral zone residua of past impressions,

[14] Woolsey's rhetoric indexes a landmark shift from the idea, best described by the prosecutor Pinard in the *Madame Bovary* trial, that '"A judge is no literary critic, called upon to pronounce on the opposite modes of making art and appreciating it"' (qtd in Johnson 7). Moreover, in the 1921 *Little Review* trial, *Ulysses* was brought to court by the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice whose rallying cry was "Morals, Not Art." Woolsey effectively ushers literary criticism and into the realm of legal ethics for the first time in Anglo-Saxon censorship history.

> some recent and some drawn up by association from the domain of the subconscious. He shows how each of these impressions affects the life and behavior of the character which he is describing. (xi)

Joyce's creative project demands that he use obscene words; it would have been "artistically inexcusable" according to the ambition of Joyce's modernist aesthetics to omit obscene content from his technique. In this narrative, Joyce's dirty words are "determined otherwise, as the words that the author in all honesty must use" (Burt 26). Quotation marks "launder" the language clean of filth, signifying Joyce's commitment to collect and contain prohibited material as *examples* of a fictional consciousness. While Leopold and Molly Bloom may display a "too poignant preoccupation with sex" (xii), the author makes a "*debt and promise* to represent the language in its entirety" (Burt 27 my italics), clearly demarcating the boundary between himself and his concupiscent Irish-Catholic creations.

The second class of dirt Burt identifies in Woolsey's rhetoric is "natural dirt" (28). The clue to this variety of filth resides in Woolsey's casually comic line that, if we are disturbed with the recurrent theme of sex, "it must always be remembered that his locale was Celtic and his season spring" (xii). 'Natural dirt' is viewed in a mythic frame as productive and regenerative to language: it is the "compost from which might spring flowers" (Burt 28). Woolsey essentially lessens the shock of Joyce's sexual imagery by casually reminding readers that, while it is perhaps indulgent, the frank language supports the orthodox American values of heterosexual reproduction and bears forth the substantial fruits of artistic labour. Along these lines, Ernst and Schwartz[15] explain how the defence team used etymological terminology to successfully persuade Woolsey that Joyce's obscenity attempts to restore the language's "ideal Saxon integrity and purity" and carry language back to "a time before they had been set aside as obscene" (Burt 27). The court witnesses the natural and regenerative qualities of Joyce's language in the moment when, for *fuck,* the defence counsel states, '"One etymological dictionary gives its derivation as from *facere*—to make—the farmer fucked the seed into the soil. This, your honor, has more integrity than a euphemism used in every day in every modern novel to describe precisely the same event"' (qtd in Ernst and Schwartz 94). The "mythic picture" (Burt 27) of language is fundamental to Woolsey's narrative: *Ulysses* is admissible into the U.S. because it purges "the old Saxon words known to almost all men and...to many women" (xii) of

[15] The incident is also recounted in Brook Thomas' "*Ulysses* on Trial: Some Supplementary Reading" (1994).

figurative encrustations and historical corruptions, rejuvenating the decayed and worn-out words with the wholesome life it possessed in its ideal, pristine state.

These functions of language are markedly different from the third variety of textual dirt, a class of irredeemable matter Burt calls "dirty dirt*"* (27). In the scheme of Woolsey's taxonomy, truly filthy language is neither productive nor indicative of a sincere dedication to craft. Had Woolsey discovered it in *Ulysses* the text would have remained on the *index librorum prohibitorum*. Woolsey's rhetoric of impermissible discourse makes this clear: "*Ulysses*...contains, as I have mentioned above, many words usually considered dirty, [but] I have not found anything that I consider to be dirt for dirt's sake" (xii). In the vocabulary of this pact, "dirt for dirt's sake" is a crucial concept. The expression points to dirt's inherent unproductiveness; the coinage indicates a language truly filthy because it is merely "unreclaimable excess; it is dirt unendowed with a purpose; dirt as an index, just more of the dirt that it stands for" (Burt 28). As a proliferation incompatible with moral hierarchies, this discourse is a pleasurable language that simultaneously increases the play of words while reducing the impetus to work towards higher order.

From Woolsey's taxonomy, it emerges that the obscene is disruptive precisely because it destabilizes any sturdy relationship between signifier and signified, "guard[ing] one door to a secret place of play in language, where the substitution of names unregulated by meaning, unaccountable to knowledge, can go on and we can take pleasure in words for their own sake" (Burt 26). Thus, the linguistic play intrinsic to the nature of obscenity is conceived as a sterile pleasure that only proliferates clutter and signals the impermissible presence of onanistic delight[16]. This un(re)productive play at the level of language opposes the orthodoxic values of procreation symbolized by the regenerative principles of legitimate language. The auto-erotic games played by Gerty and Bloom on Sandymount in the "Nausicaa" episode seem to intensify Woolsey's concern, illustrating a unique interrelation between text and law. Thus, the variety of aphrodisiacal dirt that results from degenerative (in both senses of the word) linguistic play is the only type of obscenity that remains obscene and, as such, must be delegitimized as criminal discourse.

Despite the evidence of the "Nausicaa" episode, Woolsey declares that Joyce is not guilty

[16] Marjorie Heins compelling argues that the American anxiety over the masturbatory practises of its youth lie at the source of the U.S. obscenity laws which are designed to "save" the impressionable reader from this vice.

of purveying 'dirty-for-dirt's-sake' to inspire readers to imitate Gerty and Bloom in their private reading chambers: "Whilst...the effect of *Ulysses*," he states, "on the reader is undoubtedly emetic, nowhere does it tend to be an aphrodisiac" (xiv). The book is "admissible" into the body politic because it banishes the pleasure principle, purging the irreclaimable excesses of filth as part of its salutary effect. The judgement also signals that *Ulysses* is permitted to circulate because it provides a valuable service to linguistic hygiene. The book expurgates truly dirty discourse from language while it exemplifies the requisite elimination of actual bodily pleasure from artistic representations of sexual pleasure and, subsequently, from reading. Woolsey gives the "strong draught" (xiv) of *Ulysses* to consumers as a dosage of dirt for the purposes of moral health[17]: Joyce's dirt is beneficial to hygiene because his language actually confirms the codes of orthodoxy. Indeed, the pressure on the reader to exercise an authorized reading that complies with Woolsey's doctrine was so great that, after *Ulysses* was admitted into circulation in the U.S., publishers branded the physical copy of the text with the verdict reprinted verbatim in the supplementary pages of subsequent editions. The gesture makes it clear that, for the safety of the reader, *Ulysses* must be consumed in strict adherence to the new guidelines if it is to act as a healing tonic rather than a pleasurable poison.

What is rarely considered is how Eliot played a major role in determining the regulations for the "strong draught" (xiv) of literary obscenity. In his essay, "Ulysses, Order and Myth" (1923), Eliot intervened on behalf of *Ulysses* to defend Joyce from accusations that he had tried to, in the words of Richard Aldington, '"disgust us with mankind"' (qtd. in Eliot, 25). Eliot shifts the attention away from accusations of libel derived from the obscene parts of *Ulysses*, saying he chooses not to "linger" (26) on this futile inquiry, and onto the modernist technique that accounts for the truly obscene "chaos" (26) perceived in the work. The entire essay, in fact, can be read as a kind of cross-examination, as Eliot presents the witness' testimony and then proceeds to methodically dismantle the charges of libel.

The counsel for *Ulysses* recognized the persuasive effectiveness of the Eliot's strategic essay and incorporated it into their defense of the novel in the actual courtroom setting. The defence conflated Eliot's elucidation of "classicism" (26), a technical method for "controlling,

[17] Mary Lydon, in "On Censorship: Staying Power" (1982), provides an analysis of the maternal impulses that inform Woolsey's rhetoric and links it to alimentary vocabularies that are pervasive in discourses that seek to conceptualize the effect of obscenity, including the transcripts of modernism's trials. She notes how Woolsey emerges as a "nurturing figure" and that "censorship itself begins to appear to be ambivalent , at once poison and cure, like the *pharmakon*, undecidable" (109)

ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (27), with the definition of "classic" they discovered in Webster's dictionary. Counsel stated, "The words "classic" and "obscene" represent polar extremes. They are mutually antagonistic and exclusive. That which is obscene, corrupts and depraves—it cannot be of the highest class and of acknowledged excellence" (Moscato and Leblanc 256). Woolsey clearly bought the argument, locating in the "classicism" argument the presence of what Eliot describes as the "mythic method" of language, an aesthetic device for collecting and controlling the "immense panorama" of history's residual dirt. The expert testimony of Eliot, evident in the "mythic picture" (Burt 27) the defence team presented for Woolsey, is largely responsible for the judge's legitimating narrative of regenerative linguistic dirt for "a language once virginal but now prostituted…still meaningful, still capable of being used with decency and respect" (27). Joyce, as Eliot and Woolsey agreed, had simply "[done] the best one can with the material at hand" (Eliot 26) and, as a testament to his genius, transformed this filth into something of "the highest class" (256) that could benefit the average reader. In this way, the Woolsey verdict essentially validates Eliot's claim twelve years earlier that Joyce's method possesses "the importance of a scientific discovery" (27). The unknowing collaboration between Judge Woolsey and T.S. Eliot brings together legal, scientific and academic discourses to authorize *Ulysses*, stamping it with the legitimizing imprimatur of institutional approval.

Turning from the sociohistorical and legal contexts in which *Nightwood* was produced to the novel itself, it can now be observed how Eliot, in his administrative role, edited and showcased *Nightwood* in a concerted effort to try to "anticipate a reader's misdirections" ("Introduction" xxii) and preclude the misunderstandings that might lead to legal action. He aligns Barnes' objectives within the tradition established at the *Ulysses* proceedings to clear an authenticated space in the market for its reception. It is evident from the correspondence between Barnes and Emily Coleman that Eliot and his co-editor, Frank Morley, strongly believed that *Nightwood* would encounter censorship. In a letter dated 27 April 1936, Coleman wrote that Eliot and Morley presented the case that '"the book might be taken up by the censor"' (qtd. in Plumb xxii); Morley, according to Barnes, "is *positive* he'll go to jail for my book and said he was 'proud' to!!" (13 July 1936)[18]. Eliot was less enthusiastic to be a martyr than Morley,

[18] All quotes from the Barnes' unpublished letters and the passages deleted from the early manuscripts are taken from Cheryl J. Plumb's, *Nightwood: The Original Version and Related Drafts (*1995) unless otherwise noted.

knowing that he stood to lose a substantial amount of his investment and might potentially suffer embarrassment in his homeland if his apparent protégé was banned as a dirty author. In preparation for the American market, Eliot planned and presented a careful reading of this manuscript, sealing it with the imprimatur of recognized authority—his own.

In the "Introduction," Eliot extracts determining factors from Woolsey's verdict, showing that he is a close reader of the court proceedings. He writes that it took, for him, "some time to come to an appreciation of its meaning *as a whole"* (xvii my italics). The concept of "wholeness," central to the mythic discourse of high modernist aesthetics, is essential in the verdicts of the *Ulysses* trials. The obscenity law in place in 1922 when *Ulysses* was tried for the first time derived from the *Hicklin* statute that privileged an anatomical gaze, permitting the seizure and destruction of any book that contained as little as a single obscene passage regardless of artistic intention[19]. For Woolsey, however, subject matter is inseparable from the grand scheme of structure: *Ulysses*, he says, evaluated "in its entirety, as a book must be on a test such as this" (xiii), did not have the same cumulative effect as reading "those passages of which the Government complains" (x) in isolation.

Eliot strategically neutralizes what he correctly prophesized would be the novel's most shocking and controversial chapter, "The Possessed," by highlighting its importance in the overall design. As is evident in his correspondences, Eliot wanted the final chapter removed entirely. He thought "throughout the first reading" that it was "superfluous" but changed his mind, later believing the final chapter to be "essential, both dramatically and musically" (xviii). If the final chapter, which Eliot worried might be construed as indecent eroticism, was "superfluous," then it violates the reading pact, indicating instead that Barnes was "exploiting obscenity" (Woolsey xi) to produce a criminally erotic excess of text. He ultimately concludes that the last chapter of *Nightwood* is not an isolated performance of burlesque titillation but, rather, is similar in function to the final act in a dramatic work or the last movement of a symphony: it recapitulates the themes of the entire work, inscribing it with the higher purpose of technical completion. By drawing out, and then correcting, his mistaken initial reading of *Nightwood*, he precludes any misreadings of the most dangerous chapter and reinforces the novel's most incriminating part. In this case, his account of interpretation recalls and confirms a

[19] Hall's *Well of Loneliness* was found obscene for containing a single sexually suggestive line: "and that night, they were not divided" (284).

contractual precedent following the same procedure that appears in his defense for Joyce.

Eliot also displays a concern that Barnes will be accused of demonstrating pornographic intentions, defined as the exploitation of transgressive material for 'cheap thrills.' *Nightwood* is framed in a way to prevent these charges: Eliot maintains that none of these sexually deviant characters, all suffering from "perversity particular to the individual" (xxi), are unendowed with purpose. They are not paraded for shock and amusement like "a horrid sideshow of freaks" (xxii). Instead, they participate in a mythic picture of humanity, their miseries are part of a "deeper design" to cathartically purge "the human misery and bondage which is universal" (xxi). The obscene abnormalities and perversities become allegorized, symptoms of the archetypical modernist subjectivity, the universal 'sick man.' Unlike the prosaic realism of Radclyffe Hall's banned *Well of Loneliness*, or the similarly censored writings of the sexologist, Havelock Ellis, who wrote Hall's preface, *Nightwood* is not a "psychopathic study" (xxi). Eliot's signature authorizes Barnes' text as a legitimate treatment of mankind's spiritual sickness, not an exploitive study for perverse stimulation. Significantly, Eliot references the "Puritan morality that [he] remembers" (xxi) from his past, directly addressing an American readership—the normal persons with average sex instincts—well-known for anxiety over strange bodies and sexual perversity.

Under Eliot's administration, unifying the reader body and the reintegration of the body politic become part of *Nightwood's* project, mirroring the objectives of Eliot's criticism and Woolsey's verdict. Eliot positions *Nightwood* in a particular literary heritage, writing that Barnes' "quality and horror [are] very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy" (xxii). Not only does this claim present *Nightwood* in the terms of high-seriousness suitable for the courts, it also makes an important reference to Elizabethan literature which, as he suggests in the essay, "Philip Massinger" (1920), possesses a particular moral structure: "Elizabethan morality was an important convention; important because it was not conscious of one social class alone; because it provided a framework for emotions to which all classes could respond, and it hindered no feeling. It was not hypocritical and it did not suppress" (*Selected Essays* 189). The conventions of classic Elizabethan literature, for Eliot, illustrate how the rigorous observance of structural integrity contributed to a kind of societal "wholeness" wherein lower classes, who consumed the highly-wrought intellectual property, refined their ethical and aesthetic tastes.

To extend this further, Eliot's criticism, like Elizabethan literature, seeks "to make a

bodily reading part of an ethical exploration as opposed to a simple, sexual physical exploration" (Pease 191). Pornographic reading is the result of what Eliot would call the "dissociation of sensibility" (64), the fracturing of faculties into chaos from the rule of order. In the disintegrative moment of pornography, the greater ethical and intellectual projects that high modernist critics worked towards were dissolved by the base, simple pleasures characteristic of mass culture commodities. *Nightwood,* despite its world of carnival entertainments, is subsumed into the "project worthy of all sectors of society" to reintegrate the sensible faculties, prevent the purely bodily response to art, and develop refined tastes in the lower classes "through classic, difficult literature" (191). *Nightwood,* in this light, expels dirt and produces a whole subject.

In the preface's most crucial passage, Eliot conditions the reader's response to Barnes' prose, stating that *Nightwood* "is so good a novel that only sensibilities trained on poetry can appreciate it" (xviii). Reminiscent of the way Woolsey instructs the reception of *Ulysses*, Eliot informs readers that Barnes' prose delivers, not an offensive shock, but the "direct shock of poetic intensity" ("Dante" 200). *Nightwood's* poetic qualities, perceptible to educated ("trained") faculties, produce an authorized shock, like an emetic reflex, that attaches the novel to moral purposes, enlightens the average person, and confirms the authority of institutionalized high art over the pornographic properties of mass culture. Allison Pease writes of Eliot's program of poetic sensibilities:

> By championing the "shock" to "sensibility" that could only be experienced by "true" or "high" culture, [Eliot] appropriated the very labels that had been reserved previously for mass-cultural practices. [Eliot] not only made a place for the bodily reader of cultural works in its notion of sensibility—by which it meant the connection between sensations, emotions, and cognition—but, in its use of the "invigorating shock" of real culture, made it a place for the very kind of aesthetic reception that had previously been attributed to readers of sensational thrillers or pornography. (167)

Barnes' novel does not accommodate the outlawed bodily readings produced by cheap, mass-cultural texts; rather, like *Ulysses*, the "strong draught" (xx) of Barnes' medicine flushes garbage out of the system and, in the words of the Fadiman review in the *New Yorker* (1937), is '"served up as caviar to the general"' (qtd in Marcus 203). *Nightwood* conditions a permissible physical response based on the equilibrium of sensibilities rather than pander to the discordant pleasures of poor taste. Thus, it is unsurprising to discover that Eliot "planned to bring the book out in an

expensive edition to attract the right audience and avoid prosecution" (Plumb xxii)[20].

The material edited (and that which Eliot left untouched) also reflects an acute understanding of the "new deal" in U.S. obscenity law. As an editor, Eliot suppresses overt references to homosexuality, an example of unregenerate excess in its own right. Leigh Gilmore and Georgette Fleischer both trace the ostensibly "obscene passages" on the manuscripts that Eliot read and discover that most scenes excised "describe gay male sexuality; they involve the doctor and involve sexual scenes among men" (Gilmore 621). A two-page speech about the homosexual king Ludwig was cut; so too was the Doctor's anecdote about the time he circumcised an entire military regiment. He made the line, "'You see before you, madame,' he said, 'one who in common parlance is called a "faggot," a "fairy," a "queen." I was created in anxiety'" (Barnes 64-65), into an innocuous statement: "You see before you, madame,' he said, 'one who was created in anxiety" (80). Where Barnes has the doctor joke, "You can lay a hundred bricks and not be called a bricklayer; but lay one boy and you are a bugger!" (161), Eliot strikes the line entirely. The other expletives edited out of the final manuscript include the phrases "horses arse" (99), "shit or get off the pot!" (99), and a recommended change of "balls" to "bollocks" that Barnes ultimately ignored.

While it is clear that Eliot's emendations indicate an attempt to make obscenity less visible to authorities, for all the terms expurgated, the novel still brims with homosexual scenes and protracted episodes of the obscene. The expletives Eliot cut from the original draft, including *faggot, fairy, queen, balls, bugger*, *horses-arse* and *'shit or get off the pot,'* are examples of the type of figurative language Woolsey strictly forbid. They are "pedestrian" (Fleischer 414) curses, unoriginal phrases that serve no purpose but to proliferate clutter. In his garrulous speeches, the doctor even points to his own repetitive excess as if exhausted by clichéd overuse of these terms, saying that "in common parlance," he is called *this, this, this,* and so on. For the doctor, the list of corrupted verbal figurations for 'homosexual' is potentially infinite. Conversely, the

[20] The practical steps that Eliot took to present *Nightwood* to the public as a sanctioned product caught the attention of Helen Fletcher who, in an article for *Time and Tide* (14 November 1936) magazine, appropriated the traditional alimentary rhetoric of censorship in her review:

> The manufacturers of a well-designed chocolate laxative, traduced by their own cunning, and stricken with a vision of Greedy Gregory in a worse plight than any cautionary tale imagined, have inserted in each package a warning: "Stop! This is not really a chocolate! Kindly place beyond children's reach." Similarly, Messrs. Faber & Faber, by publishing *Nightwood* (a short book) at 10s. 6d., by robing it in pale grey and by printing a tart warning to optimists inside the cover, have done all that any human publishers could do to keep this novel from the hands of that over-protected child, the average reader. (qtd in Marcus 202)

obscenities which Eliot does not contest, such as "the Lily of Killarney" (96), "the other woman that God forgot" (143), "Tiny O'Toole lying in a swoon" (141) and "an old worn out lioness" (163), demonstrate a poetic and inventive use of language[21]. The sweat of the craftsman is evident on the newly-minted faces of these coinages. In other words, they are recognized currency in Woolsey's economy of language.

That Eliot's strategy to smuggle *Nightwood* into circulation under the garbs of Woolsey's verdict was successful is confirmed by the fact that the novel was virtually invisible in the marketplace, a "non case" for the courts and a non-issue for the public – a kind of feminized version of Joyce's "Nighttown" sequences in *Ulysses*. As Donna Gerstenberger writes, "What Eliot does and does not say helped seal the fate of *Nightwood* for many years" (129).

The question of how Barnes' *Nightwood* responds to authority's "seal" (129), those controlling narratives like Eliot's, is a source of great critical debate. Most critics, especially from the feminist school, assert that Barnes acquiesces to the external coercion for practical reasons while her text operates as a subversive agent that celebrates the sexually disqualified and forbidden identities it depicts. This argument, initiated by Jane Marcus' "Laughing at Leviticus" (1989), uses Bakhtin's theory of the *carnivalesque* to insist that Barnes offers a "feminist critique" of those discourses that safely marginalize abjection, depicting an impure social world "turned upside down for carnival…the reversible world of the circus" (223). Marcus' argument for subversion, and subsequent readings guided by this essay, are led astray by a fundamental misinterpretation of carnival politics. Because Marcus imagines an interminable circus, she overlooks the fact that that, as Dianne Warren has shown, "carnival reversals are temporary, and…they cathartically vent cultural tensions prior to a return to order" (3). In other words, "the carnival must end" (117) and hegemonic patriarchy prevails precisely because the performances of transgression have reinforced order's normative centrality. Thus, any claim to Barnes' subversion inevitably makes an equally plausible argument that it upholds the very systems which it allegedly seeks to overturn by submitting to a position of exclusion that maintains the ineradicable binaries of social order. For this reason, Karen Kaivola cautions that *Nightwood*

[21] The observation is originally Georgette Fleischer's (1998) though she does not connect the poetic innovations to the Woolsey verdict or part of the tactic to avoid censorship.

may seem "strangely in collusion with what it ultimately critiques" (60)[22].

However, collusion, when it appears in the context of Barnes' discursive machinery, is not the negative spectre of submission that one might think. In fact, collusion is an essential constituent of Barnes' writing. In a letter to Emily Coleman, she revises the notions of collusion and explores its capacity for power and invigoration:

> With the correct artist we contemplate life, with the poetic artist we make a new one…Realistic values sit before one, to interpret or not, as the eye is good or off focus; with the spiritual life the critic (or novelist) has to more than record, he has to understand with a sixth sense *that is almost a kind of collusion*, not an appraisal, the one is safe, the other is danger. (5 January 1939 my italics)

Whereas Eliot claims that Barnes' 'poetic sensibilities' deliver a safely calibrated shock to stimulate equanimity and order, this passage indicates that Barnes conceives of her poetry in a different way. As Barnes understands it, poetic energy must collude with the "realistic values" that Eliot ultimately represents and, instead of "appraising" the worth of those values, it dangerously expands a space within their limits for a 'new life' – one that necessarily disturbs the founding principles upon which the accepted terms of reality are constructed. Woolsey's contract and Eliot's critical stance, each designed as "method[s] of increasing control over socially subversive forms by introducing them into the dominant cultural order where they could be more easily surveyed and controlled" (Pease 190), only reiterate the very terms of oppressive reality and the inevitable constraints that are incompatible with Barnes' aesthetics. For this reason, *Nightwood* neither challenges high modernist narratives nor condemns the degenerative effect of mass culture; it appears collusive with what it is usually thought to critique only because Barnes' poetics deny the possibility of a 'safe' place to launch an attack, either from the outside-in, or from the inside-out. Instead, her poetics dissolve both the margins and the center, creating what she identifies as a potentially "new" or radically alternative space for spiritual (and bodily) life that cannot be accommodated by the language traditionally used to contemplate and order the sprawling panorama of life.

Dianne Chisholm recognizes this negative space of occupation, insisting that *Nightwood* is neither in league with discursive powers that classify, regiment and discipline any disqualified

[22] Kaivola's analysis of Barnes' collusive strategies in *All Contraries Confounded* (1994) and Daniella Caselli's examination of Barnes' participation in censorship systems in *Improper Modernism* (2009) were influential in the development of my approach in this chapter.

identity, nor does it "voice the struggle of an emerging subculture so much as foreground the duplicitous – "obscene"– frame of speech in which any unbecoming sexuality must be lived and thought" (172). *Nightwood'*s participation in the public space of discourse is, paradoxically, a collusion that undoes discursivity itself through a linguistic matrix of uncontrollable excess. Since all her oddities traffic in the obscene language necessary for their existence, they are unmade by the same blade as the authorities, although their linguistic afterlife is constituted uniquely by punishment and pleasure. The shock delivered from *Nightwood* is its violation of the same "new deal" (Ernst vii) in the law of literature that authorized its entry into circulation.

This relationship with censorial systems is on display in a scene Eliot cut from the final manuscript, no doubt because he thought it might provoke legal action. The passage deleted involves the Doctor's account of his own obscenity trial: "I popped tiny out to relieve him of his drinking," he says, "when something with dark hands closed over him as if to strangle the life's breath out of him and suddenly the other, less pleasing hand, the hand of the law, was on my shoulder and I was hurled into jail, into Mary Antoinette's very cell […]" (Barnes 26). The doctor relates how, with "long golden curls catching in [his] French heels" (27), he is brought to prison but then exculpated of his crimes in court: So, as I went by [the judge] I whispered: 'I thank you, and I love you very much, *de tout mon coeur*!' He answered, soft and low, stabbing the blotter with a pencil: '*C'est le coeur d'une femme*!' '*Oui*!' I said gentle, so perhaps I've got me a friend" (28). The doctor dreamily imagines that he has discovered an ally in the law, deliberately misunderstanding the judge's embarrassed remarks about his female heart to be an expression of empathetic compassion. Within the confines of the system that disqualifies him, the doctor rephrases the judge's discourse to locate a source of acceptance and bittersweet happiness. Doctor O'Connor restages reality to locate a fantastical "new life," a validation ("*Oui*!") that overwrites a statement expressing orthodoxic views and clears a space that tolerates, that truly *understands*, his radically heterodox sexual conduct. Here, the words of the censor slip out of containment in a contemplative context; while not critiquing the censorial system, the annexed words imagine a contradictory location of collusive resistance that comically undoes the power of the law in the moment that it displays its power. As it was for O'Connor in the alley, the hand of pleasure is confused with the "less pleasing" hand of the law, as these oppositional sites unite to bring him fugitive and transitory joys.

Doctor Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor functions as the guide through

these sites, directing our gaze on the voyeuristic pilgrimage through Barnes' infernal dark wood. Along the way, the doctor reflexively educates his interlocutors on the reading pact unique to this textual journey. Barnes' Dante discourses upon the *contrapasso* particular to this world but, instead of faithfully reiterating the Tuscan pilgrim's divinely orthodox doctrine, he rereads the transgressions as pleasurable, destabilizing eruptions within the markings of punishment and domination. In the key scene with "Nikka the Nigger," the disqualified doctor presents a reading of the ultimate censored text, Nikka's body, and acts as Virgilian glossator for and orator of the stories. He unveils Nikka's flesh—already twice disqualified because of his race and homosexuality—like a vertical tracking shot, revealing that Nikka is "tattooed head to toe with the *ameublement* of depravity!" (19). Nikka's flesh is inscribed with a catalogue of censored logos, each text speaking the unspeakable knowledge of history. Present on Nikka's censored text is the "obscene" monkish script of "Paris before hygiene," the profane ejaculation of Prince Arthur Tudor, "so wholly epigrammatic and in no way befitting the great and noble British Empire" (19), a confirmation of the Janenist theory, and passages from the book of magic written on his buttocks. Nikka is obscene logos made flesh, a body presented as a collection of irredeemable texts, the dirty passages of illicit knowledge.

Also present on Nikka is the name "Desdemona" written on the length of Nikka's phallus. Signifying the unspeakable (and routinely unspoken) racial transgression in Shakespeare's *Othello,* O'Connor comments that this text is only legible "at a stretch" which, given Nikka's homosexuality ("I know what I'm talking about in spite of all that has been said about the black boys," [19] he states), is textual knowledge that can, quite literally, only give pleasure when the reader/receiver submits to participate in transgressive sexual passage. To decipher this censored text for its true message, the reader must "bow down" and perform debased, and therefore, delimited conduct: "I...can" (19) declares the script on Nikka's knees and, within this dramatic frame of reception, the reader is put on trial: "can you bow down too?" is the question implicitly posed. The assault on the reader's position is supported by O'Connor's ability to direct the whole passage, and thus our eyes, towards "what you musn't mention" above which is written the command: "*Garde tout*!"—Keep all! (20). Nikka's phallus is the keeper, the guardian, of apocryphal knowledge that O'Connor is making us all ("*tout*") regard, or (*re)garde* (look at again). The dramatic design of O'Connor's presentation produces a "theatrical representation with [his] audience, encouraging readers to reactivate some crucial questions

about interpretation and so to intervene in cultural history" (Parkes 20). As such, the reader is repositioned to go down and approach the disqualified textual bodies of low cultural value and find pleasure in them. The discovery of "obscene" knowledge within the alternative life of these texts is possible once "realistic values" are undone by Barnes' self-consuming *poesis*.

The strategic positioning of the "Nikka the Nigger" sequence at the outset of the novel is of crucial importance. Dante-O'Connor performs his unveiling of Nikka's body for the benefit of Felix, the character who occupies a purgatorial position between the real world of orthodox, historical values and the carnival world, presented here by Doctor O'Connor. Felix appears here as a surrogate for the reader and, through the doctor, Barnes stages a kind of initiation for Felix into the dark wood of the unspeakable. The process of initiation into this obscene underworld is, appropriate for Barnes' intricate space of paradoxes, overseen by a "Mighty" authority whose revelations must be consumed with a 'grain of salt' since his practise is disqualified and he operates without a license. As part of his pedagogical program, O'Connor imparts knowledge of *le segrete cose* ("the secret things" [*Inf.* 3:42]) that he has accreted on his tour of the tragic realms of pleasurable vice. He knows what is secretly written on the phallus of Nikka "at a stretch" (19), what half of the Janenist theory is concealed privately on each of Nikka's buttocks, what pleasurable curses are exchanged in the *pissoirs*, and what the semen tastes like from men of different cruising locales. The doctor has made a ritual of filth: "ritual itself" he says, "constitutes an instruction" (159). And here, in the first pages of "Bow Down," Barnes ceremoniously presents a mouthpiece to instruct the terms of her alternative contract with the reader. What O'Conner reveals is a ritualized reading pact that dismantles the validated rituals of Law and Power leading to an opposite, disqualified cache of knowledge. The reader, like Felix, must immediately choose which ritual to follow for instruction.

Dr. O'Connor's testimony of ritualized readings of underworld bodies mirrors the reader's initiation into the submerged spaces of *Nightwood*'s textual body, a virtual subterranea of texts lost, censored, disqualified and excommunicated from the official canon. The revelation of Nikka's body serves as a microcosm within the novel for the corpus of *Nightwood* itself—that is, a hidden gallery of apocryphal texts that are historically without value. Barnes' novel, like Nikka's flesh, is a repository of textual dirt for which O'Connor serves as the presiding, un-official authority. Both Nikka and *Nightwood* are covered in expletives (from "*explere*," Latin for "to fill up") that recuperate other disqualified texts. Diane Chisholm points out that

Nightwood "reorganizes the devices of "obscene" literature. There are literary antecedents as well as legal precedents for her avant-garde obscenity" (187). For example, the carriage ride that Robin, Jennie and the Doctor take through the *bois* recasts the "scenography" of a particularly scandalous episode in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Also pervasive in Barnes' obscenity is the "mesmerizing excrementality" of Boccaccio, references to De Sade, Chaucer, Petronius, and Joyce who had all banned in America (187). The doctor, who continually discloses ragged scraps of these discourses in a language that is torrentially abstruse and frequently unlistenable, represents the way that *Nightwood* is a garish tapestry composed of the obscene. The Doctor's expansive, instructive monologues accumulate into an archive of the transgressive material encoded into the technologies of the text: "instead of doctrine or knowledge, the Doctor dispenses a radical heterodoxy, compiled of folk wisdoms—Irish blarney, queenly drollery, anecdotal gossip...and other textual sources, most of them 'obscene'" (191). Like Nikka's body, both the doctor's discourse and *Nightwood* itself perform a ritual of obscenity and present a gallery of "censored" texts as an instruction in or syllabus for an alternative, transgressive canon.

Moreover, *Nightwood* includes explicitly pornographic publications in its infrastructure, most notably Alfred de Musset's scandalous *Gamiani, Une Nuit D'Éxces*—a novel whose net effect on the reader *is* aphrodisiacal, that contains a graphic story of lesbian lust, and a title that uncannily sums up *Nightwood*'s ceremonial excess. Unlike Joyce's *Ulysses*, which according to the legal code displays pornographic material only to supervise it, Barnes permits the erotic to circulate in secret where it can exert a destabilizing influence on the imposition of controlling narratives. And, with O'Connor's guidance, Barnes allows readers to potentially discover this pleasurable text through their own pursuits, to activate its function, to make its erotic inscriptions legible in the same way that the physician can actuate Nikka's illicit version of *Othello*. Within the self-reflexive scheme of *Nightwood*, Dr. O'Connor represents Barnes' education of filthy textualized bodies, alluding to the path to recover within this novel the residual traces of history's censored texts. Chisholm's description of *Nightwood* as a kind of "Trojan horse" (195) is a useful image: the novel's admission into the U.S. under the imprimatur of authority effectively smuggled past the censor an index of disqualified voices and expurgated material.

Unfortunately, that Felix, our surrogate, remains "always troubled by obscenity" and ultimately reasserts the enfeebled values of patriarchal doctrine ("To pay homage to our past is the only gesture that also includes a future" [43]) demonstrates that Barnes does not try to

validate the "obscene" texts because she is aware they will always be subordinated to orthodox codes, that certain discourses remain sources of illicit pleasure and are always commingled with a tragic sense of being outcast.

Felix's lingering hesitations about obscenity reflect Barnes' pessimistic outlook that we will always be "troubled" by the obscene. The sense of despair that pervades these sentiments results from the fact that her literary output was marked by frequent confrontations with censorship systems. The inescapability of censorship, traced through her personal history of contest and grudging collusion, plays a major role in the evolution of her aesthetics. Because censorship is concerned with maintaining the oppositional duality of socially-constructed binaries (speakable/unspeakable), it represents allegorically a wide range of controlling devices and methods of coercion which Barnes dissolves by formulating a poetic of myriad powerful silences.

Ryder, her first work, was confiscated by the New York Post Office in 1927. The expurgated version that appeared later that year contained a preface, written by Barnes, which directly addressed the issue of censorship by drawing attention to the asterisks replacing the indiscriminate cuts. In this satirical forward, Barnes showcases the places where "the war, so blindly raged on the written word left its mark" (vii), informing the public that it will be permitted to see "a part of the face of creation" but not allowed to view creation "as a whole" (vii). While Paul West, in the afterward to *Ryder*, suggests that Barnes' expression, the "havoc of nicety" (vii), is "the key to almost everything she wrote" (250), it is her concept of expurgation as producing a contradictory text that is most important in her oeuvre and is particularly crucial to the understanding of *Nightwood'*s disqualified aesthetics.

In this preface, Barnes haunts the text with a monumental, over-writing silence, letting the reader know that *Ryder*, "which they took for an original, was indeed a reconstruction" (Barnes vii). She strategically, subtly, and mischievously informs the reader to reckon with that part which has been severed and is unrecoverable, to read all that proceeds in the dark mirror of some apocryphal text replete with illicit knowledge. As such, Barnes' "original...reconstruction" anticipates what Holquist identifies as the central thesis supporting the work of censorship, the idea of the "corrupt original" (18) which, he writes, "goes to the heart of any attempt to understand censorship if only because the concept's surface contradiction points to the frangibility of all claims to authority on the basis of originality" (18). Barnes confirms this

statement with her perplexing decision surrounding the republication of *Ryder* by St. Martin's Press in 1979. Given the opportunity to restore the expurgations, Barnes declined the offer to publish an "original" version, a move that suggests her admission that no originary, authorized text exists in the place where censorship has enforced its laws. It is an admission, moreover, that what is troublingly obscene always remains obscene. More importantly, the decision preserves the text's impregnable silence, reconfirming the indomitable power exerted by the unspeakable and the unspoken.

Barnes' concept of the "original...reconstruction" (vii) is subsumed into the grand scheme of *Nightwood* where it finds its fullest articulation and culminates into Barnes' ability to write potent silences into spoken discourse. Here, Barnes presents story and history as always already corrupted texts embodied by incomprehensible wraiths. In a crucial passage, moments before unveiling the body of Nikka, O'Connor explicates his view of literary history:

> "Think of the stories that do not amount to much! That is, that are forgotten in spite of all man remembers…merely because they befell him without distinction or office or title–that's what we call legend and it's the best a poor man may do with his fate; the other […] we call history, the best the high and mighty can do with theirs. Legend is unexpurgated, but history, because of its actors, is deflowered […]" (Barnes 18)

Literary history is what the "high and mighty" ranks of academia call the canon, an ordered system of legitimate art that has expurgated the low-value textual dirt that threatens its 'hygiene.' Literature, for Barnes, is a censored body of text, purged of what has deflowered its purity, and presented to the public "after it was *no longer literature*" (vii, my italics). Thus, in Barnes' paradoxical machinery of poetic collusion, literature is only that which has been deemed by censorial systems as not-literature.

Working from this thesis, in *Nightwood*, Barnes disqualifies her writing through delegitimating tactics to create a discourse that is "no longer literature" (vii), a strategy that indexes her collusion with the censor just as "Robin's silence is a way of rejecting the experience of her own redemption" (Lee 216). The potential for salvation that resides in official discourse and the censorial narratives that fabricate literature are systematically undone as Barnes' uses profane garrulity to unmake her texts into non-literature, preserving their many silences, their tragic afterlives. The procedures of discursive redemption are repeatedly denied in the narrative, an argument bolstered by the fact that religion only appears to excommunicate, and that both

O'Connor's soliloquies and the final chapter conclude on a note of "nothing, but wrath and weeping" (Barnes 175), demonstrating "the signifying value of its own deconstruction [disqualification]" (Lee 217). Therefore, as an encyclopaedia of unredeemed stories that Barnes refuses to make amount to much, *Nightwood* positions the reader to "intervene in cultural history" (Parkes 18) but according to its own terms as that which, reappearing, yet remains "no longer literature" (vii).

To focus on the premise that Barnes' novel both colludes with and violates the Eliot-Woolsey reading pact, it is necessary to examine how *Nightwood'*s aesthetics of dangerous poetry enact a paradoxical resistance and submission to authority. *Nightwood* points to instances of collusion within the story as if glossing the way the text itself operates in the public sphere. The original title of the book, "Bow Down," is the clue to introducing the reader to this act that is repeatedly invoked throughout the novel. To 'bow down,' however, is more complicated than merely a performance of submission. For Guido Volkbein, it is a "genuflexion the hunted body makes from muscular contraction, going down before the impending and inaccessible, as before a great heat" (5); as for his son, Felix, "he felt that the great past might mend a little if he bowed low enough, if he succumbed and gave homage" (12). The bowed body substitutes for a transgressive body; knowing the failure of the subversive potential of boundary crossing, it instead "hunt[s] down its own disqualification" (12) to "mend" history. As Warren states, *Nightwood* utilises the signification of 'bowing down' to establish a "relation between veneration, self-abasement, and persecution: a series which elides the distinction between internal and external factors, and symbolises the way in which cultural and idiosyncratic factors contribute to the formation of subjectivity" (119). In much the same way, Barnes' foreword to *Ryder* and the self-reflexive meditation of *Nightwood* pay "homage" to systems of persecution, highlighting their social imperative within an "analysis of cultural entrapment" (139) while signalling the reader to hunt *within* the frame of censorship for the sources of disqualification.

If *Nightwood* ultimately bows down to Eliot's legitimizing narrative, it does so, like Felix, in the hopes that history "might mend a little" (12). For Barnes, it is ultimately a problem of vision that plagues the historical narrative ("the great past" [12]) motivating censorial regimes. This ailment is evident in the mythic apparatus of classicism which persuaded Woolsey that Joyce's obscenity performed a public service by cleaning up the foul dirt encrusted to a language corrupted by time. This view of history, however, is precisely *ahistorical;* it situates itself

according to an untenable position in relation to language: "It was to assume that there was a moment when the English language was entire, before contamination by suspect foreign influence, by transports this way and that" (Burt 27). Judge Woolsey, according to "some ideology of the proper" simply "goes along" with the proposal that art's function is to elevate and purify (expurgate) history, and thus "cordon[s] off the ruined parts from the living language, together with the restoration of the ideal of the language as an intact whole" (27). The testimony from the *Ulysses* trial reveals how Woolsey, Eliot, and the defense council seek to circumscribe corrupt language with the elevated language of the law.

However, in order to restore language to its pristine state, one would have to stand outside of discourse, thinking in a frame of speech that is untouched by history. An ahistorical discourse such as this is unsustainable and, despite Woolsey's best efforts, his rhetoric betrays the impossibility by succumbing to the same entrapment. His definition of "dirt for dirt's sake" does not pass his own legitimizing narrative: "it indicates a symptomatic breakdown of irreclaimable excess in Woolsey's own writing. Because it fills in for a missing definition with a word that adds nothing, we can call it an expletive, a swear word: For dirt's sake, dirt!" (Burt 30). The oppositional binary between accepted/ excluded language collapses because Woolsey cannot get outside of the language to control it – the dirt of history has irrevocably sullied him.

In *Nightwood,* Barnes continually refers to hegemonic systems of power, domination and control, the most extreme of these being Fascism. Presiding like an ominous shadow over the text, the miasma of Facism operates as a symbol that unifies regimes seeking to 'cleanse' what they think do not amount to much from collective history. In *Thinking Facism,* Erin Carlston observes, '"there is no outside to Barnes text/world; her stance is…that of the decadents, who deny "the existence of an isle of health and of the clear-eyed ones who aim to reside there"' (154). It is not so much that *Nightwood* opposes the Aryan Superman, rather "it denies that he exists, or ever could" (154). Similarly, Barnes' discourse implicitly refutes that there is "an isle of health" outside of time and language to sustain the operation of Woolsey or Eliot's "mythic method," a point that finds support in Woolsey's inability to find a "pre-linguistic position from which to criticize corruption or artificiality" (Caselli 198). In a crucial passage, Barnes states that:

> Sometimes one meets a woman who is a beast turning human. Such a person's every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience; an image of an eternal

> wedding cast on the racial memory...Such a woman is an infected carrier of the past...We feel we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers. (37)

Robin, 'the possessed' signifier that denies redemption and rejects control, enacts the impossibility of ever cleansing discourse of its undesirable "legend" because it is always already an "infected carrier of the past" (37). To buttress this claim, Barnes deploys the spectre of Fascism to circulate through *Nightwood* where it serves as an uncomfortable point of reference for all authorities and any censorial system seeking to purify the contaminated bodies of history. It is an omnipresent reminder that there is no safe, outside place from which to launch a critique.

The drama between language and the censor is re-enacted in miniature by the romantic relationship of Nora and Robin, with Robin cast in the role of "the possessed" signifier and Nora in the role of the persecuting, pursuing censor. Barnes establishes this dynamic play through the characterization of Nora as a woman motivated by puritanical Americanism. When introduced to Nora, we discover she is "known instantly as a Westerner" surrounded by the artefacts of the true-blood spirit of the West. Around her, "one felt that American history was being re-enacted" and the patter of "Puritan feet" return from the grave "walking up and out of their custom" (56). Nora's anxiety over Robin's refractory behaviour and inability to conform to an orthodoxic script of sexual monogamy is predominately the result of her inability to properly read or interpret the signs of her beloved signifier. As Benstock writes, her "interpretation of the people and events she encounters is a "normal" one – that is, an interpretation infused with Western puritanism" (Benstock 261). As such, Nora continually fails to contain and control Robin, a figure whose promiscuity and alcoholism symbolize, in the Woolsey's terms, an irredeemable excess of dirt.

Nora creates a space of normalized containment for her dirty signifier. She continually tries to reconstruct a domestic space, an ideal site of original wholeness and faithful integrity, around Robin to secure power and dominance. But Robin, enacting the playful, elusive spirit of profanity, behaves in the way most abhorrent to censors, performing precisely the kind of physical "slippage" from her grasp which "they [censors] most assiduously seek to fix" (17). That this tactic of elusiveness and duplicity is enacted through abasement, through the realms of unregenerate sexual excess and truly dirty dirt, only confirms the incompatibility of this text to the "new deal" in obscenity law. Witnessing Robin's descent through unspeakable deeds, Nora

responds predictably like a member of the American audience, "puritanized and purified" (261) and, therefore, unprepared to confront the outlawed knowledge. Nora's inability to respond, or even listen, to the doctor's sermon of the night emphasizes her resistance to true illumination and her ultimate rejection of knowledge of the obscene, the only knowledge can make explicable her inevitable failure to possess Robin.

That Nora cannot hear the truth of O'Connor's words is symbolized in the futility of her letter-writing, a gesture without response, corresponding to her aimless wanderings after Robin through the tortuous Parisian underworld. In a remarkable parallel, Nora even occupies the same impossibly external position in regards to history as Woolsey and Eliot (who acknowledges his own Puritan memories in the "Preface"): "the world and its history were to Nora like a ship in a bottle; she herself was outside and unidentified, endlessly embroiled in a preoccupation without a problem" (59). Barnes' description shows that Nora is "unidentified"—that is, denied any possibility of identity or existence—outside of history. Nora's "preoccupation," like the function of any censor, is ultimately futile because it seeks to restore integrity, unity and purity to an "infected" symbol that is always possessed by its own inextricable legendary past. Obliquely referring to the American longing for a homecoming, for a restoration of the pristine site of origins, Dr. O'Connor watches Nora wandering through the dirty cafes, alleys, and *pissoirs* and says, "There goes the dismantled…Out looking for what she's afraid to find. There goes the mother of mischief, running about, trying to get the world home" (66). Indeed, for Barnes, it is the pursuing and persecuting censor that causes "mischief" by hunting for that which it despises, by tirelessly seeking a confrontation with the very arcane knowledge that will "dismantle" the comfortably ordered world. What the censor is out to find, in other words, is exactly what it is "afraid to find," a pursuit that can only result in a desperate effort to repair "home," that original place of stability, health and safety. This quest undertaken by the censor is the source of the Puritan, western anxiety that underpins American censorship systems.

In the final chapter, "The Possessed," Nora chases down exactly what she is too terrified to accept. She finds Robin in a sexual position in her chapel with a dog, the stimulus of the scene exceeds the limit of her cognition and she blacks out. "At the moment Nora's body struck the wood" (179), the consciousness set up to mediate this scene is immediately evacuated, making the reader the only audience for the Robin's duel with the beast. Again, the theatricality places the reader in a position of judgement for the final performance. Robin, "the possessed" signifier,

in a decrepit space of ritual and order, goes down to perform an atavistic dance, approaching the essential nature of language beyond intelligibility: there is barking, weeping, growling and "laughter, obscene and touching" (179). The linguistic sign is always unruly, eternally "possessed" of a disqualified history that cannot be expurgated; no such "unmediated" (Carlston 77) state of discourse is possible within this frame. Nora cannot bear the realization that Robin is beyond redemption, that she is incompatible with her puritanical program of salvation because it means that she, and her ancestral system, are to blame for the loss – not Robin. Robin, meanwhile, debases herself and goes down in the same sense that Barnes, recalling the spiritual hymn of liberation and exile, behind her repeated use of the "Go Down" and "Bow Down" invocations. From these scenes, *Nightwood* emerges as an invitation to discover an alternative spiritual life within the dismantled forces of censorship. Presented in the finale is an unsustainable liberation marked by obscene laughter that ultimately remains within the tragic constraints of orthodoxic society, a revelation signalled by the fact Robin's last moments are tears and unintelligibility. The censor has already passed judgement (the act is declared "obscene"), but Robin's moment of fleeting pleasure and unconstrained laughter, signals the presence of something that cannot be accommodated by reality or ordering devices. The scene indicates an expansion of space within orthodoxy and reality, positing a glimpse of the 'new life' of forbidden knowledge achieved in Robin's depraved ceremonial spasms.

Barnes' key themes all culminate in Robin's "obscene" act of going down. Robin does not submit when she goes down; rather it is voluntary, a muscular contraction that achieves a place a power that cannot be reconciled by the persecutor. Just as in the case of Woolsey's rhetoric, censors forcing a subordinate subject to bend in obeisance unwittingly reveal to the disqualified the path to recuperate knowledge and rediscover the illicit pleasure. Thus, bowing or going down in collusion paradoxically becomes, in Barnes' unorthodox perspective, an alternative site of pleasure as opposed to containment or submission.

Doctor O'Connor's sermon of the night had already glossed this scenario pages earlier. Nora's refusal to "bow down" out of, what Benstock calls, '"an American "fear of indignities"…that severs the path to knowledge"' (91), is directly responsible for the failure of her education. Dirt, a symbol for censored material that simultaneously provides a key to an underworld of secret truths, is the dominant trope in *Nightwood.* As opposed to Woolsey's hierarchy of dirt, Dr. O'Connor expounds on the values of "true dust" for the American reader,

where vice and knowledge are interrelated doctrines of sin and false redemption: "We wash away our sense of sin, and what does that bath secure for us? Sin, shining bright and hard. In what does a Latin bathe? True dust" (96). The doctor compares "[t]rue dust" to a text: "*L'Echo de Paris* and his bed sheets were run off the same press. One may read in both the travail life has had with him – he reeks with the essential wit to the 'sale' of both editions, night edition and day" (96). The censor, therefore, is betrayed and undone by his own system: trying to wash bodies of vice and dirt he "secures" for us the very source of his anxiety. This is "the literal error" (96) particular to the American system of values. To extrapolate this failure, the puritanical pact of hygienic reading inaugurated by Eliot and codified by Woolsey aims to eliminate dirt from literary history, seeking a fantastical non-existent wholeness in past origins rather than a "balance" in everyday reality.

For the American, the doctor's prescription is a "strong draught" of the wine-dark Parisian night to remedy the national fears of indignity, the same nocturnal elixir imbibed by Robin. He advocates an imitation of the French who have made a "detour of filthiness–Oh! The good dirt!" (91)—which leads through "that dark door" (97) of forbidden knowledge. In Mary Douglas' anthropology of dirt, she maintains that it "offends against order" (2); that filth "appears as a residual category, rejected from our normal scheme of classification. (Douglas 48) In Douglas' estimation, pollution is intimately tied in culture to both ritual and taboo, that obscene deeds are dangerous because they illuminate a world of secret knowledge. For this reason, vice and dirt are interrelated, as "vice" — a term traditionally used in reference to "dirty" or deviant sexuality — derives from the Latin *vitium* meaning "fault," "blemish," and "imperfection." These words are all considered "characteristics that describe flaws in an otherwise faultless, unblemished, perfect order" (Davis 19). Doctor O'Connor's secret and intimate knowledge of homosexual cruising locations, the activities of the *toilettes* and *pissoirs*, and many other unspeakable sexual vices performed in the night are offered to Nora as an alternative path of illumination, a corresponding axis to the controlling narratives of puritanical hygiene. Detailing these esoteric tales of deviant identities written exclusively "between the lines," O'Connor unveils to the American reader the materials that will disturb the order imposed by history and will contribute to the disintegration of "configurations of health, sexuality, gender, ethnicity or religion" (Benstock 60) that dominate American institutional discourses. There is enough wealth to radically undo the props of censorship, if only the reader

can bow down and say "I can" to that which he has been conditioned to deny.

In stark contrast to these hygiene programs, Barnes' text overflows with dirt. Upon entering Matthew O'Connor's filthy chamber, Nora is surprised to catch sight of the doctor in powered rouges, paints and a golden wig—the markings of a particularly "dirty" sexual routine—and thinks, "God, children know something they can't tell, they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!" (85). Barnes constructs Nora's inquiry into the night as an education in dirt, a product of the body that unlocks a passage into esoteric knowledge of what we "know" but "can't tell" (85) or speak about. The doctor is presented in his ultimate pedagogic moment, about to expound his theory of the night, as being inundated in filth:

> A pile of medical books, and volumes of a miscellaneous order, reached almost to ceiling, water-stained and covered with dust…On a maple-dresser, certainly not of European make, lay a rusty pair of forceps, a broken scalpel, half a dozen odd instruments that she could not place, a catheter, some twenty perfume bottles, almost empty, pomades, creams, rouges, powder boxes and puffs. From the half open drawers of this chiffonier hung laces, ribands, stockings, ladies under-clothing and an abdominal brace, with gave the impression that the feminine finery had suffered venery. A swill-pail stood at the head of the bed, brimming with abominations. (Barnes 69)

Both the underwear and the excrement symbolically exceed structures of order: the clutter of feminine garments devours the medical books and equipment (symbols of legitimate institutional knowledge) just as the abominations threaten to flow over the pail that contains the slop. Indeed, Matthew O'Connor's status as a doctor reflects how *Nightwood* operates with respect to the discourses of control: in one sense, he is in collusion with the discursive realm of medicine that seeks to cure him of his sickness; in another sense, his license is disqualified, and his participation in the practise serves only to give him access to the illicit knowledge of the female wombs, the abortions he performs underscoring the unregenerate excess that mark the birth of this text.

Within Woolsey's hierarchy of dirt that legitimated *Nightwood,* Barnes recovers the "true dust" (96) – that is, the original reconstructions of non-literature – excluded from history and discloses the power of their hermetic silence with a comical laughter that is both "obscene and touching" (179). Barnes' text both reinscribes and devours narratives like the mythic method, destabilizing the discourses that seek to order knowledge in terms of oppositional binaries and

that regiment and classify textual bodies into speakable and unspeakable categories. By undoing these systems in the same instance that they validate her collusive text, Barnes opens up a tragically unsustainable "new life" that offers sense of pain-haunted pleasure.

Though West suggests that Barns wanted to "undo" and "deflower" all readers, to "stop them from expecting fiction to behave like some well-bred social organism" (West 243), the outlook is ultimately bleak in the end. Collusion seems unavoidable: like the Jew/Christian opposition explicated in "Bow Down," the disqualified is both undone by persecuting regimes and yet made into the "collector" (13) of their own past from this position. Just as the Jew "participates in two conditions" (13), Barnes' novel traffics in contradictory modes of discourse. The dirt that Barnes reclaims from the keep of the censor is, at once, the "serum" (13) for remedying or mending the problem of history and yet an insurmountable perimeter of language that continues to disqualify itself.

CHAPTER TWO

"This is not a book": Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and the Triumph of the Individual

"There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder"
— Mary Douglas

While Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* indirectly inculpates T.S. Eliot and Judge Woolsey in her destabilization of the censorial position, Henry Miller directly acknowledges the problematic nature of this landmark ruling. In the pamphlet, "Obscenity and the Law of Reflection" (1945), Miller writes, "Those who imagine that the *Ulysses* decision established a precedent should realize by now that they were over-optimistic. Nothing has been established" (5). For Miller, the Woolsey ruling did not usher in the golden age of literary liberalism that attorney Morris Ernst heralds in his preface for the 1934 edition of *Ulysses*; instead, the "new deal in the law of letters" (vii) only reinforced the insidious complicity between the high formalism of the literary object and the regime of censorship. Literature, in Miller's view, is itself an instrument of censorship and, if a writer is to be free, he must liberate himself from this official form which imposes creative control. Miller's awareness of the fact that the well-made novel participates in censorial practises is clear in the opening paragraphs of *Tropic of Cancer* when he announces that, "Everything that was literature has fallen from me. There are no more books to be written, thank God" (1). While Eliot may have succeeded in disabusing the public from their misconceptions

about Joyce's "libel" (26)[23], it is unlikely that the same approach could be used to exculpate Miller:

> This then? This is not a book. This is libel, slander, defamation of character. This is not a book, in the ordinary sense of the word. No, this is a prolonged insult, a gob in the face of Art, a kick to the pants of God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty...what you will. I am going to sing for you, a little off key perhaps, but I will sing. I will sing while you croak, I will dance over your dirty corpse. (2)

Miller's anti-literature is an act of *famosus libellus*, "a gob in the face of art" that refuses to function or operate for the public in the way traditionally expected of literature—that is, to elevate, beautify, sanctify, redeem. *Tropic of Cancer* deliberately aims to "disgust us with mankind" and act as "a libel on humanity" (qtd in Eliot 26), performing an act of desecration that happily lowers the value of sacred objects such as Art and God and Man. What remains to be examined, however, is how Miller writes himself out of literature's fetters. As I will show in this chapter, the impetus for Miller's resistance resides in his use of epistolary techniques, a method in the low style which produces an "anti-litterateur*"* (Blinder 49) persona[24] within a complex relation with "M. le Censeur." Upon closer examination, this relation is drawn not along traditional lines of simple opposition or, like in Barnes' prose, of collusion, but rather of correspondence.

Arriving on the literary scene in 1934, Miller's novel presented a different kind of test for censors and critics alike. *Nightwood*, while enigmatic, still appeared to possess the recognizable musical qualities of high poetic craft, a quality Eliot highlights in his preface. *Tropic of Cancer*, conversely, is written in a low comic mode, one pointing to a document more spontaneously *written* than composed or crafted. Indeed, Miller makes it clear that the author, like the Underground Man, derides the idea of the flawless art object: "I have made a silent compact with myself not to change a line of what I write. I am not interested in perfecting my thoughts, my

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[23] A key word that Miller derives from the vocabularies of the censor is the word "libel." David Saunders and Ian Hunter, in "Lessons from the 'Literatory'" (1991), demonstrate how, established in 1727 for the Anglo-Saxon world, "the new secular crime of obscene libel was attached to slander and required a blackening of a particular individual's reputation" (489). A book that was shown to corrupt public morality committed a crime in three ways: it defamed the image of humanity (*ad hominum*), it insulted the divine image in man (blasphemy), and it refuted the official values of the state united under God (sedition). Thus, obscenity libel brought together the four "modes of libel" that evolved in law: "defamation, blasphemy, obscenity and sedition" (Latham 75).

[24] Miller's writing has been described as anti-literature by a wide range of scholars. For the most comprehensive examination, see Welch D. Everman, "The Anti-Aesthetic of Henry Miller" (1992).

actions" (Miller 11). If *Nightwood* reverberates with musical patterns and symphonic rhythms, *Tropic of Cancer* is the strange sound of a Patagonian tribal chant, a song addressed, not to Olympian muses about arms and a man, but to "Tania, big with seed" and the "*penis libre*," sounding offensively "a little off key" (2-3). Thus, it is not surprising to discover that the *Ulysses* verdict could not adequately provide an interpretive scheme or, in Shaw's words, the "right key" (Jansen 3) to accommodate the shocking dissonance of Miller's song. Certainly, the public's ear was not prepared for this Dionysian music.

Elizabeth Ladenson, in *Dirt for Art's Sake*, observes that, "At the precise moment when the aesthetic integrity of the artwork was officially made an exculpating factor in obscenity trials, the work that genuinely tested the limits of this legal innovation rejected the very doctrine that had given rise to it" (164). Ladenson accurately diagnoses the case of *Tropic of Cancer*: just when censors were codifying a harmony between the radical experiments of modernist forms and traditional moral values, Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* aggressively rejected the project of progressive literary liberalism, recalling Ivan Karamazov's words: '"I don't want harmony... From love of humanity I don't want it...And so I hasten to give back my ticket"' (268). In an attempt to resist submitting to the regime of intellectual censorship, Miller dissolves the complicit structures and works towards formlessness and chaos, "the score upon which reality is written" (2), and the very quality that both Woolsey and Eliot consider irremediably obscene. Miller's aim is to locate a discursive mode capable of dismantling the "creaking machinery" (254) that reproduces the ideological structures responsible for keeping the writing body in structures of containment – structures, that is, routinely disguised as Art.

The libidinal physicality of the body and the destruction of prescribed forms are united in *Tropic of Cancer*, as Miller declares to Emil Schnellock in a 1931 letter: "I start tomorrow on the Paris book: first person, uncensored, formless—fuck everything!" (60). The triumvirate of characteristics—"first person, uncensored, formless"—Miller desires for his "fuck everything" novel is pitched in the key of the epistolary, a technique defined by the spontaneity and authenticity anathematic to the well-made work of art.[25] In an interview with Digby Diehl,

[25] My idea of *Tropic of Cancer* as epistolary in origin was conceived before I read Oliver Harris' excellent chapter in *The Secret of Fascination* (2006) which explores the notion that the correspondence of letters that were compiled into *Naked Lunch* ["maybe the real novel is letters to you" (urroughs 234)] demands a new receptive framework for from critics. This chapter on *Tropic of Cancer* is largely indebted to Harris whose study helps clarify my argument that we must take into account the material base and the original mode of reception if we are to understand how Miller constructs meaning. However, whereas Harris explores the epistolary in regards to Burroughs' ambiguous

Miller explains that "letter writing...gave me my natural style" (178). And, as George Wickes points out in the introduction to *Aller Retour New York* (1935), significant portions of the effervescently obscene reveries comprising his letters to Schnellock appear intact in *Tropic of Cancer*. This fact is crucial to the understanding of the book's ability to "sow strife and ferment" (253) in the institutions of power. In Miller's estimation, the task of the artist is to "set himself to overthrow existing values, to make of the chaos about him an order which is his own" (253). The letter, as a material product without value in the market, as a sprawling anti-form, as record for and evidence of disorder, is a dangerous manifestation of disruption that confers upon *Tropic of Cancer* the power to depose the constraining influence of orthodoxy.

The epistolary enables Miller to locate within the *Ulysses* contract a loophole: the precedent set therein applies, in practise, only to modes of expression that aspire to the aesthetic integrity traditionally associated with the novel. The precedent, as he says, "established nothing" for the artist who ensures that obscenity remains obscene, for the artist who uses dirt that aspires to nothing beyond dirt *qua* dirt. The epistolary serves as a useful tool for Miller to expose the aporias within Woolsey's concept of dirt-for-dirt's-sake, seizing upon the letter as an example of textual drek, an abortive product not designed for sale since it is not a finished or perfected product. Roland Barthes, speaking of the epistolary journal, describes the worthlessness and uselessness of the mode: "I experience it, through its facility and desuetude, as being nothing more than the Text's limbo, its unconstituted, unevolved, and immature form" (372). Incompatible with American puritanical values of labour and the concept of wholeness and artistic integrity, the letter disrupts the connection between aesthetics and the market: the letter can be consumed, but there is no use for it, as is indicated by its lack of market value. Moreover, the inchoate or, appropriate for *Tropic of Cancer*'s vocabulary of births, *embryonic* nature of the letter in relation to the finished product is itself transgressive: as Brook Thomas notes, the *Ulysses* trial took the steps to ensure that the stylistic experiments were complete because an unfinished text is "a morally subversive notion" (129). Therefore, because the textual body of *Tropic of Cancer* was not conceived in its material origins as the text of a "novel" in "any sense of form arrived prior to its construction (and, rather, elements of letters), the treatment of the text-as-such results in a series of impossible readings, each attempting mastery foiled by the

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relationship with popular culture and his aesthetics of collaboration, I analyse the epistolary in terms of censorship and Miller's "Law of Reflection."

material methodological limits" (Schneiderman 189). The epistolary performance at the material base of *Tropic of Cancer* violates the Woolsey contract because it indexes Miller's transgressive happiness ("I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive" [1]) with a refusal to aspire to the redeeming heights of modernist craft, a strategy materialized in the form of the epistolary voice.

The affinity between Miller's prose and letter-writing has been frequently noted in passing by a number of scholars, though rarely, if ever, explored at length as the source of the seismic shock *Tropic of Cancer* delivered to American culture. Erica Jong, in *Devil at Large,* says that Miller was "made for the epistolary book" (135) while Gunther Stuhlmann describes Miller's entire oeuvre as resembling "a gargantuan letter tossed at the world" (135). Neither expands on these observations. James Decker, in *Henry Miller and Narrative Form,* briefly touches upon the epistolary base of what he identifies as Miller's spiral form, suggesting that Miller's "copious correspondence" reveals that he was a "master letter-writer...treat[ing] his longer letters with extreme care, fashioning each epistle as a literary exercise" (20). For Decker, these exercises open up the space of spontaneous, interiorized communication and serve as an arena for a freewheeling style shifting unpredictably between literary essay and erotic anecdote, comic routine and serious mediation spiralling out of the naked core of Miller's consciousness.

However, for Miller, the epistolary constitutes more than a rehearsal space in the scheme of his anti-aesthetics. The epistolary mobilizes an expression of outrage, an expostulation of dissatisfaction, and evidence of "the last contractive spasm of the Victorian age...throttling the sexuality of Miller's parents and the parents of everyone around him" (Mailer 132). More precisely, the open letter serves Miller as a genre traditionally deployed—as in the case of Emile Zola's 1898 open letter, "*J'accuse,*" published in the pages of the *L'Aurore*—to express outrage over political, social and legal issues, intentionally designed to be widely distributed in the public sphere as a call to revolutionary action. As an expression of private thoughts that express unrestrained condemnation, the open letter necessarily dissolves the recognizable forms that try to contain its emotional discharge. Thus, it is a forum naturally suited for the outrage which Ihab Hassan defines in terms of the disintegration of form:

> [T]he feeling of human violation...the very being of a dark man on trial. Outrage is indeed the final threat to being, the enforced dissolution of human form; it is *both* the threat and the response to it...The word implies excess, the passing beyond all bounds; it signifies

> disorder, extravagance, fury, insolence; it refers to violent injury and gross and wanton offence. Outrage is rage without measure, but its secret rhythm is one of assault and protest, force and counterforce. The demonic and the absurd pervade this rhythm. Outrage, then...is an irrational dialectic of violence threatening the human form, the very nature of man. (197)

The description Hassan gives is representative of the "bloodcurdling howl, a screech of defiance, a war whoop!" (Miller 257) issued by *Tropic of Cancer* as it puts the orthodoxy of puritanical America on trial. As such, Miller's opening of the epistolary space in *Tropic of Cancer* invites an audience to witness the psychodrama waged between the average sexual American man "stiffened with priapric fury" (56) and the internalized censor who has enlisted academia and literature to reinforce his power over writing the sexual body. Significantly, Hassan describes outrage as a "dialectic," a duel, and a kind of exchange of verbal ammunition. The notion of the "identity and terrible union" (198) within the dynamic of the exchange defines not only the relationship generated by epistolary communication, but the Narcissistic reflection that informs Miller's conception of obscenity. Just as Ahab strikes from the hot heart of hell only to become lashed inseparably to his whale, Miller's blasphemous epistle binds him to its own addressee.

Reading Miller's obscene and shocking aesthetics as epistolary revises the way his relationship with the censor is customarily conceived. In the traditional view of criticism, Miller is either dismissed as a juvenile pornographer or celebrated as a hero of free speech, leading the cultural charge in direct opposition against the oppressive censor. In a conversation with Georges Belmont, however, Miller rejects the idea that he wrote *against* anything ("A moralist, me? You mean I spoke out 'against'? [83]), and states that he wrote "expressly for the censor who was banning my books in the States":

> *Georges Belmont*: The same one with whom you were corresponding even before the war, and who used to tell you how he was sorry to have to censor you?
> *Henry Miller*: Yes, him. And the oddest thing is that he became my staunchest champion. One day he said to me, 'Why don't you write an uninhibited book on this notorious subject? I'd like to know what your thoughts really are on it.' (83)

Miller's career-length correspondence with the censor culminates with the writing of *The World of Sex* for Huntington Cairns, the federal censor that requested the uncensored book. Miller essentially gives this manuscript to the censor as a gift, a gesture that presents difficulties to any

conception of censorship as being drawn along lines of tactics of power and domination, since "the gift is the alternative to the dialectic of master and slave" (Godbout 220).

Tropic of Cancer and *Tropic of Capricorn* make frequent use of the gift trope. This first publication is the obscene movements of a birth, the kicking of life in the "fucked-out" (249) womb that will emerge as a gift to the world: "Perhaps it is because the book has begun to grow inside me. I am carrying it around with me everywhere. I walk through the streets big with child and the cops escort me across the street" (26). Miller's blasphemous parody of Mary's pregnancy with his own 'gift to mankind' is a continuation of the comically perverse gift-giving episodes, the most notable being the story of M. le Censeur's toilet: "In the night, when I am taken short, I rush down the private toilet to M. le Censeur, just over the driveway. My stool is always full of blood. His toilet doesn't flush either, but at least there is the pleasure of sitting down. I leave my little bundle for him as a token of esteem" (238). This "little bundle" that he leaves for the censor establishes the correspondence between Miller and the *censeur*: in a "morally constipated universe" (Widmar 24), Miller evacuates himself of the blockage and gives it back to the censor as an ironic, self-distancing gift.

In the two "Tropics," gift-giving takes the form of songs, letters, and the phallic organ being given repeatedly to women in the name of pleasure and release. *Tropic of Capricorn* presents a trial-run for *The World of Sex*, presenting the allegorical episode called "The Land of Fuck" which describes an imaginative space that resembles Cockaigne and opens territory within the confines of reality where man discovers pleasure through "the sustained feel of fuck" in commune with the mythical "super-cunt" (191). Both the "World of Sex" and the "Land of Fuck" exist as imaginative destinations that express gratuitous wish fulfillment and resentment of the strictures of sexual asceticism in reality, dramatizing an inversion of the censor's moral geography. These writings exceed any conception of the aphrodisiacal text in obscenity law and offer the reader a "pure fountain of desire" (15) as an alternative site of circulation.

The concept of gift-giving is crucial to the way Miller's "terrible union and identity" (Hassan 198) works towards distancing himself from the censor in the process of constructing an autonomous subjectivity within *Tropic of Cancer*. Heidegger describes Being as "a giving which gives only its gift, but in the giving holds itself back and withdraws, such a giving we call sending...Being—that which it gives—is what is sent" (8-9). Miller generates space for the speakable within the domain of the orthodoxy by sending his all of his Being in the epistolary

mode—a discursive realm where the letter stands in for the absent individual—as a gift, but holds himself back in his refusal to provide a structural framework to predetermine reception. Any pact between the author and reader is thereby broken: with no agreement, no contractual obligation, each retains their identities and resists conforming to the "slave and master" dialectic behind censorship's power relations.

This drama plays out in Miller's quest to distance himself from his predecessor, D.H. Lawrence. Whereas Lawrence tries to widen the space of erotic consciousness but only reinscribes the literary form with the same sentiments of sexual purity and hygiene derivative of the puritanical censor, Miller exceeds his mentor: "Even Lawrence," Mailer writes, "could not let go of the idea that through sex he could delineate society. Miller, however, went further. Sex...was a natural literary field for the novel, as clear and free and open to a land-grab as any social panorama" (33). The reason for this outcome is attributable to the forms and anti-forms in which they operate expression: Lawrence, like Joyce, commits himself to "writing the sexual body into culture" but incorporates the pornographic into "serious literature [and] high art" (Pease 164) and, thus, safely assimilates the sexual body into the censorial vocabularies of "disinterest, community, health and well-being" (164). The general direction is ultimately towards conformity with the community bound by officialdom's reading contract.

For Miller, these norms that Lawrence works towards are problematic in that they present a false reality of human conformity and write 'the individual' out of the average man: "In the realm of sex, as in other realms, we speak of a norm – but the normal accounts for nothing more than what is true, statistically, for the great mass of men and women. What may be normal, sane, healthful for the vast majority affords us no criterion of judgement" (47). The epistolary, as a type of sending that forges a union while simultaneously emphasizing the gap or distance between individuals, gives to Miller the distance that regards him as separate from the agent of censorship, his addressee. In this way, Miller eschews the regulatory structures of art and stages "obscene," nearly pornographic, sceneography in the open theatre of formlessness, setting up a receptive position that cannot accommodate the stabilizing and "normalizing" discourses of orthodoxy.

If we extrapolate the open-letter/closed-form dialectic, it becomes clear how *Tropic of Cancer* negotiates and interprets the *Ulysses* verdict, and why Miller resists playing Virgil to Joyce's Homer. Judge Woolsey used the structural integrity of modernist forms to construct a

space of containment around the "person with average sex instincts—what the French would call *l'homme moyen sensuel*" (xiii). When Woolsey apotheosized impersonality and academic intellectualism in the legal code, he elevated modernism's craftsmen to a position *sub specie aeternatatum*, permitting them to use the vulgarity of the "accursed grovelling *vulgus*" (Pound 18) to unlock and observe "the domain of subconscious" (xi) in the lower-class subject. The vocabularies of the verdict read like the approval of a scientific study on a quarantined subject that must, for health reasons, only be examined from a safe distance.

Miller finds any approach that attempts to master or contain the individual in the interest of protection an offensive act. Addressing Sylvester the intellectual, he says: "He's put a fence around [Tania] as if she were a stinking, bone of a saint...But putting up a fence around her, that won't work. You can't put a fence around a human being. It ain't done anymore" (59). In nearly direct response to Woolsey's verdict, Miller opens up a space and liberates the voice of *l'homme moyen sensuel*. As George Orwell writes in "Inside the Whale" (1940), in *Tropic of Cancer,* "The ordinary man, the 'average sensual man', has been given the power of speech, like Balaam's ass" (19). For Orwell, *Tropic of Cancer* is the first true sound of the voice from "the underling, from the third class carriage, from the ordinary, non-political, non-moral, passive man" (19), and therefore it resents all conforming programs; like the magazine, *Booster*, for which Miller briefly served as editor, Orwell writes of *Tropic of Cancer*, "it is 'non-political, non-educational, non-progressive, non-co-operative, non-ethical, non-literary, non-consistent, non-contemporary"' (18). Artificial values are not imposed from the structures of text that surround the average body. This is to say, Miller's novel refuses to fulfil the contract, resisting to work towards any homogenization of thought or being. The anti-matter of *Tropic of Cancer* at its epistolary origins issues an explosive dispatch to the forms of conformity (criticism, censorship) with the aim of fulfilling Miller's prophecy that:

> If any man dares to translate all that is in his heart, to put down what is really his experience, which is truly his truth, I think then that the world would go to smash, that it would be blown to smithereens, and no god, no accident, no will could ever assemble the pieces, the atoms, the indestructible elements that have gone to make up the world. (249)

The fragmentary and "interiorized communion" (Altmam 14) of letter-writing allows Miller to translate "all that is in his heart," to put down ("I am merely putting down words" [8]) his 'true truth,' to rigorously document the debris of experience, like another serialized body admired by

Miller, the author of *A Man Cut in Slices!*. As Blanchot writes, the journal mode of the epistolary is a repository for the matter that does not belong in the polished art object because it resists rationalization, order, refinement; instead it records "who [the writer] is when he isn't writing...the series of reference points which a writer establishes in order to keep track of himself when he begins to suspect the dangerous metamorphosis to which he is exposed" (29). Miller's fragmentary record is the autobiographical testimony of Woolsey's 'average sexual man' in Paris, symbolically beyond the restraints of American codes, whose rigorously truthful obscenity establishes his union with and forceful separation from that figure of officialdom, chroniciling a kind of violent birth. It is as if Miller intentionally occupied the role of *l'homme moyen sensuel* in his natural, Parisian setting to liberate him from Woolsey's Puritanical-American confines.

Academia, the residence of the intellectuals that guard knowledge like a sacred relic, appears in *Tropic of Cancer* as the most repressive, conformist space in all of the Paris that Miller encounters, a place of relentless "silent, empty gloom" (267). On the first day at his "trivial post as exchange professor of English" (259) at the Lycée, Miller meets the three authorities, "*les surveillants*" (272) as he calls them, symbolically named M. Le Proviseur, M. Le Censeur, and M. L'Economie. As an American, Miller feels "at home" in this environment because the Lycée possesses, he says, "an atmosphere...[that] reminded me vividly of certain bureaus back in the States" (268). The institution is pervaded by the spectral presence of "certain [American] bureaus" —the Customs and Post Office censorship bureaus, no doubt—that exercise control by peddling an "obscene...love of the past," a kind of "spiritual racket" that permits "idiots" to "sprinkle holy water" over the incomprehensible, well-made works of high intellectual "nonsense" like Virgil and *Hermann und Dorothea* (274). The *censeur*, Miller shows, is in the halls of the university. Appropriating and reversing the vocabularies of censorship, he says that the truly obscene act is the forced consumption of high art: "Every man with a bellyful of the classics is an enemy to the human race" (275). Only in chatting with the "pions" (275) can Miller find relief. These are same voices from the "third class carriage" (19) that Orwell identifies, the ones who are "delightfully ignorant in all that was going on—especially in the world of art" (275).

The classics, for Miller, are particularly odious because they are elevated by the elite over of those books that possess the life-forces traditionally called "obscene." The sterility of literariness—summed by Miller's command, "let the dead eat the dead" (257)—is complicit with

the "dry, fucked-out crater" which "is obscene" (257); likewise, he writes that anything that can be "coolly and intellectually handled" in the same fashion as the scientific discovery of Joyce's mythic structure, belongs to the "festering obscene horror" of inertia and paralysis (257-8). Early in the novel, Miller establishes the parallel more concretely as Eliot's verse is dry and sterile, compared to "intellectual trees, nourished by the paving stones" (38). The network of connections that Miller exposes establishes an insidious relationship between *le censeur*, academia and the type of classical criticism lead by Eliot.

The high art of classicism exemplified by Eliot's verse and criticism (and codified in Woolsey's verdict) is responsible for a contemporary crisis, the obscene paralysis and inertia caused by the bifurcation of natural desire into fear and wish. The agents of literary form "create through art the illusory substance of our dreams...forever delaying the act. Always fear and wish, fear and wish" ("Obscenity" 23). The superstructures of modernist aesthetics evacuate a safe and controlled space to explore the libidinal desires of dreams but only by "lull[ing] ourselves to sleep with myth" (24). The mythic procedures appointed to contain and control these desires merely reproduce the obscene moment of hesitation, "the oblique, glancing confrontation with the mysteries, this walking up to the edge of the abyss, enjoying all the ecstasies of vertigo, and yet refusing to yield to the spell of the unknown" (24). In *Tropic of Cancer*, this same idea is conceived as the "creaking machinery" of sterile, intellectual thought: "the age demands violence but we are getting only abortive explosions. Revolutions are nipped in the bud or else succeed too quickly. Passion is quickly exhausted. Men fall back on ideas, *comme d'habitude"* (12). The violence of outrage requires a vessel that can mobilize a sustained revolt, a material media that does not permit the perfection of craft or the vertiginous illusion granted by heights of intellectualism and reinforced by systematic censorship. The revolution requires a distinctly anti-mythic mode that impishly dissolves order into chaos, rather than heroically orders the panorama of reality through ideas.

The epistolary provides Miller with a way out of the recidivist tendency to "fall back" (12) and become quickly exhausted, approximating as a textual space the psychic arena he describes as "an amphitheatre in which the actor gives a protean performance" (8). Like Moldorf, the godly figure to whom he aspires, Miller is desultory and digressive in meditations, putting on a performance where, "multiform and unerring, [he] goes through his roles—clown, juggler, contortionist, priest, lecher, mountebank" (8). Miller's obscenity requires witnesses and, thus,

correspondence ensures a "drugged" audience is present for the performance, and the dialogic energy intrinsic to this specific context propels the act onward. "The letter," writes Oliver Harris, "is an enabling device for the routine because its addressee...is already internal to the form: the relative autonomy of the letter coincides with the rhetorical economy of the routine. Replies are needed to maintain the flow of production" (195). The epistolary establishes a concrete relationship with a recipient, the figure whose response and reactions generate each successive routine. This bridges the moments of fall-back and maintains the spontaneity powered by desire.

For this to work, it is essential to recognize Emil Schnellock as the phantom within the epistolary mechanisms of *Tropic of Cancer*. His role as interlocutor for Miller's letters means that he is internal to the communicative act and provides the energetic impetus for the "perfect avalanche" (107) of letters Miller writes, epistles that resemble a description he gives in the book itself:

> [T]he last letter we dispatched was almost forty pages long, and written in three languages. It was a potpourri, the last letter—tag ends of old novels, slices from the Sunday supplement, reconstructed versions of old letters from Llona and Tania, garbled transliterations of Rabelais and Petronius—in short, we exhausted ourselves. (107-108)

Emil, as the recipient of the Miller's letters, functions as a kind of "feedback signal" (Harris 195) whose presence sustains the torrential flow of sentences that become *Tropic of Cancer*. While Miller effaces any trace of his correspondence with Emil in the final draft of *Tropic of Cancer* in order to bridge the relay/delay points where production is temporarily halted, his presence must be accounted for as the reflective device onto which Miller can project his consciousness, maintain an interminable linguistic stream, and receive back his identity in the sending of the epistle, his gift. Therefore, Emil's paradoxical absence/presence in *Tropic of Cancer*, no matter how "drugged" (8) his role may finally appear, revises the receptive framework at the material origins of the text. This is to say, if the obscenity in *Tropic of Cancer* is determined by its particular material history as an epistolary correspondence and, "since the aesthetic production is inseparable from the idea of consumption," any interpretation of the book's reception history "must include the actual conditions of reception" (Harris 191).

The transgressive shock delivered by *Tropic of Cancer* can be located in the 'flow' inherent to the epistolary base. For Miller, the classic literature celebrated and mimicked by high modernism artists is as incomprehensible as Mr.Wren who, he says, "is difficult to

follow...because he says nothing. *He thinks as he goes along*" (14). Mr. Wren is "constipated" (258), falling back on ideas *comme d'habitude* in the same way that the composition of form subordinates spontaneous and unmediated thought to moral hierarchies. Miller is precisely "non-moral" (Orwell 275)—neither immoral nor amoral—because he does not provide the necessary pause, the *restance*, for fabricated ideologies to determine his discourse otherwise. Art ensures that human thought is expressed in the terms of authorized discourses, that even transgressive language is inscribed and restated in the linguistic forms coterminous with legitimated discourse. The epistolary, as a kind of gap within recognized aesthetics occupied by the writer *when he is not writing art*, dissolves the discursive limitations around expression and permits the individual consciousness to stand exposed, naked, not subsumed into predetermined con-formal constructs. This explains one Miller's most cryptic lines in *Tropic of Cancer*: if the modernist aesthetics apotheosized by Woolsey signalled the triumph of formal artistic perfection over the natural flow of the individual, then in the epistolary, as he does in Van Gogh's letters, Miller discovers a "perfection beyond" the limited apex of craft: "It is the triumph of the individual over art" (11).

The epistolary mode replaces the rigid enforcements of craft with a loose formlessness that, like the Parisian hills that "gently girdle" (318) the Seine, ensuring that the course of linguistic transmission stays "fixed" (318) and driven by its own subterranean ebb-and-flow. The reader is invited to accept the stream as-is, to observe in silence whatever dirt and filth the flow may contain. In Miller's estimation, man must permit the natural, "fixed" course of things just as he has in his reveries: "Yes, I said to myself, I too love everything that flows: rivers, sewers, lava, semen, blood, bile, words, sentences" (257). This is the source of Orwell's condemnation of Miller, the "I accept" (16) mentality in a historical moment that demands political action. Furthermore, it is in direction violation of the legal code, as Woolsey, in his verdict, instructs authors and readers on their responsibility to redeem the unspeakable dirt – to not accept and to actively participate in accordance with the censorial machinery. Thus, the affirmation of Miller's *oui, j'accepte* is ultimately incompatible with the signifying nature of Molly Bloom's *yes*, whose declaration is the conclusive statement on marriage, part of the legitimating scheme of heterosexual regeneration. Miller, on the other hand, celebrates flow-as-proliferation, a democratic and Whitmanesque approval of detritus and debris everywhere equal, "even the menstrual flow that carries away the seed unfecund" (258). While Woolsey decrees that artists must grow spring flowers out of the dirt, Miller thinks, "the monstrous [unnatural] thing is not

that men have created roses out of this dung heap, but that, for some reason or other, they should *want* roses" (96). Miller, like Djuna Barnes, dispenses an irreclaimable excess of dirt and obscenity to deconstruct the fundamental concept of redemption that underlies the discourses of censorship. It challenges not only the notion that the average man needs to be saved from himself by the forces of government bureaus, but also that he even wants to be saved!

The epistolary extricates Miller from the censorship regime that would incorporate his transgressive expression into the 'Good Lie' of orthodoxy and relocate *Tropic of Cancer* in the pale of authorized knowledge. The literary form is compatible with the censorial system in place because it delineates a conservative, ideological position in terms of restoring humanity's natural condition of health and integrity. This ambition, however, is paradoxically assigned to aesthetics which are inherently artificial. Elizabeth J. MacArthur writes that "critics have traditionally believed that to be literary a text must not be authentic, and that authentic texts inevitably display a disorder incompatible with the definitions of chaos" (29). The traditional academic treatment of "genuine correspondence," Macarthur continues, is based on the assumption "that letters are pure, undistorted reflections of life" (29). This is the perfect key for Miller who claims, "I am not a realist or naturalist; I am for life" (371). The epistolary origins of *Tropic of Cancer* translate Miller's naked self into the autobiographical song, as the letter makes strong generic claims to authenticity, truth, and "aesthetic *Naturlichkeit* (naturalness)" (Simon 1)—that is, the antitheses of well-made, literary art. As an uninterrupted open letter circulating in the public sphere, *Tropic of Cancer* is a revelation of the obscene, the unspeakable, that is usually veiled in representation by aesthetic form. It is, in this way, akin to the crime of indecent exposure.

The vocabularies of exposure were popular in the nineteenth century, the period that witnessed the rise of American censorship bureaus and continued to exert an influence on sensibilities during Miller's era. In his review of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Noah Porter seizes upon the exposure trope in Whitman's rhetoric and incorporates it into his accusation of indecency: '"a generation cannot be entirely pure which tolerates writers who, like Walt Whitman, commit, in writing, an offense like that indictable at common law of walking naked through the streets"' (qtd in Wachsberger 11). The shock that Whitman's body electric delivers to Victorian sensibilities is bolstered by a poetic voice registered in a formless, autobiographical, journal structure. Whitman's correspondence with the cosmic interconnectedness of souls further supports this American tradition – one in which Miller firmly situates himself – where the song

of the self is rendered in naked truth. Indeed, the proliferation of fragmentary leaves complied in Whitman's textual corpus are a stand-in for his actual body, a nakedness the reader observes and makes physical contact with in imitation of inter(dis)course.

The letter, because it tries to approximate the intimacy of the speaking voice, is often conceived as a proxy for separated bodies. "The letter," observes Altman, embodies "a physical entity emanating from, passing between, and touching each of the lovers [and] may function itself as a figure for the lovers" (19). This omnipresent quality of the epistolary certainly resides behind Whitman's unifying symbol as, in *Leaves of Grass*, he describes leaves as "letters from God dropped in the street" ("Song of Myself" 48.27). Truthful writing about the self is equated with an act of indecent exposure like flashing, a connection strengthened by the epistolary which metonymically makes the letter a cipher for the absent body. Fittingly, in a 1972 edition of *Penthouse* magazine, Miller was diagnosed by a journalist with a case of "erotographomania" (the compulsive desire to write and send erotic letters) in an article that examines the pathology of the flasher. Miller's perpetuation and fulfillment of the American transcendentalist mission—he is "a sort of Whitman among the corpses" (11) as Orwell observes—for uninhibited self-revelation and uncivil disobedience encourages him to rediscover the epistolary format to "relocate the strip show inside the psyche" ("Burlesk" 93).

The exposure that is granted by the epistolary technique enables Miller, in *Tropic of Cancer*, to employ pornographic tropics in order to write the sexual body into culture in a way that escapes the pitfalls of the high modernists' structures of closure and confinement. The strategy sets up, to return to Mailer's concept, a kind of struggle over common terrain, a "land-grab" (33), over the suitable way to integrate the pornographic body into literature. "To read *Ulysses* through Eliot's essay," Pease writes, "is to see the incorporation of pornographic tropes as a mode of social control whereby the body (politic) is made visible in order to be subjected to increased high-cultural control" (186). Conversely, to read *Tropic of Cancer* through the lens of the epistolary is to see the pornographic openly, in a setting not inscribed with the forms of academic and legal regulation. It is to consume Miller's erotic passages without the receptive framework required to transform the 'worthless' mass-culture commodity into valuable high art.

The trial that determined the admissibility of *Tropic of Cancer* in the U.S. hinged, as did the *Ulysses* trial, on the question of the pornographic. But Miller had already precluded the possibility of subsuming his book into the classic literary tradition by exploiting the epistolary

mode and by vociferously espousing, on nearly every page of his non-book, a desire to eschew literariness. In the New York Court of Appeals, Judge John Schileppi wrote that *Tropic of Cancer* is:

> Nothing more than a compilation of a series sordid narrations dealing with sex in a manner designed to appeal to the prurient sensibilities of the average person. It is a blow to sense, not merely sensibility. It is, in short, "hard-core pornography," dirt for dirt's sake, and dirt for money's sake. (qtd. in de Grazia 381)

Everything is revealing here: the derisive nature of "compilation" and "series," words signifying a proliferating sequence that belongs to the epistolary rather than the homogenous form of high art; the "blow" this collection of narratives delivers to "sense"; the claim that *Tropic of Cancer* exploits dirty sex for "money's sake" (381).

Moreover, these concerns are dangerously interconnected. The epistolary reproduces a transgressive reading practise that delivers "a blow to sense, not merely sensibility" (381) through its approximation of the sensorial response to pornography. The crucial difference between high art and pornography, according to the Woolsey doctrine, is that admissible art requires the average reader to approach its obscene material with the cool disinterest that mirrors the author's formal impersonality, ensuring that reason always maintains control over the sensible responses of the body. Woolsey makes this clear when he says that his test subject, the 'sexually average man,' "plays, in this branch of legal inquiry, the same role of hypothetical reagent as does the reasonable man in the law of torts" (xiii). The reader must fall back on honourable ideas to recompose himself when the sexual scenes threaten to drive desire beyond control.

Pornography deliberately provides no space between the act of reading and the deed described, inviting the reader to irrationally fantasize and recollect sexual stimuli from memory in the precise moment it is conjured. The same is true of the epistolary mode, an instance of writing indistinguishable from the real-time activity it records: it is "merely putting down words" (Miller 8), the unprocessed revival of the memory of sensory stimuli and the body experience in their unmediated, originary manifestation. There is no site of "fall back" (*restance*) to think, reflect and endow a redemptive, organizing scheme on the natural deed because the epistolary is "a diary that records experience as it happens, and the act of recording is part of the experience" (Skerl 44). In *Tropic of Cancer,* the boundary traditionally separating the sexual experience and

the act of writing it down is eradicated. As such, the epistolary mode not only allows Miller to write the sexual body into literature but also to reproduce the principle of pornographic reading wherein the reader seeks to recover through erotic scenes, images, and dialogue the physical memory of sexual release. That Miller's writing is aligned with recording rather than reflection is made clear from the epigraph to *Tropic of Cancer* provided by Ralph Waldo Emerson: "These novels will give way, by and by, to diaries or autobiographies—captivating books, if only a man knew how to choose among what he calls his experiences and what is really his experience, and how to record truth truly" (ii). The epistolary substitutes the 'idea novel' with the true unmediated truth of experience and thereby implicates the sexual body in the act of writing, invoking the emptied-out receptive scene of pornography rather than the moral constraints imposed by high literature.

Despite this violation, the court ruled that Miller's work passed the first juridical use of the '"social-value"' test even if it was '"dull, dreary, and offensive"' (qtd in Rembar 194). It is a curious decision because the court never elaborates on the book's social value, nor do they expand on what '"particular ideas"' (194) the scenes or characters establish. Whereas the *Ulysses* verdict rigorously specified the qualities that merited its legalization, the "Tropic" verdict settled nothing: it simply gave '"the literary artist"—a title Miller refutes—the entitlement to speak "within broad limits"' (194). What is further troubling about this ruling is that "hard-core pornography," as defined by the courts, "has no social value whatsoever" (de Grazia 379). As has been established, the epistolary material base for *Tropic of Cancer* renders the book without social or market value and, despite its unexplained passing of 'the social-value test,' it still appears as if no purpose has been found for this open letter. The misunderstanding of the material source for *Tropic of Cancer* is responsible for the inability of the court to articulate any clear and precise framework for reception.

There is one word in Schileppi's statement that requires closer examination, as it reveals just how Miller deliberately exploited definitions of pornography and obscenity for *Tropic of Cancer*. The word is *prurient*, one of the synonyms for obscenity in legal terminology. In the *Lady Chatterly's Lover* trial, Charles Rembar, who also served as Miller's attorney in 1962, argued that Lawrence's book was not "nasty," which he took to be the meaning of "prurient" (189). This definition, as Rembar says, "worked less nicely" for *Tropic of Cancer* namely because Miller annexes the word 'prurience' from the legal discursive domain and utilizes the

etymological significations to turn it against the censor. As Miller frequently relates in his autobiographical writings, as a young scholar he was forced to take Latin lessons and, therefore, would have known well that 'prurient' derives from the Latin *prurire*, a word that means both "wanton, lascivious, lewd, to long for" and "to itch." The definition of prurient sets up an elaborate metaphor that evolves throughout the text. On the very first page of *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller and Boris are lousy with lice: "I had to shave his [Boris'] armpits and even then the itching did not stop" (1). The episode inaugurates a motif of "itching," associated with the tropes of uncleanliness and disorder, that signifies the desire to satisfy wanton urges and the longing to communicate the lewd self in 'truly truthful' detail. At one point in Miller's reveries, the image of his lousiness transforms into a cosmic, apocalyptic itch:

> The atmosphere is saturated with disaster, frustration, futility. Scratch and scratch—until there's no skin left. However, the effect on me is exhilarating. I am crying for more and more disasters, for bigger calamities, for grander failures. I want the whole world to be out of whack, I want everyone to scratch himself to death. (12)

Miller identifies the disease as the unsatisfied (unscratched) itch of sexual longing – frustrated by social norms and cultural restrictions – that erupt quite literally in the explosions of war. Miller is "exhilarated" because he wants man to "scratch himself to death" (12) trying to delouse himself of his self-inflicted torture, a sort of grand, ironic payback in the form of extermination. For Miller, censorship is ultimately self-destructive to the censorial regime. *Tropic of Cancer* dramatizes its potential to provoke wanton itches that the narrator satisfies in lewd scene after lewd scene. It reflects a longing to be a book about the happiness found in satisfying sexual itches outside of the internalized norms. For this reason, it is plausible that *Tropic of Cancer*'s social value lies precisely in its argument for erotic literature to circulate without the artist having to eliminate the aphrodisiacal tendencies, subsume them into normalizing narratives or reduce them through the disinterested structures of *ratio*.

Sex, in Miller's view, is not in need of being surrounded by redemptive roses. Miller's profanity reflects this philosophy as he engages in "fuck," a term unendowed with merit that distinguishes 'dirty sex' from the authorized 'clean' representations of sex. As Norman Mailer writes of Miller's erotic environment:

> Sex and filth were components of the same equation, as related as mass an energy—tender sex was a flower you shoved up a girl's ass. Sex was a function of filth; filth was a

> function of sex—it is no surprise that sex was getting ready for the automobile, and the smell of gasoline would prove the new aphrodisiac...In sex, in dirty sex, the tastes are ground into the other's mouth and cowardice is expiated by going down. Beyond dirt is karma. In the land of the filthy fuck…sexuality was a river of grease in the crack of the taboo (132-133).

The violence of the language, the aggressive resistance to redemption signified by the crude obscenities "ground into the...mouth" (133) of Miller's voice, ensures that sex in this text cannot be organized into the taxonomies of higher institutional discourse. It is slippery, "a river of grease" (132) whose fluidity ultimately eludes censorial constraints; it is dirty sex unendowed with a purpose; simply an index of more dirty, debased sex that differs from the mythic *eros* found in the rarefied airs of classic literature.

In this way, *Tropic of Cancer* becomes a textual site for an aphrodisiacal kind of writing, designed explicitly to have an illicit effect on the reader. For Miller, censors seek to save and protect the normal reader from certain publications and, with the *Ulysses* pact, to deny a bodily response to erotic books unless it is "emetic" (Woolsey xiv). Judge Woolsey perpetuates the long-standing effort in American jurisprudence and in literary criticism "to keep certain books out of the lower classes and uneducated" (Kelly 120). This results in a dangerous situation where man's libidinal desire finds no outlet, no safety valve, except through the genuinely "obscene" machinery of war, "the greatest release which life offers the ordinary man" (Miller 18). Erotic books, Miller believes, are culturally cathartic and, in *Obscenity and the Law of Reflection*, he quotes Havelock Ellis who writes that '"adults need obscene literature, as much as children need fairy tales, as a relief from the oppressive force of convention"' (qtd by Miller 7). This ambition confirmed in a 1966 interview where Miller explains that he aims to represent erotica in a meaningful way for 'the man in the street' (Michelson 167). The misinterpretation of its material base in the *Tropic of Cancer* verdict helped Miller circulate erotic books that destabilize the notions of normalcy and may provide the populace with sexual release. The court, it seems, inadvertently endowed social value to the product it dictated was most worthless.

Letters also have an important function within the text itself. The epistolary mode mobilizes the two illicit functions of sexual matter in *Tropic of Cancer*. The letter, as Janet

Altman observes, has two traditional purposes: seduction and education.[26] In *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller digresses into pedagogic essays that serve, like *The World of Sex*, as instructions on how to properly read "cunt" (7)—a term that, like "fuck," metonymically stands for sex that possesses no higher function[27]: "If any one knew," Miller writes, "what it meant to read the riddle of that thing which today is called a "crack" or a "hole," if anyone had the least feeling of mystery about the phenomena which are labelled "obscene," this world would crack asunder" (249). In the *Ulysses* verdict, Judge Woolsey's flaccid phallus was codified as the legal standard for the proper way to read literature's sexual stimuli. Woolsey might confirm Gourmont's statement that '"Happily...the bony structure is lost in man"' (qtd in Miller 3)[28]. Van Norden, Miller's friend in *Tropic of Cancer*, shows that this might not be a "happy" loss. In fact, in one of Miller's dreams, he observes Van Norden's phallus break off his body (127). The perennially frustrated Van Norden, like Woolsey, approaches "cunt" scientifically, with the cool of the intellectual:

> He describes to me how, his curiosity aroused, he got out of bed and searched for his flashlight. "I made her hold it open and I trained a flashlight on it...I never in my life looked at a cunt so seriously. You'd imagine I'd never seen one before. And the more I looked at it the less interesting it became. It only goes to show you there's nothing to it after all, especially when its shaved. (140)

Miller, in response, happily restores the bone. In the opening pages, Miller presents the reader with an method to decipher the code, to crack the "crack," a kind of hermeneutic key for the "hole" – that is, '"*the penis libre."* Animals with a bone in the penis. Hence, a *bone on*..." (3). Miller's formula for making the erotic legible also establishes an alternative pact to the Woolsey contract, one where the ordinary man *erectus* replaces the self-restraint of the institutional approach.

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[26] The correspondences of Abelard (and Heloise), a hero of Miller's who he identified as a kindred spirit, reveals these functions of the letter are not mutually exclusive.

[27] Miller's frequently used epithet, *cunt*, is often fodder for those feminist critics that attack Miller on grounds of misogyny, the most famous of these criticisms being Kate Millet's essay, "Henry Miller" (70). While it exceeds the scope of this study to pursue this inquiry in depth, it should be noted that Miller also uses *cock* with equal frequency. For this reason, I choose to read Miller as deliberately cultivating through these terms the crudest, most vulgar senses of the reproductive organs to inscribe them as forcefully and aggressively dirty. Had chosen polite euphemisms or relied upon scientific nomenclature he would have redeemed them, surrounded them in symbolic roses. In other words, *cunt* and *cock* illustrate Miller's desire to debase the origin of our bodies and the site of libidinal release in the hopes of finding acceptance in this lowered station. For a brilliant response to Millet, see Mary Kellie Munsil's "The body in the prison-house of language: Henry Miller, Pornography and Feminism"(1992)

[28] Leigh Gilmore, discussed in the previous chapter, writes, "To be sure, when *Ulysses* passed the "erection test," Judge Woolsey's phallus was codified as the legal standard" (622). Indeed, for Miller, flaccidity and sterility symbolize the condition of the intellectual censor. *Tropic of Cancer* essentially recovers the average man's "bone."

Besides the pedagogic function, the epistolary is also traditionally used as the go-between in the seduction plot. Altman writes that the "intimate, interiorized communion" of the letter "demonstrates its usefulness as a tool for seduction" (14-15). The letter often serves as a kind of sex tool in place of the body of the absent, longed-for lover. Because the epistolary mode is inscribed with an aphrodisiacal frame of reception, *Tropic of Cancer* is encoded with a particularly transgressive effect on the reader, one expurgated from higher forms of literature.

Miller repeatedly dramatizes the seductive function and aphrodisiacal effect of theletter in *Tropic of Cancer*. Miller writes of one of his sex partners, "The trouble with Irene is that she has a valise instead of a cunt. She wants fat letters to shove in her valise. Immense, *avec des choses inouies"* (7). For Miller and his friends, letter writing is intricately tied to the sexual experience. In another episode, Miller self-reflexively dramatizes the dangerous seductive potential of reading his own letters. Van Norden, a close friend of the narrator, is tormented by the letters that Carl sends a rich woman, letters that were written in collaboration with Miller. Van Norden obsesses over Carl's (and Miller's) "flowerpots":

> Jesus, he built that up wonderfully. It's just like him to think of a detail like that...it's one of those little details which makes a thing psychologically real...you can't get it out of your head afterward. And he tells it to me so smoothly, so naturally. ..I wonder, did he think it up in advance or did it just pop out of his head like that, spontaneously? He's such a cute little liar you can't walk away from him...it's like he's writing you a letter, one of those flowerpots he makes overnight. (118-119)

Carl's letters to the women are so potently seductive that even Van Norden imagines succumbing to them, moaning at the end of his monologue, "I can understand falling for the letters" (119), a statement that supports Altman's argument that erotic letters "may even become a fetish in sexual fantasies" (19). Van Norden's grief that he can't get Carl's masturbatory letters out of his head because of the details strangely echoes the words of Anthony Comstock, the special deputy of the Post Office's censorship bureau and international symbol of America's puritanical anxiety, about sex in print: "Like a panorama, the imagination seems to keep this hated thing before the mind, until it wears its way deeper and deeper, plunging the victim into practises he loathes" (416). The letter appears designed to produce the response in the reader akin to the practises of "evil reading" (9). Locating the epistolary origins in *Tropic of Cancer,* as guided by the self-reflexive obsession with letter-writing in the book, recovers the education in seductive,

aphrodisiacal texts in Miller's own "flowerpots" of evil reading.

The way Miller eschews the formal structures inscribed with normative ethical values demonstrates a particularly radical belief that the reader may freely decide if the material is obscene or not. This proposition may have been behind the *Tropic* verdict where the presiding judge, for the first time in obscenity law, announced that "literature...should be left to the individual rather than to government edict" (de Grazia 379). As Miller makes clear, it is this decrepit world of puritan American values of health and normality that he is talking about when he declares his desire to "annihilate the world that made me its victim" ("The World of Sex" 53).

It took, however, thirty years for the courts to reach the position that Miller vehemently expresses in *Obscenity and the Law of Reflection* (1950). In this essay, Miller aims to expose the fundamental irrationality at the core of censorship laws, the absurd proposition that the average man needs to be redeemed from the dirt—that he should want roses. For Miller, the obscene does not exist as an *a priori*; the obscene is only activated in the procedures of reading.[29] Drawing on a theory of the Narcissistic self-reflective 'dirty mind' that appears in Theodore Schroeder's observation, from *A Challenge to Sex Censors*, that '"obscenity does not exist in any book or picture, but is wholly a quality of the reading or viewing mind"' (qtd in Miller 3-4), Miller defines the position where, "by a law or [sic] reflection in nature, everyone is the performer of acts he attributes to others; that self-preservation is self-destruction, etc." (4). The act of censorship is driven by man's terror of his true reflection in the surface of the text. The contract in place (at least since Humanism) is that art should give back man an image of his godliness, his divine form, and redeem him from the low station on earth. As Miller imagines, the text is a mirror in which the censor sees his own dirtiness reflected: "what comes to the surface as strange, intoxicating and forbidden, and which therefore arrests and paralyzes, when in the form of Narcissus we bend over our own image in the mirror of our own iniquity" (24). All censorship, therefore, is an act of self-destruction: like a self-consuming flame, the censor destroys, in the instance he discovers, his own obscene reflection and inscribes his own signature into the text. This holocaust, however, is the archive of that "strange, intoxicating and forbidden" (24) knowledge that the censor seeks to keep from himself.

So, how does the epistolary permit Miller to access this realm of knowledge? Speaking of

[29] The observation is not original to Miller, going back even as far as Paul's epistles. For a similar view of obscenity in regards to the American "comstockian" mind, see Edward de Grazia, "Obscenity and the Mail: A Study of Administrative Restraint" (1955).

the narcissism in Kafka's letters to Milena, Deleuze and Guattari describe the correspondence in terms of hungry parasitism: "there is a vampirism in these letters," they write, "a vampirism that is specifically epistolary...the hunger artist who drinks the blood of carnivorous humans" (29). The Knut Hamsun-like hunger artist at the center of Miller's tale dwells on his starvation, his desperate desire for sustenance to fuel creation, saying that he is "nothing but a big intestine" (69). The correspondence that Miller establishes with the censor through the epistolary mode allows him to feed off the censor, to turn the "treacle" devoured by the censor into hearty "pabulum" (Ernst vii). According to the terms of Miller's pact with the censor, he will stuff into *Tropic of Cancer* the knowledge erased from literature: "there is only one thing which interests me vitally now, and that is the recording of all that which is omitted in books" (11). Boris and Miller endow this *encyclopaedia expurgatorium* with the "final imprimatur" of power that accompanies the recovery of secret knowledge:

> We have evolved a new cosmogony of literature...It is to be a new Bible—*The Last Book*. All those who have anything to say will say it here—anonymously. We will exhaust the age. After us not another book—not for a generation, at least. Heretofore we had been digging in the dark, with nothing but instinct to guide us. Now we shall have a vessel in which to pour the vital fluid, a bomb which, when we throw it, will set off the world. We shall put into it enough to give the writers of tomorrow their plots, their dramas, their poems, their myths, their sciences. The world will be able to feed on it for a thousand years to come. (26)

Interestingly, they do this on the way to the post office, as if sending themselves into the future and receiving the liberation of their Being from the gift. This Last Book is, in essence, an archive of delegitimized discourse, a compendium of the knowledge that has burned in the censor's conflagration. Just as Miller feeds on the censor to create the Last Book, readers will in turn "feed" on the "vital fluid" of Miller's textual corpus for a millennium. This is their gift to the world: a *convivio* of illicit knowledge at which subsequent generations can consume the outlawed substances for new works.

The correspondence that defines the laws of reflection allows Miller to "place himself in the position of the censor in the psychic economy, thus performing a kind of psychoepistle" (Ulmer 23), explaining how Miller reflects (gives or sends back) the censor's own image. *Tropic of Cancer* is a re-version of the censored text, an inversion or reversal of the palimpsest created

by censors. Leo Strauss' study, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952) helps clarify this point. According to Strauss, the censored text is composed of an exotopic level upon which the orthodox doctrine of officialdom is supported, and an ineradicable esoteric core written exclusively "between the lines" (24) that points towards dangerous heterodox truths. The psychoanalytic school extends the idea behind the Straussian text and proposes that this palimpsest exists within the micro-mechanics of language, that the linguistic symbol (the letter) restages the psychodrama of interdiction: "censorship," writes Lydon, "is not therefore belatedly repressive of an already expressed desire, but that is rather desire's twin, born necessarily and contemporaneously with it" (111). To make it clear, Lydon explains how Jean-Francois Lyotard utilizes the contradictory meanings of the French verb *se derobé* (to unveil, to conceal) to explain how censorship's corresponding impulses of desire and anxiety are born in the same instance and inextricably bound in the symbol. Literature, she implies, is composed out of legitimate discourse which is simultaneously encoded with a latent transgressive desire. Derrida approximates a definition of the Straussian text when he claims that writing is "made to circulate like an open but illegible letter" (Derrida 12), an expression that underscores the quality of correspondence. All literature, therefore, is self-censored, as it "remains self-evidently secret, as if it were being invented at every step, and as if were burning immediately" (11), paradoxically relaying an "open secret" (12) that reflects, like any censorial operation on a text, the self-same source of its own anxiety.

Miller aims to write an "uncensored" discourse where the esoteric desire has violently erupted out of the penumbra of concealment and arrived at the surface of the symbol. Miller understands this literal principle as the "Law of Reflection" and recognizes the potential power of obscenity to expose the inherent instability of the letter that censors seek to secure and stabilize with proper formalism. In an essay, *Sunday After the War*, he writes:

> [Obscenity] is the expression of the insufficiency of symbol, the explosion which occurs when the tension of antagonistic forces is no longer adequate to preserve the image. Of all the symbols which man has created to make his universe...meaningful, the sexual symbols are the least secure; for in the riddle of sex man comes closest to tasting the full savor of death. (235)

At the figural or symbolic level of language, obscenity is capable of issuing a cataclysmic disturbance that initiates the shocking action of *se derobé*: "Thus the lifting of the veil," Miller

writes, "may be interpreted as the ultimate expression of the obscene" because it exposes the mysterious, "the secret processes of the universe" (23). As the lifting of the veil (*apokalypsos*) results in the "ultimate" eruption of the obscene, it is not surprising to find in *Tropic of Cancer* a parallel obsession with bombs, detonations and explosions: "[O]ur word is dying," he writes. "And not one man...has been crazy enough to put a bomb up the asshole of creation and set it off. The world is rotting away, dying piecemeal. It needs the *coup de grace*, it needs to be blown to smithereens" (26). In *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller plays havoc with the *recto-verso* principle of the letter and generates enough subatomic power through the "explosions" of obscenity to invert the Straussian text and expose the mysteries of the esoteric and censored "cunt"— "the original burning bush" (89) of miraculous vision—on the outer surface layer of text.

That this vocabulary of apocalypse and mystery should pervade the book as "the ultimate expression of the obscene" is not surprising: *Tropic of Cancer* is a deeply religious text[30], filled with prophecy and scripture, designed to convert. But it is not Dante's *commedia* to which Miller aspires, but Boccaccio's secular comedy; it acts as the *Galetto*, the go-between, to inspire his disciples to pursue pleasure and scratch the libidinal itch through the mysteries to be discovered in "the land of the filthy fuck" (133). Indeed, in sacred, pedagogic texts, the strategic arrangements of language "act as awakening stumbling blocks" (Strauss 36) for careful readers, leading them to a revelation of "forbidden" (26) knowledge. Miller is also concerned with awakenings and conversions: the "real nature of the obscene," he writes, "resides in the lust to convert. He knocked to awaken, but it was himself he awakened. And once awoke, he is no longer concerned with the world of sleep; he walks in the light and, like a mirror, reflects his illumination in every act" (21). Obscenity is the form outrage takes when language can no longer contain it: "the obscene may be compared to the use of the miraculous by the Masters" (19). An expression of desperation, the Master deploys the miraculous like a writer who will "resort to any means to awaken their disciples; they will even perform what we call sacrilegious acts" (19). In this way, *Tropic of Cancer* launches a desecrating "gob" of spit to all godly and divine forms, utilizing the obscene to instruct and violently awaken readers like an "inverted sort of prayer" (289). Like Paul's epistles to the Romans, Miller's explosive open letter to the American censor seeks to correct the fundamental, ideological errors of a culture—the intellectual forms of

[30] Miller frequently refers to his writing as religious in his autobiographical essays and in interviews. For a comprehensive study of religion in Miller's corpus, see Thomas Nesbit, *Henry Miller and Religion* (2007).

hygiene imposed on sex, explained away as the requirements of art.

CHAPTER THREE

A Functioning Police State? : William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* and the End of Censorship

In 1962, William Burroughs appeared at the International Writer's Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland and spoke on two closely related topics: censorship and the future of the novel. Burroughs, in the first part, was graciously deferential, claiming that "What I am saying has already been better said by Mr. Henry Miller in his essay, "Obscenity and The Law of Reflection"' (5). Miller's essay, investigated at length in the previous chapter, is given a decidedly Burroughsian spin, as censorship is described as "thought control" and the "presumed right of government agencies to decide what words and images the citizen is permitted to see" (5). If Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* aimed to write the individual conscious of the 'man in the street' and his 'average sexual body' into culture and obliterate the structures of literariness that constrained him, Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* went further—indeed, further than any book went before or since—in the steps taken to destroy the thought-control machine that was language itself. Burroughs' book was such an extreme experiment in inconsumability, repulsiveness and worthlessness that it prompted Ted Morgan to state that, '"No book like *Naked Lunch* had been cleared before—why, it made *Tropic of Cancer* seem sedate,"' and presume with accuracy that '"nothing that would come after it would come close in bad language and objectionable scenes"' (qtd in De Grazia 493). In fact, through his efforts to turn the novel into '"junk,' 'muck,' 'excrement,' 'waste'...the detritus of culture's frenetic efforts to make sense" (Nash 219), Burroughs helped get the ban on *Tropic of Cancer* lifted as censors recognized the issues raised by *Naked Lunch* would require all their attention for the future of the novel in the age of mass communication.

At the Boston trial in 1966, Judge Reardon expressed a fear surprisingly unique to legal arbiters of American obscenity trials: the genuine terror that, if *Naked Lunch* was "speakable," then nothing ever again could qualify as "unspeakable." Reardon claimed that *Naked Lunch* was as obscene '"as anything ever written"' (qtd in de Grazia 494), proposing that it had brought the regulation of cultural products nearly to the brink of an apocalyptic moment:

> But what are we headed for? I want to know. My mind is entirely open as far as this book is concerned, but let's project ourselves into the era that Mr. Burroughs projects himself

> into...Is it conceivable that in our lifetime, or in the lifetime of the next generation, that there will be no censorship whatsoever, so far as freedom of writing and publishing is concerned? (493)

From the opposite side, the age of liberalism and enlightenment in letters had appeared to finally arrive. As Norman Mailer wrote in the days following the trial that exculpated *Naked Lunch*: '"I'd say after Burroughs was printed there was nothing to worry about anymore"' (495).

Mailer's heralding of another 'new deal' in the law of letters is misleading. *Naked Lunch* should alert us to be wary of the very situation it facilitated. At the Reconditioning Center in Freeland, Dr. Benway informs the narrator that "A *functioning* police state needs no police" (31). According to the logic of the control system in Freeland, transgression is considered neither deviant nor criminal because it "does not occur to anyone as *conceivable* behaviour" (31). Here, I would like to bring attention to the ways that Benway's reference to the Bismarck Archipelago—the 'police-less' police state—forces us to rethink the unsettling irony of the receptive framework forged for literature after *Naked Lunch*'s Boston trial in 1966.

Simply stated, Burroughs' book put an end to literary censorship. As Michael Barry Goodman writes, "*Naked Lunch* has earned the unique distinction as the last work of literature to be censored by the academy, the U.S. Post Office, the U.S. Customs service, and state and local government" (249). If we take Benway's "*functioning* police state" (31) as the supreme realization of the Panoptic society—the state where the law no longer requires external symbols of its power because its control has been secured—then *Naked Lunch*'s victory appears suspicious, as if the persecuted book helped usher in an age of control that effectively vitiated literature's ability to challenge the state's system. In other words, when *Naked Lunch* inaugurated a post-censorship landscape without any limits left the cross, textual transgression became legally inconceivable. However, the crucial question remains: did *Naked Lunch* conquer literary censorship? Or, did it help the state solidify power over the production and consumption of aesthetics, rendering external censors obsolete? Who was *Naked Lunch* really working for?

Taking a cue from this last question, I recruit the idea of the double agent, a particularly important character in Burroughs' oeuvre, to guide my analysis. In this analysis, the collusion and correspondence that drove Barnes' and Miller's obscene aesthetics mutates into duplicity—collusion and collaboration with a scorpion's barbed tail. Thus, the role played by expert testimony, manifesting in the form of criticism from a wide of array of scientific and social

disciplines, in determining both the ban *and* subsequent authorization of *Naked Lunch* must be a major area of concentration. No literary trial, not even *Ulysses*, required as many secondary voices and supplementary writings to point out and then to explain away the dangers of the text as did *Naked Lunch*.

The response on the part of critics is attributable to two circumstances. The first is Burroughs' own statements relinquishing authorial control over his text and the self-effacing claims that served as the introductory remarks to the original edition of *Naked Lunch.* In the preface, "Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness," Burroughs famously reported that "I apparently took detailed notes on sickness and delirium. I have no precise memory of writing the notes that have now been published under the title *Naked Lunch*" (199). Though Burroughs himself would retract this statement, from the standpoint of officialdom and their development of a receptive framework, the admission is critically problematic. Judge Reardon focussed on this claim, saying "I am somewhat concerned as to whether or not an author has license, poetic license, if you wish, to escape responsibility in his writing, so far as it concerns hard-core pornography, by describing it as hallucination" (492). When Burroughs renounced authority and admitted a loss of control over his text it was perceived, not as a realization of deconstructuralist principles (Barthes' "Death of the Author" [1968] was yet to be published), but rather of criminal negligence—the irresponsible experiment of a mad scientist whose monstrous beast had been unleashed on society.

In a peculiar parallel with the text in question, Burroughs came to resemble a real-life Dr. Schafer, the doctor in *Naked Lunch* who "will do anything for publicity" (Burroughs 87). When Schafer ceremoniously reveals his "Master Work," whose human form immediately dissolves to "unveil[ ] a giant black centipede," he is taken before the court and sentenced for letting loose "this unspeakable and...illegitimate child of [his] brain" on the human race (87). This self-reflexive episode, a fantastic and stunningly prophetic version of the obscenity trail that censured Burroughs for his hideous "Master Work," one that had to be destroyed before it could "perpetrate its kind" (88), is ambiguously presented: the man on trial, Dr. Schafer, is accused of brain-washing, "forcible lobotomy," and reducing the state to "idiocy" with his enormous community of deanxietized "Drones" (88). His accusers, meanwhile, judge him with "pure educated evil" (89). It is difficult here to tell which side Burroughs is on: is he part of the team that wants to bring justice against the thought-controlling doctor? Or is he the persecuted creator

of a repulsive "Master Work," the amorphous monstrosity? Perhaps his role is most like the attendant Negro, the man who only delivers the "Master Work" and who, with the stage in a furious state of terror and agitation, says to himself, "I'm getting out of here, me" (89).

This clandestine exit from the confusion and disorder puts into relief Burroughs' designed efforts to forfeit all claims to authority. As such, it is an invitation for critics to step into the authorial gap left by Burroughs' hasty escape. Therefore, the participation of academia in the legitimation of *Naked Lunch* is a significant factor in determining how it continues to create meaning in its afterlife, and how its transgressive potential can be recuperated. The repositionings that define the text's history of reception are paralleled by a deliberate ambiguousness on Burroughs' part that may be interpreted as his duplicitous efforts to evade the "pure educated evil" (88) leer of institutional discourse. For this reason, Loren Glass, in "Still Dirty After All These Years," offers a cautionary reading of *Naked Lunch* in response to the critical tendency to see Burroughs as "providing modes and methods of resistance" (5). Glass insists that, as the law increasingly permitted academia to adjudicate the consumption of aesthetics, the *Naked Lunch* trial did not so much as mobilize an assault on the repressive bureaucratic regime as it did "exploit the authority of an emergent bureaucracy: the literary 'experts' whose Supreme Court testimony helped exonerate it" (5).

At this point, it should be underlined that *Naked Lunch* casts *all* bureaus as the ultimate threat to the body politic and the agents of control. The "Talking Asshole" routine elucidates the point: "The end result of complete cellular representation is cancer," Burroughs writes. "Democracy is cancerous, and bureaus are its cancer" (112). All bureaus are indistinguishable since their sole purpose is conformity. They are all replicating viruses that seek to replace individual entities with copies of themselves. Bureaus, like parasites, need a host to survive. The body politic is the host which it slowly destroys, *appearing* cooperative but, behind the deceptive word-image, operates according to the principle of "*inventing needs* to justify its existence" (112). What looks like competition is actually molecular collaboration. Burroughs calls the mass of cancerous cells in the form of "transparent jelly like a tadpole's tail" covering its host's mouth, "un-D.T., *Undifferentiated* Tissue" (111 my emphasis), highlighting the idea that all bureaucratic operations are uniform in appearance and mission. To expand on Glass' point then, the emergent bureau of criticism invades the public sphere and controls the thoughts of readers, becoming indistinguishable from the censorship bureau it alleges to depose. Criticism, like

censorship, invents the need of protecting the reader's mind from disturbance, error and anxiety to justify its existence. Burroughs' statements at the 1962 convention make it clear that the censors exemplify precisely this tactic: addressing the function of these "government agencies" Burroughs asks, "What would happen if all censorship were removed? – Not much" (5).

John Willet's influential 1965 "Ugh…" review of *Naked Lunch* for the *Literary Times Supplement* illustrates the way the criticism bureau was emerging to usurp or, better yet, amalgamate with the censorial entity. Willet even borrows the censor's rhetoric, writing, '"Glug glug. It tastes disgusting...pure verbal masturbation"' (qtd in Skerl and Lydenberg 42). Later in the review, Willet address the "the book world" itself and clearly instructs the community of intellectuals to occupy the position of cultural hygienists:

> If the publishers had deliberately set out to discredit the cause of literary freedom and innovation they could hardly have done it more effectively. Let us hope that they are left to appreciate the probable impact of their own reputation, and indirectly on that of the other authors on their list, without any interfering body turning them into martyrs. Any juryman can vomit, but only one verdict can clear up the mess: that of the book world itself. (44)

Willet admonishes the literary community to perform the task of delegitimizing Burroughs' disgusting text, encouraging this institution to "clear up the mess" left by Burroughs' dirty book. It is as if he is publishing a call to arms, not for an understanding or defence of the text on its own terms, but for the legion of criticism to build an external, legal framework for literature that can keep Burroughs' monstrosity out of circulation.

The trials of *Naked Lunch* illuminate that censorship and academia amalgamated in an unprecedented fashion, and in ways far less obvious than the "Ugh" review. For the courts, the problem was that Burroughs' creation was not only unspeakable (what cannot be said) but that, as Frederick Whiting in "Monstrosity on Trial" (2006)[31] observes, it was unspeakable in the sense of indescribability—that which cannot be "accommodated by existing conceptual

[31] In his excellent analysis of the *Naked Lunch*, Whiting explores the sociohistoric and socio-hysteric moment that produced the fervour over Burroughs' text. He investigates how in the 1950s and 1960s, it was advanced by medical and scientific discourses how the 'crime' of homosexuality was linked to drug abuse, as these chemicals were viewed as the gateway to all sorts of depravity. Thus, as Whiting makes clear, while the representations of homosexual sex certainly played a major role in the trial, they did not receive the proper treatment by the courts which, instead, focussed on moralising the inferno of junk. For this reason, this chapter does not explore at length the possible implications of transgressive sex in *Naked Lunch* as it adheres to an analysis of the course of legal proceedings that legitimated the document.

categories or has no proper place in the order of things" (Whiting 146). This shift in semantics that signals the eruption of "aposiopesis, an incapacity in the speaking subject due to affective responses such as horror, disgust, revulsion, or fascination produced by unnameable phenomena" (146). The problem with *Naked Lunch* was not that it was disgusting—the "emetic" effect, of course, had been part of the legalizing pact since the *Ulysses* trial—but that no one had any idea what this junk was supposed to be or what purpose its creation served. At least *Tropic of Cancer* discussed, however crudely, a familiar topic (sex) and did so in a way that vaguely resembled an autobiography or a confession. *Naked Lunch* reported unnameable acts of homosexual homicide, featured Boschian entities like the Mugwumps who secrete a fluid called "black meat" from their erect penises upon which "Reptiles" gorge, and devolved in many places into vulgar, incomprehensible nonsense. How could social value be located in these horrifically obscene episodes if there was not a discursive mode in existence to properly explain what was happening in the episodes?

Unlike the excesses of Barnes and Miller, *Naked Lunch* exceeds the existing categories of the intelligible and violates the conceptual model of language and communication, one that serves as the very foundation upon which censorial reading pacts are forged. Burroughs makes it clear that the routines in *Naked Lunch* cannot be contained by the discourse that was traditionally used to conceive of a things like text and book: "The Word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth in and out and aft like innaresting sex arrangements. This book spill off the page in all directions" (191). *Naked Lunch* was not just foreign to American culture, it was entirely alien to language and, as such, unable to be written into the authorized code of discourse.

Despite the absence of effective instruments to analyse the alien biogenetics of Burroughs' monstrosity, critics revived the discourses of high modernist aesthetics to make meaning of the strange entity. In this way, the critics and theorists who participated all missed the point because unspeakability was the proper response: "*Naked Lunch* demands Silence from The Reader. Otherwise he is taking his own pulse" (187). However, like a character from one of Beckett's plays, reviewers and critics chatted incessantly in the unnameable world of the novel, heedlessly situating *Naked Lunch* in the traditional structures for legitimate art, and ignoring the questions that Burroughs was posing about problems of the linguistic structures themselves. This review puts it as plain as any: "Many other sexually explicit books were freely distributed at the

time *Naked Lunch* was hit with obscenity suits," but Burroughs' novel attracted attention because "it presented itself as a work of art yet refused to take a clear moral stand on the barbarous actions it described" (Main 83). Taking recourse in the aesthetics-morality debate, the intellectual, cultural and legal institutions debated whether Burroughs provided a "moral framework" to the obscene horrors it depicted, if it was "incompatible with serious artistic intent" (Main 83) and '"if the moral message itself is disgusting"' (Willet 42).

Recurrent in the legal debate was the idea of monstrosity. The question of monstrosity is a key component both within the textual space and in the trials of *Naked Lunch*, underscoring the tenuous connection between recognizable forms and humanity. The disintegration of textual structures, the formulas that critics and courts depend upon to secure knowledge, correlates to Burroughs' thesis that all junk addictions, including authority's need for power and control, results in the disintegration of recognizable human form. The "Algebra of Need"—Burroughs' "basic law" (294) that all addicts must obey—metamorphosizes human beings into insects, reptiles, and repulsive "creature[s] without species" (17) deserving of extermination. Because the ineradicable compulsion is essentially the same, a "mathematical extension" of contaminating need connects everyone it touches making drug and sex addicts indistinguishable from those in power, while merchants ("Selling is more of a habit than using"...Non-using pushers have contact habit, and that's one you can't kick" [14]) become interchangeable with the narcotic agents that represent bureaucratic power. For example, Bradley the Buyer is so effective at his job that "anyone would make him for junk" (14). Eventually, the Department threatens him with expulsion for unspeakable deeds in the line of duty but Bradley, in danger of being cut off his junk supply, assimilates the District Supervisor within his ooze in a kind of sexual conquer. As this episode makes clear, Burroughs' book is a panoramic interrogation of the need virus that contaminates, and consumes into one undifferentiated entity, addicts and the power-dependent.

But to legitimate *Naked Lunch* on these grounds, however, would have been unthinkable, for it would have forced cultural, legal and governmental agencies to confess their own addiction to methods of thought-control and expose their role as "sellers" of junk narratives. Instead, the community of powers had to locate a different "social value" to validate the text. Whiting, taking his cue from Goodman's assertion that the *Naked Lunch* trial illustrates "the speed with which we assimilate into the mainstream of American life that which was once unspeakable" (Goodman 1), examines the procedures of repositioning that accomplished this assimilation into

the realm of the speakable. For Whiting, the trope of *unspeakablility* that emerged during the trials gave the intervening authorities a chance to turn Burroughs' use of monstrosity into a serious warning about the dangers of drug use and the horrific vices (i.e. homosexuality) associated with it. Whereas Burroughs aimed through unspeakable anti-forms to warn (as in *monstre, "*to warn or caution") about the evils of linguistic abstraction, the "humanist critics at the time of publication displaced his concern with the monstrous by metaphorizing it, and thus fell into the very process of linguistic abstraction that Burroughs was criticizing" (148). In the hands of the humanist critics, the need virus was merely reconstituted and spread into the channels of circulation purporting to be a warning but acting as a threat.

Burroughs' text was designed to warn about linguistic abstraction, the source of the need virus' transmission between bodies. Rather than address the linguistic models that perpetuate misunderstandings, fear, and bureaucratic control, critics pushed to demonstrate that *Naked Lunch* passed the "social value" test by showcasing, and implicitly condemning, an emetic world where the interconnected addictions of drugs and sexual perversity literally corrupt the human form. As Whiting writes:

> The real issue negotiated at the trial was not whether the monstrous should be spoken but rather what circumscriptions were necessary to its maintenance as monstrous—what, in effect, were the rules of its iterability...Burroughs's novel found legal and cultural vindication not because authorial freedom of expression, regardless of the challenges it posed to the normative order, was sacrosanct, but because its advocates were able to assimilate it to a discourse of psychopathology that was crucial to the maintenance of the normative order. (148)

Subsequent publications of the book featured various kinds of testimony from 'experts' to reinforce the legitimizing narrative that had been constructed during the trials. Assisted largely by cautionary medical treatises, including Burroughs' own "Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs" (reprinted from *The British Journal of Addiction*, Vol. 53, No. 2) which was included as a supplementary text in the first U.S. editions of *Naked Lunch*, the book became a radical moral tract about the horrors of drug use, the infernos of sexual sin, and the nightmarish states of altered consciousness. *Naked Lunch* circulated as a hygiene pamphlet, titillating readers with its depraved escapades while confirming their worst fears about drug abuse.

Further steps were taken to write Burroughs' signature back into the text and thereby

confer authority and responsibility on him: the text of *Naked Lunch*, which Burroughs claimed he didn't remember writing, was safely contained within a contingent of paratexts penned by clean-and-sober Burroughs, now resembling the "reasonable man" who was presenting his findings to a scientific experiment ("notes") on a public health issue ("sickness"). As controlled "testimony" from an expert who has done field research, *Naked Lunch* entered the market like the lurid pamphlets hygiene bureaus would distribute to draw attention to the unspeakable horror and depravity that accompanied drug use.

For Burroughs, the source of the "junk virus" (202) is an addiction to linguistic abstraction, the manipulation of the word-image to control thoughts. This social epidemic includes, specifically, "the hysteria that drug use often occasions in populaces who are prepared by the media and narcotics officials for a hysterical reaction" (211). All media bureaus, like the pushers and sellers that Burroughs claims are driven by the strongest habits, are complicit in the scheme to induce fear and anxiety into the middle-class mentality. Magazines, pamphlets, television, movies, twenty-five-cent paperback novels are junk commodities that transmit the virus, selling to the public messages written in hysterical, hyperbolic prose in order to diagnose, titillate, terrorize and thus control.

In *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs explicitly comments on the abstraction of language that Burroughs identifies as a Pavlovian ritual for programming mind and body control:

> You know how this pin and dropper routine is usually put down: "She seized a safety pin caked with blood and rust, gouged a great hole in her leg which seemed to hang open like an obscene, festering mouth waiting for unspeakable congress with the dropper which she now plunged out of sight into the gaping wound. But her hideous galvanized need (hunger of insects in dry places) has broken the dropper off deep in the flesh of her ravaged thigh (looking rather like a poster on soil erosion). But what does she care? She does not even bother to remove the splintered glass, looking down at her bloody haunch with the cold blank eyes of a meat trader. What does she care for the atom bomb, the bedbugs, the cancer rent, Friendly Finance waiting to repossess her delinquent flesh...Sweet dreams, Pantopon Rose" (10).

Burroughs' parody of the familiar "routine" is depicted as an advertisement (the "poster on soil erosion") designed to sell a product. But here it is not Heroin being pushed. Rather, it is an equally addictive substance residing in the commodities that provide cheap thrills while reifying

the norms of cultural order with a clear-cut image of justice delivered to these outlaws.

Moreover, as is clear from the rhetoric ("She," "great hole," "obscene...mouth," "unspeakable congress," "gaping wound"), the word-images are cross-wired with sexual violence and depravity to lure and arouse. Burroughs recognizes that censorship and advertising bureaus use sex for economic purposes: "In English-speaking countries the weight of censorship falls on sexual word and image as dangerous to an economic system depending on mass production and a large public of more or less uncritical consumers" (5). Censorship, in Burroughs' view, ensures that the "impressionable minds" of middle-class individuals are subjected to a "daily barrage" of words and images "deliberately calculated to arouse sexual desires without satisfying them" (5). These "aggressive impulses" have no outlet, except in the products that maintain the need for the word-image to arouse and to reassure: "The addict needs more and more junk to maintain human form" (200). This is the circular, constrictive formula of the "Algebra of Need" that extends into goods of mass culture. The only type of sex that is useful to the ad bureaus is "the sex that passes the censor" (112), and this variety sex is without use: "*You see control can never be a means to any practical end...It can never be a means to anything but more control...Like junk...*" (137).

Conversely, the only cure is through a non-addictive word-image substance, a type of flat, reportorial and unarousing language. Burroughs gives a sample following the "sweet dreams" of Pantopon Rose: "The real scene is you pinch up some leg flesh and make a quick stab hole with a pin. Then fit the dropper *over, not in* the hole and feed the solution slow and careful so it doesn't squirt out the sides" (10). The journalistic voice of the Factualist tells it like it is: there is no gap for the interference of pre-sent messages.

The circularity of monstrosity's iterability can be witnessed in Burroughs' first book, *Junky* (1953), which provides a precedent for the type of publication and reception framework that sought to safely transmit and exploit Burroughs' words. In the notes that accompany *Junky*, Burroughs states that he intends to retract the preposterous "official propaganda [which] opposes any factual statement about junk" in an attempt to quell the social hysteria perpetuated by paperbacks, newspapers, magazines and movies who "seldom deviate from the officially sponsored myth" (Harris 140). The reportorial presentation of events in *Junky* was influenced by his work with Alfred Korzybski, a university professor researching the "the reifying effects of linguistic abstraction" (Whiting 153). Korzybski studied the division in language between the

signified and signifying symbol, proposing that "the process of generalization inherent in linguistic systems resulted in distinct, non identical phenomena being subsumed under abstract terms, thus erasing their difference and negating their individuality" (153). The gap between hard reality and the exaggerated discourse of the officially sponsored narrative had conglomerated criminal activity, violence, homosexuality, psychopathy, and drug addiction into the totemic cultural monstrosity, the 'obscene'— a concept amorphous enough to envelope (or, like Bradley the Buyer, "*schlup*"[16]) them all into a single utterance.

However, the ambitions that Burroughs had for the original manuscript of *Junky* were ultimately torpedoed by its publishers. The title became *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict*, it was presented with a "lurid and voyeuristic cover" that showed a man overpowering a terrified, beautiful woman and injecting her arm with heroin against her will, was prefaced with a series of "nervous disclaimers" to deliberately bypass "any chance of literary reputation or critical reception" (Harris xxi) and place *Junkie* on the shelves of drugstores, newsstands and subway depots.

Most significantly, the 1953 edition was published quite literally in the context of police surveillance: as part of Ace's Double Book series, it was bound back-to-back with a reprint of Maurice Helbrandt's *Double Agent* (1941), a memoir giving an account of the officer's career as an undercover agent for the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. The attendant text kept watch over the handlers of this illicit product, representing the presiding power of the state and law. The conjunction of Drug Addict/Narcotic Cop in a single volume reproduced materially "the generic conventions that conditioned the conceptual production—the speakability—of the monstrous...the unredeemed monstrous utterance of *Junkie* was qualified, indeed overridden, by larger generic conventions, rendered perspicuous by Helbrandt's accompanying text" (Whiting 156). The linguistic abstraction that Burroughs resisted had subsumed his journalistic account into a reading contract that reproduced the cheap, safe, unsatisfying titillations in terms of the very same generic myths he set out to deconstruct. The additions were enough to pass the censors as *Junkie*, like *Nightwood*, stands as a conspicuous example of a literary "non case" of censorship that slipped into circulation under an inapplicable moral code. Indeed, Paul Hollander asserts that *Junky* could "serve as a marvellous deterrent from addiction for any person reading it," suggesting that it was a scientific and sociologically important document for "demonstrating the impoverished social relationships of the addict as well as the interconnections between

addiction and other deviant behaviour, especially homosexuality" (488).

Naked Lunch can be read as retract of *Junkie*. The opening episode, "And Start West," rescues William Lee, the purported author and narrator of the previous text and transplants him into a new textual space as a prototype of Burroughs' hardboiled "recording instrument" (184). The routine is extracted almost directly from *Junkie*, orienting the reader to the same world with the familiarity of gutter talk and underworld jargon ("A square comes on hip...Talks about "pod" [3]) and the deadpan narration of our Continental Op-like detective ("I can feel the heat closing in, feel them out their making their moves" [3]). Lee's first encounter is with, fittingly, a Double Agent—"you know the type," Lee winks (3). But Lee is on to him this time. He gives the undercover "narcotics dick in a white trench coat" the slip, catching the subway on his descent to the underworld of junk where the double agent cannot follow: '"So long flatfoot!" I yell, giving the fruit his B production"' (3). At the outset of *Naked Lunch*, it is established that entry into this textual world will 'give the slip' to double-agents like B movies (i.e. *Reefer Madness*), pulp paperbacks (*H is for Heroin*!), newspapers, magazines and other circulated media.

The pattern established at the entry portal of this text is elusive action, the means by which characters can 'slip' out of containment from pursuers, including police agents and the need virus. Lee buys a "secondhand Studebaker, and start[s] West" to outrun the addict/police agent, Willy the Disk, who feels for "the silent frequency of junk" with his blind, groping mouth and consumes only "shit" for nourishment. This climactic act in the introductory episode provides an internal parallel to the way *Naked Lunch* will exceed confinement ("the heat closing in") from the collusive agencies that, like addicts, compulsively perform the task of censorship bureaus. Burroughs, as he eludes capture, leaves only a mass of textual "shit" or truly filthy dirt behind from the "groping mouth" of those who feed off the source of their addictions.

The flight from the law ultimately proved unsuccessful. Criticism stepped in to occupy the role of *Double Agent*, surveilling the consumption of Burroughs' monstrous aesthetics and, by doing so, abstracting his reportorial language into an allegorical narrative of addiction, withdrawal and redemption.

Allegory, the preeminent pedagogic and moral tool in literary history, served as the traditional model for making sense of *Naked Lunch*'s cultivated excesses. The critics that testified on behalf of Burroughs, particularly Norman Mailer and Allen Ginsberg whose testimonies were included as the preface for the authorized editions released in the U.S., imposed

a distinctly allegorical moral structure onto the text. Mailer called *Naked Lunch* a "religious" book, confessing that "the work was more of a deep work, a calculated work, a planned work...the artistry in *Naked Lunch* is very deliberate and profound" (486). Ginsberg, and fellow Beat poet John Ciardi, proposed that it possessed a moral structure that approximated for the modern fallen city the symbolic order of Dante's *Inferno*, the archetypical allegorical text in the Western canon. The testimony given by recognized intellectual figures relied on beat aesthetics to exculpate *Naked Lunch* from the regime of censorship that, as Glass writes, they believed was "coincident with the modernist enterprise" (5). However, the imposition of allegory merely reinforced the sacrosanct integrity of the well-crafted work of art and situated their defence "in the very modernist protocols whose supersession they simultaneously celebrate" (5).

The allegorical narrative imposed on *Naked Lunch* is clearly evident in the transcripts of the trial, exposing the misconception that critics perpetuated. John Ciardi and Professor Jackson ushered the contagious idea into evidence that *Naked Lunch* was in the same class of writing as Dante's *Inferno.* In defence of the particularly controversial "Talking Asshole" routine, both witnesses cited the scene where Dante witnesses a regiment of demons signal their leader by making "*del cul fatto trombetta*"[32] (*Inf.* XXI:140). Jackson further explained that a contested episode from "A.J.'s Annual Party"—the scene in which Mary violates John with a sex instrument and then, after orgasm, devours his face and genitals—employs a technique similar to the horrific cannibalism between Count Ugolino and Bishop Ruggiero. The strategy was a popular line of defence: Mailer, on the witness stand, claimed that *Naked Lunch* was a deeply religious book: "It is...Hell precisely" (qtd in Cook 171); Edward de Grazia, in his concluding argument, asked the judge: "Whoever suggested that Hell could be anything other than shocking, revolting, disgusting, indecent and offensive?" (227). Whereas Eliot and Joyce has summoned the classicism of Homer to exculpate *Ulysses*, the Beat authors brought forth the stern moral allegories of Dante and his divine ordered cosmology to validate *Naked Lunch*.

The success of the defence counsel was largely due to the Dantean scheme already encoded into the materiality of the text to provide its reception with a un-authorized moral framework. Burroughs had no hand in this arrangement; Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, the high priests of beat aesthetics and *i migliori fabbri* for Burroughs during the text's pre-publication phase, imposed the allegorical structure on the final version of *Naked Lunch*.

[32] "a trumpet out of his arse"

Ginsberg's role is especially problematic. Oliver Harris, in *The Secret of Fascination*, documents in remarkable detail how the routines that eventually became *Naked Lunch* were composed randomly in the epistolary correspondence between Burroughs and Ginsberg. The routines that provide the body of *Naked Lunch* were subsequently organized by Ginsberg who boasts in this 1957 letter to Lucien Carr: "It's quite a piece of writing—all Bill's energy & prose plus all our own organization & cleanup & structure so it's continuous & readable, decipherable" (qtd in Burroughs 237). Then, in the Boston trials, Ginsberg was the central witness for the defence team whose testimony would preface *Naked Lunch* in the authorized editions. When Ginsberg testified that *Naked Lunch* may have been lacking a traditional plot but that "did not mean it was missing a definite plan" (493) and that he detected the guiding hand of Dantean poetics, he was validating the structure he himself imposed upon it.

A closer look at the structure of the episodes in their final "corrected" version brings to light the type of textual mapping Ginsberg used and the antecedent coordinates for his plotting strategies. This is the progression of the protean protagonist: enclosed within a periphery of paratexts from the normative, institutional realms of law, academia and science, the narrator begins at street level, hops a subway into the dark forest of the underworld, continues to the bottom of hell at the marketplace in the Interzone, and then ascends back to street level in "Hauser and O'Brien," the final act in the psychodrama, a chapter that recapitulates the pursuit and escape plot of the opening chapter in the familiar hardboiled style. The circularity of this journey as a departure from a recognizable home followed by homecoming clearly aligns the text with the classical moral plan, a pilgrimage of personal redemption and salvation through the modern inferno in which the junk virus approximates the medieval concept of sin-as-disease.

For Burroughs, however, allegory is coextensive with censorship. Yet, by imposing a Dantean allegory onto *Naked Lunch* to legitimate its obscenity, the Beat critics enacted the type of linguistic abstraction that Burroughs identified as symptomatic of bureaucracy. Censorship operates under the aegis of allegory, suspending the unspeakability of obscenity until an interpretive code is forged to validate and redeem the signifier. The reading contracts codified by law rely on linguistic abstraction so that obscene signifiers can be consumed as signifying a 'higher' morality. In this way, it is difficult not to hear echoes of the "pyramid of junk" (200) in the grand hierarchical constructs of allegory.

In "Letter to Can Grande della Scala," Dante provides his honourable patron with a

hermeneutic key to unlock the secret moral hierarchy of *Inferno*'s obscene signs. Citing the biblical verse beginning "*In exitu Israel de Aegypto,*" Dante instructs the reader on the correct way to see the word, a process that demands an abstraction of the literal word through ascending spheres of signification until it is compatible with God's law. Dante's pedagogy anticipates obscenity law's own allegorical insistence on the integrity of the whole text, explicitly stating that this procedure of the work "as a whole" is derived from the branch of "moral philosophy, or ethics" with justice as its central thesis:

> And if the subject of the whole work, considered allegorically, is man, through the exercise of free will, earning or becoming liable to the rewards or punishments of justice, then it is evident that the subject in this part is restricted to man's becoming eligible, to the extent he has earned them, for the rewards of justice. (122, first column)

The ethical code Dante expounds provides the paradigm for all reading contracts legitimated by legal censors. Dante's idea of "evil reading" is as perilous as Comstock's: to read *Inferno* incorrectly is to read heretically and become damned; conversely, the proper path through these textual symbols corresponds to the actual salvation of the soul.

For Dante, moral and divine law are closely allied. In canto II of *Purgatorio,* Dante dramatizes an extraordinary allegory *of allegory* to bear this thesis out. The self-reflexive canto opens with the arrival of one hundred souls singing the Easter hymn, "*In exitu Israel de Aegypto,*" in unison and closes with the penitent souls admonished for stopping to enjoy one of Dante's aphrodisiacal love poems, "*Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona*." The insertion of the *incipito* from the letter to Can Grande signals that the theme of the canto is allegorical reading. The penitent souls, meanwhile, enact an example of 'evil reading;' they take pleasure in Dante's earthly song, literally stopping at the place of lowest signification, the letter, while forgetting to ascend the symbolic order and "go make themselves fair" (17). That they are rebuked by the guardian of Purgatory, Cato the Elder, who asks angrily, "*qual negligenza, quale stare è questo*?"[33] (*Pur*.II:121), only confirms the alliance between law, morality and salvation since Cato was the most prominent censor in the Roman empire (the administrative system responsible for the invention of that governmental agent). The presiding presence of Cato over this realm of metamorphosis illustrates how allegory is a literary mode in harmony with censorship, encrypting a readymade pact into text that controls its signification and inevitably results in a

[33] "what negligence? what stay is this?"

reading that achieves the hierarchical ascension of the censorial moral code.

It is therefore ironic that Dantean allegory helped legitimate *Naked Lunch*. Ginsberg, the architect of the comedic structure, read on the stand a poem he wrote entitled "On Burroughs' Work" that encapsulated Beat aesthetics:

> A naked lunch is natural to us,
> we eat reality sandwiches.
> But allegories are so much lettuce.
> Don't hide the madness. (Ginsberg 40)

This testimony was followed by deGrazia's comically underwhelming statement: "No more questions" (495). Despite deGrazia's confidence, a number of questions are raised, including the problematic situation produced by "the instinct of the humanist critic...to dress [*Naked Lunch*] up as allegory and moral satire, to distance and diffuse the novel by making it a mediating or disposable code serving a more abstract and therefore less threatening message" (Lydenberg 9). Allegory, "a disciplinary and hygienic control machine, systematizing the healthy production of meaning: the rule of order and law, not dirt and disorder" (Harris 232) appears to be in direct opposition to Burroughs' horror of controlling mechanisms and linguistic abstraction. Indeed, codification, requiring a presiding authorial hand—the right hand of law—to operate the symbolic code and to assert control over the refractory impulses of the spontaneous, sinister left hand, is the set up as the source of eternal struggle, a manifestation of the controlling viruses that Lee must elude. "As the most "orderly" form of literature," Harris observes, "allegory declares the author's will to control over a text" (232), drawing on the Nietzschean principles of Apollonian/Dionysian duality to delineate how it asserts order and repression over anarchy, the spontaneous. But Burroughs declares in the testimony that prefaces the original edition of *Naked Lunch* he has abandoned memory and control over his text—fair warning for those reader-pilgrims who wish to enter this inferno safely under the protective guidance of Dante's allegorical pedagogy.

In *Naked Lunch*, the act of reading is staged as an agon, a contest of controlling codes: "Keep going on the nod. Last night I woke up with someone squeezing my hand. It was my other hand...Fall asleep reading and the words take on code significance...obsessed with codes. Man contracts a series of diseases which spell out a code message" (57). For Burroughs, symbolic codes that require an authority to tell the populace what they mean are inherently evil, for they

depend upon image ("Junk *is* image" [15]) and create a kind of fetishized addiction to textual decoding. The authors of the code possess the only key to decipher it and thus, control how the subject forms thoughts, and thus secure power of knowledge over a community. Codes form a contract, a correspondence between a sender and a receiver that functions as a unidirectional power grid: the receiver *needs*, and must rely or depend on the sender to unlock the message.

The psychodrama of this correspondence is elaborately staged in one of Burroughs' great routines, "The Mayan Caper," and revisited later in *The Job* in the section called "Control." In this episode from *The Soft Machine*, the narrator travels back in history to Mayan civilization to destroy the caste of high priests who enslave the population with codices that only they can read: "the absolute power of the priests, who formed about two percent of the population, depended on their control of these calendars" (194). Though the priests do not exactly understand how the system they operate works, they nonetheless manipulate the cultural narrative which is directed with "stabbing probes of telepathic interrogation" (197). The codices speak a distinctly allegorical language as they are translated into symbolic rituals, and distracting entertainment, so that "A continuous round of festivals occupied our evenings and holidays" (198). The narrator of the piece, a kind of time-travelling undercover detective who may or may not be a member of the Time Police, disguises himself as a "half-witted young Indian" to escape telepathic control measures. Then, he prostitutes his body to the monstrous sexual appetite of a high-ranking priest as a strategic ruse to infiltrate the Mayan temple, and there he finally dismantles the codices by rearranging digits on the control machine. As the codices burn, the narrator discovers, "You see the priests were nothing but word and image, an old film rolling on and on with dead actors—Priests and temple guards went up in silver smoke as I blasted my way into the control room and burned the codices" (199).

In *The Job*, Burroughs expands on the Mayan codices, the study of which, he claims, "throws light on modern methods of control" (313). The codified system of censorship, a reading contract designed by the 'high priests' of modernism to control what the populace "did thought and felt" with any given text, functions like the Mayan codices, presenting the writer/reader with two options that resemble these contradictory commands: '"to rebel stridently" "to submit weekly"' (316). Burroughs describes the dualistic situation of this either-or position in this way: "Every time a worker nerved himself to rebel the goal to submit was activated causing him to assert rebellion more and more stridently thus activating more and more compulsively the goal to

submit" (316). The codice system is designed to ensure submission even in the act of rebellion precisely how, as Foucault observes, the micromechanics of the law ensure that even acts of transgression work in service of maintaining its own power. This conception of the dualistic, and inherently allegorical, set-up of authority helps illuminate the way that criticism, while trying to mobilise a strident rebellion against obscenity law, in the end submitted weakly to the authority they consciously despised. Far more effective than sacrificial book-burning, *Naked Lunch* became a textbook, a codice, suggesting that the high priests of the censorship system had learned to "take account of the fact that any threat clearly seen and confronted loses force" (316).

The either/or duality of the allegorical reading contract allows *Naked Lunch* to circulate with a productive purpose, programming how readers understand its subject matter within a present ("pre-sent") framework of permitted operation. Burroughs' manifesto, *The Job*, claims that "EITHER/OR is another virus formula. It is always you OR the virus. EITHER/OR. This is in point of fact the conflict formula which is seen to be the archetypical virus mechanism" (Burroughs 312). The dualistic structure of allegory, where it is always you or the legitimated code, appears as the insidious machine that powers censorship, constructed and maintained by the priest caste of the law's agents.

Because of Burroughs' studies on these linguistic viruses, *Naked Lunch* has become increasingly seen as a resistance against allegory. Frank McConnell, in "William Burroughs and the Literature of Addiction" (1967), asserts that Burroughs' rigorously factual prose is a "stern criticism of allegory" (669). In McConnell's estimation, "Burroughs is not concerned with objectifying the possible directions of the moral will" (669) and so his straightforward use of junk addiction creates a "terrible purity of...style," refusing to permit the reader "to extrapolate symbolic matrices because it will not allow terms for the problem other than its own. Any second series of correspondences would be, in the book's own terms, evil" (671). Robin Lydenberg echoes McConnell, writing that "this is precisely Burroughs' intention—to offer us a naked lunch, a revelation of what is really going on and not an allegorical evasion" (9). Burroughs' prose does not "incite reform" but, like a recording instrument, simply shows a "more naked truth" (9)—one that will, as Burroughs wrote, "Let them see what they eat and drink. Let them see what is on the end of that long newspaper spoon" (xliv). As Burroughs' prose resists the "need" to symbolize, it necessarily "constitutes a very serious challenge to criticism" (McConnell 671). The text's monstrous formlessness mocks the intervention of academia,

exposing the inability of theorists to develop new methods to cope with new literary forms. “This attitude,” Lydenberg writes, “puts Burroughs at odds with conventional literary criticism” and ensures that the “moral and the metaphorical” standards of academia are relentlessly “called into question as repressive dualistic structures” (10).

Thus, the position staked out by the critical camp which reads Burroughs as anti-literature and anti-allegory find themselves in a tricky situation—a kind of theoretical endgame wherein the dualistic nature of opposition is simply rephrased: it is Burroughs or the allegory virus. Unable to imagine a critical position beyond modernist antagonism, these critics forfeit the opportunity to forge a tenable hermeneutic for *Naked Lunch* compatible with its own terminology. To reconsider *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs’ prose must be approached from the concept of the entity seemingly rejected—that is, the position of the Double Agent.

In *The Job*, Burroughs imagines a futuristic, post-apocalyptic language where “the whole concept of EITHER/OR will be deleted from the language and replaced by juxtaposition, by *and”* (311). The theory of “*and”* dismantles dualistic oppositions and allows two concepts to stand “side by side” (311). The arbitrary and random collection of episodes and paratexts that compose the body of *Naked Lunch* can be juxtaposed in any arrangement: “You can cut into *Naked Lunch* at any intersection point,” Burroughs claims (187). The “*and”* formula governing *Naked Lunch* operates as a double agent since, in the hands of the controllers, its parts can be arranged into a redeeming narrative; in the hands of the informed readers—the marks who have been ‘wised up’ ("I do definitely mean what I say to be taken literally. Yes, to make people aware of the true criminality of our time, to wise up the marks" ["Art" 49])—its narrative can, literally, be dismantled and reconstructed to obliterate the system from within its own safe haven.

This is precisely the fate of the priest caste in “The Mayan Caper”: “If I could gain access to the codices and mix the sound and image track the priests *would go on pressing the old buttons with unexpected results*” (198). However, in order to accomplish his goal and “gain access” within the congregation of priests, the narrator claims he “prostituted himself to one of the priests—(Most distasteful thing I ever stood for)” (198). By posing as an “idiot” Native villager and performing a sexual service for the priests, he is trusted and “transferred to janitor work in the temple” (MC 198) where he carries out his purpose from within the secured space of power. In this respect, the narrator resembles A.J. in *Naked Lunch*, the anarchic prankster who spikes the socialite punch with a potent aphrodisiac, causing a giant orgy. Not surprisingly, we

read that A.J. is:

> [A]n agent like me, but for whom or for what no one has ever been able to discover…I believe he is on the factualist side (which I also represent); of course he could be a Liquifactionist Agent (the Liquifactionst program involves the eventual merging of everyone into One Man by a process of protoplasmic absorption). You can never be sure of anyone in the industry. (122-123)

Because he operates under a series of "cover stor[ies]" (123), the double agent performs the role of Pirandello's "diabolical imp," the entity which "takes apart the mechanism of each image...releases the mainspring, and the whole mechanism squeaks convulsively" ("*Umorismo*" 125). The apocalyptic ending of "The Mayan Caper" dramatizes the convulsive destruction of the world concurrently with the word-image. The comedy of *Naked Lunch* also belongs to the duplicitous and elusive trickster, the futuristic descendant of the Miller's clown who smiles viciously at the foot of the ladder by fooling the priests into operating their own demise.

Burroughs' double agent is, like A.J. and the time-travelling detective, an enigmatic figure who works one side *and* the other. For Burroughs, this protean personality who is loyal to no ideological abstraction, is the logical survival strategy for a world populated only by duplicitous persons driven by and loyal to base need. Because the junk virus is a symbol for all types of addiction, "a mathematical extension of the Algebra of Need" (294) connecting across the panorama of junk every branch of human thought and action, it creates traitors and double agents out of every subject no matter where they stand:

> The face of "evil" is always the face of total need. A dope fiend is a man in total need of dope. Beyond a certain frequency need knows absolutely no limit or control. In the words of total need: "*Wouldn't you*?" Yes you would. You would lie, cheat, inform on your friends, steal, do anything, do *anything* to satisfy total need. Because you would be in a state of total sickness, total possession, and not in a position to act in any other way (201)

In this diagnosis, total need obliterates allegiances to anything other than the satisfaction of pure need. This need extends beyond the "dope fiends" and possesses the police, the narcotics bureaus, the institutions and academics, all addicted to the total need of intellectual control. For this reason, characters like Bradley the Buyer and Willy the Disk populate the novel—police officers addicted to junk, junk addicts assisting the police—underlining the contagious "need virus" that subsumes them into the same undifferentiating formula until there is no way to

distinguish which side of the law they are on. This is "the heat" that the narrator feels "closing in" in the first line of the text: the spreading virus of the need through the both the law and the junkies, turning them into a single entity trying to satisfy the same hunger. At this point, being a junkie is no longer a solution to the law, no longer a subversive or transgressive act; it is, instead, complicity with the disease.

The first episode, "And Start West," illustrates Burroughs' conception of a world populated only by double agents and duplicitous tricksters, depicting a veritable gallery of shifty characters: the undercover narcotics dick, the "square" who "wants to come on hip" (5); the Vigilante ("best Shake Man in the industry"); The Shoe Store Kid who "got that moniker shaking down fetishists in shoe stores" (5); Willy the Disk, the junkie who works for the fuzz. Even William Lee confesses to being a trickster, trying to pull a fast one on the reader: first, he lets the reader think they are 'hip' ("You know the type," he nods) but, later, using coded jargon, and then explaining it, to remind them they are only marks in this world. As if dramatizing his shake down of the reader, Lee sells the square that comes on 'hip' some catnip instead of "pod," informing the reader that "Catnip smells like marijuana when it burns. Frequently passed on the incautious or unrestricted" (5). The brief encounter with the square seems to warn the "incautious or unrestricted" reader that the text they have been sold is not what it appears to be, that Burroughs' inside information to the ruses can wise the reader up to the mark within.

In this way, the overall effect on the reader who consumes the catnip of Burroughs' words is ultimately a kind of trick or prank that works towards a different kind of independence—that is, freedom from the need that connects the either/or binary. In terms of consumption, it is a kind of *pharmakon*, at once poison *and* cure (a medicinal double agent in its own right!) that works to create an alternative space to the sites of control. And, in *Naked Lunch*, an actual *pharmakon* exists and is endorsed as the only possible "vaccine that can relegate the junk virus to a landlocked past" (202): the Apomorphine Treatment. While it contains morphine and is administered like that highly addictive narcotic, it circulates in disguise as a curative drug with "no narcotic or pain-killing properties" (202). Burroughs reports that apomorphine works at a metabolic level to deprogram the brain's dependency on narcotics. He says, in *The Job*, that "Once it has done its work of regulating the metabolism its use can be discontinued. There is no kick to apomorphine and no one would take it for pleasure. *Like a good policeman apomorphine does its work and goes*" (Burroughs 202, my emphasis). *Naked Lunch* circulates in the body

politic like apomorphine, recording the horrors of the junk virus ("its work") and then "just goes" without imposing any allegorical moral structure on what it factually reports. The double-agent work of apomorphine permits a social value to be located in *Naked Lunch* but one that avoids the pitfalls of moralizing structures by deprogramming the control impulses at the base of morals. It's an acrobatic text, the masterful performance of a contortionist in "all types of innaresting positions" (191). As such, it possesses a value that transgresses with irredeemable excess, one that cannot be assimilated into the codified values that empower a governing body.

If *Naked Lunch* operates as a medicinal double agent like apomorphine, disguised as moral allegory and yet, through the makeup of its language, deprograms the reader's dependency on allegorical codification, it must now be examined within the community of scholars who purvey those readings guided by abstraction.

The cameo appearance by the Ancient Mariner dramatizes the relationship between readers, intellectual authorities and allegorical methods. Robert Loewinsohn examines *Naked Lunch* through the figure of Coleridge's mariner and proposes that Burroughs' self-proclaimed "How-To Book" (293) is the progeny of other how-to blueprints like *The Divine Comedy*, *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Gulliver's Travels*. He claims that Burroughs must be addressed as a modernist because he locates in drug addiction:

> "the basic formula" of the human relationship to life. His journey through a modern inferno of drug addiction and withdrawal, as if her were an alien in the familiar land, dramatizes and images the allegorical struggle of modern man against control addicts...It signals a return to life; a resurrection from the underworld. (7)

The Ancient Mariner represents the pilgrim transformed into an authority by his sins, the figure for which salvation is possible only through cathartic retellings of his journey according to a unifying moral. It is not a question of choice for Burroughs, the Ancient Mariner of *Naked Lunch*, for he *must* relate his message in terms "so violent, so bizarre, so defiant of their conventional standards of decency, even of legibility" for the edification the reader's edification: "Gentle reader, I would fain spare you this but my pen hath its will like the Ancient Mariner" (Burroughs 34). Like all allegorical readings, Loewinsohn's reading replaces "the shock value" of the imagery for the social value it points towards, re-inscribing the monstrosity of Burroughs' text with a "paradoxically comforting function" within the strictures of orthodoxy: "because of its excessiveness and its otherworldliness, its initial impact on the reader is to reassure him that

these painful pictures and experiences are exotic, altogether foreign to him" (567). When Loewinsohn indicts Burroughs, it is evident the critic is "taking his own pulse" (293).

Following Burroughs' "*and"* formula clarifies the matter, allowing us to place the Ancient Mariner side by side with his second appearance in the text. At the campus of Interzone university, the professor calls his students' attention to the symbolism "of the Ancient Mariner *himself"* (72). What is the mariner's "gimmick" to capture and hold the listener he asks?: "He stops those who cannot choose but hear owing to already existing relationship between The Mariner (however ancient) and the uh wedding guest (73). Burroughs parodies pedagogic discourse, "illustrat[ing] at some length that nothing can ever be accomplished on the verbal level" (74). This is the "pearl" that the professor "slops" or feeds to the students, now pigs with "fat stomachs and responsible jobs": *"You can find out more about someone by talking then by listening"* (74). The pedagogical institutions and the "pure educated evil" of academia are exposed in this episode as the evil authorities who send their word-images into the brains of receivers to replicate themselves. As Shneiderman writes:

> [R]eaders, in the traditional process of literary interpretation—mediated explicitly by modern bourgeois critics and the professoriate, or, more subtly, through an insidious constellation of social apparatuses—become...unable to escape the Mark inside, who, conveniently, is equally unable to dictate literary meaning beyond bland mimicry of the professoriate. (234)

Like the caste of Mayan priests, the intellectual priests of academia control the legitimate interpretation of literary texts by safeguarding the code of knowledge. Critics like Loewinsohn are bound to make sense of *Naked Lunch* by talking and, thus, what is produced is the manifestation of a pre-sent message and merely replicate the "however ancient" message. The huckster trick behind Burroughs' "How-To Book" is to wise up the Marks by demonstrating, not an allegorical moral, but a naked truth of the word virus: if the reader is not careful, he will end up "taking his own pulse" (187) and, by using the text to instruct, merely find out more about themselves than the actual text. The idea, therefore, is to slip the mark inside. In the words of Shneiderman, the message relayed from Burroughs would be: "you can't help but listen, but don't believe a word—if you can find a way to stop yourself" (235). Silence appears to be response to *Naked Lunch* as it demonstrates a breaking of the need to replicate the word-images of the high priests in control.

Thus, Burroughs has designed a text that is inconsumable. He invites the operator of the text to "cut into it at any 'intersection point'" (224), but it will not edify, it will not produce any effect. Instead, it is pure anti-effect, the undetectable sensation of it 'just going' from the body. *Naked Lunch* is the textual equivalent to apomorphine in the circulation network of the body politic: disguised as moralizing literature (orthodoxy) to get past censors, it releases the forces of heterodoxy that wake the subject from his need-based paralysis and may potentially free him from his addiction to the explanations pushed by authorities to reinforce order. When it goes, the inconsumable *Naked Lunch* has left the reader able to accept the irreconcilable nature of reality (the "and" formula), allowing their mind to resist the either/or duality of orthodoxy and hold two opposing concepts side by side. As Burroughs writes, "Apomorphine is no word and no image – It is of course misleading to speak of a silence virus or an apomorphine virus since apomorphine is anti-virus [...] (2). As a form of anti-literature disguised under its allegorical cover story, *Naked Lunch* works from within the system to dissolve the mark inside the deanxietized, normalized American squares, moving them beyond verbal and bodily dependency that censorship systems perpetrate.

The "Talking Asshole" episode crystallizes these concerns and provides an opportunity to recuperate *Naked Lunch* from what McConnell calls the "aroma which persists after it becomes suddenly "legal," and which determines its meaning as a newly public statement: not necessarily, however, an aroma inherent to *Naked Lunch* itself" (666). Dr. Benway offers the anecdote of the "Talking Asshole" in response to Dr. Shafer's idea to get rid of the scandalous inefficiency of the human body by sealing up the nose and mouth to produce an "all-purpose hole to eat and eliminate" (110). The proposal exemplifies the tendency of bureaus to invent needs to justify their existence, usually explained according to efficiency statistics or hygiene purposes. Further to this point, it is also an anecdote that offers a quite literal depiction of consumption.

To briefly summarize the anecdote, a carnival man teaches his ass to talk and turns it into entertainment—a "novelty ventriloquist act" (111). As the ass begins taking on a personality and life of its own, the carnival man tries a countermeasure to contain it by incorporating it into his performance: "He...built an act around it" (111). Eventually, the cancerous cells of Undifferentiated Tissue spread over the carnival man's head, severing connections until, Benway assumes, the "brain *must* have died, because the eyes *went out*" (112). At this juncture, Benway's anecdote becomes parable. Speaking of the un-D.T., he says:

> That's the sex that passes the censor, squeezes through the between the bureaus, because there's always a space *between*, in popular songs and grade B movies, giving away the basic American rottenness, spurting out like breaking boils, throwing out globs of the un-D.T. to fall anywhere and grow into some degenerate cancerous life-form, reproducing a hideous random image. (112)

The undifferentiated tissue is a "hideous" and "cancerous" composite of sex and the controlling narratives of bureaucracy that circulate as mass culture—the "popular songs and B movies" and the cheap paperbacks. Burroughs' bureau allows sex to seep out its porous body like ooze in the form of commodities. In Dwight MacDonald's 1952 publication, "Our Country and Our Culture," he says that mass culture was '"the very "spreading ooze" of conformity and commodification which threatened to engulf the possibility of individualism altogether"' (qtd. in Ross 45). Similar to MacDonald's conception of this popular entertainment, the "spreading ooze" of un-D.T. creates conformity that renders the brain and eyes useless. For Burroughs, the sex that squeezes out of the censor's pores destroys the thinking and seeing faculties, creating a subject that conforms to all the other consumers who, in turn, are consumed and assimilated into an indistinguishable mass. The efficient single orifice of bureaucracy synchronizes the circularity: the junk, excrement, and ooze expelled are precisely the material consumed: '"It's you," says the asshole to the man, "who will shut up in the end. Not me. Because we don't need you around here anymore. I can talk and eat *and* shit"' (111). As the host subject is turned into a home for the parasitic cells, the parallel is established: the popular entertainer (notably: a ventriloquist) who once controlled his product, becomes the servant to his creation. At this point, it becomes clear why Burroughs insists, "I am not an entertainer" (297).

Harris gives the most complete examination of "the sex that passes the censor" and ties the significance of these codes into an excellent analysis of *Naked Lunch* through the "Talking Asshole" episode. Harris argues: "The libidinal energies that pass the public censor, hungering desires so alienated that they can be commodified as images and fed back for consumption, emerge in fantasies of communication coded to bypass schizophrenic self-division" (227). Harris draws attention to Burroughs' letter to Ginsberg that states the "relation between bodily and cultural symptom" (227) in a clear way: "Or he gets message from subsidiary personality by farting in Morse code (Needless to say such obvious devices as automatic writing would never get by the Censor)" (Burroughs 311). The codes that the "Talking Asshole" speak or, in

Burroughs' conception, "fart" (311), shows how the libidinal desires encoded into the language of entertainment literature perform a service for those in control: "it becomes clear how the routine," writes Harris, "integrates two economies of censorship: the Freudian kind as well as that of the Hays production code" (227)

Typical to the Burroughsian world of double agents, it is certainly strange that Benway relates the parable of the "Talking Asshole" because it contradicts quite clearly with his role as the chief of mind-conditioning in Freeland. Benway, in this episode, simultaneously exposes the parasitic nature of his own operations and "slops a pearl" (74) to his protégé, educating him on the system that secures their power. Benway understands the system better than anyone: Pavlovian regiment of libidinal arousal and shame is the key to the success of any conditioning program. As the "manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems, an expert on all phases of interrogation, brainwashing, and control" (19), Benway ensures that the citizens of Freedland are "above all clean" through a program of "anxiety, and a special feeling of guilt" (19). The doctor's agenda, like the Mayan priests or the censorship bureaus, uses the dialectic to ensure that arousal produces fear, guilt, anxiety, and this transmutes the impulse to satisfy transgressive ("unclean") desires into the coterminous urge to weakly submit to them.

Naked Lunch deprograms the cultural need for codices and its correlative reliance on the masters, the 'experts,' who possess the key to decipher and thus control sacred texts. Burroughs frees the reader from this addiction to decoding by deliberately leaving that fix unsatisfied: "Here are the facts" he writes in *Junkie*, "There is no key, no secret that someone else has that he can give you" (xi). *Naked Lunch* brilliantly dramatizes this sentiment: in the book's final episode, the junkies seek out the sellers that usually feed their fix but the Chinese merchants turn them away, saying: "No glot...C'lom Friday" (196). *Naked Lunch* does the same to readers looking for answers: it cannot be consumed or slopped, it cannot be processed. Nothing of value can be extracted from its black meat. As Shneiderman writes, "*Sui generis*, *Naked Lunch* holds meaning for which there can be no adequate explanatory vocabulary....[it] is coded with its own interpretive counterarguments, and to subscribe to a particular narrative interpretation is to fall into its metanarrative traps" (12). The text's only meaning, therefore, is that it resists pre-conceived meaning structures. It is lesson, street wisdom, "a word to the wise guy" (210): whatever it is you are looking for, Burroughs is not selling it. Burroughs essentially disrupts the pre-sent signal of humanist ideology, creating an unintelligible work of art that *cannot* be opened

as a secure source of moral knowledge. This ticket has exploded.

The final sequence of the "talking asshole" episode dramatizes the desired situation. Benway states that, "Bureaus die when the structure of the state collapses" (113), commentating reflexively on the exploded state of *Naked Lunch.* The solution is "the building up of independent units to meet the needs of the people who participate in the functioning of the unit" (112), again referring to unconnected, individual textual units that make up the sequence of routines. Opposite to the bureaucratic state/homogenous work of art, these single units are a "cooperative" community and self-sufficient. "That is the road to follow" Burroughs states (112).

Later, the anecdote of the "talking asshole" is capped by another short tale about an Arab boy, a "real individual in bed" say the queens, who can play a flute with his ass:

> He could play a tune up and down the organ hitting the most erogenously sensitive spots, which are different on everyone, of course. Every lover had his special theme song which was perfect for him and rose to his climax. The boy was a great artist when it came to improvising new combines and special climaxes, some of them notes in the unknown, tie-ups of seeming discords that would suddenly break through each other and crash together with a stunning, hot sweet impact. (113)

The scene enacts an instance of collaboration where the one who 'gives' himself is the one who 'receives' (quite literally), while the subject who receives the other is the 'giver' of himself. This is the ideal relationship of exchange. In many ways, it parallels the narrator of "The Mayan Caper," the young boy who gives his anus over to the priest in order to receive access to the temple, thereby becoming a "great artist" (113) when he begins cutting and splicing the calendars into new arrangements.

To extrapolate these two episodes, within *Naked Lunch* Burroughs plays the role of the great artist who relinquishes control over his text and gives the receivers their pleasure. Indeed, because *Naked Lunch* provides no authorial explanation, no skeleton key, its individual episodes can satisfy any reading; it can, recall, be cut in any way. Perhaps it is better to say that *Naked Lunch* is all keys and no door to unlock because it is already opened. It is a new kind of beast; it is not a phallogocentric text; it *receives* from the reader in a duplicitous kind of homo-textual collaboration. Thus, *Naked Lunch* may be conceived as a kind of sacrificial text. It can be cut or penetrated at will. Yet, taking Burroughs' claim that "the way OUT is the way IN" (233), the focus shifts to the anus—a way out that becomes, in the homosexual sex act, the way in—as the

orifice which is sacrificed to gain entrance *into* the 'temple,' the sacred space, from where resistance can be launched. Burroughs professed to Ginsberg in a letter to desiring to write a novel for money, to "prostitut[ing] himself" (97) like the time-travelling detective, which is why *Naked Lunch*'s admission into circulation under sacrosanct modernist aesthetics may be part of the strategy of the double agent.

This act of sacrifice finds a parallel within *Naked Lunch*: "what is the origin of untouchable? Perhaps a fallen priest caste. In fact, untouchables perform a priestly function in themselves all human vileness" (99). Burroughs' text is untouchable, unspeakable, unconsumable by taking upon itself all the filth, drek, junk, excrement, and blood of American culture with the attitude of "*Son cosas de la vida*" (50). As such, it performs a priestly function by legitimating itself into the allegorical doctrine but, at the same time, its delegitimating strategies set in motion the procedures that cause the machinery to destroy itself: "the machine," he relates in "The Mayan Caper," "now gave the order to dismantle itself and kill the priests" (199). Disguised as performing a priestly function, it destroys the high priests of control. Indeed, Burroughs exploits the bureaucratic regime that generates admissible allegories to asphyxiate that very regime. The way in remains the way out.

CONCLUSION

"Not One but Many Silences"

It is fitting to end this study with *Naked Lunch* as the lifting of the ban on Burroughs' masterwork ushered in a censorship-free era of publication, a period that disconcertingly recalls the "*functioning* police state" (31) that Dr. Benway describes in the Bismarck Archipelago. Burroughs' concept of the complete internalization of the control-program prompts us to connect the purported 'end of literary obscenity' with the standstill that befalls the man from the country, his immobilization before the law whose sentinels no longer refuse to permit "illicit passages" (Johnson 7) because the open gate itself resists entry as an inconceivable passage. That this appears to be the fate of censorship criticism in the contemporary moment – an endgame, as Freshwater believes, that invites only silence – demonstrates the influence of the last of modernism's literary trials. If silence is the only solution in the current situation, then has the machinery of censorial persecution, even in what are ostensibly moments of 'defeat,' finally triumphed in bringing to a halt literature's important, heterodoxical purpose – that is, "writing's

ability *to* persecute, pursue (*persequor*), and harass not only those who claim...to detain a truth too hot for others to handle, but also those who might otherwise lose no sleep while the world around them burns" (Van den Abbeele 16)?

Silence, of course, is the ultimate goal of censorship; it is the point when the heteroglossia of language is brought to a standstill, when dialogues are replaced by unilateral commands, when voices have "nothing to say apart from what [they are] objectively authorized to say" (Bourdieu 138), and when authorities are able to "legislate" a receptive framework "that would make reading [interpretation] superfluous" (Holoquist 21). The many different ways available for censors to obstruct and eliminate expression has led to a nearly universal association of censorship with the acts of silencing. Indeed, the images conjured of controversial authors being hurled from cliffs (Aesop), drinking poison (Socrates), burning in flames (Bruno) or being imprisoned (Oscar Wilde) confirms not only Shaw's dictum that "assassination is the ultimate form of censorship" (705) but also that silence is the supreme and perfect sign of a functioning censored state. The resounding silence can only confirm the omnipotence of censorship and compel a weak submission.

The way out of this state of paralysis, however, may be the way in. As Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, writes, "There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (27). Like Burroughs, who believes that 'and' is the solution to the thought-controlling either/or "virus" of language, Foucault insists that "there is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say" and that "we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things" (27). From this particular perspective, it becomes explicable how Djuna Barnes' collusion, Henry Miller's correspondence, and William Burroughs' complicity-and-duplicity engage with the colloquy that censorship creates in the discursive network at the site of text. Though, as Burroughs believes, "You can never be sure" which side anyone in the "industry" is working for (121), it is paradoxically the particular silences underlined by these texts—those troubling absences in the official versions—which expand the realm of the debatable in orthodox discourse and critically disturb the foundations of *doxa*.

Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* demonstrates the author's ability not only to communicate the incommunicable, but also with "silence, cunning and exile" (16) to illuminate the lacuna of the incommunicable that surrounds the authoritative signifier. In a collection of essays appropriately

titled “Silence and Power,” Mary Lynn Broe insists that Barnes develops a “ritual of self-silencing, suggesting her refusal to privilege a single “authentic” voice and her uneasiness with canonical forms” (8). This is clear from *Nightwood* wherein Barnes inscribes the sub-textual underworld with the traces of censured voices and the stories that “do not amount to much” (18). As her own voice is submerged in the legendary dirt of literary history, she permits the authority of Eliot to validate this neglected gallery of voices – an act of collusion with the institutions of power to expose the fact that the canons, and the official narratives of history, are always attended by the disqualified, that every sign is an “infected carrier of the past” (Barnes 37). Barnes essentially abdicates her authority to legitimate these disqualified texts within the generic imprimaturs, directing us to the “curse” of unspeakability that permanently haunts them as they circulate the alternative channels of distribution.

In this way, the purported worthless (textual) bodies of *Nightwood* represent Benjamin’s claim that “In all language and linguistic creations there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated” (79). By exposing the failure of the patriarchal values exemplified in puritanical narratives of historical hygiene (the same ones that helped smuggle it past the censor) while refusing to “counter the failure,” and denying “the signifying value of her deconstruction,” Barnes’ creates a dangerously heterodox text: one that refuses to “give meaning beyond itself...[that] denies, in the end, the possibility of giving voice to...silence” (Lee 218-9). Barnes’ silence is ultimately so powerful because it undercuts all claims to mastery and authorization, including Eliot and Woolsey’s contract over her carnival of censored texts.

The voice of Henry Miller’s *homme moyen sensuel* may be as filthy as it is garrulous, but the goal is still a radical and anarchic silence. Miller’s obscenity, he says, is deployed just as the “use of the miraculous by the Masters” (19), to educate and convert in desperate times. Miller hopes to bring his audience to a state of awe and shock by the miraculous use of obscenity in the same way that religious miracles induce in their witnesses a deep, profound silence of gratitude and contemplation. Here, in this moment of revelation (“the ultimate expression of the obscene” [23]), mankind will catch a glimpse of what George Orwell and the high modernists decry as the most dangerous, unethical infraction art can offer: acceptance. As Ihab Hassan, in *The Literature of Silence*, writes of Miller’s work: “Miller cannot understand why man is unable to see the simple truth: to accept the world is to transform it profoundly” (50). Thus, the epistolary origins

of his "fuck everything" (60) novel indicates that his birth as a writer is an open letter, a violent declaration of outrage and "gob of spit" (2) to those things that propose to elevate the condition of man, particularly classic literature. The epistolary mode allows Miller to write his voice out of the confines and restrictions of the well-made work of art and into silence, thus explode the precepts of the Woolsey doctrine, a pact that mutes the voice of the average sexual man. Miller, in essence, writes the poisonous, censored discourse out of his system to achieve a place marked by healthy silence.

William Burroughs makes it clear that the word itself is the most powerful double agent of replicating, thought-controlling senders. In *The Yage Letters*, he writes: "IN THE BEGINNING WAS THEE WORD....COME OUT THE TIME WORD THE FOREVER...ALL OUT OF TIME AND INTO SPACE...THE WRITING OF SPACE...THE WRITING OF SILENCE. LOOK LOOK LOOK" (61-62). This writing induces the "stare" described by Susan Sontag in "The Aesthetics of Silence," a state of "cleansed, non-interfering vision" (16) similar to the awe provoked by the miracles of Miller's obscenity. Moreover, the idea of "non-interference" is essential in Burroughs' concept of apomorphine, the 'good policeman' that does its job and then goes: "Apomorphine is the only agent that can disintoxicate you and cut the enemy beam off your line. *Apomorphine and silence.* I order total resistance directed against this conspiracy in order to pay off peoples of the earth in ersatz bullshit" (226-227). Thus, *Naked Lunch*, as I have suggested, circulates like silent, non-interfering apomorphine, a medicinal double-agent that enters the system disguised as junk but deprograms the debilitating junk need that the body believes it satisfies.

Burroughs' "command" however illustrates how difficult it is to tell anyone in the "industry" (121) of censorship apart. When Burroughs writes that "Naked Lunch demands Silence from The Reader" (293), it is certainly unsettling how he approximates the thought-controllers he despises through a "will[ing] elimination of the need of deciphering, so that the meaning [he] and only [he], intends will be absorbed automatically rather than translated in the deed of reading" – an "absence" that "founds censorship's theory of reading" (Holquist 21). Indeed, when Burroughs cries, in "The Mayan Caper," "Cut word lines—cut music lines—Smash the control images—Smash the control machine—Burn the books—kill the priests—Kill! Kill! Kill!—" (199), he appears to have replaced the very censors ("Burn the books") he seeks to overthrow. That Burroughs repeatedly draws attention to the fact that all the parties involved in

the Interzone of word-economy inseparably blend together, and that “artists will confuse sending with creation” (141), should only enlighten readers of the inherent problems, the ineradicable complexities and the multitude of silences that exist when a text arrives before the law.

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