

VISION AND VOICE:
D. H. LAWRENCE, HENRY MILLER
AND JACK KEROUAC
AS AUTOBIOGRAPHERS OF THE SOUL

by
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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

ABSTRACT

At the root of this thesis lies a certain spirit that imbues the work of D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac, different as their work undeniably is. It is this spirit, or quality, difficult to pin down and circumscribe, that first instilled the trust and *belief* (if one may use a term in keeping with the subject) that there are certain significantly similar characteristics in what must remain three very different literary *voices*. Furthermore, it became increasingly clear that one could not divorce any comparative discussion of these voices from the specific world-view, philosophy or “metaphysic”, to use Lawrence’s term – in short, *vision* – that informs and shapes each writer’s voice. Significantly, it is inasmuch as their visions are comparable that their voices also are.

It is the “coming into being” of the modern individual that lies at the centre of the fiction of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac. It is my contention that their conceptions of the dynamic of this process have much in common, and that therefore, their voices share certain important characteristics. At the root of their respective visions lies the belief that modern western society has a stifling effect on the individual, a belief which results in a clear and unambiguous rejection of the modern social system, by both the writers and their central protagonists. For them it is essentially in society’s materialism, or mechanised conformity, that the wholeness of the individual, and a more vital sense of place in the world is threatened. Their call, then, is for the individual to reject social codes and conventions, and this “criminality” is reflected on a textual level in the urgent, exuberant and generally transgressive (also controversial, in terms of contemporary standards) nature of their fiction. In addition to this, the very dynamic of the individual’s “coming into being” is conceived of as a leaping off into the unknown, an abandonment to the chthonic flux and the flow of the (collective) unconscious. This is a “sacred instant”, which effects the dissolution of the individual (self-) consciousness, and, upon ceasing, propels the individual into a new sense of self. It is around such “sacred instants” that the work of these writers is organised.

For the purpose of placing them in the canon I have defined Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac as visionary writers, coming from a tradition decidedly Romantic in its focus on the (creative) individual. To this end I have included a necessarily brief consideration of basic Romantic tenets which I explore in terms of Lawrence’s, Miller’s and Kerouac’s shared literary hero, the American poet, Walt Whitman. In this opening discussion I explore and elaborate on some of the major qualities and concepts put to use in the course of this thesis. Whitman is useful as an

introduction also because he (like many of the Romantics) tends to blur the boundaries between himself and his protagonists/speakers. This is particularly the case with Miller and Kerouac, but Lawrence himself draws very strongly on autobiographical details in writing his fiction. Since, then, their fictions tend to draw on the writers' lives so overtly (while frequently altering and adapting the precise autobiographical facts), I have approached Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac as autobiographers of the soul, inasmuch as they trace the development of the individual soul (or self) in the context of external experiences.

OPSOMMING

Aan die kern van hierdie tesis lê 'n sekere gees wat die werk van D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller en Jack Kerouac deurweek, verskillend soos hulle werk ook al mag wees. Dit is hierdie gees, moeilik om vas te vat en te omskryf, wat oorspronklik die vertrouwe en *geloof* (om 'n woord te gebruik wat die onderwerp pas) verwek het dat daar sekere beduidend ooreenkomstige karaktertrekke is aan wat steeds drie baie verskillende literêre *stemme* bly. Verder het dit toenemend duidelik geword dat 'n mens nie enige vergelykende bespreking van hierdie stemme van die spesifieke wêreld-beskouing, filosofie of "metaphysic", om Lawrence se term te gebruik - in't kort, *visie* - wat elke skrywer se stem besiel en vorm, sou kon skei nie. Merkbaar is dit insoverre hulle visies vergelykbaar is dat hulle stemme ook is.

Dit is die "coming into being" (selfvolwaarding) van die moderne individu wat sentraal tot die fiksie van Lawrence, Miller en Kerouac lê. Ek is van mening dat hulle voorstellings van die dinamiek van hierdie proses baie in gemeen het, en dat hulle stemme daarom sekere belangrike eienskappe deel. Aan die kern van hulle onderskeie visies lê die geloof dat die moderne westerse samelewing 'n onderdrukkende invloed op die individu het, 'n geloof wat uiting vind in 'n duidelike en ondubbelsinnige verwerping van die moderne sosiale sisteem, beide deur die skrywers en hulle sentrale protagoniste. Vir hulle is dit grotendeels te danke aan die samelewing se materialisme, of gemeganiseerde konvensionaliteit, dat die heelheid van die individu, en 'n meer vitale gevoel van behoring in die wêreld bedreig word. Hulle beroep op die individu, dan, is vir die verwerping van sosiale kodes en gebruike, en hierdie "kriminaliteit" word ook op 'n tekstuele vlak gereflekteer in die dringende, uitbundige en oor die algemeen transgressiewe (asook kontroversieël, in terme van kontemporêre standaarde) aard van hulle fiksie. Daarby word die einste dinamiek van die individu se "coming into being" verstaan as 'n sprong in die onbekende in, 'n oorgawe aan die chtoniese stroming en die vloei van die (kollektiewe) onderbewussyn. Dit is 'n "sacred instant", wat die ontbinding van die individuele (self-) bewussyn teweegbring en, wanneer dit volbring is, die individu voortdryf na 'n nuwe self (-begrip). Dit is rondom sodanige "sacred instants" wat die werk van hierdie skrywers gestruktureer is.

Ten einde die plasing in die kanon te bewerkstellig identifiseer ek Lawrence, Miller en Kerouac as visionêre skrywers wat behoort aan 'n tradisie bepaald Romanties in sy fokus op die (kreatiewe) individu. Dien einde het ek 'n noodsaaklik bondige beskouing van basiese Romantiese tendense ingesluit, wat ek hoofsaaklik ondersoek aan die hand van Lawrence,

Miller en Kerouac se gemene literêre held, die Amerikaanse digter Walt Whitman. In hierdie inleidende bespreking ondersoek en brei ek uit op van die belangrikste eienskappe en konsepte wat deur die loop van hierdie tesis ingespan word. Whitman is nuttig as 'n inleiding ook omdat hy (soos baie van die Romantici) geneig is om die grense tussen homself en sy protagoniste/sprekers te verdof. Dit is veral die geval met Miller en Kerouac, maar Lawrence self maak redelik sterk staat op outobiografiese besonderhede in die skryf van sy fiksie. Omdat, dan, hulle fiksies geneig is om so openlik materiaal uit die skrywers se lewens te put (terwyl dit dikwels die juiste outobiografiese feite verander en aanpas), het ek Lawrence, Miller en Kerouac as outobiografeerders van die siel benader, insoverre hulle die ontwikkeling van die individuele siel (of self) in die konteks van uiterlike ervarings volg en dokumenteer.

For René, my wife and friend, my parents, Etienne and Joan, and my grandfather, Dawid, for
his great and contrary soul.

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It is it.

“Whoever you are holding me now in hand,

....

[I]t is not for what I have put into it that I have written this book,
Nor is it by reading it you will acquire it.”

(Walt Whitman)

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PART I: VISION

CHAPTER 1: KINETIC POETICS

D. H. Lawrence has written that “[m]an is essentially a soul. The soul is neither the body nor the spirit, but the central flame that burns between the two, as the flame of the lamp burns between the oil of the lamp and the oxygen of the air. The soul is to be obeyed, by the spirit, by the mind” (“Man” 389). It is this concept of the human being that underlies all of Lawrence’s writing, where, no matter to what extent the focus seems to be on the development or fulfilment of the body or mind, we can discern an intense interest in the emergence and growth of the soul. Lawrence’s obvious investment (emotional and mental) in the protagonists of his novels, and the well-documented similarities between what he wrote and what he lived, certainly serves to let us reconsider Henry Miller’s suggestion that what Lawrence wrote amounts to “an autobiography of his soul” (*Lawrence* 40). I would suggest that this term would serve equally well to define Miller’s works, as well as those of Jack Kerouac, and provides us with a useful guideline according to which the often overwhelming presence of apparently autobiographical details in their fiction might be accounted for and assessed.

Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac all make use of apparent alter egos in their fiction — in the case of Lawrence, the greater distance between the protagonist and author is accentuated by means of giving this character another name and, in some cases, even another sex, or by distributing autobiographical details among different characters. At the other extreme we have Henry Miller who, for the purpose of his fiction, invents a character also called “Henry Miller”. Whatever the case may be, it is important that we distinguish between the author in each case, and his protagonist, or alter ego. It is in the translation from the “real life” of the author to the story on paper that the creative, artistic process comes in, and the soul, as the central “flame”, functions as catalyst in this (combustive) process. If we liken the role of the soul here to the role of the imagination in the Romantic tradition, Lawrence’s comparison of the soul to a lamp immediately reminds us of Abrams’s use of the “lamp” image in his book on the Romantics, *The Mirror and the Lamp*. In fact, as I hope to demonstrate, it is very useful to consider Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac as descendants of the Romantics, who also tended to invite a blurring of borders between author and speaker/protagonist and who, for the most part, focused their efforts on the literary artist’s developing consciousness.

Harold Bloom has expressed the opinion that “[w]hat separates us from the Romantics is our loss of their faithless faith” (*Company* xiii). What he refers to here is clearly a quality of feeling, religious, if you will, although it is not linked ultimately with a specific *religion* of the

day, Christianity for the purpose of this discussion. As Schleiermacher claimed, “[f]aith is neither knowledge nor action; it is a trend of feeling; or a trend of the undividable self-consciousness” (Van den Berg 59). Van den Berg continues to suggest, in support of Schleiermacher, that “[f]aith is...an absolutely inner quality”, with no “external intermediary” (59). With faith comes an intensity of feeling and experience, as well as a sense of purpose, even if no specific goal is posited. To a large extent, the referent is no longer an external God, but the individual himself, or at least his artistic talents, imagination, soul and selfhood. Essentially, the imaginative poet *becomes* godlike. Blake, for instance, serves as a case in point: “Blake was the first and most radical of the Romantics who defined the creative imagination of the poet with the creative power of God” (Frye 130). What is important in this case, of course, is that God is not really denied; he is rivalled by the poet or, to a large extent, identified with the poet. This is made very clear in Bloom’s claim that “Blake wishes to take away from our vision of divinity everything that would make God a ‘wholly other’” (*Company* 1). The godlike in man himself becomes the focus of attention.

What all of this finally points to is the birth of a view of art as religion, a religion in which the artist fulfils the self-sanctified role of a prophet or seer. What this artist is after is the reconnection of the physical, everyday (waking) life and the life of the imagination (in the case of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac, the soul, and, since Freud, the unconscious), primarily in his own life, but also (although only secondarily) in the lives of his audience. The artistic process is one of becoming conscious. The problem that the artist is faced with in doing this is that the heightened consciousness inevitably leads to an increased self-consciousness, which contradicts the artist’s claim to a certain universality of vision. If the faculty of imagination is common to all people and, in this regard, conforms to Kant’s conception of the imagination as the common “unknown root” of understanding and sensation, the artist (as go-between or translator between this mysterious realm and the “objective” world) would have to prove that he is capable of going beyond self-consciousness. As Geoffrey Hartman says,

[t]o explore the transition from self-consciousness to imagination, and to achieve that transition while exploring it (and so to prove it still possible) is the Romantic purpose I find most crucial. The precariousness of that transition naturally evokes the idea of a journey; and in some later poets, like Rimbaud and Hart Crane, the motif of the journey has actually become a sustained metaphor for the experience of the artist during creation. This journey, of course, does not lead to what is generally called a *truth*: some final station for the mind. It remains as problematic a crossing as that from death to second life or from exile to redemption. These religious concepts, moreover, are often blended in, and remind us that Romantic art has a function analogous to that of religion.

The metaphor of the journey is central to my own thesis, and is one that will be closely considered at a later stage, but what is important here is, once again, the analogy to religion. When art starts to fulfil this role, in addition to its gaining a celebratory quality, it inevitably becomes somehow prescriptive — it tends to set out certain parameters within which life purportedly gains some unique meaning. There are overt links here to the Judeo-Christian teachings, according to which a “final station for the mind”, a higher truth, an ultimate insight can not be finally attained during life itself. However, whereas in the Judeo-Christian tradition some kind of ultimate truth is promised after life, the Romantics generally tended towards the notion that a life well lived generates its own meaning. It is the artist who, in continually connecting with the life of the imagination, undertakes the difficult (precarious) journey from self-consciousness (precarious since it implies a certain or possible loss of self), lives life to the full, and fulfils a purpose somehow more noble than that which most people are destined to fulfil.

There is an obvious elitist perception in the mind of the Romantic artist, and this inequality of man is premised entirely on a hierarchy of souls. This notion is advocated strongly by Lawrence, who argues in “Man is essentially a soul...” that although men should be equal socially, their souls can never be (389). Even Wordsworth (writing without the benefit of Nietzsche's philosophy), who generally argues in favour of the rustic life, the life of the vernacular man, purports to offer them (as well as the rest of mankind) news from beyond the reach of the unimaginative individual, and says of the artist that he needs (at least) “that first great gift, the vital soul” (*Prelude* 1.150). The “vital soul” then, is considered to be the essential quality an individual needs in order to become an artist. This gift (which implies a giver), however, is not a finished “product”, a source on which the artist can draw indiscriminately. The soul is, in fact, something that needs to be developed, and this development is achieved primarily by engaging in the artistic process:

Shelley's visionary despair, Keats's understanding of the poetical character, and Blake's doctrine of the contraries, reveal that self-consciousness cannot be overcome; and the very desire to overcome it, which poetry and imagination encourage, is part of a dialectical movement of 'soul making'.

(Hartman 49)

What becomes clear here is that, in the Romantic mind, the artist is not someone who chooses simply to write as a pastime or for an income — the artist *has* to write and, in the process of writing, rewrites himself, reinvents himself, makes himself. This is what lies at the root of the Romantic artist's interest in his own development as artist — he is sincerely self-obsessed. The sincerity lies in the belief that this “soul making” is not beyond mankind in general, that every

human being carries within them the capacity for growth and self-fulfilment. Once again, this is not an issue of equal growth, but rather, as Whitman says, that “[t]hat which fills its period and place is equal to any” (“Song of Myself” [44] 1142). It is the word “fills” that is highly important to this context. To fill something (to the brim) is to move precariously close to spilling. It is to face the possibility of transgressing the boundaries of one’s period and place, something that carries two possible risks: firstly, rejection by the historical system within which one’s place is defined, i.e. society, and, secondly, a loss of identity (which is closely linked to one’s milieu). Not to risk this, however, means to remain half full, unfulfilled. This is the risk the artist takes, the risk that, presumably, the “common man” is not willing to take. The artist then, in the tradition of such martyrs as Jesus, takes this risk in the name of mankind, the risk being the risk of dissolution, annihilation of the individual. In fact, as Wordsworth’s famous dictum suggests, it is precisely this excess that lies at the root of the artistic endeavour: “[A]ll good Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Preface 246). Wordsworth’s formulation is interesting in that it posits two major characteristics of poetry, or art in general: firstly, that art is always transgressive or excessive and, secondly, that it serves as an outlet for pressure created by the build-up of these “powerful feelings”. This pressure will, of course, not be “simply” personal, an individual affliction — being of time and place, the artist inevitably inherits the assumptions, hopes, struggles, contradictions and pathologies of his society. The artist, then, could be seen (according to one’s perspective) as either ensuring the health, or personifying the sickness of society.

The Romantic artist is essentially an idealist, but of a very specific type. The ideal is that of selfhood or self-fulfilment, never to be finally attained (for that would mean stasis, and there is no life in stasis), but continually to be sought after. There are moments in which a kind of fulfilment is achieved, but these are unstable because of their ultimate link with transgression, and the attendant danger of dissolution. Such moments are closely linked with artistic creation which, like sex and death, implies a certain intercourse with forces (chthonic or divine) beyond human boundaries. In the same way that the Christian prophet communes with God, or the Buddhist monk communes with the flux and flow of an indifferent universe, the artist communes with his Imagination or God, and makes an utterance. It is the soul that provides the alchemical space in which these elements are merged and shaped into an utterance. The imagination is an adjunct to, or aspect of this soul, as is the unconscious on which the twentieth century artist so strongly draws.

The Romantic artist's idealism extends to the rest of humanity, although that is not his primary concern. There is something inevitably didactic about the Romantic work — it hopes to change people. It purports to offer them a vision, perhaps an ideal for living. This vision, however, is generally not geared to explicit social reform (as is, for instance, the case with all forms of utopianism), but to the individual, orientated toward the (re)integration of mind, soul and body (or, in the case of Blake, “Head, Heart and Body”), and the filtering of “reality” through the imagination so as to create a sense of unity. As Northrop Frye (writing on Blake) puts it: “the end of poetic vision is the humanization of reality” (131). In pointing to this goal-orientated aspect of writing, Lawrence, in his essay on Whitman, chooses to exchange the word “didactic” for “moral”, a morality which is linked to a kind of faith that infuses the reintegrated man: “The essential function of art is moral. Not aesthetic, not decorative, not pastime and recreation. But moral. The essential function of art is moral. But a passionate, implicit morality, not didactic. A morality that changes the blood, rather than the mind” (“Whitman” 180). What is clear about this “morality” is that it is not a concept imposed on the body, but a law that is felt or believed to be right by the individual. In Lawrence's claim we are once again presented with the Romantic artist's central contradiction: prescriptiveness matched with a firm belief in the integrity of the individual. But, as Lawrence's rejection of the word “didactic” also suggests, it is perhaps less effective to prescribe than to inspire. The successful Romantic work is inspirational — in tracing the development of the protagonist (its author), it offers the reader a glimpse of the “vital soul” that serves as its basis. This goes beyond mere intellectual stimulation, and the reader starts to aspire towards a vital existence. The stasis of the soul is disrupted.

Walt Whitman, the exuberant American poet, offers an immediate, tangible link between the Romantics and the three writers that form the subject of this thesis. He is a development from the Romantics, his greatest contribution being a new poetic form, and is, by their own admission, a strong and direct influence on Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac. Whitman's style is decidedly American — enthusiastic, optimistic, cosmopolitan and expansive. His focus extends beyond nature, which formed, for instance, the virtually exclusive source of Wordsworth's poetic imagery, to include what is man-made, most notably New York City, as well as people in their social guises. In Whitman we find to an even greater extent the contradiction that lies at the basis of the Romantic consciousness, for he truly sings the praises of everyman, propounding a more inclusive view of mankind, and yet, does not avoid creating a sense of the artist's superiority. His artist, however, is of a very specific kind, as embodied in his poetic alter ego, to whom we are introduced in “Song of Myself”:

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos,
Disorderly fleshy and sensual eating drinking and breeding,
No sentimentalist no stander above men and women or
apart from them no more modest than immodest.
([24] 499-501)

In these lines a tension is clearly illustrated, a tension that we find to some extent in Lawrence, but much more so in the work of Whitman's fellow Americans, Miller and Kerouac. It is the tension between expressing and stressing the equality of people in their differences and samenesses, and exuberant self-proclamation, as the title "Song of Myself" also clearly expresses. This poet is in no way free from the urges and needs to which "common people" are subjected — in fact, he celebrates them, boasts of his very human physicality that is proved thereby. In this way too, Whitman takes a step forward from the Romantics. Although Blake referred to the uniting of Head, Heart and Body, it is not until Whitman that the body really gets its due. "Song of Myself", as many of Whitman's other poems, is filled with limbs, urges, hair, lips, loins, ribs, touching, flesh; in fact, the whole poem functions so strongly on a synaesthetic level that it virtually becomes a physical experience. The reader's sensory imagination becomes wholly engaged.

In his poetry, Whitman effects a kind of affirmative action on behalf of the body. This may create the impression that he is somehow physically preoccupied or obsessed. It is the kind of accusation many writers have had to face. But Whitman is clear on this issue: "I am the poet of the body,/ And I am the poet of the soul" ("Song of Myself" [21] 422-423). The relation between these he points out when he says that "[w]e realize the soul only by you, you faithful solids and fluids" (quoted in Matthiessen 525). There is no divorcing the soul from the body — it is on this assumption that Whitman's poetry is based (although it rarely forms the subject of his poetry itself). To Whitman, the body is man's link to the universe, to all matter that constitutes it. His reference to "faithful solids and fluids" demonstrates his sense of reliance on matter. There is a certain 'logic' to the flux and flow of all matter, an "intricate purpose" ("Song of Myself" [19] 381) he sees in all of nature. This is Whitman's stability, from which he moves forward with confidence.

Needless to say, Whitman's focus on the body did not strike a chord with his fellow Americans. In spite of the fact that his praises were sung by Ralph Waldo Emerson, he had to print two editions of his *Leaves of Grass* himself before it was finally picked up by a publisher, and even then his book met mostly with resistance, from critics as well as the general public. Censorship, however, was a possible "remedy" he would not consider. One might assume that

he did not bother too much with the critics anyway for, from the start, Whitman propounded a highly anti-intellectual stance. In “Song of Myself” he seems to equate a learned, educated response to literature to a kind of systematic measuring of the earth, a pinning down of matter:

Have you reckoned a thousand acres much? Have you reckoned
the earth much?

Have you practiced so long how to read?

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin
of all poems,

You shall possess the good of the earth and sun . . . there are
millions of suns left,

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand

.....

You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.

([2] 22-29)

There is a degree of sarcasm or mockery to Whitman’s voice here, culminating in the question, “[h]ave you felt *so proud* to get at the meaning of poems?” (*emphasis added*) At this point, also, the reader finally becomes aware that *he* is being addressed; what is more, the very fact of his reading is questioned. For Whitman, there is no pinning down of meaning, as there is no pinning down of matter — all is flux and flow. Life is beyond “reckon[ing]” (to be differentiated from “tallying”, which for Whitman has a positive meaning¹) and can never be finally calculated. Whitman even seems to suggest that the “meaning of poems” is infinitely less important or worth discovering than their “origin”, undefined except for its link to the “good of the earth and sun”. All this seems uselessly general, although one cannot fail to recognise Whitman’s assumed role as a kind of spiritual guide in this discovery, until the reader is asked to disregard even Whitman’s perspective — this is Whitman’s final warning to the reader that “Song of Myself” will be exactly what its title promises it to be. The “origin of all poems” is finally pinpointed in a process: “You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself”. At the outset of his great poem, Whitman locates the origin of poetry in the individual who, on the one hand, experiences a multi-faceted reality and listens, in true democratic style, to all sides and, on the other hand, manages to refine this diversity of input through selection, or “filter[ing]”. This is the image Whitman wishes to project of himself.

Many a critic has considered Whitman to be a rather imperfect “filter”, especially in reference to what is generally called his catalogues, consisting usually of a list of sights and sounds presented in a repetitive sentence structure. These catalogues, however, need to be considered

¹ For an interesting discussion of Whitman’s use of “tallying”, see Bloom’s “Walt Whitman as Center of the American Canon.” *The Western Canon*. London: Papermac, 1995. 264-290

in the light of Whitman's "project". As David Daiches suggests, "Whitman is concerned to build up in his own special way a picture of the relationship of his self, first to other selves, secondly to the external world of nature, and thirdly to other moments in time than the moment which he is experiencing now" (32). This approach is comprehensive to the extreme. What is clear is that Whitman's main concern lies with self-exploration, a project which requires the examination of the self's make-up, and the relation of the self to space and time (also on a historical level). Where these intersect, we have *experience*, but Whitman is at pains to contextualise his experiences, since their "meaning" resides in the complex interplay between his selves (which also partake of others' selves), his place (which shares certain characteristics with other places) and his time (which has links with other times). Once again, we see the tension between the specific and the universal.

Harold Bloom suggests that the "Jesus of the American religion is neither the crucified man nor the God of the Ascension, but rather the resurrected man who passes forty days with the disciples, forty days about which the new testament tells us virtually nothing" ("Walt Whitman" 267), before going on to say that "Whitman's version of the American religion relies upon *Song of Myself*'s most original aspect, its psychic cartography of three components in each of us: soul, self, and real me or me myself" (270). The main contrast is between soul and self, but this self is subdivided again into the "my self" of the poem's title, which Bloom identifies with the robust persona, Walt Whitman, to whom we are introduced in section 24, and "the nuanced, feminine self, which he calls 'the real me' or 'me myself'....[which] is not only a known realm but the faculty of knowing" (270). What is of especial interest to us, however, is the way in which Bloom accounts for Whitman's use of the word "soul":

[T]he soul, like the body, is very much a part of nature, a somewhat alienated nature. By the soul, Whitman means character or ethos as opposed to the self, by which he means personality or pathos.... So when Whitman writes 'my soul' he means his own dark side, the estranged or alienated component in his nature.

(270)

What one should note here is the basic identification of the soul with the unconscious, the mysterious "dark side" of the self. Right at the beginning of "Song of Myself", it is this soul that is invoked:

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer
grass.

([1] 4-5)

This is the context within which the poem finds utterance: the poet, in observing (in a trance-like state) the most minute natural detail, opening himself to the influence of his “dark side”, his unconscious.

The soul, like the body, seems to be a given, much in the way that Wordsworth’s “vital soul” was a “gift”. Yet it is clear that the soul is not overtly present — it needs to be “invite[d]”, to be invoked. For all Whitman’s familiarity with the soul, it is clear that this invitation has the quality of a religious ceremony, with a spiritual end in mind. This quality becomes overt in section 5 of “Song of Myself”, where Whitman directly addresses the soul, repeating the invitation:

Loafe with me on the grass loose the stop from your throat,
Not words, not music or rhyme I want not custom or
lecture, not even the best,
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice.

([5] 75-77)

The soul is urged to utterance, to break its usually imposed silence. This utterance is not meant to appeal to reason, or to moral, aesthetic or artistic sensibilities, but instead, seems to take on the quality of a mantra, a religious, mystic “hum”. This “hum” initiates a kind of ritual, with strong sexual overtones:

I mind how we lay in June, such a transparent summer morning;
You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned over
upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your
tongue into my barestript heart,
And reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my
feet.

([5] 78-81)

There is a very pagan quality to this “ritual”, especially in its merging of the sexual and sacrificial (the “plung[ing]” of the “tongue into my barestript heart” is strongly suggestive of religious sacrifice). The effect of this “ritual” is twofold - firstly, the speaker’s communion with the earth and the rest of mankind is re-established and, secondly, the speaker communes with God. Whitman’s poetry draws firmly on the Christian tradition:

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and joy and
knowledge that pass all the art and argument of the earth;
And I know that the hand of God is the elderhand of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the eldest brother of my
own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers and the
women my sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love;
And limitless are the leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,

And mossy scabs of the wormfence, and heaped stones, and
elder and mullen and pokeweed.

([5] 82-89)

Whitman's vision is all-inclusive, and tends to blur the distinctions between the physical and the spiritual. Instead of rejecting Christianity outright, he reinvents, redefines and personalises it, re-establishing its link to the pagan, and its celebration of the chthonic. The same mutual dependence that defines the relationship between the body and soul seems to exist between nature and God. It is precisely this kind of relation that is explored to a large extent by Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac. For all of them, Christianity is highly personalised, integrated into a personal "metaphysic", but none of them manage to finally renounce it. The gift of the soul has to come from somewhere.

As Daiches suggests, in Whitman's poetry the self is also explored in relation to "the external world of nature" and "other moments in time than the one which he is experiencing now" (32). As we have just seen, it is the soul that establishes the sense of unity across space and time. For the most part, however, the space defined was America, while the time was that of the great westward expansion. The notion of the frontier was highly important to Whitman, who saw in the poet a parallel role to that of the pioneer, who sets out into the unknown and its attendant dangers. To Whitman the poet is a pioneer whose "love above all love has leisure and expanse...he leaves room ahead of himself...he places himself where the future becomes present...he glows a moment on the extremest verge" (Preface 11-12). Once again, the view of the poet as transgressive emerges — the poet travels to the boundaries of human experience, living at the forefront of his time with no idea of what he will be facing. It also seems as though it is not so much the 'facing' that is important as the simple fact of living under these conditions, as on the frontier, where one finds the "space and ruggedness and nonchalance that the soul loves" (Preface 5). It is here that "Walt Whitman" feels at home:

I know I have the best of time and space - and that I was never
measured, and never will be measured.
I tramp a perpetual journey.

("Song of Myself" [46] 1198-1199)

This is the true home of the soul — with life conceived of as a journey, it is essential that one keep travelling, whether one is leading, or being led — and the soul rejoices in the forefront. As Whitman exuberantly exclaims in "Song of the Open Road",

I think heroic deeds were all conceiv'd in the open air, and all
free poems also,
I think I could stop here myself and do miracles.

([4] 49-50)

The word “open” is the operative one here — as in the poem’s title, it suggests the vast vista of possibilities that opens up where there are no social restrictions and, more specifically, no set goal, and leads the speaker to a point of transgressive rebelliousness: “From this hour forth I ordain myself loos’d of limits and imaginary lines” ([5] 53). Lawrence was right, of course, to recognise the irony in proclaiming this while still sticking to the road, but we need to recognise in Whitman’s poetry a sense of linear development towards a kind of wisdom. The acquisition of this wisdom is completely dependent on the journey down the open road, with its “open” end:

Here is the test of wisdom,
 Wisdom is not finally tested in schools,
 Wisdom cannot be pass’d from the one having it to another not
 having it,
 Wisdom is of the soul, is not susceptible of proof, is its own
 proof,
 Applies to all stages and objects and qualities and is content,
 Is the certainty of the reality and immortality of things, and the
 excellence of things;
 Something there is in the float of the sight of things that
 provokes it out of the soul.

(“Song of the Open Road” [6] 76-82)

This wisdom is highly individual — it is generated by the soul “interpreting” the external world, i.e. nature. The link to the Romantics’ notion of the imagination is overt. This wisdom is exuberant and unifying, rejoicing in “the excellence of things”. What is required of the individual who seeks this is to cast his lot upon the “open road” and to be open to the “float of the sight of things” that “provokes it out of the soul”. In “Song of Myself” it is the observation of “a spear of summer grass” that effects this provocation, and leads the speaker to his spiritual vision, which Whitman equates with wisdom, and in section 33 of this poem we find a highly exuberant speaker returning to the image of himself “loaf[ing] on the grass” with his soul:

Swift wind! Space! My soul! Now I know it is true what I
 guessed at;
 What I guessed when I loafed on the grass,
 What I guessed while I lay alone in my bed and again as I
 walked the beach under the paling stars of the morning.

My ties and ballasts leave me I travel I sailmy
 elbows rest in the sea-gaps,
 I skirt the sierras my palms cover continents,
 I am afoot with my vision.

([33] 709-714)

The images are larger than life, with the visionary poet appearing as a kind of colossus, a divine being, freed from the “ties and ballasts” that kept it chained. A sense of kinesis is created. We can literally see “Walt Whitman” grow from the individual who “loafed on the

grass”, “lay alone in bed”, and so on, to the poet-god, “afoot with [his] vision”. It is a supreme moment of transgression, verging on self-deification.

The focus, however, does not veer from the details of everyday life; in fact, we follow the racing Whitman through one of his more substantial catalogues, with its apparent humdrum listing of numerous sights and sounds from the American continent. There is something hungry, greedy and voracious about this presentation, which is more or less interrupted, after more than a hundred and fifty lines, by the following: “I fly the flight of the fluid and swallowing soul” ([33] 799). Where previously a “spear of summer grass” was a kind of catalyst to the soul’s emergence from silence, it now becomes clear that *all* of life serves as food for the soul. The images are not merely taken from nature, but also from society, from the man-made: cities, farmhouses, cemeteries, kitchens, steamships, churches, shops. As Matthiessen suggests, Whitman “thought of himself both as the poet of the city as well as the poet of nature, differing sharply in this from Wordsworth and Baudelaire” (543). The soul feeds on all signs of life, which for Whitman are intricately connected, and in his poetry it is predominantly the eye through which his impressions of the external world pass. There is something very spontaneous and unplanned about the objects, people and places that Whitman chooses to present to the reader, as well as the sequence in which it is done. According to Tanner, Whitman deliberately assumes the persona of a vernacular narrator with a “naive open eye”(67). This “undiscriminating” view of life lies at the centre of Whitman’s poetry which, on the one hand, tries to give us a comprehensive view of America and, on the other, suggests that

...the unseen is proved by the seen,
Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.
([3] 45-46)

Once again we see how Whitman’s “mysticism” is rooted in reality, more specifically, the diverse components that constitute it. Out of context, these catalogues could be used to stress the lack of unity in modern life, but Whitman uses them in a celebratory fashion, acknowledging diversity while stressing the underlying unity, or continuity. As Tanner suggests, “[t]he order in which objects swarm the eye, the sequence in which the eye feels the urgent tug of one thing, the subtle allurements of another, this is an order which cannot be improved on. Indeed, the important thing is not to disturb it” (66). The reader who follows Whitman’s mood, travels with him from the start of the poem, will find these catalogues making sense. By placing these lists before the reader, he is challenging the reader to find a pattern in the apparent discontinuity or discord, while inspiring an assurance that it is there to be found. What perhaps finally differentiates Whitman from the Romantics is a greater belief

in the significance of external “reality”, even if it be man-made. Everywhere, he senses the “intricate purpose” that the soul alone can interpret.

For all his “universality” and inclusiveness, Whitman is a national poet, decidedly American. As we have seen, this identity is central to his poetic persona, “Walt Whitman, an American” (“Song of Myself” [24] 499), who tells heroic tales of his own country (about Alamo and the “frigate fight” in sections 34-36, for instance) and occasionally indulges a blind patriotism, referring to America as a “teeming nation of nations” (Preface 5). This last point, however, we need to see in the light of America’s very tangible growth, and the energy that invests a country at times of expansion. It is the word “teeming” that is the operative one here — America “teems” in the way that Whitman’s catalogues do. Multi-racial, multi-cultural, with great debates arising all over the place, America seemed a nation as representative of variety as one could hope for. However, as suggested before, the major attraction for Whitman was America’s frontier culture, firstly, because America itself was established by pioneers and, secondly, because there still was a very real Western frontier — America had not yet gone as far as it could go. This was, of course, to change soon; nevertheless, the West had a great influence on Whitman’s literary consciousness, as it had (partially because of his own literary mythologising of the West) on many later American writers.

Fussel draws a direct collary between the West and Whitman’s literary growth: “Whitman grew up in the decades preceding the Civil War, when American literature and the American West were practically synonymous terms; Whitman as poet was formed by his idea of the West, and his poetic talents were consecrated to that idea” (397). The poet is to be a frontiersman in the true sense of the word, a traveller, both physically and spiritually (because the two are not to be separated). In Whitman’s poetry, the soul needs an abundance of space and time, and direct contact with the elements, i.e. a heightened sense of physicality, to be delivered from its silence. Freedom from the intricate details of cultural codes is essential, so that the poet appears as basically uncivilised, “from anywhere and everywhere, but mostly from the metaphorical West, state or territory, ‘a wandering savage’” (Fussel 411). What is finally staved off is stasis, constriction, schedule; anything that would stifle the soul. It also appears as though this course of action is not merely open to the poet, but to anyone with the necessary “heroic” will. This is the only road of personal fulfilment or salvation, and Whitman, for all his pagan pantheism and his insistence on the importance of living life itself, even foresees a goal at the end of the road: “Our rendezvous is fitly appointed God will be there and wait till we come” (“Song of Myself” [45] 1197). In the context of Whitman’s

poetry, however, this goal seems somewhat incidental to the actual travelling — the traveller is not meant to keep his eye on God, but on nature and mankind. In the same way that the Christian Jesus (God's physical incarnation on earth) refers to himself as the only path by which God may be reached, so Whitman stresses the fact that our only road to the divine is through the actuality of life around us. Unlike Jesus (or the Romantic artist), however, no one can take up this burden in the name of mankind. The responsibility rests with the individual: "Not I, not anyone else can travel that road for you,/ You must travel it for yourself" ("Song of Myself" [46] 1207-1208).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Romanticism, for all practical intents and purposes, ended with Nietzsche and the coming of Freud. Yet the modernism that was to dominate the literary scene for much of the twentieth century owed a lot to this 'movement' that stressed so strongly the importance of the creative individual. What is lost, of course, for the most part was what Bloom refers to as the Romantics' "faithless faith" (*Company* xiii). In the process, art became more of an intellectual game, relying to a large extent on literary and personal allusions, philosophical conundrums, and so forth. The nineteenth-century struggle with God was basically over — God was dead, and life ultimately absurd, chaotic, meaningless. The notion of "soul" was exchanged for the less religious and marginally more scientific "unconscious".

It was Nietzsche who finally uttered the famous cry, "God is dead!" (we may ask ourselves whether this was a cry of triumph or despair) and sounded the death-knell for Christianity's dominance over Western civilisation. The crux of his criticism lay in this, that "[f]rom the start Christianity was, essentially and fundamentally, the embodiment of disgust and antipathy for life, merely disguised, concealed, got up as the belief in an 'other' or 'better' life" ("Self-Criticism" 8). The Christian approach to life is criticised and rejected for its focus on a morality premised entirely on the promise of a better after-life. Since this morality restricted, through various laws, man's existence on earth, Nietzsche clearly had a sense of life being wasted on empty ideals. However, he still acknowledges man's need to question the conditions for his existence, and posits art as the proper way of doing this: "[A]rt — and not morality — is...the proper *metaphysical* activity of man.... [T]he existence of the world is *justified* only as an aesthetic phenomenon" ("Self-Criticism" 7). Art and morality are seen as two opposing principles, until Lawrence takes the step which makes art moral. With that step the substitution of art for religion becomes complete.

What is interesting to note is that Nietzsche is finally also concerned with the soul, the source of expression which he found stifled by the morality he criticised. In writing about the reception of his own *The Birth of Tragedy* (1871), he states that “[t]his was the voice — they said suspiciously — of some thing like a mystical and almost maenadic soul, stammering laboriously and at random in a foreign tongue, almost unsure whether it wished to communicate or conceal” (“Self-Criticism” 6). What strikes one immediately is the image created of divine inspiration, of the soul speaking as a voice from beyond. Nietzsche concludes this essay on a note of frustration (perhaps with his more philosophical mode of presentation): “It should have been *singing*, this ‘new soul’, not speaking!” (“Self-Criticism” 6). Singing, as an inspired, exuberant form of expression (note also the titles of Whitman’s poems, “Song of Myself” and “Song of the Open Road”), is contrasted here to speaking, which is more rational, considered and explicatory. Nietzsche is at pains to explain the spontaneous source of his expression, something that his readers always sense: “Nietzsche took great pride in not having produced anything resembling a systematic philosophy. What he has left us instead might be described as the intellectual echo of the recurrent oscillations of his soul, observed with the utmost sensitivity” (Schenk 233). It is because of this source that Nietzsche’s work becomes “effective”, or inspirational, instilling in the reader a sense of urgency (to be contrasted with mere intellectual stimulation). It achieves this in spite of any flaws that might be offensive to the aesthetic sensibilities — in his introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy*, Michael Tanner, commenting on its flaws and its rejection by some critics, bases his defence of Nietzsche on this quality of his work: “But it has a ferocity of conviction and exhilarating energy which put it in that small class of books in which the medium appears to dictate the message, or even to replace it” (xxvi). There is a sense in which Nietzsche convinces by sheer force of will, where his own conviction becomes inspiring and irresistible.

In Nietzsche’s concept of the soul there is a shift from the Romantics. That shift is based essentially on a belief in the inequality of souls:

Nietzsche’s anti-egalitarianism, or Aristocratic Radicalism as Georg Brandes called it, was far more radical than that of the Romantics.... In point of fact one of his main objections to Christianity lay precisely in the fact that that religion presupposes the equal value of all human souls.

(Schenk 240)

This belief has, for obvious reasons, been criticised and seems especially untenable as a philosophical stance in the late twentieth century, after the coming and going of Hitler, whose association with Nietzsche seems regrettably established. It is also a view that is significantly at odds with Whitman’s more democratic view of humanity (although this clearly does not

exclude the possibility of self-proclamation). It is between these two writers that Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac variously place themselves and find their voices. Lawrence, as a European, appears to have been influenced more directly by Nietzsche's philosophy, whereas Kerouac, whose travels were essentially limited to the North American continent, takes a more Whitmanesque view of things. Interestingly, it is Miller, the American who found his voice in Europe, who seems to juggle most clearly the two points of view.

The notion of "soul" is central to the thought and work of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac, and is the central binding image of this thesis. Interestingly, this unity of focus creates many similarities in their approach to a variety of metaphysical, as well as physical, questions and issues. To a large extent, these have developed from the Romantics, although it is Whitman's Romanticism, what Paglia refers to as "American Romanticism" or "Late Decadent Romanticism" (572), that has a direct influence on them. This influence is, to varying degrees, qualified by Nietzsche's philosophy. The recognition of these influences provides a helpful basis for the comparison of the works of three inspirational writers who are significantly divided by time and space.

CHAPTER 2: AUTOBIOGRAPHING THE SOUL

Underlying the apparent “freedom” of the writers under discussion, each one of them had a central programme, the journey to selfhood. Kerouac “defined his mission as ‘self-ultimacy’, which included the creation of a new ‘artistic morality’” (Nicosia *Memory* 134). This “mission” one could define as both his artistic mission and his “mission in life”, for the two were for all practical intents and purposes one. The word “mission” is also useful in the sense that it expresses the doggedness with which Kerouac pursued this goal, something which might have rendered inevitable his eventual descent into alcoholism. At any rate, it is a “mission” shared by Miller and Lawrence, and lies at the root of their literary output. Lawrence has stated unequivocally that “[t]he final aim of every living thing, creature or being is the full achievement of itself” (“Study” 12). It is the self-creation that is important, the “lifelong ‘struggle for self-responsibility’” (Spilka 30), the individual’s “coming into being”, as opposed to his literary creation itself, which is a mere by-product, “the fruit” (it is, however, not merely artistic works that qualify as “fruit” – any work is conceived of as such). Lawrence makes this clear in terms highly reminiscent of Whitman: “Not the work I shall produce, but the real Me I shall achieve, that is the consideration; of the complete Me will come the complete fruit of me, the work, the children” (“Study” 12-13). Man’s life is identified as the ultimate work of art, and the mystery that informs and underlies all of man’s artistic creations. In a sense, art will always mirror life, but the question lies in this: do we find mirrored there that which is rational, explicable and familiar, or does something uncanny shine through the surface (to return to Abrams’ “lamp” image) that we did not see clearly before, or not at all. The difference between these two “kinds” of art can be usefully explained according to the Jungian differentiation between the psychological mode of artistic expression, and the visionary, and we will return to these categories.

What needs to be made clear at this point is that, although the language employed by Lawrence especially seems to suggest that some final “coming into being”, a moment of self-fulfilment, can be achieved in life, neither Miller, Kerouac or himself believed in such a possibility. In fact, their writing careers mostly inspired a growing realisation that life exists in opposites which can and should never be reconciled in the true sense of the word, a realisation in various ways dramatised in their novels. Miller, writing on Lawrence (and especially his essay, “The Crown”), explains how one should interpret the sense of reconciliation that is nevertheless created: “Since there is no ultimate solution for the divided being which man is,

the thing to do is to deify the conflict itself. Thus the Holy Ghost” (*Lawrence* 155) in Lawrence’s literature. This would seem to be the central point in the representation of life offered by all three writers. The conflict is consecrated. Their novels are shot through with characters in whom conflict is artificially “resolved”, and who grow static as a result. They settle into certain roles and eventually become defined by these; in a sense, they come across as *types*. To a certain extent this explains the frequent absence of traditional character development in Miller and Kerouac’s work. Lawrence, on the other hand, prefers to trace, through meticulous characterisation, the development of people into these types (and by virtue of that, problematises the notion of *type* itself) – his individuals resist typification.

The reintegration of mind, soul and body referred to in the previous chapter is not a final achievement of self-fulfilment (which would, in itself, imply stasis). Instead, it is a reestablishment of the relations, the conflict, between these “principles”, if we can call them such, which precludes the dominance of the one over the other. The soul is forced to live in the world, the only place where it has its meaning. In this regard, mind and body serve as “anchors”, mind encompassing knowledge, norms, traditions, and so forth (all of which flow from constructed world), and body, related to matter and its relation to the chthonic forces (inherited world). Conversely, the soul serves as a unifying factor between these two principles which we can recognise as the Apollonian and the Dionysian. While life has its existence in and gains meaning from the conflict between the two, so art emerges as a “by-product” of this conflict. To continue with the Nietzschean terminology then, from the Apollonian we gain, primarily, *form* (a condition for expression), from the Dionysian, matter, spirit, intoxication (the urge to express). This is what leads Nietzsche to say that “[w]e shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics when we have succeeded in perceiving directly, and not only through logical reasoning, that art derives its continuous development from the duality of the *Apolline* and *Dionysiac*, just as the reproduction of the species depends on the duality of the sexes” (*Birth* 14). Neither can exist without the other, but what *is* possible – in fact, inevitable – is that the writer will be biased in favour of one. By completely cutting away either one, art, and for all practical intents and purposes, life, ceases to exist. The alchemical space in which these two principles are momentarily fused is the soul.

In a letter included in his essay, “Dionysus and the Beat Generation and Four Letters on the Archetype”, William Everson includes a diagrammatic presentation of what he defines as different types of Dionysian authors (193). First, he defines two main groups, namely the

“Other Worldly” (that “takes a pessimistic view of human life”) and the “This Worldly” (that “takes an affirmative & optimistic view of human life”). The “Other Worldly” are further divided into the “religious” and the “sceptical”, but of interest to us is the sub-division of the “This Worldly”, into the “hot/passionate” and the “cool/critical”. It is in this “hot/passionate” group that we find listed (among numerous others) the names of Whitman, Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac. This classification identifies the sense of exuberance created by all these writers, as well as their commitment to the physical world – it also identifies them as writers who are Dionysian. For the Dionysian writer then, the form given to expression is not as important as the “intoxication” that *informs* that expression, something which often leads him open to the charge of formlessness from his more Apollonian-minded contemporaries. This issue will be thoroughly considered in Part II of this thesis. For now, what does call for further exploration is the nature of what has been referred to by Nietzsche as “intoxication”, a word which conjures up the idea of excess. As Blake suggested in “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”, “[t]he road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom”, and Nietzsche clearly shares that belief: “Excess was revealed as truth, contradiction; the bliss born of pain spoke from the heart of nature” (*Birth* 27). In a way, excess both leads to wisdom while flowing from it. This wisdom is arguably of the kind advocated by Whitman in his “Song of the Open Road”, and is somehow related to the “heart of nature”. The “intoxication” (implying both exuberance and madness) that forces expression stems from the wisdom acquired by staring into the chaotic “heart of nature”.

The best way of clarifying these issues is to alter our terminology. Jane Nelson has suggested that Miller’s works certainly make more sense when he is considered as a writer whose work Jung would characterise as *visionary* (13). Jung differentiates between the *psychological* and *visionary* modes of artistic creation, which are roughly analogous to the Apollonian and Dionysian, and differ from each other in terms of subject matter and methodology. Bartlett explains that

[t]he psychological mode (which is tropic) draws on its subject matter from the “vast realm of conscious human experience - from the vivid foreground of life”. The psychological artist tends to be introverted, however, and sees his role as bringing some sort of meaning and order to this experience.... The mode is *psychological* because it is understandable, knowable.... The artist whose disposition is toward the psychological sees himself primarily as a craftsman...[and] his method of composition is a conscious one; that is, in his attempt to bring the objective world into clearer focus (or to create an objective world), he will remain aware of his self-imposed role as shaper and definer.

(117-118)

Our sense of what constitutes a novelistic form is largely influenced by this view of writing, and partially explains why writers like Miller and Kerouac have had a rather chilly reception in

the literary world. Lawrence, on the other hand, has a much stronger sense of craftsmanship, and his work has strong links with the psychological mode of artistic creation. However, he can ultimately be defined only as a visionary writer:

[T]he subject matter of the *visionary* mode is for Jung a little more difficult to define, being “a strange something that derives its existence from the hinterland of man’s mind”.... Because for the extraverted artist, the visionary, *the phenomenal world is symbolic*, his *art begins in the concrete*, though he assumes a registration with the archaic and cosmic.... His impulse is finally not to bring order or meaning to the world, but rather to lead us to the order and meaning which resides there.

(Bartlett 118, *emphasis added*)

This is the prophetic role that Whitman assumes in his poems, in which he leads us to the minute, concrete details of life, and invites us, infectiously and proudly, to find meaning there. The visionary writer expresses himself symbolically through the concrete, thereby embodying and revealing what Jung calls the “*archetypes of the collective unconscious*” (Bartlett 116). On a deeper level than the individual unconscious, the collective unconscious represents a kind of shared primal pool that underlies all human consciousness across space and time. The archetypes that emerge from this collective are the same for all cultures at all times in history, and thus represent a kind of stability, a virtual unchangeable, although predominantly obscured by the workings of the conscious mind. The visionary artist is ultimately concerned with making these archetypes manifest in symbols which render them “tangible”, “graspable” to the receptive conscious mind.

Sagar talks of “Lawrence’s realisation that symbolism is not an aesthetic matter..., but rather an alternative language, alternative, that is, to the language of individualism” (*Life* 125). From this point on, Lawrence couldn’t help but write symbolically, and this shift explains the reason why his writing acquires the impact of the Bible’s best moments, instead of coming across simply as tepid accounts of country folk frolicking and fighting in towns and cities. The Lawrence character is always on a quest, and that quest is for the attainment of selfhood. In keeping with Lawrence’s dissatisfaction with the age, that quest generally takes the form of a rejection of contemporary norms and values, especially with regard to economic stability and sexual conduct, in favour of a more “permanent” morality. He advocates a return to a mystic view of life and warns that this mysticism has no being without an acknowledgement of the highly physical nature of man. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the locus of this mystic sense is the soul, through which the life of the mind is reconnected to the life of the body. Miller correctly points out that “in accord with the age he [Lawrence] finds the soul in the unconscious processes” (*Lawrence* 127). To a large extent then, the growth of the soul, the

individual's coming into being, is related to the exploration and expression of the unconscious, which implies manifesting it. In a sense this will always be transgressive, in that that which has been *kept* submerged is now brought to light. Ultimately, the notion of a collective unconscious is threatening to the individual's very sense of autonomy (in addition to other elevated principles such as rationality) – the language of individualism – and traditionally the most effective defence mechanism has been denial.

This denial forms the subject of much of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac's writing, whether it be fictional, polemical or philosophical. As suggested above, Lawrence conceived of Western civilisation as presenting a denial of life, which adversely influences the individual's chances of attaining selfhood. Miller and Kerouac basically proceed from the same point of view. As Miller states in *The World of Sex*, "[t]oday the individual is virtually extinct. Today we have a robot, end product of the machine age" (95). Of specific concern to these writers, then, is how the (creative) individual can overcome the odds and "achieve itself", and since each individual is responsible for himself, they focus necessarily on their own lives, their age, their circumstances – as individuals, but also as artists (since this role represents a central part of their respective identities). As Sagar puts it, "Lawrence always wrote, consciously or unconsciously, to explore, clarify, objectify and generalize his own most pressing problems and most vivid experiences" (2). Lawrence's work, then, represents a documentation of the problem of living, not merely in general, but also in its details. What is important, however, is that this documentation is not simply an autobiographical account of personal experiences and sorrows, but an imaginative rendering of these in a symbolic language that draws the reader into the quest and leads him back to the underlying unity of all disparate "facts", and thus becomes "the rude hieroglyph of life which is art" (Miller *Lawrence* 169). What this "rude hieroglyph" also symbolises is what Hartman referred to as the "dialectical movement of 'soul making'", which stems from a "desire to overcome [self-consciousness]" (49). This very desire is revealed in the visionary artist's symbolic language.

Early in his career, Kerouac formulated the intention "to write 'what I really know, or don't or didn't want to know'" (Nicosia *Memory* 161). What he really knew (about), of course, were the actual experiences he'd had up to that point, and any revelations they might have engendered. This points to a growing unwillingness to fabricate reality, which for Kerouac implies subterfuge. In addition to this, however, his intention extends to that which he doesn't, "or didn't *want* to know", and implies a facing up to the self, the realities of one's being and one's

circumstances, even though it may prove to be a painful experience. Lawrence and Miller enter into the same confrontation with themselves and their times, and from this confrontation their writing is born. To hark back to an image previously used, their work appears as the fruit of their struggle. In a discussion of Kerouac that could equally well be related to Lawrence and Miller, Tim Hunt writes that

[t]he principle behind Kerouac's adaption of his personality and experiences is indicated by a quotation from Henry Murray's edition of Melville's *Pierre*. In March 1951, just before drafting *On the Road*, Kerouac read Murray's introduction and underlined 'Melville was not writing autobiography in the usual sense, but, from first to last, the biography of his self-image'. Kerouac also is writing a 'biography of his self-image'. Autobiography in the 'usual sense' is unreflexive and anecdotal. This is certainly what is meant when *On the Road* is criticized as being superficially autobiographical. But biography is reflexive and interpretative. Details of the life are selected and arranged according to some principle of illustration.

(5)

It is this selection and arrangement that is of the utmost importance, providing the finished work with a sense of unity that is lacking among the disparate facts on the surface of reality. What biography does not allow for, however, is the actual alteration and shaping of facts, the inclusion of a wholly fictional "yarn" – something which the autobiographer (like the quintessential fisherman) is at leisure to do. Since the soul is essentially unifying, the writing of *its* autobiography will escape the threat of unreflexivity and anecdote to which the (self-) conscious mind limits autobiography in the usual sense. The autobiography of the soul is not concerned with surface reality or "facts", but with what this surface hides, obscures or implies, i.e. the soul's interpretation of "reality" is documented. As Tanner says of Whitman, "he wanted not mere annotation but the 'vivification' of facts without which reality would seem incomplete' From the start the intention is religious, even mystical" (*Reign* 72). To put it differently, the soul documents that which reality is symbolic of. Such interpretation of reality is what sets off Whitman's exuberant transgression in section 33 of "Song of Myself", the result of a process of growing awareness initiated by the observation of "a spear of summer grass". The soul is also at liberty to alter "facts" in the interest of encouraging a symbolic reading, and finally, to view the conditions of its growth as somehow representative of the rest of mankind (in a sense that straight biography is not).

There is often no apparent (academic) purpose, besides private entertainment, to the comparison of a writer's life and his work, but in the case of such writers as Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac, it is both extremely difficult and virtually futile to ignore the impulse to do so. As the mere fact of the existence of a book such as Keith Sagar's *D. H. Lawrence: Life into Art*

suggests, there is, in fact, much to be gained from such a comparison. The benefit of this stems precisely from the fact that the writer's life and the writer's work are *apparently* so similar, even identical. It is only through close scrutiny that one can discern the very significant differences (in terms of selection, alteration, organisation and pure invention) between life and fiction, something which goes a long way towards clarifying (as far as such matters allow clarification) the process of artistic creation. Since this process mirrors also the individual's coming into being, it might be of profound interest to all people. In the interest of considering this "translation", and the process by which the artist attains his "voice" (the subject of the second part of this thesis), it might be useful to consider briefly the background (historical, personal, literary) of each of the three writers under discussion. This consideration will generally have to take the form of an overview.

When one considers the respective literary careers of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac, what strikes one is that, in addition to spending most of their lives writing, each one of them had a major creative period that lasted for about a decade. Roughly, and perhaps somewhat artificially, one might say that Lawrence's creative peak was reached somewhere between 1910 and 1920 (although in his case one might argue that his whole life was one prolonged creative period). At any rate, it is during this decade that his style developed most intensively, and he essentially wrote his greatest (and stylistically diverse) novels, namely *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920), in addition to numerous other pieces. Miller's decade seems to have been the thirties – although the majority of his books were written only in the forties and fifties, this was the decade in which he found his voice, writing *Tropic of Cancer* (1934), *Black Spring* (1936) and *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939). Kerouac's major creative period basically stretches across the fifties – although most of his books were written in the early fifties, starting with *On the Road* (written in 1951), none of them was published until the publication of this novel in 1957 brought him fame. *On the Road* was followed by *Visions of Cody* (1972), *Doctor Sax* (1958), *The Subterraneans* (1958), among various others. Interestingly, these "creative periods" are more or less evenly spaced, each one being separated by a decade from its predecessor. In a very general sense, then, we may follow the changing voice of Whitman's visionary progeny across the first part of the twentieth century.

Lawrence's writing career is influenced by the Victorian society in which he grew up and the corrosive impact on it of the First World War. His is the bleak landscape of post-war England, with its institutions still intact while a growing dissatisfaction with all of them (church,

patriarchal state, Victorian morality) arose among its people. This growing rebelliousness, however, was strictly nihilistic and secular in nature, and did not offer, to Lawrence's mind, any viable, worthwhile alternative to the old order. This was the spirit in which, for instance, he criticised the youth's new-found sexual freedom¹ and the ideals of the Women's Suffrage movement. The latter he criticises specifically for representing women's desire to get "the vote in order to make more laws" ("Study" 15), to claim the opportunity to compete in a society which is in some deep-rooted ways a male construct, instead of fighting for an opportunity to change society in its essence. This is dramatised in *The Rainbow*, where the heroine, Ursula Brangwen, resolves not to

give her allegiance to this world, and let it so dominate her, that her own world of warm sun and growing, sap-filled life was turned to nothing.... She was not going to do it. She was not going to be prisoner in the dry, tyrannical man-world.

(380)

The kind of reform that Lawrence is after is essentially not political or social², but on the level of the individual, the only level at which reform truly matters for him. It was in a similar spirit that he rejected such lofty ideals as Whitman's democracy, taking the position that it is precisely the dissimilarity and indeed, inequality of individuals that justified mankind's existence. This inequality implied a hierarchy consisting of natural leaders and followers, and within this context, democracy seemed an impractical ideal. This idea is, of course, also highly reminiscent of Nietzsche, and acquires a disreputable flavour in the wake of the fascism of the thirties and its consequences, most notably the holocaust.

Lawrence's metaphysic (as already briefly discussed) calls for each living being to "achieve... itself" ("Study" 12), to "come into being". It is this process that gives life its meaning, and therefore, the "reform" he continually proposes is aimed at allowing this process to take its natural course. This project, however, cannot be undertaken in isolation, since it depends on an intense interaction with the Other, that which is distinct from the individual:

If we think about it, we find that our life *consists* in this achieving of a pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe about us. This is how I 'save my soul', by accomplishing a pure relationship between me and another person, and other people, me and a nation, me and a race of men, me and the animals, me and the trees or flowers, me and the earth, me and the skies and sun and stars, me and the moon; an infinity of pure relations, big and little, like the stars of the sky: that makes our eternity, for each one of us.... This, if we knew it, is our life and our eternity: the subtle, perfected relationship between me and my whole circumambient universe. And

¹ See "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*", where Lawrence accuses the "modern young jazzy highbrow person" of treating sex "as a sort of toy to be played with" (91).

² This is to some extent an over-simplification – in *The Plumed Serpent*, for instance, Lawrence is very much concerned with the creation of a new society.

morality is that delicate, forever trembling and changing *balance* between me and my circumambient universe, which precedes a true relatedness.

(“Morality and the Novel” 172)

It is important that we remember this definition of morality, for it goes a long way towards explaining Lawrence’s insistence on art being moral. This being in the world on which Lawrence insists lies at the root of his preoccupation with the human body, and his characters’ very intense interaction with the world around them, whether admiring, hostile or destructive. For Lawrence, it needs to be remembered, the word “relationship” also implies conflict, so that his notion of a relationship with the universe in no way means the same as being at peace with it. But we may well ask ourselves how this relationship (or, rather, these relationships) is effectively achieved. In yet another essay, “Art and Morality”, Lawrence offers us an answer in his own use of symbolic language, claiming that “[t]here is nothing to do, but to maintain a true relationship to the things we move with and amongst and against. The apple, like the moon, has still an unseen side. The movement of Ocean will turn it round to us, or us to it” (167). This passage once again reveals Lawrence’s interest in the “unseen side” of phenomena. One could venture to say that it is in the relationships between the individual and this “unseen side” of the “circumambient universe” that becomes the “true relatedness” referred to in the preceding passage. It is significant that Lawrence refers to “[t]he movement of Ocean” as that which reveals the “unseen” to us. The absent article renders “Ocean” all-encompassing, and basically reinforces its archetypal status as symbol of the unconscious itself. There is an element of risk to this relation, in the sense that all relationships require a balance between merging and remaining distinct. This risk is inherent in the suggestion that the unseen will be turned “round to us, or us to it”. In the latter case, the human being ceases to be the centre of the complex of relationships, and would presumably be assimilated into the flux of the “circumambient universe”, dissolved. What makes the risk worthwhile, however, is that the “establishment of this multiplicity of relations with the circumambient universe results in the extension of an individual consciousness” (Zytaruk 243).

In Lawrence’s work the dangers and rewards of the individual’s relationships with the universe achieves its most comprehensive dramatisation in the relationship between the sexes. “The great relationship, for humanity, will always be the relation between man and woman” (“Morality and the Novel” 175). In all Lawrence’s novels, this relation forms the axle on which the rest of the work turns, the meeting between the individual and the Other, which reaches its greatest intensity in the sexual act. For Lawrence, sex requires the most extreme surrender from the individual (in life) to that which is Other, thereby offering a heightened experience of the

unseen. While, on the one hand, this constitutes a risk for the individual's "integrity", on the other hand, it leads (or may lead) to an intensified sense of self. This central role of sex in Lawrence's "metaphysic" will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 4 of this thesis, but it is interesting to see how directly these ideas stem from Lawrence's own life, and were influenced (and, to his mind, ratified) by his own experience of sexual liberation offered him by his wife, Frieda.

Lawrence met Frieda at a low point in his life. After the final collapse of his relationship with Jessie Chambers, and his mother's death in 1910, the next year saw him struggling with sickness,

two more failed relationships...and the end, through illness, of Lawrence's career as a schoolteacher: "Then in that year, for me, everything collapsed, save the mystery of death, and the haunting of death in life. I was twenty-five, and from the death of my mother, the world began to dissolve around me, beautiful, iridescent, but passing away substanceless. Till I almost dissolved away myself, and was very ill: when I was twenty-six. Then slowly the world came back: or I myself returned: but to another world". That experience burned away much of Lawrence's callowness.

(Sagar 22)

This is the "new" Lawrence that ran into Frieda at a lunch to which he was invited by her husband, Ernest Weekley, and it was this meeting that was to reenergize Lawrence for the years to come. As Brenda Maddox unceremoniously insists, "[w]ithin twenty minutes of meeting him, Frieda had Lawrence in bed" (113)³. It was the formidable force of Frieda's sexuality and personality that jolted Lawrence into action and provided the indomitable Other that could sustain also the necessary degree of conflict that could drive him to greater creative heights.

It was not only Frieda's sexuality that influenced Lawrence, but her relation of it to the philosophies and thought of people like Nietzsche and Freud (both from her native Germany). Sagar also suggests that "Frieda offered him a new, liberating, startlingly simple perspective. He responds to her as a fount of spontaneous wisdom, a new pragmatic morality which would have seemed wicked to his mother"(56). In addition to this, their ostracism by English society because of the nature of their relationship, as well as Frieda's German heritage, also led to Lawrence's final rejection of England, and initiated their life of travelling around the globe. It is clear, then, that in many ways Frieda's appearance forced Lawrence to break the stasis into which his life might have easily descended after the gruelling preceding years. It also marks the

³ John Worthen, in his biography, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years*, claims that this "cannot have been true," although he does subscribe to the "probability that they did go to bed together very soon" (382).

start of the decade of his most intensive creative growth – in fact, a year later he had already finished *Sons and Lovers*. In that novel, Lawrence truly buries the past, and especially his mother's dominant role in it, by documenting it. Maddox suggests that while it "is often read as a paean to mother love...it is a story of matricide" (148). At this point in time Lawrence is ready to see his mother's death as an essential step in the process of his own development, and it is with this in mind that he dramatises his own act of euthanasia as a somewhat more ambiguous action in the novel. Paul Morel realises that his life cannot progress significantly until his mother dies, something which Lawrence seems to have realised only in retrospect.

Lawrence's new-found sense of health – physical, emotional and spiritual – and aliveness after meeting Frieda, and the growing difficulty of living in England conspired to intensify his sense of the incompatibility of "healthy", meaningful living and living in society. *Sons and Lovers* also reflects this development in Lawrence's thought, and marks his acceptance of his role as a kind of literary subversive or "terrorist"⁴, whose writing "goes beyond [the] paradigm of an individual at odds with convention, for it is preoccupied with the breakup of the conventions themselves" (Baron xvii). Through the rest of his career, Lawrence was to develop his increasingly symbolic style into an effective tool for exposing society, convention, image and so forth as a thin veneer covering the spiritual and sensual essence of the human being. His writing showed, in spite of its meticulous attention to the detail, a growing interest in the unseen, and his further development away from the *psychological* mode of creation is reflected in his own defence of his novel, *The Rainbow*, to Edward Garnett, halfway through 1914: "You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable *ego* – of the character" (*Letters* 282). Lawrence's focus lies beyond the psychological intricacies of this *ego*, and this focus is never relinquished in his life-time. This shift in focus allows him to reveal a "new morality", one decidedly at odds with the moral assumptions of his day. It is the presentation of this morality that Lawrence attempts so earnestly, although one sometimes senses the feeling of defiant exuberance that Lawrence must have experienced in writing. The reader is constantly aware of the fact that Lawrence wrote predominantly for himself, for his own "salvation"⁵.

⁴ One need but consider Lawrence's use of the "bomb" image, as in his essay, "The Future of the Novel", where, in contemplating the state of the novel, he envisions a "bomb...put under this whole scheme of things" (154).

⁵ Lawrence's attitude towards his writing is neatly summed up in a letter to Ernest Collings (1912): "I always say, my motto is 'Art for my sake.'" (*Letters* 171)

Frieda's appearance in Lawrence's life had a clear effect on both his creativity and his "metaphysic", the most clear example of which we are offered in his "Study of Thomas Hardy", which he started writing late in 1914. In that work, his greatest criticism of Hardy seems to be the way Hardy chose to conclude his novels, in which the rebel is inevitably punished or destroyed for his/her transgression of social conventions. The suggestion is that, in doing this, Hardy does not merely wrong his characters and his work, but also himself. What Lawrence preaches here is a position of defiance, where the artist refuses to compromise (self-) expression by paying homage to social mores (most notably, sexual mores). The artist should trust his instincts (as should all individuals) as the only source of morality, as Lawrence pointed out in a letter to Ernest Collings: "My great belief is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect.... All I want is to answer to my blood, direct, without fribbling intervention of mind, or moral, or what not" (*Letters* 180). As we have seen, this instinctive morality of the blood is defined as a "forever trembling and changing *balance* between me and my circumambient universe" ("Morality and the Novel" 172), and is therefore highly individual, as well as dependent on circumstance.

Within this context, Lawrence is clear on his role as artist: "The business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment" ("Morality and the Novel" 171). This revelatory role is one that is clearly ascribed to the visionary writer. Also important to note is that this relation (which forms the focus of the artist's attention) is in constant flux, which is why Lawrence refers to "the living moment" at which this relation is revealed. Lawrence comes back to this moment in an introduction to the American edition of *New Poems*, where he calls for

another kind of poetry: the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present. In the immediate present there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are all flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking like the moon. There is no round, consummate moon on the face of running water, nor on the face of the unfinished tide.

(Litz 27)

This point is also dramatised in *Women in Love*, where we find Birkin throwing stones at the reflection of the moon in a quiet lake, resenting the "finished" reflection – it is an affront to his own chaotic, unconsummated existence. The point that Lawrence is making about the "immediate present", the "living" moment, however, seems to be that it contains a multitude of perspectives. The individual finds himself at the centre (from his point of view) of a "web" of

relations with the world around him. It is up to the artist to capture this “living moment” and explore the layers of reality, of the individual’s relations to the world.

The artist’s exploration of these “living moment[s]” will help him to clarify his own sense of place in the world, but as much as his work may be seen as a kind of by-product of this exploration, it may also serve to evoke these relations for others. This is where the moral nature of art comes in, as expressed by Lawrence in his essay on Whitman, to which I have already referred: “The essential function of art is moral. But a passionate, implicit morality, not didactic. A morality which changes the blood, rather than the mind. Change the blood first. The mind follows later, in the wake” (“Whitman” 180). It appears that human instincts can fail, can become stunted under the pressure of social mores. In this case, Lawrence suggests that intellectual analysis, philosophising, moralising, and so forth, will bring us nowhere. As Whitman himself claims in “Song of Myself”, “[l]ogic and sermons never convince” ([30] 652). Instead, the artist convinces through revelation and inspiration. In the same way that Whitman, observing the grass, comes to “believe [that] a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars” (“Song of Myself” [31] 662) and, in the process, inspires in his reader a similar belief, so does Lawrence scrutinise the surface of reality and eventually discerns beneath it man’s essential relatedness to the universe. In this realm man does not live by “artificial” codes and morals, but by the same “inner reality, a logic of the soul” (*Rainbow* 40) that convinces Tom Brangwen that Lydia Skrebensky is the woman for him, even though all indications are to the contrary. This kind of revelation has a religious impact, and serves as a kind of salvation – not geared towards an after-life, but to life itself.

Lawrence’s view of life is undeniably religious in nature, and for the most part, he tended to stick to the terms provided him by his Christian upbringing. However, it is clear that to Lawrence, various religions merely function as different perspectives on the same thing: “No god that men can conceive of, could possibly be absolute or absolutely right. All the gods that men ever discovered are still God: and they contradict one another and fly down each others throats, marvellously. Yet they are *all* God: the incalculable Pan” (“The Novel” 187). What strikes one is the contention that gods are not so much invented as discovered, in spite of Lawrence’s irreverent frivolity in speaking about them. To Lawrence, religion is man’s adopted stance in relation to the unseen, which is not governed by some rational deity, but which is nevertheless subjected to a kind of balance of conflicting energies which constantly redefines itself. Lawrence often spoke of “the dark gods”, but for the most part conceived of a whole

which contains, or rather, exists in the contradictory, conflicting forces in the universe, i.e. God. As Spivey puts it simply, “[t]he chief idea in Lawrence...is the mystic quest, the journey towards God” (“Symbolist Novel” 84). It is the undertaking of the journey that is ultimately important, a journey which is largely based on a sense of faith instead of a clear goal. It is a rejection of stasis and, in itself, will force the individual to constantly redefine his relations to the world around him. As Miller writes of Lawrence, in terms highly allusive of Whitman: “I see him as a sort of intellectual savage restoring to man that nomadic quality which he has lost, sending him down the open road to God knows where. A road without end – he sends him down it filled with ecstasy. Mad! Mad!” (*Lawrence* 250). These final exclamations perhaps serve best to explain the inspirational effect of Lawrence’s work and life, the admiration it attracts, while at the same time pointing out the sheer lunacy of taking up such a position against the overwhelming machinery of modern society.

Lawrence’s affirmative stance is somewhat uncharacteristic of the turn of the century. In the “Study of Thomas” he already criticised Hardy for his submissiveness (contrary to his instincts, Lawrence believed) in the face of social censure. The absence of spiritual liberation in both Hardy and his characters was something Lawrence saw carried over into the twentieth century, and the new artistic ideals that developed therein. The first indication of Lawrence’s strained relationship with the budding modernist movement is found in his relationship with Ezra Pound. Pound soon exchanged Lawrence for Joyce as a writer he could champion, feeling much more comfortable with the latter’s relationship with the prose tradition. Litz suggests that

although retrospective accounts of the early relationship between Lawrence and Pound may have been distorted...they do reflect the deep divisions in personality and artistic ideals that would gradually separate the two writers, and that would come to symbolize the most fundamental divisions in modernist literature....one following the god of ‘beauty’, the other the god of ‘life’.

(18)

One could argue that for Lawrence, there is no beauty without life, and that the isolation of beauty as an elevated ideal can result only in death. This rather dramatic formulation is reflected in the way Lawrence refers to some of his contemporaries, such as the stylistically innovative Joyce. In fact, in an essay entitled “The Future of the Novel”, he has only the following to say about the work of Joyce, Richardson and Proust: “Alas, you can hear the death-rattle in their throats.... So there you have the ‘serious’ novel, dying a long-drawnout fourteen volume death agony, and absorbedly, childishly interested in the phenomenon” (151). It should be clear that for Lawrence, aesthetic form, balance, and so forth are empty ideals if they are not ultimately inspired by the life-source. The “death-rattle in their throats” is not

merely indicative for him of artistic decay, but of the way in which art follows society, instead of leading it.

Henry Miller was particularly aware of the way in which Lawrence differed from many of his contemporaries, and he explored this issue extensively in *The World of Lawrence*. According to him, Proust and Joyce differ from Lawrence in that they simply “reflect the times. We see in them no revolt” (91)⁶. This sense of “revolt” is highly important to Miller, a firm supporter of (offensive) action in the face of adversity. The absence of any kind of revolt on the part of many major modern writers is for him simply symptomatic of death, effected in the artistic world by the substitution of art for life. All this is finally indicative of “the bankruptcy of the soul” (*Lawrence* 90) to which history had brought the Western world. Still considering Proust and Joyce, Miller is led to the conclusion that “[i]n Joyce the soul-deterioration may be traced even more definitely, for if Proust may be said to have provided the tomb of art, in Joyce we can witness the full process of decomposition” (92). Miller even goes so far as to describe Joyce as a giant cadaver in which the maggots of literary criticism are feasting away. *The World of Lawrence* attempts to distinguish Lawrence as a writer who points in another direction, towards life. Miller’s terminology also stresses that he is basically talking about the symbolic or visionary mode of artistic creation (i.e. Lawrence) versus the psychological mode (Proust, Joyce). Taken up at the completion of Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*, *The World of Lawrence* also purports to place Miller himself in the company of Lawrence, as well as other writers “[a]t the core of ...[whom is] this God-flame...this flaming wheel that rolled over Cezanne and Dostoevski and Whitman...a flame, scorching and devouring, that reaches to the mystery of all things” (30).

Although Miller (born in 1891) was a mere six years younger than Lawrence, his writing belongs to a completely different era – in fact, his first major novel, *Tropic of Cancer*, only appeared in 1934, four years after Lawrence’s death. As a young American from Brooklyn, he basically escaped the realities of the First World War completely (except for occasional taunts about his German heritage, and a brief threat of being drafted in 1917). Families, especially those of immigrants, remained closely-knit, and it was not really the time and place for experimental lifestyles. For a while, Miller even joined his father’s ailing tailoring business. Miller’s father, like Lawrence’s, had a penchant for alcohol and joviality that influenced

⁶ This does not mean to say that Miller rejected Proust and Joyce altogether – the former especially had an important influence on Miller’s artistic development.

adversely his relationship with his wife. Miller, also like Lawrence, at first sided with his mother against this danger to the household's financial security, and eventually immortalised his father as a spontaneous soul who suffered under the yoke of society and its most rigid institution, marriage.

Miller had much less of a formal education than Lawrence, and cultivated his love of literature while experimenting alternately with a number of jobs and unemployment, at which times he would rely on either his parents or a mistress to keep him fed. There was no forum for serious literary discussion in his life, so he tended to engage in such discussions with whoever was available and more or less willing to participate. This background certainly accounts for Miller's rejection of an essentially intellectual, academic discussion of literature, as opposed to the more gut-oriented, involved nature of the amateur discussions he and his friends must have had initially. He also tried his hand at writing, and had his first real project while in the service of the Western Union Telegraph company – a novel on the messenger service (entitled *Clipped Wings*) that Miller describes in *Tropic of Capricorn* as “the worst novel ever written” (32). Ferguson has succinctly set out Miller's situation in comparison to that of his contemporaries: “In 1920 a first wave of Lost Generation writers from Greenwich Village set off on a literary reconnaissance trip to Paris....and twenty-nine year old Henry Miller was applying for a post he could not fail to get, as a messenger boy delivering telegrams for the Western Union Telegraph Company” (61). After getting turned down, he bravely walked in on the vice president, demanding a job, and was taken on as an employment manger. Finally installed in a “proper job”, with the bulk of American writers in Paris, and the Prohibition initiated in America, Miller certainly did not seem to be where the action was, although the next few years certainly afforded him with a range of experiences to draw on in his future literary career.

What finally broke the growing threat of stasis in Miller's life was his meeting June Smith at a dance hall in 1923. They immediately struck up an affair which effectively ended his marriage to his first wife – shortly afterward he and June were married themselves. Leading a relatively promiscuous lifestyle already, one might well question, as a number of his friends did, Miller's reasons for getting married yet again. His reply, as dramatised in *Sexus*, seems fairly straightforward:

You think it's a mistake, eh? Let me tell you this.... I never did a better thing in my life. I love her.... You don't feel anymore. You're just trying to protect yourself. Well, I don't want to protect myself.... You think only of the same face for breakfast every day. I think how wonderful her face is, how it changes every minute.

(418-419)

Here we see some of the familiar Miller themes emerging, not the least of which is the virtue of courage, of taking a gamble. Where Miller's friend "Ned" sees only the threat of stasis in the institution of marriage, Miller reveals the static nature of "Ned's" protected life, and dispels the charge that marriage is of necessity static by describing (in a way reminiscent of Lawrence) the constantly changing nature of his relation to his new wife, "Mona" (June). June had a profound effect on Miller's life, as well as his art. It was June who, knowing his intense desire to spend his life writing (and realising that he probably would not have the courage to reject his financial security), encouraged him to resign from his job in order to pursue a writing career, while she undertook to provide for their living. This complete and final rejection of that which is socially prudent, and leaping off into the unknown, had an irrevocable effect on Miller's imagination. Just how important this decision, this change, was to have on his life can be seen in the fact that he devotes three lengthy novels – *Sexus* (1949), *Plexus* (1953) and *Nexus* (1959), also known as the *Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy – to the mythologising of this phase of his life, and the central role which June played in it.

If, to a large extent, June made notions like courage, transgression and rebellion real to Miller, she also affected his style of writing in the way she presented herself to the outside world. Ferguson (quoting Miller) refers to "her extraordinary and chaotic verbal talent which enabled her to 'say things at random, intricate, flame-like, or slide off into a parenthetical limbo peppered with fire-works – admirable linguistic feats which a practiced writer might struggle for hours to achieve'" (85). Although there is a sense of greater dissimulation to June's character, a sense in which she seems to obscure herself behind a barrage of words, she exudes a similar sense of spontaneity to Frieda Lawrence. If Frieda was a "fount of spontaneous wisdom" (Sagar 50), then June was a fount of spontaneous verbiage and verbal invention. As such, both of them provided their spouses with a new sense of direction at a crucial stage in their artistic development. For Miller, that direction would eventually lead him away from June to Paris, for which he embarked in 1930, purportedly with only ten dollars in his pockets.

Miller's central concern, in his life as in his art, is self-actualisation – as Nelson puts it, his work portrays an organised "process of becoming" (15). Nelson is basically referring here to his novels, but all his writing shows a concern with this process. It is because of this quality that a book like *The World of Lawrence* seems to be as much about Miller himself as it is about Lawrence⁷, and is as concerned with Lawrence himself as it is with his work. When he claims,

⁷ In this the book is roughly analogous to Lawrence's own "Study of Thomas Hardy".

for instance, that “Lawrence did not know who he was. He wrote his books to discover that” (73), Miller is referring to himself as well – writing is the outward manifestation of his search for selfhood. Miller translates Lawrence’s insistence on the need for the individual to relate to his circumambient universe into an insistence on the importance of experience (which flows from interaction with one’s circumambient universe), of *living*. Conversely, then, the problem of modern society becomes the fear of living it instils in its members, a fear which manifests itself (for Miller) predominantly in a submission to the machinery of society and in sexual neurosis or frigidity. “Henry Miller’s” triumph over these impediments to living, his journey through the twentieth century inferno, is what essentially forms the subject of his novels.

Experience can only flow from an attitude of openness, a deep awareness of one’s surroundings: “Strange as it may seem today to say, the aim of life is to live, and to live means to be aware, joyously, drunkenly, serenely, divinely aware. In this state of god-like awareness one sings, in this realm the world exists as a poem” (Miller, *Lawrence* 138). It is significant that this sense of awareness is immediately posited as artistic awareness – in the comparison of the world to a poem we are reminded of Whitman’s “origin of all poems” (“Song of Myself” [2] 25), the unity of a universe which exists only in the flux and balance of conflicting energies. To Miller, as to Whitman and Lawrence, the poem (and, by implication, all other forms of creative writing) is symbolic of this unity that encompasses all contradictions, “contain[s] multitudes” (“Song of Myself” [51] 1316). The act of artistic creation then, functions as a mystic ritual that symbolises the balanced conflict of the energies of the universe, which sometimes swings to the extremes of violence and tranquillity, even momentary “stasis”.

What becomes increasingly clear as one reads through Miller’s work is his vision of a future in which society (as far as we conceive of it, at least) plays no role in the life of the individual. In *The World of Sex*, Miller posits a dream of “the Adamic man, one with the earth, one with the stars, who comes to life, who roams through past, present and future with equal freedom. For him there are no taboos, no laws, no conventions” (115). This ideal of unification is one Miller recognises as being “implicit in all religious striving” (12) – for him, the end lies in the beginning. Mankind, starting from a point of pure self-consciousness (Adam and Eve covering their nakedness), is caught in a process of linear “progress” (in the Enlightenment sense of the word) through increasing degrees of knowledge. But where to? Miller seems to envision the end of knowledge, and the epistemological relativity that has haunted the twentieth century thinker. For Miller, like Lawrence, the only salvation lies in breaking out of this linear

progression (bound to end in a pile-up) and re-establishing the vital connections with the circumambient universe. Nelson recognises this vision as strictly utopian:

His utopia belongs among those utopian fantasies of the twentieth century which Frank Manuel considers a ‘characteristic resurgence of the Adamite utopia in a mechanized society.’ In such visions, the negative and positive, the opposites of man’s nature are no longer sublimated by his culture nor controlled and directed by his social instincts, but are fully reconciled and functioning as part of the total individual.

(115)

The notable difference of this kind of utopian ideal to others is the fact that it is not ultimately premised on peace and harmony between individuals, but on the “balanced” individual himself.

Of this “Adamic man” we have intimations in many of Miller’s works – for example in *Tropic of Capricorn*, where the young “Miller”, “very bookish, intellectual and worldly in a wrong way” (135), meets Roy Hamilton, “the first mystic I had ever encountered who also knew how to keep his feet on the ground” (134). Like Lawrence, Miller has no time for disembodied mysticism, even though a mystic sense of the world is of the utmost importance to him. In Roy Hamilton, Miller presents us with the kind of man who recognises the symbolic nature of the world, and responds to his revelations in terms of action:

He was indeed strange, but so sharply sane that I at once felt exalted. For the first time I was talking to a man who got behind the meaning of words and went to the very essence of things...he had no theory at all, except to penetrate to the very essence of things and, in the light of each fresh revelation so to live his life that there would be a minimum of discord between the truths which were revealed to him and the exemplification of these truths in action.⁸

(133)

The balanced relation of the individual to his circumambient universe is expressed here in musical terms – “a minimum of discord”. What is important, firstly, is that, although it may be minimised, discord cannot be thoroughly eradicated, and, secondly, that the (artistic) unification of one’s convictions (here referred to as “truths”, signalling their essentially transpersonal nature) with one’s actions forms the final phase, never to be concluded, in the reintegration of the human being. The result is a more or less harmonious life (in the strictly musical sense of the word), a life in harmony with the circumambient universe.

Miller picks up, even if not consciously, on Nietzsche’s lament for the “new soul”, which “should have been *singing*...not speaking!” (“Self-Criticism” 6). As with Whitman, artistic expression (in this case, the expression of the soul) is conceived of as a song – to be

⁸ In Miller’s language we may already discern the close link he draws between (male) sexual activity and the seeking out of “truth”.

differentiated from other musical forms like the symphony by virtue of the fact that it lacks formality. Although it is based on the same principles of musical harmony that informs the symphony, it is by far the most individual, spontaneous form of (musical) expression. In the opening paragraphs of his first major novel, *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller explains to the reader that “[t]his is not a book”, but rather, a song:

I am going to sing for you, little off key perhaps, but I will sing. I will sing while you croak, I will dance over your dirty corpse.... To sing you must first open your mouth. You must have a pair of lungs, and a little knowledge of music. It is not necessary to have an accordion, or a guitar. The essential thing is to *want* to sing. This then is a song. I am singing.

(9)

This song, while essentially a spontaneous expression emanating from a soul that *wants* to sing, is also geared at taunting the audience, moving them to action. In a sense, the reader is left with one of two options – either sing, or “croak”. The impulse that moves the individual to sing is the same impulse that moves him to live – when that impulse is absent the individual turns into a “dirty corpse”, no matter what the physiological indications may be.

There is something naïve and even childishly cruel about the way in which “Miller” purports to bully his audience into action, and uses and exploits other characters in the novels. In this we should recognise the persona of a kind of blundering, playful Prometheus, scorching people with the very flame he brings them. Miller devoted a significant portion of his writing to the mythologising of (his) childhood as that time when people still live instinctually – for him, this is a time that still partakes of the magical and mystical. These cords are severed as the individual progresses to “maturity”, which basically amounts to the acceptance of responsibilities and assumptions as dictated by society, and Miller experienced this as a loss:

Certainly he had preserved many of the qualities associated with childhood and youth.... This simplicity was essentially genuine; yet it was also conditioned by a fierce identification with Dostoevsky’s Prince Myshkin, whose childlike directness in a world of sophisticates is both genuine and also a highly self-conscious philosophic response to life.

(Ferguson 155)

The task of the artist, then, is to break through these boundaries set out by society to reveal the mystic universe beyond. This pioneering artist has much in common with Whitman’s vernacular pioneer with a “naïve open eye” (Tanner 67), virtually feeding his soul on the miraculousness of the everyday. This naivety that does not recognise any boundaries can easily result in cruelty, humour, or both, as when an overly confident “Walt Whitman” invades the marital bed: “I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself,/ And tighten her

all night to my thighs and lips” (“Song of Myself” [33] 814-815). There is no reference here to consent of any kind, especially on the part of the bride (we have no idea whether this “conquest” amounts to rape or bona fide seduction). On the other hand, of course, this naivety gives rise to generosity, acceptance, a lack of worldly ambition, kindness and exuberance, or optimism. This naivety, which lies at the root of the “Miller” persona (as developed in the novels), also underlies the basic ambivalence of feeling in his audience. It is this ambivalence that leads Erica Jong to refer to the persona of “Miller the mythic hero or antihero, whose hegira is emblematic of the hegira of the American artist” (45). The realm of this hero/antihero is among society’s outcasts, bums, alcoholics, prostitutes, saints, perverts, the insane, thieves, murderers, artists, hoodlums; those who have either rejected society, failed in the social rat-race, or subversively exploit it “from below”. This means that Miller’s landscape is essentially picaresque.

A position of naivety is also taken up in relation to the literary world, or the world of art in general. Miller’s stance is as anti-intellectual as Whitman’s, and informs the role of the buffoon that he assumes. In addition to the breaking of the rules set out by society at large, Miller intends also to break the rules of literary convention. In *The World of Lawrence*, for instance, he forestalls any rejection of his own novels as formless by saying that “for me form is so vastly important. But it’s got to be my form and not what the jackasses consider form” (16). This rejection of the preservers of traditional literary forms as “jackasses” conforms to Miller’s image as a self-styled literary terrorist, who engages in “purposeful literary buffoonery”, “a career he had outlined for himself...in 1928” (Ferguson 377). Miller presents himself as the bum at the banquet, whose good-natured blunders and antics keep the other guests shifting uncomfortably in their seats, muttering about lack of decorum⁹. However, this exuberant dancing on literary toes not only infuses his novels and other writing with the energy that vindicates them – it also leads to numerous weakly argued and even tedious essays or discussions on a variety of literary figures, and so forth. What is refreshing in Miller’s work is often what makes it fail. In a novel like *Tropic of Cancer*, however, it stands him in good stead, and places him loosely among the dadaists and surrealists he eventually felt, upon making the discovery of their existence, a great sense of kinship with. The book which *Tropic of Cancer* proclaims itself not to be is identified as “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 of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty...what you will” (9). It is

⁹ In this Miller is sometimes highly reminiscent of Jaroslav Hasek’s immortal creation, the good soldier Svejk.

Miller's programme to break all the moulds into which humanity cast themselves, to air all the rooms, so to speak, and so break through the twentieth-century *malaise* which he also felt threatening his own lust for life.

It is this same rebelliousness which made Miller appreciate Kerouac's work when he finally got around to reading it. In a preface he wrote to Kerouac's *The Subterraneans*, Miller claims admiringly that

Jack Kerouac has done something to our immaculate prose from which it may never recover. A passionate lover of language, he knows how to use it. Born virtuoso that he is, he takes pleasure in defying the laws and conventions of literary expression which cripple genuine, untrammelled communication between reader and writer.

(9)

The "untrammelled communication" is effected by virtue of the fact that the writing is spontaneous, flowing from a source that the reader presumably also has access to – i.e. the collective unconscious. This is precisely what literary conventions (according to Miller) serve to obscure. The literary game becomes one of disguising and complicating, as opposed to the ideal of elucidating, illuminating. As suggested before, Lawrence and Miller both tended to view the state of literary conventions as representative of the self-deluded path on which Western civilisation was travelling. Kerouac's attempt at developing a new voice (if well-grounded in a literary tradition of its own), expressing itself in what he termed "spontaneous prose", points to his own dissatisfaction with that which basic literary conventions allowed him to say. His programme is to speak directly from the soul, to translate its experience of the world into a language that, while remaining intelligible, points beyond itself to its source constantly.

Kerouac was born in 1922 into a French-Canadian family living in Lowell, Massachusetts. There was a more or less conventional family, his father working in his own printing business while his mother tended to the children. Eventually, however, this state of affairs was disrupted by the failure of his father's business, exacerbated by his alcoholism, something which forced Mrs Kerouac to enter the labour force. This regression in fortune was slow in coming though, and Kerouac spent most of his youthful years at home pursuing his interests in literature and football, the latter in which there seemed to be a professional future for him. Although Roman Catholic, the family members were not really staunch church-goers, until the problems of later years seemed to change Mrs Kerouac into a bit of a fundamentalist (albeit eccentric). Kerouac himself also remained rather devoted to Catholicism, even though rejecting much of its actual dogma, including the notion that regular church-going is beneficial. For much of his life, Kerouac himself struggled with the disparity between what he perceived as being his mother's

basic piety and discipline and his father's genial, careless and gruff existence which ended in sickness and ruin.

Unlike Miller, Kerouac did manage to continue a formal education at Columbia University, courtesy of his promise as football star. His interests (carried over from literary as well as more conventionally adolescent explorations engaged in with a variety of friends) seem to have lain solely with literary courses, writing, exploration and experimentation. New York being seductively near, the latter proved too pressing a programme and, experiencing some problems with his football coach, he dropped out of college in 1941. In 1942 he joined the Merchant Marine for a while, an experience which led to the writing of a first novel (never published), *The Sea is My Brother*. He also joined the Navy, but escaped, upon realising his mistake, by getting himself committed to the psychiatric ward and eventually getting an honourable discharge. What this means is that Kerouac found himself in America for the duration of the Second World War. In addition to doing a variety of odd jobs, reading profusely and dividing his time between quiet (if strained) visits to his parents and a sometimes frantic exploration of New York and its night life, Kerouac made use of his time to write his first novel that would eventually be published in 1950, *The Town and the City*. Fairly traditional in form and strongly influenced by Thomas Wolfe, it offers a fruitful opportunity for examining the deliberate changes in form that would allow Kerouac to write *On the Road*, and then his truly "spontaneous prose" novels, starting with *Visions of Cody*.

There are numerous experiences, illuminations and realisations that can influence a writer's "voice" (beyond mere emulation), but, interestingly, as with Lawrence and Miller, one can discern among the mass of influences one central individual that shaped Kerouac's writing significantly, namely Neal Cassady. More than any of Kerouac's more literary-minded friends, Cassady, whom he met in 1946, had a direct influence on Kerouac's writing by virtue of his highly spontaneous, unfettered appearance and nature. Energetic, bawdy, clown-like, criminal, quasi-philosophical and naïve, Cassady was a picaresque hero come to life. Equally important was the fact that Cassady came from Denver, which, to a New York-based easterner like Kerouac, seemed to be way out west, a place to which he still attached highly romantic notions of pioneering. To Kerouac, Cassady appeared as the "Nietzschean hero", "half slender-hipped cowboy like Gene Autry, half Greek athletic champion" (*Nicosia Memory* 175). Flippant or sentimental as these images may seem, they point to the way in which Cassady, to some extent, resolved the dichotomy in Kerouac's mind between the Whitmanesque energy, freedom,

exuberance, naivety and lawlessness of the western pioneer (American heritage), and the disciplined, formal aesthetics of beauty (as well as its decay, traced by such poets as Baudelaire) of America's own European heritage (exemplified here by Greece). On another level, it also "resolves" the conflict between the popular ("slender-hipped cowboy") and the classic (the image of a Greek athlete conjures up a multitude of marble statues) – a central concern of post-modern discourse.

Cassady's visible influence on Kerouac's life is twofold: firstly, he serves as the catalyst that finally causes Kerouac to initiate his life on the road and, secondly, influences Kerouac's writing by offering an intimation of an alternative mode of expression. This dual and reciprocal influence on Kerouac's life and art is neatly summed up by Nicosia: "Neal permanently changed the direction of Jack's writing by showing him that a man could both be an artist – if only a con-artist – and live in the world at the same time" (*Memory* 179). Consequently, not only does he influence Kerouac's writing but, indeed, becomes a central subject of much of it. By mid-1947, Kerouac was on the road, involved in numerous adventures, many of which included Cassady – experiences which eventually formed the basis of *On the Road* itself. Cassady's direct influence on Kerouac's style or method of writing was essentially effected by means of his letters. The first, a rambling, energetic account of successful and attempted seductions on a bus back to Denver, was dubbed by Kerouac "the great sex letter":

The most noteworthy feature of "The Great Sex Letter" was Cassady's casual use of vivid sexual slang words, which were studiously avoided in serious literature of the day. But what inflamed Kerouac's imagination was Cassady's closing statement that the letter should be read "as a continuous chain of undisciplined thought".

(Nicosia "Neal Cassady" 99)

As such, Cassady was suggesting a method while demonstrating its effect. One suspects that it was the sheer effect of Cassady's letter that made Kerouac sit up and focus on anything that might reveal the method that informed it. And Cassady was not shy of making suggestions, as a later letter of his suggests: "I have always held that when one writes one should forget all rules, literary styles, and other such pretensions as large words, lordly clauses and other phrases as such.... Art is good when it springs from necessity" (Nicosia "Neal Cassady" 101).

The central concept that Neal Cassady provided an answer to for both Kerouac and his close friend, Allen Ginsberg, was the notion of *beat* (which obviously informed, eventually, the idea of a Beat Generation). According to George Dardess, this term "was Kerouac's shorthand for a complex of attitudes he saw himself sharing with the many others who felt cast aside by the

modern industrial state” (287), many of whom he met on his excursions to New York, and continued to meet across America, especially in the form of the hobo. Much like Miller, Kerouac felt himself partially at home among the petty criminals, drug addicts, prostitutes, bums and gangsters, but he mythologised them for other reasons than simply the spit in the respectable eye they offer as a symbol of decay. Like Miller, Kerouac and Ginsberg had read in Spengler’s *Decline of the West*

the prophecy of current civilization’s ineluctable demise. But Allen added something to Jack’s vision of decay, a happy foil to Jack’s sense of hopelessness: the concept of the ‘angel’, a being who is elevated spiritually as he is degraded in body. The revelation of the junkies and prostitutes of Times Square as a host of angels profoundly affected Jack’s writing for the rest of his life.

(Nicosia *Memory* 144)

While one could say that the “Miller” persona conceives of himself in this fashion, not many of the “shady” characters in Miller’s books are extended the same courtesy.

These “fallen angels” were *beat* – infusing the latter term with ambiguous meaning. While, on the one hand,

the term connoted what Kerouac called ‘weariness with all the forms’ of that [modern industrial] state...[and therefore] referred to ‘beatness’, the state of having been overwhelmed by those forms....the term denoted also ‘beatitude’, the happy release of emotions no longer entrapped by observance of the forms.

(Dardess 287)

This latter meaning of the word, clearly reminiscent of Kerouac’s Catholic background, points to a certain state of transcendence above the banalities which engendered it, a state of religious serenity. This state strongly resembles (and would partially be linked, by Kerouac, to) the Blakean state of “Innocence”. The price to pay for subscription to the forms of modern society would be the loss of beatitude. Roughly, the *beat* character, and especially the beat artist, is reminiscent of Miller’s mystic with his feet on the ground (*Capricorn* 134) – in the mud, in fact. The beat artist, then, would criticise and reject society while offering a vision of alternative self-realisation, without resorting to a disembodied mysticism. Although, at times, there appears to be something self-deluding and self-defeating about the beat ethic, and “in spite of [the Beat Generation’s] dangerous recklessness”, Everson recognises

its preoccupation with the real, rather than the pseudo.... [B]y the very fact of delivering itself over in a kind of trust, to the deepest forces of the psyche, it has, in some instances, succeeded in liberating art from the preoccupation with surfaces which has dominated it since the Renaissance.

(185)

In doing this, art acquires once again a mythical function, as a kind of religious ritual.

In Kerouac's work the individual's search for a connection with "the deepest forces of the psyche", the unconscious, and with his circumambient universe is generally presented (although the term itself is only really used in *On the Road*) as a quest in search of "IT"¹⁰. "IT" has been defined in a number of ways by different critics, but what all these generally point to is that "IT" indicates a moment in which a sense of relation to, or unification with the universe is attained, much like the Whitmanesque ecstatic moment. Such moments are transient, although they leave a lasting impression on the soul of the individual. Bartlett compares "IT" to "the ultimate Reichian charge" (123), in other words, an orgasm, effecting "a 'clouding of consciousness'... which erupts into the ultimate Dionysian transportation of the ego, into the id" (121). "IT" is essentially a moment of transgression and, as Hunt suggests, "[t]he ecstasy and community of 'IT' are at best temporary states and thrive perhaps only at moments of transition or outside the normal social order" (43). For Hunt, there seems to be something futile about "IT" – in a sense he appears to be critical of the fact that "[t]he openness and hypersensitivity that leads to the joy of 'IT' also leaves one vulnerable and open to a sense of horror" (45), although this effect is inscribed in the Dionysian myth, where the ecstatic moment presents the mind with a vision of truth which drives it insane. The abysmal nature of this "truth" is evoked effectively in a poem by Baudelaire, "The Abyss":

Each way I turn, above me and below,
tempting and terrible too the silence, the space...
By night God traces with a knowing hand
unending nightmares on unending dark.

(5-8)

It is reminiscent of a somewhat more affirmative Jack Duluoz (Kerouac's persona in most of his novels) in *Visions of Cody*: "And so I struggle in the darkness with the enormity of my soul, trying desperately to be a great rememberer redeeming life from darkness" (Ginsberg 6). Also, for all the enlightenment "IT" brings, the threat of madness is never far away. It is, in fact, this very connection between the seer and the madman, the biblical John the Baptist, that underlies Kerouac's interest in the beat characters of America.

The moment of "IT" can basically be described as a visionary moment – it is the actual instant that informs the visionary mode of artistic creation. Like Whitman's own vision in "Song of Myself", this vision often grows from an actual visual impulse. Nicosia explains that

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that, although there is no evidence to suggest that Kerouac adopted the term from him, Lawrence also made use of the term "IT" in his *Studies in Classic American Literature*, in which he defines "IT

by *vision*, Jack was referring to a special sort of visual ‘take’, a sudden intuitive understanding of things triggered by some momentary sight. The fruit of such moments was an acute sensation of space, a panoramic awareness of the infinite universe surrounding him”.

(*Memory* 154)

As suggested above, this awareness can contain an element of horror also – the experience of the infinite, the universe, of God, is one that eradicates all human certainties, simultaneously holding out the promise of freedom and the threat of dissolution. Georges Bataille captures this experience effectively in his story, “My Mother”: “In the solitude I entered, the norms of this world, if they subsist, do so in order to maintain a dizzying feeling of enormity: this solitude, it is God” (36). The challenge that Kerouac was faced with is how to reproduce such visions in literature, and eventually (partly influenced by William Burroughs’s “factualism”, which held that all facts exist simultaneously on a multiplicity of levels) he was to find a solution in the substitution of “vertical writing” in the place of “horizontal writing” – the former called for a spontaneous associative development rather than the more traditional linear development (usually along a natural time continuum). The approach used was called “sketching” (which will briefly be examined in the second part of the thesis), and allowed for “Deep Form” (Kerouac “Essentials” 744) and “wild form”, as described by Kerouac in a letter to his friend John Clellon Holmes (June 5, 1952):

[W]hat I am beginning to discover now is something beyond the novel and beyond the arbitrary confines of the story...into the realms of revealed Picture...revealed whatever...revelated prose...*wild form* man, *wild form*. Wild form’s the only form holds what I have to say – my mind is exploding to say something about every image and every memory in – I now have an irrational lust to set down everything I know – in narrowing circles around the core of my last writing.... I’m making myself sick to find the wild form that can grow with my wild heart...because now I KNOW MY HEART DOES GROW.

(*Letters* 371)

Kerouac finally outlined his method in a succinct (if often considered diffuse) essay called “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose”. Although the essay will receive closer attention in the second part of the thesis (dealing with “voice”), it is interesting to note the extent to which Kerouac’s method and language remind one of Jung’s definition of the visionary writer. Drawing on William Carlos Williams’ dictum, “No ideas but in things” (Tomlinson 16), Kerouac defines as his starting point “[t]he object [which] is set before the mind” (743). The writer starts to improvise around the theme which the object becomes (these musical terms are deliberate as Kerouac continually compares writing to the blowing of a saxophone – a jazz

[as] the American whole soul” (“Spirit” 13). As such, it designates the reestablishment of relations of the conscious man with the strivings of his own soul.

performance) and is invited to write “in a semi-trance” (744), to relinquish the self-consciousness inherent in the writing process, as well as relinquishing “preconceived idea[s] of what to say about image” (744). Since the visionary artist is interested in revealing instead of inventing, the latter openness would clearly be essential. The writer is seen as submerging himself in “seas of thought” (744), the image of the sea functioning here also as an archetypal symbol of the unconscious. The writer, urged to “satisfy yourself first”, is assured, in a phrase which points to Kerouac’s own belief in a collective unconscious, Oversoul (to use Emerson’s concept) or transpersonal soul, that then the reader “cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning-excitement by same laws operating in his human mind” (744). Although providing an incomplete overview of Kerouac’s essay, these phrases clearly point out Kerouac’s “spontaneous prose” (a method he worked for years to perfect) as a visionary mode of writing. As with Miller, this mode of writing is continuously conceived of in musical terms – in the case of Kerouac, it is the frenetic jazz of horn players like Charlie Parker that provides the Dionysian impulse and becomes symbolic of his own writing, as the song did for Whitman and Miller.

Dardess has said of Kerouac that his aim was “the overcoming of boundaries of class, temperament, sexual preference, and religious practice in a common unembarrassed worship of God” (284) and, somewhat less devoutly put, the same could be said of Lawrence and Miller. The understanding of each writer as to what “God” means might differ, but all of them seem to refer more or less to a meaningful circumambient universe (even if it acquires its meaning from the presence of the human being). All three writers take up an affirmative, celebratory stance in relation to the revelation of this “circumambient universe”, and this affirmation and celebration is by nature transgressive and therefore transient. Georges Bataille, insisting that art has life only in its ability to achieve “the sacred instant” (“The Sacred” 241), identifies the sacred as “only a privileged moment of communal unity, a moment of the convulsive communication of what is ordinarily stifled” (242). It is a ritual enactment of that which is inexpressible and, as such, symbolises man’s yearning for unification with that from which he came, be it the flux of the universe, the primal soup, eternity, or God. It is that which yearns in man that we’ll define as the soul. Such a unification is finally only possible in death, in that it presupposes the dissolution of the individual. It is as Melville (still in the language of patriarchal society) puts it: “Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it” (*Moby Dick* 535). However, there is the possibility of transient moments, “sacred instants”, at which the individual has

intimations of this unification, this “paternity”, when the sense of yearning is transformed from a sense of loss and being lost to a sense of realisation and recognition. The experience of such moments in life (and the memory of them) leads the individual to a sense of relation to his circumambient universe, and allows him to “achieve himself”.

Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac, in documenting the occurrence or achievement of such “sacred instants” in life, are writing autobiographies of the soul, and how it develops from suffering a sense of displacement to experiencing a sense of place, acquiring *an identity*. There is a sense in which the individual grows increasingly at home in the world as he begins to understand the nature of death. The soul’s search for place is mirrored outwardly in the individual’s search for place – the inner journey (from self-consciousness to the unconscious) mirrored in the outer “ragged pilgrimages” (Kerouac, quoted in *Nicosia Memory* 299) of the individual. It is this symbol of the journey, the pilgrimage, which plays a central role both in the lives and the work of these three writers, that will be considered in the next chapter. Chapter 4, which concludes Part I, will then be devoted to the exploration of the idea of a “sacred instant”, especially its supreme manifestation, the sexual act, the orgasm (*la petit mort*), as it functions in the work of these three writers.

CHAPTER 3: “RAGGED PILGRIMAGES”

The Romantic artist (with his protagonists) is subject to a life of restless wandering, whether informed predominantly by frustration with the status quo or by an energizing exuberance. This ambiguity remains central to the Romantic quest, in which the (sometimes tortured) search for meaning is constantly offset by the celebration of it, and as such it takes on the nature of a pilgrimage, a ritual enactment of a (specific) spiritual quest in physical terms, which becomes a spiritual quest in itself – its purpose is to rejuvenate the soul. The pilgrim may know where he is going, but nevertheless has to entrust himself to the potential perils and hardship of the open road in order to get there. It is this journey itself that forms the essence of the pilgrimage – the arrival at the given destination serves merely as its *consummation* (in itself transient). We are much more interested in the “progress” of Bunyan’s pilgrim than his eventual arrival at the Celestial City. By virtue of the pilgrim’s devotion to the given ideal he ceases to be a mere disciple and becomes, instead, an authority, a prophet, if only on a domestic scale. The pilgrimage, as ritual, is symbolic of life devoted to an ideal, which is, in turn, symbolic of the soul’s growth towards self-achievement in expression and unification. It is in this sense that the lives of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac are conceived of as pilgrimages, what Kerouac refers to as “performing...[the] one and noble function of the time, *move*. And we moved!” (*Road* 133).

As pointed out before, Geoffrey Hartman relates the metaphor of the journey in artistic creation to the Romantic exploration and achievement of “the transition from self-consciousness to imagination” (33). This is the internal quest that is achieved by being written about. As such, these two processes grow inseparable – there is no pre-existing (internal) journey that forms the subject matter; in fact, previously disparate experiences may now be organised into a coherence that automatically conjures up the image of a journey. Even when practised in the tranquillity of the Lake District’s natural splendour, the act of writing becomes an active journey. The very Imagination that serves as its goal and inspiration is presupposed in the act of writing itself. To use Frye’s formulation (perhaps slightly out of context), “[t]he vision inspires the act, and the act realises the vision” (132). This reciprocal relationship nevertheless seems to presuppose a third element, a visionary source. Where does the vision come from? While Blake (the subject of Frye’s discussion) might point either at his head, heaven or hell, many of the central Romantics would have pointed at nature, or the world at large. The internal quest, while drawing on the symbols of reality, also manifests itself, to varying degrees, outwardly, as Schenk suggests in reference to Wordsworth:

This Romantic *Wanderlust* was certainly not motivated by the quest for establishing records of physical endurance. The main motive behind it was no doubt the poet's desire to imprint on his soul a variety of vivid and lasting impressions.

(164)

It is this "being in the world" that is so important to Whitman and his literary offspring, since it is in the experience of physical phenomena that the visionary artist may access the principles of our existence. It is on the open road that Whitman encounters the "objects that call from diffusion my meanings and give them shape!" ("Open Road" 26).

By the time of Whitman's literary arrival, the insistence on the importance of the artist's (physical) experience had acquired a distinctly American flavour, Whitman himself being one of its chief proponents. Philip Rahv writes that "since Whitman and James the American creative mind, seizing at last upon what had long been denied to it, has found the terms and objects of its activity in the urge toward and immersion in experience" (360). Although Rahv identifies this as a characteristically American literary trend, it is one that plays an important role also in Lawrence's work. While there would be no sense in attempting to carve out for Lawrence a place in the development of American literature, there is no question that Whitman's Dionysian spirit was largely passed on to Miller through him.

Clearly in agreement with Rahv on the importance of Whitman in American literary history, Bloom places him at the centre of the American canon. The "urge toward and immersion in experience" that Rahv suggests as the defining activity is translated by Bloom into the metaphor of a journey, eerily devoid of responsibility. In reference to Whitman's "Song of Myself" he claims that "[t]he magical word for Whitman at night is 'pass' and salvation for him is to be passerby" ("Walt Whitman" 269). Once again, the freedom of the frontier is conjured up – the "passerby" is at leisure to explore, test and examine everything, while remaining comfortably clear of any responsibilities that involvement would bring. This would seem to contradict Whitman's search for unification with his "circumambient universe", but it does not. For Whitman, this unification is not inherently the result of a single qualitative experience, but instead, from a multitude of experiences – we are reminded of his maxim, expressed in the second part of "Song of Myself": "You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself" ([2] 42). The quantitative impact of experience is also expressed in Whitman's use of "catalogues". These apparently random experiences add up to a sense of the whole, and to collect these experiences the individual/writer must needs be free to roam down the open road like the proverbial "rolling stone": "It is the genius of Whitman's poem ["Song of Myself"] that its knowing is a kind of passing, a journeying or questioning to where

inwardness is fully tallied” (Bloom “Whitman” 287). The “knowledge” gleaned from this journey is itself never final, complete – it is a process which sustains its own progression by embodying an inquisitive and questioning attitude which has nothing to do with cynicism. Instead, it has a lot to do with the naïve open mind, a childlike sense of awe and openness, a suspension of strict rationality and scepticism.

In his sprawling, urgent preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman has said of the poet that “[h]e shall go directly to the creation” (11). It is an ambiguous formulation which stresses, on the one hand, the importance of a direct, physical experience of the earth and the universe by the poet, while also suggesting, on the other hand, an approach to creative writing – unhampered, unmediated, direct. The experience of the universe as Creation and the act of creation become insolubly linked, the first certainly being a prerequisite for the second. Interestingly, Whitman himself wasn’t nearly as adventurous and outgoing as his protagonist in “Song of Myself” and other poems, although his experience of the outside world was certainly comprehensive. This leads some critics, such as Bloom, to make a rather emphatic distinction between the “Walt Whitman, one of the roughs” of the poems, and Walter Whitman, the printer. The Whitman of the poems is mythical in stature, a kind of superman, almost beyond society, while the writer very much forms part of his time and place. To some extent then, Whitman’s alter ego constitutes an ideal, an embodiment of the poet that he posits in his preface, “a seer...he is individual...he is complete in himself...the others are as good as he, only he sees it and they do not” (9). To some extent, by virtue of being privileged, this is a lonely position to inhabit – the poet lives outside the boundaries of society, alienated by virtue of his individuality which, contradictorily, stems from his unification with the phenomena of the universe. The poet becomes a wandering “seer”, a chthonic prophet and, ironically, a “wandering savage” (“Song of Myself” [16] 34). The relation of the “savage” to his world becomes the vision of the modern seer, the hope for mankind.

It is a similar quality in Lawrence’s work that has led Catherine Carswell to refer to his life and work as a “savage pilgrimage”¹. Lawrence, even more than his characters, who are so earnestly involved in the process of becoming, *moved*. For Lawrence, stasis implies atrophy, ultimately represented by bourgeois fear and manic self-preservation – such self-preservation at the cost of growth and development seemed simply unnatural to him. This brings us back to “the tight economical bud of caution and thrift and self-preservation” (“Study” 10) that he

¹ This is the title of her book on Lawrence, although the expression itself was used by Lawrence in 1923.

would urge us to burst. In this, Lawrence demanded nothing of his characters that he wasn't prepared to do himself – in the same kind of reciprocal process that has continually warped our efforts at distinguishing clearly between the writer's life and work (inasmuch as both affect one another), Lawrence's search for fulfilment (his life) was fuelled by and achieved in his writing and thought, while it also inspired, and provided the raw material for, his writing and thought. For the most part, however, writing about events, people and places helped Lawrence to come to terms with these, to clarify for himself his relation(s) to them, because for all Lawrence's travelling, the aim was an achieved relation to his circumambient universe, the crowning point of which seems to have the discovery of "a living homeland" ("Spirit" 12), the place where one instinctively feels at home, at ease. The "living homeland" is that place where you can finally stop wandering without growing static.

Lawrence spent a lifetime in search of such a homeland, but he would not concede any other possibility. The individual's responsibility to himself requires him to search² out the means to fulfilment. Lea, writing on Lawrence, suggests that

[e]ven 'the great laws of the universe are no more than the fixed habits of the living unconscious', and the same goes for moral laws. It is up to each to discover for himself what obstacles, internal or external, interfere with his growth, what particular sunshine and soil this particular plant requires – and discovering it by the only means possible, patient experiment; remembering, too, that what was good for the seedling may be bad for the flower.

(141)

Lea's last remark also seems to suggest that the status of homeland could be transient, that any place (or set of relations) *could* become stifling, and that the individual should thus be forever alert and willing to part with whatever it may be that stunts his growth and development. This is in keeping with Lawrence's innate suspicion of anything resembling stasis. However, Lea's quote also points out once again Lawrence's firm belief that our "homeland" is on earth, a physical, tangible and therefore ever-changing place – like Whitman's poet, the individual should "go directly to the creation" (Preface 11), and experience and test it by "patient experiment". Marlow's disillusioning journey down the river into the "heart of darkness" showed him something that the dreamy study of maps full of promising "blank spaces" (Conrad 38) never could.

Lawrence constantly stresses that this "search" for a homeland, which is also a search for self-fulfilment, should not be dominated by the conscious, rational mind, but by the instincts, "the

² In relation to Lawrence, the word "search" is rather inappropriate, inasmuch it refers to a conscious, deliberate and considered quest, but, for lack of a better term, I'll proceed with it, elaborating when it becomes inadequate.

blood” or, even more specifically, the soul (which reconciles the conscious and the unconscious). As he states in his essay on Whitman, “[i]t is not I who guide my soul to heaven. It is I who am guided by my soul down the open road” (190). Lawrence rejects the submission of the soul to a conscious “I” bent on attaining an abstract, empty ideal, a “heaven”. In this he is (in the manner of Nietzsche) criticising Christianity, but also organised religion in general. He would agree with Whitman’s claim that “[w]hatever satisfies the soul is truth” (Preface 21) and, accordingly, the conscious “I” should surrender itself to the soul (which we have seen, also takes account of both mental and physical impulses). For “heaven”, we find substituted the “open road”, which Lawrence emphatically identifies as the soul’s “home”:

The Open Road. The great home of the Soul is the open road. Not heaven, not paradise. Not “above”. Not even “within”.... It is a wayfarer down the open road. Not by meditating. Not by fasting. Not by exploring heaven after heaven, inwardly, in the great manner of the mystics. Not by exaltation. Not by ecstasy. Not by any of these ways does the soul come into her own. Only by taking the open road. Exposed to full contact. On two slow feet. Meeting whatever comes down the open road. In company with those that drift in the same measure along the same way. Towards no goal.
(“Whitman” 184)

This insistence on the absence of a goal might seem to contradict a very goal-oriented metaphysic on Lawrence’s part, but one needs to realise the extent to which Lawrence considered the “coming into being”, the finding of a “homeland”, the establishment of a living relation to one’s circumambient universe, as an essentially unconscious occurrence. It is a goal that cannot be achieved by conscious striving – one could say that once the impediments to achievement of these “goals” have been removed, the achievement itself comes naturally. To some extent, consciousness itself forms one of these impediments. Neither does achievement quell flux and flow – we have already considered at some length the eternal nature of conflict. Perhaps the example of Wordsworth would, once again, help us to clarify matters. Of Wordsworth one could say, with some certainty, that he had found his “homeland” in the Lake District. No need had he for trotting the globe in search of another. However, this did not stop him from taking to the open road – Schenk has testified to his “*Wanderlust*” (164), expressed in those perennial strolls “[o]n two slow feet” around the hills. His relation to his “homeland” was a living one, and therefore *open* and, as such, it served to fire his imagination.

Next to Lawrence, however, Wordsworth’s *Wanderlust* seems positively domesticated – if Lawrence was not guiding his soul to heaven, he was almost brutally *driven* by it all over the globe. Initially leaving England (for the first time, at age twenty-six) under pressure – having eloped with Frieda, his former teacher Ernest Weekley’s wife – he kept on travelling for the rest of his life (with occasional visits to England), through Europe, America, Australia and

Mexico, in search of “some unspoilt pocket of strangeness” (Burgess ix). Of every single space he inhabited, even for a brief period, we have some documentation, a study of its people, its history, its “vital effluence” (“Spirit” 12). Wherever he went, he established a comprehensive set of relations (whether antagonistic or sympathetic) to it. According to Anthony Burgess, the ability to “extract the very essence” (ix) of a place is in Lawrence a very real one, referring to his “feat...which still makes Australian writers gloomy – the recreation of a whole continent, along with a wholly accurate prophecy of its political future, out of a few weeks’ stay in a suburb of Sidney” (ix). This judgement of *Kangaroo* is, of course, open to debate, but, if nothing else, it points to the scope of Lawrence’s attempts to come to terms with his circumambient universe.

Lawrence spent at least two thirds of his life in England, a place he never could make his peace with, while also not being able to ever finally relinquish his bonds with it. It is certainly well represented in all of his writing and, in spite of his damning social commentary, his work reveals a deep affinity with the place itself, the soil and the people living close to it. For Lawrence, however, the state of English society simply became too much to bear – while his initial flight from England must have had much to do with the immediate problems stemming from his relationship with Frieda, his conflict with the place went far deeper. For Lawrence the problem was as simple as this: “The fault lies in the English attitude to life. The English, and the Americans following them, are paralysed by fear.... It thwarts life, it distorts vision, and it strangles impulse: this over-mastering fear” (“Paintings” 13). In this specific instance, Lawrence defines this fear as “a horror of sexual life” (13), a somewhat reduced interpretation stemming from the increasing charges of obscenity (in relation to his paintings and writings) that he had to face towards the end of his life. Generally, Lawrence would have defined this fear as the fear of life, the result of which is “uncreated lives” (“Crown” 265). In his essay, “Life”, Lawrence unequivocally points to fear as the ultimate impediment to self-fulfilment, in that it leads to withdrawal from life, a closing up, instead of an opening out:

Above all, I must have no fear. I must watch and wait. Like a blind man looking for the sun, I must lift my face to the unknown darkness of space and wait until the sun lights on me. It is a question of creative courage. It is no good if I crouch over the coal-fire. This will never bring me to pass.

(18)

The microscopic world of the “coal-fire”, with its protected, stifled glow, is contrasted to the vast “unknown darkness”, the world out there which, although dangerous and inhospitable, also renders up the glorious blaze of the sun.

If in England the fear of life was for Lawrence most clearly represented by the bourgeois middle-class lifestyle, its effect was most clearly illustrated in the advent of the First World War. According to him, the barren attitude of self-preservation in the former begets the barren counter-reaction of the latter. In terms reminiscent of Georges Bataille's economic philosophy, Lawrence seems to see acquisition (and preservation) and waste as two natural counterparts – the unnatural degree of preservation on the part of (British) society results in the unnatural degree of waste in the war. The “uncreated lives” become meaningless and therefore disposable. In later writings a similar reciprocity is identified between Victorian prudery and post-war promiscuity. Lawrence's novels are peppered with individuals that fall into these categories, and who frequently appear (in spite of psychological complexities) as mere husks – they serve as the “shades” to his protagonists' Dante, entering onto and dropping away from the road on which the latter travel. This was the impression ingrained on Lawrence's mind as he pondered the destiny of England and its people, and he would have none of it. While he had, after his initial trip to Germany, Italy, and so forth in 1912, spent most of the war in England, he finally left it in 1919, returning only sporadically over the next ten years.

Inasmuch as Lawrence's departure from England was the rejection of its social structures, his travels also became a paean to the life-force and a pilgrimage to the “homeland”. While, at first, he conceived of Italy as a likely destination, he increasingly thought of going to America and Mexico, which he finally did, via Australia, in 1922. On the whole, America did not make much of a favourable impression, but Mexico (as well as New Mexico in the US, where he and Frieda later owned a ranch) held a profound fascination for him. It became the next locale in which he would try to re-establish connections with “God” – the move to America and so forth also symbolises a final rejection of Christianity as incapable of effecting this end: “If I lived in the year 400, pray God, I should have been a true and passionate Christian. The adventurer. But now I live in 1924, and the Christian venture is done. The adventure is gone out of Christianity. We must start on a new venture towards God” (Lawrence “Books” 733). By this stage, Lawrence's sense of “God” certainly had very little in common with that of orthodox Christian dogma – for him, “God” basically equalled the “life-force”. To a large extent, Lawrence's concept of “God” has a lot in common with Whitman's, which Malcolm Cowley tries to clarify in his introduction to *Leaves of Grass*:

[H]e insisted...that God was not a trinity but a quaternity, and that one of his faces was the “sudra face” of Satan. In “Song of Myself” as originally written, God is neither a person nor, in the strict sense, even a being; God is an established principle of energy that is manifested in every living creature as well as in “the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is”.

It is this “God”, then, that Whitman communes with in “Song of Myself”.

To a large extent, what Lawrence went to look for in America and Mexico was the satanic face of God, the violent, intense and primitive side which Christianity tabooed in the form of Satan. Lawrence also began to think in terms of the “dark gods” which he had already defined in his creed in *Studies in Classic American Literature*:

Here is my creed, against Benjamin’s. This is what I believe:

‘That I am I.’

‘That my soul is a dark forest.’

‘That my known self will never be more than a little clearing in the forest.’

‘That gods, strange gods, come forth from the forest into the clearing of my known self, and then go back.’

‘That I must have the courage to let them come and go.’

‘That I will never let mankind put anything over me, but that I will try always to recognise and submit to the gods in me and the gods in other men and women.’

(“Benjamin Franklin” 22)

The link between these “gods” and the (collective) unconscious is fairly overt, and contrasts once again with the Christian insistence on consciousness, and blacklisting of the unconscious. Lawrence’s creed calls for the awareness that we are influenced, if not governed, by these “gods”, who require nothing from the individual but “the courage to let them come and go”. In Lawrence’s mind the Mexican landscape and Indian culture still offered the primitive communion with these “gods”, all conducted on a symbolic, virtually unconscious and instinctive or “dark” level. Ronald Walker also refers to Lawrence’s use of “the trope ‘dark blood’ to identify the ‘primitive’ mode of consciousness which he feared and venerated in the Mexican Indian” (25). It is this “blood” that Lawrence saw as the locus of morality as discussed in his essay on Whitman, and is differentiated from the ultra-conscious morality of the white, European, Christian peoples. “Lawrence contrasts the ‘day-consciousness’ of whites, which is mental and verbal, with the pulsating ‘dark blood-consciousness’ of the Indians” (Walker 41). Even if Lawrence’s attitude could be judged implicitly patronising, even racist, it was this alternative consciousness that he searched for, or tried to tap into, while in New Mexico and Mexico. On the whole, he found it difficult to achieve. While on the one hand he found that western civilisation had spoilt much of what he conceived of as Mexican authenticity, rather contradictorily he also couldn’t manage, being inordinately European, to feel a true sense of solidarity with the Indians – to him, they remained *inviolably other*.

Lawrence’s relationship with Mexico remained complex and oscillated, to adopt Walker’s formulation, between fear and veneration. Between these extremes one can also identify, in a variety of texts, disappointment, disgust, anthropological appreciation and jealousy. In 1925

(having also found out that tuberculosis had left him with very little time to live) he finally decided to move on:

The Indian way, he reluctantly decided, though it was a true way, was simply not available to the European, saddled with so different a consciousness, history, and adjustment to the spirit of such different places.... Yet he continued to travel, and travelling itself implies a residual hope: 'We do not travel in order to go from one hotel to another, and see a few side-shows. We travel, perhaps, with a secret and absurd hope of setting foot on the Hesperides, of running our boat up a little creek and landing in the Garden of Eden'.

(Sagar 288)

Neither was this journey in itself "fruitless" – the increasingly mythopoeic consciousness and style which had led Lawrence to Mexico in the first place had developed, while Lawrence had come to terms with his own European identity. He now turned once again to Italy and, more specifically, the ancient society of the Etruscans, for the key to a life lived in relation to one's circumambient universe. Here, in a setting less alien than the Mexican landscape, Lawrence could continue his exploration of ancient cultures' deep-rooted relation to the forces of nature. In terms of Europe, the Mediterranean presented as far a remove as possible from the colder, wetter, more "cerebral" and "analytical" north, epitomised by Britain.

Lawrence spent most of his remaining years in and around Italy, a highlight of which seems to have been a visit (with Earl Brewster, in 1927) to the Etruscan tombs in Tarquinia. Studying the painted interiors, he was struck by the sense of vibrant life that managed to persist even in such traditionally gloomy surroundings. Describing the interior of one of the tombs, he suggests that the "scene is natural as life, and yet it has a heavy archaic fullness of meaning" (*Etruscan Places* 36). Lawrence remained susceptible to the symbolic and mythological sensibility that had drawn him across the world in the first place. As Sagar insightfully suggests,

Lawrence felt free to interpret the surviving artifacts imaginatively, resurrecting a race of which he felt himself to be a last survivor. His long pilgrimage brought him at last to these tombs, and in them he found the vivid human life he had been seeking, a life of perfect awareness and relatedness, without the crippling dualism of body versus spirit, human versus non-human, life versus death. The whole Etruscan ambience was balm to his soul: '...And that is the true Etruscan quality: ease, naturalness, and an abundance of life, no need to force the mind or soul in any direction'.

(309)

Right until the end of his life, Lawrence never relinquished his belief that the soul must never be subjected to any programme, that it should be allowed to develop spontaneously.

If Lawrence went in search of an ancient heritage in the warmer climes of the south (whether Italy, America, or Mexico), Miller's travels almost present a direct opposite – for Miller, an

“uneducated” working man in New York, Europe epitomised cultural heritage, and offered a healthy antidote to the obsessive, puritanical sterility of American society. Miller’s experience of this society was as of a vast, mechanised Moloch, in which the meaning of human life was drained off – in his own humorously hyperbolic style he even reduces the consideration of the whole problem to that of lifeless, cellophane-wrapped white bread:

What do I find wrong with America? Everything. I begin at the beginning, with the staff of life: bread. If the bread is bad the whole life is bad.... The care and affection that was once bestowed on the human body now goes to the machines. The machines get the best food, the best attention. Machines are expensive; human lives are cheap. Never in the history of the world was life cheaper than it is today. (And no pyramids to show for it either.)

(“Staff” 36-38)

Miller’s conclusion is very similar to Lawrence’s – the meaninglessness of human life is reflected in and perpetuated by the structure of society. Miller’s search becomes geared towards what Bataille calls “the naïve forms that antedate the intrusion of a servile morality: it renews the kind of tragic jubilation that man ‘is’ as soon as he stops behaving like a cripple, glorifying necessary work and letting himself be emasculated by the fear of tomorrow” (“Practice” 237). The individual’s choice comes down to this, either to fulfil his role as an active, productive cog in the greater machinery, or to drop from the system, so to speak, by refusing to supply consumerist needs – in 1920’s America, art still seemed a viable option. Miller’s relationship to society becomes that of a parasite to its host and, in fact, this role becomes one of the defining characteristics of his alter ego, the “Henry Miller” of the novels.

When Miller sailed for Paris in 1930 he went on a pilgrimage to find and uncover his own artistic identity – it was the culmination of the experiment which started with the initial step of leaving his job in 1924 in order to start writing full-time. He needed, once again, the energising effect which change brings: “All longing for travel, adventure, exploration, is based on a desire to experience life more fully. It is a protest, or admission therefore, against the flatness, exhaustion of the customary stale routine” (*World of Lawrence* 159). Whereas Miller’s brief travels around America had generally not been pleasant experiences, a previous short trip to Europe had instilled the confidence that it would offer him a cultural heritage that could counter the organised torpor of America. In Paris, Miller had found an inspiring contrast to his native New York and, characteristically impressed by the “public” nature of its urinals, claims to have fallen in love with Paris through a toilet window. Such a conflation of the “high” – love – with the “low” – the toilet – forms a central part of the impact of his writing. To Miller, the presence of urinals on the street said something about society, pointed to the possibility of a

healthy reconciliation of the mind and body. Even the cities seemed to him less the products of imposing rational minds than organic growths:

By contrast with the boringly rational and all-too-obviously man-made Manhattan grid, the European cities he had visited seemed wonderfully haphazard structures that grew like natural chaos out of history. The trip gave him the beginning of a whole new set of perspectives from which he would go on to attack the worst excesses of American society.

(Ferguson 164)

In his first “European” novel, *Tropic of Cancer*, this “organic” nature of Paris is so effectively brought across that it almost becomes a live entity – throbbing and pulsating underfoot as Miller walks its abject streets.

At age thirty-eight, Miller, “cut off from friends and family for the first time in his middle-aged but still unfledged life” (Jong 91), embarked on what would be a nine-year stay in Paris. His marriage with June had basically disintegrated, primarily because of her obsessive homosexual relationship with a New York artist, and Miller was left to fend for himself. Scrounging for money, sleeping in cheap hotels or, occasionally, in theatres, and living on the handouts and charity of new acquaintances, Miller’s growth into the role of a rogue and parasite was soon complete. For the most part, he took aimless strolls around Paris, soaking up the atmosphere, and soon also started actively to consort with the prostitutes he encountered. But while all these experiences would have an irrevocable effect on Miller’s artistic identity, his first months in Paris were not devoid of a sense of disillusionment, and he even considered returning to New York. At the same time, one can also see the emergence of a new sense of self, somehow self-deprecating without acquiring any actual sense of humility:

Here I am, and I am only beginning to recognise it – a very plain, unvarnished soul, not learned, not wise, no great shakes any way you look at me – particularly ‘*comme artiste*’. What I must do, before blowing out my brains, is to write a few simple confessions in plain Milleresque language.

(Ferguson 174)

Apart from clearly sketching his own role as he saw it, Miller’s intention to “write a few simple confessions” also traces the movement in his fiction from the third person (employed in both *Moloch* and his work-in-progress, *Crazy Cock*) to the confessional “I” of his later, successful books.

Apart from the rootless and promiscuous existence which Paris offered him as an antidote to Miller’s “puritanical” American upbringing, it also offered him access to the artistic developments of the age (even if somewhat retrospectively). For the first time in his life, Miller came into contact with Surrealism, especially in the form of Dali and Buñuel’s films – once

again, much of its impact on Miller lay in its inherent rejection of conventionality, from morals to aesthetic norms. Its effrontery appealed to Miller's rebelliousness, and certainly served as the inspiration behind the 'New Instinctivism' which he propounded along with new-found friend, Alfred Perlés. However, Ferguson rightly notices a satirical intent in their programme:

In further reaction to such [intellectual] writing and the programmatic pomposities like that of [Eugène] Jolas, Miller and Perlés put together a manifesto in which they promoted their 'New Instinctivism'. They introduced it as: "A proclamation of rebellion against the puerilities in the arts and literature, a manifesto of disgust, a gob of spit in the cuspidor of post-war conceits, a healthy crap in the cradle of still-born deities".

(187)

Ferguson adds that the "good Instinctivist...was also, instinctively, against the New Instinctivism" (187). It is fairly clear that this 'movement' was neither very systematic and practical, nor very serious or successful. In short, it was a joke by means of which Miller was trying out his artistic role, that of the picaresque hero – it still serves as a notable preface to his next novel.

Tropic of Cancer sets the tone for much of Miller's writing and, in spite of its strong picaresque qualities, has as its central action the Romantic quest of its narrator, one Henry Miller, towards spiritual liberation and imaginative, creative expression. This is closely linked to Harold Bloom's discussion of the "quest-romance": "The hero of the internalized quest is the poet himself, the antagonists of quest are everything in the self that blocks imaginative work" ("Quest-Romance" 8). In *Tropic of Cancer* (and later novels), these antagonists appear to us primarily as types or archetypal figures, but also in the guise of the many problems Miller himself had to face, i.e. social problems and restrictions ranging from hunger and destitution to *ennui*. On a certain level then, *Tropic of Cancer* becomes the story of its own genesis – the internal and external quests become indistinguishable, as does reality and fiction. Similarly, the irreverence of the picaresque novel is effectively merged with the seriousness of the quest for artistic selfhood.

By 1934, when *Tropic of Cancer* was released, Miller had also taken the step of divorcing June, while becoming involved with Anaïs Nin. Sexually and intellectually challenging, the relationship certainly had a strong influence on his development as man and artist. As to the completion of his best known novel, Jong states quite simply that Miller

had been reborn through *Tropic of Cancer*. Though much in it was a wildly heightened, surreal version of his life in Paris, though he was never as profligate as the narrator seems to imply, he did blast through to a new vision of life. He made peace with the

wild man in himself, with his own mortality and his own sexuality.

(117)

His “immersion in experience” and his lengthy struggle towards a satisfactory mode of self-expression now concluded, he wrote two more important books over the next four years. His fruitful relationship with Paris finally ended in 1939, with the approach of the Second World War. At the instigation of Lawrence Durrell, Miller fled to Greece, where he stayed for just over five months, arriving back in New York in 1940.

Short as his stay in Greece might have been, it made an indelible impression on Miller. While the Paris years seem to have been epitomised by creative struggle, sexual promiscuity and looming destitution of an almost violent intensity, Greece seemed to draw Miller out into a new role, namely that of the sage, or the “happy rock” which he foreshadows in his last Paris novel, *Tropic of Capricorn*. This trip, which resulted in his next novel, *The Colossus of Maroussi*, instilled in him the “conviction...that he had experienced a rebirth there from which he had emerged less a writer and more a sage” (Ferguson 267). Ferguson goes on to remark, perhaps somewhat sardonically, that “for a man whose first idol was Whitman, who believed that religion developed from art, such a promotion was logical” (267). This kind of progression is strongly reminiscent of Lawrence’s own attempts at establishing a kind of religion from his own work and his theosophical pilgrimage in general. For Miller this progress ushers in a marked difference in style, in which the violence, surrealism and virulence of the Paris novels are largely relinquished in favour of deeply felt joy, and what Jong calls “the radiant clarity of *Maroussi*” (147). This novel was written immediately upon Miller’s arrival from Greece in New York.

While Miller, much like Lawrence, seemed to find intimations of a homeland on the Mediterranean, he essentially spent the rest of his life in America, eventually settling in Big Sur, California, after a year of travelling the country with a friend. He remained a prolific writer, working (among other projects) on the *Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy, in which his years with June are extensively mythologised. Yet Miller never finally settled in any comprehensive sense of the word. Oscillating between the roles of libertine, buffoon, liberator and sage (the latter of which somehow encapsulated all the former), Miller also moved through a string of wives and lovers – all of which attest to his insistence that one constantly reinvent oneself, that one *move*. For Miller, this was a metaphysical responsibility, and while such reinventions or rebirths may increasingly have become less original and less dramatic, he persisted until his death.

In Kerouac the messianic fervour of the “urge toward and immersion in experience” (Rahv 360), so pronounced in Whitman, Lawrence and Miller, has abated – his conception of the quest (while retaining picaresque qualities) is to a large extent elegiac, and he conceives of such pilgrimages as inevitably “ragged” (Nicosia *Memory* 299). If the “noble function” is to “move” (Kerouac *Road* 133), the avoidance of stasis, then man is also subject to the pressure of *having to move*. Reminiscent of this is Georges Bataille’s reference to the horrific moment following a sense of beatitude, at which a man “recognises that he cannot fulfill his life without surrendering to an inexorable movement, whose violence he can feel acting on the most remote areas of his being with a rigor that frightens him” (“Practice” 235). There is something haunted about this condition, and the restless spirit may end up being little more than a ghost, like the “Ghost of the Susquehanna” (103) that *On the Road*’s narrator, Sal Paradise, encounters in the night by the roadside. Nicosia points out that Kerouac “had no desire to moon poetically over the tragedy of life. Rather, his instinct was to outrun it, to lose it in the oblivion of spent energy, while searching for new and possibly more hopeful experiences” (*Memory* 94). It is this fugitive aspect to Kerouac’s life-affirming quest that renders it elegiac – Kerouac and his narrators are constantly looking back, aware that in the rush toward a new vision, something is also lost, or left behind.

Of all the writers under discussion, Kerouac seems to be the one that most energetically took to the open road (although, geographically speaking, his travels remained rather centralised). As an antidote to the goal-oriented, organised and materialistic rush toward the American Dream (Kerouac’s decades were, after all, the forties and fifties), the Beat Generation propagated the kind of pathological loafing that Whitman would have loved, and drew strongly on Eastern religion and philosophy to provide a spiritual foil to what they perceived as America’s growing materialism. In this, they basically shared (in addition to his own interest in Eastern thought) Miller’s horror at the direction America seemed to be taking. Unlike Miller, though, this position of criticism was accompanied by what one might call, for lack of a better word, a very strong patriotism – the urge toward material well-being is seen as but a perversion of the frontier spirit, the same spirit that Whitman praised so energetically. While perhaps less optimistic than Whitman, the Beat Generation generally harboured a hope for the future of America, and saw their cause as the liberation of Americans from the materialistic groove. In this they clearly set the tone for the sixties counter-culture.

Against the very clear, unambiguous and tangible goal of material well-being, *money*, one might place the Beat Generation’s search, to use Lawrence’s own strangely prophetic words,

for “IT, the American whole soul” (“Spirit” 13), i.e. individual self-achievement within the American homeland, a rooted individuality. Defined somewhat differently as a transcendental experience of self beyond time (if not space), “IT”, also forms the object of Sal and Dean’s pilgrimage in *On the Road*, and therefore fuels it. As such, much of the language employed by most of the Beat Generation writers alludes to religious writing, drawing on such ideas as (divine) inspiration, symbolic language and prophecy while, at the same time, it remains rooted in physicality. It is precisely the candour used in relation to the latter, in addition to what must have been perceived as a dedication to sloth and regression, that managed to render the Beat Generation so offensive to the general public as well as the literary establishment, who viewed them strictly as degenerate, irresponsible youths.

In a very Whitmanesque sense, the open road served for the Beat Generation, and especially Kerouac, as a foil to the stasis of life within the system. But more than just a rejection of conventional values, it was also an acceptance of a more spiritual consciousness (closely informed by physical experience), a belief, with Whitman, “that much unseen is also here [on the road]” (“Open Road” 17). It is this “unseen” to which the Beat writer hopes to become initiated. For Kerouac, the ultimate goal of all this would be simply to “see God’s face” (*Nicosia Memory* 157)³. This is, however, not easily achieved, and the writer (to a large extent a medium) has to renounce the worldly goods which hamper his progress, bearing forward with “no hope in the world...except temporary glimpses of the Light and the transient bliss of such moments” (Kerouac in *Nicosia Memory* 325). This “Light” has to be sought out, discovered, and does not come to him who waits. It is to be found in the “unknown darkness” beyond the stifled “coal-fire” (“Life” 18) which Lawrence urges us to abandon.

Practically speaking, Kerouac roughly spent a decade on the road, from his first rush after Neal Cassady to Denver in 1947 to the advent of fame (and a radically new lifestyle) with the publication of *On the Road* in 1957. Up to 1947 Kerouac had spent most of his life in and around New York where, since dropping out of college, he was trying to write *The Town and the City*. He would finish this novel early in 1948, shortly after returning from his first road trip, on which he had hitch-hiked to Denver and then San Francisco and Los Angeles. Nicosia writes that “[t]he ten days Jack spent in Denver were a turning-point, at which he switched allegiance from his bourgeois professional friends to the group he later called ‘beat’, of which Allen [Ginsberg] and Neal were charter members” (*Memory* 194). For Kerouac, moving West

³ While this sounds fairly devout it is, at the same time, an urge to transgress the limits of human knowledge. Within Christian mythology, the sight of God (to mortal eyes) is taboo.

for the first time in his life, the trip also became a re-enactment of the heroic Western Expansion, a pilgrimage in the footsteps of the great pioneers. This trip, and the others it initiated, would also eventually form the subject of *On the Road*.

Kerouac's myriad trips between the east and west coasts of America, especially New York and San Francisco, form a horizontal line, a general oscillation between the stability (or threat of stasis) of the East, represented by his mother, but also his three marriages there, and the wild madness and glee of the West, essentially personified by Neal Cassady. But in 1950, once again with Cassady, he broke from this linearity by travelling south, to Mexico. As expressed in *On the Road*, this deviation from what had almost become a new norm held for Kerouac a promise of a new vision, or rather, the rediscovery of an ancient, vital one – in language reminiscent of Lawrence, Kerouac's narrator expresses the belief that he and his companions "would finally learn ourselves among the Fellahin Indians of the world" (280), where "[l]ife was dense, dark, ancient" (299). Although his motives in going to Mexico were perhaps less "pure" than Lawrence's – to a large extent the virtue of the journey did lie in the availability of cheap drugs and prostitutes – Kerouac certainly did experience a kind of mystical link with the earth which would later culminate in a more serious outdoorsmanship. On a more practical level, the absence of America's moral and infra-structural rigidity also seemed to him a sign of Mexico's more healthy prioritising – it is especially the laxity or absence of totalitarian zest on the part of the Mexican police that impressed him beyond measure.

Kerouac would undertake four more trips to Mexico in his life, but he remained essentially within the borders of America, the "only...[place] he loved, regardless of the 'universal light' he sought there" (*Nicosia Memory* 326). With his growing interest in Buddhism (which never managed to displace his Catholicism completely) firmly linked to the view of himself as a wandering poet, Kerouac gradually also assumed the role of a sage. By 1955 in San Francisco, under the influence of Buddhist poet Gary Snyder, Kerouac started more seriously to explore the great outdoors, leaving the road for the wilds, and cutting down on the pleasures of wine, women and song. This "priestly" lifestyle culminated and ended, for all practical intents and purposes, in late 1956 with a solitary two-month vigil as a fire-watch atop an aptly christened Desolation Peak. As dramatised in *Desolation Angels*, this venture was to some extent meant to clinch Kerouac's ambition towards "Buddhist monkhood", yet another attempt at "com[ing] face to face with God or Tathagata and find out once and for all what is the meaning of all this existence and suffering and going to and fro in vain but instead I'd come face to face with myself, no liquor, no drugs, no chance of faking it" (*Kerouac Angels* 30). Coming to some

sense that life is “a passing through” (31), Kerouac’s narrator, Jack Duluoz, half-way through his term of isolation, realises that “[a]ll I have to do is wait 30 long days to get down from the rock and see sweet life again – knowing it’s neither sweet nor bitter but just what it is, and so it is –” (32). Increasingly viewing isolation and abstinence as life-denying, Kerouac’s descent from the mountain was accompanied by the “dead certain[ty] he would never return to a hermit’s life anywhere” (*Nicosia Memory* 527). Although the pilgrimage remains solitary, its meaning still resides, to a large extent, in the transient community achieved with others on the road.

Never truly having tasted material well-being, Kerouac’s lifestyle from 1947 onward became positively ascetic. Oscillating between work and unemployment he became (much like Miller), for all practical intents and purposes, a bum or hobo. Such titles would not have bothered him, however, as he tended to see such figures in a somewhat romantic light as “beat”, living innocent and simple lives, free from the restrictions of materialist society and therefore probably initiated into the “unseen”. Such people find themselves in the Blakean state of “Innocence”. The hobo himself, “in his idealistic lope to freedom and the hills of holy silence and holy privacy” (Kerouac “Hobo” 164), became a kind of sage, full of wisdom acquired from coast to coast, while leading an unobtrusive, generally pacifistic, subterranean existence. Kerouac was always interested in the existence of alternative subcultures within America’s borders, and the hobo’s solitary migration, unacknowledged by society yet somehow linked to a loose, fluctuating hobo community, made a deep impression on him. Knowing the sights, sounds and smells of America on an intimate level, the hobo becomes its most authentic voice. *Nicosia* alludes to an American tradition in which this figure plays a central role, mentioning such writers as Twain, Dos Passos and Jack London, and suggesting that

[w]hile the tramp may have no legal or social authority, he has according to London, the power of witnessing injustice and telling about it, and thus he may serve as one of the most powerful forces for change. Like Kerouac, London believed that the best stories were improvised, and as an example of the method he cited the hobo who is forced to make up credible tales while begging.

(344)

While we may well doubt the existence of structures which could translate the hobo’s testimony into actual change or social reform, the hobo’s status as a story-teller, both entertaining and manipulative, is important, since it clarifies the link of this figure with the artist, a link we also encounter in Miller’s work.

For Kerouac, “[t]he hobo is born of pride” (“Hobo” 168), a romantic, heroic figure in the tradition of the questing knight, monk, pilgrim or prophet who, by virtue of his penniless

station in life, may also be implicated in all manner of picaresque scrapes. In the same way that Kerouac conceived of Neal Cassady as the “HOLY GOOF”, he also saw the hobo as combining the angel with the outcast, rogue and derelict. It was in this role that he himself took to the road. What he learned, however, was that such a lifestyle could also become haunted, in more ways than one (and in the process, acquire the characteristics of the Blakean state of “Experience”). In one sense, the hobo has to contend with the fact of his growing unacceptability in America – according to Kerouac, an ancient reverence or, at least, acceptance of the hobo was dying a quick death as poverty became a sin in America’s materialist climate. Thus the hobo is increasingly viewed with fear and loathing, considered ‘an example’, and dereliction is monitored by the police. As a result, “[t]he woods are full of wardens” (Kerouac “Hobo” 174) and the freedom of movement which should be the hobo’s sole prize is restricted. But there is another sense in which the hobo’s life may become haunted, namely by a sense of loss, especially that of one’s roots. It is this elegiac quality which accompanies even the general exuberance that marks Kerouac’s early novels, and it also creeps in towards the end of Kerouac’s laudatory essay on the hobo, “The Vanishing American Hobo”. Assuming the voice of a derelict on skid row, he bewails the fact that

I’m alone, I’m sick, I’m dying – see my hand uptipped, learn the secret of my human heart, give me the thing, give me your hand, take me to the safe place, be kind, be nice, smile – I’m too tired now of everything else, I’ve had enough, I give up, I quit, I want to go home, take me home O brother in the night – take me home, lock me in safe, take me to where all is peace and amity, to the family of life, my mother, my father, my sister, my wife and you my brother and you my friend – but no hope, no hope, no hope.
(174)

This is what we might consider a more recognisable bum, hounded by state and desolation, existing in a Blakean state of “Experience”. Once the pride and joy flags, the bum is brought face to face with isolation. Even being “lock[ed]... in” seems preferable to rootless “freedom” – this perhaps echoes Lawrence’s claim that “[m]en are free when they belong to a living, organic, *believing* community” (“Spirit” 12). Kerouac’s bum pleads again for some vital connection to others as he comes to the anti-climactic end of the road.

The bum’s cry for family echoes also a very strong compulsion on Kerouac’s part to find stability and meaning within the family space. This can be seen quite clearly in his representations of boyhood in a number of his novels, in which the family itself, frequently beset by financial concerns which threaten to break it up, manages to remain central to the lives of its members, a sustaining force. In fact, Kerouac’s first published novel, *The Town and the City* could be called a family saga which ends, however, with the image of the central protagonist hitch-hiking by the roadside. Also, whenever he was off the road, Kerouac stayed

with his mother (his father died in 1946) and always felt guilty when resuming his “ragged pilgrimage”. Although his travelling partially stemmed from his belief that “city dwellers [were] living in ignorance because they were cut off from the fundamental knowledge of life and death stored in folk traditions, which were preserved in the country and small towns” (Nicosia *Memory* 162), he was to find that, as a loner and stranger, he had very little recourse to these traditions anyway, as they were strictly preserved in communities to which families were the centre. In Kerouac’s novels then, we find revealed his growing awareness that the chase after new visions also implies the loss of one’s roots. The effect of this is perhaps most clearly illustrated by his growing interest, over the years, in his family’s genealogy, an interest which to some extent culminated in a trip to France in 1965, meant to afford him the opportunity to trace his family’s lineage. This quest for a sense of rooted, derived identity forms the direct opposite of the search for “IT” and the quest for “self-ultimacy” (Nicosia *Memory* 134), and exposes a deep-felt recoil from the lonely pilgrimage.

Although Kerouac frequently laments the self-imposed responsibility of searching for “IT” by abandoning Lawrence’s “coal-fire”, the safe space provided by family, community, tradition, for the inhospitable yet fecund darkness, it must be remembered that this elegiac attitude is vigorously offset by a general sense of glee and exuberance instilled by both the prospect and reality of travel. As in the case of Lawrence and Miller, the experiences collected on such travels are explored and consolidated in the act of writing – although often drawing on notes made “on the run”, this act requires at least the existence of a temporary home. For Kerouac, although a vast number of places fulfilled this role at various times, this home generally lay with his mother in the East, the stable counterpart to the pioneer’s Wild West. Looking back from the frontier, the pioneer could see the locus of (moral) stability, tradition and heritage on the East coast, beyond which loomed the even more distant influence of Europe. Kerouac’s own returns home allowed him to tally his experiences, to draw from them the answers that he sought on his pilgrimage:

If the journey goes one way and ends with something comparable to enlightenment or grace, it *is* like a pilgrimage, though more often, as in Conrad, the full meaning of the voyage comes only when the traveller has returned home. The journey out west or back east in American fiction, or journeys to Europe in writers like James, keep the historical possibilities of the pilgrimage motif: the Pisgah sight may be a kind of anti-grace, but the pattern is still there.

(Howard 116)

What is important is that the Pisgah sight lies outside the reach of those that refuse to leave home in the first place – it presupposes a willing surrender of that which is familiar, *known*, and by virtue of this alone becomes a transgressive act in which borders and boundaries are

literally crossed. This step was certainly taken by Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac. For them the question now became how one would translate the Pisgah sight into language, within the traditional strictures that accompany it, in short, how to write a vision.

CHAPTER 4: THE SACRED INSTANT

If the pilgrimage is undertaken to ensure a range of experiences that could assist in the establishment of a set of relations to one's circumambient universe, thereby the clearer to define oneself and come into being, the question to some extent remains as to what the nature of such experiences should be. It seems, firstly, that there are no particular qualitative restrictions placed on experience – consider, for instance, Whitman's catalogues. However, there can be no doubt that in the work of all the writers under discussion, the experiences that are most important are potentially also the most deeply horrifying, i.e. those experiences which threaten, momentarily, to dissolve the individual's sense of self, by creating a sense of unity with that which is Other. In this transient transcendental "space", the individual is rid of socially instilled mores and values, *freed*, by becoming essentially unconscious (which implies a casting off, or losing, of self-consciousness). Such moments, impossible to sustain temporally and spatially, but essential to the (creative) growth of the individual, could be achieved, to varying degrees in the minds of these writers, by meditation, inspiration, intoxication and sex, in short, in moments of excess. Implicit in such moments is the return to a new consciousness – the pilgrim returns from the journey into the unconscious bearing treasure which will shine only once brought into the light of consciousness.

The transient moment of excess, or transgression, is conceived by Bataille to be sacred (as opposed to *religious*, which would imply a defining paradigm which would simply reject and refuse to acknowledge anything that falls outside its boundaries). As we have already seen, Bataille defined the sacred as an "ungraspable thing...a privileged moment of communal unity, a moment of the convulsive communication of what is ordinarily stifled" ("The Sacred" 242). This, then, is the inexpressible that art seeks to express. What makes Bataille's discussion particularly useful is that it grants us a clear context within which to consider the way in which Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac successfully manage to reconcile, to varying degrees, the spiritual quest with the picaresque journey, the "pure" ideals with the "sordid" reality. This reconciliation reflects that of the mind, soul and body, and achieves its clearest expression in what one could describe as sacred instants (I will be employing this term with Bataille's understanding of it in mind, because it both seems to pinpoint accurately that which these writers are after, and highlights their very 'religious' view of their respective quests). Gilles Mayné points out that "[s]acred' comes from 'sacer', which originally meant 'holy' as well as

‘soiled’, as Bataille indicates in one of his earliest essays¹” (10). This point is also borne out by James Frazer who, in commenting on the responses of different ancient nations to a variety of animals, claims that “[t]he difference of opinion points to a hazy state of religious thought in which the ideas of sanctity and uncleanness are not yet sharply distinguished, both being blent in a sort of vaporous solution to which we can give the name of taboo” (567) and continues to suggest that “it may perhaps be said that all so-called unclean animals were originally sacred; the reason for not eating them was that they were divine” (567). Interestingly, for Bataille, it is in the breaking of the taboo, the partaking of that which is “holy” and “soiled”, that the “privileged” sacred moment lies.

The breaking of a taboo, the sacred instant, remains, for all practical intents and purposes, an experience of the void, of an uncharted plane which, according to Bataille, is God, i.e. that which falls beyond the scope of human knowledge and comprehension. It is within this impossible space that the individual is threatened with dissolution, but the experience may also lead to a heightened sense of self. As Marie-Christine Lala, quoting and discussing Bataille, puts it,

[t]his experience of his limits leads man “from the ebb of pain to the flow of joy”, it is inseparable from eroticism, from drunkenness, from sobbing (half laughing, half crying) and it releases “a tiny fragment of blinding life”. All these forms of unproductive expenditure unleash the dynamics of exuberance whose life and liberty are inseparable from death and the unbounded void.

(113)

In Lala’s reference to “unproductive expenditure” we encounter the idea that these “forms” (which may usher in the sacred instant) are essentially wasteful, and loaded by virtue of that very fact. Lawrence himself also insists on the importance of both excess and waste in his “Study of Thomas Hardy”:

The excess is the thing itself at the maximum of being. If it had stopped short of this excess, it would not have been at all. If this excess were missing, darkness would cover the face of the earth. . . . The aim, the culmination of all is the red of the poppy, this flame of the phoenix, this extravagant being of Dido, even her so-called waste.

(11)

This excessive state is brief and transient – in the case of the phoenix, it immediately ushers in death.

Of all acts and activities that may precipitate a sacred instant before death, the sexual act must certainly be the most potent symbolically, a claim certainly strengthened by the taboos that

¹ This essay would be Bataille’s “The Use-value of D. A. F. de Sade”, in *Visions of Excess*. Ed. A. Stoekl. Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 14. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1985. 91-102

Christianity especially placed on it, and the suggestive reference to it as *la petit mort*. Accordingly, sexuality plays a very important role in the thought of visionary writers like Whitman, Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac. Keith Sagar writes that “[s]exuality, like mortality, is a tragic condition in that it involves the violation of the self. But only through such tragic experience can one find wholeness. For wholeness involves the opening of the self to God” (228). One should not even presume to be familiar with the basic views on sexuality held by various societies over the course of human history, but I would like to suggest that in the case of these writers at least the understanding of the sexual act is not primarily that of a procreative act. Although certainly the procreative nature of sex lies at the root of its symbolic potency in that it serves, like death, to link the course of man’s life insolubly to the chthonic forces of nature, the interest of our writers first and foremost seems to lie in it as a transgressive moment, in which the act is divorced from its procreative goal. Robbed of any pragmatic *raison d’etre*, sexual intercourse becomes wasteful, in other words, erotic. By this I do not mean to imply that Whitman, Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac are all to be classified as writers of erotic literature (since this is not a useful claim to make, except perhaps in the case of Miller), but simply that eroticism plays an important part in the introduction of sacred instants in the lives of the writers and, occasionally, their characters. We need but remember Whitman’s speaker in “Song of Myself”, and his sexual-sacrificial experience which ushers in a communion with God:

I mind how we lay in June, such a transparent summer morning;
 You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned over upon me,
 And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue into my barestript
 heart,
 And reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my feet.
 (ll. 78-81)

Neither is the erotic the only gateway to the void – in Whitman, it seems to be the spontaneous meditation on a “spear of summer grass” (“Song of Myself” l. 5) and in Kerouac, more often than not, it seems to be (in addition to meditation and eroticism) intoxication. One might even argue that the affirmative action on behalf of the body, initiated at least partially by candid writers such as Lawrence and Miller and others of their generation, had dissolved many of the taboos surrounding the sexual act, thereby demystifying it and leaving it stripped of much of its sacred potency by the time the Beat Generation came along, but this would be a wholly different study.

What keeps Whitman from being an erotic writer is his inordinately “healthy” view of sexuality – sex generally appears in Whitman’s work as a simple, natural occurrence which forms part of the cycle of life, and his project seems to be the rejection of any shame that might

attend its indulgence. This kind of candour is quite clear, for instance, in a poem like “A Woman Waits for Me”, in which sex is viewed as a kind of pivot to human existence:

A woman waits for me, she contains all, nothing is lacking,
Yet all were lacking if sex were lacking, or if the moisture of the right man were
lacking.

(ll. 1-2)

Although Whitman alludes to the abject, central to eroticism, he rejects the idea that the indulgence in sex constitutes a form of transgression:

Without shame the man I like knows and avows the deliciousness of his sex,
Without shame the woman I like knows and avows hers.

(ll. 9-10)

It is important to note, however, that although reasonably explicit, it is not so much the sexual act itself that forms the focus of the poem, but its *raison d'être*, procreation. This is what Whitman's speaker insists on with a rather grim degree of determination:

I pour the stuff to start sons and daughters fit for these States, I press with slow rude
muscle,
I brace myself effectually, I listen to no entreaties,
I dare not withdraw till I deposit what has so long accumulated within me.

(ll. 28-30)

This act is not wasteful, not purely geared towards pleasure, and therefore not erotic. Instead, intercourse is seen strictly in terms of a cycle, the natural progression of a species:

In you I wrap a thousand onward years,
....
The babes I beget upon you are to beget babes in their turn,
I shall demand perfect men and women out of my love-spendings,
I shall expect them to interpenetrate with others, as I and you interpenetrate now

(ll. 32-36)

The speaker's vision of a succession of fornicating or “interpenetrat[ing]” generations is hardly erotic, and although we recognise the speaker's egoism, especially in terms of his “demand” and “expect[ation]”, we recognise the speaker's motive as not in the least transgressive.

To consider this the final word on Whitman's conception of sexuality, however, would be over-simplifying. For one thing, there is the matter of Whitman's homosexuality, in which procreation clearly ceases to be an issue. Furthermore, Whitman also makes references to masturbation, equally devoid of any ‘function’, in some of his poems. Bloom, for instance, claims that “[m]ore even than sadomasochism, autoeroticism appears to be the last Western taboo, at least in terms of literary representation, yet Whitman acclaims it in some of his most important poems” (“Whitman” 273). And then, also, there are poems like “One Hour to Madness and Joy” which, while certainly less explicit than “Woman”, moves much closer to

eroticism by virtue of its sheer force and intensity – as an invigorating intimation of a sacred instant, I quote it here in full:

One hour to madness and joy! O Furious! O confine me not!
 (What is this that frees me so in storms?
 What do my shouts amid lightnings and raging winds mean?)

O to drink the mystic deliria deeper than any other man!
 O savage and tender achings! (I bequeath them to you my children,
 I tell them to you, for reasons, O bridegroom and bride.)

O to be yielded to you whoever you are, and you are to be yielded to me in defiance of
 the world!
 O return to Paradise! O bashful and feminine!
 O to draw you to me, to plant on you for the first time the lips of a determin'd man.

O the puzzle, the thrice-tied knot, the deep and dark pool, all untied and illumin'd!
 O to speed where there is space enough and air enough at last!
 To be absolv'd from previous ties and conventions, I from mine and you from yours!
 To find a new unthought-of nonchalance with the best of Nature!
 To have the gag removed from one's mouth!
 To have the feeling to-day or any day I am sufficient as I am.

O something unprov'd! something in a trance!
 To escape utterly from others' anchors and holds!
 To drive free! to love free! to dash reckless and dangerous!
 To court destruction with taunts, with invitations!
 To ascend, to leap to the heavens of the love indicated to me!
 To rise thither with my inebriate soul!
 To be lost if it must be so!
 To feed the remainder of life with one hour of fulness and freedom!
 With one brief hour of madness and joy.

(ll. 1-24)

Although direct sexual references are sparse and a wider reading of the poem is certainly possible, the poem does form part of a sequence of poems (which includes “A Woman Waits for Me”) entitled “Children of Adam”, dealing specifically with sexuality. Instead of the almost grim procreative determination of the previous poem, however, we find an almost manic sense of release, a purely transgressive moment in which “previous ties and conventions” are cast off, and the speaker (together with his partner²) “escape[s] utterly from other's anchors and holds”. The dangerous nature of this transgression but adds to the sense of excess – the joy which flows from the experience is insolubly linked to the onslaught of madness, which carries with it the threat of horror and dissolution. However, this extension beyond the limits of the self-conscious self, the sacred instant, is the one thing that justifies life – it “feed[s] the remainder of life with one hour of fulness and freedom”. It reminds us immediately of

² The address to the second person is much more suggestive of actual communion than the impersonality of the third person employed in “A Woman Waits for Me”.

Lawrence's pronouncement on the wasteful flowering of the poppy: "If it had stopped short of this excess, it would not have been at all" ("Study" 11).

In Lawrence's writing, the excessive moment where the subject bursts its limitations is of extreme importance. However, this release and dissolution of self into the chthonic, or the unconscious, although a prerequisite for the individual's coming into being, remains subservient to that end – a relation to one's circumambient universe also implies an awareness of difference, of oneself as an autonomous entity. This tension and reciprocity (or causality) between unification and differentiation is admirably brought out in Lawrence's poem, "Song of a Man Who has Come Through" (from the 1916 *Look! We Have Come Through!*). In the first stanza of this poem, Lawrence's speaker craves a kind of dissolution into the natural flow of things, represented by the wind, and a relinquishment of the conscious "I":

Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!
 A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.
 If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!
 If only I am sensitive, subtle, oh, delicate, a winged gift!
 If only, most lovely of all, I yield myself and am borrowed
 By the fine, fine wind that takes its course through the chaos of the world
 Like a fine, an exquisite chisel, a wedge blade inserted;
 (ll. 1-7)

The "I" of the first line is strangely dissolved – the wind blows *through* him – and expresses a yearning for merging with the wind, "blowing the new direction of Time". The speaker has intimations of a new direction, a new destiny, which will require him to "yield" himself to the wind – the word "borrowed" suggests, however, that this unification will not be permanent. What the speaker hopes to escape is the "chaos of the world", and suggests that the wind is his only chance for getting through. Interestingly, the "fine wind", perhaps by virtue of this temporary marriage, grows in density, becoming a "fine, an exquisite chisel", not something that gets through the "chaos" by virtue of its virtual intangibility but, rather, because of its very hardness, its power to confront and shatter any resistance:

If only I am keen and hard like the sheer tip of a wedge
 Driven by invisible blows,
 The rock will split, we shall come at the wonder, we shall find the Hesperides.
 (ll. 8-10)

While, to some extent, the speaker remains the object of the action – the blowing wind has become the "invisible blows" – he is no longer as diffuse as the first line suggests, but has become "keen and hard", clearly defined and purposeful, changing his role from the borne to

the “[d]riven”. The ultimate effect of this on the speaker is an exuberance that craves untrammelled expression:

Oh, for the wonder that bubbles into my soul,
I would be a good fountain, a good well-head,
Would blur no whisper, spoil no expression.

(ll. 11-13)

In short, the speaker becomes a creative source. At this point the poem takes a sudden turn, introducing the possibility of an interruption, a sense of fear and expectation:

What is the knocking?
What is the knocking at the door in the night?
It is somebody wants to do us harm.

(ll. 14-16)

In this we see the speaker’s awareness of his transgression – for a moment there hovers the spectre of guilt and punishment. This momentary fear, however turns out to be misplaced. At this point, the sacred instant renders up its ultimate prize – a Blakean vision:

No, no, it is the three strange angels.
Admit them, admit them.

(ll. 17-18)

Thus far, I have circumvented a strictly sexual interpretation of the poem (which seems reductive), but the sexual nature of the language is inescapable – it is especially in Lawrence’s treatment of the chisel that the phallic innuendoes are quite evident. Such a reading of the poem would be justified simply by virtue of the fact that Lawrence did consider the sexual act to be the most intense merging with the Other and the chthonic possible in life. Biographically speaking, one might point out that *Look! We Have Come Through!*, from which the poem comes, to a large extent “documented” Lawrence and Frieda’s initial “honeymoon” – a time of sexual awakening for Lawrence. This also accounts for the reference to “us” in line 16 of the poem, where the outside world (with its mores and morals) threatens to encroach on the cosy cocoon achieved by their sexual union. But Lawrence was not one to advocate a continued blissful slumber in this cocoon; this much is clear in the speaker’s insistence that “the three strange angels” be admitted. The sexual act, a sacred instant, becomes overtly mystical in its impact.

I have briefly referred to the threat of guilt in the wake of the transgressive moment as achieved in the sexual act. If Lawrence ever had a project in his writing, the idea of sexual emancipation must certainly have been the most overt, especially in his later work. It is this element to Lawrence’s work that leads Maurice Charney to say of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* that “[i]t is not one of Lawrence’s best novels, perhaps because it is so sexually programmatic, with

Connie's sexual awakening worked out in an entirely predictable way" (93). As we have seen, Lawrence partially traced the fear of life that stifles the individual's development to a "horror of sexual life" ("Paintings" 13). To some extent, he hoped that the candid treatment of sexuality in art would go some way towards effecting a kind of catharsis, resulting in the dissolution of unnatural taboos pertaining to sex. He insists on one recognition, that "we all have our roots in the earth" ("Pansies" 8), that we are vitally connected, through our bodies (especially the tabooed nether regions, the places where inside and outside, self and other, become dangerously indistinguishable, ambiguous, i.e. the sexual organs and anus) to the abject flux and flow of natural processes. Lawrence's project is revealed, then, in his claim that

it is our roots that now need a little attention, need the hard soil eased away from them, and softened so that a little fresh air can come to them, and they can breathe. For by pretending to have no roots, we have trodden the earth so hard over them that they are starving and stifling below the soil. We have roots, and our roots are in the sensual, instinctive and intuitive body, and it is here that we need the fresh air of open consciousness.

("Pansies" 8)

It is significant that Lawrence uses the image of roots in this context. On the one hand, it evokes a sense of the earth's dark fecundity with its abject horror while, on the other hand, it reveals the inescapable fact of our existence as depending on our bodies, which are sexual vessels. This point is stressed by Lawrence's claim that "each individual has sex, and is pivoted on sex" ("Pornography" 84).

It may be useful to explore somewhat further this image of "roots" as metaphorical of the human sensual body, the roots which form the counter-point to the glorious purity and classical beauty of the flower's corolla and petals. This would bring us to a symbolic presentation of the classic schism between the worldly body and its impure deeds, and the elevated mind and its noble products. What Bataille has to say on this topic in his essay, "The Language of Flowers", is pertinent:

Roots, in fact, represent the perfect counterpart to the visible parts of a plant. While the visible parts are nobly elevated, the ignoble and sticky roots wallow in the ground, loving rottenness just as leaves love light. There is reason to note, moreover, that the incontestable moral value of the term *base* conforms to this systematic interpretation of the meaning of roots: what is *evil* is necessarily represented, among movements, by a movement from high to low. That fact is impossible to explain if one does not assign a moral meaning to natural phenomena, from which this value is taken, precisely because of the striking character of *appearance*, the sign of the decisive movements of nature.

(13)

In this description, the flower or plant becomes a strong symbol for the "duality" of man – the "visible parts" (head) of the plant are seen as "nobly elevated", as "lov[ing] light", spiritual and beautiful, and striving upward, whereas the invisible, hidden, "ignoble and sticky", essentially

abject and obscene roots “wallow in the ground, loving rottenness”, involved in unspeakable deeds all too earthy, and in the process endlessly descending. Bataille also links the origins of the expression *base* (evil) to this image of the roots of a flower, and thereby ushers in a number of implications. If roots are *base*, they are also that which *bases* the flower, its *basis*. Here we may already discern the role of a pivot, which Lawrence ascribes to sex. This idea acquires further implications when one realises that it is precisely these roots which nourish the flower, which allows it to aspire towards the light. Once again, the relationship between the beauty of the flower and the earthy corruption and fecundity which nourishes it becomes overt. Symbolically, the duality of man is deconstructed.

Although the implications emerging from these ideas may be applied to more than just the issue of sexuality (it comments, in fact, on the split between good and evil³), such a “limited” application is certainly justified. For Lawrence, then, the image of roots allows him to evoke in his audience the same horror of abjection that an explicit reference to sex would, while simultaneously making his point for him, namely that this horror, and the neglect it entails, could achieve nothing but the final destruction of the flower. In this, Lawrence presses for a recognition that in everything there exists a healthy synthesis: “The fairest thing in nature, a flower, still has its roots in earth and manure; and in the perfume there hovers still the faint scent of earth, the under-earth in all its heavy humidity and darkness. . . . Else the scent would be just sickly sweet” (“Pansies” 8). One detects such a “sickly sweet” scent, perhaps, in *Sons and Lovers*’ Miriam, whose translation of everything, even sex, into spiritual terms leaves the novel’s protagonist, Paul, with a bitter taste in his mouth. In the same novel, the “healthy” sexual relationship between Paul and Clara is initiated and consecrated after a toiling journey through the mud – the act symbolically concluded by the image of “many scarlet carnation petals”, offset by the “black and wet beech roots” on which they are sprinkled (355). It is this rejuvenating synthesis of the “high” and “low” that Lawrence is after.

Lawrence, then, emerges as a kind of sexual emancipator, striving to eradicate the taboos which, according to him, lead to such unpleasantness as pornography and masturbation. While the former is defined as “the attempt to insult sex, to do dirt on it” (“Pornography” 67), the latter is considered to be unnatural, futile, “exhaustive” (“Pornography” 73), in other words, utterly wasteful. This is contrasted to the “creative flow” (“Pornography” 69) that is sex. This suggests to us a Lawrence who views sex as a natural occurrence which should be freed of

³ It has its predecessors in, among others, Blake (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*) and Whitman (“Chanting the Square Deific”).

feelings of shame or guilt, because it partakes of the flux and flow of the natural (procreative) cycles. To a large extent, this *is* what Lawrence stood for, but the reality of the matter is not as simple. For him, the sexual act, although “creative”, is not necessarily or primarily *procreative* – the creation it effects is that of the individual who indulges in it:

But the act, the sexual act, is not for the depositing of seed. It is for the leaping off into the unknown.... So with a man in the act of love. A little of him, a very little, flows into the tiny quick pool to start another life. But the whole spills over in waste to the beyond.

(“Study” 53)

What is illustrated here is Lawrence’s conception of the sexual act as a sacred instant, to which procreation is an incidental possibility. The real significance lies in the coming together of two conflicting opposites, the male and the female, a conflict that remains in the merging – like all essential conflicts this one is one never to be resolved, although the sexual act becomes its crowning moment. As we have seen before, in the absence of any possibility of reconciliation (which would destroy the vital opposition), the conflict itself is consecrated. So then in that vital, creative meeting of opposites, the sexual act. Ostensibly, what differentiates it from other ‘wasteful’ acts such as masturbation seems to be the implicit communion it achieves with that which is Other. Masturbation entails no momentary loss of self, because it is strictly self-referential. Still, we feel that in this regard Lawrence is perhaps nit-picking, and one cannot help but wonder whether the rather emphatic rejection of masturbation, “the last Western taboo” (Bloom “Whitman” 273), doesn’t in itself point to a latent puritanism on his part.

For sex to achieve a sacred character, it needs to be transgressive and, as such, needs to be tabooed in some way. The absence of any barriers to sexual intercourse robs it of any symbolic potency. Now some critics have remarked that the very sacredness of sex for Lawrence could only stem from a latent puritanism – where sex is viewed as completely natural, and indulged in indiscriminately, it ceases to be an *issue*. In this regard one might once again consider the offence Lawrence takes, by 1930, in the promiscuity of the youth of his time. In his “À Propos of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*”, he laments the fact that

[f]rom fearing the body, and denying its existence, the advanced young go to the other extreme and treat it as a sort of toy.... These young people scoff at the importance of sex, take it like a cocktail, and flout their elders with it.... They despise a book like *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. It is much too simple and ordinary for them.... The book, they say, shows the mentality of a boy of fourteen. But perhaps the mentality of a boy of fourteen, who still has the a little natural awe and proper fear in fact of sex, is more wholesome than the mentality of the young cocktail person who has no respect for everything.

(91-92)

What appals Lawrence we recognise immediately as the loss of sacredness that accompanied the rejection of Victorian sexual taboos over the course of the First World War and post-war period. Lawrence's response to Victorian prudery, the celebration of the centrality of sex, is replaced by a frivolous and hedonistic view of sex. In it, Lawrence himself recognises the absence of "a little natural awe and proper *fear*" (*emphasis added*). To us, the word "natural" appears suspect, but what is important to note is Lawrence's own realisation, unstated, that sex can fulfil its central role in human development only if its practice is in some way felt to be deeply transgressive.

It is because of this view of sex on the part of Lawrence that I would like to suggest that his writing frequently does become erotic. Due to the general absence of any explicit description of sexual intercourse, this suggestion remains difficult to substantiate, but it seems to me that sex in Lawrence's work is always accompanied by a sense of transgression which grants it significance. In the example referred to above, Paul and Clara's sexual encounter is preceded by numerous allusions to the abject in a lengthy description of their journey down "slippery" (353) slopes in their attempt to escape the moral world, and the possibility of discovery. Since we are spared any description of the sex itself, what strikes us, rather than any profound effect of sexual relations, is the general sense of "naughtiness". Neither do they have sex in some utopian Eden – the surroundings in themselves shift the focus from sex as simply natural and pure to something more erotic, slightly unsavoury. In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence takes things further by referring to "shameful, natural and unnatural acts of sensual voluptuousness" (220), and significantly comments on the importance of taboos: "Shame, what was it? It was part of extreme delight" (220). In Lawrence's writing career there seems to be a subtle increase in the explicitness of his dealings with sexuality until, by the time of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the approach becomes overtly obscene (I use this word strictly as indicative of its offensive nature in terms of contemporary values). Miller himself has said of the novel that it

is obscene and there is no justification for it. Because it requires none.... The crowd will accept neither life nor obscenity, nor miracle; the sacred is taboo, nay, incomprehensible to the multitude. Obscenity is pure and springs from effervescence, excess vitality, joy of life, concord, unanimity, alliance with nature, indifference to God of the healthy sort that takes God down a peg or two in order to reexamine him. Obscenity is a divine prerogative of man, and is always to be used carelessly...when the body becomes sacred, obscenity comes into its own.

(Lawrence 175)

Throughout his career, Lawrence toyed with the erotic possibilities inherent in that which is regarded as obscene, taboo. This fascination, however, turned into the fervent rejection of

taboos in the face of prude opposition, a rejection which, to some extent, contradicted his own belief in the body as being sacred.

Charney writes that Lawrence's

romantic emphasis on the instinctual life, the urges of the body over the desiccated theorizing of the mind, leads naturally to an exaltation of the phallic mysteries of sex. Connie rediscovers her blood lust and is thereby reborn to a new life: sex has the quality of religious illumination. Miller also celebrates sex, but in a less programmatic and more Whitmanesque style. Sex is part of everything that flows: food, drink, street life, conversation, poetry.

(13)

Comparatively speaking, Charney's comment is certainly not exhaustive, but it lifts out an element in both Lawrence and Miller's approach to sex that is of central importance, namely that it is celebratory. The nature of this celebration partakes strongly of the Dionysian – at times it includes all the modulations in consciousness and elements that makes up the god's celebration: lust, exuberance, madness, intoxication, violence, cruelty. This ritualistic abandon to the god in his capacity as a god of nature or fertility becomes a means of merging with the flux of nature. For Miller, such a ritual places one in touch with the savage, the man unencumbered by culture (antithesis to instinct and desire), in which he discerned the attempt or project "to arrest the flux in which life is fundamentally apprehended" (*Lawrence* 128). As a cathartic counter-point to culture (which is primarily a product of the mind) we find the chthonic rite, focalised in the sacred site, or temple, of the body. Miller's lament for the modern world lies precisely in his belief that "[t]he body, of course, has long ceased to be the temple of the spirit. It is thus that man dies to the world – and to the Creator" (*Sex* 17).

Miller's love of everything that flows, of flux, places him firmly in opposition to culture, a position embodied also by his own brand of "literary buffoonery" (Ferguson 186). Miller's way of striking back at culture is to offend and disgust it, and it is in this light that one should understand his apparent love of the abject – for Miller, this spit in the eye of culture creates a deep sense of elation:

'I love everything that flows,' said the great blind Milton of our times. I was thinking about him this morning when I awoke with a great bloody shout of joy: I was thinking of his rivers and trees and all that world of night he was exploring. Yes, I said to myself, I too love everything that flows: rivers, sewers, lava, semen, blood, bile, words, sentences.... The great incestuous wish is to flow on, one with time, to merge the great image of the beyond with the here and now.

(*Cancer* 259)

This merging that he finally refers to, of the "beyond with the here and now", is the sacred instant, which flows from the chthonic rite which is, for Miller, primarily the represented

sexual act. Not content, like Whitman, to consider “a spear of summer grass” in the hope of experiencing a sense of unification with the universe, he insists that “[p]erhaps a cunt, smelly though it may be, is one of the prime symbols for the connection between all things” (*Sex* 44). It is relatively easy to become distracted, at this point, by Miller’s crudity – one is similarly “distracted” in many of his novels. But here one must beware of staring oneself blind at Miller’s obvious insistence on being offensive, of transgressing the boundaries of decency, because our focus should be, in fact, not on the “cunt”, but on “the connection between all things” that it ostensibly represents. *That* is what Miller, also in his fictional sexual escapades, is finally after. As Jong, writing on Miller’s *The World of Sex*, puts it, the

‘cold fire’ of sexuality was equivalent to the life force for Miller. It was what he had in common with Lawrence.... He shared with Lawrence the pagan sense of sex – sex as primal flux, sex as the gyre of birth, sex as the DNA of existence, the matrix of all creativity. Miller used the word sex in a cosmic, not a genital sense.

(216)

Neither does the occasional profusion of genitals in Miller’s work refute this claim – the symbolic burden that the sexual act must bear, together with the often surrealistic language in which it is expressed, ensures that we are never (except when thematically useful) presented simply with a pornographic meeting of the twain on a grimly realistic level.

Kenneth Rexroth argues that Miller “has very little of Lawrence’s abiding sense of the erotic couple, of man and woman as the two equal parts of a polarity which takes up all of life” (130). By this he means to explain the very impersonality, some would say coldness, of Miller’s treatment of sex and sexual partners. While in Lawrence, sex always takes place within some kind of emotional relationship, in Miller it often acquires a more sordid flavour, occurring in the absence of any clear emotional bond – accordingly, Miller himself has admitted that Lawrence would probably have rejected his writing on sex, perhaps even be “disgusted” by it (Ferguson 222). In this he is probably correct. The reason for this is that Miller does not share Lawrence’s unwavering reverence for sex – even though he advocates its centrality, he retains the right, as with anything else, to treat it irreverently, to view it in a humorous light. This is because Miller is always aware of the society that will be receiving his work, and cannot resist a poke in its direction. In what is sometimes considered his “pornography”, we should discern a satirical intent, a mocking laughter that is meant to draw into question our approach to sexuality. Lawrence himself, critical of “pornography”, has admitted that “[w]hat is pornography to one man is the laughter of genius to another” (“Pornography” 60). This laughter in itself would, in Bataille’s estimation, be instrumental in creating a sense of exuberance firmly related to “death and the unbounded void” (Lala 113).

Essentially, both Lawrence and Miller conceive of sex as the vital meeting of opposites, self and Other, which may tear the veil of our consciousness and result in a sacred instant which is, in itself, an experience or intimation of death, of the limits of human existence:

[O]f all the symbols which man has created to make his universe supportable – that is, understandable, meaningful – the sexual symbols are the least secure, for in the riddle of sex he comes closest to tasting the full savour of death. The great dread of ultimate annihilation, the evasion of death, the thwarting of destiny, this enduring, overpowering and all-pervasive phenomenon of fear on which all his culture is erected exposes its falsity when confronted with the sexual. Sex is the great Janus-faced symbol of life and death”

(Miller *Lawrence* 177)

Sex, the chthonic rite, the exuberant celebration of life, becomes also the celebration of death. In erasing the effects of culture’s attempts at “arrest[ing] the flux” (*Lawrence* 128) of nature, it presents us with our own mortality. It is in this confrontation that the horror of sex, and all things abject, lies. Since man’s struggle with the meaning of life stems from the struggle with his own mortality, the symbolic confrontation with death in the sexual act becomes pertinent to the issue of self-achievement. It reveals that Dionysian truth within which lies the threat of madness, and makes man acutely aware of his limits, an experience which “leads man ‘from the ebb of pain to the flow of joy’” (Lala 113). Miller also speaks directly of the moment at which man

begins to realize his “limitations”. It is then that fear assails him. It is then that he has a foretaste of death as it were. ... Now he feels the deep roots of his being, in the earth. Rooted. The supremacy and the glory and the magnificence of the body finally assert themselves in full vigour. Only now does the body assume its sacred character, its true role. The trinal division of body, mind and soul becomes a unity, a holy trinity. And with it the realization that one aspect of our nature cannot be exalted above another, except at the expense of one or the other. When this fundamental, rooted, sacred character of the body is divined, what we call the wisdom of life here attains its apogee.

(*Lawrence* 180)

The effect of this on the individual is profound: “Thought..., digging into the very roots of being, rediscovers the enigma, the mystery of the body, rediscovers the kinship between star, beast, ocean, moon, flower, sky” (*Lawrence* 180). This is the relation of man to his circumambient universe that Lawrence is after, a relation that cannot be established unless man experiences his mortality and his limits by (symbolically) transgressing them in the sexual act. Exclusively physical as this act may at first appear to be, its impact is ultimately metaphysical, even religious, and makes possible the recreation of the Adamic “whole man”.

Sex, then, forms an important part of Miller’s thought and writing, of the individual’s (and especially the artist’s) coming into being. His presentation of sex is erotic, because of the

absence of any procreative goal – the expression of greed, lust, violence, madness, insatiability, reminiscent of the Dionysian satyr, points to an excessive drive towards the transgression of cultural paradigms. Much more destructive than Lawrence, also because of the absence of a “clear” programme, Miller’s work becomes more erotic. Although he posits the dream of the Adamic man, for whom “there are no taboos, no laws, no conventions” (*Sex* 115), this dream is less didactically manifest in his fiction than in Lawrence’s, and the almost gleeful exploitation of existing taboos might suggest otherwise to the uninitiated reader. It is important to note, also, (and this will be explored in greater depth in Part 2) that, as with much else, Miller doesn’t so much *write about sex* as he actually *writes sex*. This blurring of borders between the act of writing and its subject is unavoidable in writers like Miller because, fundamentally, writing and living become indistinguishable. As we have already seen, Charney explains that for Miller, “[s]ex is part of everything that flows: food, drink, street life, conversation, *poetry*” (13, *emphasis added*). This link of writing to flow is also stressed by Miller himself, who counts “words” and “sentences” among the flowing things he loves (*Cancer* 259). Writing partakes of that same creative flow that informs the sexual act; as such, its value lies in its excessive nature. As Miller asks, writing on the impossibility of any account (in writing or otherwise) to lay claim to any historical reality or authenticity, “Why tell anything then? Why continue? Because it is a gratuitous pleasure” (*Sex* 88).

In Kerouac, sex is treated on a less metaphysical level – for the most part, it remains one of those “simple pleasures” (*Nicosia Memory* 85). More precisely, perhaps, Kerouac seems constantly involved in the struggle to achieve a natural, simple approach to sex. As we learn, however, when he does treat the issue, our very sexuality is a social phenomenon, shaped and influenced by its representation – a case in point would be “Duluoz’s” encounter with a mildly pornographic photograph in a window on Times Square (*Visions* 100) – so that Miller and Lawrence’s greater idealism seems more or less relinquished. As suggested before, it is quite likely that the sexual “liberation”, of which both Lawrence and Miller formed a part, partially served to rob the sexual act of its intensely symbolic impact. Of course, this sexual “liberation” has by no means been strictly progressive – we have come nowhere near the kind of sexual utopia that Lawrence intimated in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. As Erica Jong suggests, “[t]he sexual revolution was deeply superficial: it never eradicated guilt or anhedonia” (5). It is this very guilt, grown increasingly diffuse and complex in the explosion of the visual media, that Kerouac has to deal with. Despite such demystifying conditions, Kerouac still maintained a degree of reverence, or what Lawrence would call “natural awe” (“À Propos” 92), for sex itself. In a letter to a friend he wrote that “[s]ex, of course, is the universal symbol for life –

I've discovered that all men, from aged veterans to sere academicians, turn back to sex in their last years as though suddenly curious of its deep and noble meaning, its inseparable marriage to the secret of life" (*Letters* 56).

To a large extent, in Neal Cassady (mythologised in so many of Kerouac's novels) sexuality is conceived of as an inevitable element of the yearning spirit which is the drive behind the search for IT. Discovering in sex "the most intense pleasure of his life" (Nicosia "Cassady" 94), much of Cassady's energy and zeal was devoted to its acquisition, something which added to Kerouac's image of him as a composite Greek god, cowboy and confidence artist, a beat Nietzschean hero. Significantly, even the letter that had such a far-reaching effect on Kerouac's writing, namely "The Great Sex Letter", had as its subject Cassady's attempts (one foiled, the other successful) at seducing two different women in one night. Later on, both Kerouac and Cassady's interest in human sexuality to some extent found focus in the work of Wilhelm Reich. Carolyn Cassady (Neal's second wife) writes somewhat wryly that "[i]n a letter, Jack strongly recommended we read Wilhelm Reich's *Function of the Orgasm*. Needless to say, the emphasis on sex as being absolutely necessary at all times appealed to Neal as a Gospel" (223). Lee Bartlett summarises Reich's thesis as follows:

Reich argues that the orgasm represents a spontaneous discharge of sexual excitation, that "the involuntary bio-energetic contraction of orgasm and the complete discharge of excitation are the most important criteria for orgiastic potency". As the point of orgasm is reached in sexual intercourse, a "clouding of consciousness" occurs which erupts into the ultimate Dionysian transportation out of the ego, into the id. Reich discovered, however, that both male and female patients suffering from a variety of neuroses were unable to fully experience this transport, that they all retained a great degree of lucidity during orgasm. He concluded that this produced a *sexual stasis* in the individual, a clogging-up of sexual energy that fuelled the neurosis. It was only when "full orgiastic gratification took place in the immediate present," that sexual equilibrium and mental health could be restored.

(121)

Rather scientifically put, Reich makes a point similar to that of Lawrence and Miller, namely that a healthy approach to sex exists, and that shame and self-consciousness encumbers the individual's well-being. What is important is that he stresses in the sexual act, or rather, the orgasm, a loss of self or, to use Lawrence's more metaphysical expression, a leaping off into the unknown. Any form of "lucidity", any kind of holding back, defeats the orgasm's beneficial effect. Stripped of its scientific lingo then, the sexual act for Reich, and also for Kerouac and Cassady, retained its character as a possible sacred instant.

Reich's influence on Kerouac and Cassady extended beyond the scope of strict sexuality. As already suggested, Bartlett recognised in IT, the generic (undefined) sacred instant, "the

ultimate Reichian charge” (123), and insofar as the experience of IT also extends to the act of writing, Kerouac’s conception of writing itself refers back to Reich’s work. It is in addressing the issue of “Mental State” at the time of writing – in his “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose” – that Kerouac stresses the importance of writing “in accordance (as from center to periphery) with the laws of orgasm, Reich’s ‘beclouding of consciousness’. Come from within, out – to relaxed and said” (745). These words conclude his essay, and suggest quite strongly the sense of orgasmic release that expression embodies for him. This expression does not flow from the conscious mind, but from a spontaneous deeper source that resides “within”. In Kerouac, then, although less of a “sexual priest” than either Lawrence or Miller, the language of sexuality still serves as the clearest expression of the sacred instant. His lack of intensity in relation to sexuality is to be explained by a more quantitative search for the sacred instant – to a large extent, the quest for IT is accompanied by a gratuitous abandon to the intoxicating effects of alcohol and drugs, speed and music, quintessentially an intimation of Dionysian revelry. Such experiences may lead to visions, but also hangovers and self-loathing – as always in Kerouac, visions are acquired at a cost, and in turn acquire the flavour of elegy. Primarily, however, both Kerouac’s depictions of such revelry and his own indulgence in it points to a deep-seated, greedy hunger for experience, for cornering the meaning of life.

Bataille has recognised in intoxication one of those “forms of unproductive expenditure [which] unleash the dynamics of exuberance whose life and liberty are inseparable from death and the unbounded void” (Lala 113). To become intoxicated is to transcend the limits of one’s consciousness, and Kerouac’s experimentation with different drugs may well be indicative of his need to experience the world from a multiplicity of perspectives (one may remind oneself of his interest in Burroughs’s “factualism”, which held that all facts exist on a multiplicity of levels). In an essay on the link between Kerouac’s writing and drug use, George Wedge also suggests that “the drug used during the gestation of each novel assisted in the development of both content and style” (246), implying also that Kerouac may have deliberately indulged in different drugs at different stages of his career so as to create a specific mood and achieve specific effects.

Strictly speaking, Kerouac harks back to the kind of artist/seer that Rimbaud advocated in the notorious 1871 letter to Paul Demeny:

I say that one must be a *seer*, make oneself a *seer*. The poet makes himself a *seer* by a long, prodigious, and rational *disordering of all the senses*. Every form of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he consumes all the poisons in him, and keeps only their quintessences. This is an unspeakable torture during which he needs all

his faith and superhuman strength, and during which he becomes the great patient, the great criminal, the great accursed – and the great learned one! – among men. – For he arrives at the *unknown*! Because he has cultivated his own soul – which was rich to begin with – more than any other man! He reaches the unknown; and even if, crazed, he ends up losing the understanding of his visions, at least he has seen them! Let him die charging through those unutterable, unnameable things: other horrible workers will come; they will begin from the horizons where he has succumbed!

(11)

In spite of the profound differences between the “demonic” Rimbaud and the “beatific” Kerouac, this declaration nevertheless represents the latter effectively. The American naivety that adheres to his role makes him appear less Faustian than Rimbaud, perhaps, but such a view would be ultimately deceived – both Kerouac and his protagonists are willing to do much to “arrive...at the *unknown*”. It is especially in the insistence on the importance of seeing visions that Kerouac’s quest resembles Rimbaud’s. But Rimbaud’s declaration also summarises, to a large extent, much of what has been discussed, also in relation to Whitman, Nietzsche, Lawrence and Miller. In an altered form, we find here an echo of the Whitmanesque filter, the voices (“all sides”) replaced by “all the poisons”. Rimbaud’s conception of the poet as a kind of higher being reminds us also of Nietzsche’s hierarchy of souls. Although the poet is ultimately distinguished from mankind by virtue of the fact that “he has cultivated his own soul”, it becomes apparent that this soul “was rich to begin with”. In his role as seer, then, the poet also becomes a kind of pioneer, “charging through those unutterable, unnameable things”, to succumb eventually on the horizon. What we should recognise in this, of course, is the voice of the visionary writer – this is why, although such a different writer, Rimbaud’s voice achieves a kind of harmony when placed in the presence of those of the writers under discussion. In Rimbaud’s conception of the poet as a seer we recognise the role of the writer as a conductor of sacred rites, whereby he hopes to gain the voice to communicate and express the inexpressible. This is the mystical role of art. For the visionary writer, the challenge lies in employing language, a culturally and rationally defined system of signs, to communicate that which is universal and permanent, immanent in the flux of the universe. Like Rimbaud, Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac had to search for a “[new] language [which] would be of the soul, for the soul, containing everything, smells, sounds, colours; thought latching on to thought and pulling” (Rimbaud 13). It is this language or, rather, these languages – inspired, vibrant, nightmarish, intoxicated, exuberant, mystical, unifying: mythological – that we will be exploring in the next part of this thesis.

PART II: VOICE

CHAPTER 5: THE CRIMINAL SONG

It is the writer's *voice* – the particular *style* and *form* of the language employed – that forms the focus of this part of the thesis. We have seen that Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac essentially wrote what one may call autobiographies of the soul – drawing strongly on personal history and experience, they trace, time and again, the development or “coming into being” of the individual, although this process (which forms the narrative spine) is never finally concluded in any given work. Closure appears artificial in the face of life’s complex web of relations, except when achieved in and by the death of the protagonist, and this is one sacrifice these writers are not prepared to make. In this regard, one may consider Lawrence’s response to the way in which Thomas Hardy tended to “resolve” the action of his novels. In “The Study of Thomas Hardy”, Lawrence first shows his appreciation of Hardy’s characters, because “none of the heroes or heroines care very much for money, or immediate self-preservation, and all of them are struggling hard to come into being” (20). This is what Lawrence would consider the ideal theme in novel-writing. But in his estimation, Hardy does not have the nerve to see things through:

This is the tragedy of Hardy, *always the same*: the tragedy of those who, more or less pioneers, have died in the wilderness whither they escaped for free action.... This is the theme of novel after novel: remain quite within convention, and you are good, safe, and happy in the long run....or, on the other hand, be passionate, individual, wilful, you will find the security of the convention a walled prison, you will escape, and you will die, either of your own lack of strength to bear the isolation, or by direct revenge from the community, or both.

(21, *emphasis added*)

Lawrence does not deny the possibility of isolation, exposure, or revenge – what he objects to is the suggestion that these are inevitable, and can never be borne, or overcome. For him “the tragedy of Hardy” (not merely the novels, but the man) lies in his cowardice, the fact that he kills off his unconventional, heroic and questing individuals, withdrawing his support from them at the last moment, so as not to appear immoral (and thereby run the risk of his own isolation and exposure). Hardy, then, is nothing like his characters. In contrast to this, the devotion of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac to their protagonists is strong, primarily because of a sympathetic bond – the protagonists are frequently made to go through experiences which recall similar moments in the writers’ lives.

The development of the individual in these works is registered predominantly in terms of a rejection of stifling codes and prescriptive social norms, a relinquishment of self into the unconscious and, ultimately, the movement into a new consciousness. This development is

dramatised in terms of *movement* – flow, progress, travel – which symbolically traces the protagonist’s journey into the unconscious (in itself dramatised in terms of sacred instants) and back to (a new) consciousness. Movement becomes life’s most vivid symbol, contrasted to the death implied in atrophy and stasis, the absence of conflict. But Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac do more than simply write *about* the “coming into being” of characters – to an important extent their writing replicates the process itself. Geoffrey Hartman, in referring to the “motif of the journey”, says that for some writers it “has actually become a sustained metaphor for the experience of the artist during creation” (53). The act of writing itself, then – and this has implications for the act of reading – may at times acquire the quality of a sacred instant: what the writing *is* and *does* becomes indistinguishable from what it *represents*. For the artist, the act of creation becomes one of those moments in which he is released into the powerful current of the imagination, unconscious and chthonic flux. This is the view of the Romantic, visionary artist, writing in the tradition of the “divinely” inspired – for the writer working within the psychological mode of creation, conscious control over his creative process is, of course, essential. The question now remains: what kind of text is produced under these circumstances? What quality imbues the visionary text? In the following chapters I will attempt to isolate some of the stylistic attributes and strategies to be discerned in the work of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac.

The struggle toward selfhood in spite of the strictures placed on the individual by society is essentially replicated in their stylistic innovation. The texts are not so much *about* the struggle as it actually *embodies* or even *is* the struggle; a struggle which remains, on a textual level, a struggle with culture, which Miller charged with arresting the flux of life (*Lawrence* 128). If, however, culture is the “enemy”, the visionary writer is in a tough spot: language, his medium, is essentially a cultural and historical artifact. This is automatically constrictive – the visionary writer, who wants to transcend the strictures of his own time and place, and avoid a strictly socio-historical appreciation of his work, finds himself arrested by his medium. It is here, of course, that Jungian notions of archetype, symbol and collective unconscious become pertinent – implied in this is that the writer has recourse to a (hidden) locus of shared experience; ahistorical, of subliminal reality. The task of the visionary writer, then, is to reveal in the phenomena of historical reality (and this includes language) the archetypes that constitute the prism of life. In this act of revelation, the writer appropriates language to make manifest these archetypes in terms of symbols, reinvented within the cultural (and historical) context. In doing so, the writer reinvents the language which serves as his tool, propelling it forward, and thus culture (through art) is thwarted in its impulse toward stasis – it remains fluid, in flux.

Since the limits of language would seem to correspond to the limits of our consciousness (this still leaves that realm beyond language, the unconscious), the extent to which language can be *made* to accommodate the experience of the unconscious would seem to be directly analogous to the ability of our consciousness to assimilate and translate such unconscious experiences – new consciousness implies new form, and vice versa. It is in this sense that language itself becomes our most comprehensive symbol. Miller conceives of language correspondingly; according to him, “[l]anguage is a prime symbol: in its dual function of communication and expression it is the most potent and the most delicate symbol of the soul” (*Lawrence* 219). What this in effect implies is that atrophy of language, of form, amounts to atrophy of the soul. This sense, or realisation, underlies all the struggles with form that defined the artistic careers of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac. It would, however, be problematic to suggest that they set out in a deliberate and conscious fashion to conjure up a new style of writing. As Norman Mailer puts it, “[s]tyle is character” (in Shoemaker 17), which implies an organic link between the writer and the text produced, a link which exists also between style and subject. The resultant organic text is in itself symbolic of the flux of life – the text is *alive*.

This notion that an artistic creation itself contains life is once again effectively suggested by Miller when he credits Lawrence with being “a man of one idea: *that life has a symbolic significance*. Which is to say that life and art are one” (*Lawrence* 222). While this final point again alludes to the organic links between the writer’s life and his art, one suspects that Miller means more than this – art *is* life, although in the form of a “rude hieroglyph” which should be “deciphered” (*Lawrence* 169) by the soul. This “rude hieroglyph” is a symbolic language which has been forgotten by modern man, and corresponds to Kerouac’s “Deep Form” (“Essentials” 744). Symbolism, then, is the manifestation or incarnation of the language of the soul, of the unconscious, a mystic language of the ancients, those who still had a deep-rooted sense of relation to their circumambient universe. Miller recognises in his contemporaries’ interest in the unconscious a realisation “that to rediscover the sources of his inspiration, the mantic quality of language, the magic of primitive life, he must return to the dark, obscure regions of the soul” (*Lawrence* 88). It is in the interest of such a rediscovery that Lawrence and Kerouac, for instance, explored what they believed to be the “primitive life” of Mexico, only to find themselves outsiders. Yet their quest, like Miller’s, remains sincere: to rediscover or reinvent a language that could speak to fellow humans on a deeper, vital level. This also informed Lawrence’s development of a highly symbolic language in *The Rainbow*, as Sagar makes clear when he refers to

Lawrence's realization that symbolism is not an aesthetic matter... , but is rather an alternative language, alternative, that is, to the language of individualism, the language of our normal discourse or of science, which is analytical, atomic, specialized for reducing the world to smaller and smaller units. The language of traditional religion having lapsed into cant, for want of being made new, it is left to the imaginative writer, through his symbolism, *to preserve and revive an older language*, which tries to 'conceive the Whole', that is to perceive relationships, patterns, continuities and essentials, so that every human being is a representative of his or her sex, race, species; and every moment in every man or woman's life is a moment in the history of that species; and that species cannot escape its dependence upon the whole non-human world, and the obligation to strive towards a new conception of God. A single symbol, like a single word, has very limited meaning, but the matrix of symbols which can be developed in a full-length novel, which can grow organically from the rich and multifarious life of such a novel, is capable of expressing a 'new truth', of making new the 'great vision'.

(125, *emphasis added*)

It is important to realise that the individual does not get lost in the "Whole" – in fact, "every human being", and "every moment in every man or woman's life" has significance, while remaining embedded in (and drawing its authenticity from) its relation to the "Whole". This is why Lawrence, and especially Miller and Kerouac, can so blatantly draw on their own lives without ruining the "universality" of their voices, even if this voice (frequently a first person narrator) seems at first glance to create a private universe.

The approach which has been most effectively employed in the twentieth century to probe and represent the modalities of consciousness in literature has been the "stream of consciousness", according to M. H. Abrams

a mode of narration that undertakes to produce, without the narrator's invention, the full spectrum and the continuous flow of a character's mental process, in which sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings, and random associations.

(202)

For our purposes this needs to be modified to include the narrator and writer – i.e. the stream of consciousness may not (simply) be the character's, but may reproduce "the full spectrum and continuous flow of [*the writer's*]...mental process" in the act of writing. This blurring of distinctions is especially useful in discussing Kerouac, who sometimes intrudes on his own texts and narrations, which are about a historically removed "him" anyway. An example of this may be found in *Desolation Angels* where the narrator, referring to previous books, explains that

I wrote those manuscripts as I'm writing this one in cheap nickel notebooks by candlelight in poverty and fame – *fame* of self – for I was Ti Jean, and the difficulty in

explaining all this and ‘Ti Jean’ too is that readers who haven’t read up to this point¹ in the earlier works are not filled in on the background.

(258)

At such moments the reader is emphatically alerted to the act of writing, to the presence of a writer whom he can only experience in his role as narrator. In Kerouac’s work, however, this technique does not have the same alienating effect which most postmodern texts achieve by employing it – in his work, the writer/narrator is the central character, a character which tends to quit the restrictions of the page, becoming the writer. Simply put, the character writes himself, a comprehensive metaphor for the individual’s capacity to invent and explore himself, undertaking the journey toward selfhood.

Inherent in this approach is, of course, the use of a first person narrator – like Whitman, Kerouac and Miller invite a close association of the writer with the persona or alter-ego in the text. The effect of this is that the text takes on a highly confessional quality. Jane Nelson, for instance, apparently conceiving of the novel as strictly a product of the psychological mode of creation, stresses that the “forms of [Miller’s] individual works...can better be described as *confession* [the *Tropics*] and *anatomy* [the *Rosy Crucifixion*]” (15). She finds these categories useful in discussing Miller’s work because it shifts the discussion from Miller’s often lamented lack of craft (i.e. what he *should* be doing, according to the literary establishment) to what it is that he actually does:

In neither *confession* or *anatomy*, as Northrop Frye has pointed out, is narrative pattern the important means of organization; hence, to insist on a sustained narrative in Miller is irrelevant. In *confession*, the coherence of the author’s character and attitudes and his integration of the significant events of his life provide the fictional pattern. In *anatomy*, moreover, people are not people, but representatives of mental attitudes.

(23)

In addition to defining Miller’s work, this would serve equally well to define Kerouac’s work and, to a lesser extent, even Lawrence’s. In Lawrence’s work we are presented with a major difference – Lawrence writes (his novels) in the third person, which removes it from the traditional scope of confession. Still, Lawrence’s tendency to reenact his life on the page (even through the medium of clearly delineated characters) retains the essence of confession: as Tambling suggests, “Lawrence ‘repeats’ his emotions confessionally” (157) in his work. Lawrence himself bears out this point when he writes in his foreword to *Women in Love* that “[t]his novel pretends only to be a record of the writer’s own desire, aspirations, struggles: in a

¹ The suggestion of a sequence “up to this point” refers to Kerouac’s conception of his novels as ultimately linking up to form “the Duluo Legend”, “a contemporary history record” (*Nicosia Memory* 109) in the vein of Proust and Galsworthy.

word, a record of the profoundest experiences in the self' (485), in spite of the fact that there is no clearly central character in the novel.

All things considered, one may well wonder why Lawrence would prefer to employ the omniscient third person in his novels. In fact, he did start off writing in the first person, as in his first novel, *The White Peacock*, and indicated his recognition of it as a confessional text by claiming that "[e]verything I am now, all of me, so far, is in that. I think a man puts everything he is into a book – a real book" (Chambers 82). But in this novel we already discern a tendency towards omniscience – Cyril, the narrator, is not always the centre of interest, and is often privy to information, or witness to scenes, which the reader is not always willing (in the interest of realism) to lend credibility. It is as though Lawrence finds the limited consciousness of a first person narrator restrictive, as though he wants to probe and explore a large variety of relations and scenarios. Essentially the narrational voice does not change much² in Lawrence's shift from the first person to the third (in his other novels) – it serves simply to forestall any objections on the part of reader. What it allows him to do is explore in detail the various sets of relations and conflicts that he perceived and identified in his circumambient universe. As Anne Fernihough perceptively remarks in her introduction to *The Rainbow*, Lawrence's novels are somehow meant to symbolise and dramatise the existence of multifarious identities within the whole (of humankind, universe, novel):

As his career progresses, Lawrence turns more and more towards art as the only locus in which individuality and connectedness can coexist, and in particular he turns towards the novel form.... *The Rainbow* is a novel which, like Gothic architecture, allows for the coexistence of conflicting ideological impulses (the imps and gargoyles) within a single work.... But it is also a novel in which the narrative drive towards perfect selfhood is countered, both imagistically and rhythmically, by the 'otherness' of the maternal-feminine, creating what Lawrence elsewhere calls 'the living conjunction or communion between the self and its context'.

(xxx1)

For Lawrence, then, the novel, as he reinvents it, becomes symbolic of life as such, the unifying principle which ties together and exists in the conflicts, relations and struggles that constitute it. It employs the "alternative language" (Sagar 125) referred to above. This is what leads him to say in "The Novel" that "[t]he novel is the highest form of human expression so far attained. Why? Because it is so incapable of the absolute" (179). According to Lawrence, the novel does not lend itself to a unified and single "purpose" – what it does lend itself to is an authentic, vital consecration of life. As we have seen, this implies a consecration of conflict, of

² This is not to say that there are no changes. For one thing, Cyril's essentially tragic outlook on life is diffused somewhat as his voice is jettisoned in favour of "Lawrence's".

vital opposites, of contradiction and struggle. In this, Lawrence's attitude reminds us of Whitman's exuberant and defiant declaration in "Song of Myself":

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself;
I am large I contain multitudes.

(ll. 1314-1316)

After Lawrence's adoption of the third person narrative voice, it took him two more novels (*The Trespasser* and *Sons and Lovers*) to attain his true voice. Although *Sons and Lovers* is readily recognised as a masterpiece, it is in *The Rainbow* that Lawrence developed his most revolutionary and deep-sounding voice: "As Keith Cushman suggested, 'the great watershed in Lawrence's career falls between *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*,' where he 'leaves behind traditional notions of form and conventional representations of scene, character and story'" (Litz 27).

It is interesting to note that, in direct contrast to Lawrence, both Miller and Kerouac, who ended up writing strictly in the first person, started writing in the third. Miller's first three novels, which all failed miserably, *Clipped Wings*, *Moloch* and *Crazy Cock*, dealing with autobiographically inspired experiences in New York (the first, for instance, dealt with the experiences of the messengers at the notorious Western Telegraph Union), were all written in the third person. So was Kerouac's *The Town and the City*, which dealt with the experiences (also roughly autobiographical) of a large family in the small town of Galloway, and the effect of the beckoning city lights on some of the sons (much like Lawrence, Kerouac divided personal qualities among a few characters – in this case, all brothers – while other characters were composites of different friends and acquaintances). In both cases, the writing of these novels served as a literary apprenticeship, and although intimations of the voices that would emerge are to be found in them, it is only in retrospect that one can appreciate the promise.

Jong has summarised the development of Miller's fiction by saying that "[t]he derivative pastiche of *Clipped Wings* gives way to mannered, self-conscious writing (*Crazy Cock* and *Moloch*), which in turn yields to madcap fuck-everything formlessness (the *Tropics*, *Black Spring*, etc.)" (146). For her, the earlier novels serve only a formative function – we also note that Miller's best novels followed, or were created in, the shift from "mannered, self-conscious writing" to his "literary buffoonery". Elsewhere, Jong makes clear the position of Miller's earlier writing in his oeuvre: "How do you go from self-consciousness to unself-consciousness? How do you come to sound on paper as natural as you sound in speech? *Crazy Cock* and *Moloch* will show you the first parts of the journey. *Tropic of Cancer* is the

destination” (88). This “arrival” corresponds precisely with Miller’s rejection of the third person narrative voice in favour of the first, and suggests not merely a development artistically, but actually reflects the gradual process of Miller coming “to himself”.

Kerouac’s writing career may be viewed similarly. Although *The Town and the City*, which “was to be a ‘huge novel explaining everything to everybody’” (*Nicosia Memory* 162) was enthusiastically received, Kerouac, like many of his critics, was intensely aware of the marked influence of Thomas Wolfe. He found the style too traditional, and therefore derivative – in a letter to Neal Cassady (Oct. 1950), his mind still on his recently published first novel, one can see him dissociating himself from his literary hero:

Wolfe was hung up on his ancestors, all of whom had “howling, remote voices like the voices of his kinsman in the hills long ago.” Well, since Mexico, I’ve been trying to find my voice. For a long time it sounded false, of course, For a long time I labored on several other variations.... My important recent discovery and revelation is that the voice is all.

(*Letters* 233)

In this same letter we also find an intimation of his new approach to writing in his urgent suggestion to Cassady: “You, man, must write exactly as everything rushes into your head, and AT ONCE” (233). In this conscious step away from craft, with the focus on a “natural” organisation in the flow of the writer’s consciousness, the move away from the third to first person becomes virtually automatic. The decision was not a superficial one, but deeply related to Kerouac’s development as artist and individual:

For Kerouac, the impulse was to define himself by the more personal forms that told the truth about his experiences, regardless of inherited literary conventions. So the issue remains: what form is that? Kerouac’s writing is an attempt to discover form, not to imitate it, and to discover experience in the act of writing about it.

(Weinreich 3)

Kerouac’s struggle, then, is the struggle of Lawrence and Miller: to find that form, or voice, that will allow him to speak from his deepest self, his soul, from beyond even the conscious world-view that he may hold, to reveal a reality which all his readers will recognise sublimely on a deep and vital level.

As we have already seen, all three writers under discussion essentially picked up on Rimbaud’s call for “new forms”, a call which one might consider essentially criminal in its intent. Miller’s study of Lawrence reveals his own understanding of the process in which the artist plays a central role: “In order for new forms to arise, for a new Culture to have inception, the artist must now go mad, must become hallucinatory. He must become again a mantic personality. He can not and does not want to stay the death of the old forms” (148), in fact, he

desires it. In this description of the artist's role we have an explanation for Miller's own "hallucinatory" style, but more importantly, the artist (the kind that "matters") emerges for the umpteenth time as insubordinate, disruptive, problematic and, strictly speaking, violent. From the point of view of culture, such an artist will always be criminal. His criminal (sublime) aesthetics challenge and offend accepted notions of balance, characterisation, plot, good form, worthy subject, and so forth. It is in this sense (and this point has been raised before) that the act of writing also takes on a sacred quality – transgressing onto new ground, exploding existing cultural and artistic boundaries, the writer essentially approximates the sacred instant; at once, he becomes aware of his capabilities and limitations.

It is in their capacity as such visionary writers that all three writers under discussion have been found guilty of "bad form" by their respective literary societies. Established approaches to literary criticism always make it difficult to accommodate a new kind of text; the automatic and, indeed, easiest way of dealing with such a text is simply to reject it as failing to live up to (or remain under the jurisdiction of) axiomatic literary standards. Contemporary reactions to their work was various, often mixed: defending *The Rainbow* against charges of obscenity, Eagle (in a 1915 review) nevertheless judged it "a bad novel", and found it "a dull and monotonous book" (213); commenting on *Tropic of Cancer*, Kauffmann decided of Miller that "[n]arrative is not his forte; his characterizations are sketchy; his philosophy jejune" (238); and in a by now notorious evaluation of *On the Road*'s creation, Truman Capote referred to it as not "'writing at all'[but]... 'typing'" (Nicosia *Memory* 588). These reactions, although they cannot possibly represent the range of reactions that all these works (and others by the same authors) have provoked, nevertheless point to the general perplexity of critics and contemporaries in the face of the new forms, new modes of creation, new *languages*, that found expression in the work of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac.

It is important, of course, that one distinguish the idea of "new form" from the charge of "no form". Although the organisational principles may have escaped initial critics, they are certainly not illusionary or absent. For Lawrence, for instance, the intricate balance of the novel's divergent voices was essential to the success of the work. Also, Lawrence's work shares with Miller's and Kerouac's confessions a focus on the development of an individual consciousness (although Lawrence much more directly explores the relationship between this development and the context(s) – social, historical, and so on – in which it takes place). What emerges as an essential organising factor to the interplay of symbols in the work of all three writers, however, is a sense of *rhythm*. In attempting to express the inexpressible, the sublime,

the rhythm or music of the text becomes central in intimating the flux of the unconscious. This point is also made by Kristeva in relation to Céline and Joyce; referring first to “music in letters – *Finnegan’s Wake*”, she continues to say that “Céline’s journey, to the end of his night, will also encounter rhythm and music as being the only way out, the ultimate sublimation of the unsignifiable” (23). This “unsignifiable” remains terrifying, even when sublimated in *form* – in the instability and arbitrariness of the signifier there resides a certain horror, an intimation of the chthonic. This music remains both offensive and seductive, in short, *abject*.

Music, rhythm, the song, are essential to one’s understanding or appreciation of the writing of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac. If we accept Kristeva’s suggestion that the “unsignifiable” can be expressed only in terms of “rhythm and music”, then music becomes the only means by which the soul can express itself – this takes us back to Nietzsche’s own lament in “Self-Criticism”, namely that “[i]t should have been *singing*, this ‘new soul’, not speaking!” (6). For Nietzsche, speaking renders the voice suspect, detracts from its authenticity – if “rhythm and music” already amount to “sublimation”, what might one say about speaking, of the translation of feelings, senses, *visions*, into words? In Whitman’s Songs we detect a similar need to express his soul – his breaking open of the poetic form is a breaking out into music, and lends itself to a completely musical evaluation in terms of movements, themes, modulation, and so forth. The song is one of Whitman’s central metaphors, and is automatically suggestive of the sense of spontaneous exuberance he wants to evoke. Song, as an attempt on the part of language, which is reflexive and referential, to approximate the purely expressive nature of music, is the visionary writer’s proper medium. In song, the impact of words does not reside simply, or even predominantly, in their semantic value – the signifier may be momentarily freed from its doomed responsibility to signify; instead, it is assimilated into the whole, forming an indispensable yet “indistinguishable” part of the melody. It is this melody which is capable of expressing something approaching the “truth”, the sublime. When Kerouac, for instance, says that his voice initially “sounded false” (*Letters* 233), he means it both in the sense of inharmonious *and* inauthentic – to sing from an inner score (however chaotic it might seem to the “cultured” listener) is to sing the “truth”, to be an authentic self.

The lust for expression, so evident in much of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac’s writing, and the musical quality of that expression essentially results in a breach of semantic contract. This is more self-evident in Miller and Kerouac’s work, but as Anne Fernihough suggests in her introduction to *The Rainbow*, in Lawrence we also find that “the thick, almost tangible

linguistic textures are often in excess of any discursive content” (xxxvii)³. In a sense language becomes chthonic. Such a quality is essentially attained in the description of sacred instants, such as the sexual encounter between Tom and Lydia Brangwen in *The Rainbow*:

The fear was like bliss in his heart. He looked down. Her face was shining, her eyes were full of light, she was awful. He suffered from the compulsion to her. She was the awful unknown. . . . She waited for him to meet her, not to bow before her, and serve her. She wanted his active participation, not his submission.

She put her fingers on him. . . . There was that in him which shrank from yielding to her, resisted the relaxing towards her, opposed the mingling with her, even while he desired it. He was afraid, he wanted to save himself.

There were a few moments of stillness. Then gradually, the tension, the withholding relaxed in him, and he began to flow towards her. She was beyond him, the unattainable. But he let go his hold on himself, he relinquished himself, and knew the subterranean force of his desire to come to her, to be with her, to mingle with her, losing himself to find her, to find himself in her. . . . His blood beat up in waves of desire. He wanted to come to her, to meet her. She was there, if he could reach her. The reality of her who was just beyond him absorbed him. Blind and destroyed, he pressed forward, nearer, nearer, to receive the consummation of himself, be received within the darkness which should swallow him and yield him up to himself. If he could come really within the blazing kernel of darkness, if really he could be destroyed, burnt away till he lit with her in one consummation, that were supreme, supreme.

Their coming together now, after two years of married life, was much more wonderful to them than it had been before.

(89)

In this incantory passage there is no real sense in which words are used contrary to their established meanings. However, their effect *is* “in excess of. . . discursive content” – under the rather insistent layout of Lawrence’s sexual metaphysic, there is a rhythm which tells the “real story”. The subjunctive mode effectively reproduces the continuous desire (predominantly on the part of Tom) while the rhythmic sentences give us an intimation of the entire sexual act, starting at the initial horror of seduction. The first sentences are almost laconic, and express a holding back. At times a sentence threatens to roll on, indicating Tom’s release into the chthonic flow, for instance when he looks at his wife: “Her face was shining, her eyes were full of light, she was awful”. This last clause abruptly cuts off the rhythm that was building up, as Tom’s fear brings him to himself. Lydia’s active, almost imposing insistence contrasts with Tom’s hesitant desire, and the passage continues on this tension between flow and arrestation, an uncomfortable rhythm which finally seems to be arrested in Tom’s dominant need to “save himself”. At this point, Lawrence inserts a break – “There were a few moments of silence” – and out of this break he starts up the rhythm anew; Tom’s submission is finally intimated in the lengthy sentence which announces his “let[ting] go of himself”. From this point on, a new

³ In fact, verbal excess is central to the critique by Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac of bourgeois mentality. They reject the “economy of prose” - still favoured by the literary establishment - which clearly has its roots in bourgeois mediocrity.

rhythm or beat emerges, imitative of the sexual act itself, and initiated by the “blood beat[ing] up in waves of desire”. There is an increase in pace and intensity, effected by the use of commas and repetition, which seems to climax, both syntactically and semantically, in the word “consummation”, the receding desire effectively captured in the drowsily repeated “supreme, supreme”. The change in the narrator’s voice, at this point, is abrupt, pulling the reader and the characters back into the “reality” of the world presented in the novel: “Their coming together now, after two years of married life, was much more wonderful to them than it had been before”.

Although Lawrence does not commit a semantic “crime” in any obvious sense, what strikes one in passages like the one above is that language, as part of everything that flows, becomes symbolic of the sexual act. While the reader may follow, virtually in point form, Lawrence’s conception of the sexual act as a “leaping off into the unknown” (“Study” 53), the reader does not follow it with intellectual detachment. As Fernihough’s use of the word “textures” suggests, there is something tangible about the writing, effected largely by the evocation of sound and movement by means of the rhythm. While semantically the language may be excessive and tautological, musically it is not. It is the sound that the reader needs to be attentive to, perhaps even more so in case of Miller and Kerouac. With Kerouac, for instance, the signifier frequently finds itself divorced from context and exploited solely for its sound. Similarly, sentence structure is also often inverted, skewed or pushed beyond its limits to accommodate the rhythm that Kerouac wants to achieve. It is practices like these that have led Miller to remark gleefully in his preface to *The Subterraneans*, referred to earlier, that

Jack Kerouac has done something to our immaculate prose from which it may never recover. A passionate lover of language, he knows how to use it. Born virtuoso that he is, he takes pleasure in defying the laws and conventions of literary expression which cripple genuine, untrammelled communication between reader and writer.

(9)

For the most part, this defiance of conventions is of such a nature that the reader need only be grammatically forgiving, although occasionally the language takes on a quality of pure gibberish – yet none of this could in good conscience be dismissed as irrelevant.

In *Desolation Angels* one can clearly see the lengths to which Kerouac is willing to go in breaking up the semantic impact of language in favour of a more subconscious impact. The first part of the novel presents us with the stream of consciousness of the narrator, alone (in his capacity as “fire watch”) atop “Desolation Peak”. In his isolation, he comes to experience a sense of dissolution and attains, at various instances, what one might refer to as a sacred

instant. We will consider two of these. In the first, the language still exhibits a certain restraint and control, although its impact (as in the case of the Lawrence passage above) lies in its rhythm:

Hold together, Jack, pass through everything, and everything is one dream, one appearance, one flash, one sad eye, one crystal lucid mystery, one word – Hold still, man, regain your love of life and go down from this mountain and simply *be – be – be* – be the infinite fertilities of the one mind of infinity, make no comments, complaints, criticisms, appraisals, avowals, sayings, shooting stars of thought, just *flow, flow*, be you all, be you what it is, it is only what it always is – Hope is a word like a snow-drift – This is the Great Knowing, this is the Awakening, this is Voidness – So shut up, live, travel, adventure, bless and don't be sorry – Prunes, prune, eat your prunes – And you have been forever, and you will be forever, and all the worrisome smashings of your foot on innocent cupboard doors it was only the Void pretending to be a man pretending not to know the Void –

I come back into the house a new man.

(31)

There are, in spite of the overt Buddhist influences, some similarities between this passage and the one by Lawrence. Thematically speaking, there is the same threat of dissolution (although in different contexts), the same hesitation in the face of unification, a release and, at the end, an abrupt pronunciation on the effect of this experience, in this case, “com[ing] back into the house a new man”. Once again, the rhythm is also essential to its impact – throughout this passage there seems to be a speeding up, taking the narrator from the cautionary “Hold together, Jack” to the inconclusiveness of the “Void” and the dash which follows it. This speeding up is also reflected in the use of words – while there seems to be a certain philosophical train of thought initially, Kerouac increasingly lets the syntax dissolve (“be you all, be you what it is, it is only what it always is”) and introduces words and phrases that are difficult to account for – a case in point would be the sudden appearance of “Prunes, prune, eat your prunes”. The effect is ultimately that of a kind of overload, an exploded attempt at communicating the unsignifiable, or the “Void”, which is associated here with “the Awakening” and “the Great Knowing”. Yet this passage by no means represents the more extreme examples of the dissolution of language itself in the representation of the sacred instant. *Desolation Angels* offers yet another example which, interestingly, follows a similar structure as the previous one, while the language is much more “corrupt”:

I could go mad in this – O carryall menaya but the wheel may track the rattle-burr, poniac the avoid devoidity runabout, minavoid the crail – Song of my all the vouring me the part de rail-ing carry all the pone – part you too may green and fly – welkin moon wrung salt upon the tides of come-on night, swing on the meadow shoulder, roll the boulder of Buddha over the pink partitioned west Pacific fog mow – O tiny tiny tiny human hope, O moulded cracking thee mirror thee shook pa t na watalaka – and more to go –

Ping.

(36)

Once again, the passage (which constitutes a chapter by itself) is initiated by an expression of fear, of caution, but this time, there is no clear sign of restraint. Within the mutilated words one can still discern the evidence of cautionary phrases – such as “avoid the devoidity runabout”, which seems to signal the dangers of a rootless life lived on the road, running about and losing one’s identity, with a continuous punning on “the Void” – but essentially it is lost in the dissolution of language into pure rhythm (alliteration and rhyme) which represents (and constitutes) the dissolution of the self into the flux of the universe, of which the “de rail-ing” (rejection or loss of linearity?) and the relation between the “moon” and the “tides” are suggestive. A momentary realisation of the fact that this stint on the mountain (and therefore such instances) is not concluded yet – “and more to go” – concludes the passage before Kerouac effects a kind of blackout: “Ping”. Here is no evaluation of the experience in terms of the narrator’s development anymore – the extreme nature of the experience places it beyond the consolations of contextualisation. “Ping” is the sound of the needle dropping at the end of the orchestra’s crashing finale.

In both Lawrence and Kerouac, repetition and reformulation, to varying degrees, effect a rhythm, a kind of musical ambience, a reverberation of meanings that results in the rich texture of their language – what Kerouac once referred to as “Organized Variations on the Theme of Existence” (Nicosia *Memory* 336). But if Lawrence was aware of the poetic-musical nature of his own language, Kerouac overtly establishes such a link in his “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose”. We have already considered the way in which this piece alludes to the unconscious (and soul) as the source of artistic creation, but we have yet to explore the way in which Kerouac conceives of the *medium* of that expression. Early on in “Essentials”, Kerouac identifies that medium analogously as jazz, “for Kerouac the most thoroughly Dionysian of all musical forms” (Bartlett 121), which he experienced in the age of experimental giants such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonius Monk. According to Ann Charters, “Essentials” emerged as the result of a request for clarity from Ginsberg and Burroughs when Kerouac explained to them that the creation of *The Subterraneans*

was all based on “jazz and bop, in the sense of a, say, tenor man drawing a breath, and blowing a phrase on his saxophone, till he runs out of breath, and when he does, his sentence, his statement’s been made... that’s how I therefore separate my sentences, as breath separations of the mind.... Then there’s the raciness and freedom and humor of jazz instead of all that dreary analysis.”

(188)

This notion is picked up in “Essentials” when Kerouac compares, throughout, the spontaneous bop prosodist to the jazz musician, linking writing to music to flow, as when insisting on “undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words, *blowing* (as per jazz musician)

on subject of image” (743). The suggestion is here of a freestyle improvisation, the almost violent exuberance of which is signalled here, as in his novels, by the action of “*blowing*”. This word recurs throughout the essay, linked every time to the idea of precarious unbridled expression and release – like a performing jazz artist, the spontaneous writer has no recourse to correction or revision, which means that “mistakes” become part of the performance⁴. Once again, it becomes clear that semantic impact is relinquished in favour of an immediate, more musical (if improvisational) form of expression. In Kerouac this is done to much greater extremes than in Miller or Lawrence. I would like to suggest that this is in keeping with Kerouac’s change of metaphor – in spite of a highly Whitmanesque invitation to “tap from yourself the song of yourself” (“Essentials” 744), Kerouac’s relinquishment of the metaphor of the “Song”, essential to Whitman, Lawrence and Miller, signals his greater reliance on rhythm and sound which, in turn, infuses his mutilated signifiers with archetypal import.

Commensurate with this central image of “*blowing*” there is another important notion in Kerouac’s “gut-theory” of literary creation, namely “sketching”. As with “blowing”, “sketching” is also suggestive of an absence of formality, an inspired jotting down of impressions which may not immediately have any place within the greater whole of an artistic creation – in its appropriate realm of the visual arts, sketches may end up being incorporated into a painting, tacked to the wall, or thrown into the trash can. As Nicosia suggests, in Kerouac’s conception of the term,

‘Sketching’ put the writer at the very center of the composition. Plot and theme were reduced to the passage of perceptions across his sensorium. Thus, the focus of the writing was narrowed to a single, sharply delineated point of view: this particular writer’s peephole into reality. Nevertheless the technique also granted an incredible freedom, since there was no longer any reason to exclude from one’s writing any detail that came to mind.

(*Memory* 359)

Once again, the organisational principle becomes the rhythm of the writer’s mind – as sensory perception is followed by associative memory or metaphysical musing, and back again, a musical theme emerges which challenges our limited, rational perception of the world. As suggested in “Essentials”, Kerouac believes, in the tradition of Whitman and William Carlos Williams, that the way to the sacred lies through the tangible: “The object is set before the mind, either in reality, as in sketching (before a landscape or teacup or old face) or is set in the memory wherein it becomes the sketching from memory of a definite image-object” (743). Like Whitman’s meditation on the “spear of summer grass”, which results in an apparent

⁴ For an exhaustive discussion of this essay, as well as an examination of these principles in action, see Regina Weinreich’s *The Spontaneous Poetics of Jack Kerouac*, pages 39-50.

deluge of metaphysical perceptions, recorded sights and experiences, as well as visions, this focused activity soon becomes an expansionist score which, though never losing sight of its starting point and central theme, embarks on exuberant flights of improvisation and association. In his “sketches”, then, Kerouac developed individual “Variations on the Theme of Existence”, which later he would frequently incorporate (and this is where conscious artistry enters) into the “plot” constituted by a given protagonist’s development. This technique was only employed, consciously and extensively, from the early 1950s onward, after the writing of *On the Road*, in novels such as *Visions of Cody* and *Desolation Angels*, and allowed Kerouac to import a sense of “unmediated” vibrant life into his work. In this sense, Sagar’s comment on Lawrence’s poems would hold true for Kerouac’s prose: “Hostile critics have called Lawrence’s poems ‘sketches for poems’; but a sketch is often superior, in terms of life, to the finished product” (218).

Miller himself was also a consummate singer, although his song, as introduced to us in the first pages of *Tropic of Cancer* (10), has a strongly surrealist quality. Surrealism is his way of reacting against the strictures placed on his expression by society and language, and approaching (in his work) the impact of the sacred instant. In a letter to Lawrence Durrell (1936), Miller explains that he sees in surrealism

only an effort, at bottom, to return to the original vital source, which is in the solar plexus, or in the Unconscious, or in the stars, if you like. I have used the method here and there, when it came naturally and spontaneously. At least, I hope so. I don’t start out by trying to be surrealist. Sometimes it is at the beginning and sometimes at the end. It’s always an effort to plough through, to say what can’t or won’t be said.

(Durrell 16)

While he does not, like Kerouac occasionally does, revert to the mutilation of signifiers, it is in his strange and striking images, rushed by us in a torrent of words, that we get an intimation of sublime reality. Miller’s surrealism ebbs and flows, assaulting the reader one moment, while suddenly pulling back the next, with Miller poring over whatever has washed up. *Tropic of Capricorn*, for instance, provides us with a opportunity to explore this phenomenon: deeply into his narration of the humorous and abject details of his life in New York, Miller suddenly interrupts his text (which has no actual chapters) with “An Interlude”, maintaining the analogy to music. This section is initiated with the aphoristic challenge: “Confusion is a word we have invented for an order which is not understood” (159). This challenge remains with us through the following passage as Miller’s narrative explodes in a surrealist description of the “general sexual confusion which prevailed at this time. It was like taking a flat in the Land of Fuck” (164). Although the full impact of Miller’s language can only be appreciated in its magnified verbiage, a sample will suffice to ascertain its general texture. Having just subjected his reader

to a strange and vivid description of one of his sexual encounters (with “the girl upstairs”), Miller goes on to ponder the mythological dimensions of her sexual organs:

It was an enormous cunt, too, when I think back on it. A dark, subterranean labyrinth fitted up with divans and cosy corners and rubber teeth and syringes and soft nestles and eiderdown and mulberry leaves. I used to nose in like the solitary worm and bury myself in a little cranny where it was absolutely silent, and so soft and restful that I lay like a dolphin on the oyster-banks. A slight twitch and I'd be in the Pullman reading a newspaper or else up an impasse where there were mossy round cobblestones and little wicker gates which opened and shut automatically. Sometimes it was like riding the shoot-the-shoots, a steep plunge and then a spray of tingling sea-crabs, the bulrushes swaying feverishly and the gills of tiny fishes lapping against me like harmonica stops. In the immense black grotto there was a silk-and-soap organ playing a predaceous black music. When she pitched herself high, when she turned the juice on full, it made a violaceous purple, a deep mulberry stain like twilight, a ventiloqual twilight such as dwarfs and cretins enjoy when they menstruate. It made me think of cannibals chewing flowers, of Bantus running amok, of wild unicorns rutting in rhododendron beds. Everything was anonymous and unformulated, John Doe and his wife Emmy Doe: above us the gas tanks and below the marine life. Above the belt, as I say, she was batty. Yes, absolutely cuckoo, though still abroad and afloat. Perhaps that was what made her cunt so marvellously impersonal. It was one cunt out of a million, a regular Pearl of the Antilles, such as Dick Osborn discovered when reading Joseph Conrad. In the broad Pacific of sex she lay, a gleaming silver reef surrounded by human anemones, human starfish, human madrepores. Only an Osborn could discover her, given the proper latitude and longitude of cunt.

(165-166)

On this oceanic drift of language, references are tossed about with no apparent function, and words are grouped in obscure and striking ways – one becomes immediately aware of Miller's love of difficult and strange-looking words. The reader would have great difficulty keeping up, if insisting on accounting for every word, especially since this torrent continues across a number of pages, in a surrealistic counterpart of Whitman's catalogues. What does strike one, however, are the recurring archetypal images of the ocean, signalling the unconscious impact of the sexual interaction, which is not a private, personal affair but, like the woman's sexual organs, “impersonal”, part of “the broad Pacific of sex”, in other words, universal, emanating from the collective unconscious. This takes us back to Miller's point, made in *The World of Sex*, that “[p]erhaps a cunt...is one of the prime symbols of the connectedness between all things” (44). An experience, and vision, of this vital connectedness, beyond conscious comprehension, becomes an experience of the Void – in fact, Miller's very language becomes a kind of (semantic) void in which the reader finds traditional supports lacking, or removed. And in the background, Miller's taunting or, perhaps, reassuring claim that “[c]onfusion is a word...for an order that is not understood”.

With language placed here firmly in the realm of “everything that flows” (*Cancer* 259), Miller does not, as Lawrence and Kerouac (in the passages quoted above) seem to do, effect any kind of climax⁵, though his surrealistic tantrum does wind down to brief moments of sobriety or clarity, as when he informs us (after extending the quoted passage for another few pages) that “[t]his is all a figurative way of speaking about what is unmentionable” (*Capricorn* 174). Another such moment arrives when Miller finally links his sexual surrealism to the central concern of his novel, “the growth of the self”, and also comments on the very role of “An Interlude” in the structure of his narrative:

No hint of labour, no sound, no struggle, no rest; relentless, remorseless, unremitting, the growth of the self goes on. Only two items on the bill of fare: the self and the not-self. And an eternity in which to work it out. In this eternity, which has nothing to do with time or space, there are interludes in which something like a thaw sets in. The form of the self breaks down, but the self, like climate, remains. In the night the amorphous matter of the self assumes the most fugitive forms: error seeps in through the portholes and the wanderer is unlatched from his door. This door which the body wears, if opened out on to the world, leads to annihilation.

(187)

Miller’s work is, and purports to achieve, the chthonic flow – “An Interlude” belongs to the realm of those “interludes in which something like a thaw sets in”, shattering the stifling forms that keep the self stunted. In the precarious toying of the self with the “not-self”, it becomes “amorphous” and “fugitive” – an interlude is a sacred instant, and holds the same threat of “annihilation”. And what holds true for the individual, holds true for Miller’s narrative, exploded by this “Interlude”, which abandons form in the interest of trying to express the “unmentionable”, Kristeva’s “unsignifiable”. To some extent, these later, more ponderous lines serve as a contextualisation of the reader’s experience, and the reader suddenly finds that he has emerged on the other side of the interlude as Miller slips back into his more “realistic” mode of narration – the entire digression having been a kind of preamble to Miller’s mythologising of the portentous first meeting with his future wife, June, appearing in this book only as the heterological “she”:

All this is by way of saying that in going through the revolving door of the Amarillo dance hall one night some twelve or fourteen years ago, the great event took place. The interlude which I think of as the Land of Fuck, a realm of time more than of space, is for me the equivalent of that Purgatory which Dante has described in nice detail. As I put my hand on the brass rail of the revolving door to leave the Amarillo Dance Hall, all that I had previously been, was, and about to be, foundered. There was nothing unreal about it; the very time in which I was born passed away, carried off by a mightier stream.... My spine was socketed to the node.... If from this point I do not begin, it is because there is no beginning. If I do not fly at once to the bright land it is because wings are of no avail. It is zero hour and the moon is at nadir...

(188)

⁵ One should remember, however, that the Lawrence and Kerouac passages are also taken from “rambling” texts.

Interludes are sacred instants that automatically also challenge the rules of narrative coherence (as they challenge the concept of homogeneous life). In this latter sense, then, Lawrence has also made use of interludes (as pointed out by Robert Kiely), although these in no way resemble those of Miller, which are bona fide sacred instants. In the case of Lawrence's meticulously structured novels, such interludes should indeed stick out like blemishes on a well-wrought urn. Commenting on what has been considered the idiosyncratic nature of certain chapters in *Women in Love*, such as "Shortlands", Kiely suggests that such apparent interruptions are highly functional in the novel as a whole and, indeed, form an important part of it:

The best-laid human plans – whether for weddings or novels – are subjected to odd quirks of chance; encounters with no future, debates without bearings, words adrift between high symbolism and commonplace literality. The chapter itself seems to be the author's purposeful 'accident', the exposure of his own masterly design to contradictory elements.... The author who would be honest and produce a vital work of art must move with a particular kind of alertness. He must exercise his judgment and will in conceiving a plan and, at the same time, must remain open to the unexpected interventions that seem to threaten the plan but in fact keep it alive.

(100)

This idea is perceptively backed up by Kiely with a passage from the chapter itself, namely the scene where Gudrun's sketch is "dropped" into the water by Hermione. His comment on this is that "[i]f the drifts and currents of nature are not permitted now and then to 'spoil' the perfect plan of the artist, the result will be neat but, in Lawrence's terminology, 'decadent', without life" (102). What is interesting about Kiely's reading, however, is his insistence on purpose – are such "accidents" placed in the novel, or are they, rather, "error[s that] seep...in" (Miller *Capricorn* 188), an inevitable result of "remain[ing] open"? Perhaps this question is not so important, for the fact remains: they were never edited out. Once again it becomes clear that in spite of vast differences in style, Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac all find ways of challenging the homogeneity of any creation, be it "God's" or man's.

Miller's surrealism is essentially like Lautréamont's in *Les chants de Maldoror*, where it ties in closely with the subordination against God and good form. This attack essentially takes the form of a re-examination – God is revealed or reinterpreted as a monstrous being or, rather, a Creator capable of monstrous acts. We see here a tendency to see God as a multifaceted being, close to Whitman's "Square Deific", where Satan becomes part of God, instead of being a separate entity, easy to isolate and ban. It is in this realm that the obscene and "lowly" are linked to the divine (in the form of "the sacred"), and accounts for the obscene in Miller's own work. It also makes it possible for him to say, in an essay on *Maldoror*, that "God had a hand in the creation of this book, as he did in the creation of *A Season in Hell*, *Flowers of Evil* and

other so-called disturbing works, which are disturbing only because we are loath to recognize the shadow as well as the majesty of the Almighty” (“Let Us be Content” 624). Miller’s own comment explains quite succinctly the kind of visions we are presented with in *Maldoror*, such as the image of the Creator sitting on a “throne of human excrement and gold” (Lautréamont 85). Such images are deliberately shocking, meant to challenge and confuse the reader’s value-systems, the frame within which life is granted significance. One notices here also a close interaction between obscenity and surrealism (fairly overt in the passages from *Tropic of Capricorn* quoted above) which work in conjunction to confound the conscious mind.

Lautréamont’s divine “throne of human excrement and gold” collapses moral hierarchies, and in that collapse, the unconscious is released from its bondage “below”, and dream attains the status of reality. In fact, the unconscious becomes the gateway to a *sur*-reality, a reality *above* (superior to) our own. For Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac, however, if such a realm exists, it does so only in conjunction with the mundane realities of existence – there is no after-life “better” than life on earth. It is in this context that we should understand their (undeniably varied) use of the obscene in their work: heaven, only in earth; the “high”, only in the “low”; the metaphysical, only in the physical.

Obscenity has been defined in such a variety of ways that it seems virtually impossible to employ the term usefully – it is equally impossible to get away from it, as Lawrence, and especially Miller have both referred to it extensively. As stated before, obscenity should be considered primarily as that which would offend contemporary moral values, and threaten the homogeneity of the community. As such, its primary references seem to be to the realm of sexuality, but also all forms of (opaque) fluidity, excrementation and decay – in short, all things *abject*, that reminds man of his insoluble bond to the chthonic. The obscene revolts, begetting a morbid, seductive fascination, and is also linked closely to eroticism in its extreme, transgressive nature. It is, of course, this kind of morbid fascination that Lawrence has taken upon himself to destroy, hoping to substitute a natural, healthy approach to sex, but we should question his occasional self-portrayal as an unspoilt Adam. Biographers and critics alike have discerned the traces of puritanism in Lawrence’s sexual metaphysic – if only in the fact that he assigns such weight to the sexual act, a weight which nature does not, at least, seem to be very conscious of. But the main point is that Lawrence must have known his contemporaries, and it seems that, the better he got to know them, the more overt his use of the obscene became – one need but consider the development from *Sons and Lovers* to *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. In the face of society, Lawrence relishes in the hidden, whether it be the “roots in earth and manure”, “the under-earth in all its humidity and darkness”, “the black of the corrosive humus”

(“Pansies” 8), “shameful, natural and unnatural acts of sensual voluptuousness” (*Rainbow* 220), “the fissure” of poems like “Figs” or “Pomegranate”, or the “wet, heavy, perfumed stillness” (*Chatterley* 237) of Connie and Mellors’ forest of love. In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, of course, the doors are thrown wide open, purportedly with the purpose of letting in some air, of clearing out the sense of shame that pervades the sexual act. In the process Lawrence momentarily sounds, in the voice of Mellors, more like Miller than one would ever have deemed possible: Mellors has a name-bearing penis like a “burning pestle” which “wants cunt”(219) – i.e. “Lady Mortar” (237) – about a previous lover, Bertha, he brags to Connie that “I fucked her like a good un” (210), and he insists to Connie that “if tha shits an’ if tha pisses, I’m glad. I don’t want a woman as couldna shit or piss” (232). Such language, while perhaps not highly unusual, certainly exudes a sense of vulgar excess. Also, it is in the rejection of “natural” sex that we reach what Charney (in his chapter on Lawrence and Miller) calls the “erotic high point of [the novel,]...Connie’s ‘night of sensual passion’”, in which he discerns a reference to “among other things, anal intercourse” (109) – this is the experience which affords Connie an experience nearest the sacred instant in its impersonality and otherness:

Burning out the shames, the deepest, oldest shames, in the most secret places. It cost her an effort to let him have his way and his will of her. She had to be passive, consenting thing, like a slave, a physical slave. Yet the passion licked around her, consuming, and when the sensual flame of it pressed through her bowels and breast, she really thought she was dying: yet a poignant, marvellous death.

(258)

Even if this experience achieves the “burning out [of]...shames”, it is clear that it is in the revolt against these shames that the quality of the experience lies – to put it clearly, there are still shames to be burned. This passage is erotic precisely because of the tension between hesitation and excessive release, signalled also by the fact that “[i]t cost her an effort to let him have his way”. The result is a sacred instant, “a poignant, marvellous death”. Lawrence, then, makes use of the obscene, either directly, or by allusion, to stress the importance of the sexual sacred instant – one frequently discerns Lawrence’s lust to have his say, and spare nobody. But such moments are inevitably sublimated in what Charney calls the “sexually programmatic” (93) structure of Lawrence’s novel, and (as in the latter quotation from the novel) his use of “sexual euphemisms...at...climactically frank moment[s]” (108). Such characteristics lead Charney to say that “[i]f sex is the life force, it is a pleasure to turn from Lawrence’s high-flown declarations of purpose to Miller’s vulgar but equally exuberant celebrations of cunt” (110). To some extent this comparison is unfair, of course – next to Miller’s “vulgar[ity]”, much would appear “high-flown”.

For Miller, obscenity is serious business – it is central to the particular sound of his voice. This much is made very clear in his advice to Lawrence Durrell (from the same letter quoted above) in relation to writing:

If you have the guts for it, the thing to do is to go to the bitter end – in your writing, I mean. If you can possibly hold out... write only what you please. There is nothing else to do, unless you want to become famous. They will shit on you anyway, so have your say first. *I'm not recommending obscenity necessarily. Each man has his own way of being himself and of saying it so ultimately that he can't be denied.* Compromise is futile and unsatisfactory.... Even when you elect to be absolutely honest it is difficult. Expression seems such a natural, God-given thing – and yet it's not either. It's a lifelong struggle to find yourself.

(17, *emphasis added*)

While recognising the fact that obscenity may not be useful to the purpose of every writer, it certainly is instrumental in his own writing, and he views it as an almost magical “technical device” of which the “purpose is to awaken, to usher in a sense of reality” (“Obscenity” 287). This “reality”, however, is not a sublimated reality, as Miller compares himself to “the great Zen Masters”, of whom “it has been observed that they never hesitate to resort to any means in order to awaken their disciples; they will even perform what we would call sacrilegious acts” (287) – what one is awakened from is the general torpid view of (surface) reality. What is interesting about Miller’s analysis of the use of obscenity is that he recognises that it stems from the writer’s own “lust to convert”, something which Lawrence never really acknowledges about his own dogmatically passionate statements. As a result, the success-rate in terms of conversions becomes the least important item on Miller’s agenda:

To revert to the artist again.... Once he has made use of his extraordinary powers, and I am thinking of the use of obscenity in just such magical terms, he is inevitably caught up in the stream of forces beyond him. He may have begun by assuming that he could awaken his readers, but in the end he passes into another dimension of reality wherein he no longer feels the need of forcing an awakening.... He realizes that the real nature of the obscene resides in the lust to convert. He knocked to awaken, but it was himself he awakened.

(288)

The act of writing obscenely is precipitated by an exuberant “lust” with some vague purpose in mind: simply, “to convert”. Quite possibly we are dealing here with an initial Lawrentian rage, transformed into the impulse to preach passionately. However, pulling out all the stops, and allowing himself all manner of transgressions (of the conventional, tasteful, acceptable), the writer is “caught up in the stream of forces beyond him”, the chthonic flow. The act of writing (for others) is always an act of writing (for) the self. What happens to the reader now is not the writer’s concern – in his “awakening” we should recognise a sacred instant. Like “An Interlude”, “[t]he obscene has all the qualities of the hidden interval. It is as vast as the Unconscious itself and as amorphous and fluid as the very stuff of the Unconscious” (290).

Miller's use of the obscene is always symbolic, in the way that Lawrence's flowers, or sexual relations, are symbolic, and functions as his gateway to the experience of the unconscious, an experience from which one always returns new-born. This is what leads him to say that "[w]hat is obscene are the preliminary or anticipatory movements of birth, the preconscious writhing in the face of a life to be. It is in the agony of death that the nature of birth is apprehended" (289). At his best, Miller manages to invest the obscene with intimations of the sublime, with the quality of the sacred – as he frequently does, for instance, in *Tropic of Capricorn* – but occasionally his narrative lacks this symbolic density and interrelatedness, and becomes, as in *Sexus*, a kind of see-sawing between graphic sex and the metaphysical babble of an *idiot savant*.

As has been pointed out before, Kerouac does not make extensive use of the obscene – his sacred instants emanate from a variety of sources, ranging from Whitmanesque meditation and sexuality to music (jazz), speed and drugs⁶. However, the sexual, and the female "other", remained an important gateway to the sublime, as is rather clear from Kerouac's succinct statement in a letter to Neal Cassady: "cunt is all and I know it" (*Letters* 316). In Kerouac's prose, however, the obscene is generally not used when referring to any actual sexual interaction; rather, it may be used to signal the *imagined* intensity of a missed sexual opportunity. A clear case in point would come from the frequently elegiac *Visions of Cody*, where the narrator, Jack Duluoz, insists that

[i]f it hadn't been for that T [marijuana] which only allowed me to goof and stare I would have done either of two things as I look back on it from my bench here in the Erie Railroad waiting for the Singapore-bound *President Adams* and my meet with Blackie the Bosun for my last chance to get on board, the dark ship of destiny – I would have said to Eileen who's her madame and old buddy, 'Eileen fix me up with Mildred', loud, with their peals of laffter rising, or I would have kneeled at Mildred's feet and said 'If you stroke that pussy too much it'll start purring'. Now why I the fuck didn't I do that! – how could I have passed up such a piece of ass! – what effeminacy, what narcolepsy has come over me from overstaying my 'leave in Manhattan' from 1943 or even 1944 or worse 1939 – a cunt like that and then we would have fucked sweetly in Danny's red bedroom, I would have said 'O my God what a perfect saddle' and she would have said 'Iffff, oooo, drive it in daddy' and don't you think I would? – with old sinister Eileen, naked, sixty, white all over, tall, bellied but well breasted, watching closely every movement of interlocked limbs

(131)

Here the sexual, masculine bombast, highly reminiscent of Miller, is constantly undercut by the narrator's admission that it is a frustrated sexual fantasy based on what might have happened. The narrator, like a teenager with a tall story, clearly feels insecure about both his lame excuse

⁶ See George Wedge's essay, "The Blues, Some Booze and Kerouac's Lyrical Prose", on the role/effect of different substances in/on the composition of Kerouac's different works.

(that he was too doped out to act) and his retroactive bravado – letting us in on his fantasy, he even stops to challenge us nervously: “and don’t you think I would?” As for the fantasy itself, it is essentially pornographic in nature and influenced, by the narrator’s own admission, by the fact that “we’d been lookin at dirty books all morning” (131). As frequently in Miller’s *Sexus*, there’s much here that is decadent and excessive, but little that is symbolic (apart from the “dark ship of destiny” that Duluoz is about to board). Neither would this seem to be the main concern of a passage in which the narrator seems to take stock of his shortcomings (both his inaction and his bravado).

In contrast to passages like the one above (which are not a frequent occurrence), Kerouac does sometimes make use of the sexually obscene to usher in a sense of the *sur-real*. Interestingly, one of the most extensive examples of this “technique”, taken from *Desolation Angels*, employs both a Milleresque surrealism and one of Miller’s favourite haunts, namely the burlesque show. After sitting through a lengthy show, the narrator, Duluoz, suddenly sits up at the arrival of “naughty Sarina – There’s a furor of excitement throughout the theater – She has slanted cat’s eyes and a wicked face – cute like cat’s moustache – like a little witch – no broom – she comes slinking and bumping out to the beat” (136). Sarina proceeds to give a sexual performance of such intensity that it dissolves the narrative which, up to this point, has been leading us through the sequence of the show, and removes us to an alternative plane altogether (music and alcohol add to the effect). Sarina enacts a magical, sacred rite, a dance like Salomé’s – a “witch”, she commands the chthonic forces and seduces her audience, who at first don’t know what they’re in for. As a compelling, rich passage, I quote it here in full:

She immediately gets down on the floor in the coitus position and starts throwing a fit at heaven with her loinsies – She twists in pain, her face is distorted, teeth, hair falls, shoulders squirm and snake – She stays on the floor on her two hands supporting and knocking her works right at the audience of dark men, some of em college boys – Whistles! The organ music is low down get-down-there what-you-doin down there blues – How really naughty she is with her eyes, slant blank, and the way she goes to the righthand box and does secret dirty things for the dignitaries and producers in there, showing some little portion of her body and saying ‘Yes? No?’ – and sweeping away and coming around again and now her hand-tip sneaks into her belt and she slowly undoes her skirt with tantalizing fingers that snake and hesitate, then she presents a thigh, a higher thigh, a pelvic corner, a belly corner, she turns and reveals a buttock corner, she lolls her tongue out – she’s sweating juice at every pore – I cant help thinking what Slim does to her in the dressingroom –

By this time I’m drunk, drank too much wine, I’m dizzy and the whole dark theater of the world swirls around, it’s all insane and I remember vaguely from the mountains it’s upsidedown and wow, sneer, sleer, snake, slake of sex, what are the people doing in audience seats in this crashing magician’s void handclapping and howling to music and a girl? – What are all those curtains and drapes for anyway, and masques? and lights of different intensity playing everywhere from everywhere, rose pink, heart-sad, boy-blue,

girl-green, Spanish cape black and black-black? Ugh, ow, I don't know what to do, Sarina the Naughty One is now on her back on the stage slowly moving her sweet loins at some imaginary God-man in the sky giving her the eternal works – and pretty soon we'll have pregnant balloons and castoff rubbers in the alley and sperm in the stars and broken bottles in the stars, and soon walls'll be built to hold her *protect* inside some castle Spain Madkinghouse and the walls will be cemented in with broken beer glasses and nobody can climb to her snatch except the Sultan organ who'll bear witness to her juices then go to his juiceless grave and her grave be juiceless too in time, after the first black juices the worms love so, then dust, atoms of dust, whether as atoms of dust or as great universes of thighs and vaginas and penises what will it matter, it's all a Heaven Ship – The whole world is roaring right there in that theater and just beyond I see files of sorrowing humanity wailing by candlelight and Jesus on the Cross and Buddha sitting near the Bo Tree and Mohammed in a cave and the serpent and the sun held high and all Akkadian-Sumerian antiquities and early sea-boats carrying courtesan Helens away to the bash final war and broken glass of tiny infinity till nothing's there but white snowy light permeating everywhere throughout the darkness and sun – pling, and electromagnetic gravitational ecstasy not even passing through and not even being –

But O Sarina come with me to my bed of woes, let me love you gently in the night, long time, we got all night, till dawn, till Juliet's rising sun and Romeo's vial sink, till I have slaked my thirst of Samsara at your portal rosy petal lips and left saviour juice in your rosy flesh garden to melt and dry and ululate another baby for the void, come sweet Sarina in my naughty arms, by dirty in my clean milk, and I'll detest the defecate I leave in your milky empowered cyst-and-vulva chamber, your cloacan clara file-hool through which slowly drool the hall-gyzm, to castles in your hassel flesh and I'll protect your trembling thighs against my heart and kiss your lips and cheeks and Lair and love you everywhere and that'll be that –

At the drape she parts her bra and shows naughty teats and vanishes inside and show's over – lights come on – everybody leaves – I sit there sipping my last possible shot, dizzy and crazy.

It don't make no sense, the world is too magical, I better go back to my rock.

(136)

Much of the impact of the passage lies in its serpentine allusions, which effectively suggests the seductively repellent nature of sex and sexual organs (*not* merely male). Duluoiz is aware of social context – he imagines, somewhat lustfully, a rather victimised existence behind the scenes for the performing woman – but mainly he experiences the performer as an archetypal female, the “Naughty One”, which, conceived of as sexually threatening to the masculine world, necessitates the building of “walls” under the cover of “*protect*[ion]”. Full of “juices”, she is the embodiment of Lawrentian life-force, a participant in a divine intercourse. Once again he allows himself to fantasise – this time, however, his tone is exuberant and morbidly fascinated, and the imagined intercourse has none of the pornography of the passage quoted from *Visions of Cody*. What he imagines is an obscene orgy of bodily fluids, a complete diffusion of individual boundaries. The scene ends humorously as we reach the climax of the show, with Sabrina briefly flashing her breasts at the audience before slipping off stage. Duluoiz comes to his senses and, shattered with glee and horror, almost resolves to return to the stability of his “rock”, i.e. “Desolation Peak”. We know of course, that such a step would be

futile – ascetic as his existence there may have been, it was just as precarious. For Duluo, like Kerouac and Whitman, the “*world is...magical*”, in the lonesome majesty of mountains as in the bustling of city streets.

All in all one needs to discern in Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac an attempt to get at the “sacred” world which exists, if not really beyond, within our own. The means they employ to achieve this may be varied, but has one overriding element in common – in order to break through, inherited, homogeneous forms of artistic expression need to be shattered. As a result, they are frequently reduced to a specific, limiting category: Lawrence, a sexual priest; Miller, a vulgar Brooklyn boy, even a glorified pornographer; and Kerouac, a spokesperson for hedonistic youth. Such readings are simply silly. Keith Sagar, discussing one of Lawrence’s poems (“Pomegranate”), makes abundantly clear a point that has been made about all three writers in a variety of ways – that they are earth-bound mystics:

The ‘fissure’ [in the pomegranate] is not just sexual; it is any point where divinity erupts through *the surface of our normally desacralized world*, the world which man attempts to remake ‘round and finished like a billiard ball’; *any point of access to the otherworld*, the underworld, the reality beneath appearances. Orgasm is a means of access to that world, the little death, but so is any opening of the self to the other, any genuine perception of the non-human, and intoxication, Bacchic ecstasy, and, of course, death itself.

(221, *emphasis added*)

To varying degrees the texts produced by these three writers, by virtue of their *otherness* (to the contemporary literary norm), become such a “fissure”, a “point of access”. There is a certain criminal exuberance in the flaunting of unwritten, and even written (if one considers the banning of books like *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and *Tropic of Capricorn*) laws, an exuberance which adds much to the appeal of these books. Where that exuberance becomes a matter of insistent philosophical or metaphysical argument, its effectiveness is frequently lost, but, more often than not, Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac achieve the ultimate Promethean crime – they import a flame of life into a realm of what Robert Graves calls “the cool web of language.” In doing so, they create individuals who manage, in spite of society, to grow through to a sublime reality which is the prerogative of all individuals. In the next, and final, chapter, we will consider how this development is dealt with in three novels which, in many ways, reveal the writers at the height of their powers, namely *The Rainbow*, *Tropic of Cancer*, and *On the Road*.

CHAPTER 6: BREAKING THROUGH TO A MODERN SELF IN *THE RAINBOW*

Lawrence's *The Rainbow* is, to a large extent, a novel in its own category – there is simply nothing in Miller or Kerouac, or even Lawrence's own oeuvre that resembles this sprawling family saga. Kerouac perhaps comes closest in his first novel, *The Town and the City*, also a family saga, but that novel has none of *The Rainbow*'s scope and density of language. What Lawrence seems to do in this novel is to reiterate and extend a theme he touched on (with a different emphasis) in *Sons and Lovers*, namely the individual's self-definition outside the family circle that shaped and nurtured him. In *Sons and Lovers*, that struggle is still very familiar to Lawrence himself, and the novel becomes a ritual celebration of his birth into independence after his mother's death. In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence explores this problem further: how does an individual, forming a mere number in the endless biological advance of the species, actually achieve a sense of selfhood? In *The Rainbow*, moreover, this problem is viewed against the backdrop of a changing society, the industrial development of the Victorian Age. With the advent of this 'new world', the problems facing the individual change, and almost become more urgent. In order to examine this development comprehensively, Lawrence focuses on no fewer than three generations of one branch of the Brangwen family, starting with Tom Brangwen (born circa 1838), and concluding with the recognisably modern Ursula (born 1883, about two years earlier than Lawrence himself), who is undeniably the 'central' protagonist of the novel. Ursula's problems are those of Lawrence's other major protagonists, as well as Miller and Kerouac's main characters, that is, how to "come into being" in the face of an increasingly mechanised and mechanical society devoted to an empty ideal of *progress*. Her voyage in *The Rainbow* is essentially destructive and self-liberating – she has to extract herself from a variety of imposed roles to become an authentic self, a process which is quite traumatic in its own way. It is in *Woman in Love*, then, that the liberated Ursula looks forward, and tries to make a new life for herself.

In *The Rainbow*'s famous opening, Lawrence sets the context from which the successive Brangwen generations will increasingly distance and extract themselves, namely the almost primal matrix of the Marsh Farm. The very opening lines introduce the idea of a kind of submerged, automatic existence straight from the Old Testament:

The Brangwens had lived for generations on the Marsh Farm, in the meadows where the Erewash twisted sluggishly through the alder trees, separating Derbyshire from Nottinghamshire. Two miles away, a church-tower stood on a hill, the houses of the little country town climbing assiduously up to it. Whenever one of the Brangwens in the fields lifted his head from his work, he saw the church-tower at Ilkeston in the

empty sky. So that as he turned again to the horizontal land, he was aware of something standing above him and beyond him in the distance.

(9)

Living in a kind of unconscious, earth-bound languor (something that cannot survive the onslaught of industrial development), the Brangwens are vitally connected to nature, to its creative flow. Lawrence strongly evokes this sense in his rhythmic use of language, achieved primarily by his use of lengthy sentences, timely periods and conjunctions (which effect a kind of ebb and flow) and phrases that echo each other (as with Miller, extracting a quotation from the text tends to mute the overall effect):

[H]eaven and earth was teeming around them, and how should this cease? They felt the rush of the sap in spring, they knew the wave which cannot halt, but every year throws forward the seed to begetting, and falling back, leaves the young-born on the earth. They knew the intercourse between heaven and earth, sunshine drawn into the breast and bowels, the rain sucked up in the daytime, nakedness that comes under the wind in autumn, showing the birds' nests no longer worth hiding. Their life and inter-relations were such; feeling the pulse and body of the soil, that opened to their furrow for the grain, and became smooth and supple after their ploughing, and clung to their feet with a weight that pulled like desire, lying hard and unresponsive when the crops were to be shorn away. The corn waved and was silken, and the lustre slid along the limbs of the men who saw it. They took the udder of the cows, the cows yielded milk and pulse against the hands of the men, the pulse of the blood of the teats of the cows beat into the pulse of the hands of the men.... In autumn...the men sat by the fire in the house where the women moved about with surety, and the limbs and the body of the men were impregnated with the day, cattle and earth and vegetation and the sky, the men sat by the fire and their brains were inert, as their blood flowed heavy with the accumulation from the living day.

(10)

In this Paradisal existence, the men lead a one-sided life – although Lawrence would clearly advocate such a vital connection with nature and relation to one's circumambient universe (intimated especially in Lawrence's use of the series of prepositions in describing the milking of the cows), these men are not moving into consciousness. "[D]azed with looking towards the source of generation, unable to turn round" (11), they remain in a kind of hypnotic, vegetable state, coming to no utterance. On the other hand, "[t]he women were different" (10). Like Eve, they aspire to something more and are, to a limited extent, visionary:

On them too was the drowse of blood-intimacy.... But the women looked out from the heated, blind intercourse of farm-life, to the spoken world beyond. They were aware of the lips and the mind of the world speaking and giving utterance, they heard the sound in the distance, and they strained to listen.

(10)

It is the word "blind" that gives us the clearest sense of the problem with this existence, "Lawrentian" as it might at first seem. In contrast to this chthonic matrix, there is another, created or "spoken world", a world of utterance and expression. This image brings to mind the biblical image of "the Word", the creative force that allows God to lend shape and character to

a previously inchoate earth. Eve's sin, like Lucifer's, lies in the attempt to appropriate this divine prerogative to be a Creator. It is the very same impulse that drives the artist, who always re-enacts this ur-act of creation. But the Brangwen men are not subjects – they are immersed in the chthonic soup suggested so effectively by the name of their realm, Marsh Farm. The women, on the other hand, look outward from this place, acknowledging the outside, man-made world, a world which Ursula will explore and reject. Her rejection, however, will be informed, *conscious*, not stem from the ignorance of the earlier Brangwens. To some extent, one may perhaps see the individual's journey to selfhood in the same light as Lawrence sees God's birth in the first lines of "God is Born":

The history of the cosmos
 is the history of the struggle of becoming.
 When the dim flux of unformed life
 struggled, convulsed back upon itself,
 and broke at last into light and dark
 came into existence as light,
 came into existence as cold shadow
 then every atom of the cosmos trembled with delight.
 Behold, God is born!
 He is bright!
 He is pitch dark and cold!

(ll.1-11)

The individual shares the fate of God, who "is not/ until he is born" (ll. 42-43), and has to extract himself from "the dim flux of unformed life", and come "into existence as light" and dark (incidentally, one has an echo here, once again, of the ambiguous, non-moralistic God referred to, in different ways, by Whitman and Miller). God's act of self-creation is the prerogative of every individual.

Essentially *The Rainbow* begins with the construction of a canal, "[a]bout 1840,...across the meadows of the Marsh Farm, connecting the newly opened collieries of the Erewash Valley" (13). Constructed two years after Tom Brangwen's birth, this canal is soon followed by the "Midland Railway [which] came down the valley at the foot of the Ilkeston hill, and the invasion was complete" (13). The town also starts to grow, metamorphosing into a small industrial centre, leaving the Brangwens quite well off. By the same token, there is also a disturbance of the vital connection between them and their land: "At first the Brangwens were astonished by all this commotion around them. The building of the canal across their land made them strangers in their own place, this raw bank of earth shutting them off disconcerted them" (14). It is in this shifting setting that Tom Brangwen grows up, a setting which allows his mother (yet another Eve in the line of Brangwen women) the opportunity to send him to "Grammar School in Derby" (16), her aspiration being that he should become a "gentleman"

(17). This is the first outward manifestation of the shift in values that Anne Fernihough sees underlying the novel's progression:

The Rainbow's quest for uncompromised selfhood goes hand in hand with a diagnosis of the breakdown of communal ties in favour of the competitive self-seeking ethos of capitalism, the disintegration of *Gemeinschaft* (community) into *Gesellschaft* (society), though it is left to *The Rainbow's* sequel, *Women in Love*, to consider the full implications of this.

(xxix)

If individual independence is perhaps compromised by the primal community of which Marsh Farm is representative, it is certainly not fostered by society, as Tom's experiences at school clearly show. From the start, this Brangwen entrance into society is marked by a denial of self, of natural inclination. Tom's initial pressure on himself is almost an act of self-mutilation or, in Lawrence's words, "a suicide":

When he got to school, he made a violent struggle against his physical ability to study. He sat gripped, making himself pale and ghastly in his effort to concentrate on the book, to take in what he had to learn. But it was no good. If he beat down his first repulsion, and got like a suicide to the stuff, he went very little further. He could not learn deliberately. His mind simply did not work.

(17)

On the other hand, Tom is "more sensuously developed, more refined in instinct" (17) than the other boys, and he lacks "their mechanical stupidity" (17). Lawrence goes on to demonstrate this by briefly exploring Tom's instinctive reaction to (orally presented) literature. Unlike his forefathers, Tom does crave "enlightenment" (17), but, unlike his peers, he wants it to be conveyed to him "through feeling" (17), and not learning – he is, in other words, a Lawrentian hero. As a whole then, the experience of school is a failure – Tom eventually goes back to the farm, and takes over his father's role – but, nevertheless, it constitutes yet another alien ingredient to his life which will render the life of his forefathers unsatisfactory to him. This kind of causality is most clearly indicated by the title of the first chapter, "How Tom Brangwen Married a Polish Lady", which suggests that everything we read up to that occurrence actually serves to effect it. Tom will be the product of his context as well as his experiences, as will his stepdaughter, Anna, and his granddaughter Ursula.

Tom's experiences bring him to start looking outward too, and to consider the question: "Where was life, in that which he knew or all outside him?" (25). This is the point from which the painful journey of self-discovery begins, and what finally brings him to this point is his sexual experience with a "reckless girl neglected for an afternoon by the man who had brought her out" (22) and, eventually, his encounter with that very man, a compellingly strange foreigner (25):

The result of these encounters was, that he dreamed day and night, absorbedly, of a voluptuous woman and of the meeting with a small, withered foreigner of ancient breeding.... He went about absorbed in the interest and actuality of this dream. His eyes glowed, he walked with his head up, full of the exquisite pleasure of aristocratic subtlety and grace, tormented with a desire for the girl.

(26)

It is these two personae that will merge, for Tom, in Lydia Lensky, the Polish lady he will end up marrying, someone in whom the primal and the (culturally) strange will meet. Until that happens, however, Tom is in such a state of frustration that he briefly turns into a binge-drinker. Realising that “you must have it one road or another” (27), Tom becomes a kind of genial drunk at the “Red Lion” in Ilkeston. To some extent this alcoholic interlude is an attempt to “obliterate...his own individuality” (28), and free himself of the desires torturing him. Lawrence represents this action as essentially barren – there is no sense here of a sacred instant, since the action is predominantly a numbing one. It is an artificial attempt to return to the unconscious existence of his forefathers, bound, of course, to fail.

What eventually pulls Tom out of this mire is his encounter, on a country road, with a portentous-looking Lydia Lensky:

She was dressed in black, was apparently rather small and slight, beneath her long black cloak, and she wore a black bonnet. She walked hastily, as if unseeing, her head rather forward. It was her curious, absorbed, flitting motion, as if she were passing unseen by everybody, that first arrested him.... He saw her face so distinctly, that he ceased to coil on himself, and was suspended.

“That’s her,” he said involuntarily.... He went on, quiet, suspended, rarified.... He moved within the knowledge of her, in the world that was beyond reality.

(29)

In keeping with the title of the chapter, this meeting is strongly suggestive of *fate* – in spite of occasional doubts, Tom essentially moves on with the intention of marrying this woman. To him, she is Other, and not only as female; as will later be the case with his adopted daughter, Anna (in *her* first meeting with her future husband), Tom feels that, in Lydia, “the bounds of [his]...experience were transgressed” (106). A foreigner, a widow and mother, about five years older than him, Lydia embodies all the mystery of experience that Tom craves. As Mudrick puts it, echoing Fernihough’s point about the decay of the community, “Tom is no simple farmer: his aspiration toward the irreducibly alien woman is an inarticulate experience of a life beyond the receding satisfactions of a community in the process of dissolution” (252). It is the very presence of aspiration that sets Tom apart from his forebears. On the other hand, he is not really comfortable in the “spoken world” outside – Tom’s marriage to Lydia, in this sense, becomes a kind of compromise, an importation of something alien into the familiar space of the Marsh Farm.

If Tom both craves and fears a relationship with Lydia, she also rebels against the emergence of a connection which she seems to take as fate. She well realises that a relationship will “endanger” her discrete self, that “[s]he would have to begin again, to find a new being, a new form” (39). For Lawrence, any vital connection to an Other requires a kind of recalibration of the self and of one’s relation to one’s circumambient universe. An experienced individual, Lydia knows what she is in for, something Tom only feels, or senses. Yet, like Tom, she abandons herself “to the greater ordering” and “an inner reality, a *logic of the soul*” (40, *emphasis added*). This is the inner score referred to in the previous chapter, and it is this score that Lawrence performs in *The Rainbow*, which is *all* inner life – there is, in fact, very little about the outward lives of the Brangwens (except, perhaps, Ursula’s) that really merits attention. This is wherein the genius of Lawrence lies. In this inner realm, everything, from natural phenomena to insignificant domestic altercations become symbolically loaded events, and the universe becomes a divine and portentous space. Nowhere is this more clearly dramatised than in the build-up to Tom’s proposal of marriage:

He went up the hill and on towards the vicarage [where Lydia is a housekeeper], the wind roaring through the hedges, whilst he tried to shelter his bunch of daffodils by his side. He did not think of anything, only knew that the wind was blowing.

Night was falling, the bare trees drummed and whistled.... In the darkest of twilight, he went through the gate and down the path where a few daffodils stooped in the wind, and shattered crocuses made a pale, colourless ravel.... Looking through the window, he saw her seated in the rocking chair with the child, already in its nightdress, sitting on her knee....

Suddenly she looked around, troubled, as the wind shook the house, and Brangwen saw the small lips move. The mother began to rock, he heard the slight crunch of the rockers of the chair. Then he heard the low, monotonous murmur of a song in a foreign language. Then a great burst of wind, the mother seemed to have drifted away, the child’s eyes were black and dilated. Brangwen looked up at the clouds which packed in great, alarming haste across the dark sky....

The wind blew, the story began, the child nestled against the mother, Brangwen waited outside, suspended, looking at the wild waving of the trees in the wind and the gathering darkness. He had his fate to follow, he lingered here at the threshold.

(41-42)

Like a soundtrack, nature plays out a score to Brangwen’s crossing of boundaries, his stepping over “the threshold” where he still lingers by the end of the quoted passage. Violent and destructive, this wind reminds one of the one in Lawrence’s “Song of a Man Who Has Come Through”, a wind both of dissolution and destiny. Having crossed the threshold, Tom and Lydia’s experience will be just as “stormy” and mysterious as the atmosphere outside, and they will be compelled to abandon themselves, much like the trees outside, to a greater force.

Throughout what follows, Lawrence keeps us keenly aware of the fact that the individual, entering into a new vital relationship, has to relinquish the established self-identity in order to be created anew. While the verbal communication between the two remains uncomfortable and embarrassed, the action essentially takes place on a subliminal level. Lydia, for instance, under Tom's gaze, "quivered, feeling herself created, will-less, lapsing into him, into a common will with him" (44). The loss of self is pertinent here, and, throughout, the experience intimates a sacred instant, an oscillation between dissolution and rebirth:

He had her in his arms, and, obliterated, was kissing her. And it was sheer, blanched agony to him, *to break away from himself*. She was there so small and light and accepting in his arms, like a child, and yet with such an insinuation of embrace, of *infinite embrace*, that he could not bear it, he could not stand.

He turned and looked for a chair, and keeping her still in his arms, sat down with her close to him, to his breast. Then, for a few seconds, he went utterly to sleep, asleep and sealed in the darkest sleep, utter, extreme oblivion....

He returned gradually, but newly created, as after a gestation, a new birth, in the womb of darkness.... And the dawn blazed in them, their new life came to pass, it was beyond all conceiving good, it was so good, that *it was almost like a passing-away, a trespass*.

(44-45, *emphasis added*)

For Tom, the experience of the embrace with the "small and light" woman is so intense that it approaches the "infinite embrace" of death. Overtaxed, he lapses into a kind of hibernation in the "womb of darkness", the unconscious, before returning to consciousness. Importantly, the notions of death and transgression are reiterated in the final line of the quoted passage – "it was almost like a passing-away, a trespass". Later, we are told that "in [Lydia's]...eyes was a little smile upon a black void" (47). This is what grants the moment its intense quality, and makes it a fearsome moment both of dissolution and renewal. When Tom leaves, and returns to the darkness of the stormy night, the struggle of an emerging new consciousness is symbolised by the "struggle" of the moonlight:

He went out into the wind. Big holes were blown into the sky, the moonlight blew about. Sometimes a high moon, liquid-brilliant, scudded across a hollow space and took cover under electric, brown-iridescent cloud-edges. Then there was a blot of cloud, and shadow. Then somewhere in the night a radiance again, like a vapour. And all the sky was teeming and tearing along, a vast disorder of flying shapes and darkneses and ragged fumes of light and a great brown circling halo, then the terror of a moon running into the open for a moment, hurting the eyes before she plunged under cover of cloud again.

(48)

The struggle between darkness and light echoes the struggle between the conscious and the unconscious in both Tom and Lydia, a chaos of dissolution and realignment. Essentially strangers to one another, their relationship will continue in this fashion, although it does reach, at intervals, a new level of fulfilment, as in their passionate reunion quoted in the previous

chapter. Remaining strange to one another, they also retain the capability of renewing one another, by granting access to that which is Other. It is this quality that Skrebensky, in his relationship with Ursula, loses, and why she has to get rid of him.

As far as Tom and Lydia is concerned, their marriage does, outwardly, result in a kind of settling down, suggested by the title of the next chapter, “They Live at the Marsh”. For the time being, Tom’s almost violent strivings are over, and Lydia, remembering her former husband, an idealist who “wast[ed] away” and eventually “seemed nothing but skin and bone and fixed idea” (50), seems resolved to lead a settled life. Interestingly, it is at this point that we are given some insight into Lydia’s socially mobile (if not always upward) past – in this context, the Marsh is certain to appear (in social terms) as a regression. What we recognise in this is an escape, on Lydia’s part, from controversy and strife, and she becomes the first of the Brangwen women not to look outward at all. By that same token, however, her very presence at the Marsh Farm introduces an alien element that wasn’t there before (especially in the form of anecdotes which always puzzle Tom). Also, Tom’s frustrations will always turn up again (if never as violently as in his youth) and we come to realise that the Marsh Farm will never be the same again. If the conflict between Tom and Lydia is strong, so is the passion, and for the time being, Tom is content to conduct his exploration of the foreign in terms of his wife:

They looked at each other, a deep laugh at the bottom of their eyes, and he went to take of her again, wholesale, mad to revel in the inexhaustible wealth of her, to bury himself in the depths of her in an inexhaustible exploration, she all the while revelling in that he revelled in her, tossed all her secrets aside and plunged to that which was secret to her as well, whilst she quivered with fear and the last anguish of delight.

What did it matter who they were, whether they knew each other or not?

The hour passed away again, there was severance between them.... But no matter. They had their hour, and should it chime again, they were ready for it, ready to renew the game at the point where it was left off, on the edge of the outer darkness.

(60-61)

Like Whitman’s “One Hour to Madness and Joy”, Tom and Lydia’s “hour” is an abandonment, in sex, to the unknown. And each sexual encounter is seen, not as a repetition of the former, but as yet another advance. This advance is not toward a tangible goal, but simply an advance into the unknown. Lawrence seems to envision, in a way reminiscent of Emerson’s argument in “Circles”, that “[o]ur life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and that under every deep a lower deep opens” (225). If the sacred instant consists in breaking through the boundary drawn by the “latest” circle, the return to a new consciousness consists in the drawing of a new, wider circle.

As Lydia settles into motherhood yet again, and their sexual life is inevitably diminished, Tom is to some extent excluded, and he turns to his stepdaughter, Anna, for solace and company. It is at this stage of the novel that the narrative bias (following nature, which favours the young and strong) slowly starts shifting to favour Anna's experiences. This shift is strictly indicated only, at first, by the title of the third chapter, "The Childhood of Anna Lensky", as the narrative is still frequently focalised through Tom, and because most of Anna's earlier experiences include her stepfather. A solitary child, with a "carelessness that had the laugh of ridicule in it" (80), she is "like a little savage in her arrogance" (81). She appears to us, from the start, as a kind of decadent creature, to the extent that we find ourselves surprised at her rather domestic end. So, perhaps, is Tom, who (in a strange echo of his mother's aspirations) at first harbours "a secret desire to make her a lady" (85). We find that he lives his life vicariously, through Anna, instead of following his own road. Like his mother before him, Tom will stay put and try to send out his child to explore. This desire of his coincides with a new surge of frustration in him, brought on by an encounter with his brother's lover, Mrs Forbes, a cultured, learned woman from a "visionary, polite world" (86), whose house, in direct contrast to Brangwen's, exudes an "atmosphere [which] seemed open and spacious, like a mountain-top to him" (86). "[S]tuck in the mud", Tom feels "a prisoner, sitting safe and easy and unadventurous" (86). However, something does occur to rid Tom, once again, of this frustration: he and his wife reunite in the passage quoted in the previous chapter, and the world is reanimated for them:

Wherever they walked, it was well, the world re-echoed round them in discovery.... Everything was lost, and everything was found. The new world was discovered, it remained only to be explored....

Now He [God] was declared to Brangwen and to Lydia Brangwen, as they stood together.

(90-91)

This is as close as one can come to a climax in their relationship – remaining two separate entities, they nevertheless forge a vital link between them. In an image recalling that of the rainbow (which is as much a symbol of deer with horns locked¹ as it is a symbol of peace and resolution), Tom and Lydia, "a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud", "now met to the span of the heavens, and she, the child, was free to play in the space beneath, between" (91). This is the very image of psychological and spiritual health, of balance. Still, we find that Tom never really ceases to live, at least partially, through Anna.

¹ This image, if not Lawrence's own, is certainly inspired and justified by Lawrence's own image of consecrated conflict in "The Crown", i.e. the conflict between the Lion and the Unicorn.

Outwardly, Anna's childhood superficially mirrors Tom's: sent to ("dame's") school in Cossethay, she remains a fairly isolated individual, "friendless" (92), and prone to "hasten[ing] home" even though she "want[s] to get away" (98). However, she differs from Tom in the important sense that she has none of his humbleness. She "was at once shy and wild. She had a curious contempt for ordinary people, a benevolent superiority" (92). Gloriously and cruelly aristocratic, impressed only by remarkable and eccentric individuals, we are led to expect things of her. She remains true to herself and "an ideal: a free, proud lady absolved from the petty ties, existing beyond petty considerations" (95). It is an ideal that requires her to quit the Marsh Farm, and we are told that "[m]any ways she tried, of escap[ing]" (99) the "spell" of her parents. Since we meet Will Brangwen, her "cousin", whom she "consider[s]...odd" (100), shortly after this, we tend to see him as one of these ways of escape, and we judge their relationship accordingly: "In him, she had escaped. In him the boundaries of her experiences were transgressed: he was a hole in the wall, beyond which the sunshine blazed on an outside world" (106). In this, Will is what he should be, an Other in which the self can be newly created. Yet Anna's ideal of isolated individuality – initially tied up with her virginity – constitutes another kind of threat to the growth of the self in that it is stifling in its discreteness, and does not allow for a relationship. It is this utter separateness that Anna will have to relinquish before their relationship can come into being, and it doesn't really happen until much later in their married life. If Tom's problem lies in his frustrated inability to assert himself against his heritage, Anna's problem lies in the difficulty she has in relinquishing herself.

We also become, increasingly, privy to Will's inner consciousness. Initially, he is understandably revitalised and inspired by the new relationship, which he almost takes as an act of rebellion:

[W]hen they went indoors, he was acutely angry that her parents looked up scrutinisingly at him and her. What right had they: why should they look up! Let them remove themselves, or look elsewhere.

And the youth went home with the stars in heaven whirling fiercely about the blackness of his head, and his heart fierce, insistent, but fierce as if he felt something balking him. He wanted to smash through something.

(108)

In this state, Will is primed for the act of creation, which appears here almost as a by-product of an over-full, violently charged heart, and "produce[s] some beautiful things", especially in wood-carving. What drives him to this are experiences of an almost sacred nature, such as the night when he and Anna spent courting in the barn, and Will finds himself walking home in a precarious world:

He held his hot face to the rain, and walked on in a trance. "I love you, Will, I love you." The words repeated themselves endlessly. The veils had ripped and issued him into naked space, and he shuddered. The walls had thrust him out, and given him a vast space to walk in. Whither, through this darkness of infinite space, was he walking blindly? Where, at the end of all the darkness, was God the Almighty still darkly seated, thrusting him on?

(112)

The intense passion created by this finds its expression in artistic creation as Will now tries his hand at carving the Creation of Eve. The carving is clearly a paean to Anna and her girlhood and, interestingly, reveals an unconscious grasp of Anna's nature. His Eve "was a thin, a keen, unripe thing. With trembling passion, fine as a breath of air, he sent the chisel over her belly, her hard, unripe, small belly. She was a stiff little figure, in the throes and the torture and ecstasy of her creation" (112). Anna will continue to elude him, both before marriage, as dramatised so beautifully in their gathering of the corn-sheaves (115), and in marriage, as dramatised by the solitary, naked dance that Anna (pregnant with Ursula) performs in front of the mirror, "dancing his [Will's] non-existence" (171). Early in the honeymoon, Anna once again seeks her own space, while a sexually awakened Will is suddenly brought to think his "Eve too hard and lively" (138). Anna's response to this judgement is pertinent: "Why?" In what follows, Will's expectations are cruelly destroyed. He becomes, as the chapter's title – "Anna Victrix" – clearly suggests, the loser in a battle that is not evenly pitched. Subjecting himself entirely to Anna, he betrays his own self, and his only act of rebellion against her, his smashing and burning of the Creation of Eve (162), is simultaneously "a self-destructive denial of his own creative being" (Daleski 93). Instead of "smash[ing] through" (108) anything, he simply ends up smashing – an inward and self-destructive action.

One shouldn't lose sight of the fact that, for the most part, this conflict between Will and Anna is subconscious, and certainly not vocalised. We are constantly reminded of the fact that she loves him, and he her. It is rather a case of their souls being contrary – Will is looking for a merging into one, while Anna retains her old ideal of separateness, an atrophied Lawrentian ideal. Of the two, she is certainly nearer the Lawrentian hero, signalled especially by the fact that "[h]er soul was in quest of something, which was not just being good, and doing one's best. No, she wanted something else: something that was not her ready-made duty. Everything seemed to be merely a matter of social duty, and never of her *self*" (146). Her aristocratic soul resists the dissolution of community, and the bonds of imposed, "ready-made duty", and the "something" that her soul yearns for must certainly be the achievement of itself. But her self-preservation and fear of assimilation is too insistent, and informs even a slight resistance to sex, although she never turns frigid:

He came over to her, and touched her delicately. Her heart beat with a wild passion, wild raging passion. But she resisted as yet. It was always the unknown, always the unknown, and she clung fiercely to her known self. But the rising flood carried her away....

So it went on continually, the recurrence of love and conflict between them.

(155)

That clinging to the “known self” is informed by Anna’s subscription to an Apollonian belief “in the omnipotence of the human mind” (161), in contrast to Will’s Dionysian running “after his own dark-souled desires” (161). Her insulation becomes even more pronounced when she falls pregnant, and achieves a kind of peak in her solitary, ritualistic dance referred to earlier (and, shortly thereafter, her resolution not to share a bed with Will anymore). Having isolated herself from Will, her soul seeks a sense of community with her “Creator”, and her dance becomes a proud, personal celebration of her own chthonic nature, which she nevertheless still fears:

She had her moments of exaltation still, re-births of old exaltations.... She sat in pride and curious pleasure. Where there was no-one to exult with, and the unsatisfied soul must dance and play, then one danced before the Unknown.

Suddenly she realised that this was what she wanted to do. Big with child as she was, she danced there in the bedroom by herself, lifting her hands and her body to the Unseen, to the unseen Creator who had chosen her, to Whom she belonged.

She would not have had anyone know. She danced in secret before the Creator, she took off her clothes and danced in the pride of her bigness.

It surprised her, when it was over. She was shrinking and afraid. *To what was she now exposed?* She half wanted to tell her husband. Yet she shrank from him....

In these days she was oblivious of him. Who was he, to come against her?... She laughed in her heart. Who was he, to proclaim his kingship? She laughed in her heart with pride.

And she had to dance in exultation beyond him. Because he was in the house, she had to dance before her Creator in exemption from the man. On a Saturday afternoon, when she had a fire in her bedroom, again she took off her things and danced, lifting her knees and hands in a slow, rhythmic exulting. *He was in the house, so her pride was fiercer.* She would dance his nullification, she would dance to her unseen Lord. She was exalted over him, before the Lord.

She heard him coming up the stairs, and she flinched. She stood with the firelight on her ankles and feet, naked in the shadowy, late afternoon, fastening up her hair. He was startled. He stood in the doorway. He was startled. He stood in the doorway, his brows black and lowering.

“What are you doing?” he said, gratingly. “You’ll catch a cold.”

And she lifted her hands and danced again, to annul him, the light glanced on her knees as she made her slow, fine movements down the far side of the room, across the firelight. He stood away near the door in blackness of shadow, watching, transfixed. And with slow, heavy movements, she swayed backwards and forwards, like a full ear of corn, pale in the dusky afternoon, threading before, dancing his non-existence, dancing herself to the Lord, to exultation.

(169-171, *emphasis added*)

If the first dance is an inspired event, which also leaves her with an uncomfortable feeling (in the sense that its source baffles her), the second dance is much more clearly an act of rebellion,

both against Will and her feelings of shame (the fact that she almost turns to Will as a confessor after the first dance may suggest that she considers him a kind of moral base). Her dance is overtly transgressive, and the experience is heightened by the fact that she may get “caught”, something which indeed happens. When she starts to dance again, it is a sheer act of self-assertion, and a complete denial of Will’s presence – Anna’s inner life is brought into the open. It shocks not only Will, but also Lawrence’s contemporaries, who identified this passage as one of the reasons for suppressing the book. One also cannot help but wonder about the effect on Ursula, still in utero – much like a pregnant Gertrude Morel’s night of ecstatic dissolution under the moon (*Sons and Lovers* 34), Anna’s dance seems to pass something on to her unborn child. Otherwise, these two experiences are very different: while Gertrude experiences a chthonic “melt[ing]” (34), which also effects a merging of her and her son (a bond which he spends the rest of the novel trying to escape), Anna’s dance of the self seems to instil in Ursula a strong individuality, a separateness from others, including her mother.

It is at the height of their tortured conflict that Will and Anna pay a visit to Lincoln Cathedral, although Lawrence holds back this part of the narrative until after the birth of Ursula, inserting it as a kind of interlude between her birth and the commencement of her childhood. In the Cathedral Lawrence symbolises both the nature of life and, as Fernihough suggested, the novel. Will and Anna simply take up opposing views of the structure, without realising that the structure itself contains their conflict. What Will responds to in the Cathedral is the sense of dissolving oneness it creates:

Here the stone leapt up from the plain of the earth, leapt up in a manifold, clustered desire each time, up, and away from the horizontal earth, through twilight and dusk and the whole range of desire, through the swerving, the declination, ah, to the ecstasy, the touch, to the meeting and the consummation, the meeting, the clasp, the close embrace, the neutrality, the perfect, swooning consummation, the timeless ecstasy. There his soul remained, at the apex of the arch, clinched in the timeless ecstasy, consummated.

(187-188)

As Daleski suggests, Will finally finds, in the Cathedral, “the same sort of consummation he has relentlessly been seeking to find in [Anna]” (101). Anna predictably resists this, and searches for something that could shatter Will’s illusion of oneness. She finds it in the presence of the imps and gargoyles carved in the stone, which “peeped out of the grand tide of the cathedral like something that knew better....that the cathedral was not absolute” (189). What endears them to Anna is their individuality, their refusal to be assimilated into the whole: “Apart from the lift and spring of the great impulse towards the altar, these little faces had separate wills, separate motions, separate knowledge, which rippled back in defiance of the tide, and laughed in triumph of their own littleness” (189). With these faces she taunts Will

into doubting the sense of oneness he had felt, but they fail to realise that they are both right. Contradicting the oneness of the structure, the faces nevertheless form part of it – they are carved *in* its stone. Will and Anna are both wrong in the sense that they are both trying to be absolutely right, and their relationship initially fails because this kind of conflict presupposes a winner, in this case Anna.

The experience of Anna's dance, however, finally forces Will come to terms with his own being, and he "come[s] into his own existence. He was born for a second time, born at last unto himself, out of the vast body of humanity" (176). Against Anna's separateness Will sets up his own, and they become "friends again" (176). Following his own contention that a stronger soul will inevitably dominate a weaker, Lawrence makes communion between Anna and Will impossible until Will has distinguished himself. However, it comes almost too late, as Anna settles into a vicarious life of devoted motherhood after Ursula's birth. Sensing the presence of something beyond that which she knows, she has a vision, at once of Ursula's future and her own shortcomings – until now she has been too strictly individual and cut off:

Anna loved the child very much, oh very much. Yet still she was not quite fulfilled. She had a slight expectant feeling, as of a door half opened. Here she was, safe and still in Cossethay. But she felt as if she were not in Cossethay at all. She was straining her eyes to something beyond. And from her Pisgah mount, which she had attained, what could she see? A faint, gleaming horizon, a long way off, and a rainbow like an archway, a shadow-door with faintly coloured coping above it. Must she be moving thither?

Something she had not, something she did not grasp, could not arrive at. There was something beyond her. But why must she start on the journey? She stood so safely on this Pisgah mountain.

(181)

The safety of her domestic life makes Anna resistant to the responsibility of seeking out another kind of life. Haunted by this vision, she nevertheless manages to escape its implicit call, and the issue is finally resolved when she falls pregnant yet again, something "[w]hich made her satisfied and took away her discontent" (182). Settling into a kind of vegetable existence, motherhood becomes her excuse for staying put, and from this point on, she seems to churn out an endless stream of children. Her view of herself changes from that of a traveller to that of a "threshold", from which other travellers will pour forth to explore the unknown:

If she were not the wayfarer to the unknown, if she were arrived now, settled in her builded house, a rich woman, still her doors opened under the arch of the rainbow, her threshold reflected the passing of the sun and moon, the great travellers, her house was full of the echo of journeying.

She was a door and a threshold, she herself. Through her another soul was coming, to stand upon her as upon the threshold, looking out, shading its eyes for the direction to take.

(182)

It is with this in mind that we follow Ursula's growth into adulthood, eventually reaching her own vision of the rainbow right at the end of the novel.

The new child also helps Will to come nearer the truth that he finally failed to see in the Cathedral. Awed by the presence of a new life created by him and Anna, he realises that "[i]t had a separate being, but it was his own child. His flesh and blood vibrated to it" (197). However, his relationship with her also becomes too intense, and he comes to rely on her too much, much in the same way that Tom relied on Anna. The result is that Ursula is "wakened too soon" (205), too soon made conscious, pulled from the "unconscious" living of childhood. As was the case with Tom, this situation will only be rectified once Will and Anna's own relationship achieves a new level of "completeness". In the meantime, however, Anna continues with her "violent trance of motherhood" (204), while "[t]he burden of so many lives wore the youth [Will] down" (204). As a result, Will becomes cruel and reckless, as seen in his malicious treatment of Ursula on the swingboat (209), and finally rebellious, as we see in his attempted seduction of a girl in Nottingham (210). These actions are misguided attempts to assert himself, but they do finally bring Anna to the realisation that Will is a changed man and may, after all, be a match for her. When Will comes back from Nottingham, the conflict between them results in one of the most devastating sexual encounters in literature:

[Anna] kept herself aloof, and watched him. He talked to her, but with a little indifference, since he was scarcely aware of her. So then she did not affect him? Here was a new turn of affairs! He was rather attractive nevertheless. She liked him better than the ordinary mute, half-effaced, half-subdued man she usually knew him to be. So, he was blossoming out into his real self! It piqued her. Very good, let him blossom! She liked a new turn of affairs. He was a strange man come home to her....

Very good, if she could not influence him in the old way, she would be level with him in the new. Her old defiant hostility came up. Very good, she too was out on her own adventure.... Something was liberated in her. She liked him. She liked this strange man come home to her. He was very welcome indeed.... She had been bored by the old husband. To his latent, cruel smile she replied with a brilliant challenge. He expected her to keep the moral fortress. Not she!...

His senses pricked up and keenly attended to her. She laughed, perfectly indifferent and loose as he was....

And she roused him profoundly, violently, even before he touched her. The little creature in Nottingham had but been leading up to this. They abandoned in one motion the moral position, each was seeking gratification pure and simple.

Strange was his wife to him.... He had an inkling of the vastness of the unknown sensual store of delights she was.... There was no tenderness, no love between them anymore, only the maddening, sensuous lust for discovery and the insatiable, exorbitant gratification in the sensual beauties of her body....

Their children became mere offspring to them, they lived in the darkness and death of their own sensual activities. Sometimes he felt he was going mad with a sense of Absolute Beauty, perceived by him in her through his sense. It was something too much for him....

This is what their love had become, a sensuality violent and extreme as death. They had no conscious intimacy, no tenderness of love. It was all the lust and the infinite, maddening intoxication of the senses, a passion of death....

But still the thing terrified him. Awful and threatening it was, dangerous to a degree, even whilst he gave himself to it. It was pure darkness also. All the shameful things of the body revealed themselves to him now with a sort of sinister, tropical beauty. All the shameful, natural and unnatural acts of sensual voluptuousness which he and the woman partook of together, created together, they had their heavy beauty and their delight. Shame, what was it? It was part of extreme delight. It was that part of delight of which man is usually afraid. Why afraid? The secret? The secret, shameful things are most terribly beautiful....

Their outward life went on much the same, but the inward life was revolutionised. The children became less important, the parents were absorbed in their own living. And gradually, Brangwen began to find himself free to attend to the outside life as well.

(217-220)

The sexual encounter of the first few paragraphs becomes a new sexual life which finally releases both parents from their dependence on the children: Will, in his emotional demands on Ursula, and Anna, in her vicarious living. This sexual life is strictly sacred in its highly transgressive nature: both Will and Anna overcome fear and moral preconceptions in the celebration of their vital relationship, and the experience is one of the death of old selves. Relishing their abandon to “shameful, natural and unnatural acts of sensual voluptuousness”, their sexual encounters are excessive transgressions of their known selves – to each other, they become fertile grounds for exploration and discovery. This is the vital relationship between man and woman that Lawrence preaches, and the experience effects both Will and Anna’s coming into being. Finally, Will achieves that balanced individuality that allows him to “attend to the outside life”.

Before the narrative of Ursula’s life is truly picked up, Lawrence effects a final break with the past in the chapter entitled “The Marsh and the Flood”, in which we are suddenly informed of Tom’s death. Cheerfully drunk, Tom succumbs to the mysterious lure of flooding waters on the farm, and finally drowns. The event is dramatised as a fated reclaiming of Tom by the Marsh from which he never really escaped. Seeing the chthonic mass of swirling water,

[h]e *had* to go and look where it came from, though the ground was going from under his feet. He went on, down towards the pond, shakily. He rather enjoyed it. He was now knee deep, and the water was pulling heavily. He stumbled, reeled sickeningly.

Fear took hold of him.... In his soul, he knew he would fall.

(229)

His death is a horrifying return to the primal soup, to which his ever-present curiosity finally brings him. Significantly, the flood is caused by the bursting of the canal that was built across the farm at the beginning of the novel, shortly after Tom’s birth – the imposition of civilisation on the chthonic Marsh Farm is simply not strong enough to hold nature in check. The flood is

also symbolic of the passing of an old order, as in the biblical flood which only Noah and his family escape. It finally brings to an end the central role of the Marsh Farm in the lives of the Brangwens, and symbolically frees Ursula from her heritage.

In the chapter dealing with Ursula's childhood, "The Widening Circle" – which once again brings to mind the expanding scope of Emerson's successive "Circles" – we are soon brought to the realisation that she is destined to be a traveller. From the beginning we are informed of her interest, much like her mother's, in distinguished individuals, as, for instance, in the case of her uncle Tom (Tom and Lydia Brangwen's first child), a well-travelled young man who is, to Ursula, "a romantic, alluring figure" (225). She also shares her mother's initial need to distinguish herself, both from her peers at the common school, and from her family. At school, for instance, she "*hated* always to represent the little Brangwen club. She could never be herself" (244), and by the same token, although she loves her home, she somehow feels curtailed there. While "attentive and keen abroad, at home [she] was reluctant, uneasy, unwilling to be herself, or unable" (252). What she does love about the household is its "very confusion" (252), and Lawrence gives us an endearing portrait of it, very reminiscent of Kerouac in its frolicking madness. Since the parents shy away from imposing rules (a condition clearly linked to their own liberated lives), their children "were badly-behaved..., head-strong and arrogant, though their feelings were very generous" (255). These qualities also imbue Ursula, embarrassing as she may frequently find her family (in this, she is hardly different from any child). Her rebellion takes the form of a kind of mysticism geared at the extraordinary, in direct conflict to what she perceives to be her mother's "practical indifference" (256). In this, she approaches the "mystical passion" (256) of her father, wedded to her mother's initial belief in extraordinary individuals. This 'wedding' takes its shape in the figure of Jesus, and the visionary "Sons of God" (256)², whom she fantasises taking her as wife. It is perhaps here, already, that Skrebensky's fate is sealed – as a limited man, he is bound to fail to live up to her expectations. Ursula's drive – "She must go somewhere, she must become something" (263) – is very similar to the drive that Anna finally eradicated in herself with her second pregnancy, and Ursula's problem is the one that faces every character in the novel, and faces her once she gets over the intensity of her childhood mysticism:

How to act, that was the question? Whither to go, how to become oneself? One was not oneself, one was merely a half-stated question. How to become oneself, how to know the question and the answer of oneself, when one was merely an unfixd something-

² At this point, Lawrence's dogmatic presence becomes fairly overt as he argues, through Ursula, about the focus of Christianity, and asserts his belief that "[t]he Resurrection is to life, not to death" (262).

nothing, blowing about in the winds of heaven, undefined, unstated.
(264)

Ursula's search for the Whitmanesque "question and...answer of oneself" will form the action of the rest of the novel. Being the first of the Brangwen women to be able (to a limited degree) to enter the man-made world, and the first of the Brangwens to truly do so (in this branch of the family, at least), the obstacles facing her will be those of the modern world. Two years older than Lawrence himself, Ursula shares his problems and, indeed, those of most of his other main characters.

Ursula, "pass[ing] from girlhood towards womanhood", loses much of her childhood's disembodied mysticism, and "come[s] to the point where she held that that which one cannot experience in daily life is not true for oneself" (263). This is not a substitution of practicality for idealism; rather, Ursula moves closer to Miller's "mystic...who also kn[ows] how to keep his feet on the ground" (*Tropic of Capricorn* 134). Christianity becomes for her an ideal which stifles the physical and instinctual self – even an expression of violence on her part has the ability to make her feel "unChristian but clean" (265). What she seems to be attuned to are the "moral" dictates of her blood, the blood that Lawrence described, in a 1913 letter to Ernest Collings, as being "wiser than the intellect", and the only locus of morality: "[W]hat our blood feels and believes and says, is always true" (*Letters* 180). This awareness of her blood is clearly also linked to her approach to sexual maturity, as she approaches sixteen. As a result, her mysticism and sexuality are merged in a fantasy of divine intercourse – guiltily, she realises that she is "accepting the passion of Jesus for her own physical satisfaction" (267). It is at this stage that the ill-fated young Anton Skrebensky makes his appearance, at a time when Ursula "wrestled through her dark days of confusion, soulless, uncreated, unformed" (268). The reader, who cannot fail to recognise the purpose of Anton's appearance, also immediately realises the great demands that will be made on him. From the moment she meets him, in the company of her parents and her uncle Tom, we are told that "she wanted to turn to the stranger" (269). Her action is assertive and eager, and we are reminded yet again of Tom Snr and Anna's first responses to their future spouses. Anton, an Engineer in the military, "brought her a strong sense of the outer world" (269), and the traveller in Ursula responds. The reader, however, is made to realise that Ursula's journey is bound to be longer and more complicated, as suggested by the chapter title, "First Love".

At first, Skrebensky cuts an impressive figure: Ursula immediately sees him as "self-possessed" (269), and soon realises that he "made no effort to prove himself to other people"

(270). This strongly attracts her to him, as she takes him to be an accomplished, proud individual. What impresses her especially is that “Anton Skrebensky could not beg.... Other people could not really give him anything nor take anything from him. His soul stood alone” (271). In this realisation on Ursula’s part we should, however, realise more. Anton is perhaps too insulated to finally achieve a vital relation to anything. In the meantime, Ursula is enthralled by the glimpses of an outside, wider world – at once fascinating, terrible, lawless, profane, exhilarating and romantic – that Skrebensky and his anecdotes constantly offer her: “Her adventure in life was just beginning. It seemed very splendid” (277). At the centre of that beginning, Anton will by no means also be the end. Still, their courtship, with its sexual play – “[d]aring and reckless and dangerous it was” (280) – does unleash a rebellious nature, a defiance that instils in Ursula the recognition that passion is the way to self-realisation. Initially asserting themselves against each other, their passion promises to give to each “a sense of his or her maximum self, in contradistinction to all the rest of life” (281). Yet in this promise, Lawrence’s narrator identifies “something finite and sad”, and once again anticipates Skrebensky’s fall from Ursula’s grace by suggesting that “the human soul at its maximum wants a sense of the infinite” (281).

The first clear sign of trouble comes in the form of an argument Ursula and Skrebensky have about his soldiership, and the subject of war. While Anton sets up war as something “genuine” and real, in distinction from the “sort of toy-life” (288) he apparently takes everyday life to be, Ursula sees war itself as a pointless game. Anton’s defence is to reiterate notions of duty and nationalism, contrasted to what he calls Ursula’s “romanticis[m]” (288). Ursula’s reply to this charge is proud and unmistakable in its criticism of Skrebensky and the society he represents: “Yes, I am [a “romanticist”]. I want to be romantic. I hate houses that never go away, and people just living in the houses. It’s all so stiff and stupid. I hate soldiers, they are stiff and wooden” (289). It is this “stiffness” that Ursula first mistakes for “self-possess[ion]” (269) in Skrebensky. In their discussion, his mindless conformity comes to the fore, in contrast to Ursula’s delicious egoism. This is the aristocratic “arrogance” (225) that Will and Anna’s parentage instilled in their children, an arrogance tempered and balanced by the “genero[sity]” of feeling (225), as we see in the scene immediately following the argument (which also consolidates its revelations of character). Continuing their walk, the lovers run into a poor family, and Skrebensky’s embarrassed inability of communicating with them contrasts strongly with Ursula’s interest and amused banter. When they finally move on, Anton’s pointless observation that the woman must be a servant contrasts blatantly with Ursula’s joy at “having met the grimy, lean man with the ragged moustache. He gave her a pleasant, warm feeling. He

made her feel the richness of her own life” (293). This feeling also culminates in the birth of a realisation that her lover has become an impediment to her growth, and has, “somehow, created a deadness around her, a sterility” (294). It is the first step in a lengthy process of recognition that Skrebensky is not destined for her.

The increasing force of Ursula’s questing force is brought to the fore soon after on the eve of her uncle Fred’s wedding. To the background of the “mysterious night” (294), Ursula “felt she was a new being” (294), and the traveller in her is released:

Waves of delicious darkness ran through her soul. She wanted to let go. She wanted to reach and be amongst the flashing stars, she wanted to race with her feet and be beyond the confines of this earth. She was mad to be gone. It was as if a hound were straining on the leash, ready to hurl itself after a nameless quarry, into the dark. And she was the quarry, and she was also the hound.... And how could she start – and how could she let go? She must leap from the known into the unknown.

(295)

Her immediate, exuberant reaction is to grab Skrebensky, as the music starts up, for a dance. But failing to engage in a true communion with him, Ursula soon turns to “the great white moon” (294) that rises over the party. It is at this point that Skrebensky, once again, emerges as a stifling influence on Ursula’s lustful greed for sublime experience, a transportation:

She wanted the moon to fill her, she wanted more, more communion with the moon, consummation. But Skrebensky put his arm around her and led her away. He put a big, black cloak round her, and sat holding her hand, while the moonlight streamed above the glowing fires.

(296)

In the context of Ursula’s ecstasy, Skrebensky’s “courting” civilities (offering her a cloak and holding her hand) are revealed as a blatant possessiveness on his part. The “big, black cloak” becomes overtly symbolic of Skrebensky’s smothering of Ursula’s growth, a smothering directly linked to his identity as a social being – a member of the “*Gesellschaft* (society)” that Fernihough refers to (xxix).

By this stage it becomes clear that Anton does not have what it takes to complement Ursula, and Lawrence moves on to ratify this by placing their conflict in the decisive arena of sexuality. Still at the wedding, feeling himself shut out, Anton somewhat unwisely tries to assert himself sexually:

An obstinacy in him made him put his arm round her and draw her to the shadow. She submitted: let him try what he could do.... And temerously, his hands went over her, over the salt, compact brilliance of her body. If he could but have her now, how he would enjoy her! If he could but net her brilliant, cold, salt-burning body in the soft iron of his own hands, net her, capture her, hold her down, how madly he would enjoy

her.

(298)

Significantly, Anton's insecurity reveals itself in the need to dominate Ursula sexually. His jealous admiration for her is translated into a growing lust to possess her. Unluckily for him, Ursula does not resist:

Even, in his frenzy, he sought for her mouth with his mouth, though it was like putting his face into some awful death. She yielded to him, and he pressed himself upon her in extremity, his soul groaning over and over:

“Let me come – let me come.”

She took him in the kiss, hard her kiss seized upon his, hard and fierce and burning corrosive as the moonlight. She seemed to be destroying him. He was reeling, summoning all his strength to keep his kiss upon her, to keep himself in the kiss.

But hard and fierce she had fastened upon him, cold as the moon and burning as a fierce salt. Till gradually his warm, soft iron yielded, yielded, and she was there fierce, corrosive, seething with his destruction, seething like some cruel, corrosive salt around the last substance of his being, destroying him, destroying him in the kiss. And her soul crystallised in triumph, and his soul was dissolved with agony and annihilation. So she held him there, the victim, consumed, annihilated. She had triumphed: he was not anymore.

(298-299)

With the brutality of nature's hierarchies, Ursula's soul annihilates Skrebensky's. Her triumphant pride is that of a predator that has made a successful kill – there is no sense of tenderness on her part. It is only when she comes “back to herself” from her murderous transport that Ursula finally achieves insight into what she has done:

Suddenly the night was struck back into its old, accustomed, mild reality. Gradually she realised that the night was common and ordinary, that the great, blistering night did not really exist. She was overcome with slow horror. Where was she? What was this nothingness she felt? The nothingness was Skrebensky.... She was filled with overpowering fear of herself, overpowering desire that it should not be, that other burning, corrosive self.... With all her might she turned away from it. She was good, she was loving.... She laid her hand caressively on Anton's shoulder.... And she began to caress him to life again.

(299)

Shocked by the egotistical intensity of her aristocratic soul, Ursula's touch turns from the “corrosive” to the “caressive” and, feigning submission, purports to resuscitate her beaten lover. Lawrence stresses that, while she seems to be successful in this, it is only “the whole shell of him” (299) that she restores – emphatically, we are told that “the core was gone” (299). This corelessness finally results in Anton going off to join the Boer War, “giving himself up to [his duties]” (304). Subsumed by his “place in the whole” (304), he also becomes lost to Ursula, who is deeply disillusioned by their break-up: “Her life was only partial at this time, never did she live completely. There was the cold, unliving part of her. Yet she was madly sensitive. She couldn't bear herself.... And in this state, her sexual life flamed into a kind of disease within her” (309). This “disease[d]” sexuality Lawrence dramatises in the next chapter,

“Shame”, in the form of a homosexual relationship which irrevocably takes Ursula beyond the boundaries of experiences previously encountered in the novel.

Skrebensky gone, Ursula now resolves to “make her conquest also of this man’s world”, in other words, “the world of daily work and duty and existence as a working member of the community” (310). Having just escaped the bonds of a stunting relationship, this is the next threat to Ursula’s coming into being. We are told that “[h]er life at this time was unformed, palpitating, essentially shrinking from all touch” (311). In need of a role-model of female pride and self-sufficiency, Ursula’s interest in her class-mistress is soon aroused:

Suddenly Ursula found a queer awareness existed between herself and...Miss Inger. The latter was a rather beautiful woman of twenty-eight, a fearless-seeming, clean type of modern girl whose very independence betrays her to sorrow.... It was after Skrebensky had gone that there sprang up between the mistress and the girl that strange awareness.

(311-312)

This unspoken “awareness” becomes increasingly sexual, during a swimming class, in Ursula’s admiration of Winifred Inger’s physique, her awe at the way in which she, “with a negligent movement” (313), flings herself into the water, her excitement at swimming in the same water with her, and her yearning “to touch the other, to touch her, to feel her” (313). The water, amorphous and chthonic, here effects a kind of mediated physical and sexual contact, even if it leaves “a craving of unsatisfaction” (313). In fact, water becomes the realm of their passion, which soon becomes overt, throughout their brief relationship. It is soon after that Ursula accepts an invitation join Winifred at a private bungalow, and Lawrence doesn’t take long to come round to the climax of the visit. As night falls, and an approaching thunderstorm is announced by a “warm rain” (315), Winifred suggests another swim and starts pulling off clothes, Ursula shyly following suit. Significantly, their setting off to the water is a “venture...out into the darkness” (315), with Ursula unable to “see the path” (315). Winifred becomes her guide into this new and unknown experience, to the extent that she carries Ursula to the water, where they apparently abandon themselves to their passion (Lawrence is much less explicit in this than in his heterosexual encounters). Ursula soon flees the scene, and returns home by train. She experiences the crowds on the station and the train as belonging to a world removed from her, feeling that “[a]ll this stir and seethe of lights and people was but the rim, the shores of a great darkness and void” (316). Her transgression brings her to the isolation of the void, and she turns to a community with Winifred.

To a large extent, Ursula’s relationship with Winifred is a kind of feminist statement, a celebration of female self-sufficiency (which should, perhaps, also be seen in the context of

Ursula's desire to enter the "man's world"). We are told that "Ursula developed rapidly during the few months of her intimacy with her mistress" (317), but Lawrence seems to suggest that this growth is essentially mental³, a broadening of Ursula's philosophical horizons, especially in the realms of religion and gender politics. To this end she is also introduced to a variety of progressive, "educated, unsatisfied people". What finally interrupts this ambiguous idyll is the arrival of the long vacation, which ends her studies and removes her from Winifred. Left alone, she realises "that she was always herself. Never could she escape that: she could not put off being herself" (319). Textually, this realisation introduces a sudden sense of repulsion at the thought of her physical life with Winifred. Piling on images of suffocation, Lawrence informs us that "a sort of nausea was coming over her. She loved her mistress. But a heavy, clogged sense of deadness began to gather upon her, from the woman's contact" (319). Like the chthonic Marsh, "clayey" (319) Winifred threatens to drag Ursula under. She conforms to Camille Paglia's definition of decadence in the "juxtaposition of primitivism with sophistication" (157) in her, which Ursula recognises and recoils from. Ursula's only recourse is, finally, to marry off Winifred to her uncle Tom who, like Winifred, has become a symbol of decadence for her. He is described as also having "something marshy about him – the succulent moistness and turgidity, and the same brackish, nauseating effect of the marsh, where life and decaying are one" (325). Both highly intelligent individuals, Tom and Winifred seem to be examples of people in whom the idea-life has corrupted the body-life. It is in this sense that Winifred's lesbianism could perhaps be seen as a politically inspired sexuality, which soon becomes distasteful. Ursula's instincts are proved correct when these two finally do marry, and settle down to manage a pit.

Ursula's rejection of Winifred completes yet another stage in her development, and she now submits to the inner drive to find a job (contrary to her father's wishes), and tackle the man's world. She finds this opportunity, eventually, in the form of a teaching position, once again entering a realm very familiar to Lawrence. Her entrance into the Dostoyevskian world of the school on Brinsley Street becomes a tormenting experience (like Lawrence's) of the impossibility of not sacrificing one's instincts and "put[ting] away...[one's] personal self" (356). Lengthy and repetitive, this chapter becomes a painful study of the way in which the individual is inevitably assimilated and altered by a given social role. Ursula's initial intention of entering into a "vivid relationship" with "her children" (341) ends in disillusionment as both children and headmaster test her to the utmost, and she comes to the apt realisation that "[t]he

³ Since Lawrence strongly believes in the importance of the vital conflict between male and female, his treatment of homosexuality, if not wholly unsympathetic, is not supportive either.

prison was round her now” (346). Struggling painfully to exert any kind of discipline over the children, she finally ends up betraying her instincts by realising that she must, “*as teacher, ... bring them all, as scholars, into subjection*” (367, *emphasis added*). The individual is subsumed by her social role, which brings with it responsibilities which may be in direct conflict with the soul. Eventually, she exerts her dominance over the class by viciously caning a troublemaker, thereby stooping to a practice she’d been rejecting from the start. The effect is strange and horrifying: “Nothing could touch her now. . . . She was as if violated to death” (371). Her achievement of social dominance effects a spiritual death, and we are told that “she . . . paid a great price out of her own soul to do this” (376). Assimilated by her social role, she also deepens her friendship with a fellow-teacher, Maggie, identified as “a great suffragette” (377), with whom she attends meetings and explores the cultural circuit. In the figure of Maggie we are presented with Lawrence’s critique (soon to be Ursula’s) of women who want to implicate themselves in the social structure erected by a very patriarchal history, instead of discovering a fresh (female) road⁴. At first, Ursula also participates in this drive, and thus, “[w]hen the work had become like a habit to her, and her individual soul was left out, had its growth elsewhere, then she could be almost happy” (378). This state of affairs does not last, as her instinctual response to nature eventually brings her to question her subservience to the social order (a subservience she is meant to perpetuate as teacher):

Why should she give her allegiance to this world, and let it so dominate her, that her own world of warm sun and growing, sap-filled life was turned to nothing? She was not going to do it. She was not going to be prisoner in the dry, tyrannical man-world. . . . What did it matter if her class did ever so badly in the quarterly examination. Let it – what did it matter?

(380-381)

Here we see the return of that aristocratic arrogance which, from this point on, allows her to exist within the system without being completely subsumed by it. Significantly, this new-found life of her soul also distantiates her from Maggie and her “fundamental sadness of enclosure” (382). Ursula now begins to yearn for a vital relationship with a male (opposed to the fleeting relationships Maggie apparently considers to be the lot of the modern individual), and so, “the two girls began to drift apart, as Ursula broke from that form of life wherein Maggie must remain enclosed” (382).

Ursula’s first step in her new journey, which precedes her entry into college, is to almost enter into a relationship with Maggie’s brother, Anthony. A gardener, and Maggie’s “enem[y] by instinct” (384), “like an animal in its unawareness” (385), Anthony is, in many ways,

⁴ Lawrence also raises this criticism in the third chapter of his “Study of Thomas Hardy”.

reminiscent of those Brangwen men who lived in complete harmony with nature. His appearance after the stifling life at school is refreshing to both Ursula and reader, but both soon realise that this is yet another impossible relationship. The problem mainly lies in his unconscious living, something which contrasts with the awareness of Ursula's artistic soul. Standing outside, and appreciating the natural scenery that Belcote Hall affords, Ursula can express the fact that "[a]ll this was so beautiful, all this so lovely! He did not see it. He was one with it. But she saw it, and was one with it. Her seeing separated them infinitely" (386). Anthony lives in the same "blind intercourse of farm-life" (10) as Ursula's forbears, a life by now impossible for her. In many ways her choice, at this point, resembles that of her grandmother, Lydia Lensky, who married Tom Brangwen to escape the outside world. Ursula does not accept this option, realising that, although she likes Anthony, they are not compatible: "All her life, at intervals, she returned to the thought of him and of that which he offered. But she was a traveller, she was a traveller on the face of the earth, and he was an isolated creature living in the fulfilment of his own senses" (387). Her acceptance of this ultimate responsibility, in spite of the many obstacles in her way, sets her apart as the true hero of this novel.

Needless to say, Ursula's experience of college also does not turn out to be what she has been seeking – after a brief initial spell of admiration, she soon decides that "[c]ollege was barren, cheap, a temple converted to the most vulgar, petty commerce. Had she not come to hear the echo of learning pulsing back to the source of mystery?" (404). Implicated in the social structure, the college only grants her knowledge that is either practical or sublimated, nourishing (at best) the mind, but not the soul. In an image reminiscent of the coal-fire in "Life", Ursula sees

[t]his world in which she lived...[as being] like a circle lighted by a lamp.... Yet all the time, within the darkness she had been aware of points of light, like the eyes of wild beasts, gleaming, penetrating, vanishing. And her soul had acknowledged in a great heave of terror, only the outer darkness.... [T]he darkness wheeled round about, with grey shadow-shapes of wild beasts, and also with dark shadow-shapes of the angels, whom the light fenced out, as it fenced out the more familiar beasts of darkness.
(405-406)

Ursula develops a taste for that darkness, which holds both the primal violence of the beasts and the "lordly and terrible" (406) divinity of the angels. In this darkness Lawrence captures all the compelling mystery of the marriage between sexuality and spirituality, and we should see it in the light of Ursula's yearning for a vital heterosexual relationship. Primed for a new sexual life, she now turns her thoughts, somewhat surprisingly, to Skrebensky, whom she hasn't seen for more than two years. Lawrence identifies this resuscitated love for Skrebensky as "a thing to hark back to" (407) at a time when "present things seemed a failure" (407), a sentimentality

which eventually leads Ursula to repeat a mistake. Right on cue, a letter arrives from him to inform her that he has just returned to England for a few months before shipping out to India. Ursula and Skrebensky, now strangers to each other, pick up their relationship again. However, she enters into this relationship with a new realisation (flowing from her study, under the microscope, of a unicellular creature) which once again precludes the possibility of success: “Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity” (409).

Ursula and Anton’s relationship, once it gets off the ground, essentially takes the form of a sexual liaison – realising quite soon that his road “was not her road” (411), she nevertheless submits to their life in the “fecund nucleus of the fluid darkness” (414). Their intimacy is a rejection of the circle of light which Ursula saw as a limitation of her being, to the extent that she even calls streetlights “stupid” (414). Through the sexual act, she “passe[s] away as on a dark wind⁵...[and] enter[s] the dark fields of immortality” (418), and she passes into a new being:

When she rose, she felt strangely free, strong.... She had taken him, they had been together. Whither they had gone, she did not know. But it was as if she had received another nature. She belonged to the eternal, changeless place into which they had leapt together.

(421)

Skrebensky, however, is not content to let matters rest there, and he soon proposes marriage. Ursula refrains from answering, yet they get a sense of married life when they take a vacation, as husband and wife, to Piccadilly, Paris and Rouen. It is at this last destination, inserted into their itinerary by Ursula, that we notice the first signs of trouble, and so does Skrebensky:

She seemed to leave him. She followed after something that was not him.... Her soul began to run by itself. He did not realise, nor did she. Yet in Rouen he had the first deadly anguish, the first sense of the death towards which they were wandering. And she felt the first heavy yearning, heavy, heavy hopeless warning, almost like a deep, uneasy sinking into apathy, hopelessness.

(422-423)

In the face of this dawning realisation, both of them, to some degree, panic. Skrebensky, once again, starts pushing for marriage. In Ursula this panic is registered, rather, in an increasingly excessive passion. Just before her examinations, they once again take a break, this time to a friend’s cottage, and with a chthonic ritualism, Ursula goes so far as to “not love him in a house anymore” (430). Taking sex to nature, Ursula both celebrates it and flaunts social codes of conduct. Skrebensky, in the meantime, is helplessly dragged along:

⁵ Once again one is reminded of the wind in Lawrence’s “Song of a Man Who Has Come Through”.

She took off all her clothes, and made him take off his, and they ran over the smooth, moonless turf, a long way..., running in the dark, soft wind, utterly naked, as naked as the downs themselves.... She took him, clenched him close, but her eyes were open looking at the stars....

(430)

In this we already notice both a cosmic view of sex and a growing dissatisfaction with Skrebensky, who never seems to be enough. Soon this process is complete, and Ursula's appreciation of Anton becomes in the strictest sense aesthetic: "His body was beautiful.... He seemed completed now. He roused no fruitful fecundity in her. He seemed added up, finished. She knew him all round, not on any side did he lead into the unknown" (438-439). A perfect, sterile object, Anton completely ceases to provide Ursula with the opportunity for growth. It is at this point that Ursula reaches yet another crisis – finding that she's failed her examination, she's also faced with renewed pressure from Skrebensky to marry him. The question now is: will she take a new road, or fold, and readjust herself to the socially mobile life of a lieutenant in India? She almost does, but the matter is finally resolved, once again, in the sexual arena. On one of their evenings out, Ursula is accosted, yet again, by the full moon, and her surrender to it finally effects Anton's complete spiritual dissolution:

[S]he went forward, plunging into it. He followed behind. She seemed to melt into the white glare, towards the moon.

The sands were as ground silver, the sea moved in solid brightness, coming towards them, and she went to meet the advance of the flashing, heaving water....

"I want to go," she cried, in a strong, dominant voice. "I want to go."....

Then there, in the great flare of light, she clinched hold of him, hard, as if suddenly she had the strength of destruction, she fastened her arms round him and tightened him in her grip, whilst her mouth sought his in a hard, rending, ever-increasing kiss, till his body was powerless in her grip, his heart melted in fear from the fierce, beaked, harpy's kiss.

(444)

Overshadowed by moon, Ursula and ocean, Skrebensky ineffectually attempts to save himself by leading her to "a dark hollow". But Ursula insists on lying under the moon – as she stares up at it, Skrebensky's role in the sexual act is but ritually instrumental: "He came direct to her, without preliminaries. She held him pinned down at the chest, awful. The fight, the struggle for consummation was terrible. It lasted till it was agony to his soul, till he succumbed, till he gave way as if dead" (445). Destroyed, Anton flees and, by the next morning, the relationship is over. He marries a Colonel's daughter and sails for India.

In spite of Anton's departure, he leaves Ursula with one final challenge in her quest – she soon finds out that she is pregnant. Feeling her journey arrested, "her flesh thrilled but her soul was sick. It seemed, this child, like a seal set on her own nullity" (448). Subject to the procreative flow of nature, Ursula's flesh responds, yet her soul recognises the threat to its own

development that submersion in the chthonic matrix implies. It is while struggling with these issues that one day Ursula, “lest the house should suffocate her” (450), walks out into the rain and has her deeply symbolic experience with the horses – trying to find her way back home Ursula constantly finds herself blocked by a group of horses. Much has been made of this scene – Daleski, in agreement with E. L. Nicholes, believes that “the horses...symbolize ‘the anarchy of elemental passion’” (123)⁶. This is aptly portentous, but vague. It seems to me that, at this stage, Lawrence dramatises the problem of “beat[ing]...[one’s] way back through all this fluctuation, back to stability and security” (451). For a moment, Ursula finds herself completely out in the cold, at the risk of complete dissolution. Faced with the sheer primal force of the horses, Ursula almost experiences what Skrebensky experienced: “Her heart was gone, her limbs were dissolved, she was dissolved like water. All the hardness and looming power was in the massive body of the horse-group” (453). Lengthy and intense, the experience becomes a sheer test of Ursula’s will, and finally she manages to reach the fence, and clear it by dropping from a bough. This weary triumph significantly results in a crystallisation of the self, and “time and the flux of change passed away from her” (454). In escaping from her horses, Ursula seems to escape the possibly self-destructive pull of her own extreme passions, and, momentarily, she settles into a sharp sense of self, a balanced conflict.

In yet another way, this experience also results in Ursula being in complete command of herself. Her ordeal is followed by an illness which effectively burns the past from her, also in the form of the child, which dies in utero. Simultaneously, this severs all links with Skrebensky, and releases Ursula from the fate of her own mother. Still feverish, Ursula has a visionary intimation of what her journey, thus far, had brought her to:

She was the naked, clear kernel thrusting forth the clear, powerful shoot, and the world was a bygone winter, discarded, her mother and father and Anton, and college and all her friends, all cast off like a year that has gone by, whilst the kernel was free and naked and striving to take new root, to create a new knowledge of Eternity in the flux of Time.... Soon she would have her root fixed in a new Day, her nakedness would take itself to the bed of a new sky and a new air, this old, decaying, fibrous husk would be gone.

Gradually she began really to sleep. She slept in the confidence of her new reality. She slept breathing with her soul the new air of a new world.... She had her root in new ground, she was gradually absorbed into growth.

(456)

Ursula’s coming into new being frees her from her past as it opens her to the possibilities of her present and future. Strong in her isolation, she realises that the male she yearns for “should

⁶ Daleski also makes the compelling suggestion that “in presenting Ursula’s vision of the horses...[Lawrence] gives us a concentrated, symbolic retrospect of crucial stages along her soul’s journey” (124). See his book, *The Forked Flame*, for a comprehensive discussion.

come from the Infinite and she should hail him” (457), i.e. she should not actively seek him out. This looks forward to the arrival of Birkin in *Women in Love*. For the time being, however, Ursula proceeds on her own. Regaining her health, she “sat to watch a new creation” (457) – what she sees beyond the window, however, is the same old “prison” (458) of society. Yet finally, the threat of disillusionment is cast off by Ursula’s vision of a rainbow:

[S]he looked for the hovering colour and saw a rainbow forming itself. In one place it gleamed fiercely, and, her heart anguished with hope, she sought out the shadow of iris where the bow should be. Steadily the colour gathered, mysteriously, from nowhere, it took presence upon itself, there was a faint, vast rainbow. The arc bended and strengthened itself till it arched indomitable, making great architecture of light and colour and the space of heaven, its pedestals luminous in the corruption of new houses on the low hill, its arch the top of heaven.

And the rainbow stood on the earth. She knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world’s corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She saw in the rainbow the earth’s new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven.

(458-459)

Recalling God’s covenant with Noah in Genesis, Ursula’s vision of the rainbow is a vision of individual self-achievement, dramatised in the way in which the rainbow forms itself. Having passed through all the waters of dissolution in the novel, the rainbow sets a seal (as in Genesis) on that journey, and ratifies the attainment of selfhood. The rest of mankind now appear as horrific “hard-scaled” creatures with “horny covering[s]”, existing in a lower state of evolutionary development in spite of the promise of the rainbow within them. These “scale[s]” also symbolise the desensitised nature of their existence, the absence of any relation to their circumambient universe. For this is what Ursula achieves, a sense of connectedness to her circumambient universe which retains the conflict between self and Other. This is also symbolised in the rainbow, which finally also recalls Lawrence’s image of the Lion and the Unicorn, locked in a vital conflict, simultaneously a merging and a distinction, which is consecrated by the Crown (“The Crown” 259).

CHAPTER 7: BREAKING INTO A MODERN SELF IN *TROPIC OF CANCER*

Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, while dealing with many of the issues raised in *The Rainbow*, is entirely different in its style and scope. While Lawrence's omniscient narrator presents us with the growth of individual members of a family across three generations, Miller's confessional first person narrator only registers the effect of external and internal phenomena on his own undulating consciousness. Like *The Rainbow*, *Tropic of Cancer* is also very much concerned with what has been referred to as "the pervasive sickness and squalor of modern society" (Anon 231), the stifling, decaying social structure which impedes individual self-fulfilment. Like Ursula, Miller looks forward to a new social order but, in the meantime, his agenda differs. To some extent, at least outwardly, his position is that of Ursula at the end of *The Rainbow* – having rejected predestined social roles, Miller (the narrator) nevertheless has to live within a social structure. His solution is, firstly, to exchange his native soil in New York for the alien and ancient streets of Paris, and, secondly, to join the ranks of society's outcasts, from which he conducts his critique of society (socially ineffective as this may be, it keeps him from being implicated in any way) and, more importantly, continues the struggle to come into being, as writer and individual. While both books are finally concerned with the inner life and growth of the individual as he interacts with his environment, and comes to terms with the fact of his existence, Lawrence is concerned to a greater extent with seeing the individual in the context of the great flow of human history, without being subsumed by it – Ursula unmistakably flows from her family history, but, like the other major characters in the book, remains emphatically discrete. We are to see her in relation(s) to her circumambient universe, which includes the social-familial sphere as well as the collective unconscious (note how the individuals struggle with some fundamental problems of the self – and resolve them – especially in terms of sex). But, as the centre of such a universe, Ursula remains the perverse imp in the Cathedral of *The Rainbow*. On the other hand, Miller, with Dantesque egoism, traces the descent of his alter ego, a rebel and destructive buffoon, who violently staves off the stasis implied by assimilation into the work-force, into the realms of the (collective) unconscious, where the self is threatened with annihilation, before emerging as a new artistic self that is vitally connected to its circumambient universe. Inasmuch as Miller traces autobiographical details in the book, *Tropic of Cancer* is a documentation of its own genesis, of the conditions for its own existence.

Conceiving of *Tropic of Cancer* also as an act of literary rebellion, Miller starts his book with an epigram by Emerson, which also provides the context in which the reader should judge the

book: “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 how to record truth truly” (7). This is a complex statement, and Miller does not employ it superficially. Importantly, Miller picks up on a challenge set by an American literary giant – in spite of his rejection of American society, Miller remains an American writer. Emerson’s remark is important because it helps us understand the nature of Miller’s (and also Kerouac’s) work much more clearly. In spite of the implicit rejection of traditional “novels”, these “autobiographies” Emerson refers to still require the writer to “choose among . . . his experiences”. This selection is all-important, as it implicitly requires a degree of craftsmanship on the part of the writer, who has to shape the work into some whole. Of greater importance, however, is that this artist “record truth truly” – the “truth” refers here both to the truth *about* his experiences (i.e. authenticity) and the truth *emerging from* his experiences (i.e. what his experiences reveal about the underlying reality of life), while “truly” refers to the method and style of the “record”, and calls for the avoidance of sublimation and reduction. Miller, with a sincerity which some may call convenient, locates this truth in the individual, since there is no stable, objective, external criterion for measuring it – in this, he approaches Lawrence’s claim that the only locus of morality is the blood of the individual. As writer, his hope is that readers will sense in his record the truth of a deep-rooted human reality, which Jung locates in the collective unconscious.

Somewhat surprisingly, Miller begins his book on a low note, creating a grim sense of stasis and a kind of living death:

I am living at the Villa Borghese. There is not a crumb of dirt anywhere, nor a chair misplaced. We are all alone here and we are dead.

Last night Boris discovered that he was lousy. I had to shave his armpits and even then the itching did not stop. How can one get lousy in a beautiful place like this? But no matter. We might never have known each other so intimately, Boris and I, had it not been for the lice.

Boris has just given me a summary of his views. He is a weather prophet. The weather will continue bad, he says. There will be more calamities, more death, more despair. Not the slightest indication of a change anywhere. The cancer of time is eating us away. Our heroes have killed themselves, or are killing themselves. The hero then, is not Time, but Timelessness. We must get in step, a lock step, toward the prison of death. There is no escape. The weather will not change.

(9)

This is a familiar scene of European decadence, pervaded with ennui. Its lifelessness is signalled by the absence of “dirt”, leaving everything sterile, static, and arranged. Dirt is primarily one of Miller’s weapons against bourgeois cleanliness, and becomes a trope for vitality and fecundity. As Jane Nelson says, “[t]he filthy world is necessary to the ‘sterile

world', for without it, fertility, creation, and life are impossible" (32). The appearance of lice somehow seems to be both a signal of the tableau's degradation and a welcome "fissure" in it, which allows Miller and Boris to know "each other intimately" (the tone remains fairly wry, however). There is a pervasive sense of hopelessness about the scene – bleak and fatalistic, these opening lines prophesy mankind's doom. The corrosive effect (on man's sense of vital connection to *place*) of history, as explored in *The Rainbow*, is continued and intensified here. Leon Lewis understands this opening to mean that

the artist/hero who is Miller's narrator and protagonist has given up on the idea of living in any sort of conventional manner and has become a kind of Dostoevskian underground man. We see him first in *Cancer* prowling through the bottom strata of a civilization in decomposition, recording disasters to which he remains immune.

(276)

This is a satisfactory account, as long as one realises that this life at the Villa Borghese is not Miller's alternative to "conventional" life, but yet another temporary (and unsatisfactory) stopover on Miller's quest. As he immediately goes on to tell us, "[i]t is now the fall of my second year in Paris. I was sent here for a reason I have not yet been able to fathom" (9). The reason, of course, is the writing of this book, and Miller's own coming into being as an artist. When the reader starts reading *Tropic of Cancer*, it is to experience Miller starting to write it. The abject funk into which Miller has fallen is suddenly converted into a springboard towards a new life of creation – in this we see Miller's belief that one has to hit rock bottom before you can start anew (which is more or less what happens to Ursula towards the end of *The Rainbow*). Rejecting and shedding an old self implies being stripped of everything that links one to that past¹ – humanity's fatalistic downward slide liberates Miller from the (artistic) *ambitions* which have always hampered him, and he is reduced to pure existence, from which his new self bursts forth in the form of *Tropic of Cancer*: "I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive. A year, six months ago, I thought that I was an artist. I no longer think about it, I *am*" (9-10). These are the magic words, and they grant Miller access to Coleridge's "eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (387). In this state of being, creation ceases to be a sanctioning and furtherance of existing cultural values, therefore,

[e]verything that was literature has fallen from me. There are no more books to be written, thank God.

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 of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty . . . what you will.

(10)

¹ This impulse may lie behind Miller's compulsion to write, or write *off*, his past.

Miller's is a satanic rebellion against established ideals. Sensing the corruption and demise of society from the high point of the Victorian age, Miller decides to pick up the axe and help things along. As he later states, "[t]he age demands violence, but we are only getting abortive explosions" (19). William Gordon also stresses that Miller's "attitude in *Tropic of Cancer* is not peaceful acceptance as it will become later. It is rather the first assertion of self against all that seeks to enslave the self" (250). Yet his voice is not merely destructive, and it certainly is not nihilistic. It emerges, in fact, in terms of "a song", life-affirming, although it may not (and cannot) pander to the criteria of high culture:

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

To sing you must first open your mouth. You must have a pair of lungs, and a little knowledge of music. It is not necessary to have an accordion, or a guitar. The essential thing is to *want* to sing. This then is a song. I am singing.

(10)

By now, Miller has disassociated himself from the dead; the act of creation which is *Tropic of Cancer*, an "off key" song, is an exuberant and ribald expression of self, but also an immersion in the chaotic matrix of life – in opposition to the restrained opening lines, from here on all will be dirt and disarray. In some ways, the book itself is a sacred instant, from which Miller will emerge newly created.

Surrendering to the dissolution of the times, Miller seeks to access an archetypal reality beneath our own, i.e. the force that informs the wavelike motion of history:

The world around me is dissolving, leaving here and there spots of time. The world is a cancer eating itself away I am thinking that when the great silence descends upon all and everywhere music will at last triumph. When into the womb of time everything is again withdrawn chaos will be restored and chaos is the score upon which reality is written.

(10)

The dissolution of society and culture is seen as part of a natural flux, a decay which may possibly lead to fecundity. Books (presumably those that are the result of the psychological mode of creation) are finished because they reflect a reality which is assumed to contain implicit structures, a reality which is now in a state of dissolution. At such a juncture, representational art becomes reactionary. Miller's "book", on the other hand, will be an attempt to access and intimate that chaotic score by penetrating the upper crust of reality (penetration, clearly suggestive of male sexual action, is one of Miller's most important tropes). As opposed to the psychological mode of creation, which would assign the objects and concepts of reality their rightful places (i.e. "Art, . . . God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty. . . what you will"), Miller's visionary book will give an intimation of that fertile chaos which our reality (social,

personal, religious) feeds on, and precariously covers. Since chaos has no form, *Tropic of Cancer* cannot be representational; taking some liberties, one may well call it *intimational*.

Early on, Miller begins to introduce us to some of his cronies in the underbelly of Paris, those characters against whom he has to shape his “ideas”, and identify his sense of self. Others are introduced through the course of the novel, as Miller proceeds on his picaresque journey. The narrator cannot present them as “satisfactorily” rounded characters for the very simple reason that he is limited by his own consciousness. As a result, certain characters are associated with certain qualities, and sometimes become monstrous:

I like Van Norden but I do not share his opinion of himself. I do not agree, for instance, that he is a philosopher, or a thinker. He is cunt-struck, that's all. And he will never be a writer. Nor will Sylvester ever be a writer, though his name blaze in 50,000-candle-power red lights. The only writers for me for whom I have any respect, at present, are Carl and Boris. They are possessed. They glow inwardly with a white flame. They are mad and tone deaf. They are sufferers.

Moldorf, on the other hand, who suffers too in his peculiar way, is not mad. Moldorf is word drunk. He has no veins or blood vessels, no heart or kidneys....

(12)

We soon find Miller to be sexual adventurer, but we are constantly to contrast his exploits to the virulent satyriasis of Van Norden. Being “cunt-struck”, from the narrator’s point of view, is his sole characteristic – “that’s all” – and therefore he is a failed individual. Sylvester, on the other hand, is implicitly denounced as a literary prostitute. Drawing on the Lawrentian image of the flame, Miller identifies the artist as strictly visionary, “possessed”, “mad and tone deaf”² like Carl and Boris. There may be, however, an implicit criticism in his description of them as “sufferers”, something which Miller, through the course of the novel, never seems to be.

Moldorf, possibly the strangest of all the male characters, is a heterological monster – he also appears as “the caricature of a man” (15), a “dwarf” (16), “clown, juggler, contortionist, priest, lecher, mountebank” (16), and “God” (16). Nelson, with her sustained Jungian analysis of the novel, accounts for him as “the traditional homunculus, belonging, as does the satyr Van Norden, to the figure of the Terrible Mother and representing one of the “human” figures in terms of which the power of the Terrible Goddess is demonstrated” (36). Within the context of her reading, this account makes sense, but perhaps one shouldn’t simply discard Miller’s own admission, having just stated that “Moldorf *is* God” (16), that “I am merely putting down words” (16). The early part of the book is especially fragmented and frustrated as Miller tries to break through the sense of homogeneity presented by such limited characters as Van Norden. Perhaps just “putting down words”, a kind of automatic writing, is the only way of

² This clearly refers back to Miller’s own “off key” singing, announced at the outset of the book.

accessing the unconscious, and Moldorf, strange specimen that he is, becomes a fitting object for contemplation.

As Miller proceeds with his writing, it becomes clear to him that the authenticity of his “automatic” writing depends on his remaining true to the produced text, and therefore,

I have made a silent compact with myself not to change a word of what I write. I am not interested in perfecting my thoughts, or my actions. Beside the perfection of Turgenev I put the perfection of Dostoevski. (Is there anything more perfect than *The Eternal Husband*?) Here, then, in one and the same medium, we have two kinds of perfection. But in Van Gogh’s letters there is a perfection beyond either of these. It is the triumph of the individual over art.

(19)

Miller’s “compact” resembles Kerouac’s resolution as expressed in his “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose”. What underlies this “compact” is the belief that the attempt to perfect one’s writing (in terms of given criteria) dissolves the “truth” that Miller announced as his object. Miller also problematises and relativises this notion of perfection by alluding to three different “kinds of perfection”, present in three different writers. The implicit point here is that each writer must find his own voice. Interestingly, however, Miller cannot abstain from introducing a “hierarchy” by placing the perfection of Van Gogh’s letters “beyond” (*not* “above”) the others³ – this is because he notes in those letters that which is to him one of the central quests in his novel, “the triumph of the individual over art”.

Female characters there also are, although, notoriously, they are usually presented in strictly sexual terms. The earliest of these to be introduced to us, Tania and Llona, seem to be representative of two opposing views (from a male perspective) of female sexuality. Tania, it seems, drives Miller to a violent, yet parodic, state of primal male self-assertion – she is an arena in which other males are vanquished:

O Tania, where is that warm cunt of yours, those fat, heavy garters, those soft, bulging thighs? There is a bone in my prick six inches long. I will ream out every wrinkle in your cunt, Tania, big with seed. I will send you home to your Sylvester with an ache in your belly and your womb turned inside out. Your Sylvester! Yes, he knows how to build a fire, but I know how to inflame a cunt.... Your Sylvester is a little jealous now? He feels something, does he? He feels the remnants of my big prick. I have set the shores a little wider. I have ironed out the wrinkles.⁴

(13)

Bombastic and crude, Miller asserts his sexual superiority. Interestingly, he is asserting it specifically against Sylvester, who seems to be the only one among all his cronies to have

³ This, once again, makes greater sense when viewed in the light of Emerson’s “Circles”.

⁴ Violent as these images are, all this is perhaps no more violent than Ursula’s “corrosive”(298) kiss of Skrebensky. Cinematically less violent, however, that scene does not as easily irk the reader.

achieved some commercial success with his writing. With “[n]o one to whom I can communicate even a fraction of my feelings” (14), both Miller’s virulence and exuberance finds expression in sex and writing. But while Tania is reduced to a “battleground”, Llona and her genitals appear as a foreboding embodiment of chthonic nature:

Llona now, she had a cunt. I know because she sent us some hairs from down below. Llona – a wild ass snuffing pleasure out of the wind. On every hill she played the harlot – and sometimes in telephone booths and toilets. She bought a bed for King Carol and a shaving mug with his initials on it. She lay in Tottenham Court Road with her dress pulled up and fingered herself. She used candles, Roman candles, and door knobs. Not a prick in the land big enough for her . . . *not one*. Men went inside her and curled up. . . . She was a liar, too, this Llona. She never bought a bed for her King Carol. She crowned him with a whiskey bottle and her tongue was full of lice and tomorrows. Poor Carol, he could only curl up inside her and die. She drew a breath and he fell out – like a dead clam.

(14-15)

Llona represents the threat of dissolution in sex, seen here, primarily, as a threat to the male erection. Like boys on a school ground, Miller and friends gather in awe around a few pubic hairs, mementoes from the void. In the face of the chthonic, language also becomes inadequate – Miller contradicts himself, and the imagery soon becomes surrealistic. It is between these two sexual experiences – self-assertion (with Tania) and dissolution (with Llona) – that we find the by now familiar action of self-renewal, coming into being, and this is the theme of Miller’s book.

Outer influences on Miller, in the act of writing, are continually allowed to enter the text. Even a “telephone interrupts this thought which I should have never been able to complete” (19). In this way we also learn that “someone is coming to rent the apartment. . . . It looks as though it were finished, my life at the Villa Borghese. Well, I’ll take up these pages and move on. Things will happen elsewhere” (19). The book acquires the quality of something written on the run, as Miller himself stresses when he says that “[s]o fast and furiously am I compelled to live now that there is scarcely time to record even these fragmentary notes” (20). This pace and intensity is, of course, all in Miller’s mind, as we realise with increasing clarity as his exuberance grows. While the violence of his verbs remain, it becomes clear that he is not so much a cynical saboteur as a genial, if egoistic, exuberant buffoon. After meeting Mr and Mrs Wren (prospective lodgers), for instance, Miller is sent out by Boris to buy liquor:

Going for the liquor I am already intoxicated. I just know how I’ll begin when I get back to the house. Walking down the street it commences, the grand speech inside me that’s gurgling like Mrs. Wren’s loose laugh. Seems to me she had a slight edge on already. Listens beautifully when she’s tight. Coming out of the wine shop I hear the urinal gurgling. Everything is loose and splashy. I want Mrs. Wren to listen. . . .

Boris is rubbing his hands again. Mr. Wren is still stuttering and spluttering. I have a bottle between my legs and I'm shoving the corkscrew in. Mrs. Wren has her mouth parted expectantly. The wine is splashing between my legs, the sun is splashing through the bay window, and inside my veins there is a bubble and splash of a thousand crazy things that commence to gush out of me pell-mell. I'm telling them everything that comes to mind, everything that was bottled up inside me and which Mrs. Wren's loose laugh has somehow released.

(22)

The lyrical prose gives a fair intimation of the joyous release of the occasion. The excess of intoxication and joy is upon Miller like an orgasm, as suggested by the fairly overt sexual imagery surrounding the bottle. This release is also registered in terms of a torrent of memories, and "[e]verything comes back to me in a rush" (22), particularly impressions of his first arrival in Paris, and the last few months, exciting yet ultimately disillusioning, with his wife Mona ("based" on June) in that city. All this is presented, not as a performance for Boris and the Wrens, but as an inner stream of consciousness, in which Paris emerges as a hellish underworld where "[e]verything happens" (27). The question that emerges is: "Which way will we go and why or where and what?" (28) It is this portentous question that Miller will implicitly seek an answer to in the course of the novel.

Embarking now on what is virtually a day-by-day record of experiences, we find Miller in an exuberant mood, and he informs us that

[a] new day is beginning. I felt it this morning as we stood before one of Dufresne's glistening canvasses, a sort of *déjeuner intime* in the thirteenth century, *sans vin*. A fine, fleshy nude, solid, vibrant, pink as a fingernail, with glistening billows of flesh.... A body that sings, that has the moisture of dawn. A still life, only nothing is still, nothing dead here. The table creaks with food; it is so heavy it is sliding out of the frame.

(29)

What commends the painting to Miller's senses is the very fact that it has a sensuous presence – it exudes a sense of life exerting itself against the implicit arrestation of its medium, dried paint. Dryness is anathema to Miller, as it suggests a lifeless form – something dead which does not decay (and thence leads to fecundity and new growth). The painting also gives an intimation of another age, in which a more vital, plentiful life is still possible. In Miller's Paris, food (and, implicitly, *all* nourishment) is hard to find, and has to be sought actively, by force or by guile. Walking with Boris to the Post Office, they discuss the creation of a book they plan on writing – once again, it becomes clear that Miller craves nothing less than a new world:

We have evolved a new cosmogony of literature, Boris and I. 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.... 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. It is colossal in its pretentiousness. The thought of it almost shatters me.

For a hundred years or more the world, *our* world, has been dying. And not one man, in the last hundred years or so, has been crazy enough to put a bomb up the asshole of creation and set it off.... We are going to put it down – the evolution of this world which has died but which has not been buried. We are swimming on the face of time and all else has drowned, is drowning, or will drown. It will be enormous, the Book. There will be oceans of space in which to move about, to perambulate, to sing, to dance, to climb, to bathe, to leap somersaults, to whine, to rape, to murder.... We have no need of genius – genius is dead. We have need of strong hands, for spirits who are willing to give up the ghost and put on flesh. . . .

(33-34)

In this diatribe Miller overtly returns to those interests of his which have perhaps only been alluded to up to this point. Brimming with arrogant energy, Miller and Boris go so far as to invent “a new cosmogony”, a virtual act of self-deification. They intend to compile a book which will simultaneously introduce a new world as it hails the end of “*our* world”. In this, Miller also draws on Lawrence’s conception of the writer as a terrorist who throws bombs or, in Miller’s words, “put[s]...[it] up the asshole of creation”. If this bomb is destructive, it is also brings about rejuvenation – filled with “vital fluid”, it brings moisture to the implicitly dry world “which has died but not been buried”. Miller’s new world is a young world, without social restraints, as is indicated by the coexistence of, for instance, “sing[ing] and “rape”. It is a return to a body-life – based, presumably, on the morality of the blood.

When we next find Miller it is at the house of Tania and Sylvester, where, listening to the voices from a social gathering “downstairs” (36) – *beneath* him? – he comes to the realisation that

[i]t is no accident that propels people like us to Paris. Paris is simply an artificial stage, a revolving stage that permits the spectator to glimpse all phases of the conflict. Of itself Paris initiates no dramas. They are begun elsewhere. Paris is simply an obstetrical instrument that tears the living embryo from the womb and puts it in the incubator. Paris is the cradle of artificial births.

(35)

Paris is ambiguous, in spite of its essentially negative presentation here. An “artificial stage”, on which people arrange themselves into a variety of tableaux, it nevertheless offers its own insights into “all phases of the conflict”. Like some laboratory, it becomes a disembodied space in which people can bring their personal dramas, “begun elsewhere”, to a climax, and give birth to their identities. Forcing the birth, however, also renders it “artificial”. The danger of this is perhaps most clearly encapsulated in Miller’s image of his friend Cronstadt giving birth to a poem, “a big, golden bell of a poem without a tongue” (37). Most of Miller’s acquaintances, in fact, are frustrated or failed artists, like Carl, who even questions the “use of

putting words together”: “I can be a writer without writing, can’t I?” (57) But Miller’s clearest insights frequently stem from details in the backdrop to these dramas, such as when Miller turns his back on “a beautiful woman who has come to look at the apartment” (37), another rich American with artistic ambitions, to look out the window:

I stand at the window with my back to her watching a sparrow pecking at a fresh turd. Amazing how easily the sparrow is provided for.... The sparrow is hopping frantically from one cobblestone to another. Truly herculean efforts, if you stop to examine closely. Everywhere there is food lying about – in the gutter, I mean.

(37-38)

This is a good example of how Miller merges sincere reflection with blasphemous humour. While demystifying the extent of God’s grace as provider, Miller nevertheless sanctions that notion – to a large extent, the observation is an implicit criticism of those behind him, and possibly even himself. While nourishment is “[e]verywhere”, it is out in the street, or the “gutter”, and it requires the same “herculean efforts” the sparrow demonstrates. It is a criticism of the sheltered, arranged and comfortable “artistic” lives that many in Paris lead. Soon afterwards, Miller will find himself out on the street again.

Taking to the streets and “[p]rowling around aimlessly” (43), a strange mixture of scavenger and peripatetic “philosopher”, Miller records the sights, sounds and smells registered on his senses, which seem super-attuned. Street-life is presented as vibrant, although Miller is clear to stress that it only obscures the dead social structure which underlies it:

Pass the Square de Furstenberg. Looks different now, at high noon. The other night when I passed by it was deserted, bleak, spectral. In the middle of the square four black trees that have not yet begun to blossom. Intellectual trees, nourished by the paving stones. Like T. S. Eliot’s verse.

(45)

In this realm, fed on the atmosphere of stale and weary intellectualism, even the trees fail to “blossom”. To Miller, intellectualism is *dry*, and thus a danger to life. Thence his horror when, in a bookstore window, he spots “[a] treatise on the philosophy of Joan Miró. The *philosophy*, mind you!” (46) Paris now suddenly appears as a “sort of human dump heap which has been filled in with cinders and dry garbage.... A fetid odor seeps from the walls, the odor of a mildewed mattress. Europe – medieval, grotesque, monstrous: a symphony in B-mol” (47). As an antidote to this Miller now presents, in the form of a memory of a prostitute by the name of Germaine, the revitalising power of sex. Germaine is unceremoniously called “a whore all the way through” (52), and Miller in no way subtracts from the squalor of her life, and those of her colleagues, but, unromantic as his presentation is, their intercourse has a marked effect on the both of them:

[S]uddenly she dropped the towel and, advancing toward me leisurely, she commenced rubbing her pussy affectionately, stroking it with her two hands, caressing it, patting it. There was something about her eloquence at that moment and the way she thrust that rosebush under my nose which remains unforgettable; she spoke of it as if it were some extraneous object which she had acquired at great cost.... Her words imbued it with a peculiar fragrance; it was no longer just her private organ, but a treasure, a magic, potent treasure, a God-given thing – and none the less so because she traded it day in and day out for a few pieces of silver.... That Sunday afternoon, with its poisonous breath of spring in the air, everything clicked again.... I liked her so much that after dinner we went back to the hotel again and took another shot at it. “For love”, this time. And again that big, bushy thing of hers worked its bloom and magic.

(50)

Here we find the usual stress on sex as a kind of magical, chthonic ritual, which ensures that “everything clicked again”. But what also emerges here, in curious fashion, is the power of language to define the self. Germaine distinguishes herself and, more specifically, her genitals, from the ranks of other prostitutes (and all other women), by creating a personality, “a peculiar fragrance” through “words”. This results in a few hours of communication and communion beyond the realm of sex itself, in which Miller takes her out to dinner. After that, their sexual intercourse completely loses its commercial *raison d’être* as they go back to the hotel, once more, “[f]or love’, this time”.

Miller soon announces his “last meal at [Sylvester] the dramatist’s home.... One by one I’ve fucked myself out of all these free meals which I had planned so carefully” (61). Having lived off his wealthier acquaintances, he is suddenly put out in the cold. After a lengthy description of a torturous dinner, which Sylvester, having “just come back from Broadway with a heart full of love” (63), dominates with his “[d]ry, brittle voice” (64), we suddenly find Miller in humbler surroundings:

It is a communal life I have been living for the last few weeks. I have had to share myself with others, principally with some crazy Russians, a drunken Dutchman, and a big, Bulgarian woman named Olga. Of the Russians there are chiefly Eugene and Anatole.

(67)

This change in fortunes places Miller among the poor, where the struggle for survival takes uppermost priority, and life is, in essence, reduced to a kind of slavery. In spite of his own disgust at their lifestyle, Miller nevertheless displays a great amount of empathy with his compatriots:

Poor Eugene! He looks about the room at the few sticks of furniture, at the dirty bedsheets and the wash basin with the dirty water still in it, and he says: “I am a slave!” Every day he says it, not once, but a dozen times. And then he takes his guitar from the wall and sings.

(68)

Eugene's singing is an attempt at vindicating his life, but, as Miller points out, he always plays "the same song" (69). The effect of such surroundings on Miller finds expression in the form of a nightmarish and apocalyptic dream-vision of reduction and death, in which the flow of life, like the flow of the Seine, has stopped:

Looking into the Seine I see mud and desolation, street lamps drowning, men and women choking to death, the bridges covered with houses, slaughterhouses of love. A man is standing against a wall with an accordion strapped to his belly; his hands are cut off at the wrists, but the accordion writhes between his stumps like a sack of snakes. The universe has dwindled; it is only a block long and there are no stars, no trees, no rivers. The people who live here are dead; they make chairs which other people sit on in their dreams. In the middle of the street is a wheel and in the hub of the wheel a gallows is fixed. People already dead are trying to mount the gallows, but the wheel is turning too fast. . . .

(70)

Miller's vision of "[p]eople already dead" bent on suicide is a vision of modern society, from which all sense of mystery has disappeared, to the extent that the universe "is only a block long", *known*. In this realm the artist finds his hands cut off. Perhaps Miller's vision of the accordion "writh[ing]...like a sack of snakes" is a vision of the postmodernist work of art without author or creator. At any rate, in his distress, Miller turns to his only source of solace, namely the enigmatic individual: "Something was needed to put me right with myself. Last night I discovered it: *Papini*" (70). Like Ursula and Anna Brangwen, Miller is enamoured of enigmatic individuals, often incommensurate with the world⁵: "It doesn't matter to me that he's a chauvinist, a little Christer, or a nearsighted pedant. As a failure he is marvellous. . . . The books he read – at eighteen!" (70-71) Reading *Papini* even brings Miller to call himself "an artist" again – "So be it" – and when he returns to the streets it is to find the Seine

still swollen, muddy, streaked with lights. I don't know what it is that rushes up in me at the sight of this dark, swift-moving current, but a great exultation lifts me up, affirms the deep wish that is in me never to leave this land. . . . A man does not need to be rich, nor even a citizen, to feel this way about Paris.

(73-74)

Rejuvenated and inspired, Miller once again senses in Paris the very current of life, "muddy" as it may be, that attracted him to it in the first place. In contrast to Paris he now recalls "cold, glittering, malign" (74) New York, "[a] whole city erected over a hollow pit of nothingness" (74), the place where his own drama began.

Miller now realises that the one thing he does not want to do is "to go back to America, to be put in double harness again, to work the treadmill. No, I prefer to be a poor man of Europe.

⁵ Miller's list of these is vast, and includes religious figures, philosophers, artists and writers, as well as characters from his own life, especially his childhood – all are treated with a more or less equal amount of veneration.

God knows, I'm poor enough; it only remains to be a man" (76). He next hooks up with another Russian, Serge, but after one night in his hallway, decides to take to the streets again: "I'm free – that's the main thing. . . . Light as a bird I flit from one quarter to another. It's as though I've been released from prison. I look at the world with new eyes. Everything interests me profoundly" (79). Trusting to luck, Miller eventually manages to get a franc from an acquaintance on the street, and to top it up, he also finds a ticket to a concert in a "lavabo". There is no deliberation about what he is to do; abandoned to the flow of events around him, Miller, "[l]ight as a feather", goes to "the Salle Gaveau" (80). Hyper-sensitised due to his severe hunger, much like the narrator in Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*, one of Miller favourite novels, his experience of the concert is a memorable one:

Even before the music begins there is that bored look on people's faces. . . . My mind is curiously alert; it's as though my skull had a thousand mirrors inside it. My nerves are taut, vibrant! the notes are like glass balls dancing on a billion jets of water. I've never been to a concert on such an empty belly. Nothing escapes me, not even the tiniest pin falling. It's as though I had no clothes on and every pore of my body was a window and all the windows open and the light flooding my gizzards. I can feel the light curving under the vault of my ribs and my ribs hanging there over a hollow nave trembling with reverberations. How long this lasts I have no idea; I have lost all sense of time and place. After what seems like an eternity there follows an interval of semiconsciousness balanced by such a calm that I feel a great lake inside me, a lake of iridescent sheen, cool as jelly; and over this lake, rising in great swooping spirals, there emerge flocks of birds of passage with long slim legs and brilliant plumage. Flock after flock surge up from the cool, still surface of the lake and, passing under my clavicles, lose themselves in the white sea of open space. And then slowly, very slowly, as if an old woman in a white cap were going the rounds of my body, slowly the windows are closed and my organs drop back into place.

(81)

Abandoned to the music, Miller is transported; he experiences a sacred instant which takes him beyond the bonds of "time and place". It is a dissolution by light which counters the frequent squalor of life hitherto experienced by him. The music stops and Miller comes to himself, but he finds, through the rest of the concert, that the music also starts to break through the bored inattention of the rest of the audience – "the second number goes off like a top", and "[b]y the time we get to the Debussy number the atmosphere is completely poisoned" (82). It becomes clear that music holds the power to rouse people from their inattentive lives:

In the Spanish number the house was electrified. Everybody sat on the edge of his seat – the drums woke them up. I thought when the drums started it would keep up forever. I expected to see people fall out of the boxes or throw their hats away. There was something heroic about it and he could have driven us stark mad, Ravel, if he had wanted to. But that's not Ravel. Suddenly it all died down. It was as if he remembered, in the midst of his antics, that he had on a cutaway suit. He arrested himself. A great mistake, in my humble opinion. Art consists in going the full length. If you start with the drums you end with the TNT. Ravel sacrificed something for form, for a vegetable

that people must digest before going to bed.

(83)

Initially feeling the promise of a Bacchic state in the music, Miller is ultimately disappointed by what he senses to be a fear of going too far on the part of the composer, a submission to “form”. While the drums wake up the audience, the composition does not really keep anyone from “going to bed” at the end of the day. Miller leaves the hall wishing for some cataclysm, and the language dissolves as he dozes off.

Next we are introduced to some of Miller’s Indian (Hindu) acquaintances, Nanantatee and Kepi. In both of these individuals are registered, once again, the regressive effect of modern society. Nanantee’s “crooked arm” (88), and “swollen glands in the armpits” (89) symbolises his spiritual decay – even his religion is reduced to “a pure commercial relationship” (89). Kepi, on the other hand, has “no ambition except to get a fuck every night” (92). Even when a young man from India, “one of Ghandi’s men” (96), arrives, he turns out to have “been contaminated by the cheap idealism of the Americans.... His ideal would be to Americanize India” (99). When Miller is called on to take him to “a whorehouse” (96), he obliges, and becomes involved in yet another picaresque scrape as the unfortunate fellow unwittingly defecates in a bidet, something which has the Madame up in arms. Later, in yet another “whorehouse”, an intoxicated Miller draws on this experience in yet another lengthy transport:

There is a sort of subdued pandemonium in the air, a note of repressed violence.... My whole being was responding to the dictates of an ambience which it had never before experienced; that which I would call myself seemed to be contracting, condensing, shrinking from the stale, customary boundaries of the flesh whose perimeter knew only the modulations of the nerve ends.

And the more substantial, the more solid the core of me became, the more delicate and extravagant appeared the close, palpable reality out of which I was being squeezed.... For the fraction of a second perhaps I experienced that utter clarity which the epileptic, it is said, is given to know. In that moment I lost completely the illusion of time and space: the world unfurled its drama simultaneously along a meridian which had no axis. In this sort of hair-trigger eternity I felt that everything was justified.... On the meridian of time there is no injustice: there is only the poetry of motion creating the illusion of truth and drama....

And so I think what a miracle it would be if th[e] miracle which man attends eternally should turn out to be nothing but these two enormous turds which the faithful disciple dropped in the *bidet*....

Somehow the realization that nothing was to be hoped for had a salutary effect upon me. For weeks and months, for years, in fact, all my life I had been looking forward to something happening, some intrinsic event that would alter my life, and now suddenly, inspired by the absolute hopelessness of everything, I felt relieved.... Nothing that had happened to me thus far had been sufficient to destroy me; nothing had been destroyed except my illusions. I myself was intact. The world was intact.... I made up my mind I would hold on to nothing, that I would expect nothing, that henceforth I would live as an animal, a beast of prey, a rover, a plunderer.... At the extreme limits of his spiritual

being man finds himself again naked as a savage.... One must burrow into life again in order to put on flesh. The word must become flesh; the soul thirsts.... The dawn is breaking on a new world, a jungle world in which the lean spirits roam with sharp claws. If I am an hyena I am a lean and hungry one: I go forth to fatten myself.

(101-104)

From his vision Miller formulates the intention to live completely in the present, in the way that an animal does, although it is clear that such a reversion to an almost Lawrentian instinctual life will also nourish the soul. It involves an abandonment to the Kerouac-like “poetry of motion”, which is also an abandonment to vital life. Miller’s violent journey has stripped him of illusions, and he finds his innermost “core”. It is a kind of rebirth, and Miller now goes “forth to fatten myself”.

We next find Miller paying a visit to his friend Van Norden, a columnist at an English Paris paper, whom he is to help move. A sex fiend, Van Norden’s obsession seems to be informed by his world-weariness, something which is brought to our attention straight away: “He wakes up cursing himself, or cursing the job, or cursing life. He wakes up utterly bored and discomfited, chagrined to think that he did not die overnight” (105). Outshining Miller in both his obscenity and sexual encounters, Van Norden is to be taken an example of a stunted individual – his obsession does not allow him to tap into the spiritually fecundating experience that sex offers. His spiritual bankruptcy is reflected in his physical decay, a nightmarish loss of teeth: “‘My teeth are all rotten,’ he says, gargling his throat.... He opens his mouth wide and pulls his lower lip down. ‘See that? Pulled out six yesterday’” (106). He talks non-stop, releasing a barrage of judgements queries, anecdotes – all about “cunt” (106) – while Miller essentially assumes the role of a silent audience, joining the reader, so to speak. Van Norden himself comes to admit that “[y]ou sort of rot here” (111), but essentially he only blames his surroundings – the “climate”, the hotel, county, job, “cunt”, even “the fucking bread they give you to eat here” (106). Later on he also admits that sex serves only a narcotic function for him: “That’s all I want of them [women] – to forget myself” (134). This is precisely why he shies away from any emotional investment in the sexual act – morbidly afraid of women, he claims that “they want your soul too” (134). It is at this point that an amused narrative voice returns:

Whenever I heard the word soul from his lips I would get hysterical; somehow it seemed like a false coin.... In a sense Van Norden is mad, of that I’m convinced. His one fear is to be left alone, and this fear is so deep and persistent that even when he is on top of a woman, even when he has welded himself to her, he cannot escape the prison which he has created for himself.

(134-135)

Van Norden is seen as essentially soulless, a condition which simultaneously forces him to be in other people’s company and makes it impossible for him to achieve any kind of vital relation

with them. Living in “fear”, he is a limited being, arrested by “the prison which he has created for himself” – his only “creation”, then, is negative and self-defeating. Prodded by Miller to state what he “want[s] of a woman” (135), he is forced to admit that what he craves is in essence a sacred experience: “When eventually he succeeds in stammering out a few broken phrases it’s with the conviction that behind his words lies an overwhelming futility. ‘I want to be able to surrender myself to a woman,’ he blurts out. ‘I want her to take me out of myself’” (135). The very possibility of this occurring is, of course, precluded by his own self-loathing and his virulent misogyny: “Jesus, I hate myself! But I hate these bastardly cunts even more” (136). Our lengthy introduction to Van Norden reaches a kind of climax in a depressing incident. Having taken Miller out to dinner, he picks up a prostitute, promising Miller that “she’ll take the both of us for fifteen francs” (145). As the proceedings start, Miller suddenly comes under the impression of the emptiness of the experience:

We haven’t any passion either of us. And as for her, one might as well ask her to produce a diamond necklace as to show a spark of passion. But there’s the fifteen francs and something has to be done about it. It’s like a state of war: the moment the condition is precipitated nobody thinks of anything but peace, about getting it over with. And yet nobody has the courage to lay down his arms....

As I watch Van Norden tackle her, it seems to me that I’m looking at a machine whose cogs have slipped. Left to themselves, they could go on this way forever, grinding and slipping, with nothing happening. Until a hand shuts the motor off. The sight of them coupled like a pair of goats without the least spark of passion, grinding and grinding away for no reason except the fifteen francs, washes away every bit of feeling I have except the inhuman one of satisfying my curiosity. The girl is lying on the edge of the bed and Van Norden is bent over her like a satyr.... As long as that spark of passion is missing there is no human significance in the performance.... And these two are like a machine which has slipped its cogs. It needs the touch of a human hand to set it right.

(148-149)

Ever the buffoon, Miller proceeds to completely take the wind out of Van Norden’s sails by “tickling him in the rump” (149), providing a comic “touch of a human hand”, but this scene remains important because it provides a critique of the desperate levels to which the sexual act can be reduced. Mechanical, dogged, cold and commercial, there is nothing in the experience to vindicate it, and Miller is led to define Van Norden as “a poor maimed bastard” (149) returned from a war.

If Van Norden is an example of the pathology to which the modern individual can be driven, Miller’s new job, as proof-reader at the same paper, allows him to get an intimation of social degeneration across the globe:

The world is brought right under my nose and all that is requested of me is to punctuate the calamities. There is nothing in which these slick guys upstairs do not put their fingers: no joy, no misery passes unnoticed. They live among the hard facts of life,

reality, as its called. It is the reality of a swamp and they are the frogs who have nothing better to do than to croak. The more they croak the more real life becomes. Lawyer, priest, doctor, politician, newspaperman – these are the quacks with their fingers on the pulse of the world. A constant atmosphere of calamity. It's marvellous.

(150-151)

It is with a certain amount of disdain that Miller considers the allegiance to the “hard facts of life”, and the belief that these constitute “reality”, yet he also clearly enjoys the opportunity to gain some overall sense of the cataclysmic state of the world. Going through reports ranging from the absurdly inconsequential to the tragic, Miller is once again brought to the realisation that one should live “[d]ay by day” (155): “Above all, never despair... Which is what I try to din into Carl and Van Norden every night. A world without hope, but no despair” (155-156). He goes on to paint a vivid picture of this “world without hope”, climaxing with his being “propositioned by a pregnant woman” (166). Turning her away, Miller wryly remarks that

I have never seen a place like Paris for varieties of sexual provender.... A missing tooth or a nose eaten away or a fallen womb, any misfortune that aggravates the natural homeliness of the female, seems to be regarded as added spice, a stimulant for the jaded appetites of the male.

I am speaking naturally of that world which is peculiar to the big cities, the world of men and women whose last drop of juice has been squeezed out by the machine – the martyrs of modern progress. It is this mass of bones and collar buttons that the painter finds so difficult to put flesh on.

(166)

This description also brings Van Norden to mind, and closes off the focus on the general squalor of modern life explored in the preceding pages. The artist – here, “the painter” – is revealed as a kind of hope, someone who, with effort, may manage to create a vision of life. This is, indeed, what we get as Miller drops in on a Matisse exhibition. After all that has gone before,

[i]t is only later, in the afternoon, when I find myself in an art gallery on the Rue de Sèze, surrounded by the men and women of Matisse, that I am drawn back again to the proper precincts of the human world. On the threshold of that big hall whose walls are now ablaze, I pause a moment to recover from the shock which one experiences when the habitual gray of the world is rent asunder and the color of life splashes forth in song and poem. I find myself in a world so natural, so complete, that I am lost. I have the sensation of being immersed in the very plexus of life, focal from whatever place, position or attitude I take my stance.... Only those who can admit the light to their gizzards can translate what is there in the heart....

In every poem by Matisse there is the history of a particle of human flesh which refused the consummation of death. The whole run of flesh, from hair to nails, expresses the miracle of breathing, as if the inner eye, in its thirst for a greater reality, had converted the pores of the flesh into hungry seeing mouths.... He it is, if any man today possess the gift, who knows how where to dissolve the human figure, who has the courage to sacrifice an harmonious line in order to detect the rhythm and murmur of the blood, who takes the light that has refracted inside him and lets it flood the keyboard of color. Behind the minutiae, the chaos, the mockery of life, he detects the

invisible pattern; he announces his discoveries in the metaphysical pigment of space.
(167-169)

It is up to the artist to breathe life into the human figure once again, and Matisse does so, Miller suggests, by “sacrificing” the boundaries of the human body “in order to detect the rhythm and murmur of the blood”. It is that “rhythm and murmur” which binds mankind to the chthonic flux of life, and only those who have “the courage” to abandon themselves, momentarily, to that flux stand to be rejuvenated, invested with new life. The artist also has to achieve this abandon – “admit[ting] the light to...his gizzards”, he also has to “let...[that light] flood” his medium – and since Matisse achieves this, he becomes a stable centre of humanity:

At the very hub of this wheel [the world] which is falling apart, is Matisse. And he will keep on rolling until everything that has gone to make up the wheel has disintegrated...

The wallpaper with which the men of science have covered the world of reality is falling to tatters.... But in Matisse, in the exploration of his brush, there is the trembling glitter of a world which demands only the presence of a female to crystallize the most fugitive aspirations. To come upon a woman offering herself outside a urinal, where there are advertised cigarette papers, rum, acrobats, horse races, where the heavy foliage of the trees breaks the heavy mass of walls and roofs, is an experience that begins where the boundaries of the known world leave off. In the evening now and then, skirting the cemetery walls I stumble upon the phantom odalisques of Matisse fastened to the trees, their tangled manes drenched with sap.... On its wobbly axle the wheel rolls steadily downhill; there are no brakes, no ball bearings, no balloon tires. The wheel is falling apart, but the revolution is intact. . . .

(169-171)

Catching fire himself, Miller bursts forth in a song of celebration which, although first centred on Matisse himself, eventually grows to include the “falling apart” of the wheel of the man-made world, of modern progress. In the spirit of tearing down the veils, or the “wallpaper”, Miller celebrates any intrusion of the chthonic into the social world, as is clear from his image of “a woman offering herself” in a place where nature, in the form of “heavy foliage”, breaks through the mass of human constructions. It is this kind of experience that takes man beyond the known.

As Miller continues on his picaresque journey, he gets a letter from Boris which reminds him of the way in which his friends always “made me feel that I was alive in the nineteenth century, a sort of atavistic remnant, a romantic shred, a soulful *Pithecanthropus erectus*” (174). For a while, he also forms a relationship with Tania, recently returned from Russia, where Sylvester remained, having “given up literature completely. He’s dedicated himself to the new Utopia” (175). He also thinks back to his early days in Paris, and his relationship with his wife, Mona. It is during this reminiscence that he remembers a visit to the Pension Orfila where Strindberg once stayed, and comes to ponder the nature of Paris as a site in which the drama of

the artist's coming into being – compared here to a Dantesque passing through the Inferno⁶ – is enacted:

I have learned what every madman discovers sooner or later; that there are no ready-made infernos for the tormented....

After leaving the Pension Orfila that afternoon...I began to reflect on the meaning of that inferno which Strindberg had so mercilessly depicted. And, as I ruminated, it began to grow clear to me, the mystery of his pilgrimage, the flight which the poet makes over the face of the earth and then, as if he had been ordained to re-enact a lost drama, the heroic descent into the very bowels of the earth, the dark and fearsome sojourn in the belly of the whale, the bloody struggle to liberate himself, to emerge clean of the past, a bright, gory sun god cast upon an alien shore. It was no longer a mystery to me why others (Dante, Rabelais, Van Gogh, etc., etc.) had made their pilgrimage to Paris.... Here all boundaries fade away and the world reveals itself for the mad slaughterhouse that it is.

(185-186)

Paris, then, is Miller's trial "in the belly of the whale" which precipitates a rebirth, a shedding of the past. He re-enacts Dante's archetypal journey through the inferno, in this case, Paris, lending an ear to the woeful cries of its inhabitants, yet passing through (like Whitman) without interfering. It is this journey, or pilgrimage, that leads to the artist's coming into being.

At this point Miller is suddenly retrenched, and he finds himself out on the street again. Performing a number of odd jobs for a variety of people, he comes to meet, first, "a spiritual-minded individual named Kruger, who was a sculptor and painter" (194), with whom he moves in. Through him, he also meets another painter, Mark Swift, and two new friends, Fillmore and Collins. When Kruger kicks Miller out, Fillmore takes him under his wing, and the two of them go off to Le Havre to visit Collins. Here Miller is treated to a fine romp which resuscitates his trust in the chthonic forces: "Sex was everywhere: it was slopping over, a neap tide that swept the props from under the city" (207). When he returns to Paris, it is with money in his pocket, courtesy of Collins, which he soon finds to be an encumbrance. Trying to plan how to spend it sensibly, "to husband my resources" (212), he only becomes miserable. Giving some of it away to a woman in distress, he suddenly feels that one "ought to atone for such unexpected bursts of goodness" (214), and does that by sleeping with another woman and then sneaking out when she's out of the room, stealing back his money. Next, he moves in with Fillmore, where they are soon joined by a Russian "princess", "Macha" (232), who claims homosexuality as a means of criticising the general treatment of women by men. When she leaves, Fillmore and Miller resume their reminiscences about the country of their birth,

⁶ Of course, there is also a reference here to Strindberg's own *Inferno*, in which he records his own mental collapse.

America. It is here that Miller makes one of his few bows to America as being the country which produced Walt Whitman:

In Whitman the whole American scene comes to life, her past and her future, her birth and her death. Whatever there is of value in America Whitman has expressed, and there is nothing more to be said. The future belongs to the machine, to the robots. He was the Poet of the Body and the Soul, Whitman. The first and the last poet. He is almost undecipherable today, a monument covered with rude hieroglyphs for which there is no key.... There is no equivalent in the languages of Europe for the spirit which he immortalized. Europe is saturated with art and her soil is full of dead bones and her museums are bursting with plundered treasures, but what Europe has never had is a free, healthy spirit, what you might call a MAN. Goethe is the nearest approach, but Goethe is a stuffed shirt, by comparison.

(241)

It is this “free, healthy spirit” that Miller wants to approach, and sometimes does. However, his world is wholly different from Whitman’s and, therefore, the “purity” of Whitmanesque exuberance is not possible – it inevitably becomes tainted with anger and violence. Still, the general spirit of Miller’s book is that of someone sounding his “barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” (“Song of Myself”, l. 1323), especially the historic roofs of Europe. “Poet of the Body and the Soul”, Whitman is an enigma to modernity, expressing himself in what Miller elsewhere called “the rude hieroglyph[s] of life which is art” (*Lawrence* 169). It is with this spirit that Miller fortifies himself against the “inner and outer cold” (241) of the Parisian winter, as opposed to relying, as do other Parisians, on the “protection and security” (242) of homes with “high walls,...bolts and shutters...[and] growling, evil-tongued, slatternly conciergès,... [i]n order that they may rot in comfort” (242).

It is in this state that Miller arrives at the most lengthy and comprehensive of his songs to the sacred instant, which takes off in a flurry of insane verbiage. Back at his temporary residence with Fillmore and “a couple of trollops” (247), Miller is about to engage himself with one of them when the sight of her genitals appears to tear the veil asunder and unleash the full force of chthonic energy upon him in the form of flood of archetypal images:

Suddenly I see a dark, hairy crack in front of me set in a bright, polished billiard ball; the legs are holding me like a pair of scissors. At a glance that dark, unstitched wound and a deep fissure in my brain opens up: all the images and memories that had been laboriously or absent-mindedly assorted, labeled, documented, filed, sealed and stamped break forth pell-mell like ants pouring out of a crack in the sidewalk; the world ceases to revolve, time stops, the very nexus of my dreams is broken and dissolved and my guts spill out in a grand schizophrenic rush, an evacuation that leaves me face to face with the Absolute. I see again the great sprawling mothers of Picasso, their breasts covered with spiders, their legend hidden deep in the labyrinth. And Molly Bloom lying on a dirty mattress for eternity. On the toilet door red chalk cocks and the madonna uttering the diapason of woe.... Wild, wild, utterly uncontrollable laughter, and that

crack laughing at me too, laughing through the mossy whiskers, a laugh that creases the bright polished surface of the billiard ball.

(247-248)

In a rush of chthonic dissolution, Miller comes “face to face with the Absolute”. In an uncanny (or deliberate) conflation of Lawrentian imagery, Miller stares into that “fissure” of Lawrence’s “Pomegranates” and “Figs”, which Keith Sagar (quoting Lawrence) defined as “any point where divinity erupts through the surface of our normally desacralized world, the world which man attempts to remake ‘round and finished like a billiard ball’” (221). This eruption partially takes the form of a divine, grotesque laughter which shatters man’s “finished” preconceptions.

When I look down into that crack I see an equation sign, the world at balance, a world reduced to zero and no trace of remainder. Not the zero on which Van Norden turned his flashlight, not the empty crack of the prematurely disillusioned man, but an Arabian zero rather, the sign from which spring endless mathematical worlds, the fulcrum which balances the stars and the light dreams and the machines lighter than air and the lightweight limbs and the explosives that produced them.

(249)

Through the “fissure” Miller has a glimpse of the Void, a void of endless possibilities rather than the spiritual void in which someone like Van Norden, with his pornographic “flashlight”, exists. Like a primary cause or fount of all creation, the zero (which also “recalls” the female genitals) stares Miller in the face – in the process his language becomes increasingly obscene and insistent, almost manic:

When I look down into this fucked-out cunt of a whore I feel the whole world beneath me, a world tottering and crumbling, a world used up and polished like a leper’s skull. If there were a man who dared say all that he thought of this world there would not be left him a square foot of ground to stand on.... There are always too many rotten pillars left standing, too much festering humanity for man to bloom. The superstructure is a lie and the foundation is a huge quaking fear.

(249)

Taking society to be based essentially on a deep-rooted fear of the Absolute, a fear which stifles the individual’s coming into being, Miller looks towards the artist as the terrorist who “dare[s] say all” and the mystic who dares to tap into the collective unconscious, as mankind’s hope for redemption:

If anyone knew what it meant to read the riddle of that thing which today is called a “crack” or a “hole,” if any one had the least feeling of mystery about the phenomena which are labeled “obscene,” this world would crack asunder. It is the obscene horror, the dry, fucked-out aspect of things which makes this civilization look like a crater. It is this great yawning gulf of nothingness which the creative spirits and mothers of the race carry between their legs. When a hungry, desperate spirit appears and makes the guinea pigs squeal it is because he knows that beneath the hard carapace of indifference there is concealed the ugly gash, the wound that never heals. And he puts the live wire right between the legs; he hits below the belt, scorches the very gizzards.... He hitches his dynamo to the tenderest parts; if only blood and pus gush forth, it is something. The

dry, fucked-out crater is obscene. More obscene than anything is inertia. More blasphemous than the bloodiest oath is paralysis. If there is only a gaping wound left then it must gush forth though it produce nothing but toads and bats and homunculi.

Everything is packed into a second which is either consummated or not consummated. The earth is not an arid plateau of health and comfort, but a great sprawling female with velvet torso that swells and heaves with ocean billows; she squirms beneath a diadem of sweat and anguish. Naked and sexed she rolls among the clouds in the violet light of the stars.... What is this chaff we chew in our sleep if it is not the remembrance of fang-whorl and star cluster.

(250-251)

Cruelly and violently, the artist, who, like the “mothers”, also carries the “great yawning gulf of nothingness...between the...legs”, performs the resuscitation of the individual “between the legs”, on the genitals. As long as the “crater” – and this image contains the promise of a volcanic force – is not “dry”, there is a semblance of life. For Miller, like Lawrence, sex (when taken beyond its mechanics) *is* the life force, humanity’s link to the chthonic. They also share a very non-Rousseauist view of chthonic nature as being vibrant *and* violent – hence Miller’s coupling of the predatory “fang-whorl” with the rather transcendental “star-cluster” as “memories” embedded in the unconscious of the species. The encounter with the prostitutes now completely fading into the background, Miller’s song continues with growing exuberance:

Today I awoke from a sound sleep with curses of joy on my lips, with gibberish on my tongue, repeating to myself like a litany – “*Fay ce que voudras! . . . fay ce que voudras!*”; Do anything, but let it produce joy. Do anything, but let it yield ecstasy. So much crowds my head when I say this: images, gay ones, terrible ones, maddening ones.... But above all, *the ecstasy!*....

Once I thought that to be human was the highest aim a man could have, but I see now that it was meant to destroy me. Today I am proud to say that I am *inhuman*, that I belong not to men and governments, that I have nothing to do with creeds and principles. I have nothing to do with the creaking machinery of humanity – I belong to the earth.... And I join my slime, my excrement, my madness, my ecstasy to the great circuit which flows through the subterranean vaults of the flesh.... Side by side with the human race there runs another race of beings, the inhuman ones, the race of artists who, goaded by unknown impulses, take the lifeless mass of humanity and by the fever and ferment with which they imbue it turn this soggy dough into bread and the bread into wine and the wine into song. Out of the dead compost and the inert slag they breed a song that contaminates.

(253-256)

Humanity being defined by the social structures they have invented, Miller distances himself from them and assigns himself to “the race of artists”, those who, in terms of his imagery at least, reproduce the fecundating processes of the natural cycle. It is in this light that we should consider the image of a decaying world created throughout *Tropic of Cancer* (by the very title Miller suggests decay and disease) – the decay in itself holds the promise of new growth, as long as this process is not arrested. In a chthonic version of Whitman’s self-deification, Miller is dissolved in a sacred instant which frees him from the imposed definitions of humanity:

If I am inhuman it is because my world has slopped over its human bounds, because to be human seems like a poor, sorry, miserable affair, limited by the senses, restricted by moralities and codes, defined by platitudes and isms. I am pouring the juice of the grape down my gullet and I find wisdom in it, but my wisdom is not born of the grape, my intoxication owes nothing to wine. . . .

It may be that we are doomed, that there is no hope for us, *any of us*, but if that is so then let us set up a last agonizing, bloodcurdling howl, a screech of defiance, a war whoop! Away with lamentation! Away with elegies and dirges! Away with biographies and histories, and libraries and museums! Let the dead eat the dead. Let us living ones dance about the rim of the crater, a last expiring dance. But a dance!

(257-258)

Mankind is challenged and invited to a Dionysian celebration, a suicidal dance on the precipice – it is a call for a complete surrender to the present, an affirmation of life to the point of death. This dance, as Miller makes clear in finally closing off his “evacuation” (248), is a release into the chthonic flow which invests all expressions of life:

“I love everything that flows,” said the great blind Milton of our times. I was thinking of him this morning when I awoke with a great bloody shout of joy: I was thinking of his rivers and trees and all that world of night which he was exploring. Yes, I said to myself, I too love everything that flows: rivers, sewers, lava, semen, blood, bile, words, sentences. I love the kidney with its painful gallstones, its gravel and what-not; I love the urine that pours out scalding and the clap that runs endlessly; I love the words of hysterics and the sentences which flow on like dysentery and mirror all the sick images of the soul; I love the great rivers like the Amazon and Orinoco. . . . I love everything that flows, even the menstrual flow that carries away the seed unfecund. I love scripts that flow, be they hieratic, esoteric, perverse, polymorph, or unilateral. I love everything that flows, everything that has time in it and becoming, that brings us back to the beginning where there is never end. . . .

(258-259)

This apostrophe to the flow of life forms part of that very flow – in its excessive verbal run-downs *Tropic of Cancer* raves against stultifying form by unleashing the anarchy of the whole “truth”, even to the extent that it frequently condemns the narrator⁷. This assault of life in all its imperfect grandeur comes in the form of a flood which is simultaneously destructive (as in the archetypal biblical flood) and fecundating. And it is the individual’s release into that flood that precipitates survival and further growth.

As Christmas comes around, Miller finds himself leaving Paris for Dijon,

where I had been offered a trivial post as exchange professor of English, one of those Franco-American amity arrangements which is supposed to promote understanding and good will between sister republics. Fillmore was more elated than I by the prospect – he had good reason to be. For me it was just a transfer from one purgatory to another.

(260)

⁷ Even Kate Millett, in her sustained feminist attack on Miller’s oeuvre, recognised what one could call his “honest[y]” (295), although, in her estimation, it certainly also condemns him.

Just before he leaves, he and Fillmore pay a visit to a Catholic church, from which they are understandably ejected. On the train to Dijon, Miller thinks back to life in America “during the celebrated boom when, like thousands of others, I was caught with my pants down” (264). He recalls how he and another friend failed to elicit any charity from both a rabbi and a Catholic priest, and being manhandled by a policeman for sleeping in the park: “All over the States I wandered, and into Canada and Mexico. The same story everywhere. If you want bread you’ve got to get in harness, get in lock step. Over the earth a gray desert, a carpet of steel and cement. Production!” (267). These are the thoughts that go through his head as he finally arrives at Dijon, a desolate winter world, and “[s]tepping off the train I knew immediately that I had made a fatal mistake” (268). Jane Nelson calls Dijon “an entirely negative city” (41), a city of death, where everything is frozen. Allocated a cold cell, Miller finds himself subjected to set meals (announced by a gong) and rationed coal and wood, courtesy of “M. l’Econome” (270), who, like his colleagues, is known only by his function: “I didn’t know what the hell to expect next. Perhaps a spittoon. The whole thing smacked very much of preparation for a campaign; the only things missing were a knapsack and rifle – and a brass slug” (270). The entire episode is highly humorous as an exasperated Miller tries to come to terms with his predicament. Surrounded by “[t]he indifferent ones whom Dante had consigned to the vestibule of Hell” (274), Miller takes to teaching his pupils whatever comes to mind, partially in an attempt to alleviate “a scummy sterility hanging over the town, a fog of book-learning” (279). Unlike Ursula in *The Rainbow*, Miller never for a moment considers pandering to the interests of the educational status quo. As the stress of the isolation begins to tell, Miller is finally forced to ask, “Who am I? What am I doing here?” (283) – for the first time in *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller is forced to consider the full implications of these questions. A while later he arrives at an answer in the form of a realisation that he is not yet fully born: “Going back in a flash over all the women I’ve known. It’s like a chain which I’ve forged out of my own misery. Each one bound to the other. A fear of living separate, of staying born” (288). In this confession we witness Miller’s realisation that sex (an abandonment to flow), while serving an important role in the development of the individual, can also keep the individual from finally coming into being. This new realisation is dramatised, once Miller returns to Paris in the spring, in a somewhat sordid affair, when he assists Fillmore (who has suffered a mental collapse) in escaping from his violent French fiancée, Ginette. Disheartened and depressed, Fillmore yearns for America, and Miller, taking the situation in hand, puts him on a train to London. The money Fillmore leaves for Ginette he keeps for himself, and takes a cab-ride through Paris before getting off to walk along the river. Thinking back to America, he also wonders, for a moment, “what had ever happened to my wife” (317):

After everything had quietly sifted through my head a great peace came over me. Here, where the river gently winds through the girdle of the hills, lies a soil so saturated with the past that however far back the mind roams one can never detach it from its human background. Christ, before my eyes there shimmered such a golden peace that only a neurotic could dream of turning his head away. So quietly flows the Seine that one hardly notices its presence. It is always there, quiet and unobtrusive, like a great artery running through the human body. In the wonderful peace that fell over me it seemed as if I had climbed to the top of a high mountain; for a little while I would be able to look around me, to take in the meaning of the landscape.

Human beings make a strange fauna and flora. From a distance they appear negligible; close up they are apt to appear ugly and malicious. More than anything they need to be surrounded with sufficient space – space even more than time.

The sun is setting. I feel this river flowing through me – its past, its ancient soil, the changing climate. The hills gently girdle it about: its course is fixed.

(317-318)

Taking stock of his journey so far, Miller achieves a sense of peace, and arrives at a kind of Pisgah sight. It is important to note that, like Ursula at the end of *The Rainbow*, his journey is not complete, and he hasn't arrived at some final station. However, he has changed much during the course of the novel – moving from a state of atrophy to an abandonment to flow, Miller now arrives at a point where the flow runs “through” him, “quiet and unobtrusive”, yet “always there”. Sitting by the river, Miller is of it while remaining a separate entity. He is, one might say, vitally connected to his circumambient universe, and he realises that the individual requires the Whitmanesque “space...that the soul loves” (Whitman, Preface 5). As the sun sets on this drama, we find the “changing climate” contradicting Boris's initial prediction that “[t]he weather will not change” (9), and Miller's final image is a rejection of the destructive flood which he unleashed in the form of the book – the vital flow of the river is contained, “gently girdle[d]... about” by the hills. This image is comprehensively marries the opposing principles of flow and discreteness.

CHAPTER 8: BREAKING OUT TO A MODERN SELF IN *ON THE ROAD*

Like *Tropic of Cancer*, *On the Road* is narrated by a first person narrator – in this case a young writer called Sal Paradise – who recounts the tale of his spiritual journey to a new sense of self. However, its impact is less immediate than that of Miller's book because it is written exclusively in the past tense, i.e. from the point of view of a narrator looking back on previous experiences. It also differs from both *Tropic of Cancer* and *The Rainbow* in two significant ways: firstly, this inner journey is consistently dramatised in terms of physical, outer, travels, and secondly, most of this journey (apart from the first and last parts) are undertaken with a friend and guide, Dean Moriarty (based on Neal Cassady), who plays a kind of Virgil to Sal's Dante. The world of "the road", about which Sal initially has a number of romantic illusions, is Dean's world. While Sal initially enters this world by himself, Dean soon becomes his guide – by the end of the novel, however, Sal's journey extends beyond the point that Dean can go, and their paths diverge. In this, *On the Road*'s basic structure mirrors that of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, but it differs from it in the sense that "the road" offers both joy and sorrow, exuberance and despair, and the fact that Dean's character also shows development through the course of the novel (even though this development does not form the focus of the book and is therefore not comprehensively explored). In their picaresque travels through the American landscape, Sal and Dean share a search for "IT", the sacred instant, but perhaps also the "IT" which Lawrence identified as "the deepest *whole* self of man" ("Spirit" 13) and the "American whole soul" (14).

On the Road is divided into five parts, four of which deal with four separate journeys undertaken by Sal (three of which are in the company of Dean), while the fifth concludes the novel by briefly presenting the aftermath to these journeys. Each of these parts is also concluded with a "vision", a portentous and dream-like occurrence which seems to summarise, conclude or consolidate the experiences on the given journey. The first part essentially deals with Sal's rejection of a "static" life in New York and his subsequent solitary introduction to "the road". But even though Dean plays no clear part in this first decisive journey, it is suggested that Sal's introduction to Dean is one of the major factors in imbuing him with the energy to break away from New York and take to the road. This much is also suggested by *On the Road*'s opening, which identifies Sal's friendship with Dean as being central to the action and theme of the novel:

I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about, except that it had something to do with the miserably weary split-up and my feeling that everything was dead. With the coming of

Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road. Before that I'd often dreamed of going West to see the country, always vaguely planning and never taking off. Dean is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles. First reports came to me through Chad King, who'd shown me a few letters from him written in a New Mexico reform school.... This was way back, when Dean was not the way he is today, when he was a young jailkid shrouded in mystery. Then the news came that Dean was out of reform school and was coming to New York for the first time; also there was talk that he had just married a girl called Marylou.

(3-4)

As in *Tropic of Cancer*, the opening lines present a state of stasis and death¹, although here it is immediately offset by the figure of Dean, and his promise of "life on the road". There is a clear life-death juxtaposition here, between the death of stasis and the life of movement, "the road", and the Whitmanesque West. While, initially, the road perhaps signifies purposeful travelling and searching, it eventually (as the book proceeds) becomes an end in itself – eternally open-ended – a negation of the stasis (and dead end) referred to in the first lines. It is all about taking action and *moving*, as opposed to "dream[ing]" and "vaguely planning", a "precept" which is ratified much later in the book when Sal refers to the "one and noble function of the time, *move*" (133). Dean is immediately identified as a native of the road, associated with criminality, i.e. life outside the boundaries of convention, and, as the narration continues and Sal finally meets him, verbal and physical excess, and a sexual appetite, "for to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on" (4). Sex equals life, and is seen as one of the major manifestations of Dean's exuberant homage to life, which soon infects Sal as the two start hanging out together:

As we rode in the bus in the weird phosphorescent void of the Lincoln Tunnel we leaned on each other with fingers waving and yelled and talked excitedly, and I was beginning to get the bug like Dean. He was simply a youth tremendously excited with life, and though he was a con-man, he was only conning because he wanted so much to live.... And a kind of holy lightning I saw flashing from his excitement and his visions, which he described so torrentially that people in buses looked around to see the "overexcited nut." In the West he'd spent a third of his time in the poolhall, a third in jail and a third in the public library.

(6-7)

The intensity of Dean's excitement is such that it takes on the quality of a religious transport, taken by others as a sign of "madness". "Mad" will indeed become a byword in the course of the book, and refer precisely to this "religious" exuberance. Also significant is the marriage, in Dean, of three separate types, namely the street-wise pool hustler (surviving with the ingenuity

¹ While *The Rainbow* certainly does not have such an opening, many of Lawrence's books, like *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and especially the picaresque *Aaron's Rod*, certainly do. Aaron's response, for instance, is also to take to the road, and eventually he also meets up with a guide and friend in the form of Rawdon Lilly.

of the frontiersman), the convicted criminal or outlaw, hunted and ostracised by society, and the self-taught literary “scholar”. It is this combination that accounts for Dean’s appeal, and his status, ratified later, as a *beat* character.

Initially, however, Dean’s main New York companion is not Sal, but Carlo Marx (based on Allen Ginsberg). In her introduction to *On the Road*, Anne Charters suggests that the earlier draft of the book made overt suggestions to a homosexual quality to this relationship (xxv), but it is clear, regardless, that their connection is really made on another level:

A tremendous thing happened when Dean met Carlo Marx. Two keen minds that they are, they took to each other at the drop of a hat. Two piercing eyes glanced into two piercing eyes – the holy con-man with the shining mind, and the sorrowful poetic con-man with the dark mind that is Carlo Marx. From that moment on I saw very little of Dean, and I was a little sorry too. Their energies met head-on, I was a lout compared, I couldn’t keep up with them. The whole mad swirl of everything that was to come began then; it would mix up all my friends and all I had left of my family in a big dust cloud over the American Night.... They rushed down the street together, digging everything in the early way they had, which later became so much sadder and perceptive and blank. But then they danced down the street like dingedodies, and I shambled after as I’ve been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes “Awwww!”

(7-8)

Dean appears to Sal, in many ways, as the kind of glutton for life that Miller’s narrator often purports to be, a gluttony reflected in the rambling pace of the narrator’s language.

Significantly, Sal is identified, at this stage, as someone who tries to tap into that energy vicariously, through Dean, and others like him. This soon changes into emulation as Sal takes to the road himself. Sal sees in Dean the promise of a truly “American” approach to artistic creation, an escape from the intellectual, “European” intelligence of his other friends:

Dean’s intelligence was every bit as formal and shining and complete, without the tedious intellectualness. And his “criminality” was not something that sulked and sneered; it was a wild yea-saying overburst of American joy; it was Western, the west wind, an ode from the Plains, something new, long prophesied, long a-coming.... A western kinsman of the sun, Dean.

(10)

In Sal’s eyes, Dean is a completely Whitmanesque figure, and, inspired by him, “hear[s] a new call and see[s] a new horizon” (10). He decides, against the advice of his aunt, with whom he stays, to respond to that call and to give free reign to his desires. His expectations of the life on the road, however, are too romantic, and his romanticism which will continually be tested on his first journey: “Somewhere along the line I knew there’d be girls, visions, everything;

somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me” (11). Sal soon finds that this line is perhaps not as straight as he expected it to be; neither is the “pearl”, if there even is one, simply “handed” to him. The road is a trial.

Under the “pretext” of joining – via Denver – “old prep-school friend” (11) Remi Boncoeur in San Francisco, and shipping out on an ocean liner, Sal eventually takes to the road in “July 1947, having saved about fifty dollars from old veteran benefits” (11). Almost immediately his expectations of the road are shattered. We are told that

I’d been poring over maps of the United States in Paterson for months, even reading books about the pioneers and savoring names like Platte and Cimarron and so on, and on that roadmap was one long red line called Route 6 that led from the tip of Cape Cod clear to Ely, Nevada, and there dipped down to Los Angeles. I’ll just stay on 6 all the way to Ely, I said to myself and confidently started.

(12)

Having hitch-hiked all the way up to Route 6, however, this confidence is soon shattered as the rain comes down and the traffic remains negligible. When eventually someone (going back to New York) does stop to pick him up, he is told that his chances of catching a ride West from that point are extremely slim. Sal, recognising the sense in this, is forced to admit that “[i]t was my dream that screwed up, the stupid hearthside idea that it would be wonderful to follow one great red line across America instead of trying various roads and routes”(13). Being on the road means being open to trial by experimentation, to diversions and interruptions, and rejecting strictly linear thought. This attitude pervades *On the Road* itself – when an initially overzealous editor asked for certain changes, “Kerouac complained that she wanted ‘a road with all the curves out,’ whereas he wanted William Blake’s ‘crooked road of prophecy”” (Charters xxv). Sal Paradise is also made to take this “crooked road” and, his efforts at travelling a strait line undermined, he is forced to return to New York. The next morning he starts out anew, this time by taking a bus to Chicago, and then to Joliet. From there he starts hitch-hiking, with a growing sense of excitement, and a growing rate of success.

Before reaching Denver, where a whole group of Sal’s friends (including Dean and Carlo Marx) already are, Sal spends an afternoon catching up on some sleep in a squalid railway hotel in Des Moines. It is here that Sal has his first experience of self-alienation and dissolution as he has to readjust himself to the new life on which he has embarked:

I woke up as the sun was reddening; and that was the one distinct time in my life, the strangest moment of all, when I didn’t know who I was – I was far from home, haunted and tired with travel, in a cheap hotel room I’d never seen, hearing the hiss of the steam outside, and the creak of the old wood of the hotel, and footsteps upstairs, and all the sad sounds, and I looked at the cracked high ceiling and really didn’t now who I was

for about fifteen strange seconds. I wasn't scared; I was just somebody else, some stranger, and my whole life was a haunted life, the life of a ghost. I was halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future, and maybe that's why it happened right there and then, that strange red afternoon.

(17)

Sal wakes up into a transitional period, from day to night, and a transitional place, from East to West, and finds his sense of self displaced. It is in this state that he takes in all the lugubrious details of his surroundings, and perhaps has some inkling of the "haunted life" that the road may lead to. The reference to "a ghost" also anticipates Sal's encounter with the "Ghost of the Susquehanna" (103) towards the end of his first journey. This experience finally severs Sal from his old self – there is no going back now. Neither does he attempt to. Meeting a fellow hitch-hiker named Eddie, they continue West, while Sal takes in a vast range of characteristics of the American landscape. He finds that the road may present one with all kinds of options that had not been considered, as when he and Eddie are approached by a "tall, lanky fellow in a gallon hat" (22) and invited to join a carnival. He also finds his somewhat naïve trust in people challenged when "Eddie turn[s] out to be a pretty absent-minded pal of the road" (23), having no qualms about leaving Sal behind when someone pulls over and offers a ride for one. Sal is rewarded, a few rides later, with "[t]he greatest ride in my life...., a truck, with a flatboard at the back, with about six or seven boys sprawled out on it, and the drivers, two young blond farmers from Minnesota, were picking up every single soul they found on that road" (24). A rambling, precarious ride, it looks forward to some of Sal's adrenaline-producing rides with Dean. It also serves to bring him into contact with two hobos and fellow travellers, "Mississippi Gene and his charge" (25). Gene's name, linking him to the mighty river, also links him to the idea of flow. Unassuming and almost sage-like, Gene's response to the world is non-assertive and accepting, an abandon to eternal movement. This leads Sal to reflect that,

[a]lthough Gene was white, there was something of the wise and tired old Negro in him, and something very much like Elmer Hassel, the New York dope addict, in him, but a railroad Hassel, a travelling epic Hassel, crossing and recrossing the country every year, south in the winter and north in the summer, and only because he had no place he could stay without getting tired of it and because there was nowhere to go but everywhere, keep rolling under the stars.

(28)

Gene's life has something of the haunted quality that Sal momentarily experienced in the hotel room. There is an elegiac quality to the tone here, most certainly that of the reminiscing narrator and not the more youthful Sal of the adventure. Tim Hunt also considers the episode to be indicative of Sal's persisting naivety about life on the road:

He intuitively recognizes that Gene's ease and gentleness are a result of how little he demands from the world, but Sal is too optimistic and too sure of his own self-reliance to accept Gene as a guide or to accept Gene's gentle fatalism.... Sal does not

understand that Gene *is always where he is going* and, because he is without goals, able to respond calmly to whatever comes his way.

(20, *emphasis added*)

Gene is a Kerouac-like hero par excellence, a gentle and devout, somewhat sorrowful pilgrim living, almost imperceptibly, on the fringe of conventional society. He is perhaps a small step away from the horror of the “Ghost of the Susquehanna”, but that small step makes all the difference. Sal, however, with his bevy of goals and visualisations, can but appreciate Gene as yet another (if likeable) road type. These expectations of Sal’s keep on being deflated – the “girls” there were meant to be turn out, when he and another fellow traveller, Montana Slim, try to chat up some Cheyenne locals, to be “dumb and sullen” (34) and, more importantly, unresponsive. Finally approaching Denver, Sal also

pictured myself in a Denver bar that night, with all the gang, and in their eyes I would be strange and ragged and like the Prophet who has walked across the land to bring the dark Word, and the only Word I had was “Wow!”.... [A]nd here I was in Denver... I stumbled along with the most wicked grin of joy in the world, among the old bums and beat cowboys of Larimer Street.

(37, *emphasis added*)

Although Sal’s excitement and joyous hyperbole (“walked across the land”) is infectious, the reader soon realises that Sal is not so much received like a Prophet at all. Neither does he act like one – among his friends, Sal remains in the position of an appreciative witness, as when, somewhat later, he sits up all night listening to Dean and Carlo talk (48). Sal also finds that his expected party in a bar “with all the gang” will not materialise either, as Dean and Carlo are slowly being ostracised by the rest of his friends.

In spite of the underlying tensions between individuals, Sal’s trip to Denver essentially turns out to be one big party: “The following ten days were, as W. C. Fields said, ‘fraught with eminent peril’ – and mad” (40). He moves into a friend’s apartment, where he joins Roland Major, another writer from the group. Major is identified, like many of Sal’s New York friends, as the kind of person from which Sal will increasingly distance himself, even though they get along fine. He is described as sitting “in his silk dressing gown composing his latest Hemingwayan short story – a choleric, red-faced, pudgy hater of everything, who could turn on the warmest and most charming smile in the world when real life confronted him sweetly in the night” (40-41). Major, then, suffers from a studied and self-imposed cynicism which perverts and stifles his “true” self, which occasionally emerges when he is caught off guard. Between cultured references to his travels to France, he writes a short story about “the arty types...all over America, sucking up its blood” (41), little realising that he must qualify as one of them. He is also Dean’s natural enemy, with the result that Sal does not see much of Dean (who is

himself involved in all manner of complications, including a divorce and a new relationship) during his stay. The glimpses we are afforded of Dean, however, together with Sal's occasional evocations of Dean's derelict childhood in Denver with his hobo father, further serve to cast a mythical atmosphere over his persona, and prepares us for his sudden and portentous arrival on Sal's doorstep in the second part of the novel. Certainly not averse to parties, Dean nevertheless spends most of his time, alternately, with Marylou, with his new girlfriend, Camille, and with Carlo in his basement apartment "like the room of a Russian saint" (47). In the meantime, Sal and the others travel to Central City for the annual opera, where they clear out an old miner's shack for accommodation, and proceed with a raucous, manic celebration. It is here that Sal, in the midst of all the commotion, thinks of Dean and Carlo, and reveals where his true loyalty lies:

The night was getting more and more frantic. I wished Dean and Carlo were there – then I realized they'd be out of place and unhappy. They were like the man [from the opera, *Fidelio*, which he'd seen that afternoon] with the dungeon stone and the gloom, rising from the underground, the sordid hipsters of America, a new beat generation that I was slowly joining.

(54)

Dean and Carlo are identified here as beat characters who also venture into the underground, i.e. the unconscious. Their interests are metaphysical, even religious. When Sal returns to Denver, however, it is to find that Dean and Carlo were, in fact, also in Central City – their beat status does not exclude them from "Dionysian" celebration and, as the novel progresses, we find that the two even complement each other. Still up in Central City, Sal also has an intimation of his final vision in the novel when he imagines "an old man with white hair...probably walking toward us with the Word,...[who] would arrive any minute and make us silent" (55). That word is not Sal's innocent "Wow!" (37). Tired of parties and "want[ing] to pursue my star further" (57), Sal finally leaves Denver for San Francisco and his friend Remi Boncoeur.

Sal finally joins Remi, and his girlfriend, Lee Ann, in Mill City,

a collection of shacks in a valley, housing-project shacks built for Navy Yard workers during the war; it was in a canyon.... It was, so they say, the only community in America where whites and Negroes lived together voluntarily; and that was so, and so wild and joyous a place I've never seen since.

(60)

He remains, then, on the fringe of society, still associated here with a disreputable joy. Even when he tries, disconsolately, to enter the mainstream by writing a film script, he remains unsuccessful. However, he soon learns that living in poverty is not too romantic, especially once tensions start developing over money. Joining Remi as a guard in the barracks, he is also

forced to enforce a law he feels no sympathy with. Eventually, Sal slips away one morning after having embarrassed Remi in front of his father over dinner. Straight away he stumbles into another ambivalent situation when, on a bus to Los Angeles, he meets a young Mexican woman, Terry, and enters into a brief relationship with her. In this we see Sal's growing willingness to abandon himself to the flow of events, to open himself to the experiences sent his way. On the other hand, we don't feel all too comfortable when Sal, after weeks of living in a worker's tent with Terry and her child, and picking cotton, suddenly decides to head back home. Heavy as the odds against their relationship are, his action is somewhat reminiscent of his "absent-minded pal of the road" (23) Eddie's desertion. Much like Miller's narrator in *Tropic of Cancer*, Sal seems to be moving through a world, or worlds, to which he does not irrevocably belong.

Sal's trip back home, partially by bus, is recounted but briefly, except for his encounter in the night, outside Harrisburg, with the "Ghost of the Susquehanna" (103). In its strangeness this encounter has the quality of a dream or vision, which serves as a kind of consolidation of Sal's first trip:

It was the night of the Ghost of the Susquehanna. The Ghost was a shriveled little old man with a paper satchel who claimed he was headed for "Canady." He walked very fast, commanding me to follow, and said there was a bridge up ahead we could cross. He was about sixty years old; he talked incessantly.... We were bums together. We walked seven miles along the mournful Susquehanna. It is a terrifying river. It has bushy cliffs on both sides that lean like hairy ghosts over the unknown waters. Inky night covers all. Sometimes from the railyards across the river rises a great red locomotive flare that illuminates the horrid cliffs.... He walked right in the road in the teeth of advancing traffic and almost got hit several times. I plodded along in the ditch. Any minute I expected the poor little madman to go flying in the night, dead. We never found that bridge. I left him at a railroad underpass.... A man gave me a ride back to Harrisburg and told me I was on the wrong road. I suddenly saw the little hobo standing under a sad streetlamp with his thumb stuck out – poor, forlorn man, poor lost sometimeboy, now broken ghost of the penniless wilds. I told my driver the story and he stopped to tell the old man.

"Look here, fella, you're on your way west, not east."

"Heh?" said the little ghost. "Can't tell me I don't know my way around here. Been walkin this country for years. I'm headed for Canady."

"But this ain't the road to Canada, this is the road to Pittsburgh and Chicago." The little man got disgusted with us and walked off. The last I saw of him was his bobbing little white bag dissolving in the darkness of the mournful Alleghenies.

(103-105)

On his way home, Sal's encounter with the Ghost, which almost leads him astray, is a pointed warning about a possible "end" of the road, a haunted rootless existence. Instantly assuming control over Sal's journey by "commanding [him]...to follow", the Ghost is a false prophet, promising a bridge over "the unknown waters" where there is none. The landscape itself

acquires faintly hellish qualities, and the Ghost's suicidal fatalism (to be distinguished from Gene's) reveals the emptiness of his promise as a leader or guide. Instinctively, Sal eventually abandons him, although he only fully grasps the extent of the Ghost's desperate insanity when someone informs him that both he and the Ghost are "on the wrong road". While Sal is willing to accept this voice of reason, however, the Ghost is not, and he walks off into the darkness, "dissolving" from view. The Ghost's world offers only a non-regenerative dissolution of the self, a complete and final abandon to madness (the close link between this madness and the madness of Dean, or life on the road, is not incidental – the reader is meant to recognise the ease with which one may slip from the latter to the former). Tim Hunt also suggests that "[t]he Ghost reveals to Sal that the father is as lost as the son and that each son must contend with his own inadequacy and mortality" (17). This suggestion is important when seen in terms of the so-called search for Dean's father (only occasionally referred to) which serves as one subtext to Sal and Dean's later travels together. It is important that Sal is cured of most of his romantic illusions before undertaking his next trip, this time with Dean. At any rate, after being stuck in Harrisburg a while longer, Sal finally gets a lift to New York, and is struck by its frantic activity:

Suddenly I found myself on Times Square. I had traveled eight thousand miles around the American continent and I was back on Times Square; and right in the middle of rush hour, too, seeing with my innocent road-eyes the absolute madness and fantastic hoorair of New York with its millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves, the mad dream – grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City.... It was dusk. Where was Hassel?... Where Dean? Where everybody? Where life?

(106)

Sal returns to New York changed, his "sight" cleansed, the road being also a kind of purgation, which allows him to reassess the familiar. Considering the rush of modern city life, Sal's New York momentarily resembles Miller's vast Moloch, in which people live out inconsequential lives as parts or cogs in the greater social machinery. There is a sense of tremendous energy, misdirected and exhausting itself into the death symbolised by the "awful cemetery cities" – in death, as in life, subjected to some organisational order. Alone and overcome, Sal immediately yearns for company and, most of all, *life*.

Part two finds Sal in Testament, Virginia, with his family over Christmas time (1948), over a year later. We are told that, in the interim, he finished the book he had abandoned on leaving on his first trip. Having written a letter to Dean, telling him of his whereabouts, Sal is pleasantly surprised to see him suddenly appear on the front porch, together with his ex-wife

Marylou and a friend, Ed Dunkel. Having lived happily with Camille since 1947, working and starting a family, Dean apparently

suddenly blew his top while walking down the street one day. He saw a '49 Hudson for sale and rushed to the bank for his entire roll. He bought the car on the spot. Ed Dunkel was with him. Now they were broke. Dean calmed Camille's fears and told her he'd be back in a month.

(110-111)

Selfishly alive, Dean's attitude seems to rub off on Ed, who marries a certain Galatea for the express purpose of getting their trip financed. To top it all, she is abandoned in Tucson when her money runs out, and Dean makes a detour to Denver in order to rekindle his relationship with Marylou. This is the state of affairs when they pull into the driveway in Testament, the Hudson already falling apart. To Sal it seems that "[t]he madness of Dean had bloomed into a weird flower" (113), and he takes off with them immediately. On their way to New York, he is once again struck by the ferocity of both Dean's attentiveness and expressiveness:

This was the new and complete Dean, grown to maturity. I said to myself, My God, he's changed. Fury spat out of his eyes when he told of things he hated; great glows of joy replaced this when he suddenly got happy; every muscle twitched to live and go.... He rubbed his jaw furiously, he swung the car and passed three trucks, he roared into downtown Testament, looking in every direction and seeing everything in an arc of 180 degrees around his eyeballs without moving his head. Bang, he found a parking space in no time, and we were parked. He leaped out of the car. Furiously he hustled into the railroad station; we followed sheepishly. He bought cigarettes. He had become absolutely mad in his movements; he seemed to be doing everything at the same time.

(114)

The curt phrases and sentences intimate the frustration of Dean's bursts of energy, his compulsion to do "everything at the same time". He seems to be compiling vast Whitmanesque catalogues, recording an insane amount of details and insights on his travels, some of which he shares with Sal in a vocalised stream-of-consciousness. This almost undirected expenditure of energy is what Sal finds so infectious: "[N]ow the bug was on me again, and the bug's name was Dean Moriarty and I was off on another spurt around the road" (115). Eventually, however, (on Sal's third trip) Dean's pace will become something of an encumbrance to Sal, as he begins to realise that it keeps him from fully experiencing the sights that flash by – Dean may offer the quantity of Whitman's catalogues, but not the quality of his contemplation of a spear of grass. On this trip, Sal will also ultimately find himself on the receiving end of Dean's carelessness about friends and family. As always, the lessons of the road remain ambivalent. For the time being, however, Sal abandons himself to Dean's exuberant fatalism: "It was a completely meaningless set of circumstances that made Dean come, and similarly I went off with him for no reason" (116). At this point, at least, Sal has abandoned the idea of a clear purpose to the journey.

Before setting out west again, the group first spends a few weeks in New York. In the meantime they receive a call from Old Bull Lee (based on William Burroughs) in New Orleans, who informs them that “a girl called Galatea Dunkel had just arrived at his house for a guy Ed Dunkel; Bull had no idea who these people were” (118). Making herself at home, Galatea seems resolved to wait there until being picked up by Ed and company on their way back to San Francisco. Dean and Sal also run into Carlo Marx, who’s been on his own travels, and apparently settled in his role as a prophetic poet. He is the one to directly confront them with the apparent purposelessness of their trip:

“What is the meaning of this voyage to New York? What kind of sordid business are you on now? I mean, man, whither goest thou? Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?”

“Whither goest thou?” echoed Dean with his mouth open. We sat and didn’t know what to say; there was nothing to talk about any more. The only thing was to go.

(119)

Unable to provide a satisfactory answer, also to themselves, Sal and Dean take the easy option of flight. Neither position here, however, should be taken as necessarily “better” than the other. Carlo’s theatrically portentous words preclude the open-ended play and abandonment of the road. On the other hand, the question is a serious one – it extends to the destiny of American society as a whole, and asks Sal and Dean to consider their role in that destiny. As it turns out, Sal and Dean end up taking the “shiny car”, representative of the materialistic progress of America, onto roads that reduce that shine significantly (299). For now, however, Dean is simply “out of his mind with real belief” (120), and abandons himself to the fatalistic precept that “God exists without qualms” (120). Listening to him, Sal admits that

[t]here was nothing clear about the things he said, but what he meant to say was somehow made pure and clear. He used the word “pure” a great deal. I had never dreamed Dean would become a mystic. These were the first days of his mysticism, which would lead to the strange, ragged W. C. Fields saintliness of his later days.

(121)

Although Sal will only fully realise this later, Dean is closer to a kind of mystic buffoon, in some ways reminiscent of the typical Miller hero – there is nothing graceful and easily digestible about his mysticism, as it is irrevocably linked with his fallible and imperfect humanity. In the meantime, New Year’s Eve approaches, and with it, yet another ceaseless stream of celebrations. Amid all this, Sal is once again momentarily brought to ponder something else:

I didn’t know where all this was leading; I didn’t care.

Just about this time a strange thing begun to haunt me. It was this: I had forgotten something. There was a decision that I was about to make before Dean showed up, and now it was driven clear out of my mind but still hung on the tip of my mind’s tongue....

And I couldn't even tell if it was a real decision or just a thought I had forgotten. It haunted and flabbergasted me, made me sad. It had something to do with the Shrouded Traveler. Carlo Marx and I once sat down together...and I told him a dream I had about a strange Arabian figure that was pursuing me across the desert; that I tried to avoid; that finally overtook me just before I reached the Protective City. "Who is this?" said Carlo. We pondered it. I proposed it was myself, wearing a shroud. That wasn't it. Something, someone, some spirit was pursuing all of us across the desert of life and was bound to catch us before we reached heaven. Naturally, now that I look back on it, this is only death: death will overtake us before heaven. The one thing that we yearn for in our living days, that makes us sigh and groan and undergo sweet nauseas of all kinds, is the remembrance of some lost bliss that was probably experienced in the womb and can only be reproduced (though we hate to admit it) in death. But who wants to die?... I told Dean about it and he instantly recognized it as the mere simple longing for pure death; and because we're all of us never in life again, he, rightly, would have nothing to do with it, and I agreed with him then.

(124)

As happened in Central City, Sal's celebrations are interrupted by a vision of a mystic figure from his future, in this case the "Shrouded Traveler", identified also as death. It is interesting, however, that Sal's first guess at the identity of this figure is to see it as himself, or perhaps, another self (which would bring about the death of the old self). This is the time of Sal's "confusion" (126); his previous life having fallen away, he now occupies a continually transitory space, from which a new sense of self eventually emerges (which also allows him to grow past Dean). This new sense of self, with its offer of a vital connection to its circumambient universe, requires that Sal comes to terms with his own mortality, something which Dean, as his recoil from the issue clearly shows, is not willing to do. Confused and vibrant, Sal decides to take to the road, against the wishes of his current girlfriend, Lucille, who "would never understand me because I like too many things and get all confused and hung-up running from one falling star to another till I drop. This is the night, what it does to you. I had nothing to offer anybody except my own confusion" (126). The night here, as it is throughout the novel, is symbolic of the dissolution of daytime moral clarity, a mysterious time when the conscious self becomes attuned to the unconscious strivings of the soul, confused as they may be. Sal decides to abandon himself to these signals, and see where they lead him.

One of the last experiences Sal has before going off with Dean is witnessing Dean's response to the "wild, ecstatic Rollo Greb" (127), who also "could hardly get a word out, he was so excited with life. Dean stood before with head bowed, repeating over and over again, 'Yes... Yes... Yes... Yes'" (127). Dean has little to do but affirm the life that gushes from Rollo. It is also here that Dean refers, for the first time, to the "IT" that will form the grail to their quest. Talking to Sal, Dean praises Rollo as

"...the end! You see, if you go like him all the time you'll finally get it."

“Get what?”

“IT! IT! I’ll tell you – now no time, we have no time now.”

Dean rushed back to watch Rollo Greb some more.

(127)

Against Sal’s tendency to look back, Dean proposes a fast-paced intensity of living that also leads to “IT”, the unspecified sacred instant. This is not only encapsulated by Rollo Greb, but also by George Shearing, “the great jazz pianist” (127), whom Dean and Sal go to see before they leave. As the concert unfolds (beautifully described by Kerouac, who truly manages to capture something of the undulations of music in prose), Dean is once again “reduced” to his obsessive affirmations, to the extent that he calls Shearing God. When the performance suddenly stops and Shearing leaves the stage, Sal and Dean are left in “the silence of God’s departure” (128), and Sal is momentarily brought to the realisation that “[t]his madness would lead nowhere” (128). Every ecstatic action to which one is moved (in order to avoid stasis), eventually winds down into the lugubrious and elegiac “silence of God’s departure”, the “myth of the rainy night” (128).

The last days in New York find the entire group once again exposed to Carlo Marx’s pointed questions. Ed Dunkel, finally beginning to understand the frequently haunted quality of life on the road, tells Sal that walking down to Times Square he “suddenly realized that I was a ghost – it was my ghost walking on the sidewalk” (130), and he begins to spend his nights “roaming his ghost around New York” (131). In the meantime, Dean, already anticipating his return home, tries to pawn Marylou off on Sal. It is clear that things are slowly starting to fall apart: “Every day the world groaned to turn and we were having our appalling studies of the night” (133). It is only once the four of them actually take the road to New Orleans that their spirits return:

It was drizzling and mysterious at the beginning of our journey. I could see that it was all going to be one big saga of the mist. “Whoeee!” yelled Dean. “Here we go!” And he hunched over the wheel and gunned her; he was back in his element, everybody could see that. We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, *move*. And we moved!

(133-134)

Mysterious as the journey is, it is the very action of moving, identified here as a “function”, that liberates Sal from the general confusion of the last weeks. There is a delight in the simplicity of movement which, for the time being, eradicates all the petty clashes of will and hidden agendas that had begun to plague the group towards the end of their sojourn in New York. After an eventful journey, which includes a run-in with the police and offering lifts to a number of equally financially challenged road characters, they finally arrive at Old Bull Lee’s

house outside Algiers (across the river from New Orleans). Lee is a clear example of the extent to which someone can be driven to live on the fringe of society. A man with a family, there is nothing conventional about the household. The house itself is a “dilapidated old heap”, Jane Lee is a benzedrine addict while Bull is a morphine addict. Sal puts this latter addiction down to Bull’s systematic study of “the facts of life” (143), and Sal proceeds to inform us of the schizophrenic range of Bull’s jobs and travels. He also acts as a kind of cynical counterpoint to Sal and Dean’s exuberance:

His chief hate was Washington bureaucracy; second to that, liberals; then cops. He spent all his time talking and teaching others. Jane sat at his feet; so did I; so did Dean; and so did Carlo Marx. We’d all learned from him. He was a gray, nondescript-looking fellow you wouldn’t notice on the street, unless you looked closer and saw his mad, bony skull with its strange youthfulness – a Kansas minister with exotic, phenomenal fires and mysteries. He had studied medicine in Vienna; had studied anthropology, read everything; and now he was settling to his life’s work, which was the study of things themselves in the streets of life and the night.

(145)

Bull’s entire existence is a sustained critique of materialist society, but his response to that society differs from Dean and Sal’s in that it is more “subterranean”. In a way he is an almost Faustian figure, initiated into darker secrets which Sal (for the meantime) and especially Dean would rather avoid. The atmosphere around him exudes a kind of decay, from his physique to his house, and the “swampy field” (141) that surrounds it – when Sal, Dean and Marylou finally leave the Lees, their course through the chthonic swamp will leave them afraid and in a hurry to get out (157). At first, however, their visit is a pleasurable one, and Sal, driving over to New Orleans with Bull and Dean, is brought to a deep sense of unity with the world around him as they cross the river on the ferry:

There was a mystic wraith of fog over the brown waters that night. . . . Old Big Slim Hazard had once worked on the Algiers ferry as a deckhand; this made me think of Mississippi Gene too; and as the river poured down from mid-America by starlight I knew, I knew like mad that everything I had ever known and would ever know was One.

(147)

In the flow of the river Sal sees the underlying flow of chthonic nature which underlies everything – the brown colour of the water also attests to the presence of earth, and the fecundating role of water. Significantly, he is reminded at this stage of the way Gene “flows” through life. In the meantime, Ed rekindles his relationship with Galatea. His experience of the road has contained an element of horror which now places him in the right frame of mind to settle down. When Sal, Dean and Marylou resume their trip, Ed and Galatea stay behind, having “decided to get a room in New Orleans and stay there and work” (155). Sal is actually somewhat reluctant to leave, but once again he abandons himself to Dean’s impatient energies.

In spite of continual financial difficulties, and with the aid of some hitchhikers, the “foolish gang” (167) eventually make their way to San Francisco. It is here that Sal truly experiences, for the first time, the extent of Dean’s selfishness. Immediately upon arriving in the city centre, Dean has the car unloaded on the sidewalk:

Suddenly Dean was saying good-by. He was bursting to see Camille and to find out what happened. Marylou and I stood dumbly in the street and watched him drive away. “You see what a bastard he is?” said Marylou. “Dean will leave you out in the cold any time it’s in his interest.”

“I know,” I said, and I looked back east and sighed. Dean hadn’t mentioned money.
(170)

Somewhat disconsolately, Sal and Marylou live together, for a few days, in a downtown hotel. Fairly soon, however, she also abandons him to his own devices. It is here that Sal, hungry and alone, experiences what may qualify as the concluding vision to his second trip:

I walked around, picking butts from the street. I passed a fish-’n-chips joint on Market Street, and suddenly the woman in there gave me a terrified look as I passed; she was the proprietress, she apparently thought I was coming in there with a gun to hold up the joint. I walked on a few feet. It suddenly occurred to me that this was my mother of about two hundred years ago in England, and that I was her footpad son, returning from gaol to haunt her honest labors in the hashery. I stopped, frozen with ecstasy on the sidewalk. I looked down Market Street. I didn’t know whether it was that or Canal Street in New Orleans: it led to water, ambiguous, universal water, just as 42nd Street, New York, leads to water, and you never know where you are. I thought of Ed Dunkel’s ghost on Times Square. I was delirious. I wanted to go back and leer at my strange Dickensian mother in the hash joint. I tingled all over from head to foot.... And just for a moment I had reached the point of ecstasy that I had always wanted to reach, which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows, and wonderment in the bleakness of the mortal realm, and the sensation of death kicking at my heels to move on, with a phantom dogging its own heels, and myself hurrying to a plank where all the angels dove off and flew into the holy void of uncreated emptiness, the potent and inconceivable radiancies shining in bright Mind Essence, innumerable lotus-lands falling open in the magic mothswarm of heaven. I could hear an indescribable seething roar which wasn’t in my ear but everywhere and had nothing to do with sounds.... I thought I was going to die the very next moment. But I didn’t die, and walked four miles and picked up ten long butts and took them back to Marylou’s hotel room and poured their tobacco in my old pipe and lit up.

(172-173)

Initially giving free reign to his imagination to invent a romantic backdrop to his miserable situation, Sal’s ecstatic experience in the street essentially turns into a sacred instant. To some extent, Sal’s dissolution and the attendant loss of his bearings first reminds one of the “Ghost of the Susquehanna”, and Sal himself points to Ed’s “ghost on Times Square”. However, we soon come to recognise that there is a fecundating element to this experience. The references to New Orleans and “ambiguous, universal water” reminds one of his experience of unity on the New Orleans ferry, and Sal himself seems to welcome the experience openly. Relieved of his

sense of place and time, Sal experiences a transport which transfers him to the realm of “angels”. Death is, once again, identified as the constant, haunting presence which inspires the very movement which is life, but Sal now also experiences the fecundating abandonment to “the holy void of uncreated emptiness”, of possibility. Hunt also suggests that Sal now comes to see death “in a larger context of birth and rebirth. He describes literally an experience of ‘ecstasy,’ of moving beyond physical limits, and the effect is strangely calming and reassuring” (35). Sal is immersed in a chthonic “roar” which teaches him the origin of his physical being. The intensity of the experience is of such a nature that Sal expects to die. Of course, he doesn’t, and eventually snaps out of his transport, only to continue his search for butts. The doggedness of that search, however, gives some inkling of the effect the experience had on him. As Sal somewhat sardonically remarks, “[t]hat was the way Dean found me when he finally decided I was worth saving” (174). He stays over at Camille’s house for a few days, and he and Dean experience “one night...[of] suddenly...[going] mad together again” (175) when they go to a Slim Gaillard jazz performance. Leaving for New York the next morning, Sal is forced to admit that “[w]hat I accomplished by coming to Frisco I don’t now” (177). Recognising the purposelessness of their trip, something which a number of their friends across the continent has been pointing out to them, Sal now moves closer to the simple acceptance of the road as life.

Sal’s next journey is undertaken, by himself, “[i]n the spring of 1949” (179). First he travels to Denver, where he conducts a solitary existence as a labourer. With no friends or company around, Sal spends his time walking around Denver, feeling “like a speck on the surface of the sad red earth” (180). It is during this time that he overtly starts exploring his sense of identity as a white American citizen. Doubtlessly over-romanticising the experience of the economically disadvantaged black communities, Sal’s dreams are expressive of his own frustration with the absence of both “ecstasy” and vital community presenting the white 1940s male:

At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night.... I wished I were a Denver Mexican, even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a “white man” disillusioned. All my life I’d had white ambitions; that was why I’d abandoned a good woman like Terry in the San Joaquin Valley.... I was only myself, Sal Paradise, sad, strolling in this violet dark, this unbearably sweet night, wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America.

(180)

Sal's frustration with the limits imposed on the self extends to the limits defined by race – clearly neither a stranger, nor averse to poverty itself, the economic disadvantages of such a “cross-over” certainly don't seem to bother him. His experience of the “colored section”, however, only leaves him feeling more lonely, and he finally takes off to visit Dean in San Francisco. This time it is Sal, “all my bridges...gone and...[not] giv[ing] a damn about anything at all” (182), who shows up on Dean's doorstep, “at two o'clock in the morning” (182), disrupting his family life. Camille's reaction is understandably unfavourable. Neither are things going too well with Dean. His hand bandaged after a series of medical complications which started with him breaking his thumb on Marylou's brow, he now finds himself unemployed while Camille works, and this with a second baby on the way. As Dean tells Sal,

You see? Heeby-jeebies, I'm classification three-A, jazz-hounded Moriarty has a sore butt, his wife gives him daily injections of penicillin for his thumb, which produces hives, for he's allergic. He must take sixty thousand units of Fleming's juice within a month. He must take one tablet every four hours for this month to combat allergy produced from his juice. He must take codeine aspirin to relieve the pain in his thumb. He must have surgery on his leg for an inflamed cyst. He must rise next Monday at six A.M. to get his teeth cleaned. He must see a foot doctor twice a week for treatment. He must take cough syrup each night. He must blow and snort constantly to clear his nose, which has collapsed just under the bridge where an operation some years ago weakened it. He lost his thumb on his throwing arm.

(186)

The very way in which Dean recounts this reveals his own sense of being trapped, assimilated into a regime (in this case, purely medical) which regulates his actions and keeps him in his place. Camille clearly knows what is coming, for the next day she throws both of them out. There is no sense of resistance to this on the part of Dean, who now seems to be approaching the fatalism of Mississippi Gene, and he and Sal walk off,

that enormous bandaged thumb sticking up in the air.

That thumb became the symbol of Dean's final development. He no longer cared about anything (as before) but now he also *cared about everything in principle*; that is to say, it was all the same to him and he belonged to the world and there was nothing he could do about it.

(188)

Sal sees this as a development of Dean's quasi-Buddhistic “mysticism”, but the absurd image of the thumb (perhaps symbolic of Dean's eternal OK, or thumbs-up to the world) also stresses that there is something both comic and pathetic about him. These elements are eventually merged in the image of the “HOLY GOOF” (194), but here, it is Dean's sad confusion that is lifted out:

I was glad I had come, he needed me now.

“Why did Camille throw you out? What are you going to do?”

“Eh?” he said. “Eh? Eh?” We racked our brains for where to go and what to do. I realized it was up to me. Poor, poor Dean – the devil himself had never fallen farther; in idiocy, with infected thumb, surrounded by the battered suitcases of his motherless feverish life across America and back numberless times, an undone bird.

(188-189)

Throughout this trip, Dean will find himself rejected by former friends and family, while Sal almost takes charge of him. Sal now proposes that they travel to New York and then to Italy, a journey east, in search of heritage and stability (as opposed to the rootlessness and adventurousness of the west). This, then, eventually also becomes a tentative search for Dean’s hobo father, old Dean Moriarty, whom he hasn’t seen in years. In the meantime, Sal falls into his new supporting role:

It was probably the pivotal point of our friendship when he realized that I had actually spent some hours thinking about him and his troubles, and he was trying to place that in his tremendously involved and tormented mental categories. Something clicked in both of us. In me it was suddenly concern for a man who was years younger than I, five years, and whose fate was wound with mine across the passage of the recent years; in him it was a matter that I can ascertain only from what he did afterward. He became extremely joyful and said everything was settled.

(189-190)

With a new sense of companionship, Dean and Sal now tackle this trip as “two broken-down heroes of the Western night” (190), returning to the morally stable world of the east.

Decisions made, Sal and Dean nevertheless first spend a few more nights in San Francisco. They go to Galatea Dunkel for accommodation, and they all decide to go out to a jazz performance. Before going out, however, Dean is once again subjected (once some more people arrive) to a barrage of criticism about his lifestyle and treatment of Camille. Galatea herself finally tells Dean that

“You’ve done so many awful things that I don’t know what to say to you.”

And in fact that was the point, and they all sat around looking at Dean with lowered and hating eyes, and he stood on the carpet in the middle of them and giggled – he just giggled. He made a little dance. His bandage was getting dirtier all the time; it began to flop and unroll. I suddenly realized that Dean, by virtue of his enormous series of sins, was becoming the Idiot, the Imbecile, the Saint of the lot.

“You have absolutely no regard for anybody.... It never occurs to you that life is serious and there are people trying to make something decent out of it instead of just goofing all the time.”

That’s what Dean was, the HOLY GOOF.

(193-194)

Recognising the pathetic element to Dean’s character, Sal nevertheless considers this to be part of Dean’s “sainthood”. An elegiac version of Miller’s buffoon, Dean’s mysticism exists in his movement beyond the realm of socially defined adulthood, of responsibility, seriousness, decency and caution. This makes him, in the eye of the beholder, either childish or childlike.

Important, however, is the complete absence of aggression in *him* – recognising his guilt as an indelible part of his being, Dean both accepts it, and the criticism it evokes:

Then a complete silence fell over everybody; where once Dean would have talked his way out, he now fell silent himself, but standing in front of everybody, ragged and broken and idiotic, right under the lightbulbs, his bony mad face covered with sweat and throbbing veins, saying, “Yes, yes, yes,” as though tremendous revelations were pouring into him all the time now, and I am sure they were, and the others suspected as much and were frightened. He was BEAT – the root, the soul of Beatific. What was he knowing?....

“We’re going to Italy,” I said, and washed my hands of the whole matter. Then, too, there was a strange sense of maternal affection in the air, for the girls were really looking at Dean the way a mother looks at the dearest and most errant child, and he sat with his sad thumb and all his revelations knew it well, and that was why his was able, in tick-tocking silence, to walk out of the apartment without a word, to wait for us downstairs as soon as we’d made up our minds about *time*. This was what we sensed about the ghost on the sidewalk. I looked out the window. He was alone in the doorway, digging the street. Bitterness, recriminations, advice, morality, sadness – everything was behind him, and ahead of him was the ragged and ecstatic joy of pure being.

(195)

Dean’s beatness brings Sal to refer to him as ragged, broken, even a ghost. But this state merely precedes another of “pure being”. Having hit rock bottom, Dean is momentarily freed of all ties and responsibilities, with the result that he finds himself beyond blame. His lonely stance in the doorway symbolises the final solitary step across the threshold, away from the (now critical) community inside. Sal will choose to join him, though not as a disciple, in the search for, on the one hand, the father, and, on the other, “IT”.

In spite of Dean’s accusers retaining their anger, Sal eventually convinces them to join him and Dean on the town, drawing on their continued curiosity to see what he’ll do next. Suddenly the slow and deliberate pace is replaced by an explosion of contained fury and excitement as the group takes off to a jazz performance:

Out we jumped in the warm, mad night, hearing a wild tenorman bawling horn across the way, going “EE-YAH! EE-YAH! EE-YAH!” and hands clapping to the beat and folks yelling, “Go, go, go!” Dean was already racing across the street with his thumb in the air, yelling, “Blow, man, blow!” a bunch of colored men in Saturday-night suits were whooping it up in front.... In the back of the joint in a dark corridor beyond the splattered toilets scores of men and women stood against the wall drinking wine-spodioidi and spitting at the stars – wine and whiskey. The behatted tenorman was blowing at the peak of a wonderfully satisfactory free idea, a rising and falling riff that went from “EE-yah!” to a crazier “EE-de-lee-yah!” and blasted along to the rolling crash of butt-scarred drums hammered by a big brutal Negro with a bullneck who didn’t give a damn about anything but punishing his busted tubs, crash, rattle-ti-boom, crash. Uproars of music and the tenorman *had it* and everybody knew he had it. Dean was clutching his head in the crowd, and it was a mad crowd. They were all urging the tenorman to hold it and keep it with cries and wild eyes, and he was raising himself

from a crouch and going down again with his horn, looping it up in a clear cry above the furor. A six-foot skinny Negro woman was rolling her bones at the man's hornbell, and he just jabbed it at her, "Ee! ee! ee!"

Everybody was rocking and roaring.... Boom, kick, that drummer was kicking his drums down the cellar and rolling the beat upstairs with his murderous sticks, rattley-boom!... The pianist was only pounding keys with spread-eagled fingers, chords, at intervals when the great tenorman was drawing breath for another blast – Chinese chords, shuddering the piano in every timber, chink, and wire, boing! The tenorman jumped down from the platform and stood in the crowd.... He just hauled back and stamped his foot and blew a hoarse, baughing blast, and drew breath, and raised the horn and blew high, wide, and screaming in the air. Dean was directly in front of him with his face lowered to the bell of the horn, clapping his hands, pouring sweat on the man's keys, and the man noticed and laughed in his horn a long quivering crazy laugh, and everybody else rocked and rocked; and finally the tenorman decided to blow his top and crouched down and held a note in high C for a long time as everything else crashed along and the cries increased and I thought the cops would swarm in from the nearest precinct. Dean was in a trance. The tenorman's eyes was fixed straight on him; he had a madman who not only understood but cared and wanted to understand more and much more than there was, and they began duelling for this; everything came out of the horn, no more phrases, just cries, cries, "Baugh" and down to "Beep!" and up to "EEEE!" and down to clinkers and over sideways-echoing horn-sounds. He tried everything, up, down, sideways, upside-down, horizontal, thirty degrees, forty degrees, and finally he fell back in somebody's arms and gave up and everybody pushed and yelled, "Yes! Yes! He blowed that one!" Dean wiped himself with his handkerchief.

(196-198)

The performance has strong Dionysian overtones, and the atmosphere is ripe with energy, violence and sexuality. Like some of the other musicians the group go to see at a variety of bars – for instance, the "little short Negro with an alto horn" (201) – the tenorman "*ha[s] it*", and this is what Dean taps into. Dean's hunger for "[m]ore life! More hunger! More pain! More experience!" (Miller *Lawrence* 53) is so great that the tenorman notices him among the others, and, in fact, responds to this hunger by pulling out all the stops, and increasingly abandoning form, i.e. "phrases", for sheer chaotic expression. This immersion in the purely present moment is "IT", Dean's "pure being" (195), and eventually leads Sal to salute the "Frisco nights, the end of the continent and the end of doubt, all dull doubt and tomfoolery" (201). With religious abandon, the entire night is spent running from one performance to the next, interspersed with conversations and visits with the characters they meet. When the morning finally comes around, Sal stresses this religious aspect of the festivities when he reflects on their fellow ravers of the previous night: "Holy flowers floating in the air, were all these tired faces in the dawn of Jazz America" (204). After catching up on some sleep, Dean "rushe[s] out to get a travel-bureau car" (204), while Sal collects their luggage from Galatea. It is at this point, considering the vibrant streets of San Francisco, that he momentarily reflects on the negative aspect of Dean's frantic pace, the impossibility of properly exploring one's surroundings and former proper relations to it when in his presence: "I hated to leave; my stay

had lasted sixty-odd hours. With frantic Dean I was rushing through the world without a chance to see it. In the afternoon we were buzzing toward Sacramento and eastward again” (205). Sal’s experiences with Dean retain the qualities of rootlessness (they never find his father) and dissolution – the responsibility to take these experiences and consolidate them remains his own.

On their way to Denver Dean finally returns, in his own unacademic and incoherent way, to his notion of “IT”, referring Sal to their previous night on the town:

“Now, man, that alto man last night had IT – he held it once he found it; I’ve never seen a guy who could hold so long.” I wanted to know what “IT” meant. “Ah well” – Dean laughed – “now you’re asking me impon-de-rables – ahem! Here’s a guy and everybody’s there, right? Up to him to put down what’s on everybody’s mind. He starts the first chorus, then lines up his ideas, people, yeah, yeah, but get it, and then he rises to his fate and has to blow equal to it. All of a sudden somewhere in the middle of the chorus he *gets it* – everybody looks up and knows; they listen; he picks it up and carries. Time stops. He’s filling empty space with the substance of our lives, confessions of his bellybottom strain, remembrance of ideas, rehashes of old blowing. He has to blow across bridges and come back and do it with such infinite feeling soul-exploratory for the tune of the moment that everybody knows it’s not the tune that counts but IT –” Dean could go no further; he was sweating telling about it.

(206)

“IT”, then, within this context of a jazz performance, is the quality that invests the moment when the artist taps into the collective unconscious, something which an audience intuitively realises. Dean’s first reaction is to call the concept imponderable – incapable of being defined and circumscribed, it is clear that this moment only grows from excess. The musician might start out “lin[ing] up...ideas”, but eventually, as also happens with the tenorman, this structure is abandoned as the musician gets “IT” and “Time stops” (206). It is in this state that the musician seems to approximate an expression which is recognised as truthful, something which fills the void or “the empty space” which is opened up with the “substance of our lives”. The effect is linked to that of the “confession”. This is the quality that Miller was led to expect in the piece by Ravel, before disappointedly realising that “Ravel sacrificed something for form” (*Cancer* 83). In the car, Sal and Dean also both get “IT” as they excitedly proceed to tell each other tales about their childhoods, and they come to see, in spite of the vast difference in circumstances, the similarity of their experiences, dreams and imaginary games. Their “discussion” becomes so lively that the driver orders them to stop “rocking the boat” (208):

Actually we were; the car was swaying as Dean and I both swayed to the rhythm and the IT of our final excited joy in talking and living to the blank tranced end of all innumerable riotous angelic particulars that had been lurking in our souls all our lives.

“Oh, man! man! man!” moaned Dean. “...Sal, think of it, we’ll dig Denver together and see what everybody’s doing though that matters little to us, the point being that we know what IT is and we know TIME and we know that everything is really FINE.”

Then he whispered, clutching my sleeve, sweating, “Now you just dig them in front. They have worries, they’re counting the miles, they’re thinking about where to sleep tonight, how much money for gas, the weather, how they’ll get there – and all the time they’ll get there anyway, you see.”

(208)

In the realm of “IT”, which is essentially a sacred instant and an abandonment to the flow which Miller loves, there is no effort to try and exert a constant control over one’s surroundings and one’s destiny – there is simply an acceptance which reminds us, once again, of Mississippi Gene. Dean goes so far as to consider these concerns that he ascribes to their fellow travellers as being predetermined, “established and proven worr[ies]” (208) that they simply latch onto to keep their “souls...at peace” (208), for the duration of the journey, within the intimate interior of the car. By contrast, there is no urgency in Sal and Dean to reach their ultimate destination – in fact, no mention is really made of Italy anymore. When they are finally dropped off in Denver, Sal is clearly resigned to the fact that “we had longer ways to go. But no matter, the road is life” (211). He has been rid of the idea that life happens elsewhere; like Gene, he essentially “is...where he is going” (Hunt 20).

After staying over in Denver with an “Okie family” (214) for a while, and becoming involved in all kinds of trouble, Sal and Dean eventually find, at a travel bureau, “a tremendous offer for someone to drive a ’47 Cadillac limousine to Chicago” (224). With two “Irish boys from an Eastern Jesuit school” (224) as passengers, they set out with Dean behind the steering wheel. With Dean’s driving approximating the pace of everything else in his life, they eventually reach Chicago with a night to spare, and decide to take the car to town. Here, once again, they spend their night chasing jazz bands and, once again, it is in the performances that they find the only suitable metaphors for life. So, for instance, after George Shearing has treated an audience to a tune, the next band faces the prospect of having to top him:

He went back to his dark corner, old God Shearing, and the boys said, “There ain’t nothin left after that.”

But the slender leader frowned. “Let’s blow anyway.”

Something would come of it yet. There’s always more, a little further – it never ends. They sought to find new phrases after Shearing’s explorations; they tried hard. They writhed and twisted and blew. Every now and then a clear harmonic cry gave suggestions of a tune that would someday be the only tune in the world and would raise men’s souls to joy. They found it, they lost, they wrestled for it, they found it again, they laughed, they moaned – and Dean sweated at the table and told them to go, go, go.

(241)

Here we find the struggle into being of the young artist, who has to eradicate the spectre of his teachers. There is something here, in these musicians’ struggle to unearth the “tune that would someday be the only tune in the world”, of Miller’s “*The Last Book*” (*Cancer* 33), which

purports to be the only literary source for generations to come. But the performance also dramatises the search for “IT” (disguised here as an innocent-looking “it”), and the way in which the individual struggles to attain it, yet always turns out to be unable to hold it, to maintain that intensity of being. Once again we are reminded, in the musicians’ struggle, of Emerson’s “Circles”, the symbolic nature of which also underlies Sal and Dean’s journey. The next morning, returning the car, by now a complete mess, to the owner’s mechanic, they take off again, this time to Detroit.

Taking the bus to Detroit, Sal and Dean eventually arrive there, “ragged and dirty as if we had lived off locust” (243). This image, while stressing their increasing resemblance to the bums they encounter all along the road, also reasserts Sal’s view of themselves as prophets, initiate into certain mysteries. This image is indeed apt, as Sal now has his next “vision”, which concludes this third part of the novel. Destitute and homeless in Detroit, they

decided to stay up in all-night movies on Skid Row. It was too cold for parks.... For thirty-five cents each we went into the beat-up old movie and sat down in the balcony till morning, when we were shooed downstairs. The people who were in that movie were the end.... If you sifted all Detroit in a wire basket the beater solid core of dregs couldn’t be gathered. The picture was Singing Cowboy Eddie Dean and his gallant white horse Bloop, that was number one; number two double-feature film was George Raft, Sidney Greenstreet, and Peter Lorre in a picture about Istanbul. We saw both of these pictures six times each during the night. We saw them waking, we heard them sleeping, we sensed them dreaming, we were permeated completely with the strange Gray Myth of the West and the weird dark Myth of the East when morning came. All my actions since then have been dictated automatically to my subconscious by this horrible osmotic experience. I heard big Greenstreet sneer a hundred times; I heard Peter Lorre make his sinister come-on; I was with George Raft in his paranoiac fears; I rode and sang with Eddie Dean and shot up the rustlers innumerable times.

(243-244)

This experience, which precedes the vision *per se*, and to some extent informs it, brings to Sal’s consciousness the repetitiveness of his and Dean’s own journeys back and forth between the east and the west. It sets up the duality of the optimistic and exuberant west to the mysterious and vaguely threatening east while, on the other hand, this duality somehow seems to be collapsed in the “horrible osmotic experience” – as if both are always present at the same time. It is the kind of Lawrentian conflict that cannot be resolved, and this comes across clearly in part four, where the trip ends up being, not east to west or vice versa, but north to south. For the time being, however, Sal has to contend with the vision that seems to flow from his experience:

In the gray dawn that puffed ghostlike about the windows of the theater and hugged its eaves I was sleeping with my head on the wooden arm of a seat as six attendants of the theater converged with their night’s total of swept-up rubbish and created a huge dusty pile that reached to my nose as I snored head down – till they almost swept me away

too. This was reported to me by Dean, who was watching from ten seats behind. All the cigarette butts, the bottles, the matchbooks, the come and the gone were swept up in this pile. Had they taken me with it, Dean would never have seen me again. He would have had to roam the entire United States and look in every garbage pail from coast to coast before he found me embryonically convoluted among the rubbishes of my life, his life, and the life of everybody concerned and not concerned. What would I have said to him from my rubbish womb? “Don’t bother me, man, I’m happy where I am. You lost me one night in Detroit in August nineteen forty-nine. What right have you to come and disturb my reverie in this pukish can?”

(244-245)

In this vision, Sal comes to realise both his status as part of societal debris, the “dregs” and rubbish, and the threat of a growing torpor possibly brought on by the sense of repetition suggested by the movie. The “rubbish womb” does not allow for birth, but instead, induces a somatic reverie that keeps the self drawn in on itself. The image of Dean searching among the rubbish also brings to mind the rather unfocused search for Dean’s father – Sal seems to sense that the search would, even if by chance it did turn out successful, probably result in nothing, that the old man would be irretrievably immersed in his own “pukish can”. At any rate, as the dawn breaks over the rubbish, like all those “ragged” mornings he has been experiencing, Sal is forced to consider and account for his nights – we sense in him a need to consolidate his experiences of the past trip. When Dean and Sal resume their trip to New York, Sal also realises quite consciously that “I was beginning to cross and recross towns in America as though I were a traveling salesman – raggedy travelings, bad stock, rotten beans in the bottom of my bag of tricks, nobody buying” (245). It is this repetition that will be avoided in the next trip, this time down to Mexico. In New York, Dean becomes involved with yet another woman, Inez, who also falls pregnant. Intending to marry her, he starts communicating with Camille over divorce papers: “With one illegitimate child in the West somewhere, Dean then had four little ones and not a cent, and all was troubles and ecstasy and speed as ever. So we didn’t go to Italy” (247). That this would not have occurred anyway, however, seemed clear from a much earlier stage.

In part 4, Sal’s next trip is once again initially undertaken by himself. Coming “into some money from selling my book” (249), Sal is drawn to the road yet again: “Whenever spring comes to New York I can’t stand the suggestions of the land that come blowing over the river from New Jersey and I’ve got to go. So I went. For the first time in our lives I said goodbye to Dean in New York and left him there” (249). Sal responds, in simple and non-deliberating fashion – “So I went” – to the natural exuberance of “spring”, which is ostensibly the only reason for his departure from New York. Significantly, this response also involves a moving away from Dean – for the first time, Dean is not the indirect or direct goal and reason behind

Sal's leaving New York. Still involved in his negotiations with Camille, his new romance with Inez, and working in a parking lot, Dean is involved, for the time being, in the endless complications of his life. Shortly before Sal's departure, Dean (in a somewhat sentimental mood) shares with Sal his vision of the two of them ending up as bums:

"...You see, man, you get older and troubles pile up. Someday you and me'll be coming down an alley together at sundown and looking in the cans to see."

"You mean we'll end up old bums?"

"Why not, man? of course we will if we want to, and all that. There's no harm in ending that way. You spend a whole life of non-interference with the wishes of others, including politicians and the rich, and nobody bothers you and you cut along and make it your own way." I agreed with him. He was reaching his Tao decisions in the simplest direct way. "What's your road, man? – holyboy road, madman road, rainbow road, guppy road, any road. It's an anywhere road for anybody anyhow. Where body how?" We nodded in the rain.

(251)

Dean's vision here is essentially a vision of Mississippi Gene's "life of non-interference with the wishes of others", an abandon to the flow of life, and an abandonment of any and all bonds, responsibilities, qualms, expectations and dreams, both of which are here reflected in the corruption of his language. Dean also recognises the open-endedness of the road, and the freedom of choice with which it presents the traveller. But if Sal is invited to name his road, we cannot shake the feeling that Dean's road remains undefined, an "any road". Growing increasingly dishevelled and incoherent through the course of the novel (and especially from this point on), it begins to look, eventually, as though Dean's attempts to maintain the intensity of "IT" may perhaps have brought him dangerously close to the dissolution of the "Ghost of the Susquehanna". This intense chaos of Dean's reality is contrasted by Sal, soon after, to the photographs that Dean shows him of his family in San Francisco:

I realized these were all the snapshots which our children would look at someday with wonder, thinking their parents had lived smooth, well-ordered, stabilized-within-the-photo lives and got up in the morning to walk proudly on the sidewalks of life, never dreaming the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless nightmare road. All of it inside endless and beginningless emptiness.

(254)

Inasmuch as this realisation also points to the general artificiality and limitation of "realistic" artistic representation, it essentially picks up on a thematic strain which also runs through *The Rainbow*, namely the inability of the young to recognise and acknowledge the "raggedy madness" of the lives of their parents. The young, in perhaps appropriating the "senseless nightmare road", replace it with the "sidewalks of life" when imaging their own parents' youth. One is also surprised by Sal's suddenly negative attitude to a road which, shortly before, he couldn't wait to get onto. It cannot but have something to do with the final impressions Dean makes on Sal – the mess of his life is beginning to frighten Sal. As Sal and Dean say goodbye,

his last sight of Dean is of him “walk[ing] off in the long red dusk” (254): “Suddenly he bent to his life and walked quickly out of sight. I gaped into the bleakness of my own days. I had an awful long way to go too” (254). For Sal, there is a responsibility to life on the road too, even if only the responsibility to the self. This responsibility will resolve itself in the new pilgrimage to Mexico.

Sal first travels the usual route to Denver by bus, where he meets with a number of old friends, and is introduced to Stan Shephard, who decides to join Sal on his trip to Mexico. This is the first mention of such a trip, so it seems likely that the idea evolves in Denver, while Sal has to consider his next move. It is while the two of them are getting ready for the trip, between parties and so forth, that Sal gets an unexpected phone call from a friend, informing him that

“.... Dean bought a car and is coming to join you.” Suddenly I had a vision of Dean, a burning shuddering frightful Angel, palpitating toward me across the road, approaching like a cloud, with enormous speed, pursuing me like the Shrouded Traveler on the plain, bearing down on me. I saw his huge face over the plains with the mad, bony purpose and the gleaming eyes; I saw his wings; I saw his old jalopy chariot with thousands of sparkling flames shooting from it; I saw the path it burned over the road; it even made its own roads.... It came like a wrath to the West. I knew Dean had gone mad again. There was no chance to send money to either wife if he took all his savings out of the bank and bought a car. Everything was up, the jig and all. Behind him charred ruins smoked.... It was like the imminent arrival of Gargantua; preparations had to be made to widen the gutters of Denver and foreshorten certain laws to fit his suffering bulk and bursting ecstasies.

(259)

Dean approaches like Whitman’s Gargantuan speaker in “Song of Myself”, “magnifying and applying” (l. 1020), “skirt[ing] the sierras” (l. 713); in Sal’s mind he now appears as being swollen with “ecstasies”. Beyond humanity, Dean becomes a terrifying “Angel”, and is even associated with the “Shrouded Traveler”, or Death. These images seem confused and even contradictory, but it is tempting to account for them as pointing to Dean’s tendency to take life to the point of death. His excess is so great that it distends his being to the point of dissolution and pure anarchy. When Dean finally does arrive, the growing incoherence of his speech indeed suggests such a state, and when he finally falls silent, things are not much more stable:

He simply disappeared for a moment to gather up more energy. If you touched him he would sway like a boulder suspended on a pebble on the precipice of a cliff. He might come crashing down or just sway rocklike. Then the boulder exploded into a flower and his face lit up and he looked around like a man waking up.... He was finally an Angel, as I always knew he would be, but like any Angel he still had rages and furies, and that night when we all left the party and repaired to the Windsor bar in one vast brawling gang, Dean became frantically and demoniacally and seraphically drunk.

(263)

Dean's status as "Angel" puts him beyond the pale of true human interaction, and of any predictability – he almost exists in the realm of the sacred, a heterological being that undergoes constant metamorphoses, who has no clear being. In the bar, he drinks "like the ghost of his father" (263) and, together with Sal, assaults a door in the men's room.

When the time to leave for Mexico finally arrives, Sal is clearly aware of the fact that the linearity of his previous trips between the east and west is finally being broken:

I couldn't imagine this trip. It was the most fabulous of all. It was no longer east-west, but magical *south*. We saw a vision of the entire Tierra del Fuego and us flying down the curve of the world into other tropics and other worlds. "Man, this will finally take us to IT!" said Dean with definite faith.

(265-266)

Importantly, Sal cannot "imagine this trip", and neither does he try to. The road once again leads into a completely unknown, and therefore fecundating space. It is also significant that this space happens to be Mexico, for like Lawrence, Kerouac felt that the Mexicans retained a vital relationship to their circumambient universe, as well as to the ancient founders of the human race. In the context of *On the Road*, Mexico is Lawrence's Crown to the Lion and Unicorn of the west and east, the "resolution" to an eternal conflict (in this case, between unbounded freedom on the one hand, and community and sophistication on the other). As Sal and his two companions "roar...off" (267), Sal experiences the recurrence of another old vision:

Far up in the purple shades of the rock there was someone walking, walking, but we could not see; maybe that old man with the white hair I had sensed years ago up in the peaks. Zacatecan Jack. But he was coming closer to me, if only ever just behind. And Denver receded behind us like the city of salt.

(268)

It is this figure that will eventually, upon Sal's return from Mexico, present him with "the Word" (55), a kind of purpose – as such, this approaching figure may well be considered symbolic of Sal's coming into being. Before that can happen, though, Sal has to go through this "final" trip, a trip both exciting and horrifying. This latter quality is immediately evoked as they pull out of Denver, and Stan is stung by "a strange feverish exotic bug [which] rose from secret corruptions and sent fear into our hearts.... It made the trip seem sinister and doomed" (268-269). As they move south, both the heat and the insects become increasingly difficult to ignore, and the landscape becomes increasingly underworldly: "There was no night dew, not a breath of air, nothing except billions of moths smashing at bulbs everywhere and the low, rank smell of a hot river in the night nearby" (273-274). The entire atmosphere is suggestive of a chthonic soup. This atmosphere also has an effect on social structures and strictures, as the group find out once they reach the Mexican border and its unauthoritarian officials, who

“weren’t like officials at all. They were lazy and tender” (274). Their surprise at this is so great that for a moment they allow themselves the luxury of believing that they’ve “finally found the magic land at the end of the road and we never dreamed the extent of the magic” (276).

Mexico provides the “magic”, open space of possibility to America’s structured Moloch (where the only possibility of attaining some freedom lies in renouncing all bonds with others, and becoming a wandering loner).

Retaining a gleeful, childlike wonder, the group continues to travel through Mexico; when Sal takes the wheel at some point, he exults in the fact that they are

driving across the world and into the places where we would finally learn ourselves among the Fellahin² Indians of the world, the essential strain of the basic primitive, wailing humanity that stretches in a belt around the equatorial belly of the world. . . . These people were unmistakably Indians and were not at all like the Pedros and Panchos of silly civilized American lore – they had high cheekbones, and slanted eyes, and soft ways; they were not fools, they were not clowns; they were great, grave Indians and they were the source of mankind and the fathers of it. The waves are Chinese, but the earth is an Indian thing. As essential as rocks in the desert are they in the desert of “history”. And they knew this when we passed, ostensibly self-important moneybag Americans on a lark in their land; they knew who was the father and who was the son of antique life on earth, and made no comment.

(280-281)

As this fatherless threesome – “Dean looking for his. . . , mine dead, Stan fleeing his old one” (267) – pass by the Indians, Sal recognises in them an older, more ancient fatherhood. Robert Holton also suggests that “this is the fulfillment of Sal’s desire to put an end to his white bourgeois life” (277). It finally remains as impossible for Sal to join them as it was for Lawrence, but nevertheless, they give him an intimation of another way of life which is “dense, dark, ancient” (299). Their descent into the chthonic “belly of the world” and, eventually, the “Tropic of Cancer” (293) recalls Miller’s “sojourn in the belly of the whale” (*Cancer* 186), a descent into hell from which the new self is eventually born. This “sojourn” is dramatised in terms of three separate experiences that follow: firstly, the group’s drug-taking and whoring in Gregoria, secondly, their night on the Tropic of Cancer and, finally, Sal’s debilitating illness in Mexico City. The first experience starts with Sal’s earlier promise to a now sleeping Dean, “as a joke, that I would get him a girl” (281). When they enter Gregoria, the car is approached by a young Mexican called Victor, who immediately responds affirmatively to Sal’s joking request for a “señorita” (281). With Victor in the car, they first go to his mother’s house in order to buy some marijuana, which they proceed to smoke in the car, with Victor’s brothers hanging around outside:

² This term comes from Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* – for a discussion of the influence of this text on Kerouac, see Robert Holton’s “Kerouac Among the Fellahin: *On the Road* to the Postmodern.”

To drag on this thing was like leaning over a chimney and inhaling.... I looked out the back window of the car, and another and the strangest of Victor's brothers – a tall Peruvian of an Indian with a sash over his shoulder – leaned grinning on a post, too bashful to come up and shake hands. It seemed the car was surrounded by brothers, for one appeared at Dean's side. Then the strangest thing happened. Everybody became so high that usual formalities were dispensed with and the things of immediate interest were concentrated on, and now it was the strangeness of the Americans and Mexicans blasting together in the desert and, more than that, the strangeness of seeing in close proximity the faces and pores of skins and calluses of fingers and general abashed cheekbones of another world.

(283)

Even though they remain separated by boundaries of language and social codification, Sal and his companions momentarily experience a kind of kinship with these "brothers" – when the car is "surrounded by brothers", the absence of the possessive, namely "Victor's," suggests that these men momentarily become "brothers" to Sal, Dean and Stan, and vice versa. It is an experience of simple community that has been conspicuously absent from their lives in America. This experience is extended when the group drive off with Victor toward the "whorehouse" (286). This trip, during which Sal loses "consciousness in my lower mind of what we were doing" (285), is interrupted by Victor, who takes them past his own house to proudly show off his new-born child. It is a gesture which once again strengthens the pervading sense of community, a sense which also does not disappear once they reach the "whorehouse" (286). Asking the proprietor to put on some "mambo music" (287), the din is so loud that the whole town soon comes running to view the spectacle:

[I]t shattered Dean and Stan and me for a moment in the realization that we had never dared play music as loud as we wanted, and this was how loud we wanted. It blew and shuddered directly at us. In a few minutes half that portion of town was at the windows, watching the *Americanos* dance with the gals.... "More Mambo Jambo," "Chattanooga de Mambo," "Mambo Numero Ocho" – all these tremendous numbers resounded and flared in the golden, mysterious afternoon like the sounds you expect to hear on the last day of the world and the Second Coming. The trumpets seemed so loud I thought they could hear them clear out into the desert, where the trumpets had originated anyway. The drums were mad.

(287)

The apocalyptic imagery strengthens the sense that Sal, specifically, is once again effecting a clean break with his past. What follows is a confused and orgiastic Dionysian celebration which seems "like a long, spectral Arabian dream in the afternoon in another life" (289), a dissolution in dancing, sex and alcohol, and an excessive waste of money. Sal's experience on the Tropic of Cancer is also foreshadowed by the description of the mambo as "never let[ting] up for a moment, it frenzied on like an endless journey in the jungle" (289). The image of the jungle, like that of the swamp, is employed here because of its ability to evoke the full choking

horror of the chthonic mire and the (collective) unconscious, both of which form a heterological pool in which the human race remains irredeemably rooted.

When the three travellers finally leave Gregoria, and bid Victor farewell, their trip to the “belly of the world” (280) is immediately continued as they find themselves literally descending:

Immediately outside Gregoria the road began to drop, great trees rose on each side, and in the trees as it grew dark we heard the great roar of billions of insects that sounded like one continuous high-screeching cry. “Whooh!” said Dean, and he turned on his headlights and they weren’t working. . . . And now we shot in inky darkness through the scream of insects, and the great, rank, almost rotten smell descended, and we remembered and realized that the map indicated just after Gregoria the beginning of the Tropic of Cancer. . . . I stuck my head out the window; bugs smashed at my face; a great screech rose the moment I cocked my ear to the wind. Suddenly our lights were working again and they poked ahead, illuminating the lonely road that ran between solid walls of drooping, snaky trees as high as a hundred feet.

(291-293)

The excess of Gregoria serves as the entrance into the underworld of the Tropic of Cancer, in which the three friends are literally submerged. This submersion is given a particularly dramatic effect when the headlights of the car initially fail to work, and Dean literally has to commit them to the unknown. During that interlude, their senses of smell and hearing become especially attuned to the atmosphere around them. The “roar” of the insects, which almost seem like emanations of the jungle itself (and perhaps recalls the roar he heard during his second “vision” in San Francisco), seems to symbolise the roaring flow of violent natural energy, the kind of flow that invests *Tropic of Cancer* before the violence is resolved in the peaceful flow of the Seine at the end of the book. When they finally encounter a “jungle town” (293), and “stop. . . in the unimaginable softness” (293), the group decide to sleep just outside the town. It is here that Sal has an experience which leads to yet another “vision”:

It was so incredibly hot it was impossible to sleep. So Dean took a blanket and laid it out on the soft, hot sand in the road and flopped out. Stan was stretched on the front seat of the Ford with both doors open for a draft, but there wasn’t even the faintest puff of a wind. I, in the back seat, suffered in a pool of sweat. I got out of the car and stood swaying in the blackness. . . . I jumped up on the steel roof of the car and stretched out flat on my back. Still there was no breeze, but the steel had an element of coolness in it and dried my back of sweat, clotting up thousands of dead bugs into cakes on my skin, and I realized that jungle takes you over and you become it. Lying on the top of the car with my face to the black sky was like lying in a closed trunk on a summer night. For the first time in my life the weather was not something that touched me, that caressed me, froze or sweated me, but became me. The atmosphere and I became the same. Soft infinitesimal showers of microscopic bugs fanned down on my face as I slept, and they were extremely pleasant and soothing. The sky was starless, utterly unseen and heavy. . . . The dead bugs mingled with my blood; the live mosquitoes exchanged further portions; I began to tingle all over and to smell of the rank, hot, and rotten jungle, all

over from hair and face to feet and toes.... I didn't even know if branches or open sky were directly above me, and it made no difference. I opened my mouth to it and drew deep breaths of jungle atmosphere. It was not air, never air, but the palpable and living emanation of trees and swamp. I stayed awake. Roosters began to crow the dawn across the brakes somewhere. Still no air, no breeze, no dew, but the same Tropic of Cancer heaviness held us all pinned to the earth, where we belonged and tingled. There was no sign of dawn in the skies. Suddenly I heard the dogs barking furiously across the dark, and then I heard the faint clip-clop of a horse's hooves. It came closer and closer. What kind of mad rider in the night would this be? Then I saw an apparition: a wild horse, white as a ghost, came trotting down the road directly toward Dean. Behind him the dogs yammered and contended. I couldn't see them, they were dirty old jungle dogs, but the horse was white as snow and immense and almost phosphorescent and easy to see. I felt no panic for Dean. The horse saw him and trotted right by his head passed the car like a ship, whinnied softly, and continued through town, bedeviled by the dogs, and all I heard was the faint hoofbeat fading away in the woods. The dogs subsided and sat to lick themselves. What was this horse? What myth and ghost, what spirit? I told Dean about it when he woke up. He said I'd been dreaming. Then he recalled faintly dreaming of a white horse, and I told him it had been no dream.

(294-296)

This is a night of chthonic dissolution, in which Sal is invaded by the jungle, and the discrete boundaries of his body are breached. Here, however, Sal (and friends) does not flee as he did, with Dean and Marylou, from the swamps outside New Orleans. Abandoned to a new intoxication, Sal stands "swaying in the blackness". Ceasing to be a discrete object – "the weather was not something that touched me...but became me" – he now becomes part of the atmosphere, and finds his blood horrifically "mingled" with dead bugs and other blood (transferred by mosquitoes). Everything is completely earth-bound, to the extent that the stars are invisible, and the sky becomes "heavy", holding them "pinned to the earth". In spite of the fact that there is a constant, if submerged, sense of horror about this experience, Sal does not recoil, and actually seems to abandon himself to the merge, as can especially be seen in his opening of his mouth to draw in "deep breaths of jungle atmosphere". Interestingly, however, this sacred experience is interrupted by Sal's vision of "an apparition: a wild horse", the only object that stands out in the blackness by virtue of its "phosphorescent" whiteness. And this seems to be its "message" – appearing to Sal toward the end of his night of dissolution, the horse heralds a dawn of reconstitution, of radiant discreteness. Unlike the horses Ursula encounters toward the end of *The Rainbow*, this horse is *alone*; it doesn't form part of a group, and neither is it very suggestive of bursting primal energy in the way those horses were. It is perhaps closer to Lawrence's Unicorn, which opposes the primal fury of the Lion. Significantly, Dean does not see this horse, but only "faintly dream[s]" of it, while Sal is convinced of its "reality". For Dean there is no clear end to his endless night of dissolution, but Sal's journey is now bringing him to a point of rebirth.

With everybody awake, the group resumes its journey to Mexico City, and they soon rise from the jungle where they had spent the night. Their interest in their surroundings is soon rekindled as they start encountering mountain Indians, and the air grows cooler. Eventually they come to the “dizzying heights of the Sierra Madre Oriental” (299), where

shawled Indians [were] watching us from under hatbrims and *rebozos*. Life was dense, dark, ancient. They watched Dean, serious and insane at his raving wheel, with eyes of hawks. All had their hands outstretched. They had come down from the back mountains and higher places to hold forth their hands for something they thought civilization could offer, and they never dreamed the sadness and the poor broken delusion of it. They didn't know that a bomb had come that could crack all our bridges and roads and reduce them to jumbles, and we would be as poor as they someday, and stretching out our hands in the same, same way. Our broken Ford, old thirties upgoing America Ford, rattled through them and vanished in the dust.

(299)

This is a strange meeting of two groups, both of which feel that the other holds the key to a better life. Sal beholds their “dense, dark, ancient” life with a Lawrentian mixture of awe, respect and patronisation. For the first time, also, Sal includes the atomic bomb in his apocalyptic calculations, clearly seeing (in agreement with Spengler) a western civilisation in decline. This notion is also embodied by the woeful state of the “old thirties upgoing America Ford”, which is now clearly in decline. One is also reminded of the question which Carlo Marx posed Sal and Dean at the beginning of their first trip together: “Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?” (119). By this stage, the car is no longer shiny – Dean and Sal’s journey has led them to the earthy and ragged civilisation of Mexico, in which the ancient and modern are joined. This is especially apparent in Mexico City, “stretched out in its volcanic crater below and spewing city smokes and early dusklights” (300). Vibrant and delirious with activity, dirty and run down, it is described by Sal as “the great and final wild uninhibited Fellahin-childlike city that we knew we would find at the end of the road” (302). It is here that Sal finally succumbs to an illness which recalls his previous two experiences of dissolution in Mexico, and also concludes it:

Then I got fever and became delirious and unconscious. Dysentery. I looked up out of the dark swirl of my mind and I knew I was on a bed eight thousand feet above sea level, on the roof of the world, and I knew that I had lived a whole life and many others in the poor atomic husk of my flesh, and I had all the dreams. And I saw Dean bending over the kitchen table. It was several nights later and he was leaving Mexico City already.

(302)

Mexico City, rooted in the chthonic, situated in a volcanic crater, and also elevated above the world, resolves the complex of conflicts with which Sal had been struggling through the course of his travels. His fever, which once again takes him into the realm of the “unconscious”, mirrors the illness which he mentions at the beginning of the book, an illness which there

signalled the casting off of his married life. Here, also, Sal seems to be ready to cast something off, to be reborn from the “poor atomistic husk of my flesh”. All this is very reminiscent of the end of *The Rainbow*, where Ursula also goes through the crucible of an illness, and emerges ready to face “a new Day”, and shed the “old, decaying, fibrous husk” (456). Sal now has “all the dreams”, a visionary deluge precipitated by his feverish state. Dean abandons him, going back to America, and this effectively spells the end of their travels together. Dean’s role, first as guide, and then as fellow explorer, has now been taken to the “end of the road” (302), and Sal’s new road now leads elsewhere.

Part five briefly traces Sal’s return to New York and the new life he embarks on there. The first thing we are told, however, is that Dean returned to New York

with the divorce papers in his hands, he and Inez immediately went to Newark and got married; and that night, telling her everything was all right and not to worry, and making logics where there was nothing but inestimable sorrowful sweats, he jumped on a bus and roared off again across the awful continent to San Francisco to rejoin Camille and the two baby girls. So now he was three times married, twice divorced, and living with his second wife.

(305)

The chaos of Dean’s life is not resolved in any way; there is no clear sense in which even the trip to Mexico effected any change in him. Sal, on the other hand, returning from Mexico by himself, finally finds the old man of his recurring vision catching up with him:

In the fall I myself started back home from Mexico City and one night just over Laredo border in Dilley, Texas, I was standing on the hot road underneath an arc-lamp with the summer moths smashing into it when I heard the sound of footsteps from the darkness beyond, and lo, a tall old man with flowing white hair came clomping by with a pack on his back, and when he saw me as he passed, he said, “*Go moan for man*,” and clomped on back to his dark. Did this mean that I should at last go on my pilgrimage on foot on the dark roads of America?

(306)

This episode mirrors Sal’s vision of the white horse on the Tropic of Cancer, which I would suggest foreshadows this encounter. The “hot road” and “summer moths” recall the chthonic night in the jungle, while the old man’s “flowing white hair” echoes the horses radiant whiteness. Also like the horse, the man suddenly emerges from the darkness and, just as suddenly, is swallowed by it again, and Sal is first alerted to his approach by the sound of his “clomping” footsteps, as he was by the “clip-clop of the horse’s hooves” (296). This man finally presents Sal with a new role, or a dual role, in fact. His command, “*Go moan for man*”, seems to refer to Sal’s role as a writer – in this command we see the elegiac quality that already runs through *On the Road*, and increasingly does so in the rest of Kerouac’s novels. The old man casts Sal in the role of an elegiac “singer”, and proceeds with his journey. But the

old man himself also serves as an example, and in his peripatetic pilgrimage Sal seems to foresee Kerouac's "great rucksack revolution" (*Dharma Bums* 83), in which the youth of America would abandon social centres in order to explore the roads and the wilds of America. For Sal, now, a possible future lies in exploring America *by foot*, to explore it intensively and add to the quantity of his experiences a more resonant quality, thereby establishing a clear relation to his circumambient universe. When he finally arrives in New York, however, a chance meeting with "the girl with the pure and innocent eyes that I had always searched for and for so long" (306) results in a new and stable relationship.

Sal and Laura "agree...to love each other madly" (306). When they decide to move to San Francisco, Sal writes to Dean to come and help them move in six weeks. Characteristically, Dean arrives "five and a half weeks in advance" (306), disrupting all plans and making the move impossible. It also becomes clear that his chaotic lifestyle is pushing him nearer the brink of insanity:

He couldn't talk anymore. He hopped and laughed, he stuttered and fluttered his hands and said, "Ah – ah – you must listen to hear." We listened, all ears. But he forgot what he wanted to say. "Really listen – ahem. Look, dear Sal – sweet Laura – I've come – I'm gone – but wait – ah yes." And he stared with rocky sorrow into his hands. "Can't talk no more – do you understand that it is – or might be – But listen!" We all listened. He was listening to sounds in the night. "Yes!" he whispered with awe. "But you see – no need to talk any more – and further."

(306-307)

Incoherent and distracted, Dean is beyond human communication, and cannot explain, when Sal asks him to account for his untimely arrival, the reasons for his sudden appearance, except to admit, eventually, that he doesn't "know why I came" (308). He stays in New York for a mere three days before he takes off across the continent again. Sal and Dean's final goodbye is a lugubrious affair in which Dean suddenly finds himself out in the cold:

The last time I saw him it was under sad and strange circumstances. Remi Boncoeur had arrived in New York.... I wanted him to meet and know Dean. They did meet, but Dean couldn't talk any more and said nothing, and Remi turned away. Remi had gotten tickets for the Duke Ellington concert at the Metropolitan Opera and insisted Laura and I come with him and his girl.... The Cadillac was parked and ready to go. Dean stood outside the windows with his bag, ready to go to Penn Station and on across the land.... "D'you think I can ride to Fortieth Street with you?" he whispered.... I whispered to Remi. No, he wouldn't have it, he liked me but didn't like my idiot friends....

So Dean couldn't ride uptown with us and the only thing I could do was sit in the back of the Cadillac and wave at him.... And off we went to the sad and disinclined concert for which I had no stomach whatever and all the time I was thinking of Dean and how he got back on the train and rode over three thousand miles over that awful land and never knew why he had come anyway, except to see me.

(309)

Dean's isolation contrasts strongly with the image of Sal and friends going off to a concert at the Metropolitan Opera, for which Sal understandably loses his taste. The concert, with its impressive and formal venue, replaces the vibrant dives in which Sal and Dean have been listening to jazz, in the same way that the Cadillac replaces the broken Ford of their last trip. The entire episode is described in a deeply elegiac tone. In this way, Sal's establishment of a new, stable life (the only alternative to the chaos of Dean's) is not set up as an absolute. As Tim Hunt suggests, "Kerouac and his narrator, though wary of Sal's earlier foolishness, are unwilling to dismiss it for fear that it might mean dismissing the vitality that went with it" (7). For both Kerouac and the mature Sal, the mystery of the self finally seems to be eternally wrapped up in the conflict between naivety and disillusionment, exuberance and horror, purpose and purposelessness, community and isolation, celebration and elegy. This accounts for the conflicting moods in the final passage of *On the Road*:

So in America when the sun goes down I sit on the old broken-down river pier watching the long, long skies over New Jersey and sense all that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over to the West Coast, and all that road going, all the people dreaming in the immensity of it, and in Iowa I know by now the children must be crying in the land where they let the children cry, and tonight the stars'll be out, and don't you know that God is Pooh Bear? the evening star must be drooping and shedding her sparkler dims on the prairie, which is just before the coming of complete night that blesses the earth, darkens all rivers, cups the peaks and folds the final shore in, and nobody, nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old, I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty, the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty.

(309-310)

Like Miller's narrator at the end of *Tropic of Cancer*, Sal also stares out over a river as the book comes to a close. Seeing in everything the hand of a "God" who is compared to "Pooh Bear", Sal creates a sense of childlike wonder while creating the image of a God who is simultaneously blundering, clumsy and innocent. There is a strong evocation of a sense of peace as night settles in a completely non-threatening manner, which nevertheless does not blind Sal to the mystery of the future or man's mortality. His reminiscence on Dean Moriarty, which ostensibly also gives rise to his narration, clearly implies that Dean only forms part of his past, to which he looks back with that inevitable mixture of joy and loss. As Regina Weinreich suggests, "Sal as narrator reaches the goal for which Dean is a catalyst – the understanding and freedom which comes of telling his tale, celebrating the fact that he is both alive and free. He tells the story to celebrate further that he has survived on terms authentically his own" (38). This quality certainly informs his narration in *On the Road*. On the other hand, one cannot miss the fact that much of the mood of the book also flows from the old man's command to Sal to "*Go moan for man*" (306).

CONCLUSION

Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac are very different kinds of writers, and it is not the purpose of this thesis to suggest that they should be isolated as a discrete group. My intention in bringing them together is the exploration of a tradition in which the writer, drawing strongly on personal experiences and revelations, proceeds to explore, in fiction, the development of the individual sense of self, the Lawrentian “coming into being”, and develops a style which can effectively dramatise and intimate the dynamics of this process. The result is in essence an “autobiography of the soul”, and the process which forms the focus of this autobiography can be defined as a “dialectical movement of ‘soul making’” (Hartman 49), which draws on existing opposites in the universe. Some of these oppositions, for instance, can be found in the conflict between life and death, the conscious and the (collective) unconscious, the known and the unknown, the body and the mind, isolation and community, male and female, individual and species. All of these conflicts, if balanced, are vital, and their cessation is not to be desired. In fact, the soul is frequently conceived of as that very balance between two vital opposites, and thus serves as the “resolution” to conflict. It is “the Crown”, “the keystone of the fight” (254) in the conflict between the Lion and the Unicorn in Lawrence’s essay. As Lawrence suggests in “The Crown”, the elimination of either pole would spell the end of meaningful life. Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac all suggest that modern society has tipped the balance in favour of one pole, for instance, the conscious over the unconscious, the mind over the body, and that this imbalance accounts for the sense of meaninglessness and of the despair pervading the twentieth century.

The coming into being of the modern individual requires a principled rejection of modern social (and moral) values, and this rejection finds its clearest expression in the act of taking up a pilgrimage, a physical and spiritual journey which takes the individual beyond the pale of established boundaries. This movement is undertaken, time and again, by Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac’s characters, as well as by the three writers themselves. It is in this realm that the individual can escape from the identity that has been imposed upon him or her by essentially shedding it, by being reborn. It requires the individual to be open and attentive to a personal “circumambient universe” (Lawrence “Morality” 172), and to achieve new and vital relations to this universe. Such relations are vital because they are not *established*, i.e. circumscribed and categorised – instead they are to be seen as an ever-shifting *balance* between the self and the not-self, or Other, which share a kinship in sprouting from the same flux of energy and

matter. It is in this dialectical balance that the soul is constituted. The journey, in challenging the homogenous nature of the individual (inasmuch as it manages to open him to his circumambient universe), keeps the conflict vital.

The rebirth of the self essentially takes place in terms of a sacred instant, a moment of excess in which the new self, in growing, bursts through the “skin” of the old self. Simultaneously a moment of exuberance, vulnerability, horror and exploration, this sacred instant is essentially an abandonment to the heterological flow of life, the primal soup of both nature and the collective unconscious. This abandonment is simultaneously an act of faith and an act of rebellion. If it is not to result in death or dissolution (insanity), the self has to emerge from it again and reconstitute itself, assume a new form. The struggle for the self, then, the “dialectical movement of ‘soul making’”, is an ongoing conflict and oscillation between discrete form and the formlessness of matter. This conflict is dramatised in a variety of ways in the work of Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac, but the important thing to realise is that it is also *intimated* in the actual style of their fiction. In creating a sense of the dynamics of rebirth as circumscribed or implied, to a greater or lesser extent, in their various “metaphysics” (to use a Lawrentian term), these writers go beyond simple representation to actual intimation. In other words, they allow the text to disintegrate and cohere, syntactically and semantically, in sympathy with the dynamic of dissolution and reconstitution implicit in the “coming into being” of their characters. Similarly, they employ rhythm to intimate this dynamic. It is this quality that has led them (and their readers) to refer to their work in musical terms, which also goes a long way to accounting for the celebratory, inspirational, ritualistic, spontaneous and expressive power that their texts achieve at certain moments.

The text also plays a role in the “dialectical movement of ‘soul making’” of the writer. It is in the conflict between the inner and the outer, the conscious and the unconscious, the matter and the form, or the content and the style that the soul (of character, text and writer) finds itself created. While this conflict informs the process of any given character’s coming into being and the very texts which these writers produce, it also seems that the production of these texts plays an important role in the coming into being of these writers themselves. This lends the text a particularly urgent quality and, I would suggest, underlies its “criminality”, in other words, its conscious and deliberate transgression of literary aesthetics. There is much to suggest that Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac (should have) expected the frequently controversial reception of their work, and that this very expectation fuelled their transgression, imbued it with the urgency, exuberance or, to use Miller’s word, “lust” (“Obscenity” 288), which keeps these

texts compelling long after the social codes and conventions that inform such controversy have disappeared.

Lawrence, Miller and Kerouac are problematic writers – all of them left themselves open to charges of sexism, racism, intolerance, insensitivity, preachiness and inconsistency. This places them on uncertain ground in the current socio-political climate¹ where difference is tolerated with the understanding that tolerance itself is not negotiable. What this should demonstrate is, of course, is that they are simply, truly human. And it is because of this kinship with us that they may move us in the first place, and feed our souls. The soul has become a questionable concept or ideal in an age where people are considered as products of a complex web of social, familial, educational and a vast range of other influences. Under the influence of this climate, literary criticism has in some sense metamorphosed into case of picking one's poison (or one's scalpel). Harold Bloom, for instance, in his own elegiac *The Western Canon*, bemoans the fact that "Shakespeare criticism is in full flight from his aesthetic supremacy and works at reducing him to the 'social energies' of the English Renaissance"(3). It is a point he raises time and again in relation to the collective canon – literary criticism has become strictly political, and beside the point. A kind of chronic self-analytical neurosis assails the critic as he settles down to explicate: Will I appear taken in by this writer? Was she a good human being? Did he promote any minority groups? It is a quirk of our age that the literary critic should feel obliged constantly to either reject or make excuses for his subject. In the end, much of the soul (of the work, writer and reader) is lost.

What is tolerable in an established critic like Bloom may be sheer effrontery in an apprentice academic like myself, but it is my hope that this thesis may contribute to the (scholarly) appreciation of three writers who have made significant contributions both to the literary canon (from which Bloom, admittedly, still excludes Miller and Kerouac) and to the lives of their readers, in spite of the resistance they have encountered from literary critics. Lawrence's case doesn't need much pleading – his case has been won by others more accomplished than I. But Miller essentially remains stuck in the rut of feminist criticism, while Kerouac's image is still defined by the popular impression of him as an avatar and father of the juvenile delinquency of a self-immolating sixties counter-culture. The result is that most established critics give them a wide berth. It is my hope that, in viewing these two writers in conjunction with Lawrence,

¹ Lawrence is, perhaps, in the least danger, since the bulk of his works received serious critical attention before the sixties (and a more serious and comprehensive feminist criticism) came along.

something of their immersion in a visionary tradition and of their own (stylistic) innovation – their vision and their voice – might have become clear.

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