

***An Anarchy of Man: Cartesian and Post -
Cartesian Representations of the Self in
Selected Western Literature.***



Submitted by

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Introduction

In January 1996 I moved from Canberra to Sydney to get away from a relationship that was going bust. By chance a friend of mine had just found a very cheap rental flat in Bondi Beach and I moved in with him. A number of friends had previously moved from Canberra to Sydney and I soon reacquainted myself with them, and as usual began writing about them. I had almost finished my BA at the time, and was immersed in Foucault, particularly *Discipline and Punish* (1997), and the extracts from *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality Vol. 3* (1986) we had been set to read as part of a philosophy unit. Foucault's ideas concerning the roles of ideologies as narratives in creating the ways we think about ourselves immediately appealed to me as I had never thought about the world in this way before. In Sydney a friend urged me to read Henry Miller's *The Tropic of Capricorn* (1939) and his *Rosy Crucifixion* series of *Sexus* (1949), *Plexus* (1953) and *Nexus* (1960). Between Foucault and Miller the possibility of an interesting mix of style and substance began to intrigue me. Miller's rolling prose and his play with scenes and his cynicism of ideological certainties, his askew realism, combined with Foucault's insights into the roles of narratives in forming our selves seemed like ideas that could be effectively combined.

At the same time a brace of grunge novels by young writers was appearing and I read them in the hope of experiencing solidarity with the characters and deriving some kind of feeling of authenticity from the idea that the types of people and the kinds of places I knew were being given the amazing imprimatur of being published. Andrew McGahan's *Praise* (1992) had been published earlier but I had not read it yet, Justine Ettler's *The River Ophelia* (1995) was being talked about, and the idea of a young 'grunge' realism was quite popular with the people I knew. My reading left me disappointed. I did not recognise the lifestyles and characters of these books, but I appreciated their urban landscapes and realist styles.

I wrote and wrote, but could not get to the point when one says 'I have a novel going now'. In July I moved back to Canberra to complete my BA and quickly finished a novel I literally had left in a drawer when I moved to Sydney. The novel, *Hollow Days* (Spencer, 1998) was accepted for publication by Mergemedia. Through the editing process the publishers excised all the philosophical 'raves' from the main character, in the process cutting the novel by about a quarter. They made me put more 'action' in the story, and concentrate on building colour into scenes. I didn't want to remove the ravings of the main character, but I really wanted to get published so I went along with it. After

ten drafts I realised the novel was better without the raves. The reader probably did not want to hear plain discourse on the meaning of everything spouting from the main character. I came to realise that just because I enjoyed writing it, this did not mean others would enjoy reading it. If the book was to sell people had to enjoy reading it. This seems basic but it was quite a revelation to me at the time.

At the same time as revising *Hollow Days*, I was studying the works of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, and became intensely interested in how, if Wittgenstein were right about there being no essential inner self, this could possibly be represented in fiction.

The triumvirate of concerns for this thesis novel *An Anarchy of Man* was forming. They were: the issue of living in a postmodern world, Wittgenstein's ideas of the self, and trying to write about these issues in an easy-to-read realist style. Reading Foucault had led to reading postmodern theorists, and the ideas of Jean-Francois Lyotard, Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida. The broad critique postmodernism as an intellectual force brings against the certainties of modernist dogmas, and in particular the awareness of the role of narratives in our understandings of the world, appealed to me as a writer. I became interested in Don DeLillo's novels *White Noise* (1985) and *Underworld* (1997)

engage with the postmodern world: its uncertainties and paranoias bleed through his work, yet his characters remain middle-class and American and mostly retain wholesomely modernist perspectives. They hold on to a belief in the inviolability of the self, while the governing narratives of the world around them crumble.

Reading Wittgenstein and postmodern theorists led me to internalise as a writer and an individual ‘subject’ the postmodern idea that the ‘certainties’ that surround us are really narratives that can be deconstructed. It is well to realise the infectious and insidious self-constructing role of late capitalism’s spectacles. But what of the idea of the ‘self’? The notion of an inner self remains central to the Western way of life, it is embedded in capitalism’s professed veneration of the individual, yet this idea is itself a constructed narrative. The comparing of postmodern ideas about the role of narratives with Wittgenstein’s ideas about the self led me to look into Descartes as a foundational thinker about the self. My dilemma as a writer was the question of how one could create a character that did not rely on the Cartesian view that a human has an essential inner self, yet have that character remain recognisably human to the reader.

Reading the grunge novelists, and having *Hollow Days* published made me realise the inherent power of a novel set in a

landscape that is recognisable to the core target market of readers. People often commented to me that they enjoyed the fact that *Hollow Days* was set in Canberra, that they liked reading about places they knew. For my second novel, I wanted to write about the people I knew in the places I knew. I wanted the novel to be easily understood by my peers and to rock along nicely with an even pace and an interesting narrative. I wanted people to like my book because it was entertaining.

The three concerns mentioned earlier were to do with postmodernism, Wittgenstein, and writing in a realist style. These concerns were difficult to reconcile in one work of fiction. My problem was how to portray recognisable characters and settings and at the same time question the widely held beliefs that a self is made up of an inner 'soul', or has an essential character. Also, I wanted to present these philosophical concerns without preaching. The book must not appear to be seriously philosophical, but must subtly question, through the story itself, the still powerful trope of the Cartesian self. Yet, in order to have a story progress, events must happen to the characters' 'selves' in a way the reader can recognise and understand. Assuming the reader holds the Cartesian view that they possess an inner self, for a character to be recognisable, probably it also should believe it has an inner self.

With all this in mind I got out all the bits and pieces I had written in Sydney. With about fifteen thousand words of notes and observation, little stories and jokes already written, I moved to Melbourne and enrolled in an MA in creative writing.

My simple way of writing is to imagine what would have happened had one of my friends made a different decision to the one they made in reality. The characters in *An Anarchy of Man* are loose conglomerations of people I knew, with added fictionalised characteristics. When I use a model from life I find that elements like descriptions of their bodies are much more believable, and when writing dialogue, by using the patterns of language that I have learned from listening to these people for hours, I can make the character's speech patterns ring true. Even though this MA project is to a certain extent, concerned with questioning assumptions about what is 'true' about a character, the above technique of characterisation - of working partly from real people - is meant only as a technique within the craft of writing.

I had a very close male friend who – like me - had moved from Canberra to escape a relationship, and I still knew the lady involved. I imagined what would happen if she decided to move to Sydney. As the novel took shape it became clear that these people were just going to live their lives and nothing much was going to happen, so I had to invent a subplot, a contrasting tale to

the one I was working with. The story of Joe and Gin began to run parallel with the story of Caudral and Rebecca. I was tempted to make the two plots significant via comparison, but then backed away from that, thinking it too obvious and easy. The novel would also have turned into a morality tale, and I certainly did not want that.

With the character of Leon I wanted to have a foil between the two plots of Joe and Gin, and Caudral and Rebecca. Leon also offers a different perspective on the mechanics of the plot as it unfolds. He is somewhat like the reader's friend, in that he is there to point at the other characters, and laugh at them, or chide them, or push them.

Once I had around twenty-five thousand words on paper it seemed clear I needed a twist. The novel needed to be lifted out of its trajectory and taken in a new direction, in order to keep the reader turning the pages. Since the whole novel was about narrative it seemed fitting that I use the not-known device of making the novel turn out to be a letter. This is a standard kind of twist, but in my case it would extend at once the novel's function as a narrative about narratives, and yet also play into the cultural expectations of narrative twists in a way so deeply ironic as to comment in itself on the narrative expectations of popular culture. At first I thought of making Leon write the book, but because of

his role as handmaiden to the reader I felt it would be breaking a trust with the reader to make Leon lose his distance from events.

I decided to make Caudral write the novel. As Joe's best friend this device would have more emotional cachet, and would suggest that when Caudral has been writing about himself in the novel perhaps he has not been so truthful, thus a light intrigue enters the equation. But the device also repeats the novel's concerns about narratives, in that it shifts the perspective of the reader and the novel, thus destabilising the narrative assumption throughout the novel that it is largely a novel about Joe. To add to this, when parts of the novel are not written in the first person, the reader is first led to believe that the novelist has written them, then that the novelist has written Joe as writing them, then that the novelist has written Caudral writing Joe writing, for example, Gin's perspective. This is playing with the reader's expectations, but is also meant to reflect the interconnectedness of narratives and the way that our ideas of our own identities are multi-layered and produced by very many perspectives, that we are not as the Cartesian model would have us believe we are.

Chapter 1. The Cartesian Picture of the Self and Australian Grunge Fiction.

Part 1. The background to Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

The notion that there is an inner self, distinct from the outer world, and further that the inner self is somehow non-physical, as well as the essential, or 'true' person, remains a strongly held belief today. This Cartesian picture is radically at odds with contemporary theory, and yet powerfully influential in literature and in popular culture. This chapter considers the Cartesian picture itself, and the role it plays in Australian 'grunge' fiction of the early to mid-1990s, as well as in my own novel *An Anarchy of Man*.

When Descartes published his *Meditations on the First Philosophy* in 1641,¹ his aim was not primarily the elucidation of a theory for describing the self, but rather a methodology for the discovery of principles which could be held as valid and foundational in a larger system, or process of scientific enquiry, and which proved the existence of God.

In 1623 Galileo published *The Assayer*,² in which he outlined the concept that all ideas and relations in the natural world could be represented mathematically. Galileo claimed that there was a commonality between all physical object events which differed radically from the Aristotelian convention. Galileo was a well-known and respected ‘scientist’, even if somewhat infamous from the Church perspective. Problematically, his idea seemed to yield an array of useful answers, descriptions, and thus inventions.³

Descartes, at this time primarily interested in lenses and optics,⁴ could not help but recognise the value in Galileo’s idea, and embarked on *Discourse on the Method for Rightly Conducting the Reason, and Seeking Truth in Sciences*.⁵ This was his most famous ‘scientific’ work and involves elucidating a process for evaluating and solving problems using mathematical principles. Most importantly for this study he claimed that the process would involve breaking a problem into its smallest possible components expressible on paper using known relations,

¹ The manuscript had already been made available to a series of scholars, as a kind of peer review/censorship/editing process. When it was printed Descartes included their objections and his responses in the text.

² This is a full ten years after his defence of Copernicus.

³ He was particularly famous for inventing the telescope, which aided influential coastal merchants immensely. It was thus much harder to ignore or restrict his works than it had been ten years previously.

⁴ See Rodis-Lewis (1998), Chapter 4.

⁵ First published in 1637

and that by then finding a relation between these smallest possible parts, a mathematical explanation would be produced. As Sorrel states: “Like Galileo he [Descartes] believed that the observed properties of physical objects had causes that were specifiable mathematically, and he was as impatient as Galileo was with the vacuity of more traditional explanations of phenomena put forward by followers of Aristotle” (Sorrel, 1997: xvi).

Convinced that his system of mathematical principles was better than the Church’s, Descartes was faced with a powerful problem. Unless he could reconcile conflicts between the new system and the Church, he would get nowhere. Let us not doubt though that Descartes was a firm believer in the Christian God also, and that the ramifications of his methodology on contemporary Christian thought would have caused him some personal anxiety.⁶ One major problem was his idea that the physical world was explainable in written, mathematical terms. To the Church of the time this was plainly blasphemous. It was too close to calling God a number, or questioning the idea that God is the cause, and the answer.

Descartes sincerely believed that his *Meditations* were bridging a gap between the necessity, as he saw it, of the new science, and the truth of God. As John Cottingham notes:

Descartes- and there is no good reason to doubt his sincerity here- saw his own philosophy as breaking new ground. The theologians could now be offered a metaphysic in which consciousness was a *sui generis* phenomena, wholly detached from corporeal events of any kind, and therefore inherently immune to the effects of bodily dissolution. In providing, as he thought he could, a philosophical demonstration of the incorporeality of the mind, Descartes thus explicitly saw himself as fulfilling the edict of the Lateran council, that Christian philosophers should use all the powers of human reason to establish the truth of the soul's immortality (Cottingham, 1992:240).

⁶ Russell (1961)

Part 2. Cartesian dualism in *Meditations on the First Philosophy*.

The famous dictum ‘cogito ergo sum’ appears in the second *Meditation*, and serves firstly as a foil to any position of extreme scepticism. Descartes imagines, or postulates that everything he senses is the work of a demon, bent on deceiving him. Even if this were so, Descartes argues, he can still not doubt the fact that he is the thinking audience of this deception. No matter how ornate and pervasive the demon’s guile, it can never deceive Descartes that he is thinking when he is not. So here is a foundational fact: I am thinking.

But this is a simple idea, and Descartes admits as much. The crux of the idea does not lie in the plain statement of fact, but in the assumption within the analogy that there is an ‘I’ receiver, separate from the sense messages received from the ‘outside’ and separate world. Descartes reasons that this ‘I’, as it is not affected in its character by any external physical object or event, must not be a physical thing. Also, it must not be a part of the body itself, but rather distinct from the body. Then, because it is neither physical nor reliant on the body, it can not perish, and therefore must be immortal.

Peter Markie writes:

‘In the letter where he [Descartes] says “I think therefore I am” is so obvious it might have come from anyone’s pen, he observes that its real value is that it can be used to “establish that this I which is thinking is an immaterial substance with no bodily element”. The idea that he can use his initial certainty about his thought and existence and his initial uncertainty about his body, to establish that he is an immortal substance distinct from his body is a continuing theme in Descartes’ (Markie, 1992:142).

This is a pervasive conception of the self, built upon a need to reconcile a new way of thinking about the physical world, with a powerful belief system founded on religiosity. Put very simply, the new rationality relied on critical scepticism and evidence, yet the contemporary world-view of the self relied heavily on faith and doctrinal teaching. The Cartesian picture of the self requires a critical reduction, via doubt about senses, and the process to the smallest possible item; and then affirms a very religious concept as the centre, or first concept in the new rationality. That is, I can at least not doubt I have a soul and it is immortal.

It is important to note that the idea of dualism in pictures of the self did not originate with Descartes, but rather his justification for it, and his characterisation of the self, has survived most pervasively into the current day.

Despite comprehensive criticism of the Cartesian picture its durability and simplicity have allowed it to grow so that it still dominates literature and popular culture, and for that reason it remains an important idea. As Terence Penelhum states:

‘This view of the soul [or self] has taken deep root in our culture in many popular and sophisticated doctrines . . . in modern times in the Cartesian tradition. We can readily wonder whether all the elements in this view of ourselves are necessarily connected, and whether they are consistent, but they are all powerfully present in popular culture’
(Penelhum, 1994: 123).

The idea that every human is made of an inner, essential self and that the rest of existence is outside and separate from this self, is an assumption that still permeates much modern fiction. And though the idea may have been discredited by a long line of philosophers since Descartes, its simplicity and power seems to still hold an appeal. In grunge literature of the early to mid-

1990s, the Cartesian ideal of an inner self remains central, even while many of the characters in the oeuvre at first seem to define themselves as outsiders, outcasts and misfits.

Part 3. *Praise, Loaded, The River Ophelia*: Cartesian Representations of the Self in Australian Grunge Fiction

The genre of ‘grunge’ fiction emerged in Australian publishing in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Written by authors in their twenties and thirties, grunge novels swamped the ‘youth’ publishing market at this time and were seen as literary embodiments of alienation and disenchantment with the economic and social system of late capitalism, and as groundbreaking manifestos of ‘Generation X’. This sub-section focuses on key works by three grunge authors: Andrew McGahan’s *Praise* (1992), Christos Tsiolkas’ *Loaded* (1995), and Justine Ettler’s *The River Ophelia* (1995).

Each of these works plays with the notion of identity in that they attempt to usurp ‘mainstream’ ideas of traditional constructions of the self, yet they do not fundamentally question the Cartesian picture of the self. Instead, they reinforce the Cartesian ideal by merely replacing the notion of a spiritual soul

being at the centre of the self, with the idea that a sexual identity is the essential character of the self.

To establish their credentials, each of the three grunge novels above needs to distance itself from what it considers traditional and middle class values, or self-creating narratives. In *Loaded*, the protagonist Ari plainly hates workers. He sees them as boring: 'Working people always think you'll be interested in what they do. None that I know do any thing interesting' (Tsiolkas, 1995:8). Working people are conformist cowards: 'The faces of all the workers and all married people I see carry the strain of living a life of rules and regulations. . . Coward, I whisper' (11). And: 'I love my parents but I don't think they have much guts. Always complaining about how hard life is and not having enough money. And they do shit to change any of it' (11). Working people are fragmented, as when Ari speaks of the West of Melbourne as a mass of fighting ethnic cliques (142). Working people are the remainders: 'The West is a dumping ground; a sewer of refugees, the migrants, the poor, the insane, the unskilled and the uneducated' (143).

Ari also hates the middle classes: 'I detest the East. The whole fucking mass of it: the highways, the suburbs, the hills, the rich cunts' (42). They are seen as boring people also, whose lives are ruled by dull media: 'In the East, in the new world of suburbia

there is no dialogue, no conversation, no places to go out: for there is no need, there is television' (43) Basically anything to do with work or the suburbs is seen as boring conformist drivel, and something that is covering up the more worthy pursuit of having sex: 'Hard work bores me, I'm ruled by my cock' (150). Ari's gay identity is a central element of the book and it is taken for granted that this is seen as a subversion of middle-class values in so far as middle-class values are seen to promote heterosexuality, monogomy, and marriage.

In *Praise*, the protagonist Gordon is very much a part of the Brisbane underclass. Having just discarded his job at a bottle shop, he does not seek any more work. He emphasises his distance from the world of work in myriad ways: 'I'd never worked four days straight in my life' (McGahan, 1992:1). Or, '[i]t was beyond my conception, the importance of Friday night to those who worked a five-day week' (17) And as with *Loaded*, workers are seen as Others, suspected of conformism and stupidity: 'University graduates. Doctors. The gainfully employed. I wasn't sure what I thought of them. I'd almost gone that way myself. I'd believed in things. Dedication. Diligence. Direction. I'd even finished school in the top one per cent of the state. It was a cruel and meaningless system, still, there I was at

the top of it. But things had changed since then. I was ashamed of it all now' (17)

Both Ari and Gordon are positioned outside this workaday world, which is meant to give them a critical distance. 'I'm content to hang around the edge of the circle, listening in' (Tsiolkas, 1995:15).

In *The River Ophelia* the protagonist Justine is not disdainful of working people, yet she is also a character who does nothing in the sense of work, Justine lives on a scholarship, but doesn't actually do any of her thesis: "I'm writing an honours thesis", I said, "or I'm supposed to be writing one. I'm not really doing anything though" (Ettler, 1995:5). Justine does not have the same hatred for the supposed conformity of the middle class, yet she does contrive distance from suburbia: 'Meanwhile all around us suburbia laboured on, quiet tree-lined streets, rows of dark terrace houses, people watching videos and drinking beer into the night' (5). Most of the action of *The River Ophelia* takes place in the inner city, and Justine's friends are all mid-level professionals: Sade⁷ a writer, Juliette a psychiatrist, Bataille an academic, Hamlet a film-maker. These are consciously not tropes of middle-class suburbia.

⁷ Many of the characters' names in *The River Ophelia* allude to literary/intellectual icons.

Overall, the distance from the world of work evinced by all the main characters in *Praise, Loaded* and *The River Ophelia*, is meant to give them a critical perspective on mainstream, working class/middle-class life. From this distance the characters play out narratives with entirely sexual bases. In *Praise* the sexual issues are to do with belonging, loss, and love, and the relationship between these ideas and sexual acts. Gordon's relationship with Cynthia is initially one where Gordon is the receiver of Cynthia's advances. She is a nymphomaniac,⁸ and Gordon's lacklustre attitude toward sex is seen from her perspective as a lack of self. Gordon tries to live up to Cynthia's needs, but can't. In the process he is forced to seek explanations for the way he is, in light of his inability to perform sexually. In this novel the performance of sex acts is seen as central to the idea of self and one's life is seen as equal to the history of one's sex acts. When Gordon answers a series of questions from a doctor about his sexual history, he reflects: 'And there it was. My life' (McGahan,1992:221).

In effect, *Praise* is a long meditation on the relationship between love, sex and self, in which sex is the driving force, the one true element of a self, above other narratives which are seen

⁸ I do not mean to use this term to endorse a relic of Freudian pathology, but to indicate that in my view McGahan's portrayal of Cynthia is redolent of that archaic belief.

as malleable and therefore open to doubt. Gordon is fearful of calling his relationship with Cynthia 'love':

“Look, I like her. I might even *love* her.”

“Love, Gordon? Love?”

“I know, it’s a terrible thing to say . . .”(106)

As Gordon’s affair with Cynthia dissipates into infidelity and drug-taking he begins to come closer to an ex-girlfriend, Rachel, whom he has never slept with. This fact serves to render Rachel enticing, in that in Gordon’s mind sexual relations are a game where the winner is the participant who can have sexual relations without being burdened by emotional difficulties.⁹ When he does sleep with Rachel he agrees that he can offer nothing to her outside sex (258), but the very fact of sleeping with her is to him a victory (245). The idea that sex is the essential defining element of a self, an irresistible, undeniable, template of the self is the central element of *Praise*. After sex with Rachel, Gordon says:

Rachel didn’t appreciate just how sex and self-indulgence could completely take over. Even I understood that. Sex appalled me,

⁹ Gordon’s relationship with Cynthia is presented as a competition between the two. When he finally rids himself of Cynthia, the whole of chapter thirty-five reads: ‘I’d won’(McGahan,1992:202).

disappointed me, depressed me, but I knew it had *power* over me, all the same. Only heroin seemed capable of engrossing me more, and heroin was sex anyway. But the urge to fuck was the one thing for which I could pardon anyone, anytime, for anything. Maybe that's what I was after with Rachel. Maybe I needed to prove to myself that she wasn't any different from the rest of us. To prove that her cunt would over-ride her reason. I wanted to see what lay underneath all that self control, (246).

Gordon equates true selfs with sex acts, and believes anything else is a false construct given to us by society. While giving Rachel oral sex he says: 'This *was* her. My mouth was wrapped around the straw that led to her soul'(247).

In *Loaded* a similar schema is at work. Much cynicism is levelled at traditional narratives such as the suburbanite existence mentioned above, but particularly toward labels of race and ethnicity. Ari is able to on the one hand dismiss ethnic names as they apply to him - he rejects being called 'white'(Tsiolkas,1995:5), or others seeing him as a 'wog'(142, 39)- and he is keenly aware of the ways others use racial names as shorthand for vilification (34). Yet Ari is quite able to apply these terms to others; however when he does so, it is usually based on a sexually related prejudice. He does not want his sister to be in a

relationship with a muslim because ‘I know that the muslim boys treat Christian girls like shit’ (51). Australians are unromantic (57), Lebanese are violent toward their wives (35). Even differences within Australo-Hellenic cultures are suspect: ‘Betty is a wog who wants to be black’(43), Ari says just before a sexual encounter with her.

The difference between when Ari is taunted and when he taunts others is that Ari uses name-calling to represent sexual malfunction (from his point of view), and for Ari sexual actions represent the true self. At one point Ari reflects: ‘ I’m ruled by my cock . . . I’m not Australian, I’m not Greek, I’m not anything’ (149). This is putting him outside the normal narratives. He then says: ‘What I am is a runner. Running away from a thousand and one things people say you have to be or should want to be. They’ll tell you God is dead but, man, they still want you to have a purpose’ (149). He then lists his perception of what these purposes are and how they are illusory and those who live by them are fools. Finally, he finds meaning:

I’m going to have sex, listen to music, and watch films for the rest of my life. I am here, living my life. I’m not going to fall in love, I’m not going to change a thing . . . My epitaph; he slept, he ate, he fucked, he pissed, he shat (150).

The idea that if one is able to strip away all the ‘false’ narratives produced by society one will be left with sexuality is a constant theme in *Loaded*. Sex acts in this novel are loveless and meaningless in so far as they are disconnected from other narratives in society, and it is this disconnectedness that serves as a proof for their meaningfulness. They are in this way like Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*, except here they are *copulum ergo sum*. As Ari says: ‘That’s what I like about casual sex with men; there’s no responsibility towards the person you fuck with’(74). This attitude is repeatedly portrayed as liberating because it is an essentialist act in defiance of social norms. When Ari goes to St. Kilda, he reflects:

In latrines and underneath piers I have enjoyed pleasures that are made sweeter by the contempt I know they bestow on me in the eyes of the respectable world I abhor. To be free, for me as a Greek, is to be a whore. To resist the path of marriage and convention, I must make myself an object of derision and contempt’ (132).

As in *Praise*, a person’s history of sex acts is seen as equating to their meaningful history. Ari sees his past life as: ‘Fucking in bedrooms, toilets, cars, under railway bridges, on the beach . . .

Coming home, late from school, Mama asks 'Where you been? You answer, out with friends' (108).

So while *Loaded* plays at challenging and deconstructing such social norms as constructed sexualities, classes and races, it actually reinforces the story at the centre of these narratives, that is, that there is a central defining element of the self, and that being 'true' to it equates with being a good person. *Loaded* places sex acts as this centre, and then operates much as any other social norm, by making value judgements based on its own perspective, and privileging itself as authentic and other narratives as false.

The River Ophelia also privileges sex acts as the primary defining element of a self. Justine's long and tortuous relationship with Sade is one from which she can not escape because her sexual urges dominate any other mitigating force in her personality. The pendulum swings between hating Sade and wanting to be rid of him, which is seen as a mental activity, and wanting him and needing to have sex with him, which is portrayed as an undeniable force, a reflection of her true self. Her jealousy toward Sade is intense, and his infidelities are betrayals because by having sex with Justine he has taken on the burden of her self and yet won't accept it. This is portrayed as a

contradiction in Sade's behaviour. Yet Justine engages in infidelities and these are seen as justified because they are expressions of her true self. This is not a contradiction in the 'moral' of the book because the continuous theme is Justine's sexuality, not Sade's.

Whether Justine is having sex with Sade, Hamlet, Bataille, or engaging in threesomes with Simone and Sade, the theme is not the interplay of a number of personalities, but that of Justine's self and the outside world. For Justine, sex acts are the self crystalised, a true expression and a remedy for all existential difficulties (Ettler, 1995:225). Indeed, sex as existential panacea is a common theme to all three grunge novels.

In contrast, *An Anarchy of Man* does not portray sex acts as a central element of the self. Gin and Joe's courtship is examined overwhelmingly without sex, and when they do have sex the act is not described in graphic physical terms, but in terms of the intermingling of the narratives they built for each other (Spencer, 2003:104). For the characters in my novel sex is not isolated from other social narratives, but operates with them as an organic part of what makes a self. Sex is not the essential inner expression of the self, but an ingredient in how the characters view themselves, mixed with many other narratives. The idea that sex can be disconnected from other narratives is often mocked by

Leon (19, 170, 204), and after Joe and Gin have sex Joe contemplates the idea of an inner and outer self in relation to sex and his feelings for Gin (105-6).

Generally, the concerns of the grunge novels revolve largely around rejecting what the novels portray as false or shallow narratives, such as work, and the intricacies of courting in a contemporary Western setting, whereas my novel is examining selfs which exist indelibly within these narratives. This is seen, for example in the main characters' relationship to their socio-economic situation: Gin wants to go to Sydney after she loses her job in Canberra, and her not having a job is a difficult hurdle for her to overcome; Leon is forced to live with his brother and his brother's girlfriend because he is unemployed, and this in part motivates him to be out of the house often; Joe and Caudral are part-time builders' labourers. Throughout the novel this group's lack of money is a difficulty. Caudral's courtship with Rebecca is made difficult because Rebecca is relatively wealthy, and when all the characters meet for their boat cruise this difference is sharpened to the point where Joe, Caudral, Leon, Gin and Jac have difficulty operating in a social environment made alien to them by Rebecca's friends' wealth (Spencer, 2003:195). While the main characters in both *An Anarchy of Man* and the grunge novels are poor, the grunge novels' characters are portrayed as

obtaining a critical distance from false narratives of the middle class via their poverty. This trope does not operate in my novel. While the narrator (Caudral) has difficulty understanding or operating within the narratives of contemporary society, the narrator is not armed with an ability to cut through these narratives with a single fact, or view, of what is the self.

The main characters in the grunge novels occupy a privileged position, in that they are portrayed as able to apprehend a kind of truth beneath the narratives of contemporary society, these narratives being thus portrayed as somehow false. In *An Anarchy of Man* the characters do not have this ability to the same decisive extent. Leon in particular is an illustration of how characters may believe themselves separate from the narratives of society when they are not. Leon sees himself as a rebel, and he lives up to a kind of modern narrative of one. Preferring dingy little pubs, and sneering at the modern world, he is a caricature of the rebel-type. His memories are like a pop song he once heard on the radio and now can't get out of his head (Spencer, 2003: 34). Leon revels in the noise of popular culture, while Joe worries about it. Leon seeks peace from knowing and living as fully as possible, while Joe seeks a solution: 'Where I look for the quietness behind the noise, trying to peel and pare back to something; he takes the quietness that comes when all the noise is

going full bore and you can't grab on to anything. There's peace for him in anarchy.'(35-36) This clash of perspective operates through the novel, as a parallel to Joe's concerns about the inner and outer self.

Finally, while *An Anarchy of Man* and the grunge novels are similar in setting in that they are both set in the inner city and among poor people, the concerns they raise are quite different. Where the grunge novels portray sex acts as an essential inner expression of the self, *An Anarchy of Man* deals with the interplay of a number of narratives. And where the main characters in the grunge novels are privileged agents in their ability to see through the narratives of contemporary Western society, the characters in my novel exist within these narratives, and are not given a privileged position outside them.

In the next chapter, I explore philosophical and fictional departures from the Cartesian picture of the self by focussing on a twentieth century philosophical critique of Descartes' essentialism (Wittgenstein), and by comparing a modernist depiction of selfhood (Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*) with my own novel, via a consideration of the role of memory in Proust's novel and my own.

Chapter 2: Post Cartesian Pictures of the Self.

Part 1. An Examination of Wittgenstein's critique of the Cartesian picture.

In this chapter I focus first on Wittgenstein's critique of the Cartesian ideal, although it is important to emphasise that Descartes' dualism has been criticised almost from its inception. Hume, writing not long after Descartes, is probably the most famous pre-19th Century critic of the picture.¹⁰ Hume was particularly interested in the subjugation to reason of emotion and senses in the Cartesian picture, and famously claimed that the passions are the masters of reason.

Hume also delivered the first description of the circularity of the Cartesian picture when he said of the system:

‘[M]uch inculcated by Des Cartes as a sovereign preservative against error [is a methodology proceeding] by a chain of reasoning, deduced from some original principle which cannot possibly be fallacious . . . But neither is there any such original principle, which has a prerogative above all others, [nor] if there were, could we advance a step beyond it, but by the use of those very

faculties of which we are already supposed to be diffident”

(Hume, 1748: 150-151)

This section focuses on Wittgenstein’s conceptions of the self as elucidated in the *Philosophical Investigations* (1958). In philosophical terms, it is not controversial to claim that in order to know that a representation is true or untrue, we need criteria. We apply this criteria, and if the representation corresponds to the rule 'true', we say it equals 'true'; if it does not correspond to the criteria, then it is 'not true'. The idea 'true' is in itself a criteria. In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein begins his examination of this idea's relationship to the self by imagining that he will make a kind of 'true' for a sensation by keeping a diary. He will make a diary entry for every time that sensation occurs and call it 'S'. To do this he will ‘speak, or write the sign down and at the same time concentrate my attention on the sensation - and so, as it were, point to it inwardly’ (Wittgenstein, 1958: 258). Then Wittgenstein ponders the purpose of this ritual of looking inward and checking the sign S. He asks what kind of meaning can it establish?

Well,[he answers] that is done precisely by the concentrating of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connection

¹⁰ See Section XII, Part One, *Enquiry into Human Understanding* (1748)

between the sign and the sensation. But 'I impress it on myself' can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right' (Wittgenstein, 1958: 258).

Wittgenstein's idea here can be summed up in this way: Because I am the only arbiter, and since truth can not be entirely subjective, then inward-looking creations can not be given the moniker 'true'. McGinn has further examined Wittgenstein's notion of 'correctness':

'I have no criterion of correctness' is to be glossed as 'I have no non-circular criterion of correctness', and that is why 'whatever is going to seem right to me is right', and why, therefore, 'it makes no sense to talk about "right"'...S has no meaning because there is no way of fixing that a future use of S is correct. The only remedy for this state of affairs is to provide some form of independent check on the use of S, by linking its use with *public* criteria of application' (McGinn, 1997:129).

Therefore, according to McGinn, Wittgenstein's argument is meant to destroy the Cartesian ideal that 'the reason I know I exist is that I can not doubt that I exist', by replacing it with the idea

that '*because* I can not doubt my own existence, I can have no knowledge of it on that basis alone'. Since the pacification of doubt can only be performed in an outer, social sphere, any 'knowledge' about the inner sphere will have to be assessed by outer criteria, therefore negating the claim for some kind of inviolate, self-referring 'self'.

Budd has further explored the notion of 'inner' and 'outer' in relation to the use of language and the creation of the idea of self. Budd writes:

[T]he self ascription of an 'inner process' will be criterionless; and without outward criteria a sign that supposedly stands for the 'inner process' will not be rule-governed . . . I need a criterion of identity for the sensation in order to give content to the concept of a sensation of that kind.

The private language user (believer in the Cartesian ideal) is therefore impaled on the horns of a dilemma: either he intends 'S' (could be 'I') to be a sign for something others can have a real conception of, or he does not. But if he does not, he is condemned to silence: there is nothing he can say that will make clear to others what kind of a sign 'S' ('I') is supposed to be. If, on the other hand, he intends 'S' to be a sign which can be explained to others, either he intends it to be the name of a

sensation or he intends it to be some other kind of word' (Budd, 1991.: 61).

Assuming the private language user can not fall back to claiming an unprovable proof, a special word without wordness, Budd says: '[T]he words he uses to explain the nature of 'S' will be words in a common language' (62). He will thus be rule-governed by common language rules, 'and this is something he can not do, or can achieve only at the cost of rendering his sign one that is not a word in a private language' (62). As its 'self-ness is a product of the social creation of language, his self can not be Cartesian because it is neither internally nor self-reliant for its existence.

So if Wittgenstein is right, and the language of our selfs is negotiated and created by forces intrinsically social, or 'external' in the Cartesian picture, the idea that the self is an essentially 'inner' phenomena, empirically and factually separate from the 'external' world must be false. It is common for us, when thinking about ourselves, to think of our memories as being 'private' and 'internal'. The fact that I can remember pictures from the past I assume no-one else can, seems to enhance a claim that my self is at least unique and self-reliant in its perspective on past events. Perhaps then the mosaic of my memories, sometimes disordered and elusive though they are, could offer a constitution for my self.

Perhaps by examining our memories we could find a way of describing what we are.

Part 2. *Remembrance of Things Past*

Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-1927)¹¹ is a novel about learning to write a novel, about trying to find a perspective from which the narrator Marcel can make sense of his world, and about how memory is the basis of any attempt to do so.

As such, then, it is a very long meditation on how later reconstructions of memories into narratives form the self. It is also a coming of age novel, and argues that individuals learn that they are often mistaken in their comprehension of events as they pass through them, but that with age people learn to create a perspective in which their pasts can be ordered, or reconciled, to their present.

Proust's novel is a first-person account, over eight volumes, of a life spent in the Paris salon culture at the end of the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth century, up to the beginning of the First World War. The main character Marcel negotiates his way through the milieu of bourgeois society on a

¹¹ This exegesis uses the 1981 Vintage Books edition, translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff & Terence Kilmartin.

quasi-quest to become a writer. His problem is how to apprehend a life which is lived internally in some spheres - love, art, music, ennui- and externally in others - the salons, the cliques - and in which those spheres are interlinked, in that who one loves and what kind of art one enjoys is inextricably linked to the external sphere. The novel argues that one can not properly assess this relationship between internal and external spheres at the same time that any important event is occurring, but that one can only wait for remembering to reveal order.

Remembrance of Things Past straddles the Cartesian/anti-Cartesian divide, in that on the one hand the novel is overtly concerned with two ideas: first, things are not as they seem and the world is full of games and pretence, and second, that there exists a central self, able to stand outside these games and construct stories which will eventually validate its selfhood. Then again, the novel both realises and dwells on, for literally thousands of pages, the notion that 'selves' are created by the forces around them and particularly by how they perceive those forces in events, while at the same time propagating the idea that there is, or can be found, a true way of apprehending these events, or rather, a way of apprehending these events which will yield a kind of truth, and which can also be described as internal.

So in *Combray*, the first part of *Remembrance of Things Past*, the novel opens with the narrator's childhood and introduces the concerns of the novel. The narrator Marcel addresses the reader in a way that comes close to a voice of reflection. He says:

For even if we have the sensation of being always enveloped in, surrounded by our own soul, still it does not seem a fixed and immovable prison; rather do we seem to be borne away with it, and perpetually struggling to transcend it, to break out into the world, with a perpetual discouragement as we hear endlessly all around us that unvarying sound which is not an echo from without, but the resonance of a vibration from within (Proust, 1981a: 93).

In effect, Marcel is arguing that the soul is both external, something to be 'enveloped' in, and internal, 'the resonance of a vibration within'. Also though, he is acutely aware of the malleability of 'selves', and of the social construction of them. When speaking of M. de Saint-Loup's pretensions, the narrator sees them not as falsity, but as something created in de Saint-Loup's self by his upbringing:

After I had seen him repeat the same process every time something was introduced to him, I realised that it was simply a

social usage peculiar to his branch of the family, to which his mother, who had seen to it that he should be perfectly brought up, had moulded his limbs; he went through those motions without thinking about them any more than he thought about his beautiful clothes or hair; they were a thing devoid of the moral significance which I had at first ascribed them, a thing purely acquired (Proust, 1981b: 786).

Throughout *Remembrance of Things Past* the conflict for the narrator Marcel is one between what is seen as internal and valuable on the one hand, and which traits of character are external and contrived on the other. The various emotional and social battlegrounds also reflect this duality. The narrator's love affairs are viewed as more internal phenomena but relying on external, social demands. The social events in which the narrator is involved, in the streets, clubs, and private salons are opportunities to investigate the socially constructed self. Every volume in *Remembrance of Things Past* has its party, and these outward events produce inward reflection on the narrator's part. They are used as moments of realisation for the narrator. In all except the last, the realisation is partly that he doesn't want to be at the party, but the parties are essential to the Parisien life he is both satirising and trying to live through.

So for Marcel the problem of the inner and the outer is essential. Whenever he ponders the outside world he is acutely aware that because there is an 'I' which is doing the perceiving, and that because that 'I' has motivations, the perceptions of the outside world are always subjective. This is a direct parallel with Descartes' demon analogy in that it places the 'I' as a central experiencing entity around which events occur, and in that the events are separate from the 'I', yet reliant on the 'I' perceiving them.

Adele King notes this interdependence, when she states that '[M]emory [in *Remembrance of Things Past*] is dependant both on the external world for its substance and on the mind for its final form. It combines something perceived and a subjective reaction to this perception' (King, 1968: 33). This duality is a problem for the narrator: it makes him cynical that he can ever know reality, and thus that he can even know that the self exists, for whenever he looks at the self, this act of looking is itself fraught with the problems of looking at the outer world. In other words, if he can not know the truth of the outer world because he is always looking at it subjectively, the same problem may apply when he looks at his inner life.¹² King has noted this process in the narrator in relation to love:

¹² This is an argument made in great detail by Wittgenstein, and discussed in Chapter 3.

Marcel [the narrator] even calls into doubt the continuity of the self. Normally he experiences only a series of disconnected moments; there seems to be no continuum of perception. He only knows feelings when he is experiencing them. Knowledge of love, for example, is intermittent, since no one love is constantly aware of being in love. Marcel suggests that on awakening from a deep sleep he has no identity; since he does not remember who he is when he wakes up, he is no-one (King, 1968: 32).

The role of memory in experiencing love is important to *Remembrance of Things Past* both as a springboard for, and as an example of, the role of memory in creating the self. The narrator's description of love in *Combray* presages not only his attitude to love, but also his view of the self's changeability. The narrator states:

To such an extent does passion manifest itself in us as a temporary and distinct character which not only takes the place of our normal character but obliterates the invariable signs by which it has hitherto been discernible! (Proust, 1981a: 277).

The narrator is talking here of our ability to discern our own selves. So while the narrator is engaged in the same doubts of the

outer world, and particularly when dealing with other's emotions, as was Descartes when he described the demon analogy, he is also willing to turn this scepticism 'inward', thus creating the problematic and circular situation whereby he is subjectively looking at himself looking at himself. If 'passion manifest[s] itself' to the extent that it 'obliterate[s] the invariable signs' by which we have previously recognised ourselves, it is impossible to ever be able to discern correctly when it is really ourselves thinking about ourselves and not some momentary passionate character, or some other subjective version of ourselves. But Marcel/Proust does not then discard the Cartesian project. Instead the narrator embarks on what is a very painful and detailed quest of trying to 'know' himself (Terdiman, 1993: 151).

For Marcel, the problem of subjectivity when thinking even about oneself and one's past is finally solved with the idea of 'involuntary memory'. There are three major actions of involuntary memory in *Remembrance of Things Past*. The first, when Marcel smells a madelaine dipped in a cup of tea while visiting his mother as an adult (Proust, 1981a: 48), evokes memories of childhood in Combray and serves, after the initial forty-eight pages of reflection, as the start of the narrative proper. The second, while tying his shoe, evokes memories of his grandmother dying, and provokes a critical examination of the

paucity of social relations and the fleeting nature of love. The third is the great epiphany after a party at the Guerlaines', when the narrator realises the ability of memory to create an order through which he may recognise and describe his life. This act of involuntary memory is the last because it lets him find a way of expressing the character of his self truly, and thus become what he considers a writer, which is the quest of the book. For the narrator these bursts of involuntary memory come to represent proof of the 'true self', because they are not dependant on the subject's current state of mind and emotions, and so transcend the subjective narratives we usually impose on memory, thus revealing a kind of truth.¹³ For the narrator memory is the only way to apprehend who he truly is. Therefore, in Cartesian terms involuntary memory is an expression, or in philosophical terms a proof, of 'truth' or 'authenticity' in apprehending the self.

Through the realisation of this, the narrator is able to reinforce the Cartesian ideal. It gives him, finally, an objective perspective through which he can clearly see the way people, and himself, are 'in fact'. This situates the 'I' as privileged by reinstating its ability to uniquely apprehend truth. The importance of the last act of involuntary memory as an epiphany can not be

¹³ Note that this is not meant to be Freudian in any way. The memories which come back to the narrator are not repressed, or located in any subconscious stratum. Indeed, the narrator plainly remembers the most important moments in

understated. It is the trajectory that *Remembrance of Things Past* is constantly following, and it serves to justify the inner/outer dichotomy, and placate the narrator's previous doubt. For King, the narrator's use of involuntary memory allows him, 'to formulate a more accurate definition of reality which resolves his dilemma . . . Reality lies neither in brute matter nor in a transcendent realm, but in the world that the mind creates from the pressures of the material universe impinging upon it' (King, 1968: 38).

By using an 'inner' state phenomena such as memory, the narrator attempts to resolve the circularity of the demon analogy by appealing to an essentialist notion of the inner self. But he also raises the problem of getting a perspective on the inner self, and because *Remembrance of Things Past* is the story of a man's development, it focuses necessarily on the 'inner life' of the narrator. However, within this very Cartesian solution there arise various strikingly anti-Cartesian concerns, in addition to the previous dilemma.

One of the preoccupations of the novel is with names and naming. At the outset we are introduced to *Swann's Way* and *Guermantes' Way*. These are the different routes to two different eponymous households. They are also symbols for two kinds of

his life; what he doesn't remember in voluntary memory is instantaneously how he felt then and now. For the narrator this event is a way of escaping time itself.

lives to be lived, although this is only because the child Marcel sees them as such. As Marcel grows he becomes disillusioned with the division he first apprehends between the 'real' old money symbolised by *Guermantes' Way*, and 'fake' artistry and the petty bourgeoisie symbolised by *Swann's Way*. He swaps sides in the end, but realises that both are basically the same in their snobbery and gossip. The unity of the two Ways is symbolised by the marriage of Saint Loup and Gilberte, Marcel's first 'love'.

Another key pre-occupation with naming in *Remembrance of Things Past* concerns the way we use a name to gather a group of feelings together and describe that collection as one entity. As Marcel grows he falls in love three times. Each affair ends in failure, though it is the one with Albertine that comes closest to success, and which is meant as the most 'real'. Through his experiences with love, Marcel becomes aware of his ability to project perspectives on his surroundings and thus create feelings. This hints at an anti-Cartesian perspective by suggesting the relationship between inner and outer states is not one separated by the impervious relation of sender and receiver. But when falling for Albertine, it is the inability of the narrator to control his feelings of jealousy and suspicion (when she stands him up) that make him decide he must love her. He realises that '[w]e give the name "love", for example, to a series of feelings which in fact has

no such unity while we are experiencing it. Cohesion only belongs to creations of the mind' (King, 1968: 30). Marcel has been quite cynical previously toward the drama of love. When commenting on Swann's ability to manipulate his [Swann's] own feelings of love, Marcel says:

Recognising one of its symptoms [love] we remember and recreate the rest. Since we know its song, which is engraved on our hearts in its entirety, there is no need for a woman to repeat the opening strains . . . and if she begins in the middle . . . we are well enough attuned to that music to be able to take it up and follow our partner without hesitation at the appropriate passage (Proust, 1918a: 214).

But these feelings, nevertheless, are seen as innate and non-constructed essential elements of a self. These emotions are given a primacy, even above perception, something the narrator comes to consider, via involuntary memory, a thing outside himself and separate from emotion. He realises also though, that the duality between emotion and perception is not merely a rational inference, which should be taken correctly from the latter to the former.

Alain De Botton argues that one of Proust's aims in writing *Remembrance of Things Past* was to reflect an essentially

human conundrum. De Botton argues that Proust was very much aware of the way reading helps us become people, but that Proust's perspective was that literature is much more important when it helps us discover who we already are:

In reality, every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self. The writer's work is merely a kind of optical instrument which he offers to the reader to enable him to discern what, without this book, he would perhaps never have experienced in himself. And the recognition by the reader in his own self of what the book says is the proof of its veracity (De Botton, 1997: 25).

So Proust, through Marcel, confronts a central dilemma in the Cartesian project, but invents a new defence of it. The circular nature of the Cartesian project is dealt with by appealing to involuntary memory, and by constructing involuntary memory as the one impartial lens through which one may apprehend one's self objectively. It does not then challenge the Cartesian project fundamentally, but becomes a reinforcement of the principle of a central defining self.

Part 3. Memory as a 'self'-creating force in *An Anarchy of Man*.

The novel *An Anarchy of Man* also uses memory as a device for raising concerns about authenticity in relation to apprehending the self, though it does not seek to reaffirm the Cartesian picture, rather to doubt it subtly. *An Anarchy of Man* at first appears as a straightforward realist grunge novel, and like *Remembrance of Things Past*, is set in a particular social milieu. In contrast to *Remembrance of Things Past*, whose milieu is solidly bourgeois, the milieu in *An Anarchy of Man* is young, fluid, working-class and disaffected. Joe and Caudral are part-time labourers, Gin a barmaid, Leon has finished study but not yet started working, Jac has been a telemarketer. Whereas *Remembrance of Things Past* has one narrator (Marcel), *An Anarchy of Man* is a decentred narrative where the point of view shifts from first person to third-person between the characters. Mostly this shift is from the first-person account from Joe, to a third person account of Gin, or Leon. This gives the impression that Joe is narrating the story, and that therefore his understandings of the other characters' motives will be coloured by his own. The twist at the end is of course that Joe has not been narrating the story at all, and this is meant to give perspective to the ways in which subjective memory can create

our understanding of ourselves and others. Through the book there are obvious fallacies in memory, hints that Joe could not possibly be writing the book. This occurs, for example, when the narrator describes Leon and Caudral as being asleep when Joe and Gin arrive at Joe's flat, and then later claims Joe and Gin had been asleep when Leon and Caudral arrived (Spencer, 2002: 160-170). This is a subtlety that the reader may not apprehend but which lies beneath the surface of the text and indicates its philosophical concerns.

So *An Anarchy of Man* deals largely with each character's perception of other characters, and how these perceptions are either wrong, or based on a personal desire of the individual character. Gin has Joe firmly in her mind when she decides to go to Sydney, and the memory of their relationship becomes a reason for her to go toward him. In a direct reversal of this situation, Joe doesn't want to think of Gin, and since Joe does not voice his memory of their relationship, the reader has no knowledge of Joe's perspective from the voice of Joe in the book, as well, the reader's perception of Gin's perspective is biased by her other wish to become independent.

But the more important trope regarding memory occurs via the concern of who, or which perspective is actually narrating Gin. At first, the reader is led to believe Joe is narrating Gin's

part, and her part reflects the way Joe would wish to believe she thinks. Gin is portrayed as moving to Sydney to make her life complete and to be with Joe. But when Gin goes to Sydney her need for Joe dissolves as she becomes more independent, and realises she was using the memory of Joe as a prop to leave her Canberra life behind. Gin is portrayed as Joe would want her to be, with Joe at the centre of her concerns. But then Joe disappears, and Caudral is revealed as the narrator. Thus Gin was narrated not by her jilted lover but by her jilted lover's friend, a different perspective again. This denies the possibility of a Cartesian style rapprochement, or epiphany of self-awareness, by decentring the readers' awareness of who is narrating the story.

Hence *An Anarchy of Man* illustrates the ways in which the stories we tell about ourselves and others are woven by a complex strata of motivations and perceptions, and that the elucidation of a simple truth when describing a self is problematic in the extreme. As well, the concern about the verifiability of memory, and the role emotions play in our construction of narratives of memory is central to *An Anarchy of Man*, as it is to *Remembrance of Things Past*. *An Anarchy of Man* though, does not provide, as Proust does for the narrator of *Remembrance of Things Past*, an escape clause: it does not allow Joe or the reader a transfiguration of the self into a higher or wiser being.

The notion that the self is not characterised by an inner, essential element but rather is a conglomeration of socially constructed motives, memories and forces is an idea explored at great length in postmodern theory, which I explore in the following chapter.

Chapter 3. Postmodernism and the Self.

Part 1. Postmodernist Perspectives of the Self.

In *The Inhuman*, when Jean Lyotard is writing about what it is to be human, he states: “[This] faculty of being able to change levels referentially derives solely from the symbolic and recursive power of language’ (Lyotard, 1991:13). This demonstrates the centrality of language to the way contemporary philosophers think about the self, and is a direct link between Wittgenstein and contemporary thinking, as it (Lyotard’s statement) largely concerns the idea that the self is constructed via language games. In this regard, Richard Rorty states:

The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it can not propose a language for us to speak (Rorty,1989: 2).

The term ‘I’, then, is not a recognition of a physically, pre-language, apparent being. It is a shorthand signifier for a set of linguistic rules that enable the user to participate in language games. Neither does it exist empirically, as say ‘rock’ (the meaning of which can at least partly be said to be constituted by the visible, feelable thing). ‘I’ has no such empirical advantage.

And even to attempt ostensible definition actually destroys 'I' in the grammar game. For then it's 'me'. But still we seek criteria for discerning the character of the self. Catherine Belsey has argued that the urge to centralise the idea of the self is a defining force in classical realism, and that the wish to do so can be seen as ideologically driven. She writes:

It is in the interests of this ideology [liberal humanism] above all to suppress the role of language in the construction of the subject, and its own role in the interpellation of the subject, and to present the individual as a free, unified, autonomous subjectivity (Belsey, 1980:67)

This picture of the self as a separate, self-defining entity, an arbiter of truth and meaning, is problematic to most contemporary philosophers, even if it remains a dominant force on contemporary popular culture. But Rorty sees a way forward, when he writes:

But if we could ever become reconciled to the idea that most of reality is indifferent to our descriptions of it, and that the self is created by the use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary, then we should at

last have assimilated what was true in the Romantic idea that truth is made rather than found. What is true about this claim is just that *languages* are made rather than found, and that truth is a property of linguistic entities, of sentences (Rorty, 1989:174)

Indeed the role of language in our knowledge of others has a history in Western literature. One example of this awareness of the power of language can be seen at the beginning of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, when Pip reads the inscriptions on his parents' tombstones and makes personalities from the letters. Bennet and Royle look at this passage in the light of contemporary theory, and claim:

The text implies that our knowledge of people is determined by writing. Although he is 'unreasonable' in taking the shape of the letters to denote character, Pip is not simply mistaken in recognising that our sense of self and other people is determined by language. For as this passage indicates, we construct ourselves through and in stories (Bennet & Royle, 1995: 1).

In much contemporary fiction the narrative drive is provided by the process: self, threat to self, solution to threat, triumph of self. The sanctity of the self may be threatened, it may even be made malleable, but what remains is a belief portrayed

repeatedly that being ‘true to one’s self’ is both admirable and necessary if one is to negotiate the slings and arrows. Catherine Belsey has noted this phenomena in relation particularly to classical realism, and the ideological construction of this point of view when she writes: “[T]he ideology of liberal humanism assumes a world of non-contradictory (and therefore fundamentally unalterable) individuals whose unfettered consciousness is the origin of meaning, knowledge and action” (Belsey, 1980:67).

In this way of thinking the self is a pure arbiter of truth, and it is privileged over other possible arbiters by the very fact that it is seen as a central, essential blueprint for acting righteously. Armed with a broad apprehension of the character of a true self, writers can create character models that conform to more or lesser degrees to that model, and make value judgements on the actions of people or characters by measuring their conformity to the agreed rules. This is not a simple case of discrimination along generally agreed and recognised moral lines, but the result of thinking in a way that demands adherence to a central tenet, that of the centrality of the self, which in turn relies on the model of truth that there is a central fact from which all other deductions may rationally flow. Lyotard describes the phenomena in this way:

The temptation to look for criteria is a species of the more general temptation to think of the world, or the human self, as possessing an intrinsic nature, an essence. That is, it is the result of the temptation to privilege some one among the many languages in which we habitually describe the world or ourselves. As long as we think that there is some relation called 'fitting-the-world' or 'expressing the real nature of the self' which can be possessed or lacked by vocabularies-as-wholes, we shall continue the traditional philosophical search for a criterion to tell us which vocabularies have this desirable feature. (Lyotard, 1992:174).

This search is doomed because the 'self' just isn't as the Cartesian picture describes.

It is not that contemporary literature doesn't participate in the process of constructing self, both as characters in the narrative and as beings via the reader's reflecting on the narrative, but rather that it does, and that when it does, it often uses the Cartesian picture. This gives great power to the Cartesian picture, and perpetuates its dominance in popular culture, for, as Bennet and Royle state:

To identify with a person in a novel or play is to identify *oneself*, to produce an identity for oneself. It is to give oneself a world of fictional people, to start to let one's own identity merge with that of fiction. It is finally, also to create a character for oneself, to create one's very identity in fiction (Bennet and Royle, 1995:56)

The idea that one would be able to produce an identity for one's self is not the same as the Cartesian idea that the self is an inner, inviolable, unchangeable metaphysical entity.

Jonathan Culler has suggested that "even the idea of personal identity emerges through the discourse of a culture: the "I" is not something given but comes to exist as that which is addressed by and relates to others" (Culler, 1981:246). Also, this malleability of the self has been assumed when thinking about the reader. Bennet and Royle claim of the fictional characters: "Through the power of identification, through sympathy and antipathy, they can become part of how we conceive ourselves, a part of who we are" (Bennet and Royle, 1995:55). This would seem to suggest the self is not an inviolate, essential entity, but one that can and does change according to the experiences of the individual. In other words, a reader's self can change, can be constructed, by their interaction with literary characters, and whatever picture of the self is presented in any novel, it will engage the reader in some

way with their own 'selves'. I am thinking here of people who read purely for 'entertainment', and who do not 'reflect' on what they have read. One could say that their self is engaged with the text, but not in a reflective way. Since language plays a central role in the creation of selves, and a book is a lot of language, that language itself can be central to the way we view the characters, and thus ourselves and those around us.

Catherine Belsey has reflected on the power inherent in dominating this discourse when writing about the pervasive power of classic realism, an idea she describes as liberal humanist, and one which is readily identifiable as Cartesian:

Classic realism, still the dominant popular mode in literature, film and television drama, roughly coincides chronologically with the epoch of industrial capitalism. It performs, I wish to suggest, the work of ideology, not only in its representation of a world of consistent subjects who are the origin of meaning, knowledge and action, but also in offering the reader, as the position from which the text is most readily intelligible, the position of subject as the origin both of understanding and of action in accordance with that understanding (Belsey, 1980:67)

In a postmodern world, the disintegration of master narratives and the proliferation of narratives derived from global capitalism and

consumerism has seen the emergence of new ways of conceiving the contemporary self. Bereft now of the previously pervasive ideals such as God, King and Empire, individuals find themselves in a world of shifting and malleable narratives, and this has been reflected in literature. Anthony Elliot has speculated on the presumptions of contemporary literature in a postmodern world, and writes:

Firstly, there is an emphasis upon fragmentation. The postmodernist critique suggests that the contemporary self is so fragmented, multiple and dispersed that the symbolic consistency and narrative texture of experience disintegrates. In a world invaded by new technologies and saturated with flashy commodities the self loses its consistency and becomes brittle, broken or shattered (Elliot, 2001: 136).

But this does not mean that the meaningfulness of narratives that do constitute this kind of self are any less valid. The argument that the master narratives break down in a postmodern world and are replaced by a complex shifting series of images does not mean necessarily that the inherent hierarchical structure seen in the Cartesian ideal is replaced by a pluralist model involving several equal yet competing narratives. Rather it could follow that the place in the narrative of self previously occupied by say,

‘Religion’, could now be occupied by say, body image as received from popular culture.

When Elliot notes the Baudrillardian idea of the self mirroring consumerism’s representations, they often adequately describe the menagerie of narratives available for self constructing:

[t]he flickering media surfaces of postmodern culture are . . . mirrored internally, so that a narcissistic preoccupation with appearance, image and style dominates the regulation of the self. This is a world that puts a premium on appearance, a world of spin doctors, public relations experts and self help guides (Elliot, 2001:136)

Yet Elliot remains resolutely convinced that this kind of self-creating is somehow less valid: “[t]he self, in this context, can easily lose its anchorage, becoming self-absorbed and cut off from wider social ties” (Elliot, 2001:136).

The point is that these shifting and dazzling images of the postmodern world are not separate from the self, but constitutive of the self. These new narratives, while exchangeable and malleable are not necessarily less meaningful than the old master narratives, but rather replace them in their power to influence the

way individuals see themselves. Elliot writes a good description of the postmodern Baudrillardian world:

It is a world where images become more powerful than reality, where everything is a copy of something else, and where the distinction between representation and what is being represented is done away with. At the same time, core distinctions between self and object, inside and outside, surface and depth, also vanish. . . fantasyscapes such as MTV, Disneyland and McDonalds become more vivid, more intense, and more real than that which we typically think of as reality (Elliot, 2001: 240).

But the important point, is not that 'images become more powerful than reality', rather that they come to constitute reality. Not that 'McDonalds becomes more vivid . . . more real than that which we typically think of as reality', but that McDonalds *is* reality. In the mediated postmodern world, self-identities for those in the West are exchangeable, buyable commodities, but that does not make them any less real than a self-identity based on traditional master narratives. As Elliot notes in his introduction:

The self is not simply ‘influenced’ by the external world, since the self can not be set apart from the social, cultural, political and historical contexts in which it is embedded. Social processes in part constitute, and so in a sense are internal to, the self. Neither internal nor external frames of reference should be privileged; all forms of identity are astonishingly imaginative fabrications of the private and public, personal and political, individual and historical (Elliot, 2001: 6).

The next section of the thesis looks at the work of the American novelist Don DeLillo. In DeLillo’s novels we see repeatedly a character who maintains a kind of Cartesian inner life while the world around the character is a myriad of crumbling certainties; the character’s attempts to negotiate aims within this uncertainty is a primary trajectory for DeLillo’s work.

Part 2. Don DeLillo and the Postmodern World.

In his writing, the contemporary American writer Don DeLillo presents us with a portrait of the postmodern world and the way humans move through it. He does not provide solutions, but he does not see that as his role.¹⁴ His concern is with presenting the way people can come to see themselves and their world when, as

Lyotard states ‘the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation’ (Lyotard, 1984:37). Yet DeLillo remains a kind of humanist in that his characters possess the very human characteristic of wishing to construct systems through which the world can be made intelligible. Indeed his characters overwhelmingly see it as essential for humans to be able to explain their world to themselves in systemic ways. But the characters also realise these systems are flawed narratives, and that as they integrate them into their selves, they suffer and do not find any solutions. DeLillo is a postmodern writer, whose view of the self is evident in the view his work gathers of the world-at-large. His characters remain humanist, classic realist, but his world resonates with the plurality of postmodernity.

The characters in DeLillo’s work are fully engaged with the postmodern world of the mediated and the artificial. There is no delineation between real and false in their views of the world other than those set up by popular culture. Of *White Noise* (1985), Michael Moses notes:

DeLillo’s most astute commentators are in general agreement that the America of *White Noise* is a fully

¹⁴ See DeLillo’s interview with DeCurtis (pp43-50) in Lentricchia (ed), 1994.

postmodern one. For DeLillo's characters, contemporary American 'reality' has become completely mediated and artificial; theirs is a culture of comprehensive and seemingly total representation (Moses, 1991: 110).

White Noise is the story of Jack Gladney's search for a meaningful narrative that will become a centre for his life. This idea of the need to find a meaningful centre is obviously not a postmodern one and is much more readily equated with the classic realist model of the self. But it is important to note that by meaningful, Jack means 'useful', for that is the real test of the efficacy of any narrative, he believes. This attitude leads to a number of ridiculous situations. Jack is chair of the Hitler Studies department at his university. He seeks refuge from his fear of death in chronicling the minutiae of Hitler's life - the chilling reality of Hitler's reign is irrelevant. Gladney needs Hitler Studies to salve his fear of death. DeLillo himself says:

In his case, Gladney finds a perverse form of protection. The damage caused by Hitler was so enormous that Gladney feels he can disappear inside it . . . He feels that Hitler is not only bigger than life . . . but bigger than death. Our sense of fear . . . I brought this conflict to the surface in the shape of Jack Gladney" (DeCurtis, 1987 in DeLillo, 1985:331).

But DeLillo's vision is also humorously ironic. As Paul Cantor states: 'In *White Noise*, Hitler does not seem to evoke the moral indignation. . . that have become our standard cultural response . . . In fact, the whole idea of Hitler Studies becomes quickly comic in DeLillo's portrayal, especially when he links it to the study of . . . Elvis Presley' (Cantor, 1991:40). This ironic juxtaposition, and the humour in it, is a very postmodern convention, and invokes Umberto Eco's claim for Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, that it 'initiates the postmodern discourse: it demands, in order to be understood, not the negation of the already said [that is, Grand Narratives], but its ironic rethinking' (Eco, U, 1996: 87).

So while Gladney's seeking to find a meaningful centre for himself can be seen as evidence of him having a classically realist or modernist or humanist ideal of his self, the fact that he is quite happy to conduct his quest within the morally appalling history of Nazism, and to wax lyrical comparing Hitler to Elvis, shows a very postmodern inclination to not privilege narratives along classically humanist moral lines. As well, Gladney's salvation does not lie in subsuming himself into the systemic horror of Hitler.

Everywhere throughout *White Noise* the same problem is repeated. That is, when Jack finds the system around him inadequate, he seeks another, which is just as inadequate because all systems he encounters are mediations of events. When the airborne toxic event happens, Jack takes refuge in the news when the radio says the cloud has gone from a 'feathery plume' to a 'black billowing cloud'. He tells his son: "It means they're looking the thing more or less squarely in the eye. They're on top of the situation" (DeLillo, 1985:105). The gadgetry of media-reproduction are considered more real than a person's physical state. Similarly Jack's wife Babette tells him to turn the radio off during the airborne toxic event:

'So the girls can't hear. They haven't gotten beyond the déjà vu.

I want to keep it that way.'¹⁵

'What if the symptoms are real?'

'How could they be real?'

'Why couldn't they be real?'

'They only get them when they're broadcast' (133).

Towards the end of the book, Jack only believes he is going to die when the machine tells him, not when any human does. His

¹⁵ Déjà vu was a symptom of having been poisoned by the airborne toxic event.

experience of the world is inextricably linked to mediated experience.

This is not surprising in the postmodern world of *White Noise*, a world where events and beliefs are mirrored in the popular culture of global capitalism, destabilising traditional notions of self-identity. As Elliot states: '[T]ransposed to the realm of the self and self-identity, the disorientating effects of the new capitalism means there is little stable ground for an individual to lodge an anchor' (Elliot, 2001:129). For Jack Gladney and the characters around him, there is still very much an impulse to 'lodge an anchor' in their world and know where they stand. The bewildering nature of modern society is disturbing for them because it robs them of a certainty they think should exist, but which remains forever elusive in the inherently uncertain postmodern world. They are caught in a postmodern bind, as articulated here by Elliot:

The image of postmodernism . . . with its shimmering media surfaces, its cult of hi-tech, and its pervasive globalization – resonates with a state of mind split between the enticing excitement of casino capitalism and the terrifying spectre of nuclear catastrophe' (136).

The three main characters of DeLillo's more recent novel *Underworld* (1997) - Nick Shay, Matt Shay, and Klara Sax - are embodiments of what DeLillo sees as the struggle in the postmodern world between isolation and participation, conformity and rebellion, production and destruction. Nick Shay is a waste disposal expert. He tries to find places to hide nuclear and biological waste. Matt Shay helps design weapons of mass destruction. Klara Sax has taken over a massive field of decommissioned B-52 bombers and is painting them as a giant work of art. All three protagonists work largely in the desert, but their histories take place in the city, namely, New York. Nick had an affair with Klara when he was seventeen and she around thirty; it was the same year he shot a man and was sent to prison, and eight years since his father walked out on Matt and him.

Nick is separate from his surrounding world, yet constantly drawn into it. He 'has that paradoxical gift for being separate and alone, and yet intimately connected, mind-wired to distant things' (DeLillo, 1997:89). And much of the time this paradox is played out through Nick's uncertainty in living in the world when so many conflicting stories surround him. There are a multitude of paranoias in *Underworld*. From vignettes of a few pages, such as the story of the missing freighter, packed with radio-active waste - or is it heroin? Or guns? - to the broad and

ever-present question of whether Nick's father left of his own free will, or was taken.

The book is largely a story about stories. It asks: what makes a story believable? How should we gauge importance? Is it, for instance, more important that the Soviets detonated their first atomic bomb, or that the Giants won the pennant? Then, how does the finder of the ball that won the pennant prove its provenance when the finder is a suspicious-looking black man from Harlem? These stories clash continually throughout the novel, and Nick is always sceptical about what to believe. He searches repeatedly for new ways of looking at his world.

Nick then is unsuited to the changing world around him in that he can not find a certainty, or a rule, by which he can judge the truth or veracity of the events that play upon him. His own sense of self is impeded because he can not be sure of what is going on, even in his own personal history. Anthony Elliot constructs what could be considered a good bridge between DeLillo's writing and the postmodern world when he writes: '[I]n contemporary social conditions durable selfhood is replaced by a kind of supermarket identity – an assemblage of scraps, random desires, chance encounters, the accidental and the fleeting' (Elliot, 2001: 131).

Like *White Noise*, *Underworld* describes a very postmodern milieu. From the town being built around an emporium for coloured condoms, to a holiday on a firing range, to the hotel booked concurrently by the waste managers group and the swingers group - there is always a humorous juxtaposition of images and ideas. But *Underworld* is a much bigger book than *White Noise*, and it deals with United States society from the Cold War of the 1950s to the global capitalism of the 1990s.

The picture of the postmodern world DeLillo's novels describe, and the theories about the self discussed earlier served to inform my writing, as the juxtaposition of these ideas seemed fertile ground for writing new work.

Part 3. Postmodernism and the Self in *An Anarchy of Man*

In this section I discuss postmodern notions of selfhood and narrative in *An Anarchy of Man* and its departures and re-inscriptions of traditional notions of the 'unified' self and 'realist' narrative in relation to grunge fiction and the novels of De Lillo previously discussed.

The novel *An Anarchy of Man* departs from the traditionally held picture of the self in its representation of its characters, and in the

philosophical and stylistic underpinnings of that representation, but it does not do so too insistently. The central narrative involves a group of young people who come to Sydney for different reasons. They have all known each other previously in Canberra. This device allows the novel to deal with the different perceptions the characters have of the same place. The main characters, Gin and Joe, are re-united. This makes memories of their previous relationship emerge, and just as all the characters have the location of Sydney in common but see it differently, so Joe and Gin have a past in common but perceive it differently. A similar device is used by De Lillo in *Underworld*, where the initial narrative trajectory is provided by different characters having different perspectives about the importance and provenance of a baseball.

In *An Anarchy of Man* this difference in perception drives the novel forward, as Joe and Gin each seek to affirm and arrange an idea of themselves that can be useful rather than destructive. The novel is therefore different to a traditional realist narrative in that there is no central 'self' at the heart of the story; instead there are two main characters, Joe and Gin, who are created as characters by each other and by other characters. This shift away from the traditional realist concern with, and representation of, the main character also signifies a shift away from the philosophical

notion of the unified self. By decentralising the focus of the novel, so that it does not rely on the narrative of one self, but on the interplay of a number of characters in creating different selves, *An Anarchy of Man* seeks to destabilise the notion that a self is an inviolable and separate entity, floating in a society made of other independent and inviolable selves. As discussed above, De Lillo achieves much the same sort of destabilisation, but his characters remain modernist.

Stylistically *An Anarchy of Man* straddles two 'traditions'. On the surface it appears to be both a realist and a grunge novel. The characters are young, unemployed, and disenchanted generally with society and their place in it. But at the same time the novel is fragmented, and the point of view shifts from one character thinking about another, to a different character thinking about another. The novel is supposedly narrated by Joe. Finally though, the reader discovers it has not been narrated by Joe at all, but by another character, Caudral. The novel seems simple and straightforward, while in fact it is stylistically and structurally quite complex. It departs from realism and the grunge genre while maintaining the facade of both. Like grunge realism, it deals with characters who are unemployed and outsiders, and its writing style is meant to speak plainly to the reader. This style is intended to demystify the idea of fiction having to be 'literary'. The setting

of Sydney has symbolic significance in the way Gin is moving from the quietness of Canberra to the anarchy of Sydney, just as she is doing this in her life also. But setting the novel in Sydney also has the direct aim of making the book popular and enticing to readers, as – if the readers are Australian - they will be reading about familiar places and familiar kinds of people.

The difference between *An Anarchy of Man* and grunge literature lies in the picture of the self inherent to the narrative drive of the novel. Sexuality is not pursued in the same way. Indeed, instead of playing a very central role in the lives of the characters, sexuality is very deliberately secondary. There are no graphic portrayals of sexual intercourse, and instead of being the currency in the games between the characters, the physical fact of sex is kept in the background. Much more central is the portrayal of Joe's and Gin's *thinking about sex*, which is actually not about sex per se, but rather the personal and social ramifications of engaging in it. Sex is not a central defining element of the self as I have argued it is in grunge realism, and the characters in *An Anarchy of Man* have much more complex points of view about who they are in the world than is commonly found in grunge. This device is meant to broaden the appreciation of what it is to be human and decentralise the traditional literary view of the self, away from the idea of it being a central element around which

other elements revolve, toward a more pluralist understanding of the way narratives are internalised and acted upon, and thus come to be constitutive of the self.

The character in whom these concerns about the nature of the self are most evident is Joe, for most of the novel the main character. There is a severe disruption to Joe's idea of his self. He wonders about whether to ascribe more value to his 'inner' or 'outer' feelings. As he travels through the barriers presented to him, he begins to question his very motivation for going forward. He begins to wonder about what 'part' of him is driving him onwards. Is it that he is relying too much on his 'inner true feelings'? Could it be that his 'outer pretence' is in fact 'true', and his 'inner true feelings' a pretence? In particular Joe wonders whether his desire to be with Gin again is a product of some 'external' romantic pretence, or an impulse from 'within', and then wonders about whether either of these motivations have the right to claim a greater legitimacy over the other, and how to go about deciding this (Spencer, 2003: 163).

A similar dynamic involving the main character is at work in *Underworld*, where Nick Shay wrestles with his past association with Klara Sax and how important it is or should be to his contemporary view of himself. Here, the main character is concerned with the ascription of value to his past and present self.

However Nick Shay remains a thoroughly modern type of man. He may question or struggle with the relative importance of the events of his past – Klara, his father’s abandonment – but he does not extrapolate this to a questioning of either what he fundamentally is, or more importantly for this comparison, what it means ‘to be’. He struggles in shaping a useful narrative for himself, but does not approach the question of whether he is or needs a narrative in the first place.

In contrast Joe, in *An Anarchy of Man* questions his own picture of himself, and thus the ontological map by which he navigates himself around his world. It is important to note that Joe does not question his idea of himself, qua self, but rather the very idea of having a picture of his 'self'. He is only superficially disturbed by the picture, but mostly disturbed by the idea of *having to have* a picture in the first place.

Nevertheless, this first reading of *An Anarchy of Man* becomes in fact false. At the end of the book we discover that Joe has not been the narrator after all. This twist is meant to underline Wittgenstein's idea that all 'self' exists (and exclusively, actually) in the language games played. The reader comes to believe (though of course not literally) that Joe is engaging in a certain catharsis, but then the reader is shown how even their belief that the character Joe was a true character, is false - that the character

Joe himself is created by the language of another character, Caudral.

The novel's other main character – Gin - comes to Sydney from Canberra, down out of the certainty and the compactness of the mountains and a planned city, to find freedom in what she considers the great potential of a much larger, more anarchic city. This puts the two main 'factions' in a symbolic dialectic. Gin seeks to get away from stultification, while Joe seeks certainty. They approach the same idea of self-actualisation from different points of view. Although at first it seems as if Joe is 'free' and Gin 'imprisoned', the opposite turns out to be the case: Gin is freed by her process of growing, while Joe remains captured by his romantic notions of himself as an anti-hero.

There is a parallel here with Jack Gladney in *White Noise*, and his inability to see the trivial nature of the facts of his life and work in relation to the swirling, uncontrollable world around him – particularly during the Airborne Toxic Event. Here, Jack's safe self-referential sense of importance becomes humorous when pitted against a real apprehension of imminent and uncontrollable danger.

This 'table-turning' unfolds via Joe and Gin's tentative steps toward rekindling their relationship. When Gin moves to Sydney both she and Joe have to decide how to position

themselves socially and emotionally in relation to each other. The way each remembers the past is fundamental to how they each see the present and plan for the future. But Joe and Gin seem to remember their previous relationship differently, and especially the reasons for their break-up. As they re-enter each other's social realm they question their respective motivations, their wishes, and their values.

Gin is reluctant to re-engage with Joe as she considers her whole purpose for moving to Sydney is to create a new 'her'. Joe is likewise reluctant, although tantalised by the prospect of getting to 'feel' some emotion again; his life in Sydney is decidedly emotionless, and he careens from one drinking bout to another. He has essentially lost control of his own life, and become separate from society. For Joe memory is sentimental, for Gin it is annoying.

The character Leon acts as a central foil for these two self-creating forces. He is driven by another symbolic dichotomy, namely the tension between the idea of being 'real', and the idea of 'pretending to be real'. In *An Anarchy of Man* all the characters attach themselves to self-creating narratives, or generic types that obviously originate in popular culture. Joe is a kind of seeker, a widely known character type seen in films of all genres, from *Star Wars* to *Mad Max* to the recent postmodern film about writing a

film, *Adaptation*. Leon is a Bogart character model, and his posturing toward this type is repeatedly mentioned in the novel, from his surliness toward women and his disdain of 'Romance', to his fashion sense and his way of equating smoky little pubs with authenticity. Leon needs these tropes in the same way the middle class people he imagines as a boring monolithic tribe need theirs, though of course Leon sees their 'markers' of selfhood as false and his as real. Leon is a caricature of the grunge picture of the rebel. He wishes overtly to become a part of the city, when city equals inner-suburban seedy nightlife. His memories are 'like some bad pop song he heard once late at night and now can't get out of his head' (Spencer, 2003: 43). He acts like his life is a movie, he interacts with other people by posing, and he is aware that his character types are incompatible with the pressures of his society to 'conform', but he is no rebel. He ponders the 'yuppification' of King Street as the loss of a true way of being, yet at the same time is careful to construct about him an aloof air of coolness and style (Spencer, 2003: 85). More than any other character Leon represents the Baudrillardian picture of the self. He is able to borrow freely from a range of types within popular culture that more or less conform to the wider type of the modern rebel. He is caught between an awareness of the superficial character of the postmodern world and a desire to appear

authentic, even though his idea of authenticity is an obviously contrived copy of popular culture. Leon demonstrates the superficiality of identity in a postmodern world, but it is important not to equate superficiality, and an ability to orchestrate 'self-realising' performances of popular culture identity tropes with being valueless. The point is not that the commodification of identity in postmodern popular culture is somehow 'fake', but that it embodies a different definition of the real, and of selfhood.

The triumvirate of Joe, Gin and Leon illustrate different ways in which people tell themselves stories about themselves, which in turn form their definitive pictures of themselves. Collectively, the triumvirate demonstrate the process of narrative that exists in the characters' internal lives. The novel as a whole is a narrative, and in this respect it could be considered a narrative about narratives. Here again AOM borrows structurally from the concurrent narratives that occur in *Underworld*. The twist at the end of the AOM is that the whole narrative, or 'story', has been written by another character, Caudral. The novel is, in fact, a story about one character, written by another. This demonstrates the very public nature of our ways of looking at ourselves. All the characters, no matter how personal their stories, have been created out of the opinions of another character. In this way the focus on

the idea of 'self' is shifted from a self-unifying, internal and private process, to one of a public, shared, language-game.

Nevertheless, these concerns are not overt in the novel. It reads like a more traditional realist novel in that there is a set of characters in conflict who are seeking to overcome obstacles and to resolve that conflict to further their own ends. While Joe's speculations about the nature of his motivations are somewhat overtly concerned with the issues of what constitutes a self, these deliberations happen in a very recognisable narrative context, in that he is trying to win the girl he wants.

In this way, *An Anarchy of Man* has both Joe and Gin trying to impose a traditional, if pop culture-framed, idea of romantic love onto a world where this picture of romantic love seems almost cartoon-like in its naivety. The first part of *An Anarchy of Man* has a first person deliberation comparing love and relationships to finding similar or contrapuntal drum beats. This illustrates the way Joe¹⁶ seeks to find a systemic representation of the world around him. Love for him is thus a system, albeit musical, to ward off the horror of being isolated.

¹⁶ At this stage the reader assumes the speaker is Joe, though of course they later find it to have been Caudral.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the issue of how we can define or portray a 'self' in literature. Central to the thesis' concern is the idea that the Cartesian picture of the self remains dominant in the narrative artefacts of Western popular culture, while it has been left largely redundant in contemporary philosophical and critical theory. Alongside this concern is the question of whether it is possible to portray a self that is not Cartesian, while still writing in a style that attempts to be popular and retain many of the characteristics of realism. I now believe it has not been possible for me to reconcile coherently these two aims in a way that renders *An Anarchy of Man* popular, yet challenges to the dominant paradigm of the Cartesian picture of the self.

In my view *An Anarchy of Man* succeeds in that it is entertaining and written in an engaging style, and it also succeeds in that the philosophical underpinnings of the novel remain hidden to the reader. This is what I aimed to do at the outset. But in

writing this novel and this thesis I now believe the philosophical concerns should have been more openly available to the general reader. Although it is possible to write novels that are overtly philosophical in their concerns, for example the writings of Sartre, Hesse, De Beauvoir, for example - in the case of *An Anarchy of Man* the particular project of interrogating the Cartesian conception of the self did not withstand the constriction of writing in a realist style. I wanted *An Anarchy of Man* to be popular, and because I lacked the confidence to make my objectives plain to the reader, I believed the philosophical concerns would be better left submerged in the text. This belief was predicated on an image of the reader as someone who would be bored, or discouraged were I to more openly engage them in a demonstrably philosophical work. The experience of having *Hollow Days* published in 1998 contributed to this belief, in that my publishers at the time extricated the philosophical writing from the novel and I believed at the time made it a much better book.

In my future writing I intend to make the philosophical concerns more overt and not allow them to be excised for the sake of ‘narrative’.

The process of writing the exegesis solidified the philosophical ideas concerning the self and the portrayal of the self in literature that had previously been more nebulous to my mind. It has become clear to me that the process of studying the way the self is portrayed in literature can reveal a very rich vein of critical practice. In the future some of my non-fiction writing will continue to investigate the ‘self’ in literature, as the process of writing the exegesis made me wish to write more purely critical work.

In the process of writing the novel I developed more confidence in being able to switch between scenes and voices. The way the action moves in *An Anarchy of Man* is much more refined and considered than in *Hollow Days*, and the pace of the narrative is more successfully intertwined with the trajectory of the drama. But my self-imposed censorship in terms of wanting to write a realist-style piece detracts from the novel’s ability to effectively portray the philosophical concerns that are central to my thinking.

In the end it seems that the desire to write a popular novel necessarily negates the ability to write a novel that does not conform to the Cartesian picture of the self.

On further reflection this does not seem too surprising, given that the idea of a narrative in Western literary terms seems to demand a Cartesian picture of the self. This is not a new problem for any artist, and it illustrates the age-old dichotomy of form and substance. If the novel is to conform to a particular form or genre such as realism, this will restrict the scope available for substance; on the other hand, if the novel wishes to speak of a new and challenging substance, then it will probably have to seek not to conform to the stylistic assumptions that underpin the contemporary form, whatever that might be.

This bind is not unbreakable, and it may be argued that with the correct marriage of form and substance virtually any project is possible. But when the project's aim is something as essential as the way the self is portrayed this becomes problematic, in that the philosophical assumptions inherent in the

Cartesian picture to an extent dictate the form of realist narrative. In my future fiction writing the assumption of what will be popular, and the assumption that conformity to certain stylistic forms will facilitate popularity, will not be central to the work. Instead, I have gained the confidence to experiment by trying to make the form fit the substance, and not vice versa.

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