

**Projectiles of Chaos: Symbolic (Dis-)
Order in the Works of Adonis, Walcott
and Yeats**

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis proposes that there arises in postcolonial societies a species of literature that neither conforms to the dictates of a “stable” symbolic order nor is it determined by “symbolic history.” What is divulged in this type of literature is the influence of “chaos” – a force that attempts to upend the normative assumptions, machinations and influence of a given social order, or disclose a language that strives to go beyond what “symbols” determine of culture, the human psyche and the unconscious. My assessment takes in consideration the works of Adonis, Derek Walcott and W. B. Yeats – poets who belong to disparate regions of the globe and who had written at a time when their countries were in a state of political, cultural and social upheaval.

The symbolic order in this thesis is defined in mostly Lacanian terms, and the methodology used is elaborated upon in conjunction with specific literature, postcolonial theory and criticism related to the three authors. In this manner, I argue that the sway of chaos on the signifiers of the symbolic order shepherds a para-symbolic impulse in postcolonial literature that has multiple ramifications. This impulse engenders within the psyche a paradoxical movement that attempts to unsuccessfully delineate chaos even as it ventures to use it to upend, invent and reinvent the social and cultural assumptions of a given region or age.

Although the symbolic order is elucidated in mostly Lacanian terms, the conception of chaos uses a broad array of critics. Some of the works and notions which pertain to chaos and which I employ include Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s ideas in *The Repeating Island*, entropy as the second law of thermodynamics, chaos theory and fractal geometry as introduced by James Gleick and Edward Lorenz, the

irreconcilability (hence, chaos) of myth in the works of Lévi-Strauss and Yeats's *A Vision*, as well as the *transforming* impulse in Adonis's theoretical work *The Immutable and the Transforming*. Other theorists that I use include, but are not limited to, Homi Bhabha, Julia Kristeva, Frederic Jameson, Gautam Basu Thakur, Mikhail Bakhtin, Slavoj Žižek, Walter Benjamin and Frantz Fanon.

What this dissertation aims to disclose in the assessed works of the chosen writers is both a “desire” to push against the limits of symbols and what they determine of history, and an encounter with chaos where signifiers fail, where their very failure provides the conditions necessary for a brand-new poetics and literature to be produced and reproduced. Fundamentally, what I reveal is that although Yeats, Walcott and Adonis often employ different strategies in their poetry, beneath those strategies it is chaos that stitches all of their motives together as it weaves and tightens its thread across the different parts of the postcolonial globe.



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Introduction

The Symbolic Order and Chaos in Adonis, Walcott and Yeats

Introducing Chaos and the Symbolic

What would transpire in the literature of a region when the symbolic order to which it belongs is in a state of malleability, entropy or chaos, is not yet fully formed or entrenched in the community that is supposed, through its writers and authorities, to pass it forth? To my mind, this question points to a panoply of concerns that couple localized literary innovation with regional fluxes. In such a place, nebulous psychic forces and volatile historical events engage with the socio-symbolic order(s) and arise to concoct a species of literature that attempts to go beyond its place of genesis. In contrast to this, I may surmise a literature that merely fits the symbolic pattern of the place it is created in. Such a literature emerges in locales where a “stable” community manifests itself in a merely symbolic manner, where history as it is perceived unfolds in an apparently coherent ensemble of progressive events that lead towards the ostensible creation of an ideological cultural Arcadia. In light of these antecedents, I will attempt to answer the question I have posited. In doing so, I will take as examples poets of disparate postcolonial spaces where history, ideology and literature are fluctuating – are being subjected to the dual forces of disorder and order, entropy and creation, life and death. I will consider writers who have heavily influenced their region – the St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott to assess, through him, the symbolic order of the Caribbean in general and his country in particular, Syrian poet Adonis to discuss the influence of chaos on the cultural milieu of Syria and Lebanon, and William Butler Yeats to examine the fluctuating symbolic order of Ireland.

The premise that makes me take these poets into account are diverse. So far, I have touched on some of the factors in a broad generalized manner. Through interrelating points, I will provide the reason I chose those writers – why I believe they have similar rapports and affinities to each other specifically when it comes to the creation of a literature that strives to go beyond its symbolic value. But first, since I will synthesize Lacanian psychoanalysis with postcolonial literature, I will put forward my rationale for using Lacan as the major theorist. Afterwards, I will attempt to expatiate on the concept of the symbolic order as it is subjected to chaos / entropy on one hand and order on the other. This, I will undertake with the intention of pointing out how I can view the poets' writings under the lenses of symbolic fracture and cohesion. Next, I will endeavour a comparative assessment of all three writers with the objective of teasing out "commonalities" and differences between them and their cultures – commonalities that will lay the foundation of a broader analysis in subsequent chapters. Finally, relevant to this chapter, I will assess, in certain poems written by Adonis, Walcott and Yeats, a dimension to their language that attempts or succeeds in breaching or pointing to a beyond of symbolic culture.

Why Lacan and Chaos?

The grounds which make me posit "chaos" as a "marker" whose manifestations become evident in postcolonial societies are contingent on the need to account for the "peculiarity" of how signifying elements of such societies may operate – something that I believe Lacan's notion may not be able to fully articulate. The symbolic order, as I will explain later, imagines cultural signifiers / elements as a closed network of checks and balances, of constraints and restraints. To my mind, fashioning the symbolic order in such a way implies one of two things: either a culture divorced from

the impact of the outside world and existing in isolation, as in some kind of social petri-dish where symbolic elements have reached their ultimate form, or the “regulators” which police such elements are so entrenched and established that any new symbolic structure is dependent on it being granted their permission to manifest.

Indubitably, as the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss who first introduced the concept of the symbolic order to Lacan believes, one needs to presuppose a kind of order for one to “map” it, an “unconscious activity of the mind” which imposes “form upon content” and which creates the human psyche and the symbolic structure of a society (Lévi-Strauss 18). However, to do so, one does not consider extra-cultural influences or only takes them into consideration when they are fully integrated in a cultural milieu, when they become stabilized and regulated, when they finally create a “finished” culture. In *What the Twilight Says*, Derek Walcott denounces writers, including Lévi-Strauss, who view the Caribbean through such lenses of “elegiac pathos” which decries the ambition of its dynamic cultures and “unfinished cities” that have not reached any “homiletic conclusion” (75-76).

Statements such as these articulate a need to look at postcolonial culture and literature differently. Indeed, western psychoanalysis, whether Lacanian or Freudian, is often considered antithetical to postcolonial studies precisely for this reason. Gayatri Spivak writes in “Echo” that she is uneasy about the use of psychoanalysis in a postcolonial or cultural context because she feels that “it is so culturally specific in its provenance” (20). Kelly Oliver, in a pointed criticism of Lacan, argues in *The Colonization of Psychic Space* that the psychoanalyst’s notion of symbolically constituted subjectivity “presupposes a privileged subject and cannot account for the subject of oppression” and that his theories cover “over the alienation inherent in

oppression by postulating a universal alienation that renders invisible concrete forms of alienation” (4).

How then to account for the use of Lacan in my thesis? Why not use Frantz Fanon who is at least considered to be a postcolonial writer? I answer this by saying that if I am to use Lacan’s system – a system that can be viewed as a western meta-narrative – this does not mean I will do so in a manner in which my assessment will fall under the purview of Lacan. Indubitably, when I speak of the symbolic order, I am automatically speaking of what is generally associated with it: a “lack in being” or “alienation” that propels the subject along its labyrinthine network of symbols. I do not deny that this is a Lacanian attempt at a “universalization” of the human condition that may raise the objections of postcolonial writers and critics alike, but as Gautam Basu Thakur argues in *Postcolonial Lack*, what is “universal” is not necessarily what is Western: “The universal condition of lack can find diverse, particular expressions” (xxv). What better to assess such expressions but through the medium of the postcolonial symbolic order which is in itself diverse and particular to a community and, furthermore, differentiated from the “Western” Lacanian paradigm with the introduction of chaos? I believe that chaos will ameliorate and answer Walcott’s objection to Lévi-Strauss since I will argue later in this chapter that chaos is precisely that which prevents a society from reaching its “finished form.”

As for not using Frantz Fanon as my main theorist, Fanon himself in *Black Skin, White Masks* finds Lacan useful and utilizes some of his works to criticize the psychoanalytic ideas that inundate colonial psychoanalytic thoughts, particularly when it comes to French racialization theories that posits biologic determinism of the psychic constitution (*Black Skin* 58). This is not to say that Fanon is Lacanian. He finds, for example, the Lacanian-Freudian notion that the Oedipal complex is at the

heart of most forms of neurosis to be erroneous and only specific to the western world. He asserts, in contrast, that in the Antilles, neurotic symptoms are not contingent on a malfunctioning Oedipal relationship but are the “product of a cultural situation” where a “series of propositions” absorbed with the help of “books, newspapers, schools and their texts...” produce an unconscious idea of inferiority in black individuals (*Black Skin* 118). This may be the case, but I will point out that to Lacan, the Oedipal Complex is socially determined. What is important is its triangular structure which replicates and organizes the whole demesne of the symbolic order. The “series of propositions” that Fanon detects in the Antilles can be translated qua Lacan as the Laws and habits of cultural institutions that stand for the Oedipal father even if the actual Father may not play such a role. I can therefore argue that Fanon himself, in this particular instance at least, is Lacanian. I agree with Derek Hook when he says that when it comes to Fanon, one must not “lose sight of the structural role of the symbolic... in the psyche of the subject” and that the implementation of Lacanian theory can play “a supporting role in extending Fanonian insight” (313).

It is my intention to implement this Lacanian theory, and if I am to use the symbolic order to stand for culture, I will do so for the express purpose of disclosing the influence of chaos. I will point out that I am not the first person who has attempted to “fuse” chaos with the symbolic. Particularly in Caribbean literature, authors and critics such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo in *The Repeating Island* and Rhonda Cobham in “Of Boloms, Mirrors and Monkeymen” find that the psyche of the Caribbean individual is caught between the imaginary and the symbolic. This, according to Benítez-Rojo, produces the effect of chaos where the Caribbean self is split between unattainable sources of legitimation: “On the one hand lie nature and the folk tradition

– the Mother, the Imaginary... On the other lie the languages and epistemes of Europe... the Symbolic” (275).

Cobham and Benítez-Rojo’s assessment of Caribbean literature is highly suggestive. It will factor into my own evaluation although I will not attempt to conflate, like they do, Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage and the role the mother plays therein with what appears to be the psychoanalytic thoughts of Melanie Klein. Rather, I will comprehensively examine Lacan’s own formulation of the symbolic order before I attempt to part ways with it.¹ Regardless, the manner in which both authors fashion Lacan’s ideas point to a need to view postcolonial symbolic orders in a different manner than that of their mostly western counterparts.

My use of Lacan is further substantiated by Thakur who contends that what is important in assessing postcolonial texts is not the symbolic order but that which resists its influence. Postcolonialism has to explore “the excess, surplus, or lack” that lingers in the “wake of exercises of self-representation” in addition to the “function of the [Lacanian] real” (xiv). I, on the other hand, believe that assessing the manner in which a postcolonial symbolic order gives rise to aspects that are intimately linked, through the influence of chaos, with the real is one way of looking at the reasons why many authors, including Thakur, find excess or lack in such societies. In my attempt to prove that the postcolonial symbolic orders are *dynamic* and *open-circuited*, my assessment will differ from Thakur who follows the Lacanian model.

To view the symbolic order as dynamic will also go a long way in mitigating some of the criticism Julia Kristeva levels against Lacan. Kristeva argues that Lacan’s overemphasis on the symbolic order does not consider the fact that it often fails to

¹ In his fourth unpublished seminar, Lacan systemically attacks object relations and goes out of his way to distinguish and differentiate his own thoughts from that of Klein, particularly when it comes to the role the mother plays.

reckon with para-symbolic psychic phenomena that are unsymbolisable and associated with the “feminine” semiotic materiality (“Within the Microcosm” 35-37). Kristeva’s own notion of the psyche accounts for what she calls the *semiotic* which emanates from the body’s instinctual modes and primary affects. *Le sémiotique* is a *signifying process* involved in dynamic prelinguistic psychic operations which Kristeva contrasts with the symbolic static mode (Barzilai 297). Kristeva argues in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that the semiotic, when it flows into the symbolic in a manner that cannot be fully regulated by the latter, energizes, restructures and alters this register (*Revolution* 58). This, according to her, is particularly seen within certain literary texts or in “borderline” personalities (Clément 55). Interestingly, a typical symptom of the borderline condition is the appearance of “discursive chaos” that points to the limits of the symbolic order and is outside its socio-historical enclosure (“Within the Microcosm” 45).

Considering Kristeva’s position, an argument can be made, as with Fanon, that I need not use Lacan at all in my thesis. I could simply assess the works of all three poets to reveal the semiotic processes that upend, charge or alter through the medium of “discursive chaos” the symbolic’s signifying process. As a rebuttal to why I did not use Kristeva, albeit one made for practical purposes, I will point out that Lacan’s notion of the symbolic is more fleshed out than hers without being much different. More crucially, its relationship to history is much more detailed and intelligible, particularly in Lacan’s “The Rome Report” found in *Écrits*.² Since history will factor into my assessment, I believe my use of Lacan will provide a better understanding of how culture and history interact. Additionally, Lacan provides a better correlation between culture and mental activities – the whole premise of his assessment of the

² “The Rome Report” will be examined in chapter one of this thesis.

“The Purloined Letter,” an assessment that I will tackle in depth later, is to reveal a sympathetic one-on-one relation between the symbolic unconscious and the socio-symbolic order.

Even Kristeva’s objection to the clearly delineated registers of Lacan, whose topologically fixed boundaries substantiate and maintain (patriarchal) Law and authority by disallowing her conception of the maternal semiotic from impinging and influencing its structure, is somewhat extenuated by my introduction of chaos into the symbolic order. Such entropic forces tend to erode the clear-cut borders of the symbolic very much like her semiotic does. Furthermore, chaos may have the added benefit that it is not necessarily internal to the body but can also denote external unsymbolisable influences. Finally, Kristeva’s own species of psychoanalysis has been subjected to postcolonial criticism, the same as Lacan. This means that using her theory is not without its problems.

To my mind, Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theories, and even her own notion of “discursive chaos,” can relate or engage with any symbolic order, not just those of postcolonial societies. Admittedly, I may be able to appropriate her own argument regarding China to my end, that it is a matriarchal, i.e. semiotically inclined, society – this, as opposed to western patriarchal cultures which are predominantly symbolic. This argument of hers, however, has its detractors and its limitations in the postcolonial field. As Kelly Oliver writes in *Ethics, Politics and Difference*, “Kristeva’s text [on China] is at once both strikingly different from the earlier French orientalism and yet disturbingly reminiscent of its postures and rhetorics” (150).

For these reasons, I believe that Lacan is a better theorist for my purposes. His work can be manipulated to serve as a better foundation from which to launch my own argument. With the proviso that I attempt to factor in entropic elements, I argue that I

can modify his work to account for the peculiarities of psychic phenomena that are unique only to postcolonial regions and to its literature. This is not to say that I will not use Kristeva, Fanon or other writers, but their own writings will be appropriated under the umbrella of the postcolonial “dynamic” symbolic order and chaos.

Why Adonis, Walcott and Yeats?

“Chaos” designates social and psychic forces which predominantly operate in postcolonial nations whose sense of identity and consciousness are still in the process of becoming. This produces a *dynamic* symbolic order whose effects I will trace in the literature of the three writers. There is a reason that I have chosen those three poets although, for all intents and purposes, they do not seem to have much in common apart from the fact that they have left their literary mark on their regions and the world. However, to say that they do not have much in common does not mean they do not have *anything* in common. For example, both Walcott and Adonis engage with French thought and poetry of the mid-twentieth century, both consider the French-Caribbean poet Saint-John Perse as an influence and both engage in a dialectical relationship with surrealism.³ In addition, the regions to which all three poets belong have been colonized by either Britain or France or both.⁴ Walcott himself identifies with Yeats and other Irish poets because “they were also colonials with the same kind of problems that existed in the Caribbean. They were the niggers [sic] of Britain” (*Conversations* 50). Furthermore, both Adonis and Yeats are heavily influenced by Heraclitus and

³ Adonis would translate Perse into Arabic while Walcott, in *What the Twilight Says*, considers him an important influence in his writing (59). Walcott’s opinion on surrealism, that in its attempt to subvert artistic “formulas,” “rigidifies” its own (*What the Twilight* 123), is opposed to Adonis’s belief that this artistic movement is a force which can rejuvenate the Arabic language (see his book *Sufism and Surrealism*).

⁴ The Greater Syrian region and the Caribbean were colonized by both France and Britain. More specifically, modern Syria and Lebanon were colonized by France and St. Lucia and Ireland by Britain. St. Lucia was also colonized by France before it became a British colony.

Nietzsche and both, surprisingly in Adonis's case, use the concept of "masks" which they were initially introduced to by the works of Ezra Pound (al-Musawi 99).

Be that as it may, I am hard-pressed to find a lot of common ground between all three writers. Yeats and Adonis may not even share the designation of being postcolonial. Edna Longley writes that Yeats does not comfortably relate to the postcolonial world despite Edward Said's essay which invites critics to think of the poet in such a context (146-147). She attempts to shift the critical focus on Yeats by arguing that his presence in Irish poetry should actually be viewed more within the context of a *sui generis* or, at least, a distinct modernism than within the framework of Irish nationalism or postcolonial poetics. As for Adonis, his ambition, as Robyn Creswell reminds his readers, is to think of himself as an international rather than a nationalist or postcolonial poet: a "late modernist liberal" whose stringent secularist attitude has more to do with the tenets of French *laïcité* than with a regional ethos (*City of Beginnings* 182).⁵

From this perspective, how can I relate the three writers to each other, to postcolonialism and subsequently, to chaos? First, I will answer this question by pointing out that Edna Longley, in her critique of Yeats, does not say what she means by postcolonialism. I will also have to point out that the definitions of "postcolonialism" and their usage across the literary field are many.⁶ As for the manner in which I have used this word, I do not take it to mean merely an engagement with literature which counters colonial narrative. Postcolonial writing also implies literature which partakes in national and socio-cultural formation, or at the very least points to the chaotic effect of a social and psychic symbolic order that is not stable or

⁵ See also, Creswell's "The Man who Remade Arabic Poetry."

⁶ See the introduction to *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman.

in equilibrium. Furthermore, I will contend in the conclusion of this thesis that through chaos, postcolonialism may reflect a “unique” and “distinct” modernist sensibility.

This means, and although it is beyond the purview of this thesis, it is possible to examine Yeats’s “distinct” modernism as being contingent on, or within the context of postcolonialism and not, as Longley is wont to do, separate from it.

Second, and in relation to Adonis, Creswell is correct in calling him a stringently secular humanist – but as Creswell himself attests, his “secular humanism” does not exist in a historical void. Rather, it is influenced by a panoply of cultural and historical elements and experiences that have shaped and reshaped his many opinions over the decades. His “secular humanism” may have derived its earliest if not ultimate form from the teachings of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and not from some pure “universalist” intellectualism. Founded in Beirut in 1932 by ’Anṭūn Sa’ādah, the SSNP is an anticolonial secular movement that envisions a “Greater Syria” encompassing today’s Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Cyprus and the Sinai Peninsula (Moubayed 42). The SSNP propounds a nation composed of “Levantine ethnic and cultural groups” united under the banner “of an egalitarian, secular, socialist, uniquely Syrian national identity.” This attitude comes to mean “a total repudiation of the neighborhood’s Arabs, a rejection of pan-Arabist irredentism, and a complete divorce from all things religious – especially the symbiotic religion between Arabness and Islam” (Salameh 100-101).

Adonis may have eventually separated himself from the SSNP, but there is no doubt that he is influenced by the teachings of ’Anṭūn Sa’ādah who attempted through his writing to reconstitute “a Levantine secular polity” where Syrians and minorities “would reclaim their millennial pre-Arab heritage, and reintegrate a humanist, multifaceted, polyglot, cosmopolitan identity, separate and distinct from strictly Arab-

defined identities” (Salameh 101). The corollary of this is that if Creswell designates Adonis as an international “humanist” poet, this does not mean that he is not a postcolonial writer, nor does it mean that his “humanism” is not colored by the brand of humanism fashioned and modified by the intellectuals of his region to suit topical, political and anti-colonial considerations.

From my arguments above, I can conclude that, in addition to Walcott, both Yeats and Adonis can be considered postcolonial poets and can be studied within a postcolonial context. There are at the very least some common points that connects all three of them together and permits me to assess them side by side. In Edward Said’s essay on Yeats, I find another important commonality.

In “Yeats and Decolonization,” Said examines the conditions that lead to the existence of two postcolonial moments that produce the fluxes which I will call chaos. The first moment is a nativism and a negative dialectism qua Adorno that is alchemized into a mode of nationalist anti-imperialist resistance. This is closely followed by the second moment which Said calls liberationist anti-imperialist resistance. In both moments, literature is deployed as a tool, both to fight against the “narrative” of the colonist and to fashion or invent a community. The literature existing in these instances is necessarily a messy affair that reveals “a sense of the instability of time, which has to be made and remade by the people and its leaders” (Said 86).

I will assess in the following chapters the presence of such an instability of time, and I will link this instability to the influence of chaos on the symbolic order and history. Ultimately, what I will do is trace a “postcolonial ground” that discloses the movements of chaos. In doing so, I will attempt a certain way of assessment between disparate postcolonial regions that, to use Natalie Melas, brings incommensurable

forces into relation “over a ground of comparison that is common but not unified” – common but not unified may as well be a characteristic of chaos (43).

In the next section, I will introduce what I mean by Lacan’s “stable” symbolic order through an in-depth exegesis of his seminar on Poe’s “The Purloined Letter.” Next, I will begin to trace factors that point to the entropic qualities of the socio-symbolic orders to which Yeats, Walcott and Adonis belong and which I believe cannot be fully explained by the Lacanian paradigm. I will have to specify, however, that my assessment is related to the literature of the three writers and as such, my thesis involves an in-depth psychoanalytic assessment of some of their written texts. Although Lacan may insist on the importance of a detailed historico-socio-cultural engagement to understand the motivation of individuals, such a thing will be beyond the purview of this thesis. Adding detailed historical contexts to my assessment will detract from the areas I want to concentrate upon. Be as it may, I will engage with a few choice historical elements. Furthermore, from a psychoanalytic perspective, literary texts are “historical” texts and are indicative of a historical ethos: Lacan sees the machinations of the signifier in such texts as an expression of a wider cultural phenomena (*Écrits* 288). In this regard, I will follow him by treating literary texts as an expression of the manner in which symbols and history function, or in my case, malfunction to produce them.

The Lacanian Symbolic Order in “The Purloined Letter”

I shall begin by defining the symbolic order and I will do so in broad terms. Roughly speaking, the symbolic order, as conceived by French thinkers like Jacques Lacan, is the social order of a given culture. It is what integrates through “chains” of signifiers into a subject’s psyche forming the nucleus of his being whilst dictating his

thoughts and actions. It is what regulates the intersubjective interactions one has with other individuals, deciding one's position and function in the social environment he inhabits. The symbolic order determines a subject's destiny and limits his choices to the constellation of signifiers that orbit his psyche: "There is a symbolic circuit external to the subject, tied to an external group of supports, of human agents, in which the subject the small circle that is called his destiny, is indeterminately included" (Lacan, *Sem. II* 99).

In perusing Lacan's works, one comes to recognize the pervasiveness in which the signifier-chains that form one's unconscious confound the very desire that propels the subject into its labyrinthine symbolically determined paths. His unequivocal self-evident beliefs and traditions, his norms and taboos and even his written literature are subjected, in the last analysis, to the symbolic. What a writer *originally* creates is necessarily dependent on a social order and a symbolic language that exist before he does. Another way to look at this is through Roland Barthes who, in "The Death of the Author," states that "it is language which speaks, not the author" and that "only language acts, 'performs,' and not 'me'" (143). This is to say, an author does not write something inasmuch as he is written. Culture writes the individual – and the individual writes his culture in the manner that culture writes him: "In the course of socialization, the body is progressively written or overwritten with signifiers; pleasure is localized in certain zones, while other zones are neutralized by the word and coaxed into compliance with social, behavioral norms" (Fink 24). In such a fashion, through this circular loop, the symbolic order maintains and sustains itself.

In *Écrits*, in his "Seminar on the Purloined Letter," Lacan masterfully (psycho)-analyses, through the medium of the symbolic order, Edgar Allan Poe's tale regarding a scandalous letter stolen by the French Minister from the Queen. To Lacan,

the letter represents a signifier that belongs to her majesty, not merely through physical ownership, but by the more nebulous symbolic Law that positions her under the purview and within the circuit that constitutes the social order. That the Minister steals and attempts to hold onto that which does not belong to him shows fully the symbolic matrix in action as it mobilizes its signifiers and its agents to neutralize the threat, preventing him from destabilizing the status quo of a culture that depends on the function of Her Majesty within it. The symbolic forces called upon to stand against the threat are not merely external: It is not just Parisian detective Dupin or the police that have been called into service to retrieve the letter. The symbolic, to Lacan, is the unconscious itself. At the level of psychic phenomena, the letter as signifier acts against the Minister inasmuch as it acts within the culture to self-regulate it.

The letter insists upon the Minister's unconsciousness, and conscience as well. It compels the man to "behave according to the mode of neurosis" – and I can assume that it does this, on one level, precisely due to the guilt it engenders as it splits the Minister between his reality as a subject beholden to symbolic Law and his ego that desires to use the letter for ends of power (Lacan, *Écrits* 34). The letter is not in the possession of the Minister inasmuch as he is in its possession. The signifier unfurls its symbolic influence. Its potency and danger lie not in what its thief unlawfully intends to do with it but in its lawful function as a queen and a woman's possession. "The mode of neurosis," among other things, points to the evidence that the Minister is assuming some of the Queen's characteristics even against his own volition. Apart from the fact that he unwittingly hides the letter in a manner comparable to the Queen's, he also manifests some of her "feminine," symbolically-determined virtues: "An aura of nonchalance... the display of an ennui verging on disgust... conspires to make a personage, whose every remark seems to have surrounded him with the most

virile of traits, exude the oddest *odor di femina* when he appears” (Lacan, *Écrits* 35).

Lacan ends his exposition by implying that no one is outside the purview of the symbolic circuit of culture. We are all culturally determined individuals whether we consent to this or not.

In one of Yeats’s early poems written in 1886, “The Indian Upon God,” it is “God” that acts as signifier in place of the “letter.” The speaker, wandering among the diverse anthropomorphic flora and fauna of his region / culture, encounters talking “animals” and “plants” that are inundated by the signifier “God.” Like the “letter,” the signifier “God” is transmitted from one sentient being to another, shaping in the process the operations of the symbolic order and configuring the intersubjective relationship between them. As soon as they assume the signifier, they identify it with themselves. To the moorfowl on the grassy slope, God is created in its image, an “undying moorfowl” (6). Similarly, the lotus asserts that, like itself, God “hangeth on a stalk” (9). A male deer assumes that God is “the Stamper of the Skies” (13-15), and a peacock declares that God is a “monstrous peacock” (17-20).

This is par excellence the symbolic order of a stable cultural apparatus whose signifiers shift in a consistent array of interactions and reactions. “God” in Yeats’s poem orients the anthropomorphic entities in their intersubjective relationships, ordering them in the place they can cause the least amount of chaos. I notice in the poem, by this very orientation, a lack of any interaction that can blow into a full-scale conflict. The entities’ various dissimilar beliefs in God’s traits are limited to their respective personal spheres so as not to create dissension and upend the social order. Even the speaker does not communicate with the creatures. He can be assigned a role similar to detective Dupin. By not interacting with them, he does not convey to them what the others’ versions of “God” are. By this means, he maintains the peace.

I shall go further than this analysis in the hope that in doing so, I will reveal a deeper, more insidious level at which the symbolic operates. I shall assume that the speaker of the poem is Yeats and not an anonymous “Indian.” Following John Lennon, I shall also assume that the entities he spies upon are individuals representative of the sectarian and cultural conflicts of an Ireland differentiated, during Yeats’s life, into religious ideologies divided across the Catholic-Protestant line (221). The entities in the poem are merely a *metaphorical* representation of individuals of different sects who view God as an apparently Divine Law that upholds a concretely Symbolic Law vis-à-vis the materiality of the signifier. In the poem, since each creature essentially creates God in his own image thereby validating himself and his own sect as that which upholds Ireland’s symbolic order, Yeats appears to be undermining such an egotistical belief by revealing its sheer absurdity. Building on Lennon’s argument, I may even posit that he is critiquing the method in which religious sectarian beliefs are assumed by individuals with the insidious unwholesome intention of marginalizing others. “God” becomes God-in-the-image-of-the-man-who-believes-in-Him and the man-who-believes-in-Him sanctions himself to become the Law of the symbolic order through this very identification. His beliefs and prejudices, his truths and opinions become, to his mind, uncontested. It is after all, culture, the symbolic order or God’s will, not his own, that he is following.

It is at this juncture that I would like to view the poem in yet another light. Metaphors in “The Indian Upon God” are very much overdetermined, and it would do well to recognize both their dangers and the deconstructionist critiques that they are subjected to. Metaphors obfuscate the unique historic event and erode it through the act of generalizing it: “Metaphor is endowed with the capacity to situate the experience at the heart of a universe that it generates. It provides the grounds rather

than the frame, a limitless anteriority that permits the limiting of a specific entity. Experience sheds its uniqueness and leads instead to a dizziness of the mind” (De Mann 235). In other words, metaphors blanket the message that Yeats is trying to spread and remove the bite of its particularity. At the level of the speaker as either Yeats or the anonymous Indian and at the level of their respective symbolic orders, the message transmitted by the poem, the signifier “God,” like the Queen’s letter, is *deferred*: from creature to creature or from metaphor to metaphor, it does not matter. Yeats may have striven to criticize the symbolic order that constitutes him and subvert it by his sly observations and disruptive verses, yet at an intrinsic and unconscious level he has *protected* it by employing metaphor.

The Irish of Yeats’s era, with their internal conflicts and ideologies, are transmogrified into magical animals and plants. Ireland becomes India – and even India, far from being a nation whose history of sectarian strife is more convoluted than Ireland’s, is more of a phantasmal fictitious concept than one of the most populous and culturally rich nations in the world. The inherent message in Yeats’s poem is declawed and defanged. The events in “The Indian Upon God” could have occurred anywhere and therefore occurs nowhere. In Paul De Mann’s words: “Far from referring back to an object that would be its cause, the poetic sign sets in motion an imaging activity that refers to no object in particular. The ‘meaning’ of the metaphor is that it does not mean in any definite manner” (235). The symbolic order that is to be criticized is *saved* by the *symbolic order*. The signifier “God” twists back within its loop and closes the symbolic circuit to any change while Yeats, supposedly his culture’s foremost critic, becomes, through the insistence of signifiers in his unconscious, its paramount guardian and protector.

This is all well and good. The cultural order described here, as in Lacan's seminar on Poe, is a stable fixed system. Whatever danger the imaginary capture of the symbolic causes, i.e. the arresting of the signifiers "God" / "the letter" by the ego, is intricately managed by the orientation of the symbolic chains within each society. The aim of any culture is to survive, to maintain itself and to avoid danger. It is no coincidence that the creatures are adjusted and orientated in an intersubjective space that does not permit anarchic interpersonal interaction. The creatures in "The Indian Upon God" would be unaware as to the reason they have positioned themselves as such in their respective spaces but in doing so, they will be able to carry on with their lives and never come in ideological conflict with another.

It is time to restate the question I have raised at the beginning of the chapter: What happens if the symbolic order is in a state of flux – subjected, for example, to what Antonio Benítez-Rojo, in his book *The Repeating Island*, calls chaos? I have already explained how the symbolic imposes *order* through its convoluted networks of signifiers. The operative word here is "order" – as in symbolic "order," maintenance of "order," space orientation towards maximal "order," forces in play protecting the "true order" of things by returning the signifier to its rightful position. All this is possible if the preexisting symbolic order's circuit is closed, the orbit of its signifier-satellites determined by the pull of the culture it gravitates around, its national and individual history coherent and unfragmented, and its imagined communities uncontested, unquestioned and self-evident. It is my contention, however, that no such symbolic order exists in postcolonial societies – that their signifiers is subjected to the influence of chaos.

Indications of Entropy in the Symbolic

In this part of the chapter, I will examine the elements which have me posit that the symbolic orders to which Adonis, Walcott and Yeats belong are not regularized, stable or in equilibrium. There is no doubt to my mind that all three authors have experienced an era of cultural fluctuation and change, of shifting and warring ideologies, split identities and contested social norms. I cannot say of their symbolic orders, the culture of Ireland, the Caribbean and the Syrian-Lebanese region, that they express a *fixed* formularized rhythm that can be charted and parsed, what Benítez-Rojo in the *Repeating Island* calls a *western* rhythm: A rhythm which is “domesticated and systematized” by a quintessential western history, and “emptied of cosmological and racial signification.” A rhythm whose noise “is silenced and converted into a simulacrum of what it once was” and its signs subject to a limited number of rhetoric that “[prearrange] their differences, making them so predictable that from that point on they could be inscribed ... according to the reigning notations and conventions” (171). Although Benítez-Rojo’s opinion only holds for the Caribbean, I cannot but view it, in this instance, as provisionally indicative of the postcolonial societies in general since such societies’ “rhythmicity,” their structure, are still in the process of being formed.

To return to Yeats, even if “The Indian Upon God” apparently discloses the operations of a “stable” circuit of signifiers, I cannot say that Ireland’s symbolic order is a fixed entity. Yeats was born at a time of great political and cultural upheaval. During his lifetime he witnessed multiple wars and sectarian tensions. He belonged to various literary traditions that attempted to influence the emergent national and cultural identity of Ireland. His earlier pre-Raphaelite work, to name one example, was influenced by the Celtic Twilight – a literary movement that combined an interest in Ireland’s Celtic heritage with Irish nationalism. He was one of the founders of the

Abbey Theatre and his play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, written in 1902 and featured in the Abbey's opening night, was considered a battle cry for the Irish republican movement. His intimate association with the ardent nationalist Maud Gonne, the leader of the Fenians John O'Leary and the controversial Irish politician Charles Parnell saw him play an active role in politics which would culminate in him becoming a senate member of the Irish Free State in 1922, the year his country gained its independence.

There is no doubt that Yeats's Ireland and its symbolic order cannot be considered stable qua Lacan. To take only the late nineteenth century, the era in which Yeats penned "The Indian Upon God," Declan Kiberd in his seminal work *Inventing Ireland* writes that the Ireland of that time "was a political and social laboratory" (23). More revealingly he asserts, through his assessment of various historical events, that the Irish then did not have, psychoanalytically speaking, a "good father" and were consequently forced to self-invent themselves as subjects: "[The] generation of Irishmen and Irishwomen fathered and mothered themselves, reinventing parents in much the same way that they were reinventing the Irish past." Kiberd adds that during that time, "there were major reversals in the relations between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons: families split into their constituent parts and the free person was born" (7). To explain Kiberd's statements in psychoanalytic terms, I will direct the reader to *Totem and Taboo* where Freud locates the historical origin of the Oedipus Complex at the moment a primordial band of brothers murder their authoritarian lascivious "primal father" who takes all the women in his tribe for himself.

Wracked with guilt, the brothers "deify" and "resurrect" their sire. They internalize him as a master and venerate him as a god who brings forth order and compels obedience. The first two taboos of humanity come into being to keep the Oedipal complex in check: incest, so that no brother can take the father's place with

the women – and a restriction, but not a complete ban as I shall explain later, on killing the “animal totem” that symbolizes the father, i.e. a restriction on murder so that no one will commit patricide (*Totem* 164-168). The death of the “primal father” is then the origin of culture. The brothers’ remorse for their heinous crime compel them to create and obey laws, traditions and morality. The whole array of culture is thereby created and maintained, guarded by a father-god assimilated into the psyche, who elicits guilt and terror in a subject’s mind whenever he strays.

Lacan reworks Freud’s primal father into the symbolic order as the name-of-the-father or the “paternal metaphor” that stands for any authority which regulates the symbolic order itself. This authority includes, but is not limited to, actual fathers, traditions, norms, colonial powers and the institutions they prop up to maintain their control. To the French psychoanalyst, the name-of-the-father guards the symbolic against entropy and prevents the whole of culture from unravelling by forestalling the *chaotic* “cascade of reworkings of the signifier from which the growing disaster of the imaginary [would] proceed” (*Écrits* 577).

For Kiberd to have written that the Irish did not have a “good father,” or that they had fathered themselves suggests a lability, a weakness in the network of signs promulgating onwards to stabilize Irish culture. Their name-of-the-Father, having malfunctioned, was not behaving accordingly. Consequently, the chains of signifiers, no longer under the influence of the paternal metaphors holding them together, could not, in their unravelling or anarchic motion, maintain or impose the law. This is what Kiberd means in his evincing of the idea of fathering oneself. With the failure of culture and its authorities to shape the individuals, the individuals must somewhat shape themselves as they have no (name-of-the)-father to shape them. Taking this argument to its conclusion, I can surmise that neither Yeats nor his countrymen were

entirely constituted by the socio-cultural order during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This suggests that they might be able to subvert the values of their communities by pointing to *something* that was beyond what could merely signify symbolically.

Like Yeats, Adonis (Adūnīs) belongs to a dynamic symbolic order of centrifugal and centripetal impulses, volatile historical events, diverse political ideologies and conflicting literary movements. Born ‘Alī Sa‘īd Esber in 1930 in the village of al-Qassābīn near Latakia, French Syria, Adonis witnessed large-scale seismic shifts that radically altered the cultural geography of his country and neighboring areas. He moved to Lebanon in 1956, a year after he was imprisoned for his membership in the SSNP. In Beirut, which had been experiencing a cultural renaissance, he joined a vibrant community of writers, poets, artists and exiles. There, along with Yūsuf al-Khāl, he founded *Shi‘r*, i.e. *Poetry*, a literary magazine whose influence on the Arab community was never to be outmatched by any Arabic publication of the twentieth century. His four-volume study of Arabic literature, culture and religion *The Immutable and the Transforming (Al-Thābit wa al-Mutaḥawwil)* caused much consternation and commotion at the time of its publication and remains one of his most controversial works to date.

To say that the symbolic order that Adonis witnessed is in a state of violent aleatory fluctuation is to put it mildly. During his lifetime, Adonis saw his country take its independence from France, witnessed successive coup d’états, was party to tensions between divergent political parties, artistic movements and ideologies, weathered and survived multiple wars. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, for example, is “commemorated” in *The Book of Siege (Kitāb-al Ḥiṣār)*. In such an environment of mutably shifting events and volatile historical occasions, one can presuppose that the

region's symbolic order is dynamic rather than fixed qua Lacan. In a six-hour interview by al-Mayadeen Television titled "This is My Name... Adonis" ("Hadhā Huwa Ismī... Adūnīs), this is what the poet says, for example, on the culture of Beirut: "Beirut, initially, was a dream. Beirut is the only Arab city that is *incomplete*.... [During my time there,] I was connected to Beirut like a project, a project open to the future, like a poem or a love experience that is without end.... [The city] is written and built every day.... Beirut's identity is based on questioning and discovery, based on openness" (00:06:40-07:30).

It is a fascinating way of looking at Beirut's culture – and I would like to remind the reader again that Adonis's initial encounter with the city in the mid 1950s came on the tail of his imprisonment in Syria for being a SSNP member. Syria during that time was embroiled in a succession of coup d'état mostly originating in the army where various national forces vied for supremacy. In 1955, Adonis had spent a year in a Syrian jail without a trial due to his militant activism.⁷ His coming to Beirut was, for all intent and purposes, to escape war trauma. In his memoirs *There You Are, O Time* (*Hā Anta Ayyuhā al-Waqt*), Adonis writes of his coming to Lebanon as a voyage of personal and artistic rebirth, an "emergence from the closed world of Damascus – a city attached to dead monuments of culture and riven by violent power struggles – into the new world of Beirut, with its intellectual adventurousness and tolerant social codes" (Creswell 21).

There You Are, O Time is redolent with the pessimism the young Adonis was feeling at that time regarding Syria. His imprisonment would have a lasting effect on his psyche: "I was inhabited by the feeling that I was no more than ruins," he writes in

⁷ The murder of the popular Ba'athist-affiliated officer 'Adnān al-Malikī by a SSNP member in 1955 would lead to a general crackdown of SSNP members in Syria. The party would remain outlawed until 2005.

his memoir. “I was broken, disappointed, all but depressed” (*Hā Anta* 30). His country was moving in a direction that did not appeal to him – and this was, to some degree, the result of Ba’athism, and to a lesser extent, Nasserism: Two movements which called for unity among all Arab nations⁸ and aimed to overturn the Sykes-Picot Agreement⁹ and whose belief in a “Pan-Arab mono-identity” ran contrary to the ideology of the SSNP.

To Adonis, who was still a believer in the teachings of ‘Anṭūn Sa‘ādah, the stranglehold the Ba’ath party was to have on Syrian politics excluded him as a SSNP member and an Alawite minority and prevented him from expressing himself: “A ‘nationalist’ and ‘in the name of the nation’ – I was deprived,” he writes in his memoir. “I had no right to think of the country or work in it... I had no right to be a ‘nationalist’.” To him, Syria had become a reified ideological system disallowing dissenting opinion while Damascus had become “a city of endings,” a “vast closed box” where history “almost transforms into a machine” (*Hā Anta* 31,33).

Beirut, on the other hand, was “a city of beginnings.” It became to Adonis a “world emptied of the history it had emerged from... and primed towards a history that is not written for it but written by it” (*Hā Anta* 33): After four centuries of Ottoman rule followed by the end of the French Mandate, it appeared to the poet that Beirut was finally primed to determine and invent itself. If it was emptied of the history it emerged from as Adonis was wont to put it, then it can decide its own way forward untethered from the shackles of the past.

⁸ Egypt and Syria would merge into the United Arab Republic in 1958 before dissolving in 1961.

⁹ The Sykes-Picot Agreement was a British-French accord whose existence reneged on the pledge made by the British to the Sharif of Mecca al-Ḥusayn bin ‘Alī al-Hāshimī. In exchange for siding with the Allies in World War I and declaring war against the Ottoman empire, the British promised the Sharif support in founding an Arab Kingdom. Instead, following the defeat of the Ottomans in 1918, the British and French callously carved up the Middle East into arbitrary nations and zones of influence with scant consideration to differences in regional culture: Mark Sykes, one of the orchestrator of the agreement, was famously known to have said while divvying up the Ottoman empire, “I should like to draw a line [on this map] from the ‘e’ in Acre to the last ‘k’ in Kerkuk” (qtd. in Berdine 63).

To put Adonis's opinion of Beirut in Lacanian terms, Beirut's symbolic order was unfinished and inchoate, but in the process of being unfinished and inchoate, it was forming and reforming – creating itself again and again from the ashes of history. It was ever undulating, ever unfurling, ever extending – more so each day. It was akin to a banquet spread with a continuous dizzying diet of literary tropes and theories, interacting and contentious artistic expressions, and divergent ideals and politics. To give a historical example, from the 1950s to the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, Hamra Street, one of the major neighborhoods in West Beirut and one Adonis used to frequent, was famously a contact zone for artists, liberals, conservatives, writers, poets and militants from the far left to the far right (Creswell 1).

Something then, according to Adonis, was continuously added to the Lebanese capital's "identity" every day, filling a space revealed by all that flux and upheaval. To the Syrian-born poet, the penultimate thing constituting the city's culture was exactly that very space inside it where the city had *no clearly-demarcated culture*, where absence empties itself into the symbolic order or pushes against it inciting riot, where the poet is invited to fill a void with the frenzy of his own innovations and artistic expressions. As if to Adonis, Beirut's symbolic order was a fetal creature that never assumes a full form or shape although, with the poet's intervention, it can assume *something*.

This something, nevertheless, cannot completely render it whole – the space is always open and cannot be closed, perhaps because the identity of the poet who is trying to finish it is also *incomplete*. Adonis writes in *The Incomplete Identity: Innovation, Religion, Politics and Sex* that "an identity must be created and recreated perpetually, and this does not end with death.... For identity is motion and cannot be fixed and frozen" (69). To my mind, this compels the incomplete poetic "identity" of a

writer to attempt the completion of an incomplete cultural “identity” of a region, maneuvering the poetic subject to write more, to tirelessly reach for *something* – the fullness of a finished “identity” perhaps. But the void within each symbolic order can never brim unto repletion, cannot find one singular identity, and so the poet continues his endeavor to discover, only to discover that discovery is without end, and so returns to discovering again.

Another way to look at this is to use Adonis’s concepts of the *transforming* as opposed to the *immutable*. I can say that Beirut’s dynamic symbolic order, with its “incompleteness,” give rise to a brand of a literature where the *transforming* impulse, outside the dictates of culture and inside the space open within it, operates in a void un beholden to symbolic law. In the *Immutable and the Transforming*, the poet defines the *transforming* as “the thought [*fikr*] that does not see in the text any reference and depends primarily on the mind and not on *naql*” (*Al-Thābit* 1: 14). To Adonis, *naql* is a quality of the *immutable* impulse of a culture. The word “*naql*” can be translated into “copying,” “faithfully mimicking” or “transcribing.” It implies a fetishistic transmission of literary and theo-cultural traditions from one generation to the next. The next generation of Arabs inherit the tradition of their predecessors without changing them in any shape or form. A fixed symbolic order suggests precisely this kind of *naql* – where innovation does not exist or merely implies a rearrangement of signifiers within acceptable symbolic parameters. Adonis’s dynamic symbolic order indicates *something* else; it indicates an impulse of creation that goes beyond what is merely there within the social fabric. It indicates a species of literature that cannot be explained by the extant signifiers and their normative arrangement.

Like the other two writers, the symbolic order to which Walcott belonged appears to be in a state of fluctuation – and this, I contend, is evidenced, among other

things, by the volatile forces unleashed by the region's violent colonial history: I will argue later that the existence of such entropic unsymbolisable forces can be traced to the present where their presence will have far reaching consequences on the contemporary Caribbean region. The Middle Passage, slavery, revolutions, genocide, the colonial occupation of the archipelago, etc. – to Walcott, all these events, which he had continuously engaged with in his writings, have remained, to redirect and modify Lévi-Strauss, unfinished. This is to say, their history is not fully integrated into the fabric of the symbolic order, and as such, they have neither reached, nor allowed the symbolic order to reach, any kind of “homiletic conclusion” or stability.

In “The Schooner Flight,” Walcott’s speaker Shabine bears witness to the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the poem itself, according to Mattia Mantellato, “can be read as circular and redemptive Middle Passage... for the whole Antillean archipelago” which aims to correct the pain of the past by “rebalancing the forgotten bonds” between individuals and their community (279). “Rebalancing” implies a will to order and to pure symbolization – and whether Shabine has found this “balance” that would mitigate the historical trauma of the slave trade is doubtful. By the end of the poem, he is still looking “in vain search” for an island that “heals with its harbor” (415). In later lines, Shabine expresses that “there are so many islands” and not merely one, but as many “as the stars at night / from that branched tree” (418-419). This implies that the “forces” acting on the Caribbean are too numerous and branched that one is hard-pressed to find between them an equilibrium that would catalyze an order of absolute symbolization – or an agent that may provide the precise location, among so many dizzyingly random coordinates, of a space where one force, one island or one “healing harbor” can be found. There are too many entropic-inducing agents acting

within Caribbean space, and these agents cannot, like pure signifiers, be easily neutralized or balanced against each other.

Unlike Mantellato, I will argue that these concentrated “forces” of entropic-inducing phenomena will remain inassimilable and out of balance with the Laws that govern the signifier: If Adonis’s understanding of a given Arab culture exhibiting signs of dynamicity and chaos is that it is pleasingly incomplete, I would, therefore, like to propose through Benítez-Rojo that the symbolic order of the “fugitive archipelago” of islands that constitute Walcott’s Caribbean is almost the exact opposite. If anything, due to the existence of these dense “forces,” there appears to be too much of it in the space it occupies. It is not complete inasmuch as it is over-complete – a veritable overlapping oceanic stretch of uncountable islands, to redirect Shabine’s thoughts.

I have linked Benítez-Rojo’s conception of “western rhythm” to a fixed symbolic order, i.e. a certain kind of metered recurrent movement that fixes the symbolic order to the constraints of the Lacanian model. In contrast, Caribbean culture has mostly an “African Rhythm:”

It is ubiquitous, fluid, and it responds to a symbolic poetic like those of the societies from which it issues; its discourse in the present tense carries the group’s law, myth, history, and prophecy; it is the immemorial attempt to capture the cosmogenic together with the social, and it is, in itself, the ritual sacrifice (not its simulacrum) which is there to forget past, present, and future violence.... In short, for the People of the Sea, before Rhythm there was Chaos; after it, Order, except that, in time, in the West, such Order came to be seen as (Dis)Order. (Benítez-Rojo 171)

This is quite a statement to unpack, as if the Caribbean's symbolic order is a simultaneity of historical symbolic spheres insisting and clamoring in the present in some kind of (Dis)Order or Order. This (Dis)Order or Order which constitutes the present of Walcott's socio-symbolic register contains the traces of African cultures, cosmogenic mythos, social habits and even western rhythm. It is as if all these dense symbolic spheres are superimposed and coalescing with each other, birthing the current Caribbean order whose rhythm and interactions, whose signifiers-chains and codes are hard to parse. Within this dynamic, even the concept of the "ritual sacrifice (not its simulacrum)" implies a continuously dynamic cultural reconstitution, as I shall explain.

I have already mentioned Kiberd's take on the Irish of the nineteenth and twentieth century – that they mothered and fathered themselves. I have drawn the implication of such an idea in psychoanalytic terminology. In *Totem and Taboo*, after the death of the "primal father," the band of brothers come together and commemorate him out of atonement and a shared sense of guilt. This they do through the simulation of his murder by sacrificing the totem animal – the only time they allow themselves to do so – creating in the process a ritual-sacrifice invested with culturally propagating symbols that sublimate their violent murderous tendencies into communally sanctioned impulses. To become a ritual, the sacrifice would have to be perennially repeated, the repeated sacrifice would be a simulacrum of the original sacrifice denoting the dead father. In its repetition, collective memory is created and the ritual enters and becomes part of culture, part of the symbolic order. To my mind, repetition intimates stability – the faithful enactment of the sacrifice season after season or year after year for the same purpose and in the same way creates a constant tradition. A constant tradition implies a stable symbolic order. To put it in simpler terms, the first

ritual-sacrifice is what determines a *specific* culture by bestowing it with *specific* unique attributes and traditions.

It is the original ritual-sacrifice that is the creative impulse; the simulacrum that comes after it merely reproduces the same pattern of signifier-chains thereby fixing the socio-symbolic order in a state of balance, maintaining a culture in its specificity and preventing a different impulse from imposing a different cultural narrative. If an African rhythm, on the other hand, captures the first ritual-sacrifice and not its simulacrum, it means that it is not repeating the original ritual-sacrifice since such a repetition is precisely a simulacrum. Rather, it appears that the African rhythm attempts to create a *second* original ritual-sacrifice different from the first. A different ritual-sacrifice promulgates a different panoply of rites and traditions, in effect, a *different* pattern of symbols that the first ritual-sacrifice does not sanction, in effect, a *new* second symbolic order. This order is then superimposed on the first whereby the sum and the interaction of the two, or more than two, creates the dense dynamic seemingly arrhythmic symbolic order that I have extrapolated to be Walcott's Caribbean – a network that appears to be made out of a simultaneity of superimposed symbolic “orders” or “spheres” interacting with one another.

If a Caribbean rhythm is too convoluted and impenetrable to follow its structure, I will examine one of its effects through the superimposition and interaction of two of its symbolic spheres: Christianity with its pantheon of saints and prophets, and African pantheism. In *What the Twilight Says*, Walcott writes generally of historical incidents where European missionaries attempt to transmit, or more accurately, to force their religion on the Africans they had abducted. The missionary's hope, according to Walcott, was to impose their God, i.e. their symbolic order, on those they enslaved. In the process, they expect a total conversion of the black

population to Christianity, effectively silencing their dissent through symbolic indoctrination.

This did not go according to plan, the Christian *ritual* that enacted the *sacrifice* of Christ, which the missionaries attempted to impart, interacted in an unforeseen manner with the Africans' symbolic order and ritual-sacrifices. Suddenly, it was the missionaries whose God is being taken away from them by a submerged force that "rose at *ritual* gatherings, where the subconscious rhythm rose and took possession and where, in fact, the Hebraic, European God was changing color, for the names of the sub-deities did not matter, Saint Ursula or Saint Urzulie; the Catholic pantheon adapted easily to African pantheism. Catholic mystery adapted easily to African magic" (47; my emphasis). The superimposition of the two symbolic spheres, one white and the other black, invents and underlies this part of the Caribbean symbolic order: a black Christian God whose ritual sacrifices are different than western doctrine. By the reasoning of my previous exposition on ritual-sacrifice, it therefore follows that a culture with a new ritual sacrifice has a new symbolic order, and if the ritual sacrifice (not its simulacra) is constantly recreated, then culture is constantly rebirthed and the symbolic order is constantly dynamic.

In this section of this chapter, I have revealed the rationale by which I have conceived of the dynamic symbolic orders that run in opposition to Lacan's belief that the symbolic is "the pact which links the subjects together in one action," regulating their actions by founding them "on the existence of the world of the symbol, namely on laws and contracts" (*Sem. I* 230). I would like to clarify that the specific methods I have fleshed out to defend my objective do not exclude other methodologies. I cannot say of Ireland that the dynamicity of its symbolic order is utterly explainable by a deficiently functioning name-of-the-father, or that the Lebanese region's *transforming*

impulse and incompleteness of its identity is all that destabilize its signifiers. Nor can I say that the density of the Caribbean's socio-cultural order is the sole fact which sustains its chaotic motion. By its very definition, I cannot generalize the particularity of chaos, and what I have done is examine the entrance wound in the symbolic where a certain "chaotic projectile" breached through into "flesh" and weakened the function of its robust body.

In the next section, I will assess, in broad terms, leaving specific evaluations for subsequent chapters, the impact of a dynamic chaotic system in the creation of a species of poetry that either cannot be entirely explainable by the Lacanian register or seeks a beyond that is always its point of reference. I have chosen the three poets in view of the fact that their community is in a state of flux, on the brink of violence and within the grip of chaos. Such communities, I believe, are predominantly postcolonial: Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* argues that the symbolic subject, i.e. "subject of enunciation," of such communities is a split entity. This initiates in such a subject the destruction of historical coherence and evolution through the opening up of a "third space" between "enunciation" and "proposition" (54). This space, according to Bhabha, constitutes the "discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity of fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (55). I have gone differently than Bhabha by proposing not a fixed symbolic order that loses its authority with the intrusion of the "subject of the proposition" but a dynamic symbolic order already in motion. By doing so, I have reached the same conclusion as Bhabha – that in postcolonial societies, the meaning and symbols of culture have no fixity.

Poetics of Chaos in Three Poems

In this section, I shall appraise Adonis's "The Path," Walcott's "Laventille" and Yeats's "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea." I will first comment by saying that I chose all three poems because they depict or represent either a literal or symbolic journey, or at least a need to discover or confront *something* within the symbolic itself even if that *something* is not there. All three poems are written early in the poets' careers, and I believe that they foreshadow an impulse early on in their writings that is to inform their career throughout their life. Adonis's "The Path" ("Al-Darb") is published in the writer's first book of poetry fittingly titled *First Poems (Qaṣā' ed Ūla)*. I shall begin here, and since I shall discuss "The Path" at length, a translation from the original Arabic may be necessary:

[Sections]

In the lost stone, the tint of anxiety,
The tint of an imagination wandering, –
Who, I wonder,
Passed this way and burned.

Red flames appeal to my steps
Glory appeals to them
And as the distance lengthens
They become prouder, refuse to complain,
And every time I asked my path: I wonder
Till when, this burden of nightly wanderings and wanderings
When shall I attain what I desire
And reach the end

And be calmed therein?

Said the path to me: Here I begin.

There are many intriguing elements in this poem. Let me start by understanding the word “*ta’eh*” which I have translated as “lost” but which also contains the implication of “wandering” – hence one is lost in one’s wandering. “Rock” appears to be the speaker’s eye, wandering everywhere, tinted and faded with anxiety, lost and searching for *something* that has not been found. The poem itself seems to begin *in medias res* – I know nothing about what the speaker is looking for, merely that he is on a path that leads *somewhere* but I know not where. The question in the first stanza is not punctuated by a question mark but a full-stop. Does this mean that the question is rhetorical? Another fascinating feature is that, for a poem that invokes and evokes a journey, there are absolutely no landmarks described. I am left with a mystery on more than one level. The second stanza does not help either except to inform me that “red flames” and “glory” appeal to the speaker. By the end of the poem, he asks a second question, this time ending with the appropriate punctuation.

To Lacan, an analysand asks the question to the psychoanalyst that he, at some level, *knows the answer of*. In this, he has modified one of Heidegger’s stances on “being” to apply to his brand of psychoanalysis. The reason one can say that the question is in the answer is because an individual’s question denotes that he is aware of the problem that afflicts him: “In what is asked about there lies also *that which is to be found out in the asking*” (Heidegger 24). What then is the first answer to the first question posited in the poem? “Who passed this way and burned.” If the question is the answer reversed, then the proposed answer here, extrapolated as the reverse of the question is, “*I am the one who passed here and burned.*” But as stated earlier, the question is not punctuated by a question mark. I can say that the speaker, although he

knows the answer, *does not want it articulated*. He knows and still does not want to be conscious of that knowledge. The full-stop is there instead of the question-mark to frame the information and limit it – beyond that frame, nothing exists. The caesura stretches between the question of the first stanza and the beginning of the second; the second continues with a syncopated shift away from the query and towards glory with all its egotistical and imaginary affiliations.

I cannot say that the second stanza answers the lack of information even though it does contain the theme of fire. To Lacan, the imaginary register, the order that causes individuals to misrecognize the symbolic realm through denegation, denial, seduction and aggression, is not the place where one should find one's truth as a subject. The answer is in the question, but if the speaker is asking the question then what he is really trying to do is repress the answer or else the question wouldn't have been there in the first place – or perhaps the question points to *something* else beyond the symbolic. This is not to say that there is no answer within the symbolic, merely that any answer will be nothing but a placeholder to this *something* else, and if answered, this *something* else would breach through the placeholder-symbols. Perhaps the caesura is the location of the true answer – this blank space where the signifier to the question should exist remains white and empty signifying an *incompleteness* from a symbolic perspective, but it is an incompleteness the speaker simultaneously wants and refuses to encounter.

It is at this point that the word “[Sections]” at the beginning of the poem starts to take on an extra dimension. Is this word indicative of some modernist literary gimmick that Adonis uses to imply some sort of fracture in the world – as if his poem is a part of a greater message that is now forever lost in the degradation of modern life? I have initially thought as much: *First Poems* is not a book of selected verses,

there is no reason for Adonis to have taken snippets from an original poem and collect it here. Regardless, the title page of *First Poems* informs the reader that the book being used is the fourth and last *revised* version, and the first version contains the poem in its entirety. The question asks itself. Why is the edited version as significant if not more so than the unedited version?

To answer, I will engage with the “unabridged” version of the poem where there is a more protracted engagement with anxiety and angst. The emotional landscape that blankets the speaker’s physical journey is much more detailed and circuitous, filled with a hallucinatory poignancy that never concludes or mitigates the speaker’s hardships. The poem begins with eyes being riveted “on the sealed / on love’s seed,” then the speaker, “in an utter trance” seeks his path which he describes as a “madwoman / falling onto danger.” Afterwards, he transmits the opinion of other people in their evaluation of his path, “They said, destiny, / Buried itself inside it, seeking shelter” (1-8).

What does this talk about destiny mean, and why is destiny buried inside the path? This is an ambiguous contradictory statement, and one has to be reminded that the symbolic is what usually determines destiny. I can only conclude that destiny is literally fleeing from the symbolic order since this order is what regulates its function. The “path” which destiny takes for a sanctum should result in the protection of individuals from symbolic determinism, but the path itself is frightening because there are aspects of it that are *not symbolized* – aspects of it that are not part of the social order, that stretches onto the abyss of *something* that cannot be parsed or circled by signifiers, absorbed into culture and neutralized. Nevertheless, the Lacanian symbolic order with its stable signifiers and laws, although under threat, is still there exerting its influence. This is why, in the original unabridged version, there is more to the

speaker's wanderings and why, in general, the theme of wandering is crucial. I, myself, shall digress for a couple of paragraphs with the intention of elucidating the importance of "wandering" in Adonis's poem.

Love in Lacan is crucially linked to demand. Demand is usually manifested in the subject as a demand for love or a proof of it, but demand is something that cannot be entirely expressed and as a result, it usually cannot be attained. The frustration that arises when a subject's demands cannot be met is what brings forth desire. Desire is an indication of the subject's lack-in-being that he attempts to fill. To do so, he must enter into the symbolic order, into language to be able to articulate what he wants in the hope that he will get it. This is where desire comes in. Desire is the consequence of language / the symbolic order and is the result of the impossibility to bridge the gap between this want – this extra something that would prove to the subject that he is loved – and what he merely needs to sustain himself: "Desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting" (*Écrits* 691). It is only through language that a demand for love can be made and once a child assumes language, he enters into the symbolic order and accepts symbolic castration.¹⁰ Since language cannot frame exactly what is demanded, a problem arises with the child's ingress compelling him to use more signifiers in hope of getting what he desires. However, the demand for love will never be truly answered to the child's satisfaction, and so he will deploy more and more symbols in hope of attaining what he wants while being sustained by a desire that cannot be assuaged.

¹⁰ I am not using "castration" in the Freudian but the Lacanian and Kristevan sense. Lacan is highly suspicious of Freud's notion of penis envy. In "The Signification of the Phallus" Lacan argues that at birth, both genders have the "phallus" and both need to be "castrated" to gain entry into the symbolic order. The symbolic phallus is not the penis but rather it is a "signifier that is destined to designate meaning effects as a whole" (*Écrits* 696).

This is the reason that the symbolic order is structured by desire; it is through the frustration that arises from the symbolic that the individual operates within it. The subject keeps chasing signifiers, hoping to catch something that will fill that gap in his being – all to no avail. The signifier can fill nothing, and so the subject keeps going on and on, traversing the symbolic order, flitting from one signifier to another in his attempt to capture something that will always remain elusive.

The reason this is relevant is because Adonis's "The Path" begins precisely within a symbolic order that divulges this gap between demand and need. In the first version of the poem, the speaker's eyes are watching hopefully "love's seeds" – a metaphor for a yearning and a demand for love that launches him onto his symbolic journey. The first version of "The Path" is replete and perfused with this voyage, and there is a sense that the man has fully traversed the whole of the symbolic with its multitudinous combinations of signifiers. There is no place for him to go now – at least not within the stable elements of a culture that merely determines for him a sanctioned direction and a lawful destination that does not threaten its very existence. This is the reason that I believe Adonis excises the section engaging with this symbolic journey. This voyage is not particularly important since the speaker is merely moving from signifier to signifier, reinforcing the very value and traditions that he is seeking to escape.

By comparison, the last version of the poem with its excised lines is more compressed. I contend that by removing the sections that concern the unwinding of the symbolic journey, Adonis successfully fashions "The Path" to begin at the place where the symbolic voyage, elaborated in the first version, is about to end. I also argue that the question left unanswered in the first stanza is one last attempt to stay on the "straight" symbolic path, so to speak. The question with its full-stop punctuation

shrouds and encircles the encroaching horror which comes to destabilize the normative symbols of culture. It is a signifier chain that acts by plugging the breach to the very disorder it gestures to. Nevertheless, the underlying essence of the question still directs the reader to the caesura, still invites the speaker to respond to the question even as he simultaneously posits and evades it. It is the second question that proves to be the dismantling of the symbolic, or at least a destabilization of its structure. The second stanza, perhaps operating as a rallying point against the chaos that has been unleashed against Lacan's symbolic order with the first question, extends and disseminates its signifiers in an attempt to bring the disorder brushing against it to heel. This action fails, or more accurately, is not entirely successful since the narrative there is egotistical and incoherent: The pain of fire subverts the glory felt by the speaker. His steps' lack of complaint, "They become prouder, refuse to complain," is undermined by the reality that most of the stanza is reserved for complaining, "Till when, this burden of nightly wanderings and wanderings..."

At this juncture, the second question is posited and unlike the first question which the speaker has neatly sidestepped, this one appears to be innocuous and not very dangerous. There is, after all, no "burning" involved – perhaps this is the reason why the speaker is willing to hear an answer – he does not expect it to upset him. He does not believe that his query, which I will paraphrase, is perilous to his mental wellbeing: *When will I achieve my dreams and my desires; when will my journey end?* A symbolic answer relating to the Lacanian symbolic order would be ambiguous: *Keep going no matter what, never prevaricate, no matter how long the path. You'll never know if you can get there if you quit.* The hypothetical answer is not truly a lie per se, but it redirects the subject again along the chains of symbols. Instead, in a short sentence, the "path" to which the question is directed answers the speaker with a bald

laconic brutality, not giving him any time to absorb the violence it will unleash on his psyche, “Here I begin.”

It is at this point that I will argue that the answer revealed here relates more to Heidegger’s stance on being than Lacan’s own – and since this is the case, I will then argue that the given answer engages with elements beyond the domain of the symbol: I have already written that Lacan has modified Heidegger’s notion of the question asked by an individual – that one needs only to reverse the question to arrive at the answer. If I am to return to Heidegger however, the question itself denotes an honest search for the truth more than an obfuscation. Heidegger’s true or “authentic being” is beyond the domain of the symbolic – and it is this being, this *Dasein*, that is realized through the question. As he writes in *Being and Time*, one’s being, whose existence in the world necessitates it finding its authenticity, must distinguish itself from the inauthentic self which conforms to the Others and takes pleasure and enjoyment “as they take pleasure” (27).

Heidegger’s “Others” appears similar to Lacan’s “Other” – that is, the symbolic order: In both, they relate to an individual born to a pre-existing communal world, i.e. the Other(s), that determines his being and his desire or pleasure. Although I cannot substitute Heidegger’s philosophy with Lacan’s psychoanalysis, I can cautiously say that in Heidegger, the question that launches the self towards finding its authenticity does not return to the symbolic order. On the contrary, it has to go beyond it – a situation which Lacan, incidentally, appears to find impossible. As he jokingly and ironically writes in *Écrits*: “The signifier’s answer to whoever questions it is: Eat your *Dasein*” (40). In other words, one’s being and his subjectivity are crucially linked with the signifier, the symbolic order and the Other.

I argue that in Adonis's poem, the question posited is answered in a manner that is similar to Heidegger's position more than Lacan's. True, the speaker himself is obfuscating the answer, but the answer itself is not of the symbolic, or a return to it. This is not to say he is searching for an answer in the manner specified in *Being and Time*, nor that he actually reaches an answer that finds an authentic self, but his search takes him beyond the signifier. His symbolic journey has ended where his "true" authentic path has appeared even if the speaker has yet to follow it. What the answer opens up is not a link to other signifiers but a track into an abyss, making the speaker understand, through horror and chaos but not symbolic language, that no matter how tired and exhausted he is, no matter how much he has achieved and overcome, he is merely at the beginning of his journey, not at its end. The end of language, of the stanza, of the poem itself implies that the symbolic can offer no rebuttal, no negotiation with the terror the answer has unleashed. Unlike the first question, there are no subsequent lines to mitigate or dampen the chaos perceived in the unsymbolisable space beyond the poem's verses. The path that begins, i.e. "Here I begin," begins there – at the threshold of language, at the border of culture, in an area that is not safe, that is not known and that offers no solace or sanctuary.

Desire, that emotion that steers the speaker into the symbolic, now veers towards catastrophe and symbolic incoherence. It becomes something else, a drive, or the product of a drive. Untethered from the symbolic regulations of the poem, it continues to repeat itself *across* others of Adonis's poems – as if this impulse, having broken away from "The Path," can find itself in other verses – gleefully upending language, striving towards *something* dangerous and unlawful. It repeats itself in "The Road" ("Al-Tarīq") for example, another of Adonis's poems where the speaker, unmoored from the symbols that has tethered him to culture, finds himself in danger –

cut adrift on “a ship, narrow as a wing / wearing the rose of the wind / forgetting its harbor” (7-9). It repeats itself in “The Beginning of the Road 2” (“Awwal al-Ṭarīq 2”) where “the face of fire, and the face of poetry [becomes] a path” (7). It keeps on repeating and multiplying – always pointing to the beyond of the symbolic, always expressing something else – a dynamicity influenced by entropy, a stability upended by chaos, a pattern mauled by disorder, altering everything.

I have ended my exposition of Adonis’s “The Path”. I have examined the journey that spirits the speaker away from what is symbolically known and onto the edge of some dark unsymbolisable void. I have viewed how, with its influence, the Lacanian symbolic order is rendered volatile, its signifiers less structured and patterned – sliding away or dissipating to reveal that blank space where the trio of horror, elation and destiny hides. This is the locus where a gaping hole, an *incompleteness* qua Adonis or a potential authenticity via Heidegger, invites the shrinking poet with a confrontation that traverses the borders between language and chaos.

Having done so, I shall now direct my attention to “Laventille,” a poem first published in Derek Walcott’s *The Castaway* in 1965. There, the journey is of another kind: Whereas Adonis’s “The Path” portrays a voyage where geography becomes forgotten or effaced by abstractions that express a distressed if elated state of mind, the journey in “Laventille” begins very literally. If in “The Path” one is frustrated by the expungement of all physical landmarks, in “Laventille” one is intrigued by the material description of the landscape that continues in eighteen verses before the speaker redirects his attention to a different journey, a journey that is half-memory and half-imagined but completely real – the Middle Passage.

I begin my analysis with the speaker traveling up an incline towards Laventille, a ward on a hillside situated on the edge of Port of Spain and located in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. This area is a poverty belt.¹¹ It is a slum with “perilous streets” whose edges fall “like Episcopal turkey-buzzards,” while “lank electric / lines and tension cables [link] its raw brick / hovels like a complex feud” (4-5,16-18). The description here is visceral and actual, there is no introspection, not yet anyway, but the poem communicates the existence of a poverty that no doubt occupies the speaker’s mind. This poverty adds the first potential for introspection in the poem and prompts the reader to see a *thrust* and, so far, to guess at an undisclosed aim. There is a direction to the journey then, and it is not just physical but spiritual as in Adonis’s “The Path” – but here is where the similarities end. “The Path” has one *thrust* despite its meandering and this thrust aims at the beyond of the symbolic voyage. By my estimates, “Laventille” has four *thrusts* – something that, I will argue, can be explained by Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic which destabilizes the rhythm and Laws of the symbolic. These thrusts are directed into four accounts that superimpose into one. It is not unjustified to imagine “Laventille” as a palimpsest where underlying but seemingly effaced narratives interrelate in a network of interactions and repulsions fabricating something unexpected.

A symbolic order, with its signifiers and laws, dictates an individual’s destiny. I have already mentioned this at length but the reason I mention this again is its relevance to “Laventille.” Let me return to what I have termed “*thrust*” and expand on it. The first thrust in the poem is relayed by the speaker’s uninspiring walk in the slums. The encapsulation of poverty within the streets gives the first direction of the poem – towards a place where the impoverished, the “inheritors of the Middle

¹¹ The area has since been gentrified.

Passage,” live in penury (19). Their lives represent the “height of poverty / for the desperate and black” and revolve around “prison, graveyard, church” (22,29-30). There is a quiet desperation implicit in the repetition of routine that cannot be broken, the lack of prospects that cannot be changed and an economic class which cannot be transcended. Walcott describes it as a chartered structure correlative with the manner the city is arranged by wealth. On the top of the hill there is Laventille, and as one goes down, the poverty is erased to make way for the city proper, Port of Spain, with its “merchant, middleman, magistrate, knight.” To put it succinctly in the speaker’s own words, “to go downhill from here / was to ascend” (26-27).

Here is a culture steeped in abject poverty, its symbolic order determined and assembled by wealth and hardship, tragedy and a hand-to-mouth existence. Here then is a variation of Lacan’s symbolic order as absolute destiny, of the signifiers possessed by the psyche being the one doing the possessing. Yet, underlying all this is the second *thrust* in the poem, one which segues into the verses so smoothly that I am hard pressed to guess where one ends and the other begins, which is perhaps the point that Walcott is attempting to make. What determines the present is something that does not appear as *separate* from the narrative of the present but that *connects* to it as if it is part of it. The *second thrust*, that of the Middle Passage, fuses into the slums of Laventille. I am reading of the speaker’s hilltop ascent when it intrudes into the poem and blurs the line between the present-day poor and the slaves captured and brought to the Caribbean. Consequently, the poor, the inheritors of the Middle Passage, are not written in the poem as separate or distinct from their African ancestors – they are still clamped “below their hatch” (20).

The addition of the second thrust or narrative adds an extra aspect to the first. It orients it in a certain way, or as Paul Breslin puts in in his book *Nobody’s Nation*,

“The horrors of slavery are superimposed on the present, in a grim version of Eliot’s ‘historical sense,’ through which the entire legacy of the past ‘composes a simultaneous order’” (111). The Middle Passage dictates the facticity of the slums whose symbolic order is not only of one sphere but of two. Breslin is correct, the past underlies the current moment and directs its circumstances and signifiers. Poverty and hardship are not merely a product of this day and age, it is also a consequence of the past. Cause and effect, symbolic determinism – the two thrusts interweaving within the symbolic order push the inheritors of the Middle Passage towards an unabating anesthetizing routine and poverty-stricken life. Unlike Breslin, however, I argue that there is something else going on, not just an unfurling of the symbolic order qua the tragedies of the Middle Passage, but also an opposing impulse.

If the first two thrusts overdetermine the destiny of the denizens of Laventille, there is, nevertheless, a space opening up between them that destabilizes this blatant rhythmic symbolic regulation. The Middle Passage, when it rises from the vast body of the symbolic and is made visible, heightens the pain of those whose psyche is inscribed by its signifiers. At the very least, it jolts people to rail against their situation: It is galvanizing to remember the atrocities done and be a byproduct of them as well, to look at them with “widening memory / on the hot corrugated-iron sea / whose horror we all shared” (31-33). If the first thrust is a *routine* of poor lives “fixed in the unalterable groove / of grinding poverty,” then I can easily imagine the violence of the second thrust, although determining the first, must also evoke entropy (76-77). The composition of a simultaneous order by the Middle Passage which Breslin perceives in the poem is merely a skin to what lies beneath the surface. Chaos is the enemy of a routine symbolically regulated.

I shall write more about the aspect of the second thrust later. For now, I will continue with another thrust which is revealed when the speaker is walking towards a church where he is to attend a christening. This is the *third thrust* in the poem, the question of the future, ostensibly of all Laventille, represented by the child about to be baptized. This too will interweave with the Middle Passage representing the past and the speaker's journey in the poverty belt representing the present. As a cliché, albeit an apt one, a child's future represents hope, and for his caretakers, represents a need to give the boy better prospects and a better life than they have – an impossibility if the existence of this child will also be subjected to the cultural order that encases them. It therefore follows that the interweaving of the Middle Passage with the third thrust in the poem introduces its own indefinable resistances against Laventille's cultural order. Dread is felt, and through the process of an anxious question, it reveals itself: "What other gift was there to give / as the godparents of his unnamed child?" (42-43). Will this child also inherit the horrors of poverty and the Middle Passage?

The question, unlike that of "The Path," does not need an answer to produce its perilous uncertainty. The realization that even the boy's life will be determined by such a bleak social order provides its own volatile anxiety. This is exacerbated as the Middle Passage segues with the third thrust of the poem like it does with the first. I am reading of the child's christening, of the "supercilious, brown curate" intoning his rituals and chanting, when the Middle Passage, like before, is inserted within the narrative in an unhitched manner (63). The speaker continues, building on the curate's words as he transitions between the two tales, his memory shifting from the church into a recollection of the Middle Passage and back into the church – the cross-journey between the two thrusts being stylistically seamless with respect to both poetic content and form:

Which of us cares to walk
 even if God wished
 those retching waters where our souls were fished

for this new world? Afterwards we talk
 in whispers, close to death
 among these stones planted on alien earth.

Afterwards,
 the ceremony, the careful photograph
 moved out of range before the patient tombs. (64-72)

Notice that the word “afterwards” is repeated as if the speaker is portraying chronological events of his own timeline although I am not entirely sure if that is true. I cannot tell, in the first instance after the occurrence of “afterwards,” if what is depicted is the christening ritual or the Middle Passage. The second occurrence of the word definitively takes the reader back to the child and his baptism – but it is as if even this is now flavored by the tragedies most commonly associated with the slave trade, what with the invocation of the “patient tombs.”

The Middle Passage is stitched seamlessly into the symbolic order, yet there is still a stitch – it is not completely homogenized, not the way Walcott integrates it, or else, it will not only be invisible to the denizens of Laventille, but it will also be more obscure to the reader. Rather, there are transitions that, no matter how smooth and frictionless, reveal the Middle Passage underneath or within the symbolic order or indicate it when it cannot be precisely delineated. This here is the paradox: To follow my own lines of reasoning, I have postulated two contrasting arguments, that the

Middle Passage as a signifier fluidly mobilizes the whole of Laventille's society and, at the same time, stands in tension to it. This is not entirely unusual however, for I have seen a similar effect in Adonis's "The Path" where contradiction testifies to an entropic singularity at the border of language or the symbolic order indicated by the speaker's simultaneous fears and desires, his ambiguous state of mind caught between glory and terror, and the questions that he himself posits but whose answers he attempts to evade. I can extrapolate a similar attitude in Walcott's poem but not because the speaker has traversed the full demesne of his region's symbolic order like his counterpart. Rather, it is the *fourth* and *final thrust* that births the tension, that opens up and heterogenizes what may have been a fully homogenous integration.

The bracketed dedication at the beginning of "Laventille" divulges the fourth thrust of the poem. The ironic address is devoted to V. S. Naipaul, and I can do well to remember the literary rivalry existing between the two. Both authors are considered opposing poles of West Indian literature. They are near contemporaries, born on Caribbean islands a few hundred kilometers apart. Whereas Walcott is known for optimistically celebrating the Caribbean, Naipaul is renowned as a harsh critic exposing its dark underbelly. In "Laventille," the fourth thrust has an *aim* against Naipaul. Beginning with the dedication, it is directed through verses by romantic poet William Blake, "To find the Western Path / Through the Gates of Wrath –." The dash by the end reveals that the thrust continues into the poem proper. Having been altered by the dedication, then the epigraph, the thrust will engage with Naipaul's animosity towards the West Indies and his fondness for western culture. Already, I have a thrust loaded with intent – a rebuttal of Naipaul's sensibilities – and judging by the themes in "Laventille" in addition to Blake's choice words, it is not too hard to discover the direction this thrust is taking the poem towards.

A much-quoted statement in Naipaul's *The Middle Passage* involves history and the West Indian region and reads: "The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies" (20). It appears that to Naipaul history can only narrate a stable symbolic order – a symbolic order as that which belongs to most Western societies. To Naipaul, the history of a culture with a dynamic symbolic order is no history at all. His analysis of Trinidad's culture, which he describes in terms of dynamicity and flux, literally displays this sentiment. To him, Trinidad is merely "a materialist immigrant society, continually *growing* and *changing, never settling into any pattern*, always retaining the atmosphere of the camp; unique in the West Indies... in the *absence of a history*" (49; my emphasis). It is this opinion that has so incentivized Walcott to write "Laventille" and the ingeniousness of the poem is that Walcott's narrative does not appear to deviate from Naipaul's – the description of the slums, the exaggeration of its denizens' manners, their lack of cultural monuments and achievements... all point towards a critique and not a defense of Caribbean culture.

This is not the case, the fourth thrust directed into Blake's verses already suggests a criticism of Naipaul's opinions. The fourth thrust, interacting with the others, has the objective of generating a tensile reverberation between the narrative of the Middle Passage on one hand, and the slums / the child's christening on the other – much like Kristeva's semiotic, with its intrusion, changes, charges and subverts the normative rhythmicity of the symbolic order. The Middle Passage, inserted into the poem as part of the symbolic order, vibrates chaotically. The *seamless* unity between all thrusts is threatened and the signifiers of the Middle Passage are subtly extricated from the symbolic order and made entropic. The pain and horror of the Middle

Passage, invisible in their silent symbolic machinations, are now revealed. The trauma of the tragedy is unshrouded disclosing what the signifiers cover up – the chaos now visible between the space separating the past and the present / future.

This is the reason why the Middle Passage acts both as symbol and chaos. It acts as symbol because it is well integrated into Laventille's social fabric and so, like Poe's letter, can mobilize society in an unconscious manner. It acts as chaos because, with its slight extrication, it is not fully integrated. The Middle Passage is therefore the locus or a representation of what Kristeva, in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, may call the "dialectical interplay between semiotic and symbolic dispositions" where chaotic "fragmentary phenomena which have been kept in the background" of "communal signifying systems" are revealed, divulging the "*process* that exceeds the subject and his communicative structures" (5,16).

I can therefore say that what is unconscious, with some difficulty, becomes conscious and reveals the entropy the symbol and its communicative structures hide. Furthermore, the space between the symbolic and the chaotic, the hole left between the Middle Passage and the poem, allows for a final "revelation" to breach through the gap – the most distinct, *conscious* and delineated articulation of the Middle Passage seen in "Laventille." It is as if this articulation could not be sanctioned until the symbolic order is broken down and reconfigured differently. The "deep, amnesiac blow" is thereby remembered:

Something inside is laid wide like a wound,

some open passage hat has cleft the brain,

some deep, amnesiac blow. We left

somewhere a life we never found. (79-82)

Walcott's abjuration of Naipaul's sentiment is fully realized here. "Laventille" is an attack against Naipaul's acerbic criticism of the Caribbean – an acknowledgment that, even though the present has no prospects, there is a reason for this: not a historylessness, as Naipaul would have it, inasmuch as a destruction of history. The fixity the symbolic exhibits, being made from different seamless thrusts, is ultimately destabilized into dynamicity by the selfsame thrusts that try to hold it together. What springs forth from this disorder is a narrative that could not be fully articulated until what is hidden beneath the order is revealed to be its opposite.

Walcott's point is now made but a problem reveals itself. After his message is delivered, Walcott sees no reason to undermine the cultural elements of the poem further. After the destabilization of the symbolic order allows him to offer his judgement, he withdraws his own intent, the fourth thrust, from "Laventille." There is no longer a need for chaos now that the message has been imparted. The signifiers, the content of the poem, having reached the threshold whereby they can be influenced by chaos or order, eventually settle back into a balanced fixed structure. The thrust of the Middle Passage sinks back into the symbolic order and, again, becomes unconscious. Its ambiguous function as threat or catalyst is altered to favor the latter, becoming merely a signifier. I can also assume that the amnesiac blow is forgotten with the poem's end, and the child's future remains anxiety-laden and without resolution. I believe that Walcott does not take the poem to its (il)logical end: After the amnesiac blow is revealed, there is no counter to it, no "new" path like that in Adonis's poem that reveals itself and goes *somewhere* even if that somewhere is towards an abyss.

"Laventille" offers merely an examination of its pathology without a "cure" being proposed. Regardless, there is no doubt that the poem points to something beyond the symbolic even as the thrust that impels it to do so returns it, like the

movement of a pendulum, back to its cultural domain. Fortunately, this is not the last word that Walcott will have on the subject of “blows,” “amnesia” and “history.” As I probe into other poems, what will be seen is a more protracted engagement with the “amnesiac blow” which does not just utilize it as an argument justifying the status quo of the Caribbean region but fashions it, or its approximation, into an attempt to recreate history and the symbolic order altogether. The Middle Passage will again resonate between two extremes – pessimism and determinism on one hand, creativity and dynamicity on the other. What will be chosen is the latter, but that is for other chapters to fully reveal.

I have now finished with Walcott’s “Laventille.” I have analyzed the interrelating thrusts that make and unravel the symbolic order. It is time to move on to Yeats’s “Cuchulain’s Fight with the Sea” published in 1893 in his book *The Rose*. The poem is a reconfiguration of the myth of Cuchulain from the *Ulster Cycle* of Irish mythology. Reconfiguration is an apt word here: According to Heather McCracken, Yeats is to write many poems and plays about the hero, reinventing his character time and again. McCracken also considers Yeats’s Cuchulain an example of the “culture hero” typically created by the postcolonial writer to fashion a national identity from precolonial myths. To her, “Cuchulain is a cultural superhero stand-in for Irish national identity and a metonymical representation of Yeats’s political frustrations” – metonymical in the sense of Cuchulain’s constant reconfiguration from one play to the next as determined by a change in Yeats’s opinion, Irish politics or historical events (148). As a folk hero, Cuchulain is a by-product of Ireland’s social order, except in McCracken’s own admittance, Ireland’s culture is dynamic and has not fully formed: “A culture hero, then, is a convenient representation of the nation, but when the ideological ‘utterances’ of nationhood have not fully coalesced – as in the case of

Ireland – it is up to the author to simultaneously shape both the hero and the nation that they represent” (149).

McCracken’s opinion is close to Yeats’s own when he claims that Ireland is like “soft wax” and that it is up to him to “[seal it] with an image before it begins to harden” (*Autobiographies* 105). I, however, have many practical concerns with Yeats’s statement and McCracken’s opinion. I have already argued that Ireland’s culture shows signs of dynamicity, and in this I concur that its symbolic order is malleable like wax – but the metaphor is not entirely apt to describe a dynamic chaotic symbolic order. For one, it intimates an *imaginary* ease in which a culture can be shaped to one’s whims and Yeats, in his later years, would grow bitter and frustrated that the Ireland he is struggling to mould is not the Ireland that is taking shape in accordance with his own expectations. There is no doubt that Yeats had a crucial influence on his country’s culture as critics like Kiberd would attest, but to my mind, as I have formulated dynamicity as a quality of entropy and chaos, I cannot but assume that the symbolic’s chaotic aspect is not so easily moulded.

“Cuchulain’s Fight with the Sea” is an account of the hero killing his only offspring who is sent by his jilted wife Emer to murder him. The son fails and having been struck a fatal blow by his father’s blade, finally confesses his lineage causing the hero to go catatonic with grief. Conchubar, realizing that Cuchulain will not stay apathetic, asks his Druids to enchant the warrior so that his fury, when it comes to be, is redirected towards the sea. Having done so, Cuchulain eventually wakes from his trance, hears his own name and rises to fight the “invulnerable tide” (93). The fight is an engrossing motif in the poem and it has no doubt gripped Yeats’s imagination. This futile battle with the sea is also rewritten in his play *On Baile’s Strand*. In “To the Rose upon the Rood of Time,” the act is considered one of Ireland’s “ancient ways”

(3); it is also mentioned in “The King of the Great Clock Tower” and “The Circus Animal’s Desertion.” It is an image that Yeats is to invoke repeatedly.

Yeats’s fascination with this image fascinates me in turn. That, in addition to McCracken’s suggestion that Cuchulain stands for a representation of Yeats’s political frustrations, is highly suggestive. Cuchulain’s aspect changes metonymically from one work by Yeats’s to another to assuage this frustration, but the idea of Cuchulain’s fight with the sea is something that is unchangeably recalled again and again. It is repetitively invoked and interspersed in Yeats’s works. What can I make of Cuchulain’s fight with the sea? To answer this question, I will have to return to “The Indian upon God” and the repetition compulsion that occurs with the signifier “God.”

One of Lacan’s prominent arguments in his seminar on Poe’s tale is that Freud’s repetition compulsion, which the Austrian psychoanalyst associates intimately with the death drives, i.e. what can also be termed the Lacanian *r  el* or real, is actually a socio-symbolic and not a pure biologic phenomenon. The signifier “God,” for example, depending on its position in the symbolic order and the creatures it attaches itself to, compels an action of repetition based on the extant signifier chains that determine each creature. Hence, the poem’s subject matter, and by proxy, the cultural order it represents, “is repetition, the burden of each utterance being the tendency of the speaker to perceive its godhead as a replica of itself” (Muldoon 162-163).

In “The Indian Upon God” as in the seminar on the “The Purloined Letter,” the signifier forces repetitive actions. Such actions may vary depending on the circumstances or the symbolic chains the signifier is attached to. Let me return to “Cuchulain’s Fight with the Sea” and the oath / signifier that binds the hero to act in a certain way. According to the poem, Cuchulain only “gives his name / at the sword point” and is the only person “so bound from childhood on” (55-59). I do not

necessarily take Cuchulain at his word that the true reason he *repeatedly* fights other warriors is to uphold his oath. This is, after all, the hero talking as the subject of the proposition, i.e. imaginary, and not the enunciation. Regardless, even if the statement suppresses another signifier that reveals the subject's truth, what concerns me here is Cuchulain's need to fight. Whenever the oath is invoked, it expresses a compulsion to take arms against someone.

In the play *On Baile's Strand*, I find a reason behind Cuchulain's hawkish attitude. The oath, as a symbolic precept, allows the hero to maintain an imaginary denegation. I observe in the play that Cuchulain yearns for children and simultaneously denies it. His liege Conchubar states that he has heard his friend cry in his sleep that he has no son, "and with such bitterness" that he has gone upon his "knees and prayed / That it may be amended" (157). Cuchulain's repetition compulsion is a form of sublimation and repression – a symbolic action with imaginary connotations that allows him never to confront his desire. It is also a defense to maintain that desire in perpetuity. Desire, as I have stated earlier, is perpetuated by deferral across the symbolic chain. It arises out of a frustration of not having what one wants. Attaining or acknowledging desire cancels it – at least this is one of the most common stances Lacan takes in *Écrits*. In "The Youth of Gide, or the Letter as Desire," the French psychoanalyst writes with approval of Gide's wife burning his love letters because he uses them as a crutch to maintain his desire for an imaginary idealized relationship with a mother figure misrecognized as having the phallus.

What action will remove Cuchulain's own crutch? I maintain that it is his facing of his son who acts as a *symbolic mirror* to the father. As a matter of fact, it is remarkable how like a Lacanian psychoanalyst the son acts. He keeps silent or

noncommittal in the face of Cuchulain's hysterical, ego-driven questions, "Is there no maid / Who loves you... That you have come and dared me to my face?" (62-65). He does not allow himself to enter into an imaginary relationship with the hero as the *sujet supposé savoir*, the analyst whom the analysand believes is a master, an entity who *knows* and is knowledgeable about the *truth* of his mental illness. He also *punctuates* the silence in a manner that Lacan would approve of, giving an ambiguous answer that does not engage with Cuchulain's narcissistic tendencies. When the hero finally delivers his coup de grâce and asks his son to tell him his name and lineage, the answer reflects a symbolic relation and not an imaginary one. It appears that the son has his father's name and his answer is: "Cuchulain I, mighty Cuchulain's son" (58).

It is an eerie answer, not the least because it is a true one. If I look back on the poem, I see that both Cuchulain and his son have an uncanny similar life and that the son is indeed an actual *symbolic reflection* of his father. Both are skilled warriors, both have the same name, both are bound by the same oath not to reveal their identity. The son's answer is therefore not merely an answer to the question posited to him, it is also an answer to who Cuchulain is qua symbolic order. Cuchulain's oath hides the truth of who he is as a subject – he fights not because his oath compels him to do so, but to deny his yearning for a son. Putting a mirror in front of Cuchulain's face allows him to confront his own repressed desire at the moment when the object of desire is forever taken away from him. Cuchulain sees who he truly is, the facetiousness of the son's answer mimics his own excuses for fighting. His son's own life and death parallel his own and resemble the futility of his own repetitive symbolic actions. The symbolic chains, i.e. his oath, that bolster his imaginary narcissistic denegation and trigger his aggression to defend his ego against the truth, erode.

In “The Youth of Gide, or the Letter as Desire,” the destruction of the symbolic chains, i.e. the love letters, allows Gide to move past the narcissistic fixation he has with the mother figure. This is the ideal end of any therapy session to Lacan, where the erosion of the ego permits the subjectivized truth of the individual to reveal itself “healing” the subject, or, at least, making him less neurotic. This does not occur in Yeats’s poem – if anything, coming face to face with his own symbolic truth makes Cuchulain mad and exacerbates his symptoms, which were at least maintained in a token of *balance* by his symbolic oath. If not for Conchubar’s quick thinking, Cuchulain might, in his insanity, have destroyed the symbolic order itself by killing his brothers-in-arms and every authority figure standing for the name-of-the-father. Instead, Cuchulain, being untethered from the signifiers and enchanted by the Druids, picks a fight with the sea. Having cancelled his desire by confronting it, nay annihilating it, there should be no repetition compulsion to push him from one battle to the next. Yet, in an act of rage and wrath that has so fascinated Yeats, Cuchulain launches himself against the “invulnerable tide.”

To redirect Lacan, this is not the repetition compulsion that has at its basis “the *insistence* of the signifying chain,” i.e. the oath, which “binds and orients” its imaginary effects (*Écrits* 11). There are no more symbols that possess Cuchulain and compel him to repeat his actions within the social order. Rather, there is a protracted force of rage and grief that exhorts him to war against the sea. I can even describe this force in the same manner Yeats has described the tide, as “invulnerable.” I mean by this that if Cuchulain is to stand in defiance against such a phenomenon of nature, the psychical force which presses him to do so must be a *mirror* to such a phenomenon, possessing its inexorable forbidding motion. If the hero has mirrored his son qua the symbolic at the beginning of the poem, he now mirrors the *meaningless* and the

mindlessness of the tide qua the *real* and beyond any symbolic repetition. Now the repetition compulsion, or what appears to be the repetitive compulsion, is without signifiers to tether it into recurring periodic acts triggered by the particularities of symbolic circumstances or the fulfilment of symbolic criteria. No longer does Cuchulain move from signifier to signifier, maintaining his desire and redrawing the same symbolic circuit. Rather, he has opened himself to the most dangerous forms of chaos one can experience.

Slavoj Žižek in *Enjoy Your Symptom* may argue that Cuchulain, having faced the truth of who he is, has been reduced to “a scrap of the real,” a leftover “without any support in the symbolic order” (25). In other words, without the signifiers to steady him, Cuchulain has merely undergone an exacerbation of his neurosis. This may be the case if I take the poem in isolation where the end of the poem itself indicates the end of Cuchulain. However, as in Adonis’s “The Path,” the end here is merely the beginning of the hero’s journey even if, unlike Adonis’s poem, the journey is not implied. Using McCracken, I contend that the act of fighting the sea stands beneath every metonymical re-moulding of the hero that Yeats conceives in the various plays which have Cuchulain for a protagonist. As the dynamicity of Ireland’s symbolic order forces Yeats to assess and reassess his own attitudes and sensibilities, Cuchulain’s own symbolic order and his very identity in the *plays* must necessarily change in a manner that is impossible in actual life. This is the other solution Yeats has to a dynamic socio-symbolic order – a fixed psychical order reflecting merely one static instant of the external disorder; hence a metonymical restructuration of the hero is always required to reflect a different instance of this chaos. Cuchulain does not merely become neurotic or mad qua Žižek, rather his subjectivity, now that it lacks

supports from the symbolic order, shifts to reflect the chaos of his era by entropically *engaging with, producing and reproducing* the symbolic order itself.

In *On Baile's Strand*, initially published in 1903, Yeats fashions Cuchulain in such a manner that the forfeiture of his freedom to the High King reflects Ireland's relinquishment of its political agency to England during that time: the implication being that Ireland has to fight for what is hers or its end will be as tragic as its hero. In *The Green Helmet* published in 1910, fearing that Ireland's internal conflicts may erupt into civil war, particularly after Parnell's death which has created a schism within the Irish anticolonial movement, Yeats reconfigures his culture hero into a shrewd and intelligent pacifist who calls for unity in the face of such growing divisions – a man who is willing to sacrifice himself rather than kill others (McCracken 152-156).

The same process repeats with other plays as different timelines necessitate different Cuchulains. However, underlying every particular symbolic Cuchulain is his obverse – a hero who fits into every timeline, who is the most apt representation of Yeats's frustrations, impotence and inability to mould Ireland to his whimsy. A hero who fractures and turns away from his symbolic order – a hero who is mad, blind to reason, stricken with grief, standing implacably against that which is invulnerable, withdrawing from the cultural order that has betrayed him, emptied of desire and suffused with the *jouissance* of the real, his sword and eyes pointed to the place where no signifier is present, where only chaos resides.

I have now come to the end of this chapter. The poems I have examined here depict the beginning of an *impulse* or a *thrust* that is to inform the poets' writing more fully as their works mature and their ideas coalesce. Since Lacan considers that the symbolic order and history are inextricably linked to each other, the following chapters

will assess the poets' works through the lenses of history to show the effects of how chaos subverts the machinations of the Lacanian model of the symbolic. The definition of history which I will use is Lacan's own, and I will relate it and contrast it to Yeats, Walcott and Adonis's own opinions. In the process, I will reveal an extant discursive relationship between chaos and the signifier that steers the symbolic order away from its psychically oriented historico-causative capacity.

The following three chapters will assess each of the three authors separately. I will start with Adonis, then follow with Walcott and finally, Yeats. The rationale behind this ordering serves a practical purpose. As I will reveal, Adonis's own engagement with history appears to be a direct refutation of Lacan's: In his criticism and essays, Adonis tends to conflate history with culture, hence the symbolic order, and to elaborate upon its deterministic aspects only to reject this sort of determinism – seemingly in direct opposition to Lacan himself. Since I need to introduce Lacan's symbolic history early on in my thesis as his idea will be dealt with across all chapters, I believe that the choice to start with Adonis is logical as it will serve as the ground from which I will launch my arguments on both Yeats and Walcott. The rationale for leaving Yeats last, even if he is born before the two authors and belongs to an earlier era, is the following: Yeats's idea of history is the most complex of the three, and my argument there is the most nuanced and requires a greater elaboration. This will significantly increase the length of Yeats's chapter, and as such, his chapter is longer than the other two. Beginning with Yeats will force me to add more sections to his chapter to provide an explanation of Lacan's concept of history, and this will lengthen it excessively. My engagement with Adonis first, then Walcott, then Yeats is therefore prudent, not to mention that it will also allow certain Lacanian ideas to be dispersed equally across my thesis and not concentrated just in the first chapter.

In the following chapters, I will continue on elaborating the ideas that I have engaged with in the introduction. When I have said that “The Path,” “Laventille” and “Cuchulain’s Fight with the Sea” depict a journey, it is not merely a narrative journey, but also a stylistic and experimental journey – a journey of language and words, forms and content, ideas and ruptures. Those I will assess under the perilous influence of entropy. I will also tackle other concepts such as anxiety, violence, myth, wounds, death, nonbeing, etc. – all with the intention of revealing how such ideas introduce chaos and destabilize the structure of the symbolic order. I will observe, among other things, that the destabilization of the symbolic will allow Walcott’s amnesiac blow, which is the cause of his people’s suffering, to be the focal point from which a new inception of the Caribbean will come to be – while Adonis’s journeys and the constant transformations of his characters will always push the limit of his own culture – and that underlying Yeats’s body of work is the same impulse that has Cuchulain throw himself at the sea and its invulnerable tide.

Chapter I

Adonis and the Falcon: Suspended Time, the Forking Branches and the Tree of History

The Dilemma of History

In this chapter, I will assess the manner in which Adonis's poetry, particularly in his long poem "The Falcon" ("Al-Şaqr") in his *The Book of Transformations and Migrations in the Regions of Day and Night* (*Kitāb al-Taḥawwulāt wa al-Hijrah fī Aqālīm al-Nahār wa al-Layl*)¹² tackles historical symbolic themes and subverts them. By reinterpreting them in a manner that undermines their embeddedness within the matrix of the symbolic order while opening them to the horizons of chaos, he will change their thrusts and established detours, their discrete balances and invisible equilibriums. I will reveal that in Adonis's poetry, the paths "symbolic" history takes to influence the present are not a single causal chain of events that determines one's destiny but multiple chains that simultaneously fork and branch out from a point of traumatic singularity into dizzying chaotic iterations that prevent the symbolic order from stabilizing its circuitous chains. I will strive to reveal the encroaching of chaos on the symbols – where the speaker, through different approaches, either confounds the matrix of signifiers that fashion his unconscious or is successful in his attempts of turning his proverbial back on them.

Before I begin my chapter, I would like to point out that Adonis's take and struggle with history is a persistent theme in most of his poetry. His is a complicated engagement with the cultural forces that shape and create the present. If I can summarize this opinion by saying that there is an outright rejection of history and the

¹² For brevity, the book will be referred to as *Transformations*.

symbolic order in his work – something a lot of his detractors and critics accuse him of, I am all too aware that such an opinion does not entirely encapsulate the poet's own persistent and complicated beliefs on the matter. History is very much present in Adonis's poetry but the history that the poet evokes is not the history of the victor, nor does his interpretation of history conform with the mainstream orthodoxy and symbolic institutions that govern the cultural order at large. "The historical dilemma for [Adonis]," writes Robyn Creswell in *City of Beginnings*, "is that the archive of poetry has been continually shaped by history's victors, who have handed it down in an even more falsified form" (153).

I have decided to use "The Falcon" in this chapter since it both engages with actual history and expresses Adonis's own opinion and ethos on literature as it relates to the symbolic order. Unlike Adonis's "The Path," "The Falcon" engages with events that had happened and are widely disseminated in the Arab world as historical "orthodoxy," i.e. symbolic history. Within "The Falcon," there is then a discursive "interaction" between the "themes" I have tackled in "The Path" and actual history itself. This will serve the purpose of revealing how an actual symbolically constituted historical figure like 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dākhil can be subverted and redirected by Adonis along the axis of chaos. He will be pushed, not towards "true" "Islamic" history – his conquest of al-Andalus, but towards what Adonis calls the "Andalus of the depth."

In this chapter, I will examine Adonis's own take on history, particularly through his controversial work and dissertation *The Immutable and the Transforming*. I will relate and contrast the poet's theory to Lacan's own, especially when it comes to the manner in which the French psychoanalyst believes (symbolic) history determines destiny by determining the symbolic order. I will reveal the Adonisean *transforming*

impulse that strives to unleash itself in “The Falcon” along both the content and the form of the poem. I will argue that this impulse – which according to Adonis allows ancient communities to change beyond the prescriptions determined by tribal, social and symbolic decrees or the traditions of the empires that had conquered them ¹³ – this impulse, which I will intimately link to chaos and complexity theory – is what breaks the hold of the *immutable* on the culture and the human psyche thereby allowing an entity to “overcome” history.

Adonis, Lacan and History

To Adonis, history is the chronicled past events, norms and habits of a region or a nation as it is taught to an individual and as it is rendered in his psyche into a standard of identification from which he measures and molds his present actions. In the *Immutable and the Transforming*, he associates history, predominantly if not exclusively, with the former titular concept. Adonis claims that across most historical periods, Arab individuals were taught their religion and nations’ history as if they were a transcendent *immutable* event not open to interpretation or reexamination. For example, an indication of the *immutable* impulse in culture or literature stems from one’s perception that history is a static occurrence that had *indisputably* reached the peak of flawlessness – this as opposed to an imperfect disappointing present removed from the golden age of the past. What use is there for the *transforming* impulse in the present when one has to only be guided by the ancient ways of one's culture – by a history that reached the most superlative and ideal state of its being?

¹³ Since antiquity and up to modern times, the numerous cultures which had conquered or ruled the “Greater Syria” region had left their cultural marks on the place. These include Phoenicians, Achaemenian Persians, Macedonian Greeks, Romans, Sassanid Persians, Umayyads, Abbasids, Fatimids, Mamluks, European crusaders, Ottoman Turks, French....

The *immutable* impulse and history exist in synergistic feedback which reinforce and buttress one another: By affixing the past in a narrow perceptual configuration, the *immutable* is maintained in its supposedly unyielding and unchanging distinctiveness while history is prevented from being “degraded” from the thing-in-itself to some pale copy of what it is. The corollary of this is that an individual, by incorporating the history of his culture into his memory, becomes as rigid as the past he has learned to unquestioningly revere. This is reinforced, according to Adonis, by the *four* qualities of the *immutable* which prevent any *transforming* impulse from destabilizing said individual’s culturally-constituted being by compelling him to stay faithful to history and by preventing him from taking any action that counters it – whether in his culture at large or within his own private life.

Adonis defines the *first trait* of the *immutable*, which he calls “theologism,” as the excessive encroachment of institutional religion on all aspects of human life. It is propagated by a privileged class constituted by religious scholars and theologians whose uncompromising assumption that the “common” people are not equipped to comprehend godly matters have led them to enforce a reified interpretation on critical religious texts. This they do out of fear that alternative “loose” interpretations as conceived by “less” knowledgeable individuals are dangerous and may be believed by the “credulous masses” who are too “uneducated” to know any better. To live an ethical and fruitful life, a person must blindly follow this standardized and agreed-upon interpretation circulated by his religious masters.

A subject’s being is thereby saturated by such dogmas, and he is compelled to heed them as they disseminate to him, not merely how to live his public life, but how to act or think in his private one as well. In effect, they fashion his very individuality and through this fashioning, his individuality is unsurprisingly lost. Adonis continues

by suggesting that theologism leads to “abstract individuation” and “absolute metaphysics” – or more accurately, the paradoxical merging of the two. It causes alienation since, in accepting its injunctions and “truths,” an Arab’s “mode of existence” is rendered into a “form” that is not that of his “true being” but the “being” that the theocratic class has fashioned for him. The conclusion that Adonis reaches is that “an Arab lives a stranger to his self, because he exists... spiritually in God and temporally in religion, the nation and the family” – but never in himself (*Al-Thābit* 1: 58).

The *second trait* indicating an *immutable* impulse, “pastism,” is elucidated as a fetishistic nostalgia and attachment to the past, to a history that is absorbed and assimilated, becoming the golden standard of reference against which all present things are assessed. It is also a fear, denegation and aggression towards what is unknown and new, towards what is not part of an individual and a nation’s history, or his heritage, or to put it in Lacanian terms, what is not part of a subject’s historically constituted symbolic order. Pastism is also the belief that past events and bygone historical achievements are better or closer to the truth, to pure origins or platonic archetypes – the implication being that the here and now is an imperfect simulacrum or a rough imitation of what is original and what was conceived and created in antiquity (*Al-Thābit* 1: 58-59).

The *third trait* that Adonis attributes to the *immutable* is the separation between form and content / function – or meaning and speech: “The belief that meaning precedes speech” and that speech is merely “an ornament for meaning” (*Al-Thābit* 1: 60). Adonis contends that this should not be the case since “in any civilizational progress, a change in function must entail a change in form.” To explain this, Adonis takes language as a marker for social progress and posits a somewhat symmetrical

correlation between language and civilization. As a civilization evolves in function, it must evolve in form and correspondingly, its language and literature must also *transform* and develop its form to fit this new function / content. A separation between form and content in language indicates a subliminal retrenchment of a culture, and by proxy, the individual, in the past. The culture assumes the trapping of progress, but its essence remains that of the reactionary old system it has supplanted. The new message it is to impart is subverted by the form in which it is transmitted. This is commensurate, according to Adonis, with poets who want to impart to their world a new original brand of poetics but whose desire is hijacked by an insistence, unconscious or otherwise, on using old forms and genres of poetry (*Al-Thābit* 1: 60). Hence, the separation between meaning and speech or form and content is a trait of the *immutable*.

The *fourth* and *final trait* of the *immutable* is the antimonial relationship of an individual or culture to modernity. To put it succinctly, it is the refusal to get on with the times and to open oneself to new cultures. Most of the points Adonis makes on this trait is merely a reiteration of previous arguments and I will not go into them at length. It will suffice to say that Adonis here has come full circle: The fear of what is modern, i.e. the fourth trait, is caused by a fetishistic love of the past and theology, i.e. the first and second trait, that prevents modernization. This erodes the *transforming* impulse that typically allows a plethora of original meaning to come into being and reinforces the *immutable* impulse which retrenches and subverts any new social, literary or religious movement that calls for change – casting it back into the old foundation of culture and literature, i.e. the third trait. The four traits close the circuit – and close the individual within it, making him, in his personal present, merely a relay to a rigid interpretation of his culture's history – a history that is now his own.

Since history is linked to the *immutable*, in Adonis's writing it appears as a foreboding force all too deterministic of the present. More importantly, the poet's concept of history conflates with Lacan's own in certain respects – so much so that a comparative assessment will be necessary to understand the point of similarities between the two authors. Such an assessment will be important at this juncture since it will reveal, not only the points on which Lacan and Adonis agree on history, but also the place where their opinions depart. Before I go through with this, however, I will examine Lacan's notion of history in some detail by predominantly assessing the "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" – a seminal paper delivered by Lacan to the Rome Congress of Romance Language Psychoanalysts in 1953 which delineates the influence of history on the symbolic order.

In "The Rome Report," Lacan highlights the importance of an analysand's past as that which constitutes and determines him and his unconscious – this, in contrast to an "ahistorical" ego which insists on imaginary and often deleterious attachments to objects and signifiers in contradistinction to its subject's historical constitution. It is history that determines an individual's own truth and restores to him "the continuity in [his] motivation" (*Écrits* 257). It is history which permits the analysand to live up to his own subjectivity by revealing to him the unconscious that a misrecognizing ego refuses to acknowledge.

History is the "censored chapter" of the neurotic's psyche whose truth is displayed in the following signs: It is displayed in the "hysterical core of neurosis" in which the symptom "manifests the structure of a language," in impenetrable "childhood memories," in "sematic evolution" which corresponds "to the stock of words and acceptations" of one's "particular vocabulary," life style and "character," and in "traditions" and "legends" which in a "heroicized form" convey a subject's

history. Lastly, it is evidenced in the “traces that are inevitably preserved in the distortions necessitated by the insertion of the adulterated chapter into the chapters surrounding it” (*Écrits* 259). This is another way of saying that history indicates the reason for neurosis, and that not heeding one’s own history is the *cause* of neurosis.

One cannot easily escape history; it is a pervasive element. Like Lacan, Adonis too acknowledges the reality of history in determining an individual’s actions. The *immutable* element that he formulates in his work is proof-positive of this. In a similar vein to Lacan, Adonis claims that a writer living in a specific time and place cannot but follow the norms, habits and concerns of his community – his actions being determined by a historically constituted social order. The world he is born to, with its traditions, language and literature, is the world that he will express and voice in his poetry: In a statement reminiscent of the French psychoanalyst, Adonis says that a poet “exists in a location [culture] that precedes him. He is, in essence, a thread in a weave. He does not choose the Other, that is, he does not choose the outside. For the outside is a primary condition for [his] existence.”¹⁴ As such, a poem “cannot be an expression” of a non-communal ahistorical “particular concern” – which is to say, it cannot be something that is utterly original and divorced from the poet’s symbolic order (*Al-Hiwarāt* 65).

Adonis’s opinion, even if somewhat similar to Lacan’s own, differs in one relevant distinction from the French psychoanalyst. To Lacan, one has to accept his history to move forward. A momentous past event(s) transmutes an arrangement of signifiers into an analysand’s own subjectivized truth, whereby any present action is

¹⁴ There is no uppercase or lowercase in Arabic. My use of the uppercase to translate the word “al-Ākhar” into the “Other” is done in the context of Adonis’s statement which specifies that the “Other” is the “outside” – meaning, it is the culture or symbolic order one is born into. As such, in keeping with the manner Lacan often uses the “Other” when he equates it with the symbolic order, I have decided to capitalize it.

launched from, confirmed by, affirms or negotiates this truth. To “betray” or to deviate from such a truth or history is what leads to mental illness – as the subject’s present actions and motives will be discordant with a past inscribed into his unconscious.

What I will take from this for the time being is that, to Lacan, history must be the process from which a subject can launch his present narrative and make this narrative cohesive and concordant with said history. Another way to look at this is that this “concordance” or “synchronization” is a negotiation between the subject’s “historical” unconscious and his present narrative, motivations and actions. To mitigate neurosis, what must be accomplished in psychoanalysis through the advent of “true speech” is the “subject’s realization of a history in relation to a future” (*Écrits* 302).

To Adonis, on the other hand, history must not be accepted but transcended. To mindlessly move with history, to always be influenced by its *immutable* elements is to always be under its yoke: It is never to move at all. It is to be stuck under its dictates, unwilling to engage with the modern elements of the world that may deny to history its relevance or “truths.” It is never to progress, to remain within one’s own symbolic world, to always insist on the supremacy of the past as it is recounted and interpreted by the “names-of-the-father.” In the poem “Time” (“Al-Waqt”), Adonis renders history as “shards” or, more accurately, “rags,” in the speaker’s “throat” (5). History, in the speaker’s words, is a “blinded history” and a “history of ruins” (143-144) – and when it is “slaughtered,” a new history, not contiguous or determined with the old one or the victor’s culture, can spring into being: “Saddle these unbridled winds / [it is] history slaughtered and slaughtering is [but] the *fatihah*¹⁵ / let the slaughterer and the slaughtered and the sacrifice be witnesses” (191-193).

¹⁵ *Sūrat al-Fatīḥah* is the preface or prelude to the Koran. Thus, I can translate this section as: “It is history slaughtered and slaughtering is merely the beginning.” The above verses of the poem are translated by Allen Hibbard and Osama Esber who use a different transliteration method to Romanize the Arabic language than I do.

Adonis's poem divulges an aversion and a negation of history, a negation that is quite ubiquitous in a lot of his poetry and works. It also reveals an opinion that is at once ideologically-charged, stubborn and committed – a will to transcend history through poetry and literature. It is a persistent stance that he has not changed in the decades since he first burst on the poetic scene, a stance which finds its ultimate expression in his work *The Immutable and the Transforming* where he proposes the *transforming* as another element that runs parallel to the *immutable* impulse that stabilizes the past. The *transforming* is Adonis's answer to the *immutable* disease of history: It is a "force" that destabilizes the manner in which history expresses itself by positing the private experience of the poet or individual, in relation to a "truth" unmediated by his culture, as the centre of his universe and not the assertion of familial, theological or public symbolic institutions which insist on the primacy of their own interpretation and symbols.

The *transforming* "interprets" the world in a manner that is unmediated by history – or alternatively, it does not posit history as something whose interpretation is stable or sanctioned by the symbolic order – but as a force that is always chaotic and ever changing. The *transforming* is the chaos beneath the *immutable* origin which history attempts to set as pure presence. It is the source of creativity and innovation that subverts and deviates from this fixed impulse whose relationship to it, as a consequence, is never, according to Adonis, dialectical but violent: The *immutable* always attempts to brutally stamp the chaos that the *transforming* produces within the *immutable*'s assertion of posited truth (*Al-Thābit* 1: 15).

One example Adonis gives of the *transforming* element is found in Sufism, a movement in Arabic literature and culture that has been historically charged with apostasy because it proposes viewing existence in a manner which opposes the

monologic “legitimate” interpretation of the theological and cultural institutions of the time. For example, Sufism does not realize “the truth” through the use of the *‘aql* which filters and mediates truth in accordance with what one has learned, internalized or accepted through the injunctions of the names-of-the-father. The Sufi experience is much more immediate than that: It uses the *dhawq* of an individual, a concept which Adonis defines as “a direct revelation that occurs through a state that possesses the Sufi and changes his traits” thereby allowing him to “move away from the *Sharī‘ah* [i.e. the institutionalized sanctioned religious laws derived partially from the Koran], towards the truth – moving [him] towards discovering [the truth] of God, the essence of the world, [so that he can finally] die within it” (*Al-Thābit* 2: 98). As such, *dhawq* is a way of “knowledge” that attempts to “get to the truth through direct experience, which means it is a form of internal suffering.” In addition, the “*dhawq* is not only an alternative to the *‘aql* but its exact opposite.” It is a “form of connection” that allows the “knower to connect to the truth and taste it the way a taster connects to what he has tasted.”¹⁶ And as the *dhawq* contradicts the *‘aql*, so it contradicts learning. As such, *dhawq* is not... *naql*¹⁷... or tradition... or logic. It is a way of acting and a state [of being]” (*Al-Thābit* 2: 99).

Through *dhawq*, Sufism also privileges what is hidden and esoteric, i.e. what is *bāṭen*, over that which is revealed and exoteric, i.e. “*zāher*.” If *dhawq* aims at the truth, as Adonis keeps insisting, then:

Since the truth is the *bāṭen*, then *dhawq* is already overstepping the *zāher*. And every act of overstepping it includes an overstepping of its laws and rules and the creation of laws in accordance with the *bāṭen* and

¹⁶ The word “*dhawq*” can be translated into “taste.”

¹⁷ See previous chapter.

what it reveals. But the *bāṭen* is a state between sobriety and inebriation... it is an endless cycle and since it is the origins, then all that had been built on it will be supplementary to it and will be perpetually in motion” (*Al-Thābit* 2: 100).

Sufism, according to Adonis, does not believe in the mediation of religious scholars, jurists or cultural institutions for the true message of God to be revealed. It does not believe, to use Lacan, in the mediation of the symbolic order. It does not believe, to use Adonis, in the “*‘aql*” which has connotations of “reason,” “mind” or even “logic,” i.e. to use one’s mind or reason to get to the truth. As such, Sufism can be considered a type of unsymbolisable madness that is almost Foucauldian in the sense that it is linked to creativity and exists “in the lightning-flash of works [similar to] those of Hölderlin, of Nerval, of Nietzsche, or of Artaud” (Foucault, *Madness* 278). Adonis views madmen as people subjected to forms of rationality or logic which brackets the manner culture or the symbolic order sees them by deeming them immoral or medically ill and by denying them the validity of their irrationally transgressive experience. To use an Adonisean quote that is reminiscent of Foucault: “Logic [or reason] freezes the representations of the world into a series of contradictions – the real and the possible, the action and the dream, the normal and the mad – contradictions that constitute the apparel of social conservatism, which is designed to ward off any strange behaviour by the individual” (Adonis, *Sufism* 221).

The madness of Sufism actively subverts reason, *‘aql* or the symbolic order by probing at their limits to reveal truths that are not rationally or symbolically viable.¹⁸ Sufism is both mystical and transgressive – Adonis compares it to an experience that

¹⁸ I am using the word “reason” in the Foucauldian sense which I can relate to the symbolic. I am not using it in the Lacanian sense which is linked, through Kant, to a transcendentalism divorced from the strictures of the symbolic order and aligned with the sublime and the register of the real.

“overcomes history.” It does not look at a bygone era for guidance, it does not seek guidance from the past or the symbolic order. Rather, it “moves towards the future and awaits the coming [of revelation]” *in that future* and not in some perfect fictitious golden age whose function is to disseminate its historical message to the present, thereby allowing an individual’s *motivation to be continuous* with his actions, his culture and his own history in the way Lacan specifies (*Al-Thābit* 2: 97). “Man,” writes Adonis in *Sufism and Surrealism*, “contains in himself something that is greater than himself. His identity is hidden in this mystery. Man is a product of history, but inasmuch as he is a mystery, he transcends it” (116).

Madness, Sufism, dynamicity – the *transforming* impulse appears to be multiform. Its expressions are diverse and subversive of history, but within the context of the *immutable*, the *zāher* or the symbolic order, it is chaos personified since it counters everything the *immutable* posits as truth and absolute presence. In its stead, the *transforming* propounds change, entropy, mutability, sheer symbolically-unmediated experience, madness, love, revelation, inspiration, dynamicity, modernization, even hedonism and decadence as a way to experience a world unmediated by the injunctions of the symbols and the insistence of the signifiers. In this manner, Adonis believes that an individual is able to overcome the *immutable* impulse that stabilizes culture in a specific configuration, and to transcend or sidestep history and its influence on the symbolic order.

Adonis’s stance is highly ideological and stubborn. He has maintained it, in one version or another, in the face of immense, even polemic criticism. To give an example, twenty years of interviews collected in *The Complete Conversations: 1960-1980* (*Al-Ḥiwarāt al-Kāmilah 1960-1980*) shows him reiterating a version of those ideals and beliefs times and times again even before he contextualized them within the

framework of his own philosophy. Despite contradictory intellectual traditions that he has pursued over his political and literary career, from SSNP ideology, to Marxism, Shiism, Nietzscheism, Sufism, etc... his essential commitment, if one follows the continuities of his ideas rather than his breaks with them, reveals a rather resilient matrix of belief that insists on the values and the conclusions that he has reached in *The Immutable and the Transforming*.

To elaborate further by giving a specific example of such a “continuity” hiding behind a “break,” I will reveal later in this chapter how the poet re-appropriates the figure of Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, already expropriated from the records of Islamic and Arab history by Lebanese Marxist intellectuals, to suit his own idealistic purposes: At a time when Adonis was being influenced by the teachings of Marxism, he uses Marxism to reach a conclusion that conforms, not to dialectical materialism, but to the personal ideology he has carried with him over the decades and whose ultimate rendition becomes the *transforming* impulse.

Another example can be drawn from the writings of Franck Salameh who argues that Adonis attempts in “This is My Name,” published in *A Time Between Ashes and Roses*, to underline and rehabilitate a plural Mediterranean heritage inherited from pre-Islamic cultures in an effort to reclaim an inclusive “Levantine-Syrianist” identity (Salameh 94-143). I believe that Adonis’s ethos at the time of the publication of “This is My Name” is not so easily demarcated by SSNP teachings. He is, for example, less hostile if not fully accepting of Pan-Arabism and would dedicate *A Time Between Ashes and Roses*, written partly in response to the defeat of Egypt, Syria and Jordan in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, to the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. Rather, I would say that Adonis would use the teachings of the SSNP, its belief in the ethnic pluralism of Syrian identity, as a basis to inhabit a *transforming*

identity in his poem – that is, an identity that ever changes and appears to be, not necessarily ethnically-plural, but psychically plural, multitudinous and multiform. Here too, the poet would appropriate and hybridize an ideology to his own ends, modifying it to serve his own distinct and resilient beliefs.

The corollary of this is that I do not believe that Adonis's assessment is particularly objective given that his rather encyclopaedic ambition to conceptualize the history of the Arab world through its religious and literary themes is too invested with his own creeds and his conclusions always seem to return there. Būlos Nūyā, the supervisor of Adonis's dissertation and a professor in the University of St. Joseph declares in a statement Lacan may agree with that the impulse to return to the past is not necessarily "reactionary" and *immutable* as Adonis is wont to believe but human: "Repeating the past is not a phenomenon particular to the Arab world... It is a human phenomenon that, if absent, the consequence would have been deleterious to [our] mental balance" (10). As such, "isn't this return to the distant past an indication of a nostalgia for a lost paradise, an [ideal] mother, or as Jung used to say, a manifestation of the archetype buried in the depth of the unconscious" – and not say, merely an injunction disseminated and reinforced by *immutable* religious and cultural institutions? (10).

On the whole, Nūyā's commentary praises Adonis's dissertation but his statement above sheds a subtle critical light on Adonis's conclusion. He does not find, in this instance, the poet's stance on religion, culture or history fair or objective. In the *Immutable and the Transforming*, Adonis is always careful to state, on more than one occasions, that he is "objectively" studying literary history "in itself" without ulterior motives (*Al-Thābit* 1: 15). Like Nūyā, I cannot but feel that this is not entirely the case. He certainly is not being objective when the conclusion he has reached, as it so

happens, is commensurate with virtually *every ideological stance* he has adopted: A need for change, a desire to revolutionize the Arabic language and its poetic tradition, a facile linear relationship between social revolution and literary innovation, a heavy handed critique of the traditional forms of the Arabic poem or *qaṣīdah*, etc. In addition to this, the generalizations evident in his dissertation may have weakened some of his arguments, something that Nūyā points out in a roundabout manner: “I can say that most sections of your dissertation, if not all of them, can be used, I hope, by new [students] to launch new research” – which is another way of critiquing the *Immutable and Transforming* and implying that it requires better defended, more elaborate arguments – and more vigorously-researched references (14).

In light of Nūyā’s critique, I feel that the Adonisean stance diminishes some aspects of Adonis’s dissertation. Throughout his work, his intentions shine through, and inasmuch as his intentions shine through, the conclusion he reaches is subverted, not reinforced, by his sometimes mystical, sometimes polemic literary manifestos. Despite his contrary assertion, his uniquely particular ideology is the lens in which Adonis examines literature. Despite his claims, there is no “history-in-itself” in his dissertation, the *transforming* and the *immutable* are not something which he has discovered inasmuch as they are *invented* for the purpose of the present to examine the past and formulate it in an anachronistic, ahistorical or, at the very most, a partially historical manner from which the modern Arab world can reshape its cultural elements to fit some revolutionary humanistic idea of social and literary progress: What can I make, after all, of the fact that Adonis insists that there is no dialectics (*jadaleyyah*) between the *immutable* and the *transforming* when the whole four volumes invite some form of dialectical engagement?

Nūyā sidesteps this issue by following and reiterating Adonis's stance that the *immutable*'s relationship to its counterpart is not dialectical but violent, "negatory" and "contradictory" (15). However, even "negation," as Mujāhed 'Abd al-Mon'em Mujāhed points out in his polemic criticism of the *Immutable and the Transforming*, is a dialectical relationship: "The dialectical relationships [between two parties] remains parallel, then becomes tense, then we see conflict, particularly if one of the parties feels that there will come a time when [it will lose], or when an assured absolute victory is written for it. In this case, dialectics reaches its absolute pinnacle in 'negation'" (26-27).

It is a valid argument on Mujāhed's part that specifies a causal "chain" of action and reaction which can be generalized to any conflict, but which Adonis disingenuously refutes even as he provides readers with information disseminated across four volumes of the *Immutable and the Transforming* which invites them to view the two concepts in such a manner. For Adonis to render this "chain" in terms that paradoxically "negate" dialectical causality, and to invest it with an ineffable intentionality where the *immutable*, in its essence, non-dialectically refutes and prohibits the *transforming*, is baffling. It seems to me that whichever becomes the victor, whichever wins and "negates" the other in this scenario is defined as *immutable* in retrospect. As if any *transforming* revolutionary movement is ultimately condemned to failure or marginality, or ultimately consigned to become *immutable* if it proves itself the victor – as if the Arab world is forever condemned to be under the aegis and tyranny of *immutability*.

It does not help Adonis's case when Mujāhed argues that the narrow binary in which the poet sets his argument is facile at best. Some of the movements or scholars Adonis exclusively invests with either one of his two concepts, to the exclusion of the

other, cannot be so clearly delimited: The Kharijites, for example, which Adonis approvingly bestows the *transforming* impulse upon, are not, according to Mujāhed, entirely “regressive” or “progressive,” revolutionary or reactionary. Mujāhed argues that they showed both a *transforming* orientation, in some respects, and an *immutable* orientation, in other respects. Their principles did not stay the same, nor did they, as a group, have a uniform set of doctrines: “Didn’t they fight for ‘Alī ibn abi Ṭālib? Then, didn’t they rebel against ‘Alī? Finally, didn’t they fight amongst themselves?” (27).

Added to Mujāhed’s argument, I can point out a very obvious detail that Adonis misses. No one knows the “true history” of the Muslim Kharijites: They are known mostly through the writings of their enemies and through heresiographical accounts which shed a negative light on their actions and can hardly be designated with the label of objectivity. Granted that their doctrines had been violently suppressed and “negated” and their *transforming* beliefs stamped by the *immutable* culture that had prosecuted them. Yet, the Kharijites had lived for centuries alongside the “mainstream” Islamic culture they had fought against. I am hard-pressed to believe that they did not influence the Arab-Islamic world, that the whole entirety of their “*transforming*” “revolutionary” thoughts were prevented from “dialectically” disseminating within the larger Islamic community, that there were absolutely no exchange of ideas between the two parties, that all the Kharijite’s beliefs were actively and vigorously suppressed and not one scrap of their teachings was adopted in some manner or another, even in an altered form, by their enemies.

The same goes in reverse for the Sufis. ‘Abd al-Qāder al-Janābi, in his booklet / letter *An Open Letter to Adonis (Risālah Maftūḥah ila Adūnīs)*, splenetically objects to the manner in which Sufism is viewed by Adonis as a revolutionary literary and social force. In particular, al-Janābi objects to Adonis’s conflation of Sufism with surrealism

in *Sufism and Surrealism*. Al-Janābi accuses Adonis of shoddy scholarship, of intentionally cherry-picking quotations out of context to prove his point, and of an overall wilful disregard of the main tenets of surrealism that views religion, including Sufism, as a regressive force. Al-Janābi concludes that this comparison between Sufism and surrealism is superficial at best, and for Adonis to write a whole book comparing a revolutionary artistic movement with Sufism is glib and simplistic.

Sufism, in al-Janābi's estimate, is a conservative force. It may as well be invested with the *immutable* impulse. It does not wish to revolutionize society but to retrench it further in religion: "A Sufi may depend [like a surrealist] on the coincidence of a miracle," he writes, but this dependency is explained as the existence of "a supernatural element that helps him discover the presence of God." Unlike a surrealist, "he does not want for things to change in the material world." He seeks "coincidence" or a source of amazement to distance himself from his "existence in time." His social demands are for "convenient circumstances that allow him to worship God" more thoroughly. If there are any similarities between surrealism and Sufism, claims al-Janābi, they are merely coincidental as the two movements are in actuality opposed to each other (*Risālah Maftūḥah* 21).

I see in Mujāhed and al-Janābi's critique some of the problems implicit in *the Immutable and the Transforming*: In al-Janābi's case, the Sufi movement is not as *transforming* as Adonis paints it. In Mujāhed's case, what is highlighted is that inasmuch as there are two ideas existing within the same region, there is bound to be some dialectical (historical) exchange even if one appears to be *immutable* and the other *transforming*. That the *transforming* appears to be timeless has more to do with the intentional manner Adonis has created it. I cannot say that he has "discovered" the method in which poetry and literature gesture to a force that can move a poet or writer

beyond the dictates of history and the symbolic order. Rather, Adonis has merely fabricated this force, and he has done so in a simplified manner which disregards the influence of history and the complex factors that shape the past and present of the Arab world.

To sum up, Adonis has made the *transforming* into a process of continuous becoming and change: a perpetually moving rolling stone that gathers no moss. The *immutable*, on the other hand, becomes a rigid fixed boulder stuck in the mud of history. Between the two there is no compromise because Adonis says there is no compromise, because he has made them as such, because then, he can break away from his own symbolic order and ostensibly ride the *transforming* impulse towards a fruitful unsymbolisable chaotic abyss where poetic expression is unmediated. There, the truth is not predicated on pre-existing symbols or on any history that filters the ineffable mysterious encounter through the sieve of one's own symbolically constituted being. I may as well accuse Adonis in this instance of a problematic, *immutable* and programmatic literary theorization of Arab literature where the poet disingenuously supplies the reader with the elements and the tools that are to be used as a device to frame his own poetry as revolutionary, *transforming* or outside the bounds of the symbolic order or history.

The reality, however, is not that simple – something which Rif'at Salām reminds me in his essay “On the ‘Ideal’ Method in *The Immutable and the Transforming*” (“Un al-Munhuj al-Mithālī fī *al-Thābet wa al-Mutaḥawwel*”). Literary history, in itself, cannot be isolated from history at large and as such, a significant part of Adonis's argument fails in Salām's eyes: “The poetic phenomenon does not explain itself [in itself]. The kingdom of the ‘thing-in-itself’ has ended and will never return”

(34). Ḥusayn Muruwwah,¹⁹ in a criticism which complements Salām's, writes: "I see that [Adonis's] attempt to look at poetry as separate from time and place, as transcending their boundaries, cannot but put [an individual] ... in a labyrinth that does not lead to any truth. It is a pure abstract mental outlook that situates the person... in a frigid arctic weather separate from the heat of flesh and blood, from the vitality of self-experience" (270).

Adonis's own desire to transcend history in his poetry is merely that – a desire. Inasmuch as he attempts to pursue this desire, his poetry becomes, to use Muruwwah, a "frigid" abstraction divorced from lived self-experience – and his literary characters become, to use Lacan, ahistorical, neurotic but still unable to overcome their history. Desire and reality are two separate things and Adonis is very much part and parcel of the Arab cultures he has lived in. His "innovation" is a product of history – of his interaction with Arab intellectuals, his SSNP membership, his reading of the works of Western and Arab philosophers, his passion for French liberalism and his wide-ranging perusal of literature. Adonis is not viewing history as it is, he is viewing it as he is.

Having gotten so far in my assessment, I can admit that the arguments made against Adonis are valid in certain respects, but inasmuch as I take the points expressed by the scholars without further examination, I am ignoring something subversive in Adonis's poetry. What Adonis's critics tend to miss are two things: the complexity of the poet's engagement with history which tend to be reduced by them to a sentiment that does not conform with classical Marxist or nationalist ideology, and the fact that history is not being refuted by Adonis inasmuch as it is being rehabilitated

¹⁹ Muruwwah is a renowned Lebanese Marxist critic assassinated in 1987 in his house in Beirut during the Lebanese Civil War.

for the sake of the present. Which is to say, it is the victor's history which is being effaced and, in its stead, it is a hopeful counter-history which is taking its place even if this counter-history is not entirely "factual."

Al-Janābi's objection against Sufism in relation to surrealism, for example, misses how a "conservative" element, in a new context, may act in a revolutionary capacity. As al-Musawi argues, Sufism has its normative "registers," but its "innate resistance to formality and limits, along with its ultimate rift with orthodoxy are appealing to modern poets" (116). To al-Musawi, Sufism is a tool that is used by modern Arab poets as a "dialogic strategy [which] targets superimposed limitations, strictures, and bondage that fossilize [the Arabic] language and deprive it of spontaneity. This strategy becomes a poetic engagement with issues of language and tradition" (111). As such, Adonis's "misguided" rendering of Sufism into a revolutionary force is hardly that and it does not stem from a lack of knowledge. If Al-Janābi is right in accusing the poet of not being stringently accurate in his comparative assessment between this mystical movement and surrealism, accuracy is not exactly the point.

What Adonis is attempting to do is counter the victor's history, counter the very force that determines and delimits culture, traditions and the symbolic order. He is attempting to point out that the unity that history is invested with, from a symbolic perspective, is a unity that can only exist when other "dissenting" histories are elided or suppressed and when other traditions are ignored and effaced in favour of the victor's tradition. Robyn Creswell is right to say that this is the reason that Adonis's "tradition-within-the-tradition is largely made of heterodox figures: marginalized individuals... revolutionary social movements... and dissident intellectual currents. Adonis does not confirm the unity of the classical tradition, which both Marxist and nationalist

intellectuals emphasized, but argues instead of a plurality of pasts within the past” (151). It is those marginalized entities that stand against history. Their resurrection through Adonis’s works and poetry is not for their own sake and not for historical accuracy but to recreate in the present the hypothetical “chaotic” circumstances that lead to history’s genesis – circumstances which have to be effaced from the victor’s symbolic narrative if his ideology and cultural beliefs are to be realized. To use Talal Asad, what Adonis is doing is changing established history into *myth* thereby dislocating a subject’s own certainties and “settled feelings” regarding what he knows of truth. This happens because myth “arises whenever human reason encounters perplexing questions about existence and attempts to answer them in what can only be a non-rational way” – that is, a way not sanctioned by the symbolic order, religion or orthodox history (Asad 54-55).

Furthermore, Adonis’s conception of contemporary and modern Arab cultures as carrying a *transforming* and *immutable* impulse is a way to counter the influence of nationalist and Marxist intellectuals of his time for whom the separation of literature and politics is anathema: “Leftist thinkers, in the Arab world as elsewhere, formulated their own poetics and erected their own artistic canons, which emphasized the intrinsically political nature of literary activity. This helps explain why the tone of the Beirut modernists [including Adonis] is so often embattled” (Creswell 8). Adonis’s revolutionary ethos stands for the belief that culture and literature must effect a change in politics more than the other way round. The *transforming* occurs on every level of life, and literary innovation must precipitate political innovation. To have literature be a reflection of mere political concerns is to prevent it from truly being a revolutionary tool for political concerns.

Finally, by proposing elements of the *transforming* as indicative of impulses which have, historically speaking, countered history's reification, Adonis is preventing the present from being only a "continuum of [an *immutable*] past that has offered no compensatory signs of growth or rejuvenation" (al-Musawi 264). It is, after all, the *transforming* impulse that simultaneously makes him historical and thereby "legitimizes" him by putting him side by side with movement such as the Kharijites and the Sufis who subscribe to a purported innovative ethos while, at the same time, makes him "ahistorical" in the sense that it allows him to alter and change the *immutable* traditions and forms of the literature he has inherited and even prevent the criticism levelled against him by Arab writers such as Nazik al-Mala'ika who is uncomfortable with modernizing the Arab language using western tropes and ideas – something that Adonis wholeheartedly embraces.²⁰

I argue that Adonis's stance, whether on his plurality of pasts within the past, or his *transforming* impulse, is his attempt to reject a historical model similar to that of Lacanian symbolic history. It is an attempt to bring back the very *transforming* forces that shape and define history before it ossifies and consolidates in its current symbolic structure. It is to bring chaos into the mix – historical factuality is not relevant because the victor's history, after all, is hardly factual. What Adonis is highlighting, through his lack of factuality, is this very fact. What he is doing here is opening up a space where a subject can interrogate his historically determined symbolic constitution. This constitution may see, for example, Sufism either as a harmless mystical element, a heretic sect or a conservative religious entity. It may see the Kharijites, through the eyes of those who had vanquished them, either as barbarous fanatics all too willing to kill, slaughter and shed blood – or see them as a group whose name in the

²⁰ See pp. 132-135 of Creswell's *City of Beginnings*.

contemporary Arab world, contiguous with the manner in which they had been historically viewed, is reduced to a label of accusation against modern-day extremist groups and zealots.

Adonis's engagement with history is far more complex than most of his critics are willing to admit. In this engagement, I can agree with his detractors that one does not truly have access to history-in-itself – a conclusion which Adonis either does not reach or intentionally disregards by fabricating his version of histories and his traditions within the tradition. I can ignore Adonis's assertion to "objectivity" at this juncture, it is misleading. I will also ignore his statement that the *immutable* is the only impulse that perpetuates violence – which implies that the *transforming* is always pacific. I cannot, however, ignore that there is in his poetry a certain nuanced understanding of the "rawness" of history, i.e. history as belonging to the Lacanian *réal* and which, to redirect and modify Frederic Jameson, is "non-narrative and nonrepresentational" and "inaccessible to us" and which hurts and "refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individuals" (*Political* 81,102).²¹ It is this *réal* which is "filtered" or encircled by the victor's symbols to become symbolic history or is re-contextualized by the present symbolic order whose injunctions highlight "orthodox interpretations" while prohibiting less palatable or more subversive expositions that Adonis is trying to access.

By bringing back the pasts within the past into the present, or at least a rendition of them, Adonis is recreating the circumstances where chaos impinges on the symbolic order again – where culture has not yet stabilized its symbols and fashioned

²¹ In Jameson, history always belongs to the "real" but I am using and modifying it to fit Lacanian ideas. The "real" relates to economic necessity in Jameson and its implication is more Marxist than psychoanalytic. Jameson tends to dismiss the individual psyche in favour of a social totality that can be viewed not through the subject's unconscious but through the assessment of a political unconscious (through objects in the world and not mental phenomena) which reveals the truth of this totality structured by necessity.

its symbolic circuit into a closed self-sustaining network enclosing and encoding its version of history. The gap that opens through this space may allow the contemporary Arab to wonder if the “truth” of history is warranted – if certain historical reputations like that of the Kharijites should be accepted, for example. To use his poem “An Introduction to the History of the Petty Kings,” it is also an attempt to rewrite history by burying its “doltish inheritance” thereby allowing for the *transforming* impulse to innovate an unsanctioned poetics and articulate a heretical social position (3).

In the prose poem “This is My Name,” Adonis invokes Rome and emperor Nero whose (symbolic / historic) reputation – as having played the fiddle as Rome burned – makes him, in Christian consciousness, just as notorious as the Kharijites are in Islamic consciousness. Here too, Adonis simultaneously proposes the effacement of the dominant symbolic history which makes Nero into a monstrous tyrant, and the formation of a counter-history. Nero, in Adonis’s poem, becomes the *transforming* agent who heralds the destruction of the *immutable*, of history itself, of a Roman empire entrenched in its own stasis, stability, tyranny and imperial ambition: “I said settle down Nero in the forehead of creation. Rome is every house, Rome is fantasy and reality, Rome is the city of God and History. I said, settle down like a spear, Nero” (72).

What happens when Nero settles like a spear in the forehead of creation? It allows the speaker to give himself to chaos and “to the abyss of sex.” It permits him to “give to fire the conquest of the world” (72).²² In other words, the *transforming* impulse that ignores symbolic prohibition is allowed to run rampant – and if the world ends by the “conquest” of fire, this end is a new beginning: The word “conquest” in

²² This is my translation of the poem from a bilingual edition of *A Time Between Ashes and Roses*. I feel that the translator’s text is too cumbersome with its strange syntax.

Arabic is “*fatihah*,” the same one Adonis uses in his poem “Time.” It has religious and secular connotations and apart from “conquest,” it also means “beginning.” As in “Time,” the two opposing meanings collapse into each other in this poem – destruction and creation, chaos and order, apocalypse and genesis, ends and beginnings – all are one and the same. This, as I will explain more fully in the next chapter that engages with Derek Walcott, is one of the manifestations of chaos.

In the next part of this chapter, I will assess a section of Adonis’s *Transformations* called “The Falcon.” My intent is to reveal that instead of a symbolic history determining the speaker’s actions, Adonis will fashion for his speaker the circumstances needed to transcend the causal relationship history has with the present by allowing the speaker to return to an event-point in the past where the incident occurring there is too intense to be easily manageable by the symbolic order. Which it to say, the speaker will return to a traumatic event that is “raw” in its proximal immediacy. He will return to a cataclysmic incident without signifiers, to history-in-itself or *r  el* history. However, instead of encircling this *r  el* history with the symbolic narrative of a social order, the speaker will use the very chaos that this event-point produces to *transform* himself, moving away from the dictates of his culture, pushing himself onto a path whose scarcity of symbols allows him an immediacy of experience that is sometimes ecstatic, sometimes neurotic and tragic, but never falling under the dictates of his social order.

In contravention to the symbolic order, I will reveal that history in *Transformations* will “bifurcate” from the event-point into a multitude of parallel-moving histories. Each “history” will have its influence on the speaker but none of them will singularly determine his actions and none of them will be effaced for the sake of one historical “branch” that will grow into the dominant narrative of a newly

immutable extant order that may hypothetically come into being with the attrition of the old one. Here too is another version of pasts within the past, not in the manner specified by Creswell, but in the manner where an individual can return times and times again to the scene where the symbolic order fails, where he lies suspended outside time due to this very failure. There, instead of being galvanized by anxiety to return to the “symbolic path” of the culture that he has left behind, he will move through his anxiety away from it by forging multiple passages towards new beginnings.

The Adonisean Falcon: Chaos and Content

A section of *Transformations* titled “The Falcon” (“Al-Ṣaqr”) contains a sequence of poems that depicts a journey of sorts. Knowing this, I immediately remember the importance of journeys to Adonis, something I have already assessed in the previous chapter. I recall my argument that what that poem inspires is not a return to a symbolic order, but a forward movement beyond the order’s chains of signifiers – a movement into an abyssal track that both frightens and inspires the speaker, a movement towards *something* that is not part of the traditions and histories he is linked to or defined by. I have argued that such a journey of chaos and discovery is embedded in many of Adonis’s poems, and I clearly see this in the “The Falcon” section. I am anticipating another voyage, another iteration of a journey where entropy and chaos appears to be either part of the environment or part of the relation one has to such an environment. Unlike “The Path,” however, this voyage is linked to historical markers and true events, if only at the beginning.

In the epilogue, I realize the voyager is ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dākhil, a historical Islamic figure otherwise known as “The Falcon of Quraysh” – Quraysh being the tribe

from which the prophet Muḥammad descended from. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was a member of the Umayyad lineage and the founder of the caliphate of Cordoba, an Arab dynasty that ruled the greater part of Iberia in the eighth century. The chain of events leading to the Falcon founding the caliphate began when the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyads in Damascus, forcing ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and his brother to flee the city. The Abbasids dispatched assassins who eventually caught with the brothers while they were crossing the Euphrates River, forcing them to throw themselves into the water in an attempt to reach safety on the other shore. The horsemen urged them to return, promising them no harm, and out of fear of drowning, and perhaps because he believed their promise, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s young brother reversed direction towards the men who killed him. By the Falcon’s own words, which Adonis quotes in the epigraph, it was a horrifying event to witness.

This is the event-point or the historical background that the epigraph sets for the poem: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān in grief, his brother murdered, the Umayyad line destroyed, his allies turned on him and the sociopolitical system on which his very being depends, around which his identity hinges and around which his symbolic order revolves all but destroyed. The Adonisean Falcon, cut away from his very past, can only journey in a hallucinatory poignant haze that somehow invokes and evokes what he has lost even as his steps direct him to an uncertain destiny. Where is history to bestow upon him his due as a monarch and a symbolic subject? To attempt answering this question, I shall look at the first poem in the sequence. “The Days of the Falcon” (“Ayyām al-Ṣaqr”) begins by a suspension of time and continues to describe an apocalyptic world – apocalyptic, that is, in the linguistic and environmental sense:

It calmed above my head – between the prey and the horseman – the spears
My body rolls, and death is a helmet – and the wind

Are hanging corpses and an elegy, –

And as if the day

Is a rock that punctures life

And as if the day

Are wagons of tears,

Change your ringing O voice

Hear the sound of the Euphrates:

- ((Quraysh...

Is a caravan voyaging to India

Carrying the fire of glory.))

... and the sky on the wound is stretched, and the shores

Whisper, they stretch:

Between me and the shores

Is a language, a conversation

Cradled by waders²³, they floated with it like a sail

Between us. (1-18)

What can I take from this section of the poem? To begin with, the speaker is rambling. He is not making much sense. There does appear to be syntactic cohesion to the language if only barely but there are no markers, no traditions or laws I can seize upon to understand how the sentences, as signifiers, relate to a cultural background, to a socio-symbolic order, to an historical occurrence. In other words, there is no *continuity* of motivation of the subject's action with his history as Lacan would have it, nor is there "pastism" and "theologism" with their laws and symbolic doctrines to render the present determined by the past as Adonis would have it. History ends in the

²³ A type of bird.

epigraph with death and trauma, and although it orients the poem and the speaker in his journey, it orients them towards chaos, towards the abyss. From this perspective, “The Days of the Falcon” is similar to Adonis’s “The Path.” Unlike “The Path,” where I only see the symbolic order completely deteriorate by the end of the poem and the speaker’s entropic journey from thereon is implied, “The Days of the Falcon” begins precisely with the intrusion of chaos, begins where the symbolic journey ends, where history itself is no more. In Nūrā Mer‘ī’s words: “The historic voyage has failed, and the new voyage [that is to come] is solely the Adonisean voyage” (23).

One thing that fascinates in the poem is that time has paused in it. The spears have “calmed” above the Falcon’s head: They are suspended as in a still image between the moment they have left the horsemen’s hands and the moment they will find the flesh of their prey, presumably the flesh of the Falcon’s brother. I conclude that the trauma of the brother’s death is still in effect in the Falcon’s psyche, and this allows me to posit a hypothesis: that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān may find “closure” if the still image, suddenly animated by time, allows the spears to move and fulfill their grim but welcome purpose. Which is to say, the Falcon may be able to “bury” the memory of his brother, a memory very much “alive” in his mind. Instead, the Umayyad noble will relive the death of his loved one again and again. The spears hanging above his head will be an emblem of his very voyage and the memory of his dead brother will remain alive, inextinguishable and painful.

I would like to render time in Lacanian terms to understand the poem better and its link, or lack thereof, to the symbolic order and history. In “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty” Lacan has a prison warden inform his three prisoners that he is carrying five disks, *three white* and *two black*. The warden then ties *three white* disks, one on each of his charges’ back where they cannot see it. He

informs them that the first prisoner to guess the color of his *own* disk will be freed.

Here are how all three prisoners, in their own words, realize at the same time that they are white without communicating with each other:

I am white and here is how I know it. Since my companions were whites, I thought that, had I been a black, each of them would have been able to infer the following: “If I too were black, the other would have necessarily realized straight away that he was a white and would have left immediately; therefore, I am not a black.” And both would have left together convinced that they were whites. As they did nothing of the kind, I must be a white like them. At that, I made for the door to make my conclusion known. (*Écrits* 198)

What Lacan is attempting to explain is the manner one makes decisions based on the symbolic order that ties each individual to each other in intersubjective relationships. In such relationships, each prisoner uses “logical time” to reach the *certainty* of his choice. Lacan divides logical time into a tripartite structure – the first of which is the “glance,” where a prisoner takes the measure of the situation by gathering information with his senses / eyes, i.e. seeing what colored disk the other prisoners have. After which comes the *time for comprehending* – having acquired all the information, the prisoners will use it to *meditate* on each other’s hesitations. For example, if the scenario is different and two of the prisoners have black disks, then the third prisoner would know immediately that he is white and be the first to walk towards the door – no meditation is needed here. The other two, seeing this action, would correctly deduce that the quickness in which the third prisoner intuited the color implies that their own disk is white; they would quickly follow him. In this instance, the *time for comprehending* would be nearly *instantaneous*, and this is unlike the first

scenario where all the prisoners are *suspended in time*, *mulling* over the information they have until their collective hesitations finally become the *very thing* that ultimately inform them that they are all white. When this happens, when the prisoners are brought to *the moment of concluding*, they become filled with haste and anticipation – they want this ordeal finished now that they have the answer.

What do the prisoners anticipate? They anticipate their entry into the symbolic order by positing a symbolically mediated conclusion which they believe to be certain – a conclusion which will bring about their own freedom. They expect their *suspension in time*, the time in which they are indecisive and have no answer, to abate since the symbolic is where things *happen* – and by entering it they expect time to flow again. Yet, there is also something else going on. Beneath this anticipation is where the “ontological form of anxiety... seems to emerge” (*Écrits* 207). The individual’s fear of not positing a choice, of being left behind while others reap the reward promised by the symbolic order, is a source of distress to him. This is the reason time suspends itself in his psyche. In M. D. Faber’s words, “the individual’s apprehension of ‘bad time’, or ‘bad eternity’ [is] a feature of hell” (58). Anxiety is the flip side of anticipation, the horror of being stuck in limbo, the fear of being left behind and suspended between a present where one no longer knows what he is in relation to the Other and a future where one is no longer able to find one’s destiny as a symbolic subject. This is why the prisoners, hastened by an anxiety induced by their existence within chaos and suspended time, and compelled by an anticipation that promises a possible reentry into the symbolic, choose their answers. Time moves for them again, they exit the room, they give their answer to the warden, they leave. They have entered the symbolic order.

Having finished the assessment of “Logical Time,” I return to “The Days of the Falcon.” In the poem, the Falcon’s “hell,” to lift the word from Faber, is precisely this suspension of time. Unlike the prisoners where time finally moves, the spears, being temporally frozen above the Falcon’s head, indicate both the falcon’s inability to enter his own symbolic order, and his inability to protect himself from anxiety by *anticipating* the fulfillment of his desire within said symbolic order. Unlike the prisoners, no signifier can deliver to him the symbolic choice that allows him an egress out of his hell, out of his symbolic death, out of a world where his brother is neither alive nor dead and where *he* is neither alive nor dead, out of a nightmare where chaos is endless, where the past cannot guide him onto the path of his salvation, where the present is merely an apocalypse and the future is the present extended from the apocalyptic here and now to the apocalyptic then and there. The Falcon is stuck beyond any signifiers that may map the world he traverses. The realization of his subjectivized truth, which warrants the existence of a stable symbolic order with its complex permutations of interpersonal relationships, is unbearably impossible to attain.

From that moment on, the Falcon’s history is *not* continuous with his present and cannot guide him with any degree of *certainty*. The fragment of history left floating in the apocalyptic “bad” time of the poem, the fragment evoking Quraysh, is untethered from its foundation. Adonis embeds it in double brackets as if both stressing its strangeness in this wasteland and making its message appear ironic to the reader – the message being a harking back to a golden age of yore, of origins, of religion or history that, instead of imposing order, causes upheaval and chaos precisely because it is there to remind the Falcon of two things: the brother he has lost, and the promise, forever impossible now, of an Umayyad empire stretching from the

westernmost ends of the Greater Syrian region all the way to the southernmost reaches of the Indian peninsula – most of the continent of Asia under its one rule.

What I can surmise from all this is that there is an entropic orientation that veers the Falcon's "destiny" beyond cultural signifiers. This has been revealed through four interrelating points that I have already assessed: a fractured symbolic order, a time suspended in apocalyptic space, an unabating anxiety that cannot be assuaged since it is induced by the visibility of chaos that a stable symbolic order usually conceals, and a fractured history that is *not continuous* with the Falcon's present motivation, particularly as it extends or relates to his future. Can I infer then that the Falcon's path has veered beyond what history, as conceived by Lacan, has determined for him? Can I accept that the new voice which issues yet again from the Euphrates, the direction the Falcon has come from and the direction he is distancing himself from, is not a call to glory, to pastism or a return to the symbolic order but an acknowledgment that "nothing remained of Quraysh," of his history or his tribal inheritance save the "wound" and "the blood protruding like a spear" (35-39)?

This may be the case, but I detect a certain discrepancy that makes me wonder if Adonis is not unwittingly manipulating history to return the falcon to the domain of the symbolic. I am not pondering this without cause. The function of suspended time and of anxiety is to elicit a desire to reenter the symbolic order, to rid oneself of the anguish that would cannibalize one's spirit. Anxiety is a major reason that make children, no matter their gender, accept castration at the hands of the name-of-the-father since they can then gain ingress into the world of symbols and have at their disposal the Laws and social contracts that help them navigate the culture they find themselves in. Anxiety is not a product of the symbolic but of the real and it comes into being when "the order of symbolization (substitution and displacement) is at risk

of disappearing” (Shepherdson xxxii). My point is anxiety is an indication of chaos and one of its byproducts. By experiencing it, the Falcon’s first reaction would be to find a way back into history’s telos, history’s symbolic order and away from the angst-ridden apocalypse around him.

There appears to be some indications in the poem that the Falcon is ready to reconstruct the symbolic order again, to impose on the unsymbolisable chaos the chains of symbols that would recreate order, Laws, intersubjective bonds and whatnot. By the end of the poem, Adonis asserts that the Falcon shall build “in the end of depth / the Andalus of the depth / the Andalus springing forth from Damascus” (“Ayyām al-Ṣaqr” 119-121). I can infer from this a provisional positivist manipulation on Adonis’s part: The historical ‘Abd al-Raḥmān who conquered Cordoba after fleeing Syria brought a golden age to the Andalusian region, not to mention an empire that would last for three centuries after its inception – at least this is the way he is recalled in Arab collective memory.

One point that may support this argument is the temporal structure of the poem which mimics the tripartite “logical time” seen in Lacan’s essay. The glance would be represented with the Falcon taking in with his eyes his brother’s death, causing time to be suspended. The *time for comprehending*, which extends from the beginning of the poem almost to its end, would reveal the speaker as he attempts the difficult task of making a symbolic choice. I would like to point out that during such a time, the Falcon is *regressing*. By regression, Lacan does not mean a return to some infantile state of being as with Freud but the reduction of the symbolic order in an individual to his imaginary order. This may occur as a psychic defense of sorts against a horrifying event, i.e. a brother’s death, that threatens the ego with erosion and annihilation. Regression evinces this erosion – indicated by an ego that discharges “fantasmatic”

rambling discourse at “each stage of the decomposition of its structure” precisely like the Falcon does in the poem (*Écrits* 252).

When the ego’s defenses are taken down, or when an event occurs that forces ‘Abd al-Raḥmān to move beyond his imaginary relationships, then his *moment of concluding* is at hand. The *moment of concluding*, which can be gleaned by the poem’s end, indicates the haste in which the Falcon has to decide what to do. Having procrastinated too long in his musings and ramblings, in his *time for comprehending*, he is now compelled by his very *anxiety* to *hastily* make a choice – else he will stay suspended in time and left in a worse predicament than he was in before. He *concludes, almost* at the last moment, as people in such situations are wont to do. By the end of the poem, he re-forges the chains of signifiers that had been sundered from him by the act of death and historical loss. He “raises like a lover // the Andalus of the depth / He raises to the cosmos – this new structure” and he regains what has been taken away from him: his past, the continuity of his history with his present and his symbolic order (“Ayyām al-Ṣaqr” 134,136-137).

Can I consider Adonis’s poem the discourse of a speaker whose speech conveys one thing and his actions another? This is a convoluted question to respond to that does not yield simple answers. To begin with, the Falcon is attempting to *seek* order – a predominantly symbolic enterprise, he is attempting to *impose* order – a mostly imaginary enterprise, and he is traversing chaos beyond symbolic law and imaginary capture – this enterprise I can associate with the Lacanian real. Chaos and order, law and apocalypse interpenetrate each other in the poem. This may create a neurotic subject in the manner Lacan specifies, but it also creates a destabilization of the *immutable* “historic journey” and compels an “Adonisean journey” to take its place.

As such, the implication of the anxiety felt by the Falcon has more to do with Heidegger than Lacan. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān does not choose to allay his anxiety by returning to his social reality, rather, being anxious, he realizes, in the Heideggerian sense that the “They,” the Lacanian Other or symbolic order, has concealed from him a range of possibilities that would have enabled his being, his *Dasein*, to establish its authenticity in relation to itself. According to Heidegger, in anxiety, an individual feels uncanny, “not-being-at-home,” not being among the “everyday publicness of the ‘they,’ which brings tranquilized self-assurance, with all its obviousness – into the everydayness of *Dasein*” (233). This description is congruent with the manner that Lacan proposes to allay anxiety by subsuming oneself into the symbolic order again so that one’s assurance and certainty will reassert themselves – an action Heidegger explicitly objects to since that would return the subject back to his inauthentic self. Rather, what the individual should do is “permit [himself] the anxiety for the courage in the face of death” (298).

By death, Heidegger might mean a being’s existential death or the possible death of *Dasein* – what I may translate in Lacanian terms as a subject’s refusal to be constituted by the symbolic, i.e. the big Other. As such, death becomes “*Dasein*’s ownmost possibility,” the absolute possibility of establishing *Dasein*’s authentic self apart from the “They.” The reason for this is that confronting death, confronting existential annihilation, compels *Dasein* to choose for itself and not rely on the symbolic choices bestowed by the Lacanian big Other (307). For the Falcon to realize his death, his *Dasein*’s ownmost possibility, his journey must take his being towards such a death. I contend that his journey towards death is represented by his reaching of the “Andalus of the depth” in the poem which I will prove is not of the order of the

symbolic. Indeed, I will also argue that the topos of Al-Andalus that Adonis uses is in itself not a part of the poet's *own* symbolic order.

In the poem, Al-Andalus, which signals history's aim and telos in the "historic journey" of the historical 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dākhil, becomes the "Andalus of the depth." This "Andalus of the depth" does not indicate a geographical region, nor does it indicate the forays of the actual 'Abd al-Raḥmān. It does not gesture to his history of conquest and triumph as it is recounted and remembered in the Arabian Peninsula. I cannot but suspect that, by making the Falcon sojourn towards the "Andalus of the depth," Adonis is not only breaking the Falcon from his symbolic order, but subversively undermining some of the Arab nationalist rhetoric of his time which uses the al-Andalus trope to elicit a nostalgia for a golden Arab age that serves the contemporary regional political purpose of identity formation and reification.

Al-Andalus is a well-entrenched topos in the politics and literature of the Arab region and can be traced, in its current aspect, to the early twentieth century if not earlier. The Egyptian poet Aḥmad Shawqī, for example, wrote a poem on the occasion of the fall of Edirne in 1913 during the first Balkan war called "The New Andalus" (Al-Andalus al-Jadīd) which conflates Edirne with Al-Andalus in a manner that suggests that in doing so, the city's loss to European Bulgarian troops is equivalent to the loss of the Andalusian "paradise" to European Spain. Here, the topos of Al-Andalus becomes the golden standard to measure loss and defeat. The two losses in the poem are described as two wounds, "one dripping blood and the other never healing," and where "Islam and the caliphate" are no more (Shawqī 1-8). In this manner, Al-Andalus becomes a banner for anti-European sentiments – a trope that would be replicated in other eras and by other politicians and writers.

Even Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (Maḥmūd Darwīsh) raises the emblem of al-Andalus for his own political and poetic ends. Darwish's "The Violins," a poem which has become popular in the Middle East by being made into a song by the Lebanese singer Marcel Khalīfah, has the following lines in it: "The violins cry over the Arabs leaving the Andalus / The violins cry for a lost time that doesn't return / The violins cry over a lost country that might return" (2-4). In this iteration of Al-Andalus, Darwish uses it as a symbol for a dispossessed, read Palestinian, people. He is utilizing one of its more known and ubiquitous aspects – as an Eden an Arab is exiled from and as a lost paradise that one hopes to return to. Peter Wien is correct when he writes that the term Al-Andalus evokes "visions of harmony, wisdom... [and] offer a transcendent meaning of an elevated Arab state of mind.... The notion of paradise lost implies a return to paradise, and the longing for paradise implies a promise of redemption and reinstallation into former grandeur" (63).

More fascinating than Darwish or Shawqī's usage of the term is the manner in which Al-Andalus and its mythologized history is utilized in belligerent political rhetoric. Wien traces, in particular, how the story of Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād, who led a Berber-Arab army to defeat Roderic the last king of Visigoth Spain, is used in the Arab world. According to widely accepted tradition, Ṭāriq ordered the burning of the ships his men had sailed upon across the straits of Gibraltar in 711 – an action that would grip the Arab imagination for centuries to come. It will be seen in a heroicized light, interpreted as an act that showed courage and determination in overcoming adversity and an unwillingness to back down or return home. The Ṭāriq myth has served modern opportunist authors who extol military regimes, political strongmen and dictators. Wien examines how a Libyan author presented Ṭāriq "as a distinctly Berber hero, and thus as a model for unity with the Arab peoples under the banner of

Colonel Qaddafi's rule." He also assesses how an Iraqi historian ideologically contextualized Tāriq, equating his spirit and the spirit of early Muslim warriors "with the determination of Iraqi soldiers fighting in the Iran–Iraq war" (74-75).

What I can take from this is that Al-Andalus is a powerful trope whose use by Arab authors can range from the evocation of a golden age, to the affirmation of Islamic supremacy and virtue, to expansionist ambition and the glory of conquest, to exile and the loss of paradise. In other words, the trope itself may be an example of the Adonisean *immutable* – of pastism, to be precise. By the manner in which it is presented, it is also an example of a lost idealized age that the present must strive towards. Furthermore, its entrenchment in the symbolic order serves the purpose of buttressing the status quo of militarist regimes thereby preventing any change in the political system. It is a master signifier that ameliorates an individual's anxieties by mediating between his expectations and his socio-political, economic and ideological reality.

The "Andalus of the depth" in Adonis's poem, on the other hand, indicates no such *immortality* but rather, it designates the manifestation of a *transforming* impulse that upends order and the subject's certainty in the symbols that he knows and the history that has nursed him into being. Adonis links it to a Sufi state – a state unmediated by the symbolic, and reveals that "[the Andalus of the depth] does not return me to... what I was. On the contrary, it compels me to search for what I am not" ("Andalus al-A'māq" 98). The "Andalus of the depth" is not an end inasmuch as it is the means – the means of continuous dynamicity within the primal elements of chaos – elements that effect a *transformation* in the very signifiers of the symbolic order thereby subverting them to its own end: "The Andalus," states Adonis, "is in itself *transforming*. It no longer is a geography... It becomes something that I must produce.

It becomes congruent with my inner self. It does not stop becoming. I invent myself in it and it invents itself in me. A mutual endless creation” (“Andalus al-A‘māq” 98).

History itself is revised by this mutual endless creation. Its trauma becomes the catalyst that upends it. Chaos becomes the impetus that *transforms* the Falcon’s “true history” from a dynast as he is remembered and lauded by Arabic texts to a wandering “exilic figure of cultural translation who rescues the literary heritage” (Creswell 175). It changes the meaning of his moniker from a raptor that *symbolizes* “martial prowess” to a bird that “bears connotations of migration and flight” (Creswell 176). It alters his symbolic beliefs from a subject who thinks that the path to his future is through his history to a being who “ascends the towers of *transformation* where the catastrophe [exists] / where the ashes fall [systemically and gradually],” where one’s own existential death, his ownmost possibility – indicated by his ramblings – although denoting regression and neurosis, also denotes an absolute challenge to the “They,” to historico-symbolic authority and to the names-of-the-father (“Ayyām al-Ṣaqr” 74-75; my emphasis).

By undermining the topos of al-Andalus, Adonis subverts his own symbolic order and allows the Falcon to go beyond his. He “mines” history for some of its most “chauvinistic moments and uses them to punctuate a revolutionary poetry committed to the values of plurality, freedom, enlightenment, and the inevitability of change.” He envisions a future not determined by symbolic history: A future “freed from all the moribund ties to the past” (Rabbat xii-xiii). He transforms ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and Al-Andalus from historical entities that validate the *immutable* identity encoded and disseminated by “official” Arab history, i.e. as conquering hero and conquered land respectively. He *transforms* them, one into a wandering lost journeyer who invades nothing and the other into a protean space whose geography cannot be conquered and

whose features cannot be assimilated by symbols. Al-Andalus becomes a land that only exists in the Falcon's journey as he walks through the apocalypse and through the death of the symbolic order towards his own death, his ownmost possibility. It is rendered into a land that changes and *transforms* as the Falcon changes and transforms – a land that may as well be a metaphor for the Falcon as he *transforms*: one in the other, one through the other – an endless giddy creative transformation.

The Adonisean Falcon: Chaos and Form

In the previous section, I assessed the ramification of the Adonisean intervention on the Falcon's journey. At the moment where the trauma of the brother's death occurs, Adonis discovers the circumstances where a *transformation* existed before it had reified. At this juncture, the poet pushes the Falcon away from history. He reproduces the conditions where the *transforming* impulse is still extant within the anxiety-inducing experience while simultaneously denying the Falcon the comfort of his own past and culture by suspending him outside time and by disallowing him to replicate his signifiers in the new land of Al-Andalus. Having reached this far in my conclusion, I would like to examine the implications of *transformation* and chaos, not only in regard to the content of the poem, but in regard to its form as well. More importantly, I will examine how form and content affect each other synergistically, *transforming* each other and breaking the boundaries that the symbolic order sets for them.

The implication I have drawn from assessing the poem in relation to its content is that the Falcon has become protean – a virtual stranger to his symbolic order without a *beginning* or *origins*: When 'Abd al-Raḥmān returns to his *origins* and his old symbolic order, having changed utterly by his traumatic encounter, he is not returning

to what is familiar. In a reverse migration back to his own city Damascus, the Falcon ironically but truthfully asserts that “the call to return has ceased” (“Faṣl al-Rabī” 4). That he has returned is beside the point, or it is precisely the point – he is now a stranger, and his own city will not register him within its social matrix. He is outside his Damascene symbolic order, outside his symbolic origin, outside history and he cannot be “rescued” by the city, which does not even register him in its symbolic rubric: “((Did he pass? If he passed / He passed without a voice here or a secret))” (“Faṣl al-Rabī” 8-9). The man is effectively “dead:” “There is nothing [left] in my eyes of my [past] life / But sad ghosts” (“Faṣl al-Rabī” 16-17). His life, that is, the life he knows as a symbolic subject, is no more.

I will examine the influence of the *transforming* impulse and chaos with respect to “The Falcon’s” form. I will argue that the structural form of “The Falcon” is congruent with the “chaotic” message / content it is imparting: The form of the poems therein interposes on the symbolic event a species of chaos that bifurcates its linear historical path compelling it to *transform* into a multitude of branching entropic narratives that run counter to the chronicle of history. Before I begin my assessment proper, I will return to the *Immutable and the Transforming* since what interests me in Adonis’s comprehensive assessment of Arabic poetry and what is relevant there is the quality that I have designated as the third trait of the *immutable* – that which causes a schism between form and content or speech and meaning.

To Adonis, the schism between speech and meaning or content and function denotes a cultural or literary message whose seemingly revolutionary spirit is hijacked by the actions of those who deliver it. To put it in simpler terms, the conveyors of such a message are not willing or unable to practice what they preach. I have teased out the implication of the third trait early on in this chapter. I will remind the reader that to

Adonis, a new message with a new content must be delivered in a new form. If a new message utilizes the old forms of expression, then such forms will most probably subvert the new content by subliminally acting to *counter* its revolutionary or innovative credos. In other words, history will reassert itself.

One such form of Arabic literature that Adonis raises an objection to is the classical Arabic ode the *qaṣīdah*. This species of poetry was invented in the pre-Islamic *Jāhiliyyah* era and is one of the earliest types of Arabic literature and a major source of grammar and vocabulary for the Arabic language. The *qaṣīdah* has a rigorous rhymed form that falls within sixteen different varieties of meters (*buḥr*, pl. *buḥūr*) of which a poem has usually one type. It is arranged in a parallel structure: A line or *bayt* is divided by a caesura into two more or less symmetrical hemistichs ("Prosody"). Its genres include *fakhr*, i.e. self-glorification or the glorification of the tribe, *hijā'* or lampoon, and *madīḥ*, i.e. eulogy ("Jahiliyyah"). As for its themes, it may vary but it usually engages with issues that concerns the tribe's way of life, its politics, enemies and its relationship to its environment, i.e. "the power of community, encampments, travels, horses, camels, palm-trees..." (Allen 9).

I will paraphrase some of Adonis's criticism of *Jāhiliyyah* poetry. To begin with, *Jāhiliyyah* poetry appears to be *immutable* to change. Its *form*, if not its content, has been used faithfully with virtually no change in its structure or its general themes. Even the Islamic age that came after it was not able to counter its influence – if anything it reinforced and reified it. Adonis claims that although this type of poetry had been belittled and denigrated by an emergent Islamic religion ostensibly due to its regressive themes and outdated politics, the new religion had paradoxically attempted to use it for its own revolutionary purposes (*Al-Thābit* 1: 70). Adonis asserts that Islam failed in its attempt precisely due to the third trait of the *immutable* – the new,

revolutionary content that was to be disseminated was undercut by the ancient outdated form in which it was transmitted. Instead of the *qaṣīdah* asserting a new revolutionary religious function, “it asserted, on the contrary, an ideological political function [thereby] recovering its pre-Islamic tribalist function – particularly that which relates to the socio-political” (“Al-Kitābah al-Ibda‘iyyah” 3). Essentially, *Jāhiliyyah* poetry sabotaged Islam’s own revolutionary teaching by allying itself, not with a new religion that was to bring equality and justice but as it is wont to do, with the interests of rulers, tribal leaders, caliphs or, in the modern age, strongmen, political parties, ideologues and regimes.

With its strange and ironic association with Islam, *Jāhiliyyah* poetry has gained a sacred dimension to become, in the mind of Arabs, the penultimate perfection of poetics. No other types of poetry following it can be better in any shape or form (*Al-Thābit* 1: 80). It is rendered into the *origins* and the golden standard against which any new type of literature and innovation must be measured – only to be found lacking. Nothing new can rival the poetry of the old in the minds of most Arab individuals, claims Adonis. According to him, *Jāhiliyyah* poetry has allowed the *immutable* reified impulse to play its part in the retrenchment of Arab societies, preventing change or *transformation* from occurring and compelling cultures to repeat and disseminate the same old symbolic code times and again.

I do not agree with Adonis’s take on the *qaṣīdah*, not entirely. In “Rhythms of the Secular: The Politics of Modernizing Arab Poetic Forms” Khaled Furani turns to a modern poet who defends the *al-‘āmoudī* or the “verticality” verse construction of the *qaṣīdah*, so called because the lines, each with their two equal hemistichs, create a vertical “pole” when arranged beneath each other. To Hanna Ibrahim, unlike Adonis and other poets of his kind who subscribe to the view that the *qaṣīdah* is too

rhythmically and metrically restrictive and regulated to express the ethos of the modern world, and too affiliated with ideological doctrine and political dogma to express the personal in a public world, the *al-'amoudi* still has its role to play in personal and public affairs. It is not an obsolete historical form that cannot be used in the present because it stifles creativity. On the contrary, it is *generative* and *agentive*: It is the “disciplining of sound... [that] simulates the generation of verse.... The poet's initial rhythmical docility is the prerequisite for cultivating his or her versifying capabilities, and poetic freedom is attained through submission to the authority of traditional rhythms” (qtd. in Furani 296). Classical poetic form can move and be part of modernity by tackling social or private issues and by allying itself with human rights, modern causes and the aesthetic life. Its stringent rhythmicity does not have to correlate to the rigidity of outdated traditions or norms as Adonis is wont to believe but can very much undermine such norms by using the same form that disseminates them as a tool to dismantle them.

Be that as it may, Furani still sees the importance of free verse as a method that relates to all aspects of free expression – whether political, social, literary or personal. Apart from Ibrahim, the poets he interviews typically have a literary credo congruent with Adonis. Furani associates theirs and Adonis's beliefs with what he calls the “secular” which he is careful to define as different if not mutually exclusive from secularism: “The secular refers not simply to secularist views on religion and politics in society but also to ways of hearing, speaking, writing, and seeing that orient modern poets in distinct ways” (291). To Furani, the secular is a means by which writers attempt to either personally question the world or reveal through their verses a need to look at things differently. It is a method which interrogates or even stands in conflict with the cultural order.

The secular refutes the definition of a poet as an uninspiring repository of the habits and norms of his community. It repudiates the perception of a poet as someone who is merely a mouthpiece of his symbolic order and history – someone whose ‘I,’ to redirect Adonis, “is organically united with the ‘We’ of the tribe, if not utterly subsumed by it...., [whose] consciousness... is not separate from the consciousness of the community” and whose poems have a “psychological dimension which returns us [as we follow it] to his social dimension – which returns us to his *historical* dimension – which returns us to his linguistic dimension – which returns us [once more back] to his psychological dimension” (*Kalām al-Bidāyāt* 99; my emphasis).

The secular appears to have the potential to subvert the symbolic. It has the power to go beyond it by breaking the loop Adonis traces above. It is where the personal, the historical, the psychological and the social are sundered from each other through a poet’s resistance to normative poetic scansion – or through his “activation and deactivation” of secular rhythms that illuminate “affinities and dissonances between the secular and the ‘other’” or through his mediation and maneuvering of the “language’s lexicon” – or through the manner in which he establishes “a relationship with the public” – or through the means by which he attains a “sense of freedom, knowledge and creativity” (Furani 300, 303).

Does Adonis’s “The Falcon” carry connotations of a secular persuasion that attempts a subversion or a confrontation with the symbolic order qua Furani? Adonis is assuredly one of the pioneers of the free verse and the prose poem in the Arab literary scene of the mid-to-late-twentieth century. I cannot deny that his introduction to such poems does instigate a historical confrontation of sorts, producing “a continuous violation of rules and a transgression of limits” and a “change... in the order of viewing things” (Fakhreddine 75). I am, however, hesitant in relegating

Adonis's quarrel with history or the symbolic order to such a facile generalization – that one merely has to change the normative form of a poem and suddenly, history, the symbolic order and literary narratives become subjected to a *transforming* impulse that works beyond cultural imperative or the name(s)-of-the-father. What I will therefore attempt to do is not generalize the secular but particularize it. This is to say, I am going to examine the *particular* form that “The Falcon” takes and it is this singular specificity that I am going to link with the secular – and through the secular, to what chaos does to a symbolic history or to a historical symbolic order.

I will begin by examining the general arrangement of the poems and the sections in which they are divided. What captivates me at first glance is the *asymmetry* of the arrangement. “The Falcon” has *two* sections; the *first* section is, of course, “The Days of the Falcon.” The second section, “The Transformations of the Falcon” (“Taḥawwulāt al-Ṣaqr”), contains *four* subsections of which the first *three* are poems whose length are roughly the same as the first and are respectively titled “The Season of Spring” (“Faṣl al-Rabī”), “The Season of Ascension to the Towers of Death” (“Faṣl al-Ṣu‘ūd ila Abrāj al-Mawt”), and “The Season of the Old Image” (“Faṣl al-Ṣūrah al-Qaḍīmah”). The fourth subsection, “The Season of Trees” (“Faṣl al-Ashjār”), unlike the previous three, is further subdivided into ten one-page-length poems each having the same title “Tree” (“Shajarah”). This is a rather unusual arrangement: Adonis is already confounding one's ability to easily take in or order the entirety of *The Falcon*. A section can be a poem, a subsection may not be a poem but can contain more than one poem, poems can have the same title, etc....

This asymmetrical arrangement makes me unsure where “The Falcon” ends. It may not have ended at the last of the poems titled “Tree,” for example, but continued to the next division of *The Transformations* called “The Transformations of the Lover”

(“Taḥawwulāt al-‘Āshiq). This is not an illogical line of thinking to follow since the theme of transformation is relevant in both parts. Also, since a section of “The Falcon” is called “The Transformations of the Falcon,” it is reasonable to assume that a potential subsequent section may be called “The Transformations of the Lover.” Alternatively, I am not sure whether “The Falcon” itself is a division of the book – it may have been merely one page titled as such with ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s quote on his dead brother disseminated in it – all to give the poems following it a certain context by which they can be perceived.

My point is “The Falcon” does not have a typical structure, even for a free form. It also contains themes that threaten or influence this structure – themes which appear to replicate haphazardly in the book, themes such as transformations, love, tragedies, towers, journeys, trees, etc..... All these signifiers, if you can call them that, are found in “The Falcon,” but they are also found elsewhere in *Transformations*. Although they act their part as symbols by arranging the verses in chains of significations, they also threaten the text, both with their exuberant excesses and with the fact that they divert or impose upon the underlying symbolic history a species of apocalyptic history and suspended time. Furthermore, by replicating in different poems, sections, subsections and divisions, they break the boundaries that frame them.

Let me begin the proper structural analysis of the form of “The Falcon.” The outermost frame of “The Falcon,” i.e. the only frame that encircles and delineates the epigraph where the account of the brother’s death is recounted, is the space where history and chaos touch. Existing outside the two inner frames / sections of “The Falcon,” the epigraph, as assessed earlier, veers history as a symbolic construct from its established path. This is where Adonis has embedded the trauma of the brother’s death thereby making it the fulcrum that changes the Falcon’s historical journey into

its chaotic counterpart. Instead of the Falcon sojourning to Spain and establishing a dynasty that revivifies his dead symbolic order, the Falcon's path pushes itself beyond the symbolic. It would be useful here to imagine a historically determined line or a trunk moving in one direction, only to deviate at the point of the brother's death into another line or branch which subsequently forms an angle with the initial, but effaced, branch and continues into "The Days of the Falcon."

I do not use the word "trunk" or "branch" here indiscriminately. One of the "signifiers" that Adonis manipulates, those that I have argued threaten the text with their exuberant excess, is "tree." In section two, subsection one of "The Falcon," in "The Season of Spring," after the speaker pronounces that there is nothing *left of his life* "but sad ghosts," he proceeds by proclaiming that despite all this, the "trees crying over the land of the city / are lovers who live in my heart and sing my songs" ("Faṣl al-Rabī'" 16-19). The signifiers "trees" have a duality of existence. They live inside the speaker and outside him in the symbolic order of Damascus.

Despite the fact that the Damascene symbolic order wants nothing to do with the speaker, the "trees," nevertheless, connect both city and speaker. On the level of language, "tree" may belong to the symbolic, but there is another aspect to the word that cannot be determined by its function as mere symbol. The "tree" sings the Falcon's "songs," but these songs, as by his own recognizance and by my own assessment, cannot be an aspect of his historically and symbolically determined *life*. I contend that one aspect of "tree" is fundamentally linked to the *form* of the poem. Not only that, but I will also maintain that the manifestation of a non-linear asymmetrical *history* in the poem is also linked to its non-linear asymmetrical tree-like form.

I have asked the readers to imagine the structure of *The Falcon* as a trunk that deviates, with the introduction of chaos and the death of the Falcon's brother in the

epigraph, into its first main branch / section. Now, I will ask them to imagine another deviation and *another* section at the *same* entropic point from where the first section branches. I now have *two branches* deviating from the trunk and the *bifurcation* / point of chaotic singularity at the upper base of the tree “trunk” angles the two sections, “The Days of the Falcon” and “The Transformations of the Falcon,” away from each other. This is congruent with the manner history operates in *The Falcon*. The sections do not succeed each other in a linear timeline inasmuch as they seemingly germinate entropically and synchronically. I argue this to be the case due to another epigraph that Adonis embeds in the second branch or section, i.e. the “Transformations of the Falcon.” It includes two quotes: One from an Islamic *Ḥadīth*, “Deprivation is almost blasphemy,” and another from one of the earliest converts of Islam Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, “I am amazed at those who do not find sustenance in their own home – how they do not go out waving their swords at people” (*Transformations* 23).

I can say that the second section is being acted upon by the “contents” of two epigraphs: The first being the epigraph for “The Falcon” entire, and the second being the epigraph for its second section “The Transformations of the Falcon.” As such, the two epigraphs can be considered as examples of a paratext in the manner defined by Gérard Genette, as an “‘undefined zone’ between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard boundary on either the inward side (turned towards the text) or the outward side (turned towards the world’s discourse about the text).” The paratext creates a zone, not only of “transition” but also of “*transaction*: a privileged place” whose influence “is at the service of a better reception of the text and a more pertinent reading of it” (2). I will examine how the epigraphs serve such a function. I believe that the form of “The Falcon” is so unusual that the zone that Genette specifies is much more chaotic and less delineated than what a typical “paratext” may produce.

The “inward side” of the poem, as I have argued earlier, does not have, in itself, a clear boundary. The corollary is that the discursive interaction between the paratexts and the poem proper will serve a very radical *transformation* across multiple levels that would certainly serve for a very pertinent reading.

I have proposed that the chaos introduced in the *first* epigraph, i.e. the brother’s death, veers the “branch” of history away from symbolic determinism. I will argue here that what the *second* epigraph does is provide for the chaos unleashed in the first epigraph a “symbolic structure” against which chaos will (inter)act with / upon in a manner that reveals a new synchronic variation of the entropic symbolic order assessed in “The Days of the Falcon.” As the Adonisean journey repeats itself in “The Transformations of the Falcon,” what is revealed is a new face of the symbol’s interaction with chaos since the “symbolic material” is different than in the first section. If the first section necessitates a *migration* away from the Euphrates towards the “Andalus of the depth,” the second section divulges that the implication of such a *migration* is also a *transformation(s)* across the multiple symbolic “localities” of the Falcon’s psyche.

The transformations occurring in this instant are the result of chaos interacting with what I have translated as “deprivation” although other synonyms can include “need,” “privation” or “want.” The two quotes in the second epigraph indicate an engagement with political and social affairs relevant to the date on which *Transformations* was published, but this engagement is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. At one level, Adonis is reassessing religious texts in a manner that reopens them up for reinterpretation by loosening the hold that the first impulse of the *immutable* has on them: Both the quotes from al-Ghifārīy and the Islamic *Ḥadīth* indicate a modern reassessment of Islamic orthodoxy qua a Marxist commentary on

social equity and economic disparity – something that, to Adonis, may very well be sacrilegious to some conservative Muslim scholars.²⁴

At another level, Adonis is subjecting this very (re)interpretation to another (re)interpretation. This is the manner chaos is working and *transforming* the text. It is not substituting one *immutable* symbolic or ideological category for another, and then resting on its laurels inasmuch as it is unfurling and perpetually altering every symbol it is coming in contact with. The implications of the two quotations may be a demand for economic parity across social classes, and the subsequent poems in the second section may contain an ideation towards such a new symbolic position – but there is also *something* else going on in the second section of “The Falcon.” “Deprivation” is not merely economic privation, it also carries extra-connotations that cannot be encapsulated or fixed within what symbols and their patterns convey. The *transforming* impulse does not abate now that the new and redeveloped configurations of signifiers have altered into a novel unprecedented pattern. Furthermore, the new symbolic significations do not stratify, consolidate and become *immutable* now that the anatomy of the old symbolic narrative has been altered. By its very definition, Adonis’s notion of the *transforming* is that it is an impulse that does not subside. It destabilizes the fixity of meaning. It refutes structure as a thing separate from content and acknowledges no distinction between a poem and its form (*Al-Thābit* 1: 152-156).

It follows that “deprivation” is *transforming* into *something* else even as it is posited as that which has *transformed* or that which is doing the *transforming*.

“Deprivation,” which now denotes a need for cultural change, does not become a stable symbol now that its entropic charge appears to be spent, i.e. once it is sated in its

²⁴ al-Ghifārī is often considered a proto-Marxist by Arab and Lebanese Socialists and Marxists. See ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī’s article “A Pioneer of Socialism in Islam: Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī” (“Rā’ed al-Ishtirākeyyah fī al-Islām: Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī”).

guise as “hunger.” The word still gestures towards chaos, towards a void, towards a hunger that is not related to food, or not just related to food. Let me explain this through an assessment of the following verses in “The Season of Ascension to the Towers of Death.”

I hear like longing

Like the pulse of softness in a rock that never softens

Like the gush of springs, like words:

- “We *hungry* man, we were *sated*

Our procession never walked behind you

We never wrapped you in a burial shroud nor prayed for you

We, *hungry* man, never heard your call.

Now we are *hungry*

So, invite us [to your house]

Yesterday, we returned tired

We threw ourselves down and pillowed the years

And dreamt,

And saw

That we, in our dreams, prayed for you...” (“Faṣl al-Ṣu‘ūd” 40-54; my emphasis)

Notice that the voice of the individuals issuing from between the ruins, the voice that claims “hunger,” is apparently asking the Falcon himself for food although by its own admittance, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān is also in need of sustenance. How do I make sense of this – that the individuals speaking are conceivably inviting themselves into the Falcon’s house for succor even though they know that no succor is to be had? My answer is that Adonis is taking a trope from classical Arabic poetry and flipping it on

its head. Hospitality is a well-recognized custom in most of the Arab world, particularly its peninsula. A host who is being visited is customarily and culturally obliged, even honored, to give assistance and offer food to his guests, even if they are strangers (Guthrie 181-198). Such a practice is important to a lot of Arab tribes. It is mentioned frequently in their classical poetry, particularly in the *qaṣīdah* genre of *fakhr*, i.e. self-glorification, where the tribal poet commemorates the charity of his tribe's hospitality in his verses.

It then follows that the apparent demand for food and accommodation in "The Season of Ascension to the Towers of Death" would be answered with alacrity. Yet, 'Abd al-Raḥmān in this poem is by all accounts a "hungry man" and cannot answer the call since he has nothing to offer, and this is something known to the individuals whose voice the Falcon hears. Why then would they ask to be invited into his abode? My answer is that their exhortation is *not* for hospitality as understood within the context of 'Abd al-Raḥmān's symbolic order. Rather, their exhortation is for him to share, not food, but his *own deprivation* with them and for him to share theirs. It appears that the voice is acknowledging that a lack of "hunger" brings with it a certain lack of awareness, a certain lack of experience, a certain lack of *something* that "hunger" or "deprivation" may very well impart to those who endure it. Now that they have known and felt its acute touch, they are able to commiserate with the Falcon on the tragedies that befell him whereas before they were unable to understand the depth of the tribulations suffered. Yet, for this "awareness" to manifest, it is necessary that "deprivation" has a shifting chaotic meaning that never settles, is constantly *transforming*, and cannot be fixed. In other words, it is necessary for deprivation-as-signifier to shift what it signifies in a manner where its meaning cannot be managed or "sated" by the symbolic order.

I argue that a stable symbolic order should not allow “deprivation” or “hunger” to “register” within the psyche or interact with its signifiers in a manner that is deleterious to said order. A stable symbolic order, as previously defined, is a closed structure. Anything that threatens its existence is handled by its multitudes of permutable symbols which safeguard its circuits by acting as a check and balance against anything that may veer it from its established paths. Thus, within one’s psychic locale, in the exact space where “deprivation” may upend or wreak havoc on one’s symbolic assumptions, chains of signifiers mobilize against the threat. Those “chains of signifiers” are invested with specific significations that buttress the status quo of socio-cultural power, preventing chaos from destabilizing the symbolic order by “rationalizing” and “narrativizing” deprivation even before it is registered as-such, as itself, as chaos: *You are hungry because this is what God wills.... Have patience, all will be well in the end.... The state will provide for your needs.... This suffering that you are feeling is a test, endure and eventually things will turn around, etc....*

Those “rationalizations” prevent individuals from waving their swords at people, to use al-Ghifārī’s quote. They *sate or* at least pacify individuals’ feelings of deprivation – perhaps not with the materiality of food, but certainly with the materiality of words. Within the symbolic order, they are mobilized to mitigate the threat of hunger. They subtly but predictably push individuals along their established symbolic circuit where the lure of the thing that they desire – social change, satiation, economic opportunities, justice, an end to deprivation, etc., – is always assumed to exist there and yet is always frustratingly out of reach – believed to be just around the next bend, then the next. This is another variation of how the symbolic order regulates desire by frustrating it and how it maintains itself against anything that threatens its annihilation.

Another way of looking at this is that language and the symbolic order, usually considered as a medium of reconciliation and mediation between individuals and authorities, hide within their fold the ability to enforce on their subjects what Žižek calls “symbolic violence.” In designating what “deprivation” should mean or symbolize, they violate individuals by disallowing them from voicing their grievance. They actually make grievance impossible to articulate or express at the level of symbolization: “There is something violent about the very symbolization of a thing, which equals its mortification.... Language simplifies the designated thing, reducing it to a single feature. It dismembers the thing, destroying its organic unity, treating its parts and properties as autonomous. It inserts the thing in a field of meaning which is ultimately external to it” (*Violence* 61).

Yet, as I have already stated, in order for the symbolic order to do what it does, for symbolic violence to be maintained, “deprivation” must be apprehended and ensnared within the symbolic apparatus of the psyche like any signifier, i.e. it must have a specific albeit contextual meaning(s) that can be captured and handled by what I have termed symbolic “narrativizations.” If a symbolic order is unable to do such a thing, if it cannot control what is elicited by the placement of “deprivation-as-a-signifier” in a specific psychic locale, then chaos ensues.

I cannot claim that “deprivation” in “The Falcon” does not register within the symbolic matrix. It is, after all, embedded in both quotes in the second epigraph of *The Falcon* and both of those quotes point back to the symbolic order, to historical texts widely disseminated, narrativized and regulated by culture. “Deprivation,” however, is not *just* a signifier. The chaos that is unleashed in the first epigraph by the brother’s death has acted on it in an unforeseen and unprecedented way, investing the word with *something* that has a chaotic element to it. As such, what “deprivation” elicits, unlike a

signifier, is not merely *desire* which can only find its path along the symbolic circuit, but something more threatening than that.

The individuals' exhortations to the Falcon is proof of this: They want to apprehend a "deprivation" that cannot be pacified, controlled, integrated or fixed into the structure of the symbolic order. They are not asking for a hospitality that is accorded to them by their culture – they are neither asking nor *desire* to be *sated*, nor for their hunger to be removed, nor rationalized, nor for things to return back to what they were before. Rather, they are operating from the nexus of entropy where "deprivation" finds itself to be an agent of chaos – a thing that washes away symbolic "narrativizations" since its "meaning(s)" cannot be pinned down in its entirety. "Deprivation" here does not truly elicit *desire* for change – i.e. desire as that which is regulated or pacified by the symbolic order and its chains of signifiers, but a certain *something* which is deleterious to the symbolic order and its determining effect on the individual.

I will argue that what "deprivation" does is elicit *something* beyond desire – *something* that is akin to what Lacan defines as *jouissance*: a certain pleasure undifferentiated from pain, a will to go beyond the Freudian pleasure principle.²⁵ This is because I think that "deprivation's" fundamental *transformation* is *perpetual transformation*. In the lines right after the voice's exhortation, as if in answer to what has been said by the individuals addressing the Falcon, the poem returns the reader to 'Abd al-Raḥmān:

I see myself there, at the end of the sidewalk

My body, an empty pit

²⁵ In seminar thirteen *The Object of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan states that one of the functions of desire, and by proxy the symbolic order, is to act as a barrier to this surplus, to *jouissance*: "It is precisely the barrier that keeps you the distance that is more or less correctly calculated from this burning hearth... which is called *jouissance*" (25).

I find myself there, in a virulent appetite

In a forehead corrugating above the bread. (“Faṣl al-Ṣu‘ūd” 55-57)

A body like a ravenous empty pit, dark and unfillable, a forehead deformed, wrinkled and corrugated by an illimitable hunger that a loaf of bread indubitably cannot assuage and finally, a “virulent appetite” which can also be translated as a “virulent lust.” All these words overflow with *something* – a surplus that exceeds a subject’s “desire” and that cannot be satisfied or pacified, that cannot be pinned down in symbols. If desire is structured by the symbolic order, then by that fact itself, the surplus engendered here by “deprivation,” the surplus that produces this seemingly pathological “virulent appetite” is something that is more than what a stable symbolic order can contain. Since “deprivation” refuses to be symbolized and shunted across the chains of signifiers, then the symbolic order cannot level against the individuals who embody “deprivation” its own brand of symbolic violence.

Rather, what occurs, since “deprivation” has failed to enter the matrix of symbolization and be “beaten down” by symbolic violence, is that it has become, from a symbolic perspective, “meaningless.” Although Adonis never writes this in his poem, but if the individuals addressing the Falcon cannot be pacified, then I can assume that those individuals, untethered from the prohibitions and fiats of the names-of-the-father, are willing to commit an act that is outside the purview of the symbolic, and as such, this act will be deemed (symbolically) meaningless. I argue that they will commit what Žižek, following Walter Benjamin, calls *divine violence*. Divine violence is “an expression of pure drive, of the undeadness, the excess of life, which strikes at ‘bare life’ regulated by law” (198). It “serves no means, not even that of punishing the culprits and thus reestablishing the equilibrium.... It is a sign without meaning” (199-200). It is also a sign of the big Other’s “impotence” and “it is a decision (to kill, to

risk or lose one's own life) made in absolute solitude, with no cover in the big Other” (201-202). In other words, this type of violence is not an expression of the symbolic or imaginary order, rather, it is, I contend, of the order of chaos – and it is from the unsymbolisable nexus of “deprivation” that this form of violence is unleashed.

The mere possibility of violence is indicative of the stance Adonis takes regarding social revolution and literature – where literature, in itself and in its innovations, promotes and manufactures the message that leads to upheaval. One can see here a correlation between the *transforming* impulse in poetry and the *transforming* impulse in a society. The early Adonis, the writer of “The Falcon,” tends to argue that sclerotic ideals promoted by rigid traditions and socio-political regimes need to be combated by a *transforming* cultural and political revolution that upends such regimes even through violence. To him, Islam was such a cultural force before it was manipulated and used as a tool employed in the hands of those who were in power: It was “justice, equality and freedom. It was on the side of the oppressed, the abused, the persecuted, the impoverished, and the outcast; it was not on the side of power and tyranny.” The true Islam, in his opinion, “radically transformed Arab society: It was a revolution. This movement of transformation and revolution ceased, or went into retreat, as soon as the institution of the caliphate, i.e. state power, began to oppose the *transforming* impulse of Islam” (“Bayn al-Thabāt” 152).²⁶

At the level of literature and the poem’s *content*, it is “deprivation” that produces chaos and political violence by refusing the narrativizations and symbolizations of the “institution of the caliphate.” “Deprivation” also operates at

²⁶Adonis would later revise his stance on violence. After the Iranian Revolution (1978-1979), which he and most left wing Arab intellectuals considered a revolutionary anti-imperialist movement, devolved into a theo-political state power, Adonis would become more stringently secular. His stance would prove controversial during the Syrian Civil War with his criticism of militia factions and Islamists opposing the al-Assad regime due to his suspicion of their religious, political and ideological affiliations (Creswell 189-202).

another level: It is the *catalyst* that shapes the entropic *form* of the poem. I have finally reached the point where the secular in Adonis's text is revealed as the indispensable fusion of content and form, of *transformation* and chaos. My argument hinges around the fact that although "deprivation" cannot be entirely framed or pinned down by signifiers, this does not prevent the symbolic order from attempting to do exactly that – this is what it does after all. However, this is precisely what allows chaos to unfold and manifest its changeable guises. At the level of the poems' content, as soon as "deprivation" in its guise as chaos is revealed, the symbolic order rearranges itself in an attempt to re-assimilate this point of singularity into its chains as if it is merely a signifier. Had it been successful, I contend that at the level of form, the structure of "The Falcon" would reveal a linear chronological timeline. The poems succeeding each other would have a more "classical" or conservative structure that correlates with the fact that the trauma of death has been apprehended and "narrativized" within the symbolic order. The poems would be invested with a journey that aims itself through history in one direction rather than a chaotic multitude.

History as that which assembles and arranges the Falcon's symbolic order would then be the grounds from which current events spread out in a cohesive reaction. The result of this, at the level of literary narration, is a symbolic chronicle which is recounted by its subject in the "heroicized form" which Lacan claims conveys an individual's history: *I returned back from whence I came – back to my father's house, my culture, my symbolic order. I was able to overcome my brother's death. I found a way to sublimate my pain by accessing signifiers available to me as a symbolic subject. I found my purpose again – not in Damascus but in Spain.*

A subject's ability to issue and accept such a cohesive narrative corresponds to a symbolic order functional enough to mitigate the ego's worst tendencies and stable

enough to protect the ego and its subject from chaos. “Deprivation” prevents this from happening: Existing on the borders between the symbolic order and chaos allows it to change its guises. It empowers its signification to alter beyond recognition even as signifier-chains latch on to it and attempt to unsuccessfully pin it down. This undermines the whole configuration of symbols resulting in more signifier-chains being mobilized. The entirety of symbols that constitute ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s psyche and which are represented in “The Falcon” by different poems are compelled to converge on this point of singularity only to *diverge* again. Entropy, trauma, “deprivation-as-chaos” – whatever one may call it – spreads its subverting influence on every locale of the Falcon’s unconscious. It effects a change on the symbolic order that is not *localized* but *systemic*. In other words, it revises the Falcon’s *entire* symbolic order – all its aggregate psychical “localities.” It alters his history and the entirety of his symbolic assumptions.

The locale of the Falcon’s psyche constituted by the configurations of signifier-chains which are structured by his past historical life in Damascus converge on “deprivation-as-chaos” but cannot “narrativize” it: The result is a destabilization of this symbolic “locale” and a branching of history corresponding to the second section of “The Falcon” dividing and branching out into “The Season of Springs” – the poem where ‘Abd al-Raḥmān visits Damascus only to realize that he is, from a symbolic perspective, dead or a stranger to his beloved city. Next, the symbolic locale of the Falcon’s psyche whose signifiers inscribe cultural norms and memories of tribal habits and customs also attempt to assimilate “deprivation-as-chaos” only to fail. The result is another branch / poem divaricating from the second epigraph and corresponding to another permutation of chaos – another forking away of history that collapses its historically-delimiting and linearly-narrativized structure. This branch is “The Season

of Ascension to the Towers of Death” where ‘Abd al-Raḥmān neither offers nor receives succor, where his memories evoke loss. It is the poem where he describes his appetite as “virulent,” where he pronounces his symbolic history as “tame” and “abandoned” and where he portrays his journey as Adonisean, invested with chaos, going on and on and on (“Faṣl al-Ṣu‘ūd” 117-118).

The same thing occurs in “The Season of the Old Image,” the third poem of “The Transformations of the Falcon.” The poem branches out from the second epigraph, from “deprivation-as-chaos” until one can count three sub-branches / poems forking from the same point of singularity. This leaves me with the fourth and the last sub-branch “The Season of Trees.” This division, as I have stated earlier, is further subdivided into ten one-page-length poems, each of which is titled “Tree.” Adonis writes a third, and last, epigraph in this section: “The epitaphs of the Falcon, and the headstones on his grave.” This informs me that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s symbolic life is no more – that from this death, another life has germinated – a life that is not beholden to symbols. This life will see its end only for another life, another *history*, to germinate and become a “branch” / “tree” / subsection in “The Falcon.” The Falcon will therefore live many lives and die many deaths – the multiple headstones on his grave is an attestation that his history has touched upon chaos and branched beyond and away from any symbolic influence. As such, the Falcon’s life, his *Dasein*, is always, in the Heideggerian sense, being-towards-death – and each one of his life / death is an indication of a poem / “Tree” that escapes from “the towers of catastrophe” – a “Tree” that is akin to a new “fetus / settling into the bed of space,” or a poem where, through the authority of chaos, a deterritorialization of the historical psyche and a

reterritorialization of its symbolic space occur – over and over and over again

(“Shajarah 69” 7-8,11).²⁷

Chaos, Transformation, Becoming

I finally recognize how content and form relate to each other in Adonis, how the secular, in this instance, works contra the classical structures and rhythms of the Arabic classical ode and subverts it, and how the paratextual epigraphs orient one’s reading of the poem by changing its very implication in its interactions with its verses. Had Adonis used the *qaṣīdah* form in “The Falcon,” its “verticality” and finite rigid rhythms would have limited the scope of “The Falcon” by affixing its poems in a formulaic frame that indubitably would have restricted its *transforming* message and constrained the influence of chaos. Instead, the form of “The Falcon” is congruent with its content. Its content describes trees which “are lovers who live in [the Falcon’s] heart and sing [his] songs” (“Faṣl al-Rabī” 19). Such “trees” cannot be parsed or assimilated by the symbolic order as if they are mere signifiers. Hence, the similarity of the titles “Tree” in the last ten poems of “The Falcon” – as if ‘Abd al-Raḥmān is wandering in a forest with no marker, where one tree cannot be differentiated from the next – which is precisely what signifier-chains do to signifiers they attach to: They create a differentiation gradient that generate meaning syntagmatically thereby parsing and affixing meaning in a specific historically-determined orientation. Instead, the reader is left disoriented, as if he cannot map history, nor can he determine the future in relation to this history. When he reads “The Falcon,” he is subjected to a certain kind of anxiety that is somewhat similar to what ‘Abd al-Raḥmān may have felt with

²⁷ “Shajarah 69” is the “Shajarah” or “Tree” poem on page 69.

his brother's death – as if his *time for comprehending* will be indefinitely extended since he cannot make a choice as to what each tree signifies.

In regard to “The Falcon’s” form, I have examined how its structure is correspondingly shaped like a tree whose branches, i.e. sections or poems, keep on dividing and subdividing beyond the singular path that symbolic history unwinds for it. I have argued that this is exactly how history operates in “The Falcon.” Instead of one journey being determined by a stable symbolic order, I have a multitude of journeys, each going its separate way, reaching an end that is a beginning – a new branching and a new division. I would like to point out that in chaos theory, a tree-form, particularly a tree-form similar to the one the “The Falcon” takes, is associated with fractal geometry and chaos (Lorenzelli 169). A specific pattern, in this case a (Y) bifurcation, can repeat endlessly: A trunk bifurcates into two branches which ceaselessly bifurcates in turn until the whole of space is territorialized. I will not go into the math of fractal geometry that makes trees, or certain trees, “chaotic,” nor is the representation of “The Falcon’s” form a fractal pattern per se. The principle here, if not the math, is the same – branches whose locales never converge on the same space / events / symbols – or conversely, an entropic history that branches in a manner that appears haphazard since it neither originates from a stable symbolic order nor maps, delineates or relates to the same “spatial” future.

The results of this are entropic narratives, bifurcating branches and chaotic symbols which are continuously becoming and changeable, which are in constant change, which are changing, which have already changed, which will change again. At a fundamental level, this is what “The Falcon” conveys: The Adonisean ‘Abd al-Raḥmān is chaos personified. Chaos, to quote James Gleick, “is a science of process rather than state, of becoming rather than being” (5). This is perhaps the crucial

difference between ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and the Lacanian analysand: The analysand has to rewrite his history; which is to say, he has to *become* in order to be (*Écrits* 300). The Falcon, on the other hand, he exists – he *is* in order to *become*.

Chapter II

The Wound Outlasts the Wearer: History, Symbolic Spheres, Coins and Chaos in the Works of Derek Walcott

History and Walcott

Derek Walcott's "argument" with history is one of the most debated topics in the postcolonial field. Expository opinions have ranged from the sympathetic to the critical, and poems such as "The Schooner Flight," *Omeros* and "The Sea is History" have been exhaustively appraised to such an extent that it does not seem that I can add more to the existing literature. My chapter will distinguish itself by assessing two things: how chaos impinges on history, and how the Caribbean's socio-symbolic order is chaotic in a manner that disallows pure signifiers from fully determining the present. Using critics such as Benítez-Rojo, Jahan Ramazani and John Kraus, I will examine Walcott's play *Drums and Colours* and his epic poem *Omeros* since in both texts there are two tropes which, I will argue, *mimic* the Queen's letter whose circulation in Parisian society creates its symbolic order. Although these two tropes may appear to be signifiers, they belong to the (dis)order of chaos and as such, the symbolic circuit they draw can never be closed and stabilized. I will also use, to a minor degree, "The Sea is History" and "Koenig of the River" and I will assess them in relation to each other as they fortuitously provide opposing ways "history" itself may (mal)function. Here, my comparative evaluation will argue that a chaotic Caribbean symbolic order, as seen in "The Sea is History," can allow its subjects to overcome the absence of history, unlike the stable western symbolic order which manifests in "Koenig of the River."

In the previous chapter, I have linked chaos to complexity theory and suspended time. In this chapter, I will relate chaos to mimicry, Kristeva's notion of abjection, the Lacanian real, the second law of thermodynamics and, more importantly, Benítez-Rojo's notion of an ineffable underlying "chaotic" pattern of Nature which is defined by him as having "dynamic states of regularities that repeat themselves globally" and which connect the Caribbean islands together (2).²⁸ As with Benítez-Rojo, chaos in my dissertation is particularized to the condition of its interactions. Through my evaluation, I hope to propose that what appears to be a signifier in Walcott's writing such as the coin in *Drums and Colours* and the wound in *Omeros*, i.e. that which bears similarities to the Queen's letter in Poe's tale, merely *mimics* a signifier since it not only relates to the socio-cultural elements that fashion its structure but also gestures to forces that open this closed symbolic circuit and upend the progress of "symbolic" history within its folds.

The Iguana and the Inverted Newspaper: Mimicking History

The history of the Caribbean is fraught with trauma. Its history is the Middle Passage where, to quote Shabine in "The Schooner Flight," slaver ships with "flags of all nations" hold their chained unwilling human cargo in their pitch-black bowels, "below deck too deep," carrying them towards the New World and a future whose only absolute certainty is bondage (228-229). Its history is shaped by what Benítez-Rojo calls the "plantation machine" which designates economic processes initially installed by Europeans on Caribbean soil to simultaneously control and regulate, even to this day, the flow of wealth and goods while reinforcing colonial or neo-colonial

²⁸ Benítez-Rojo's derived his notion of chaos from the science of chaos theory.

hegemony.²⁹ Its history, according to one historian, encompasses the death and ethnocide of its indigenous people. Between 1492 and 1550, “a nexus of slavery, overwork and famine killed more natives in the Caribbean than smallpox, influenza or malaria” (Reséndez 17).

In *Omeros*, the first witness to history on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia is an iguana, and what the lizard records of the death of a race is nothing save oblivion. History’s traumatic event is effaced and rejected from the annals of its memory. It is possible it has not even registered. Even as Walcott writes “Aruacs” in his epic poem, the indigenous race disappears from the reptilian vision (*Omeros* 2). Not that the saurian ever cared about human machinations and intrigue. What remains in its attention is not history, nor is history ever its concern. Its concern is the here and now – and in the here and now there are men cutting trees, shaping the environment of the island to their will.

Much like this lizard that gave St. Lucia its Aruac name Iounalao, to Derek Walcott, history does not matter: “It has never mattered, what has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of the races, what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention” (*Critical* 53). When Walcott rejects history, or claims its peripherality to the Caribbean present, he is doing so in a specific way. He is rejecting, for example, Naipaul’s take on Caribbean history – and this rejection begins with mimicry. If the poem “Laventille” launches itself from Naipaul’s statements that the West Indian region has no history since it is in a constant state of flux, Walcott’s essay “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry,” from which the previous statement is

²⁹ Plantation machines “produced no fewer than ten million African slaves and thousands of coolies.” It turned out “mercantile capitalism, industrial capitalism... African underdevelopment... [and] Caribbean population. It “produced imperialism, wars, colonial blocs, rebellions, repressions” to name but a few consequences and effects (Benítez-Rojo 9).

taken, operates in a different manner to subvert, through mimicry, what the St. Lucian believes is another of Naipaul's critical positions.

In Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, the politician Ralph Singh claims that West Indians are "mimic men" who pantomime Europe, whether it is in its guise as a metropolitan centre, an entrenched symbolic order or a palpable civilization whose historical achievements and illustrious monuments dwarf that of the West Indies. Naipaul's vision confirms a perception of West Indian society as "nihilistic, uncreative, and as the title indicates, purely imitative." It shows its politicians falling back on "mimicry, corruption, and racial prejudice to palliate their total powerlessness" (Arnold 144). They are, in Naipaul's words, "mimic men [who] pretend to be real, to be learning, to be preparing [themselves] for life" (*Mimic Men* 175).

It is a damning indictment, and in reaction, Derek Walcott, as he does in "Laventille," does not disavow Naipaul's opinion or condemn his polemical view outright. Rather, he alchemizes the meaning of "mimicry." He "mimics" its Naipaulian definition but with a difference – he validates Naipaul's critical judgement to undermine it. History does not exist; the Caribbean is filled with mimic men – but history is irrelevant. As for mimicry, to mimic does not mean to be unoriginal, far from it. "This is not the force of the current," writes Walcott. "And that its surface may be littered with the despairs of broken systems and of failed experiments, that the river, stilled, may reflect, mirror, mimic other images, but that is not its depth" (*Critical* 52-53).

In agreement with Walcott, Homi Bhabha states that mimicry sabotages the validity of a history whose aim is to consolidate genealogies, erect and authenticate the great monuments of the past, invest a nation's narrative and symbolic order with the

mystique of triumph and progress and offer it its validation as a nation (Bhabha 121-127). Let me explain Bhabha's idea through Walcott's "Koenig of the River." Koenig, whose name means "king" in German and whose people are "the German eagle and the British lion" (95), has come to the Caribbean to "expiate the sins of savages / to tame them as he would tame [the] river" (27-28). Instead of triumphing in his endeavour, the man, sailing up the currents from the river's mouth, feels a sense of alienation and dispossession – the empire that he has sought is no more. History in the Caribbean has turned over a new page and all that is left of his empire, of his history, is what time ultimately makes of everything – detritus, ruins.

The Caribbeans who have inherited the land vacated by Koenig and his empire mimic his affectations and culture – but this kind of mimicry does not comfort him or provoke his contempt inasmuch as it induces his anxiety. Homi Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture* that "the *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (126). The "savages" whose "taming" has been undergone by white missionaries, whose sense of self or symbolic subjectivity is allegedly a pale reflection of the culture of their conquerors reveal themselves as both "resemblance and menace" (123). Their mirroring of Koenig's symbolic order does not produce a "recognizable Other," an inferior subject of a difference that is "*almost the same but not quite*" (127). Rather, what occurs through mimicry is a mode of representation that "marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable" (Bhabha 125).³⁰

³⁰ Bhabha's analysis in *The Location of Culture* uses Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*. See p. 125.

In his journey, Koenig encounters “a top-hatted native reading an inverted / newspaper” (78-79). Seeing the man’s mimesis of customary European clothes and habits, instead of contempt, Koenig feels that he is the one laid bare and being read like the “newspaper / or a hundred year novel” (83-84). The colonist gazes at the colonized and the colonized gazes back. It is his assumptions and certainties that are shaken, not the native’s. The event, which disguises itself as mockery, reveals itself to be a threat to the German’s sense of self. He is made visible – gone is the mystique of his actions, gone is the glory of his history and its rationalizations. What is disclosed is something insidious: an inability to use his own symbolic order to justify the nobility of his beliefs or make them acceptable in his eyes. The signifiers that constitute his being fails him; his illusions fall from his eyes. He realizes the crimes of his empire beyond any heroicized symbolic narrative that may obfuscate them: He is compelled to see, to his horror, the immediacy of the trauma his countrymen have caused in the Caribbean – the ghosts of Indians his empire had slaughtered.

What mimicry does is efface the symbolic violence of the symbolic order – it prevents the “mortification” of the “thing,” the trauma itself, into chains of symbols that validate and support the heroicized historicization of the narrative of empire. To redirect and modify Žižek through Bhabha, mimicry prevents the discourse of the colonial Master whose “‘really existing’ space of discourse is ultimately grounded in a violent imposition of a Master-Signifier which is *stricto sensu* ‘irrational’: it cannot be further grounded in reasons. It is the point at which one can only say that ‘the buck stops here’” (*Violence* 62). This is to say, through the machinations of mimicry, the buck does not stop before it is passed to the native. The colonized may now articulate a discourse unsanctioned by the colonist’s symbolic order, a discourse that may upend the illusory appearance of “humanism” or “equality” which the Master’s discourse

sustains to maintain an un-reciprocal balance of asymmetric power in his encounter with the alien “other.”

To Walcott, mimicry confounds, mocks and undermines history. It does not operate diachronically from a point of historical origins inasmuch as it uses what is there in the present. It is what repeats in an entropic multitude of differences until the “end product” may find itself so far removed and *distinct* from the “origins” that has birthed it that it cannot but be categorized as an entirely different genus. In the “Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry,” Walcott gives the example of the calypso, a type of Afro-Caribbean music:

The banning of African drumming led to the discovery of the garbage can cover as a potential musical instrument whose subtlety of range, transferred to the empty oil drum, increases yearly, and the calypso itself emerged from a sense of mimicry, of patterning its form both on satire and self-satire. The impromptu elements of the calypso, like the improvisation and invention of steelband music, supersedes its traditional origins, that is, the steeldrum supersedes the attempt to copy melody from the xylophone and the drum, the calypso supersedes its ancient ritual forms in group chanting. From the viewpoint of history, these forms originated in imitation if you want, and ended in invention.

(*Critical* 55)

Mimicry indicates that there is *something* going on in the Caribbean. Mimicry is a thing of threat, originality and chaos because it does not fit precisely within historical parameters. It is not merely a pale reflection of a stable western symbolic order. It is not encapsulated by symbolic history. Mimicry gestures towards a certain resonance that pushes the track of history as it fashions the present away from

symbolic determinism. Mimicry reveals a certain dissonance in the Caribbean – cultural signifiers that *almost* operate in the same fashion as their western equivalents but not quite.

The reason for Koenig's disorientation is that the top-hatted native, in his mimicry, is familiar to Koenig. His actions indicate a symbolic subjectivity that the German can relate to. The native's "discourse" should be symbolically intelligible and unthreatening – what with the missionaries disseminating the discernible signifier-chains of Koenig's own social order. However, inasmuch the native's subjectivity is the same, inasmuch as Koenig anticipates the predictability of "intelligible symbols" he can use as "signposts" to orient himself, the space around him unfolds in a manner that is not predicated on the accuracy of any "symbolic map." Mimicry may demonstrate familiarity, but this familiarity is uncanny. It is familiar enough to be threatening since it accentuates the alien presence of a radical alterity that *knows* how to mimic the effect of a signifier or that which is intelligible but whose function gestures to *something* else.

I believe that mimicry gestures to chaos inasmuch as it gestures to the demesne of the signifier. It straddles the two spheres in a manner that disallows history's structuration by the symbolic. In the next section, I have found it critical to further evaluate history and its symbols, this time alongside Derek Walcott's play *Drums and Colours*. This play is the only work by Walcott assessed by Benítez-Rojo in relation to chaos – and as such, my reassessment of it will prove crucial and set the premise for my hypothesis as to the manner a postcolonial Caribbean symbolic order operates through mimicry. It will also lay the grounds for my subsequent evaluation of *Omeros*.

Walcott and the Symbolic

To Walcott, history is a thing to be rejected since it is riddled with trauma and violence. The present, being determined or evoked by the past, is also riddled with trauma. History's body is a closed body, when history repeats in the present, it is the present whose body closes. In "Laventille," the correlation between the enslavement of slaves (history) and the denizen's own poverty (present) is made explicit, unambiguous and horrifically overdetermined. When Walcott writes of the "grille of light" that "clangs shut... in bondage" to withhold his people from the "world below... and beyond," he is not talking of the enslaved Africans but of present day Caribbeans ("Laventille" 86-88). In "The Tales of the Island," when the optimistic potential for change in the present-day Caribbean is discussed relative to voting and contemporary politics, the speaker ironically reminds his compatriots of the improbability of such an outcome. The history of their enslaved ancestors is very much alive – so alive in fact that in any referendum or election, they "will outvote the quick" and stall any true progress that may be enacted (Ch. 4: 9).

To Walcott, Caribbean history is a tool to remember, but never resolve, affliction, victimhood, suffering, colonization, pain, genocides, enslavements, indentured servitude, poverty, exile, the Middle Passage. History compels helplessness, intractable horror, inevitability. The historically constituted Caribbean subject of the present, whose symbolic order and its signifiers are determined by his culture and its history, remains stuck in a narrative of pain. What this produces, Walcott asserts, is a literature of "servitude" which tautologically repeats the tribulations of the past, a literature "of recrimination and despair... of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or... of remorse written by the descendants of masters" (*What the Twilight* 36).

Neither is this the only take Walcott has on history. Beyond history-as-trauma, there is history-as-Africa. This African history attempts to be continuous with the Caribbean present by bridging one continent with another thereby passing over the Atlantic with its slave ships, bypassing the trauma of the Middle Passage altogether while simultaneously bestowing a historical narrative to a Caribbean that is ostensibly without one. A rootless dispossessed people graft themselves to historical roots as ancient as those of Europe. In one fell swoop the trauma of the past is bypassed, history is rediscovered, and imperial Europe is denied its pervasive hegemonic cultural influence. Africa and the Caribbean are fused together seamlessly, and the present moves forward. The movement that propounds such a fusion and return to Africa, i.e. history-as-Africa, while celebrating that continent as a home for Afro-descendants, is Négritude.

If Walcott rejects history-as-trauma, history-as-Africa does not fare any better. In *What the Twilight Says*, he is dismissive of those who view Africa as some lost Eden that is to be refound again. To him, there is no straightforward connection between Africa and the Caribbean. In “The Star-Apple Kingdom,” the St. Lucian compares the islands of the Caribbean basin to turtles trailing one another, leaving their location and migrating towards a continent they hardly remember. “They yearned for Africa,” the author writes. “They were lemmings drawn by magnetic memory / to an older death” (325-326).

Walcott is using the wildly popular misconception that lemmings commit mass suicide by jumping off cliffs. The word “magnetic,” although carrying the connotation of being seduced or mesmerized to death, may also refer to “animal magnetism” or magnetoception where animals including turtles are compelled by instinct to use the earth’s magnetic field to orient themselves towards the beach from where they hatched

– a literal return to origins that is fraught with peril. In the poem, the speaker could understand the turtles’ “natural direction / but they would drown, sea eagles circling them” (329-330). A return to Africa, the speaker overtly suggests, can be nothing but a foolish endeavour.

To Walcott, history has moved on. Although some of the Caribbean’s cultural elements may have their origins in Africa, this does not mean that the link to that continent should be a “magnetic instinct” that slavishly compels a historically determined journey back to some lost Edenic birthplace. Neither is Africa the only “hatching ground” of the Caribbean people, nor is it the sole source of their cultural heritage or tools. As seen in “Laventille,” Walcott may have been critical of those who imitate western affectations and habits but even if the colonist’s aggrandizing accounts and narratives of history are to be rejected, his literature, culture and language are another matter. Such tools should not be dismissed but rather, they must be appropriated and utilized to express a Caribbean ethos. One does not, Walcott affirms, discard or reject what can be useful, nor disparage those who use them, or treat them as unknowingly oblivious victims because they learned the language of the imperium, the language of the “master.”

New World poets who see the “classic style” as stasis must see it also as historical degradation, rejecting it as the language of the master. This self-torture arises when the poet also sees history as language, when he limits his memory to the suffering of the victim. Their admirable wish to honour the degraded ancestor limits their language to phonetic pain, the groan of suffering, the curse of revenge. The tone of the past becomes an unbearable burden, for they must abuse the master or hero in his own language, and this implies self-deceit. Their view of Caliban is of the

enraged pupil.³¹ They cannot separate the rage of Caliban from the beauty of his speech when the speeches of Caliban are equal in their elemental power to those of his tutor. The language of the torturer mastered by the victim. This is viewed as servitude, not as victory.

(What the Twilight 38-39)

In Walcott, history-as-trauma is to be rejected, history-as-Africa or Europe is to be rejected. In the Caribbean's historical void, it is not history but the imagination that is necessary to move forward: "I had no nation now but the imagination," asserts Shabine in "The Schooner Flight." In the poem, the man dismisses a symbolic order dependent on the march of history and commemorates a Caribbean world that is to be shaped by loss and the triumph of the imagination over history's absence (151).

Yet, the paradox in Walcott is that history is not entirely dismissed either. Edward Baugh argues in *Derek Walcott* that it is a colonial-style history that the poet rejects, not history in its entirety: A history which is "conceived of as linear, a time-bound chain of cause and effect, abuse and recrimination, the worship of fact and historical time" – a cohesive history of aggrandizing monuments and lofty grandiloquent events, or a history of victimhood and suffering (9). What is needed, and what Walcott champions instead, is a history that is redemptive, that "continues in the idea of endurance, [that]... even continues in the idea of a sublime gaiety that goes beyond suffering" (*Conversations* 155-156).

By this argument, even Négritude or history-as-Africa, when it fulfils such a historical function, becomes accepted by the St. Lucian so long as it is used as a tool to

³¹ Since the 1950s, writers from the Caribbean and Africa contend that Shakespeare's Caliban in *The Tempest* embodies neglected meanings and a different message than the typical scholarship of that era allows. Instead of being seen as a monster, Caliban is recast as an enslaved victim "who stands for the countless victims of European imperialism and colonization. Like Caliban... colonized people were disinherited, exploited and subjugated. Like him, they learned a conqueror's language and perhaps that conqueror's values" (Vaughan 144).

realize a Caribbean self. As Paula Burnett argues, although he is averse to the polarization that Négritude privileges by propping up of the “formerly negative pole” of Africa on the expense of the European pole, Walcott nevertheless still undermines the Western Homeric canon by injecting his writings with African themes (18).³² Elsewhere, Shane Graham holds a similar position: Walcott may feel that “there is little to be gained from attempting to go back to Africa or recuperate the precolonial African past.” Nevertheless, “Achille’s dream journey back to Africa [in *Omeros*] lacks the implicit scorn that characterizes many statements the younger Walcott made about Afrocentric movements” (108-109). Even the younger Walcott is not altogether censorious towards Négritude. As a journalist following the Négritude movement in 1964, he wrote that although it did not map a Caribbean’s identity, “Négritude and the assertion of the African personality” have offered an “assertion of pride, but not of our complete identity, since that is mixed and shared with other races... and have restored a purpose and dignity to the descendants of slaves” (*Critical* 23).

Walcott’s take on history appears to be complex, even contradictory. His disavowal of history and his inconsistent stances may point out to a symbolic constitution that is beholden to the very thing he disavows. Walcott, as the subject of the enunciation, hides his anxiety by assuming the persona of the subject of the proposition. His affirmation of history’s irrelevance hides the fear of history’s pervasive influence. One cannot transcend history according to Lacan, even if in “The Rome Report” he expresses the opinion that an individual can “rewrite it.” However, he can only rewrite history as to divest it from the “mirage” that “perpetuates in symbols... [and] in which [he finds] himself trapped” (*Écrits* 262). In other words,

³² See in particular Paula Burnett’s chapter “‘The Echo of the Shape’: The Metamorphosis of the Homeric.” *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*. U P of Florida, 2001, pp. 281-313.

rewriting history is merely a “trimming” away of its false chapter so that its “truth” can be more fully realized. It is the excision of the imaginary register’s influence from symbolic history – the disclosure of the subject of the enunciation as he finally takes the place of the subject of the proposition.

A Lacanian assessment of Derek Walcott may yield the unsurprising result that he is, regardless of his disavowal, a subject beholden to his culture’s colonially influenced history. Even if he denies its effects in his region, he still remains, in the account of Trinidad-born writer Amon Saba Saakana, “an unconscious vector of colonial education and consciousness” who reveals a “primarily colonial consciousness in the treatment of characters and situations” (*Colonial* 14). By privileging the private life over the communal in his poetry and essays, Saakana argues that Walcott is not bypassing or transcending history, he is very much within its boundaries even as he denies this. Walcott’s strategy of “personalizing a collective experience of holocaust” makes him fall into “the imperial cry of personal and private hurt,” no more (*Colonial* 15):

There is nothing anonymous about memory or filial love: they are visible products of history. To escape this reality is to suffer from a psychic trauma which recoils in fear and subordination. It is the racial composition of Walcott, part white, part black, which is the basis of his conundrum. Thus, locked into his colour, he refuses to confront history and apportion blame. Forever suppressed, the demons of psychological colonialism are never exiated. The crisis of the Caribbean writer is his inability to understand the intricacies of history. The colonial status of his society, whether achieving independence or not, coupled with a colonial education and metropolitan dreams of success, inescapably

contributed to the traumatic literature of the Caribbean writer. (*Colonial* 15)

Saakana's interpretation converges with Lacan's opinion on critical points, particularly when it comes to history. Saakana's argument is a psychoanalytic critique using material dialectics where Walcott's false rejection of history is a pathology facilitated by his culturally induced "schizophrenia." Schizophrenia is defined as "psychic memory in conflict with material reality" (*Colonized* 44), but I can, without being too inaccurate and with some caveats, change this definition to a subject's ego-arranged history in conflict with his true symbolic history.

If critical literature and Walcott's various contradictory statements support a Lacanian interpretation, I would like to propose that there is *something* else going on in Walcott's poetry. Contradiction may indicate "neurotic" inconsistency, yet contradiction also indicates a performative quality that gestures to *something* else. I can call this *something* else Homi Bhabha's "third space of enunciation" which makes "the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, [and] destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code... [while] properly [challenging] our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force" (54). I can call this something else "schizophrenia," the label Saakana so uninspiringly stamped the poet with but which, when assessed from a different angle, proves to carry positive connotations. In her evaluation of Walcott's work, Burnett contends that the "'breakdown' of the schizophrenic [is in reality] a 'breakthrough,' an essentially creative and revolutionary process, a rejection of an intolerable order" (18).

Anti-Oedipus, Deleuze and Guattari's book from which Burnett derives her criticism, is essentially a critique of Freud and an argument for "schizoanalysis" as

opposed to “Oedipalization” which reduces a literary object of consumption to a standard material that conforms to the social Oedipal order.³³ A “creative schizophrenic” is able to subvert the “Oedipal complex,” which means he can also bypass the symbolic since the Oedipal triangular relationship, as I have assessed in my introduction, is the building block of the symbolic order. Schizophrenia, states Burnett, is a “revolutionary sign” that postulates “the disruption of the Western-defined ‘norm’ in terms that resonate profoundly with the Caribbean experience” (19).

Instead of alienation being merely an indication of a pathology that gestures towards an inability to cope or alter the march of history as Saakana would have it, to Burnett, the character Achille in *Omeros* marks a “complex sense of the plural individual which contests the Freudian notion of schizophrenia as pathology” (22). Instead of unimaginatively being labeled a character with mental disorders, Achille is thereby defined as a complex subject “whose creative response to the socially induced trauma of alienation enables [him] to outwit the conspiracy of history... to assert [his] full humanity, if anything enhanced by the depth of [his] suffering and the difficulty of working through the potentially crippling negatives” (23).

Walcott’s statements on history may appear inconsistent and paradoxical, but this inconsistency does not merely gesture to neurosis or schizophrenia as pathology. Even his simultaneous rejection and fascination with Négritude is a possible indication of schizophrenic “creativity.” Belinda Jack argues in *Négritude and Literary Criticism* that while Négritude is associated with a *specific* consciousness and a state of being, “the actual history of the idea itself reveals a quite remarkable instability” (3). She goes on to call it an “unstable critical trope” (10). Her book assesses the term as it is

³³ For more on schizophrenia and schizophrenic creativity in relation to Burnett’s usage, see pp. 133-134 and pp. 359-362 in Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Robert Hurley et al., Athlone Press, 1984.

modified and changed across diverse writers associated with the movement. As such, Walcott's own coming to terms with his Afro-Caribbean identity may be termed, from a different point of view, as a version of Négritude. This version is not the prevalent version of a seemingly isolationist "militant" Afro-centric movement that a younger Walcott, as a journalist, has written against. It is a version that may fall, with some caveats, under the umbrella of Aimé Césaire's broad definition: "Négritude... is a concrete rather than an abstract coming to consciousness... I have always thought that the black man was searching for his identity. And it has seemed to me that if what we want is to establish this identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of what we are" (91-92).

If the "concrete consciousness" that Walcott attempts to find is not entirely congruent with Césaire's own, it is still a version that fits with Fanon's writings. If the identity and the "first action of the black man is a *reaction*" against the white colonizer which gives birth, for example, to Césaire's Négritude movement, then eventually, one must go beyond this dualism of colonial discourse that imprisons the black man in such a binary where his identity is still dependent on the white colonial other to be formulated (*Black Skin* 23). Walcott's discourse, although sometimes inconsistent, decisively goes beyond this dichotomy while never losing sight of the fact that the Caribbeans are "African-sourced people" who should "recognize [their] African origins but not to romanticize them" (*Conversations* 18,46).

In the following parts of the chapter, by assessing Walcott's play *Drums and Colours* and his epic poem *Omeros*, I will argue that the inconsistencies in Walcott's stance gesture to the underlying structure of chaos whose manifestation on the symbolic scene is expressed in a paradox. My position is that it is chaos which explicates Walcott's simultaneous affirmation and rejection of history in its many

guises – and this will manifest in his literary writing in a similar vein. The next section of the chapter shall begin with an assessment of *Drums and Colours*. It is the only work of Walcott that Benítez-Rojo engages with in the *Repeating Island*, and I have found that the conclusion that he reaches is relevant to my own evaluation since I will show that the play can be interpreted as an allegory of a West Indian symbolic order as it coalesces and comes into being, weaving itself from chaos and disparate contradictory historical threads.

Drums and Colours: A First Reading through Benítez-Rojo

Drums and Colours, commissioned by the University of the West Indies, was first performed in 1958 in Port of Spain as part of the West Indian Festival of the Arts to inaugurate the newly minted West Indian Federation. The validation of the newly created nation necessitated the “production of a history appropriate to the politics of the Federation” and to do so, Walcott had to fashion “a consensual narrative.” In *Drums and Colours*, this consensual narrative had the aim of binding the different nations together into one sociopolitical entity (Thieme 64). According to Benítez-Rojo, one way in which Walcott produced a West Indian history in the play is by focusing on four events seen through the eyes of four major historical figures relevant to the Caribbean: the “discovery” of America through Columbus, the quest for El Dorado through Raleigh, the Morant Bay Rebellion through George William Gordon and the Haitian Revolution through Toussaint L’Ouverture.

Walcott’s choice of events, integrated in the play in a non-linear ahistorical fashion, appears to be arbitrary, but according to Benítez-Rojo, by collapsing the timelines together and allowing the lives of the four characters to unfurl side by side, Walcott uncloaks the force that drives history in the Caribbean into a cycle of trauma

and counter-trauma (302). By revealing the violence that underlies the social order, Walcott hopes that his region can break away from history-as-trauma by renting the umbilical cord that tethers the present to the past, freeing it from a toxic replicating (co)dependency that, figuratively speaking, turns the child into its parent – thereby delivering the West Indies into a cohesive federation with a stable symbolic order. Benítez-Rojo goes on to call Walcott’s management of historical themes in *Drums and Colours* “neopositivist” precisely due to this manipulation of events (300).

There is some truth to Benítez-Rojo’s designation. The play, in its assessment of the Caribbean past, has the overt agenda of creating and inventing a united unfractured West Indies. There is a facile didactic humanism in *Drums and Colours* where Walcott’s examination of history is manipulated to reveal the culpability of both colonist and colonized and, in Bruce King’s words, to “[teach] that all races and nations are alike, that revenge is wrong, that empires and personal life end in failure and tragedy” (138). The lesson itself is there to performatively create and invent a united unfractured reality of “Anglo-Caribbeanness” that would, despite the implicit trauma on which the history of the region cycles, assemble its chaotic fragmentary experiences into a symbolically-cohesive maxim that is delivered in the epilogue by the character Pompey as a call for, and a representation of, the unification of the disparate West Indian nations into a new symbolic order – that of the newly minted Federation:

So, you men of every creed and class,
We know you is brothers, when you playing Mass,
White dance with black, black with Indian,
But long time, it was Rebellion.
No matter what your colour, now is steel and drums.

We dancing together with open arms.

But if you listen now, you going see,

The painful birth of democracy. (*Haitian* 120)

Can I postulate that the play, through Walcott's manipulation of history, is able to transcend trauma and the historical circumstances of the Caribbean? Benítez-Rojo's designation of "neopositivism" indicates the opposite. The ultimate timeline of the Caribbean may very well be a repetition of the past as determined by the violent history of the region, and it is possible that Walcott himself knows this. By the end of the play, in reply to Pompey's didactic monologue, the crowd raises its collective voice to deliver an ambiguous chant that seems to threaten the Caribbean region with violence again. The crowd's voice insinuates that a repetition of history may be at hand even as the act itself may have been inserted there as a stop-gap measure and a warning, presumably to the citizens of the newly minted Federation, against such a repetition: "Bend the angle on them is to blow them down, is to blow them down. / When the bayonet charge is the rod of correction. /.../ Till rebellion" (*Haitian* 121).

The actual West Indian Federation was a short-lived experiment – it never got to have a "stable" symbolic order. If the play in 1958 was a celebration of the newly formed nation, it can only be read now as a piece of literature that haunts and gestures towards the unfulfilled hopes and dreams of many Caribbeans whose expectations had led them to disappointment as the Federation dissolved with the withdrawal of Jamaica followed by Trinidad and Tobago.³⁴ According to John Kraus in "Through Loins and Coins: Derek Walcott's Weaving of the West Indian Federation," the islands that made the Federation were too culturally and economically disparate to fashion one national symbolic entity. They may have had the commonality of being British colonies but

³⁴ See Wallace p. 274.

some of the distinct communities had “different literary traditions, different histories, and little historical interaction, the islands of the Federation could not be considered a nation. Which is to say, there [is] nothing connecting them” (61).

There were countries like Jamaica who wanted a loose federation while others wanted a strong one. There were movements which privileged the Afro-Caribbean experience, sometimes at the expense of the Asian or Indo-Caribbeans who might have felt left out. Insular islandism, particularly in Jamaica, played its part in undermining the forging of a united identity. Furthermore, there was no consensus on what it meant to be a “West Indian” and those who attempted to create the Federation found it difficult to translate undefined “romanticized ideals of West Indianness into the concrete aspect of nation building” (Duke 214).³⁵

In “Monotonies of History,” Chris Bongie argues that even Walcott himself is not able to transcend his own history. He contends that *The Haitian Trilogy*, which includes *Drums and Colours*, can be read as a rhetorical performance where Walcott attempts to hide his anxiety by disavowing the “little *clerc* (to whom) he denies being” (222). This little *clerc* is the character Vastey in *The Haitian Trilogy*, a man modelled on the real complex historical figure Pompeii de Vastey whose anti-colonial sentiments against the French colonists in the 17th and 18th centuries foreshadowed the more censorious and militant opinions of contemporary political African movements.

Bongie argues that with his dismissal of history, Walcott progressively flattens the past, streamlining history’s complexity to a naïve misleading didacticism that refuses to engage with the multifarious factors that lead to its existence. The multiple components of history are elided or ignored in favour of an unsophisticated narrative

³⁵ For more about the conflicts that caused the dissolution of the West Indian Federation see in particular pp. 183-264 of Eric Duke’s *Building a Nation: Caribbean Federation in the Black Diaspora*. U P of Florida, 2016.

where both the colonist and colonized are equally culpable in their barbarity. The fictional militant Vastey, who is a sympathetic if flawed figure at the beginning of the trilogy, is sundered from the machinations of history to become a sort of villainous petty caricature whose crimes is on par with the atrocities that the colonists committed. Bongie claims that this reduction correlates with a young Walcott's anxieties about his "mulatto identity."

Both Walcott and the real Vastey stand for a united Haiti, and neither ignore the racial divide between "North-Negro" and "South Mulatto" leading to tragedy post-independence. Unlike the St. Lucian, however, the real Vastey does not simplify this complex issue by inaccurately and "repeatedly associating the figure of the mulatto with *mixed* (Euro-African) racial and cultural origins" (244). Walcott's reduction of the North / South Haitian divide to such a straightforward opinion has more to do with his own feeling of dispossession and alienation as a "mulatto" than any true historic assessment of the past.

Walcott changes Vastey from a grey flawed character who initially stands for the ambivalence of a young poet / "little *clerc*" whose identity has not yet "reified" to authoritatively condemn and overcome the machinations of violence and history, to the one-dimensional character whose exaggerated faults serve as a model against which the more mature Walcott can easily attack and censure as a figure guilty of atrocities similar to that of the colonist. By scapegoating and consigning Vastey to the rubbish-bin of history, it is Walcott that proves his triumph over history, over his younger self / Vastey. Bongie encourages the reader to consider the arc of the plays in *The Haitian Trilogy* like a circle, "one that repeatedly doubles back to a ghostly historical figure who, where he not so thoroughly disfigured, might well be thought to bear an

uncommon resemblance to the man who bid this scapegoat die so that he, the legendary artist, might live” (250).

Bongie’s assessment is relevant as it gestures to a Walcott whose disavowal of history reveals an anxiety that points to a historically constituted symbolic subjectivity that is unwilling to challenge its Eurocentric sympathies. Walcott’s plays in *The Haitian Trilogy* construct a West Indian history where the imperial “master” seems to be as blameable as the slave. What is then obfuscated is Walcott’s true *symbolic* history as a subject whose symbolic constitution is as flawed as the real Vastey and whose manipulation of history fails. Walcott’s fashioning of the West Indian symbolic order in *Drums and Colours* does not transcend history inasmuch as it obscures it by muddying its water to hide his own interests and fears within it.

Drums and Colours: A Second Reading through Benítez-Rojo

So far, my engagement with the play is derived from Benítez-Rojo’s first assessment of *Drums and Colours*. Unlike Lacanian psychoanalysis where an initial assessment may take Walcott’s narrative at face value to later reveal, in a second reading, the subject of the enunciation hidden under an anxious subject of the proposition unwilling to confront his subjectivity, what Benítez-Rojo seems to be doing in his “first assessment” is relegating both enunciation and proposition to a first reading only to inform the reader, in his second assessment, that the text in *Drums and Colours* does not operate in accordance with symbolic truth or imaginary (mis)recognitions. Beneath the “neopositivist” manipulation of history is a (dis)order that inundates the cultural order in its pure function as a system of signifier chains. Chaos is there and it is through it, not through history, that the text of the play operates.

If there is any cultural unity in the Caribbean, it is not that which belongs to the symbolic order but to chaos. Benítez-Rojo claims that by using the four historical figures, by collapsing the Caribbean's historical eras from whence they came together, by unfurling their lives side by side, Walcott reveals that "Caribbean history is underlaid by a trans-historical order, that is, a ritualistic and self-referential message that always exists in the present... [where] magic coexists with reason, history with myth, the epic sound of the bugle with that of the ritual drumbeat" (Benítez-Rojo 303). In other words, the pattern of history that repeats is not merely the chains of signifiers that cycle their way back to the present.

In the play, the four figures who have committed violence within the Caribbean or had violence committed against them, with the "segments" of their lives placed adjacent to each other, form the elongated body of a snake. This reveals the themes of a Caribbean "body-carnival" whose trans-historical interjection into the chronology of historical events creates the conditions that allows rebirth and regeneration from the obverse of the historical markers of violence and death. The "body" of the four characters is in actuality the locus of the "body-carnival," a ritual "oozing blood and suffering" and representing the old ruler who is to be ambushed in the play by Mano. This character acts as an agent for his people and his name, Benítez-Rojo states, literally means "hand," i.e. the hand of the Caribbean (302). This body-carnival, shaped like a snake, gestures to a (dis)order that confounds history since it does not point back at it. Rather, it is "a self-referential sign that speaks about its own paradox: that of receiving a sacred death in order to give civil *life*. It is precisely this paradox, present in all sacrifices and in the foundation of all religions, that makes it possible for there to be dialogic relations" (300; my emphasis).

Benítez-Rojo's formulation relates well to what I have called "symbolic spheres" in this thesis's introduction – a concept that, in this instance, appears to come into being through the process of chaos and political violence. As such, Walcott's abjuration of Vastey in *The Haitian Trilogy*, and his apportioning of equal culpability between colonizer and colonized when it comes to violence, does not add up when the play *Drums and Colours* is subjected to a second reading. Baron de Vastey himself points out that the violence committed by the slavers does not hold a candle to the violence committed by the Haitian slaves and revolutionaries: "Could we fail to recognize the hand of our tormentors, those who for centuries have tortured and mutilated our fathers? Could we fail to recognize their frightful scheme? The work of the colonists is there for all to see!" (de Vastey 142). Bongie is correct in believing that the anxiety which inundates Walcott's being is a possible indication of Walcott's realization that violence and death may be a necessary process, even if they do not appeal to Walcott's liberal humanism.

Violence in itself may not be a productive force, but it is Fanon who says in *The Wretched of the Earth* that violence is a "cleansing force" necessary to rid the colonized of their "passive, despairing attitude" (51). Violence is not the last step in the act of decolonization even if, to the Martinican, it is a necessary step for the colonized to reclaim their autonomy and sovereignty. It is not something that should be internalized by black individuals, or they will be forever trapped in the white / black dualism that they must ultimately go beyond and would be "unable to be fully actionable human beings" (Gibson 106). Violence in *Drums and Colours* fits this criterion: It does not exist in itself or for its own sake, nor is it the last step to be taken. The production of the paradoxical "self-referential sign" there indicates, in this

instance, the provisional formation of *something* that is the obverse of violence or chaos or death, but which, nevertheless needs it to manifest.

From death comes life, from decay comes regeneration, or to use Walcott's verses in "The Castaway," "We end in earth, in earth began. / In our own entrails, genesis" (18-19). This prescription is antithetical to the machination of a stable symbolic order since the symbolic refutes "death" and pushes it out of its boundaries, according to Lacan. From the rejection of history or from its end comes its beginning, from a paradox that refuses the differentiation of signifiers comes an act of creation outside the boundaries of the symbolic. What is then seen is the process where chaos interpenetrates the signifier in its pure aspect to deliver a message outside its directives and functions.

According to D. E. St. John, in "The Sea is History," the speaker, in answer to a question that implies a contempt for his "ahistorical" region, narrates the tribulations of the Caribbean's "history" by embedding it in Christian symbolism, anthropomorphic animal catalogues and colonialism, and foregrounding it against a fluctuating chaotic seascape. This seascape uses the process of entropy to turn the material of history, particularly colonial history, into rotting matter and ruins only for this very process to produce new forms and vegetation – a "new history" that begins both at life's ending and at the poem's end (St. John 1024). Until finally:

In the salt chuckle of rocks
with their sea pools, there was the sound
like a rumour without any echo

of History, really beginning. (77-80).

St. John reveals that Caribbean history is not entirely marked by the symbolic per se – and neither are Caribbean beginnings which "*cannot be found in words* but

through biological matter itself... [through] the ‘packed cries, the shit, the moaning’ [10-11]... [through] the ‘bone soldered to coral by bone’ [13]... that serves as physical traces of the body” (St. John 1024; my emphasis). Here, my use of entropy qua St. John refers to the second laws of thermodynamics – the decomposition of organic life, the universe tending towards chaos, matter transforming from a higher to a lower energy state. Yet, the meaning of entropy also refers to *something* else: Its meaning doubles, through Benítez-Rojo, into a *paradox*, into the opposite of the law of thermodynamics, into regeneration, ecstatic life, thriving rebirth, verdant vegetation. This paradox finds itself in the poem’s language as well. Even if St. John argues that the Caribbean’s beginning in “The Sea is History” is not marked by words, it is, nevertheless, marked by a linguistic paradox that occurs when the words’ attempt at history also discloses the locus of history’s absence.

The last two lines of the poems is where the linguistically formulated paradox is evoked. By *punctuating* them differently, the two meanings which the two lines generate are read as antonyms, either as “a rumour without any echo of history, really beginning” or “a rumour without any echo. Of history, really beginning.” The former sentence implies that Caribbean beginnings occur “without any echo of history” while the latter suggests that, finally, after all the events that have happened in the Caribbean’s past, history is “really beginning.” This is another iteration in which chaos is showcased in the poem, not merely through material decay, but also through this linguistic syntax where meaning chaotically doubles and differentiates to imply a process that is not symbolically coherent even if it uses symbolic language as its medium: Caribbean history can begin again while, at the same time, the Caribbean can begin without history. It is this paradox that shall inform my understanding of *Drums and Colours*.

So far, my assessment of the play yields only an understanding of the operations of chaos through the body-carnival. I would like to relate chaos to the symbolic order that Walcott fashions for the Federation of the West Indies in his play. For this, I will return to John Kraus and attempt a Lacanian formulation of some of the themes of his essay. According to Kraus, one manner in which Walcott invents the idea of the Federation is by circulating a gold coin across the different timelines of *Drums and Colours*, from one character to another. This coin appears to be a signifier of sorts much like the letter in Poe's tale, and as it exchanges hands, its signification alters. In Quadrado, a Spanish officer on the ship that has brought Columbus to the new world, it is a representation for the massacres he had committed against the indigenous peoples of the Americas. By giving the coin to Paco, a Taino of mixed race whose Amerindian mother was forced to work and die in the very mine from which the gold is possibly extracted, Quadrado is trying to make amends for his crimes. Kraus claims that the coin then becomes a marker of fatherhood – an indication of a bond that is to be made between the conquistador and the Indian: "Think me not as your officer but as your father" (*Haitian* 135).

Through Kraus's analysis, I argue that as the coin circulates, it forms through this circuitous exchange *one* Caribbean society. It creates the symbolic, familial and Oedipal chains that bind signifiers together – chains whose ultimate configurations tie, not only individuals, but also different Caribbean communities to each other until they become *one* seamless and stable symbolic order. In effect, the coin as a signifier gives rise to the society of the West Indies much like the letter in Lacan's analysis of "The Purloined Letter" creates the Parisian society of Poe's tale: The letter circulates from the Queen to the Minister thereby mobilizing the police and finally Dupin who retrieves the letter and returns it, i.e. circulates it, to the Prefect who then returns it to

the Queen where it is presumably destroyed. This tortuous route by which the signifier finally reaches its true destination is the symbolic order par excellence.

The coin in *Drums and Colours* appears to be equivalent to the letter in Poe's tale, but there is *something* else going on there. In point of fact, I can say that the coin is not a "true" signifier inasmuch as it *mimics* one. To begin with, the coin is not merely a signifier, it is also money and this carries with it a signification that is extra-symbolic. At the end of Poe's story, Dupin collects his fee for stealing the letter back from the Minister. Despite how intriguing it may have been to read the letter, the detective does no such thing. His only motive is money, and he takes his monetary remuneration for services rendered. Lacan actually specifies that this is how it should be. At its most fundamental, the socio-cultural order acts through interpersonal relationships and the circulation of gifts. This means the symbolic order, according to one of its underlying laws, operates through reciprocity: Services or "gifts" between families, friends or individuals engender a feeling of symbolic indebtedness that makes a subject beholden to the persons who have helped him, compelling him to attempt to "repay" the favour or help them in return. Dupin, with his retrieval of the letter, would have accrued a significant symbolic credit and the Queen would have felt an obligation to "repay" him in the manner in which such interpersonal relationships operate.

This would have actually destabilized the symbolic order since the Queen's reach and her influence is vast and would have made the way in which she can oblige and indulge Dupin catastrophic to her culture. As I have already expressed, one of the edicts of the symbolic order is to protect itself. What is therefore needed to relieve the Queen's symbolic debt in this instance is not "symbolic credit" but actual money since money, when equated with the signifier, "annihilates every signification" (*Écrits* 37). "Everyone knows," says Lacan in his second seminar, "that money doesn't just buy

things, but that the prices which, in our culture, are calculated at rock-bottom, have the function of neutralising something infinitely more dangerous than paying in money, namely, owing somebody something” (204).

A symbolic debt is much more perilous than a monetary one, and the coin in Walcott’s play *is the anomaly that synthesizes the properties of a signifying signifier with that which “annihilates every signification.”* In other words, the coin serves a paradoxical duality where it is both redraws a Lacanian stable symbolic order and annihilates it – or creates a chaotic symbolic order if I am to use my system. A symbolic debt, after all, is what creates the lack in being that propels a subject to obey the symbolic, and in its absence, chaos ensues: “The symbolic debt, otherwise called the space that lack introduces between signifier and signified, is what keeps the symbolic order moving. The belief that one day this knowledge will be known, makes the subject continue speaking and desiring, hoping that one day all things... will be known” (Davidoff 82).

The coin forges and sunders such symbolic bonds, sometimes simultaneously – any symbolic debt it may create does not operate in a manner which creates a reciprocal balance between different individuals, people or cultural moieties – something which both Lacan and Lévi-Strauss argues is necessary for the stable constitution of a symbolic order.³⁶ Paco’s relationship with Quadrado is forged by the coin itself, and sundered by it when the Taino realizes what the coin signifies of monetary value and what it means to the Conquistador – a marker indicating atonement for the genocide committed against the Amerindians and a cheap price to pay for a guilty conscience. Yet, even this paradox doubles onto itself, and another

³⁶ See *Structural Anthropology* pp. 132-166 where Strauss assesses how culture groups and moieties are organized based on reciprocal exchange of gifts and services.

bond takes place between Quadrado, this time in his guise as the Spanish colonist-subject, and Paco. The coin as a signifier influencing the Taino's actions does what every signifier is meant to do – inscribe onto the psyche its function while simultaneously revealing who its owner is. The Minister, having stolen the letter, act in the manner of the Queen without realizing it. The coin, even as it cancels the familial signifying process that it has implemented, still compels Paco to assume some of the manners of a Spanish colonist-subject. His voyage however reverses the European voyage to the Caribbean. It is to England he goes, compelled by a coin whose metal is possibly extracted from the Caribbean and whose stamp bears the mark of England's enemy and rival.³⁷

It is there that he shall search for wealth, and whether the play intends the irony of a Spanish coin minted from Caribbean gold to compel its bearer onto English soil, I am not sure. The coin, has it been a pure signifier of Spain's symbolic order, should have pushed Paco towards the country of its origins, towards its "lawful destination." Instead, for no apparent reason that I can think of except for the vagaries of chaos and possibly, an ironic mimicry of western orientalism, where one European nation, people or culture may look like another to a Taino Amerindian, the voyage's destination doubles and differentiates under the influence of the coin.

From Spain to the Caribbean, from the Caribbean to England – the route is not circular and does not close to form a stable symbolic order. The coin, almost a signifier, *mimics* the signifier, but is not a signifier. Charged with chaos, cradling the paradox of that which signifies and annihilates signification, it has no true possessor or can be possessed by everyone. Unlike the letter which belongs to a Queen, neither

³⁷ When Quadrado waxes about the "barbarous metal" of the coin, Paco notes that the "pus-colored metal" is called money although, "we did not call it that when in the ground" – the implication being that the gold extracted for the coin may have come from Caribbean mines (*Haitian* 134).

Quadrado, nor Paco, nor Raleigh to which the coin finally passes to are its symbolically lawful owner in the Lacanian sense of the word. There is nothing orienting the coin – no symbolic Law or authority disguised as a monarch or a government institution closes the circuit of its convoluted voyage. The coin “creates” an “open” chaotic dynamic symbolic order of the West Indies – and it does so even if it is not the Caribbean but Spain that has initially fashioned it into symbolic and material being. It does so even if the coin finds itself in England, influencing an Englishman whose symbolic constitution is neither Spanish nor West Indian.

The voyage of the coin continues. If it doubles with Paco, it now triples and differentiates once again with Raleigh’s arrival on the scene. Just before his death, Paco gives the coin to Raleigh, and the coin mimics the signifier in that it compels Raleigh onto a reverse journey back to the Caribbean where his futile and notorious search for El Dorado is undergone. Now a mirror can be seen between all actants who have possessed the circulating coin: They *mimic* each other somehow – it is not quite a sameness of symbolic motives but not enough of a difference to utterly sunder the comparison between all three.

There is an uncanniness going on that can only be partially explained by the symbolic. All of the actants’ motivations are somehow familiar to each other, at least enough to find commonalities, but alien enough for the familiarity to disturb the reader: Quadrado, conqueror of the Caribbean, first possessor of the “coin [that] outlasts its wearer” (*Haitian* 137), dreamer of fame and fortune, searcher of great riches, repentant Spaniard, seeker who never finds, voyager who never reaches... mirrors Paco, voyager to England, secondary possessor of the coin that outlasts its wearer, dreamer of fortune and fame, searcher of great riches, repentant Amerindian,

seeker who never finds, voyager who never reaches... mirrors Raleigh, conqueror of the Caribbean... voyager who never reaches... El Dorado.

Repetition but with a difference, causality but ahistorical, determinism but of chaos, not symbolic history – and for all three men, a voyage, whether literal in the case of Raleigh or metaphorical in the case of the other two – a voyage that leads to El Dorado. There lies the ultimate paradox of the coin without an owner / with every owner – the coin whose symbolic order does not / does belong to Spain / England / the West Indies – the coin that should have no destination because there is no Queen, no actual symbolic debt, no ultimate authority at the end of its path, whether European or otherwise, to orient its route in psycho-historical space. Yet, despite all this, the paradox of the coin multiplies in contradiction and one realizes that there is indeed a virtual, if not an actual, “route” to the coin itself, a route that is not purely symbolic, a route that resonates with the threat of chaos, with the promise of death and rebirth – a route that takes the owner of the coin towards El Dorado in its many guises.

El Dorado is a fictitious Amerindian city with partial roots in native narrative which, according to successive colonial accounts, is a place filled with obscene wealth and gold. The word itself is first used by the Spaniards to describe a mythical chief of the Muisca who is “so rich that his servants routinely anointed the full length of his body with a kind of resin, to which they then applied a fine overlay of golden talc” (Slater 46). The tale of El Dorado does not end there, it changes with each account, growing more malleable, more invested with colonial and native passion, greed and yearning. The golden metropolis becomes more myth than history, more fiction than fact. El Dorado’s nature changes, following the desires of those who want to possess its abundance and plenitude, its excesses and secrets.

The result is that El Dorado is a paradox, a real city that is unreal, a truth rendered fantastical, a place desired more for its absence than its actuality. Its geographic coordinates are fluid and moves from region to region. Its potential location changes with each telling, with every different manifestation of colonial desire: The Amazon, the Andes, the Orinoco, California, the Antilles, Mexico – all have been posited as possible places (Slater 29). The real Raleigh situates the city in the Guianas; his account of it in his *Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana* changes El Dorado's name to Manoa – a metropolis that “exceedeth any of the world” (13). Raleigh's account is as fantastic as any traveller from the European continent. It is invested with the same sense of wonder – and this after it was *toned down* and edited by his friend to make his text more believable and probable in order to convince his own regent Queen Elizabeth to fund another expedition to locate El Dorado (Johnson 704).

In my reading of *Discovery*, I am frustrated that, despite the title of his book, Raleigh never actually discovers Manoa, never reaches the land of El Dorado, never sees a chief covered head to toe in gold. His journey ostensibly ends just before he is about to reach the object of his desire. My use of the word “frustrated” is deliberate – when I started reading the book, my aim was to examine what the English noble has to say about this mythical city, but unlike many Spanish travelers who came before him, what I finally realize is that Raleigh never enters or discovers El Dorado. Raleigh “has knowledge” of the “that great and golden city” but he has never actually visited it (v). Raleigh has *almost* found himself in Manoa but “it pleased not God to favor” him that way (11). Raleigh has been told of Manoa by other European lords, but he has never truly seen it for himself. Raleigh has heard good things about the king of Manoa, the

“Golden One,” that he can be a good ally to England, for example, but Raleigh has never truly set eyes on his person.

In other words, Raleigh’s text of discovery discovers nothing but the absence of the thing it is referring to. Raleigh incessantly makes mention of Manoa in his text: He journeys *towards* Manoa, is *almost* within reach of Manoa, has heard of Manoa through others, has glimpsed gold that comes out of Manoa, has reached one of the countries that borders Manoa – but he cannot corroborate anything as an actual eye-witness. He has never walked the streets of Manoa or seen its wonders. Hearsay, lust and wishful dreams are the primary movers of his text. His journey is an itinerary that leads to every space where the city does *not* exist.

Manoa remains undiscovered, and Guiana retains its “maydenhead” and purity, its opaque inaccessibility, its *out-of-reachness* – that exact distance where it appears *so close* as to motivate the nobleman and *not close enough* to be within his grasp (*Discovery* 115). Raleigh’s text is therefore a “tissue of distances,” writes Mary Fuller. It is the “distance from home, the distance and time one traverses in the narrative, the distance between oneself and the thing one is attempting to ‘discover’.... One begins to wonder if this distance is not as much a product of human wish as are the fantastic objects it conceals” (51). In psychoanalytic parlance, with frustration comes desire for that which cannot be attained – the imaginary demands the thing desired, the Lacanian symbolic order veers away from the object exactly at the point where its circuit and El Dorado’s location would intersect – and chaos injects the sojourner with a frenzy that keeps him searching for the very thing that would kill or renew him long after a stable symbolic order would have used the injunction of the Law and the command of the Word to order him to stop. As a matter of fact, I can say that the English symbolic order, being stable in the Lacanian sense, indeed orders Raleigh to stop. More

accurately, the cultural order, represented by Queen Elizabeth in her guise as one of the names-of-the-father had “stopped” the historical real-life Raleigh by ordering his execution, divesting her culture from the chaos he had carried with him back home after his failed second attempt at locating El Dorado.

In *Drums and Colours*, there is *something* else going on, a *something* that is not discerned in the actions of the actual Raleigh who belonged to a stable symbolic order. It is Paco that bestows the coin to the Englishman, it is he who enters into an interpersonal relationship that is not altogether symbolic, it is he who orchestrates Raleigh’s ultimate end. The coin itself seals the deal – the Englishman orients himself within a symbolic-chaotic space around which the coin circulates, with the Taino ironically being the point of reference this time as the letter is to the Queen. Yet Raleigh has nothing but his own “stable” symbolic order to make sense of the Amerindian and the coin. He does not know the chaos invested in something that mimics a signifier that is / is not of his / others’ symbolic order(s). He cannot modulate his actions to account for the triangular relationship between him, a shared coin and the Taino because there are no pure signifiers that regulate such a relationship.

Raleigh’s action may reflect a causality determined by a symbolic English history. As soon as he possesses the coin, he is compelled towards the Caribbean to attain the riches and glory that would make him recognized within his own community – yet the consequences of his actions, unlike the real-life Raleigh, is altogether different. The manner in which he orients himself in space may *seem* congruent with the edicts of an English symbolic order – that is, his actions *almost* have the same historical consequence as the actual Raleigh: a journey, failure, and finally death in England. Yet Raleigh does not die *for* England in *Drums and Colours*. He does not die

so that its symbolic order is *maintained in its stable configuration*. Rather, he dies so that the symbolic order of the West Indies *grows more chaotic*.

In the manner I have expounded upon in the thesis's introduction, I can interpret the end of the real-life Raleigh as the simulacra of an original ritual sacrifice whose function is to stabilize England's culture – an Englishman constituted by his culture dies at its hand to maintain its symbolic order. On the other end, the inglorious end of Raleigh in *Drums and Colours* connotes an *original* sacrifice within the societies of the West Indies. Although his death in the play still occurs in Britain, it is the Caribbean that reaps the rewards of his demise. His death allows for the absorption of his rejuvenating blood and by proxy, his English symbolic order into the fabric of the Caribbean. After Raleigh's end in the play, in verses that intimate the paradox of death and life, violence and peace, regeneration and desiccation, ends and beginnings, the chorus raises its voice to proclaim a *change* occurring at the level of the symbolic order:

The blood that jets from Raleigh's severed head
 Lopped like a rose when England's strength was green,
 Spreads on the map its bright imperial red
 To close the stain of conquest on our scene.
 So Time turns now from Europe and the sea,
 Revolves its gaze and shows the land itself,
 Hundreds of battles past the discovery,
 To the slaves' suffering and the settlers' wealth,
 Until an exiled people find release,
 Through revolutions of despair and love,
 As human suffering presages peace.

How shall we love, till we have known love's cost. (*Haitian* 214)

This change in the symbolic order may be accounted for by the signifiers that has once constituted Raleigh's being. Gathered in the West Indies in the form of a symbolic sphere, the signifiers will propagate and interact with other spheres, whether Spanish, Amerindian, African, Christian, etc. The result of this is that a dynamic symbolic order gains another body of symbols to use in its dense fabric. In the same manner I have assessed such interactions in the introduction of the thesis, the new sphere will play its part in altering, changing, remaking and reinventing the symbolic order. Another way of looking at this is that the Caribbeans, through the hapless intervention of its colonial authorities, become more "hybridized." My use of the term hybridity conveys the manner in which one non-integrated symbolic sphere, belonging in this instance to the colonizing power, interacts with other local spheres, further hybridizing Caribbean culture.

According to Bhabha, hybridity is a process that shifts the fixities of colonial powers dependent on a pure identity: "Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects... It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power" (159-160). Whereas I have assessed and synthesized hybridity as a local topical effect in relation to the symbolic order, Bhabha's hybridity is projected outwards from the periphery towards the centre of the empire. His views complement my own since the hybridized colonized, much like the native in the top hat holding the inverted newspaper, does not only subvert the machinations of a stable symbolic order, but also subverts the fixed assumption of colonial hegemony and authorities represented by Koenig.

Whether I call what occurs in the Caribbean “symbolic spheres” or “hybridity,” it nevertheless occurs according to the principles of chaos. The conundrum that occurs in the play, however, is that Raleigh’s death somewhat stabilizes culture. The coin loses some of its chaotic charge. The implications may not be entirely shocking to Benítez-Rojo who argues that ritual sacrifice is a means by which “collective violence” is sublimated and channelled to “reach a stable social order” (303). This very well may be the case, but I will argue later that even this “stability” perceived by Benítez-Rojo is merely a paradox intrinsic to the nature of chaos and the complex dynamics of entropy. For the time being, I recognize that the coin can finally but momentarily become a “pure” symbol now that it has lost its chaotic potential. “This is only a symbol... And it have its good uses, if power won’t abuse it,” says Yvette in *Drums and Colours* (*Haitian* 291). For a while, the Federation of the West Indies comes into being vis-à-vis a temporarily stable symbolic order. The circulating coin, now in Yvette’s hand, permits her to inherit that which once belonged to Quadrado, Paco and Raleigh – but her actions, influenced by the coin, are not entirely informed by greed, entropy or fantasy as were those of the coin’s last three owners.

This is not to say that Yvette is not searching for her version of El Dorado, but this El Dorado, i.e. the Federation of the West Indies, is a place she herself must create, must birth into being, must nourish with toil, compromise and hard labour – not merely fantasize about. Like Paco, she too wants to be made whole. To her as to the Taino, the city of El Dorado is a “fugitive place, where Caribbean Being, violently fragmented and uprooted, intuits that it can recover its lost form” (Benítez-Rojo 187). Which is to say, Yvette wants to divest herself of history-as-trauma, that which cleaves her being into fragments – but her solution is not a journey to England or the desire for a European-style history. El Dorado’s meaning is different to her; it is not entirely

fictitious, nor is it entirely an “experience of spiritual transcendence, where a moment of unity and comprehension of human existence... [can be] attainable only in death” (Rogers 118). For the first time in Walcott’s play, myth and reality coincide within the same space, the virtual and the actual collapse into each other and a new stable symbolic order is born from chaos. Reaching El Dorado becomes possible. The stage, whether literal or metaphorical, is set and history is ready to commence: By reaching El Dorado, the coin would have finally *closed* the circuit and produced a stable symbolic order whose common Laws, names-of-the-father, norms and traditions would act as a buffer against chaos.

The coin, however, is still inundated with its entropic aspect. The very action of Yvette that intimates the coin’s stability as a signifier, her acknowledgement that it is “only a symbol,” also implies an entropic anomaly. In Lacan’s assessment of Poe’s tale, the letter, having finally circulated back to its true owner the Queen, is finally extracted and cancelled by the symbolic circuit. Its threat is thereby removed, and the Parisian community can function without any scandal or peril that may upend its social fabric. The coin in Yvette’s hands should have also been cancelled in a similar fashion: Indeed, Yvette asks that the coin be buried with a dead Pompey. With its burial, the coin would have been removed from the West Indian society, but then *something* else happens. Pompey absurdly and impossibly comes back from the dead, and Yvette realizes that the coin is not “an enemy that bring man into division” but just a symbol (*Haitian* 290). The very act of realization that intimates a stability to the symbolic order of the West Indies is also the act in which chaos can reproduce within the coin and symbolic significations can be annihilated once again.

The Queen’s letter, finally in her hands by the end of Poe’s tale, is cancelled and is no longer a threat. The coin, on the other hand, by the same token in which its

own stability is realized and invoked, escapes its own destruction and remains an agent of chaos and a threat to Law and order. Yvette's realization that the coin is just a symbol makes her keep the coin – she does not retire it as she no longer sees in it any danger. She scolds Mano for his fear of the gold metal that is, to her, just a mere signifier, just a piece of cultural heritage and inheritance. The coin then, unlike the letter, *outlasts the wearer*, outlasts the symbolic order and has the potential to repeat the journey to El Dorado beyond any authority that can regulate such a journey.

In such a manner, chaos outlasts order, entropy turns everything to ruin, and life rises from death itself. From chaos comes stability and from stability, chaos. Pompey's warning speech at the end of *Drums and Colours* is also the catalyst that foreshadows the inevitability of what his own speech may not prevent. Symbolic history begins and does not begin in the Caribbean. The symbolic spheres which strive to become absorbed in each other to produce a stable social order, which strive to find a balance from where history can start anew are also the very nexus where history is revoked, denied, reformulated, refashioned, stabilized and unbalanced all at the same time. History-as-Africa, history-as-Europe, history-as-trauma are all revoked at the level of a stable order, but accepted at the level of a chaotic symbolic register that can manipulate such histories synchronically and wrest their influence from time into the entropy of space. El Dorado is always within and out of reach and unlike a Spaniard or an Englishman's journey towards a purely fictitious place, the golden city within the Caribbean's psyche *simultaneously* occupies a space that straddles tangible reality and nebulous fantasy, the symbolic and chaos, illusions and facts, mimicry and originality, the familiar and the uncanny.

Having finished my assessment of the play and what it implies about the West Indies, I return to Walcott's "Koenig of the River" and "The Sea is History."³⁸ A side-by-side examination of the two pieces yields a fruitful analysis vis-à-vis my assessment of *Drums and Colours*. By sketching the outlines of the two poems, I come to a crucial understanding: "History" actually *mimics* "Koenig" and yet, its outcome is different. Both poems start with a journey of sorts and engage with the anxieties of history's absence. Both list the destruction of ancient monuments and the effacement of historical markers. Both recount the elision of empire and the absence of history. I may feel that the two poems, commencing with a journey, moving in the same thematic direction and ending with an absence of historical cohesion and the potential for a new beginning must have the same historical psychic outcome, but this is far from being the case.

In "Koenig," the titular character feels out of place on the river as he wends his way inland. His engagement with the native reading the inverted newspaper has not gone well. The "glorious" history that is slowly and painfully revealed to him is not the one he seeks. Whatever edifices or marks his people have left behind are gone, there is merely entropy: "A ruined factory wheel / locked hard in rust" (8-9). The Christian missionaries he has invoked are also gone: "They have met their ends – / swinging in the wind" (30-31). When he shouts to the river about his "Queen" and "Kaiser," the natives reply, "The Queen dead! Kaiser dead!" (84). Koenig feels his grip on reality loosening; he sees nothing that gives him a sense of "identity." His empire is merely ruins. If it is there at all, it is ravaged by time, soon to be forgotten. In the absence of history, all that he can do unsurprisingly is assert its bygone glory to the Caribbean natives by evoking a past age where his people "ruled worlds wider than

³⁸ For Brevity, I shall refer to the poems as "Koenig" and "History."

this river flows,” governed countries where dyed elephants and striped tigers roamed, “ruled rivers as huge as the Nile, / The Ganges, and the Congo.” Koenig’s diatribe ends by addressing the natives directly, “We tamed, we ruled / you where our empires reached their blazing peak” (95-102).

If an event in a subject’s life occurs that runs contrary to his historically constituted symbolic order, then the subject cannot cope with the breaking down of his imaginary assumptions or symbolic constitution. In this case, a necessary psychoanalytic intervention has the aim to assist the subject in restructuring and rewriting his history in a manner that is less deleterious to his present reality. Instead, what happens in this poem, as if to mock Koenig’s words and reinforce the paranoid but ironically factual belief that he has vocalized in the poem – that he is indeed a fabricated persona in a book, a fictitious “character called Koenig,” who despite his assertions to the contrary, cannot “dominate [his] future like a fiction” (50) – is that “a mist / rises from the river” and the page of the book that narrates him and his history “goes white” (109-110).

Koenig has reached, to use Fanon, a “zone of nonbeing” where he is “doomed to watch the dissolution of the truths that he has worked out for himself one after another, he has to give up projecting onto the world an antinomy that coexists with him” (*Black Skin* 2). Thakur associates Fanon’s “nonbeing,” when it registers on the symbolic order, with Lacan’s lack-in-being or with a “radical negativity positivized” which unconsciously propels a subject to journey across the symbolic order in the hope of plugging this lack (*Postcolonial Lack* xxxiv). For Koenig to reach this zone implies that the “positivised aspect” of his nonbeing, that which symbolically constitute him in relationship to the antimonial colonized other, has eroded leaving his symbols and assumptions meaningless. In other words, Koenig’s stable symbolic order has failed

him – he has no recourse but for his subjective being to be expunged, as from a book. Koenig cannot depend on his signifiers to forge new interpersonal relationships with this threatening hostile world around him or its people. His history cannot validate, interpret or symbolically determine for him any action from which he can launch himself into a stable direction. With such an occurrence, Koenig can no longer act, he is mired in stasis and oblivion and cannot operate without that which drives his present into a cohesive future. In essence, the German “dies” – his story ends in blank pages. There isn’t even any “true conclusion” to his “narrative” – it has merely stalled, indefinitely.

In “The Sea is History,” although the absence of a stable symbolic order is expressed, although the process of entropy, erosion and decay is made as explicit as in “Koenig,” there is nevertheless *something* else going on. The roles are now reversed back to the typical assumption that the Caribbean and its people have no history, no “battles” or “martyrs” or “tribal memory” (1-2). The speaker, after being asked about this, does not offer his interrogator any disavowal but informs him that history is locked up in the “vault” of the sea, that “the sea is history” (3-4). In a paradox that evokes this history even as it acknowledges its omission, the speaker recounts the past of his region by allegorizing it vis-à-vis a superimposition of historical events on biblical accounts and Christian iconography primarily taken from the Old Testament.

The journey begins with darkness – the capture of Africans from their tribes, then “Genesis” is evoked from “chaos” – the captured prisoners are ushered into Spanish ships – the beginning of their journey. “Exodus” comes next – the Middle Passage commences. The poem goes on, invoking the “Arc of the Covenant,” “Babylonian bondage” and the “Song of Solomon” – all relating to those drowned or thrown in the sea, those who would not make it to the New World. “Jonah” continues

to “Gomorrah,” “Lamentations” and “The New Testament,” until finally, “Emancipation” is reached and the slaves are freed (5-64). The tribulations do not end there. Freedom comes with its own tragedies “but the ocean kept turning blank pages,” Walcott writes, and there lies the crucial difference between the two poems (24).

In “Koenig,” the pages of the titular character’s story turning white or “blank” and his imperial history being effaced are a deleterious process from which he never recovers. As his symbolic order is stable, as his very self depends on symbolic history, the undermining of that which constitutes his very being makes the edifice of assumptions and mesh of signifiers on which the German has built his truth teeter and fall beyond any hope of recuperation – pushing him into a zone of nonbeing. His faith does not save him from neurosis or anxiety. One of the symbolic foundations his being is built upon, his “Christian mission” in the Caribbean and the bible that “History” has so ironically and subversively invoked, avails him nothing.

In “History,” *despite* and *because* of the elision of the past, the Caribbean people try and try again. History, if it can be called that, not being of a stable symbolic order, is broken and then reformed in a new configuration, broken again and reformed again in a different configuration. In “Koenig” there is merely one beginning and end to the character. In effect, he only has one story to recount: He comes to the Caribbean region, experiences the destruction of his symbolic order, and meets his doom – there is no renewal. The page that turns “blank” by the end of the poem is the page that effaces or folds on his “written” history.

In “History,” there is *more* than one beginning and end. Every biblically-themed section that the speaker recounts, from Genesis to Emancipation and after, implies a tragic end that should have stopped the Caribbeans from rising again – their fate concluded in a manner similar to that of Koenig. Instead, a new potentiality

arises from the death of the old one. Here too is another iteration of the “body carnival” with its segmented elongated body where each section of the creature, instead of representing the four deaths in *Drums and Colour*, represents a chapter or a theme from the Bible which represents in turn a Caribbean tragedy where some form of death occurs: death when the Africans are captured on their continent, death during the Middle Passage, death by drowning, death in the plantations, etc.. These deaths are subsequently transformed into a ritual sacrifice that gives life to an environment always ready to renew itself. Thus, chaos attempts its metamorphosis into order then reverses its position and reverses it again. Vegetations rot and new ecstatic growth takes its place. Empires turn to ruins and new nations rise in their ashes only to be effulged in turn.

Another way to look at this is that the Caribbeans, like Koenig, also return to a zone of nonbeing where the binary antimonial relationship between colonizer and colonized which props their identity, and which is based on the negation of the other, is eroded. However, whereas Koenig finds no step beyond this nothingness that he finds himself in, the Caribbean people’s zone of nonbeing, their posited lack-in-being, is precisely the “utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born” (Fanon, *Black Skin 2*). To direct Gibson, this zone is a journey and a bumpy descent that is “not only the experience of being underground but also the discovery of new element in that journey; that is to say, a ‘*genuine* new departure’” from what symbolically determines the colonized subject (105). The result is that every death in “History,” every time there is a return to a zone of nonbeing, every time another symbolic sphere is added to Caribbean culture and every time chaos rears its head, the Caribbeans’ symbolic order does not erode, rather it alters and changes as the Caribbeans alter and change.

Different symbolic spheres in “History” keep on interacting, negating, building and altering each other in a dense dynamic symbolic order shaped by the protracted ceaseless machinations of chaos. Instead of *one* generic beginning and an inglorious end informed by an underlying order that determines destiny, there is a multitude of beginnings which differentiates into a frenzy of endings. Such endings do not repeat their sameness although they do repeat the underlying impulse of chaos to deliver a birth in the same locale where there is death, to build without symbolic foundations, without historical monuments, without a religious book that determines one’s symbolic history.

In “History,” unlike “Koenig,” the biblical references have nothing to do with a subject’s history being that which determines his present in relation to his future. The Bible is, of course, a foundational text but its invocation there does not mean that the Caribbeans are attempting to symbolically build their future on its foundations. Rather, it means that they are *creating* the foundations itself. Their experience is not “founded” on Genesis, or Lamentation, or Emancipation – it is their experience that *is* Genesis, and Lamentation, and Emancipation. This is to say, unlike “Koenig,” the Bible in “History” is not entirely a referential sign but *also* a *self-referential* one. The Caribbeans do not use it as a component of their “symbolic history” to determine their present, rather they determine their present by paradoxically *making* and inventing it as their present. This is why when the page turns blank in “Koenig,” this conveys that the titular character has conventionally reached an inglorious end, but when the same happens in “History,” what this signifies is that the end itself is being erased so a new beginning can take its place. Indeed, in the latter poem, the sea takes history’s place as the title reveals, and “the sea,” to use Walcott, “gives you an idea of time that makes history absurd. Because history is an intrusion on that immensity. History is a very,

very minor statement; its intrusion is not even a minor speck on the rim of its horizon” (*Conversations* 158).

In the next section, I will examine, through Jahan Ramazani’s “The Wound of History” how particular symbolic spheres act in *Omeros* to influence the present. What engages Ramazani’s attention in Walcott’s epic poem is the manner in which the poet fashions wounds into the flesh of the characters. Through Ramazani, I can say there is *something* to the wound that, like the coin in *Drums and Colours*, *mimics* the Queen’s letter by straddling chaos and the signifier. It impels the characters towards an unsanctioned journey where what is discovered complicates what is desired and where healing itself is a paradox of woundedness – a necessity for the very epic to move forward in non-chronological time and non-Newtonian space. This movement itself shall double back onto the wound until the reader realizes that the wound is the process and the means to transcend and “cure” history.

***Omeros*: [A] Voyage to Begin to the End of [the] Wound**

The title of this section is a line taken not from a work of Walcott’s but from the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. It comes from “Lie Still, Sleep Becalmed,” a poem having certain elements which makes it comparable to *Omeros*. It tells of a wounded “becalmed” sufferer-sailor, it informs of a certain kind of stasis engendering a desire for a voyage, and it details a wound that fuels, complicates and contradicts this very desire. This wound enforces “becalmed” immobility on the sufferer in the boat – he is twisting and turning, unable to move. The word “becalmed” also gestures to an unmoving ship stuck in the middle of a body of water neither finding traction on a windless day nor progressing in any direction. As such, “becalmed” gains a two-fold meaning: The sufferer is becalmed since his wound, weakening and sickening him,

locks him in sleep, and also becalmed by proxy, being on an immobile ship stuck in the middle of the sea.

The desire for motility is thus opposed by a bleeding wound, a sick human body fevered and unconscious, an utterly static diorama of a frozen ship in a listless sea and an absolute obstruction of movement on every level of the poem – sea, ship, wind and sufferer are locked in a standstill. It is a calamitous overdetermination of stasis and torpor against which motion is nigh impossible to achieve. This is further complicated by the reality that wound and sea are linked and superimposed onto each other. When the “loud wound” “sings,” what issues out of it is a “sea sound flowing like blood” (Thomas 6). A wound, of course, is what typically bleeds, and the sea is what normally produces a “sea sound.” Yet this type of verse is not unusual in Thomas’s poetry. It is a typical example of a stylistic idiosyncrasy of his where the quintessential description of two nouns sharing certain similar traits and situated near each other in a sentence are reversed, making readers stop their perusal in an attempt to make sense of things that run contrary to their linguistic, literary and experiential preconceptions. In this particular case, what this stylistic idiosyncrasy does is merge sea and wound together, making them one with each other.

In a later verse, the sea sound increases its crescendo and breaks “in a storm of singing” which may imply some movement at hand, some event that pushes the sails and moves the rooted ship from its place (Thomas 7). The “storm of singing” calls to the people who have drowned at sea, whose voices “[swim] on the wind” when they hear the wound (Thomas 8). The wound is therefore a paradox: It plays its part in drowning the living and resurrecting the dead. It is a “mouth in the throat” that sings and narrates even as it silences the sufferer into an uneasy sleep. It is what becalms the ship but also what engenders the violent frenzy of the weather. It is the torpor of

sickness and the rage of the storm, the locus of stasis and the nexus of dynamicity, the agent of immobility and the mover of the wind. The wound is both salvation and damnation, danger and seduction – a blackhole in the centre of the poem from which the world, the sea, the sound and the voyage itself issues from and returns to.

In *Omeros*, the poem begins with such a wound, or rather a healed scar “puckered like the corolla of a sea-urchin” on the shin of Philoctete who is acting in the capacity of a guide to a group of tourists. Although he informs them what has caused the injury in the first place, a rusted anchor whose “pronged iron / peeled the skin in a backwash” (8), he does not relay the implications of the wound, its “woundedness,” its significance or, to use Thomas, the sea sound it makes from which springs forth the whole tale of *Omeros*. Like the Welsh poet, Walcott describes the wound as a mouth, more accurately, as the “mouth of [a] sore” and the “puckered corolla of a sea urchin” (15,1). Both portrayals depict a hole that excretes sound and interacts with the environment – an orifice that somewhat fits Bakhtin’s notion of an organ which constitutes the grotesque body that partakes of the world and is not closed to it: “That figures in all the expressions of the unofficial speech of the people is the body that fecundates and is fecundated, that gives birth and is born, devours and is devoured, drinks, defecates” (*Bakhtinian Thought* 228). Yet, the wound-as-a-mouth differs from a mouth in one crucial manner. It is not under its owner’s control, there is no choice in its opening or closing. Being a rent on the organs of the body, the wound resists the symbolic narrative process that it at the subject’s disposal – the symbolic history, which is enacted to make sense of the trauma, and to heal and close the wound’s edges to the world thereby creating a seamless symbolic circuit from which the social order gains its stability.

Another way of looking at the wound is that it is a manifestation of what Kristeva calls abjection, that which an individual attempts to violently reject to come into being as a subject beholden to a stable symbolic order. What is abject – corpses, wounds, excreta, the maternal body, etc. – challenges and breaches one’s tenuous borders of selfhood and breaks the line between life and death. In *Powers of Horror*, she writes that abjection is what “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). Like Bakhtin’s grotesque’s body, it is a menace to the “clean” body, one’s own proper self – or in this instance, it is a menace to a stable symbolic order.

I can hypothesize that the “abject” wound in *Omeros*, being that which disturbs Caribbean individuals or culture, needs to be ejected for a stable symbolic order to come into being. The wound is the locale where the semiotic intrudes and destabilizes the order which symbols attempt to impose on the world and the psyche. To direct Kristeva, the wound, which needs to be rejected, is, nevertheless, the very site of rejection in its positivized aspect, and rejection “constitutes the return of expulsion within the constituted subject” and “reconstitutes real objects, ‘creates’ new ones, reinvents the real, and re-symbolizes it” (*Revolution* 155). As long as the wound exists, the “cultural” order will always be chaotic, a “black hole” where the semiotic issues from to continuously reorganize and disorganize the symbol.

The whole point of the wound is to be this unfillable “black hole” – a point of chaotic singularity from which issues the whole epic of *Omeros*. The poem comes into being by the operations of two dual forces: the trauma the wound inflicts and the machinations of the *Omeric* actants who struggle to work with, around and against the affliction. They attempt to close the wound by “dressing” its injury with words, attenuating its pain with the soothing “salve” of language, or healing its trauma with

the “balm” of a symbolic narrative or alternatively, by ejecting the wound from the flesh of their social order. I believe this to be, at least in certain respects, an impossibility. This is not to say that the wound in *Omeros* does not close, but *something* else going on that gestures to the wound’s threat even when it appears to have healed.

For the time being, I will point out that the wound *partially* represents trauma – the two words are related to each other, “trauma” being the Greek word for “wound” according to Ramazani. Trauma is not of the symbolic order. Rather, it is a disconcerting experience of that which is absolutely unsymbolisable – a petrifying encounter with the register of the *réel*. Unlike the symbolic order, the *réel* is not a differential gradient formed by mobile signifiers whose syntagmatic relationship to each other creates meaning and generates the Lacanian unconscious. The *réel* is undifferentiated – a radical alterity, a smooth, frictionless surface on which a human’s very being, his Laws and symbols, can find no traction. The *réel* cannot be *moved* like a signifier – it is dissimilar to the Queen’s letter which can be circulated back to its owner, whose temporary immobility by the egos of the characters in Poe’s tale can be overcome. Rather, the *réel* is just there – an impersonal will that *wills* the subject, that reveals itself when a stable symbolic order stops functioning as it should. “The real,” writes Lacan, “whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always and in every case in its place; it carries its place stuck to the sole of its shoe, there being nothing that can exile it from it” (*Écrits* 25).

Trauma as being an “encounter with the real” is therefore “beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves guided by the pleasure principle” (*Sem. XI* 53-54). Which is to say, trauma is beyond symbolic directives and beyond the Laws and rules that regulate a subject and

his desires. The wound as trauma in *Philoctete* should be completely subject to the register of the real. Yet, I am not entirely sure that *Philoctete*'s wound in *Omeros* is wholly trauma. To begin with, Walcott bestows an intentionality and a meaning to the wound. Inasmuch as I am dealing with meaning, I am dealing with the symbolic order and its signifiers since the real itself is without meaning.

In a section of *Omeros*, Walcott, as one of the poem's *characters*, deliberately reveals himself to the reader. He enters the text to "stitch" another wound on another *Omeric* character, this time Plunkett who, like *Philoctete*, also "has to be wounded, [since] affliction is one theme / of this work this fiction, since every "I" is a / fiction finally" (25). This is an intriguing trope: If Walcott has been satisfied with merely being a writer, I could make an argument that the text can be assessed as a discrete world – that I need not acknowledge an authorial authority to guide my examination. Through Barthes, I can proclaim the death of the author and through Derrida, I can argue that nothing exists outside the text – certainly not an anxious poet who wants to be the ultimate reference of his own work. Yet, even if nothing exists outside the text, even if I have chosen a deconstructionist mode of assessment that permits me to ignore Walcott the author, I still have to engage with Walcott the character.

If *Omeros* exists as a discrete world separate from the man who writes it, I could take the wound as a gash without intentionality or meaning – a black phenomenal unrepresentable presence, a mere Lacanian trauma. Walcott, however, has prevented me from doing even that when he interjects himself into his own work. The wound is not merely trauma – paradoxically, it is also a symbolic narrative. The wound is a chaotic paradox. For example, apart from trauma, I can also think of the wound as history-as-trauma. Which is to say, I can think of it as the attempt of the symbolic order to unsuccessfully narrate the traumatic event thereby forcing the present to be

stuck in the memories and the tribulations of the past. An unhealed Philoctete believes the swelling of the wound comes from:

the chained ankles
of his grandfather. Or else why was there no cure?
That the cross he carried was not only the anchor's

but that of his race, for a village black and poor
as the pigs that rooted in its burning garbage,
then were hooked on the anchors of the abattoir. (*Omeros* 17)

History-as-trauma may in itself be traumatizing but it is not entirely trauma-as-such. Furthermore, this is not the entire signification of the wound. Being of chaos, there is *something* else going on in its shrouded depth. The wound is not *only* trauma or history-as-trauma. I have already stated in the beginning of the essay, through Walcott, that history-as-trauma is a closed body. The wound on the other hand, being an open sore, is grotesque in the Bakhtinian sense. Its intentionality is to open history-as-trauma; its purpose is to partake of the world. Its aim is not merely to expel blood and pus, but also to absorb *something* from the environment and Caribbean culture – to partake of the chaotic symbolic order extant in the region.

By straddling time and space, by jumping across different chronologies, regions, characters and locales, the wound interacts with the world and absorbs / ejects symbolic significance. Lorna Burns, to explain the proliferation of the wound in *Omeros*, calls it qua Deleuze a “shadowy presence of the pure event that cannot be precisely located in an actual occurrence (Chronos). The wound as pure event is something that has already happened and something yet to come” (89). I, on the other hand, am inclined to posit the notion that in *Omeros*, the wound is *circulating* like the gold coin in *Drums and Colours* – that it somewhat functions like a (chaotic) signifier

– or that it *mimics* one – and that all the wounded characters in the epic, both literally and metaphorically, “share the one wound, the same cure” (*Omeros* 245): From the Afro-Caribbean Philoctete, to the Englishman Plunkett, from the fisherman Achille to his adversary Hector, from a contemporary St. Lucian Helen to the historical white settler and Native American activist Catherine Weldon.

Even the environment itself is wounded. At the beginning of *Omeros*, Philoctete raises his axe to “wound the first cedar” and transform it into a fisherman’s canoe – the act itself according to Sneharika Roy is conflated with the colonists killing and effacing the traces of the Arawak in a bygone age (1). To her, this act of wounding depicts a violence that is not usually explicit in the classic western political epic which tends to constantly require “an accompanying figurative justification” which betrays “an awareness that heroic action is not inherently justifiable and in itself does not contain the meaning attributed to it externally by tropes” (33). Walcott’s postcolonial epic, on the other hand, makes use of “the corrective function of the metamorphosed tree as an acknowledgement of the irreparable human cost of war.” The Caribbean fishermen felling the cedars “seems to be literally hacking the Arawaks, creating a much deeper sense of malaise for the reader” (45). The implication for me is that by disclosing the violent act of woundedness, Walcott, despite his abjuration of violence, is returning to it in *Omeros*. He is attempting “to find in the wounding event a line of flight or creativity and thus to be ‘equal to the event’ or to become ‘the offspring of one’s own events’” (Burns 90).

If the wound, jumping across individuals, demonstrate its chaotic aspect, then the fact that the characters in *Omeros* are riddled with chaos and resonate with more than one symbolic sphere makes the wound even more entropic. Walcott’s epic poem recalls characters from Greek mythology, Homer’s *Odyssey* and most importantly, his

Iliad – the text which it is provisionally modelled on. *Omeric* characters and events resonate and double with their Homeric counterparts: the Sibyl seer with the Obeah woman Ma Kilman, the fisherman Achille with the Trojan Achilles, Homer with Omeros / Seven Seas, the Caribbean Hector with the prince who dies at Troy etc. This is further complicated by the fact that there is no one-on-one linear correlation between the Greek and the Caribbean characters. Both Achille and Hector in *Omeros* fight over Helen's love; their actions mimic, according to Paul Breslin, Paris and Menelaus in this instance, not their own Greek counterparts (Breslin 250). Their metaphorical woundedness consequently relates to their love for Helen – or *also* relates to their love for Helen. Missing Helen, Achille compares his loneliness to the rotten smell of Philoctete's wound (*Omeros* 114). Hector, in a futile attempt to exorcise the certainty that Helen still loves his adversary, compares the car he is frenziedly driving to a "leopard shot / with its flaming wound that speed alone could not heal" (*Omeros* 116).

The doubling, tripling and quadrupling of characters and themes in *Omeros* multiply the entropy of the wound. The wound differentiates into a chaotic multitude – but the representation of this multitude, according to Ramazani, is a singular density embodied by the wound in Philoctete. Philoctete is the locus of the wound in its many disguises, the fulcrum on which the conflicts in *Omeros* rotate, are resolved and potentially return again in different iterations and permutations. He is the centre from which the wound spreads its web to touch every major *Omeric* character and locale. Ramazani writes that Philoctete is similar to the Fisher King in Eliot's *The Waste Land* as well as a variation of the meta-myth of the wounded vegetation god ("Wound" 58). The Fisher King in Euro-modernist myths is a wounded king whose life exists in a magically sympathetic relationship with the land he rules. His woundedness, which is

usually a groin injury, corresponds to the barrenness and woundedness of his land. When healed, his land and his people are also revived (Weston 114).

According to Ramazani, the Greek Philoctetes, having incurred a wound at Troy, is transported to an island and left alone where he suffers for years. His wound suggests, like the Caribbean Philoctete, “not only affliction but also colonial penetration evacuation and forgetting” (“Wound” 55). In this manner, Walcott draws a comparison between Europe, Africa and the Caribbean – Philoctete is, after all, a “compromise formation.” Yet, even if he is a “compromise formation,” he is still a “venerable vehicle legitimizing the tenor of black rage and suffering” (57). While Walcott acknowledges in him the cultural influence of Europe, he also vigorously appropriates him to Afro-Caribbean ends, hybridizing him by “tropicalizing and twisting [the] ancient Greek hero into a vibrant new figure for Afro-Caribbean pain. One of the oldest dead white European males is reborn in a wounded black body; a member of the colonizing tribe resigns his part to limp along the colonized” (54). In other words, the doubling of this character in *Omeros* does not imply the hegemonic influence of Europe, nor a linear chronological dependency on its culture in a manner that would cover up the “absence” of “historical achievements” in the Caribbean. Rather, it is history-as-Africa that has taken the primary position in Walcott’s consideration despite his refusal to ignore Europe’s cultural influence.

In my assessment, the wound has absorbed two additional historical “symbolic spheres,” history-as-Africa and history-as-Europe. Both spheres denote woundedness precisely because they do not create a stable symbolic order whose closed loop compels a signifier back to its proper place on the circuit. In contrast, those symbolic spheres are open to the world and to each other and interact with the world and one another. By their very nature, they are volatile and chaotic; any time a character

attempts to enact a linear historical causality between the Caribbean on one hand and Europe or Africa on the other to fashion a stable symbolic order, his endeavour collapses by their chaotic machinations.

I will submit the example of Achille whose woundedness is founded on his feeling of rootlessness stemming from the violent exile his ancestors incurred during the Middle Passage. In his historical journey back to Africa to meet his forebear Afolabe and to apparently discover for himself a symbolic history that determines a linear insular chronological relation between Africa and the Caribbean, Achille fails in this endeavour. Having met Afolabe for the first time, Achille is asked about the signification of his modern name. Names, according to Kelvin Ngong Toh are “what gives identity.” For one to belong, one “needs to be identified – having to exist with essence.... This shows that naming is very important as it helps the individual to belong to a place” – a place or a stable symbolic order (57).

To Achille, his name is an untethered sign, a mere sound without ties to history: “The same sign I am blessed with, with this gift, / whose meaning I do not care to know” (*Omeros* 136). The name is not chained to a stable symbolic order or to any signification such an order bestows – but whereas Achille has made peace with this, Afolabe, still tied to his own cultural beliefs and to the African continent, cannot reconcile with his own symbolic subjectivity that a name can mean nothing, that it is merely a sound that does not carry with it its own symbolic ties to a community or a place: “If I pointed,” says Afolabe to his son, “[at] that man, that tree, and this father, / would every sound be a shadow that crossed your ear, / without the shape of a man or a tree?” (*Omeros* 136). Afolabe’s question divulges that at one level, Achille’s own symbolic order is radically alien to the ancestor and at another level, it is inundated with chaos and cannot give his name a “proper” subjectivity. Afolabe comes to the

realization that there is no history to connect him to Achille. Literally, there is no stable symbolically regulated Oedipal relationship tying father and son:

I am not Afolabe, your father, and you look through
my body as the light looks through a leaf. I am not here
or a shadow. And you, nameless son, are only the ghost

of a name. Why did I never miss you until you returned?

Why haven't I missed you, my son, until you were lost?

Are you the smoke from a fire that never burned? (*Omeros* 136-137)

As such, Achille's journey to the past indicates an entropy in his symbolic order in that it transgresses the "stable" narrative structure and form that a western epic may take. According to Bakhtin in the *Dialogic Imagination*, the classical epic is a closed form. It is, to use Lacan, heroicized history, or to return to Bakhtin, it is the literature of the ruling social groups, i.e. the colonists, whose intention is to create the "the national heroic past" that fills the space between heroes and audience with "national tradition" that would indubitably buttress their own political and social power. It incorporates the epic hero "in a world of ancestors," and in an "absolute past" indicative of the "patriarchal social structure" of its given culture (13-15). According to Roy, its narrative form is "'monologic,' centralising and intolerant of contestation" (6).

Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, echoing Bakhtin, relates colonisation to the epic because the coloniser proclaims his conquest to be the absolute beginning of history: "The colonist makes history. His life is an epic, an odyssey. He is invested with the very beginning: 'We made this land.' He is the guarantor of its existence" (14-15). In contrast to this, in *Omeros*, Achille's journey back into the past problematizes and undermines the notion of the pure origins of history. To Roy, the

narrative of the postcolonial epic, as can be seen in Achille's return journey to the past, shuttles "between the primal need to construct counter-stories of lineage and a postmodern awareness of the constructed nature of narrative. For postcolonial epic, the past tense of history is mediated by the continuous present of the epic utterance" (83). As such, Achille's need for "genealogical and cultural continuity" is placed against a background "of disruption, dislocation and even erasure" which would subvert his desire to find a history, whether personal or social, that is continuous with his present in the manner which Lacan specifies – and in the manner which a stable symbolic order is able to produce (98).

Now that I have finished with Achille, I can return again to the wound in Philoctete's shin and assess it in conjunction with Achille's journey. In this specific iteration of history-as-Africa, I have demonstrated the lack of stability of this "symbolic sphere" situated in Philoctete's wound. Philoctete himself, in a scene when he is among his yams whose leaves look like "maps of Africa," feels the wound acting up again, the pain radiating all over his body so excruciatingly that he tears at the plant in agonized rage, curling "head-down without their roots" (*Omeros* 18). He shouts, "You all see what it's like without roots in this world?" (*Omeros* 19). This scene elucidates the signification and affliction the wound is burdened with. The pain it causes is not only physical but psychological, and the agony it forces on Philoctete resonates with the dispossession and deracination Achille suffers from – the pain of being without African roots. The sympathetic correlation between Achille and the Fisher King Philoctete becomes evident – both of their symbolic spheres, history-as-Africa, are the same and yet different.

Neither is Achille's woundedness the only injury that subsists vis-à-vis Philoctete's. The Englishman Plunkett is also wounded, and his head injury is one he

sustains serving in the British army during World War II. Like Philoctete's, Plunkett's wound resonates with more than one signification. Plunkett's attempt at healing the wound is to give Helen, whether in her "guise" as a woman or as the "personification" of the island of St. Lucia a symbolic history: "Helen needed a history, / that was the pity that Plunkett felt towards her. / Not his, but her story. Not theirs, but Helen's war" (*Omeros* 28-29). Like Koenig, Plunkett also desires an uninterrupted history to give validity to his identity.

The Englishman wants to heal his wound by expunging his guilt: One necessitates the bestowal of a symbolic history to St. Lucia and the Caribbean, the other requires a connection to said history. In this instance, such a link is genealogical, but Plunkett's search for a possible ancestor that connects him to the Caribbean, a midshipman called Plunkett who has participated in the infamous naval Battle of the Saintes, proves fruitless. The modern Plunkett is not related to him. Neither is the sailor's death glorious or heroic in the manner that history requires seeing that his demise is an accident. "The verdict of *Omeros*," writes Sean Seeger, "is that [Plunkett's] approach to History is an evasion. In effect, Plunkett's solution to the problem of History is to escape from a *nightmare* into a *dream*" (80).

This lack of a historical link between Plunkett and the Caribbean implies that as with "Koenig," in *Omeros* history-as-Europe is rejected. Yet this symbolic sphere, made volatile by this rejection but more chaotic, finds its way into Philoctete's dense open wound to find other iterations of itself there, to interact with different spheres, to set the scene for a healing that cannot come to pass unless there is a wounding in the first place – an open hole that partakes of the very world which has caused its paradoxical injury, which will also be the locale where a healing will take place. Philoctete's wound multiplies beyond any ability to make sense of it as a symbolic

narrative even if it insists on such a narrative. Everything sinks into it, everything collapses into its void.

Helen's woundedness, her rage and anger at people's attempts to define her, to literally give her a symbolic order of their choice, to urge her like a "panther back to its cage," is added to the wound as well (*Omeros* 36). Being a personification of St. Lucia, Helen's woundedness is also the island's own injury which stems from the attempt of characters who, very much like Walcott in *Drums and Colours*, strive to bestow their own version of a symbolic order to the land, to enact on its geography their own political and social ideologies, to shape it in their own image and version of Caribbeanness – to love Helen / St. Lucia not "the way the leaves loved her" but as if she is "a pink leaflet / printed with slogans of black people fighting war" (*Omeros* 106).

The list of characters' injuries added to the wound goes on and on, investing it with more chaos and entropy. In his role as a character in the epic poem, Derek Walcott's own wounds are also annexed: A love gone sore – a possible reference to his third wife Norline Metivier whose departure makes their residence feel like a "House of memories that grow / like shadows out of Allan Poe" (173). Ma Kilman's own woundedness, her amnesia, and inability to find a cure, and Seven Seas' pain at the farcical tragedy of history repeating itself – both of their "wounds" are also signified in Philoctete's. Indubitably there are other characters I can add to this list of damaged individuals, but this will suffice for the sake of my argument. I will return to Philoctete to propose how the wound itself, through its interaction with the world and the spheres it has absorbed, effects the very process of healing in the locus where the dense opaque injury is located.

I will return to Ramazani's notion that Philoctete is a representation of the Fisher King. I find no objection, at least for the moment, with Ramazani's reasoning. It is Ramazani's other claim, that the man also relates to Frazer's meta-myth that I would like to contend. According to Frazer, the meta-myth of the wounded vegetation god runs as follows: In disparate ancient pantheons, there is a male solar deity who is killed and resurrected again by his female consort / earth goddess. His demise and resurrection are linked to the cyclical nature of the seasons, to life and death and is believed to cause the vegetation to grow and the harvest to ripen. As such, a human "sacred king" is sacrificed in some legends as a representation of the dying-and-rising god so that his spilled blood, figuratively and literally speaking, acts to make the grass grow green.

In relation to Philoctete, Ramazani does not stress the "god's" demise inasmuch as he emphasizes the fact that he is healed. He provides the example of the Egyptian god Osiris who returns from the dead due to the ministrations of his sister-wife Isis – an act corresponding, in Ramazani's estimation, to Ma Kilman eventually healing Philoctete of his wound. This well may be the case, but Frazer's meta-myth does not entirely correlate with Philoctete's circumstances. Ma Kilman's healing of Philoctete cures the region, but in *The Golden Bough*, and in contrast to the popular versions of the Fisher King, to make the harvest grow and revivify the land, a representative of Osiris has to be sacrificed first, not healed. Whether such a representative is an animal or a sacred king, the meta-myth in its familiar versions necessitates death for life to return to the social order.³⁹

³⁹ See, for example, pp. 491-493 for the killing of animals and pp. 277-279 for the killing of sacred kings in James Frazer's *Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, A New Abridgement from the Second and Third Editions*, edited by Robert Frazer, Oxford U P, 1994.

Unlike the tale of the Fisher King, Ramazani's other scenario is not entirely congruent with Philoctete's case in *Omeros*. Regardless, Ramazani has created a fortuitous if unintended paradox that is very much an indication of chaos. Philoctete, I will argue, must die in order to live even if such a death is merely metaphorical. The agent of this transformation is Ma Kilman who doubles as the Sybil, and according to Breslin, also triples as the goddess Athena (Breslin 250). Like Philoctete and most other characters in *Omeros*, Ma Kilman straddles worlds even if she is primarily presented as her role of the African healer. Ramazani may have compared her to Isis but her role as the obeahwoman is more crucial.

According to Vincent Brown, during the era of the plantation, "obeah offered people power over the most fraught and perilous feature of life in slave society: the permeable frontier between life and death" (147). Among the enslaved, obeah is a powerful political force that regulates slave society. Although mischaracterized by whites as malignant witchcraft, practitioners of obeah has operated as healers, "herbalists and sages tending to physical, social and spiritual needs" (146). One critical role those practitioners have is to regulate the relationship between the living and the dead. Their society is supposed to "offer protection from the workings of malevolent forces, but especially from the unsettled spirits of the dead. Suffering under the evils of enslavements, sickness and social disharmony, the enslaved turned to such tactic to negotiate a path in the world" (147).

The modern obeahwoman Ma Kilman may not have the exact same role that her "shamanic" ancestors do, but her role, although altered, must still regulate the relationship between the living and the dead in modern St. Lucia. It is history-as-trauma that needs to be dealt with after all, and this can be seen as stemming from the ghosts of the dead who have expired as a direct or indirect result of slavery. The

wound in Philoctete's shin has been correlated to the wounds incurred by ancestral enslavement and its healing necessitates a harmony between the restless spirits of the deceased and the modern Caribbeans haunted by a painful history. What Ma Kilman must do is straddle the undifferentiated nexus point between life and death to deliver onto the environment *something* that is para-symbolic – a psychical “cure” that goes beyond the dictates of the signifier and the sway of history. Alternatively, what she must do is “eject” the abject by “closing” the borders between life and death.

As obeahwoman, Ma Kilman must recall the ancestral cure that will “pacify” the dead and ameliorate the symptoms of the living who struggle under the malaise of history-as-trauma. More critically, she must heal the living by changing their relationship to their dead. She must remember her African history – but memory is a thing of paradox, mimicry and imagination in the Caribbean. What is remembered is something that may have its roots in history-as-Africa but the cure, like the wound, is made of symbolic spheres. Like the wound, the cure is also a thing of chaos. Initially carried as a “seed” in the beak of a swift, the cure appears to be African in origin, even if, like the bird itself, it is connected and it connects to other parts of the globe (*Omeros* 86).

The cure of the wound is closely linked to the swift inasmuch as it is linked to Ma Kilman. The swift is there when Philoctete, pained by his wound, severs the yams from their roots. It is invoked when Achilles's pirogue gets christened by a priest who makes “the swift's sign” over it – conflating crucifix and bird (*Omeros* 5). The swift appears and guides Achilles on his journey back to his ancestral land and away from it. The bird may have been sent by God “as a pilot” and messenger but it has also witnessed the deity's death and woundedness (*Omeros* 134). It has “seen the god's body torn from its hill” (*Omeros* 124). It is also there following Catherine Weldon,

being a witness to her psychic injury – the death of her son. It has carried his “brown, whirring soul” to heaven (*Omeros* 177).

The swift and the seed it carries, like the coin in *Drums and Colours*, like the wound itself, *enables* and *cancels* signification simultaneously. Following it has enabled Achille’s journey back to Africa in an attempt to forge a stable symbolic order, but it has also allowed him to negate the intent of the journey. Furthermore, it has also taken the place of the crucifix thereby altering or annihilating one of the most prominent and important symbols in most stable social orders: During his departure from his ancestral land, God speaks to Achille, informing him that he has permitted him to establish roots by connecting him to Africa – he has allowed him to “come home” by sending the swift “whose wings is the sign of... crucifixion” and should he fail to heed his commandments, he “shalt have no God” (*Omeros* 132). Achille turns his back on his ancestral homeland, betraying the deity even if the swift itself remains with him, having cancelled its “divine” signification. It becomes, not a messenger or the signifier of a god, but a dense presence emptied of a stable symbolic meaning and overburdened with chaotic signification, untethered from any closed order that can regulate its circuitous journey.

The path the bird takes, in contrast to the Queen’s letter, is beyond any strictly delineated cultural order: The “swift’s road” anchors Homeric Greece to *Omeric* St. Lucia (*Omeros* 33). I can say that the swift’s journey and the wound’s journey are one – the bird is witness to woundedness. In the process of its voyage, the bird follows the injury, follows the myriad narratives that the wound compels – and in its beak the cure follows. From Achille’s journey back to Africa to Plunkett’s efforts in discovering a history to Hector’s insecurities and beyond, the swift and the cure it carries collapse history into the present – not as a causality but, like the wound, as a chaotic multitude

that resonates and cancels its typical symbolic structure, returning it to its entropic form.

The cure / seed, in the swift's beak, like the wound on Philoctete's shin, is *of* the world and *partakes* of the world. I can say that it is the *inverse* of the wound, but I can also say, following Ashok Bery, that it is the wound *itself* (175). It certainly has similar characteristics to the wound. Ma Kilman recognizes "that it [carries] the smell, when it gangrened, / of Philoctete's cut" (*Omeros* 235). Furthermore, like the wound, the "stinking flower" that the plant brings forth is described as a "whorled corolla" (*Omeros* 240). Finally, in the same manner in which I have assessed how the Middle Passage and the Caribbean present merge seamlessly in "Laventille," the same thing happens with the plant and the wound. The plant is described as a wound on the flesh of the earth and the earth is personified as an Afro-Caribbean with the same attributes as Ma Kilman or Philoctete:

The wound of the flower, its gangrene, its rage
fester for centuries, reeked with corrupted blood,

seeped the pustular drops instead of sunlit dew
into the skull, the brain of the earth, in the mind
ashamed of its flesh, its hair. (*Omeros* 242)

The cure is the double of the wound, its semblable, its inverse. It is the locale where life and death or absence and presence cannot be differentiated because they are one and the same. It is the site of abjection, the site where Kristeva's semiotic and symbolic interact. It is what allows Philoctete, in his role as the vegetative deity, to die so that he, in his guise as the Fisher King can live.

I have already posited the role Ma Kilman has to play in curing Philoctete. If Loretta Collins suggests that the obeahwoman's name "Kil(l)-man" signifies colonial

fear of obeah in its role as dark magic and that the woman is a “*gardeuse* or sibyl capable of inflicting harm,” I would like to suggest that the name, as the woman herself, doubling and tripling with chaos, actually signifies a different kind of death (149). From death comes life, this is the paradox of undifferentiated chaos: Philoctete has to die, not an actual death, but a symbolic one and for this to happen, Ma Kilman has to be the mediator of his demise since she is the shaman / *gardeuse* / obeahwoman / sybil who commands the space between the world of the living and the dead.

In *Omeros*, Ma Kilman cannot recall the magic of her African ancestors, the cure made of the very flower deposited by the swift: “It have a flower somewhere, a medicine, and ways / my grandmother would boil it. I used to watch ants / climbing her white flower-pot. But, God, in which place?” (*Omeros* 17). Ma Kilman has to undergo a transformation to connect to her “roots.” This link, however, is not to an actual African culture even if African gods such as Erzulie, Shango and Ogun return to her in *Omeros* at the moment of her apotheosis, “building a web” over her head, “a net that [enters] her nerves” and connects her to “history” and the obeah magic of her forebears. I contend that such a link is based on *mimicry* and on the imagination that Walcott claims replaces history in the Caribbean (*Omeros* 241).

To begin with, when Ma Kilman links herself to “history,” she links the speaker in *Omeros* to “my mother, my grandmother, my great-great-grandmother” – as if the connection has restored to her a linear genealogical line that stretches back to a time before the Middle Passage sundered her from her roots (*Omeros* 243). Yet, at the same time, I notice all those women, the mother, the grandmother and the ancestor are all configured in one spatial point in the present. All relate to the obeah woman, all appear in her, all collapse in her, all resonate in her, all are undifferentiated from her.

There is no causal progress of history inasmuch as there is a *density* of roles within Ma Kilman. History's beginning is the present. Its origin maps an entropic spatial point of singularity. Within that point, there is simultaneously a mother, a grandmother and a great-grandmother, but before that point there is nothing. Much like "The Sea is History," in *Omeros* history in St. Lucia can finally begin and St. Lucia can begin without history.

Unlike Lacan, where a tie to one's "true" symbolic history is crucial to "heal" one's present neurosis, I will first take this following position only to contradict it later: Ma Kilman has to heal herself first before she can tie herself to "history" – but this is only the first step of the process. I contend that the point of singularity whose position the obeahwoman has incarnated and was incarnated in is self-referential in the manner that I have assessed with Benítez-Rojo. The point moves back into a past that is as actual as it is imaginary only to return to itself. The present in *Omeros* creates history in a manner where history itself can paradoxically create the present. The reason I believe this is because I am not entirely sure how Ma Kilman has healed herself and undergone apotheosis. Does she heal herself first and thereby forge a link to "history" or does she forge a link to "history" and heal herself in the process? The question also relates to another – if I am to differentially divide the wound into its main "components," the injury and the cure, which will come first? This question is significant since Walcott writes that the swift "aimed to carry the cure / that precedes every wound" – a paradox that increases the layer of complexity and chaos that burden the wound (*Omeros* 237).

In *Omeros*, Ma Kilman finds the cure by ostensibly following the stench of the flower that germinated by the seed deposited on the shores of St. Lucia by the dead swift. Nothing but the smell of it makes her realize the flower's implication – that and

a memory of her grandmother boiling the flower to extract its healing properties. This is the paradox from which one can infer the cure's self-referentiality. The cure here exists as a historical causality, it is tied to history, to the grandmother – but history itself is tied to the present which gestures back to that which “determines” it to create it in return. The swift may have deposited the cure on Caribbean soil and the seed itself is fashioned by its journey – but the swift's journey exists in the present, following Achille's return to Africa, or Plunkett's attempt at creating history, or Hector's insecurities, or Philoctete's woundedness, or Helen's rage towards Achille and her capriciousness towards the Plunketts. Even the bird's death after the cure is deposited implies a lack of cohesion in *Omeros* since the swift is also alive *after* its death – most of the journeys occur after the fact of its demise and furthermore, it has been sighted by *Omeric* characters long after Philoctete is healed by the seed its corpse has yielded.

The wound resonates with events that are chaotic or may be termed fictitious from a symbolic standpoint – not to mention that its signification is inconsistent – inconsistent in the manner that Walcott's many opinions on history, when assessed together, appears to be inconsistent. Within the context of the poem, Achille's sojourn back to his ancestral homeland may not be a factual journey since it occurs during a hallucination brought about by sunstroke and this, according to Justine McConnell, “problematizes the direct lessons to be learned” from such a voyage (131). It then follows that Achille's journey, and by proxy Ma Kilman's apotheosis which partially depends on such a journey, does not imply an “Afrocentric proposal: Achille neither actually returns to Africa himself, nor does he try to take others there when he returns to St. Lucia.” Instead, he “incorporates what he has learned there into his Caribbean life” (131). This, paradoxically, at least to me, does not make Achille's journey less significant but indicates the operation of chaos on the symbolic.

Everything the wound signifies collapses and explodes from itself – a black hole of chaos that sucks in everything, a supernova of entropy that ejects all. Ma Kilman’s apotheosis is therefore as symbolically inconsistent and ineffable as the wound itself. Much like the injury in Dylan Thomas’s poem, it is the wound, her amnesia, that prevents her from “transcending” and it is the wound, her amnesia, that also causes her ascent. If I have said that Philoctete is the locus of the wound, then Ma Kilman is the locus of the cure even if they are the same. The differentiation of the wound into cure and injury at this juncture in the epic poem also implies the machination of chaos but it also implies a symbolic order being formed. It is the symbolic which configures the world into a gradient from which cure and wound are separated by signifiers existing in a syntagmatic relationship to each other. At this point in *Omeros*, it is perhaps necessary to do so in order for a symbolic order, no matter how chaotic, to be delivered and for “apotheosis” to be registered within the cultural order that is to become St. Lucia. Which is to say, another symbolic “narrative” has to be delivered by Ma Kilman, by the wound, by Philoctete and every *Omeric* character and event – but unlike the other narratives and journeys, this one will be registered on the level of the symbolic order as “successful.”

During the healing process, Ma Kilman incorporates her “African” knowledge into the cure that will heal Philoctete. She uses a “basin” left by the old sugar-mill – indubitably a reference to European colonization and a representation of history-as-Europe. This cauldron, whose opening is similar to the wound in that it is “agape in its crusted, agonized O: the scream / of centuries,” will also play its part in forming the cure to the wound (*Omeros* 244). When Philoctete is bathed in the basin which holds the flower’s ingredients, he feels “the putrescent shin / drain in the seethe like sucked marrow, he [feels] it drag / the slime from his shame.” There is, yet again, as in Ma

Kilman's own woundedness, an implication that the injury partially stems from Philoctete's lack of acceptance of his Africanness (245). The man, after feeling both relief and pain, attempts to circumvent the healing process by climbing out of the cauldron shouting, "*Not yet!*" (*Omeros* 245).

This is not altogether surprising from a Lacanian standpoint. The wound, in one of its guises, is part and parcel of Philoctete's identity, his imaginary-symbolic constitution. It has been with him for so long that his very self, despite all its misery, rotates around it. His life is fashioned by it, his being revolves around what it represents. It is the very fulcrum around which his whole essence moves – it dominates and represents his life. It is, in actual fact, his life and it has not only cursed him, but also blessed him: "Moin blessé ... // I am blest / wif this wound, Ma Kilman, qui pas ka guérir pièce. / Which will never heal" (*Omeros* 16-17). As Maria Fumagalli writes, the adjective "blessé" means "'injured,' 'cursed' but can also signify that Philoctete is 'blessed'" or "blest" due to the phonetic similarity with this word (75). As such, healing the injury would fundamentally mean that Philoctete, whose wound is sutured to his essence, whose wound is his essence, must unreservedly die, at least from a symbolic perspective. Without the wound, he has nothing to do, he is *nothing*, he will have to be another person, he will have to *die* or change utterly into *something* else.

This is why Ma Kilman must "kill" Philoctete in his role as a vegetative deity to resurrect and heal him as the Fisher King. The obeahwoman, who can now effectively manage the relationship between death and life, pushes the wounded man back into the cauldron with a "mother's ritual rage"—knowing full well the reason behind his recalcitrance but also knowing the necessity of a cure that is as painful as the wound it is supposed to heal (*Omeros* 245). Eventually, Philoctete's injury closes on his shin. The cure made of the same diametrically-opposite symbolic spheres as the

wound, the cure that is the same as the wound, the cure that is the inverse of the wound – cancels the wound.

There is no difference between the wound and the cure but the position that the wounded subject takes in respect to his injury. The wound with all the spheres that it contains, with its traumatic face, can be the very thing that heals. To reach “El Dorado” – that is, to become “whole” in the manner specified by Benítez-Rojo, all that Ma Kilman does is accept the fact that she is not whole and fashions out of the spheres at her disposal a cure to history thereby making her, paradoxically, whole. History-as-Africa and history-as-trauma, instead of causing pain or nostalgia for a lost essence, become the very tools that fashion an identity – and this identity is Caribbean and not African even if the African elements predominate within it. Ma Kilman no longer hides her body or hair, nor her beliefs in obeah. The histories that have wounded her and caused her shame are the very histories that have healed her and gave her strength.

As for History-as-Europe, even if, from the perspective of the wound-as-injury, it causes the Caribbeans to feel anxiety and suffering, or compels them to dismiss their own region due to its “historylessness” – from its position as the wound-as-cure, it permits *Omeric* characters to use the very tools that are fashioned to enslave their ancestors to save themselves. The very English language which is used against the Caribbeans becomes the Caribbean poet’s implement to write back to the centre or, in the words of the speaker / Walcott, “Like Philoctete’s wound, this language carries its own cure, / its radiant affliction” (321). In Bery’s words, the English language “is both wound and cure.... [It] is a wound partly because the one Walcott is using is a legacy of colonial history, and it is a cure because it allows the writer to deal with the pain of the wound” (175). The cauldron left from the time of the plantations becomes the basin where Philoctete can heal. The horror of history or the lack of it becomes the impetus

to survive and bypass its replicating tragedies. As in Thomas's "Lie Still, Sleep Becalmed," that which causes torpor and immobility also mobilizes the force that overwhelms stasis. The injury that prevents the journey from happening causes the journey "to begin to the end of [the] wound" (Thomas 11). In the end, the "wound has found her own cure," the wound is her own cure (*Omeros* 245).

Philoctete's wound, open and partaking of the world, partakes of the cure, partakes of the wound-as-cure, partakes of the cure-as-wound, partakes of itself. It does not heal because it has expunged what festers inside it, or rejected what is outside itself. It has healed by chaotically and ineffably changing the manner in which what is inside relates to what is outside, the manner in which it relates to the world and the environment, and the manner in which it interacts with the world and becomes the world. Thus, the vegetative deity dies in a ritual sacrifice enacted by obeah magic and a "stable" social order is achieved in the manner specified by Benítez-Rojo. This order is inundated and "stabilized" by African symbolic spheres more than any other sphere extant within Caribbean culture. The Fisher King is thereby healed, and the healing process moves from the webbed centre of the wound towards every wound in *Omeros*, healing them in turn, changing and altering the manner in which the world through the wound is perceived, in which the wound perceives the world. The speaker feels "the wrong love leaving [him]" and senses an "elation / opening and closing the valves of [his] panelled heart" (246-247). The island is cleansed with rain and the Caribbeans "feel the shame, the self-hate / draining from all [their] bodies" (243). Helen finally decides for herself which direction to take in her life and Plunkett foregoes his attempt to find a history for St. Lucia. He even asks Ma Kilman to connect him to the spirit of his dead wife.

Ma Kilman, by healing the Fisher King, heals the land. Yet, because of the wound's paradox and self-referentiality, I can also say that Philoctete is healed when the land and its people heal themselves. From a different perspective, I can say that a confluence of events is necessary to heal the wound – and this includes Achille's acceptance of Helen's decision and his acknowledgement that his home is the Caribbean and not Africa, in addition to Ma Kilman's regaining her shamanic puissance and obeah knowledge. From a chronological perspective, both Ma Kilman and Achille therefore heal their wounds before Philoctete. I can extrapolate that these events are what determine Philoctete's healing process, not the other way around – but I can also say the reverse is also true due to the wound's self-referentiality. This is why I have some reservations to Ramazani's depiction of Philoctete, not only as the vegetative deity, but also as the Fisher King. It may be true that the man heals the land, but it is also true that the land heals the man as well.

With the “ritual sacrifice” finally “stabilizing” St. Lucia's social order, I am inclined to posit that the symbolic has finally found the balance necessary to close its circuit and attain a balance that predominates with African-inspired signifiers from which a subject's destiny can finally be determined. Yet, like the coin in *Drums and Colours*, the wound itself, though healed, remains paradoxically in “circulation.” During the Boxing Day celebration, while dancing and remembering the Middle Passage:

all the pain

Re-entered Philoctete, of the hacked yams, the hold

closing over their heads, the bolt-closing iron,

over eyes that never saw the light of this world. (*Omeros* 276)

Sarah Senk is right when she writes that “*Omeros* never fulfils the promise of return and the resolution of complete healing” and that the possibility of “working-through-as-closure,” that one has to “psychically return to the site of wounding to recover from a traumatic experience” can never be fully realized (42). Trauma, being of the order of the *réel*, can always obdurately return. Alternatively, if I view the wound as a representation of abjection and not trauma, then, the abject, being that which has been ejected to create the clearly delineated borders of the self and, in this case, the social order, although radically excluded, nevertheless cannot be banished altogether. It hovers on the periphery of the Caribbeans’ existence, constantly challenging their tenuous border of identity. The wound in *Omeros* retains its multifarious guises – and whether it is considered trauma or abjection or chaos, its return heralds suffering inasmuch as it heralds salvation. The wound opens itself to the world preventing history-as-trauma from closing its circuit and recycling the memory of pain as pain-in-itself. It is the nexus where wholeness occurs through the process of fragmentation, where *Omeric* language is possible and where a dead swift remains impossibly alive and obliquely chasing an injury which has yet to happen and which had happened and which can be reversed through a seed carried in its beak – a cure to be delivered to a suffering island and a wounded people.

I have argued in the introduction of my thesis that in “Laventille” Walcott does not take the poem to its “(il)logical end.” After the amnesiac blow is revealed, there is no counter to it. The blow sinks once more beneath the symbolic order and history-as-trauma is allowed to determine the present of the Laventilleans in a manner that is deleterious to any optimistic future. In *Omeros*, Ma Kilman’s amnesia, Philoctete’s wound and the injury of every *Omeric* character, by taking the place of the “amnesiac blow” in “Laventille,” become the very thing that offers salvation to the region, that

prevents a symbolic order or a symbolic history from determining the present in an injurious fashion, that refuses history-as-trauma as the sole inheritance of the Caribbean islands.

“Laventille” may have been Walcott’s reply to Naipaul’s pessimistic beliefs, but it still somewhat validates those beliefs since it only engages, at least on a surface level, with the reason why the region has no history without negating Naipaul’s nihilistic opinion. In *Omeros*, the wound creates the journey that “Laventille’s” amnesiac blow refuses to undertake. Its narrative may exist because of history, but it also exists *despite* history and also exists in the *absence* of history. In the end, like Naipaul, Walcott acknowledges that his countrymen have no “true” historical foundation but he goes one step farther by revealing that they are the foundation: “Who set out to found no cities; they were the found, / who were bound for no victories; they were the bound, / who levelled nothing before them; they were the ground” (*Omeros* 20).

Chapter III

A Mythical Vision of Chaos: The Spiral in Yeats's *A Vision* and Poetry

Yeats and *A Vision*

Of all the three poets assessed, Yeats's take on history is the most frustrating, esoteric and complex. The cyclical gyres of history introduced in *A Vision* are the densest and least accessible of his work. Even books which successfully illuminate its obscure and demanding passages such as Neil Mann's *A Reader's Guide to Yeats's 'A Vision'* and W. B. Yeats's *'A Vision': Explications and Contexts* require patience and a careful assessment and cross-referencing. Partly because of this seemingly fatuous difficulty, W. H. Auden, who in 1948 lauded Yeats as a poet who wrote "the most beautiful poetry" and rescued the "English lyric from the dead hands of Campion and Tom Moore," nevertheless, asserted that the apparently obscurantist *A Vision* is irrelevant, that the man's confounding occultism and use of Irish myth in his poetry is "nonsense," and that his particular worldview is a false "Weltanschauung" (195,188).

Auden's critical opinion of Yeats's esoteric predispositions was written almost a decade after his death in a post-war era still reeling from the atrocities committed by the axis powers. If Adorno is often (mis)quoted as saying it is impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz (Adorno 33),⁴⁰ Auden's stance would complement this statement by specifying the type of literature to be written: an art that is accessible and

⁴⁰ The misquotation arises from Samuel and Shierry Weber's English translation of Adorno's text. It does not help matters that Adorno "retracted" this statement (which he had never actually made) in his book *Negative Dialektik*. As such, I can say, with some irony, that Adorno meant the quotation to be perceived as it is now misunderstood, if only after the fact.

that relates to the world, its tragedies and alienations. Any other work of art may very well be an insult to the millions of people dead in an age that proved that evil is all too common and, to use Arendt, all too banal. “Mediums, spells, the Mysterious Orient,” he wrote of Yeats, “how embarrassing” (189).⁴¹

Auden’s prognosis is that Yeats will be solely remembered for his verses. *A Vision* will be consigned to oblivion since it is too fantastic to be considered on par with his poetry. It is not an inaccurate prediction on Auden’s part. Even if critics’ interest in the text has seen a significant spike in the last few decades, the general reader will hardly be interested in its esoteric terminologies, diagrams and geometries which are often frustratingly removed from its everyday and even philosophical usage and which, furthermore, interrelate to each other in different dizzying iterations that can scarcely be understood. Frederic Jameson states that Yeats’s system “is horrendously complicated, involving simultaneous clockwise and counterclockwise rotations through contraries and variables which themselves define each position” (*Modernist* 273). Jameson’s take on *A Vision* complements Auden’s in certain respects. He is particularly dismissive of its occultist elements. He is also disdainful of its conception of time as a series of cyclical gyres that appear all too deterministic of history.

Jameson’s outlook, in conjunction with Auden’s, complicates the manner in which I believe *A Vision* may shed light on Yeats’s conception of history in both the text and his poems. I argue that Auden was too hasty in dismissing Yeats’s inclinations. As is seen in his Cuchulain cycle of plays, Yeats’s revamping of Irish myth and folklore, which Auden relegates to uninspiring delusory fantasy, is

⁴¹ Ramazani states that even if Yeats’s writings sometimes show signs of orientalism and “partly distortive suppositions” relating to Asia, he at least took Asian cultures seriously and attempted to understand them: “He engaged them, performed them, learned from them, and made poetry and theatre enmeshed with them” (*Poetry in a Global Age* 154).

nevertheless an example of a writer using his cultural past to model “a new ethos of heroic and militant nationalism” (Tymoczko 111). It is Fanon who asserts that the colonized intellectual writing for his people must use the past “with the intention of opening up the future, of spurring them into action and fostering hope” (*Wretched* 167).

It is my belief that Yeats’s fashioning of the cyclical gyres of history in *A Vision* indicates a need to transcend, contend, deny and negate history – as well as engage with the chaotic, cultural, political, postcolonial and national elements that had been unleashed in Ireland around the time of its independence from Britain. Consequently, my assessment of *A Vision* is not for its own sake. Rather, it is to expound on a cyclical psychic economy that I believe is coeval with the historical cycles of *A Vision*. As such, my argument will use, not only *A Vision*, but also Yeats’s poetry. It is my intention to synthesize Claud Lévi-Strauss’s “spiraling myth” whose axis is determined by a synchronic and a diachronic aspect with Lacan’s theory of the obsessive neurotic in “The Neurotic’s Individual Myth” to reveal how Yeats’s psychic economy, which I will show takes the form of a spiral, works in an environment where the symbols of Irish culture are threatened or operate under the influence of chaos.

My use of Yeats’s poetry may appear eclectic and random: I will not be concentrating on *The Winding Stair* and *The Tower*, the books that, according to Yeats, are influenced by *A Vision* (*AVB* 7).⁴² Since it is my intention to assess Yeats’s actions and the manner in which they conflate and differentiate from the actions of the obsessive neurotic, the literature I will discuss must reveal a psychic economy similar to such an individual and will be taken from across his whole body of work. I will

⁴² Following recent scholars like Neil Mann and Claire Nally, I will abbreviate the 1937 version of *A Vision* as “*AVB*” and the 1925 version as “*AVA*.”

assess poems about obsessions and deadly desire, verses about ablative love and the woman-as-Thing, literature about “analogy” and fecal matter, images of life intertwining with death etc. All these qualities will be evaluated to reveal that Yeats’s psychic economy goes beyond the obsessive neurotic’s actions which strive to bypass the symbolic even as it unwillingly returns to it.

What I want to reveal is that the “psychic spiral” in Yeats’s work is not that which is found in *A Vision*. Yeats may have “formalized” this revolving spire stylistically in his esoteric text, especially in the historical cycles that herald the beginning and the end of successive eras, but the rotating gyral structure I have detected goes beyond *A Vision* and even beyond the poems that have influenced *A Vision* or used it as a point of reference. Ultimately, what I will discuss is the manner in which history in Yeats’s work gestures to its own unravelling and points to a mode of Yeatsian poetry or art that is not entirely dependent on it. This mode of art reveals the influence of chaos, its hazards and subversions as well as its continuous generation of life from death and decay. In the next section of my chapter, I will examine the manner in which “order” hides the entropy implicit in Yeats’s *A Vision* thereby creating the very conditions that allows chaos to prime itself and manifest across the cultural, psychic and linguistic reality of his literature.

Order in *A Vision*

If I am to state that chaos underlies Yeats’s esoteric text, I am implying a contradiction of sorts. The whole text is obsessed with the need to order and arrange the world into a system of comprehension where everything can be elucidated, managed and controlled to such an extent that Brian Arkins designates *A Vision* as a “monologic” text – this, in contrast to Yeats’s dialogic poetry (83). If anything, order,

history and all the elements of *A Vision*'s various systems seem to be too overdetermined. It is as if Yeats, in sheer denial of his inability to master a world veering in a direction unappealing to his ethos, decided to elaborate and refashion his wife's automatic writing into a text where historical events, human incarnations or personalities, astrological signs, lunar and solar phases, *antithetical* and *primary* tinctures, secular and religious dispositions, the spirits and the living, the self and its anti-self, the *Faculties* and the *Principles*, the cycles of reincarnations and the thirteenth cone all interrelate in a manner that infers the whirring mechanism of some intricate clock. *A Vision* must have given Yeats a sense of mastery and control over the anarchy that had inundated his life and the Ireland of his time. In a letter published to the illustrator of the first edition of *A Vision*, he wrote, "I do not know what my book will be to others — nothing perhaps. To me it means a last act of defence against the chaos of the world; & I hope for ten years to write out of my renewed security" (qtd. in Mann, "Overview").

Yeats's statement strengthens my belief that *A Vision* and some of his poems are an attempt of order in the face of disorder – in the face of the encroachment of chaos on one's assumptions and desires. If, with the death of Parnell in 1891, Yeats erroneously sensed that Ireland will be as soft wax that can be moulded to his desires, in the controversial preface of his book *On the Boiler* published four decades later in 1939, he wrote splenetically: "If ever Ireland again seems molten wax, reverse the process of revolution. Do not try to pour Ireland into any political system" (*Later Essays* 224).⁴³ The nation that Yeats had yearned for and attempted to form, whether as a poet or a senate member of the Irish Free State, had not come to pass.

⁴³ This preface is where Yeats notoriously elaborates on his beliefs in eugenics and fascism. I will engage with the preface later in my chapter.

The upheaval Yeats's Ireland had witnessed in his lifetime, the Easter Rising of 1916, the War of Independence of 1919-1921 and the Civil War of 1922-1923, had disenchanted the poet by blocking most of his cultural projects (Kiberd *After* 4-5). Ireland's soft wax had hardened into a shape that was sectarianist much to Yeats's disgruntlement. The politics of his day saw the Catholic church and the state attempt to interfere in all private aspects of Irish life. The passing of the Dance Halls Act in 1935 to regulate dancing, for example, "introduced state licencing and so an element of police control" (Comerford 195). The official banning of divorce in 1925 and the solidification of this action in the Irish constitution was objectionable to Yeats's notion of nationalism and secular freedom even if he, in his 1925 famous senate debate, would couch his dissent in sectarian terms (Doggett 97). Yeats was also alarmed by the church's ascendancy and influence on "the repressive Catholic sexual morality" of the 1920s and 1930s (Bradley 165).

If, on the public level, Yeats felt he had failed to guide his country, on the personal level, he had not found much success either. His yearning for Maude Gonne and later, her daughter Iseult, proved futile with their rejection and subsequent marriages. It was his marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees and her attempt at automatic writing culminating in the publication of *A Vision* that gave Yeats a semblance of order in his life. George needed an activity to keep Yeats's attention centered on their marriage, and a spiritual visitation by the "instructors" yielded much interaction between the couple. It certainly fascinated Yeats enough to spend the last decades of his life making sense of the seemingly mystifying utterances issued by her (Saddlemeyer 100-104). The making of *A Vision*, and not just the "final product," created a grounding effect in his life – "an act of defence against the chaos of the world."

In point of fact, the letter I have cited recalls Eliot's notion of the "mythical method" – a poetic concept that also attempts to impose order on disorder, and one that Yeats surely had in mind since the part of the letter quoted contains thematic and linguistic similarities to Eliot's definition.⁴⁴ In "Ulysses, Order and Myth," Eliot defines the mythical method as a literary process whereby a myth is used to manipulate a "continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity." Eliot claims that the mythical method is a way of "controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (*Selected* 177). Although Eliot links the concept to Joyce's *Ulysses*, he writes that "it is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which [he believes] Mr. Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious. It is a method for which... psychology (such as it is, and whether our reaction to it be comic or serious) ... have concurred to make possible" (*Selected* 177-178).

To Eliot, a modern lucid narrative requires underlying coherent myths to buttress it which the present itself, with its fractured history, is unable to bestow. *A Vision* would certainly offer such myths to Yeats's works. Many poems such as "Leda and the Swan," "The Second Coming" and "The Magi" are apparently contingent on *A Vision*'s conception of history and "mythology" to deliver their message to the reader. The implied birth of some monstrous "rough beast" refers to the coming of an "avatar" in *A Vision*. Formed by what the "antithetical East will beget upon the *primary* West," this entity heralds the beginning of a new era whose "religious dispensation" is *antithetical* to the last one's *primary* (*AVB* 187). This means that religious life will not

⁴⁴ Yeats's letter to his illustrator Edmund Dulac was written in 1924, a few months after Eliot published his essay " 'Ulysses,' Order and Myth" in *The Dial*.

be *primary* and unified in the world as with the coming of Christ the current avatar but will be disunited and chaotic since its *antithetical* nature “obeys imminent power” and is “hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical” (*AVB* 192).

A Vision then offers Yeats “a positive theory of the world and not just its limitations” (Kiberd, *After* 139). It posits chaos – the “rough beast” of “The Second Coming,” the new avatar who is alien to the current age and culture, the catastrophic events that upend history, etc. – in a system of comprehensibility. At one level, it explicates entropy in language, in the symbolic order itself, in a clockwork system of gyres and wheels and rotations. At another level, it attempts to make disorder orderly, even historically determined to such an extent that Yeats’s friend George Russel (AE) wrote in 1926 that “to follow in the wake of Mr. Yeats’ mind is to surrender oneself to the idea of Fate” (714). Even Auden, despite his reservation on Yeats’s esoteric and occult predispositions, acknowledged in a roundabout way that his need to seek order, in the absence of a “stable” Irish social order, was understandable: “Yeats, like us, was faced with the modern problem, i.e., of living in a society in which men are no longer supported by tradition without being aware of it.” He was “forced to do deliberately for himself what in previous ages had been done for him by family, custom, church, and state, namely the choice of the principles and presuppositions in terms of which he can make sense of his experience” (Auden 192).

Not only is *A Vision* a text that helped Yeats make sense of his poetic experience during his lifetime according to Kiberd, but it also acted to “provide a spiritual foundation for the new nation-state” of Ireland (*Inventing* 316). If, in a previous chapter, I had evaluated Yeats’s “The Indian Upon God” as a poem where the symbolic order arranges the positions of different self-centred creatures who solipsistically perceive the divinity of God in their own image and within their own

limitations, in *A Vision* I can postulate that there is an attempt to resolve the different “ideological” strains that may be found in such separate creatures – or even encapsulated within one of them – in a manner where conflicting beliefs are transmuted into antinomies that interact and strain against each other instead of destroying and cannibalizing one another. Such antinomies, by relating to each other in *A Vision*, “would ultimately be transcended by a third term, the “unnameable” thought which combines both reality and justice” (Kiberd, *Inventing* 317).

According to Kiberd, by envisioning “Ireland as an imagined community” where fiction is “self-interrogating” and protean, the text allowed Yeats to sidestep the strident narratives of the Irish Free State apologists whose conception of the country was rigid and inflexible, whose notion of the nation was constructed as a discrete organism formed in isolation, as in a petri dish, without the outside contamination of British culture and literature (*Inventing* 326). The dual gyres in *A Vision* reflect and highlight Ireland’s and Yeats’s own “doubleness.” To make his point, Kiberd resorts here to stereotypes: Yeats, who was both “‘Anglo’ (cautious, analytic, even cunning)” and “‘Irish’ (passionate, careless, emotional),” would fuse those seemingly incompatible conflicting chaotic features of his identity to “establish [an] underlying unity” where none could be perceived (*Inventing* 317). In a similar vein, the birth of his nascent nation arose from the “fusion” of contraries as in *A Vision*: The *antithetical* “Celtic” gyre interpenetrating its opposing *primary* “Anglo” gyre, creating in the process the necessary conditions for creative life to form and for a hybridized “Celtic” nation to come into being (*Inventing* 318).

Chaos in the Order of *A Vision*

As per my assessment, *A Vision* is a text that serves two functions: It is a tool to symbolically “map” the world’s chaos, making it orderly and comprehensible, and it is also the product of such a “cartography.” Why then have I implied that Yeats’s poetry and the text itself are inundated with chaotic elements that, despite the mechanistic functions of the systems and phases elaborated within, seem to escape a regularizing pattern or law that may inform the readers how to navigate their way through a treacherous symbolic order or history, or find a safe path within a perilous world?

To begin with, the invocation of order does not mean its imposition – and the symbolic “mapping” of chaos in *A Vision* does not mean that chaos’s influence has attenuated. If anything, I sense a certain paradox much like in Walcott’s *Drums and Colours* or *Omeros*. Chaos seems to be the flipside of order and neither seem to be able to exist without the other. Claire Nally, for example, contests Kiberd’s argument that *A Vision* is a tool to resolve and order the conflict between Yeats the “Anglo” and Yeats the “Irish.” Through Bakhtin, she argues that Kiberd appears to have interpreted the interpenetrating gyres as a binary capable of reducing oppositions into an ordered sacrosanct language (75). To her, the gyre, despite their orderly structure, “are always engaged in a cosmic battle. There is no integration” (76).

Neither does the “order” which the esoteric text produces give comfort to its reader. In *A Vision* and some of his poetry, Yeats imagines history as a continuously-ordered spiralling chain where an *antithetical* era and its avatar replace a *primary* era and its avatar – where the interpenetrating antimonial gyres that create the time-chain wax and wane, dilating and contracting in a symmetrically inverse relation to each other, “dying each other’s life, living each other death” (*AVB* 50). By reviewing the text, I may be able to foretell the birth of the beast of “The Second Coming” which is

famously described as slouching towards Bethlehem to be born. However, I cannot see how such knowledge will reinforce the sense of “renewed security” that Yeats divulged to his illustrator. It does not help matters that, according to Terence Brown, in the poet’s initial manuscript written during the Irish Civil War, the poem is connected to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the anxiety-inducing conflicts and upheavals of the Great War (270). Similarly, the rape of the titular character in “Leda and the Swan” – an act whose repercussions ripple on the timeline until, decades later, it culminates in the “burning” of the “roof and tower,” the sacking of Troy and “Agamemnon dead” – disturbs more than gives comfort (10-11).

Both poems begin suddenly in *medias res* – Yeats does not wait for the reader to acclimate to their moods: Leda being raped by the swan and tragically passive under the assault, the falcon flying away in an expanding spiral from the centre point where the falconer cannot dictate its movement. Even the endings of the poems are surprising in their abruptness, leaving off in a “fashion that the meter seems to persist after the words terminate, as if such a powerful rhythm were achieved that it continues by sheer momentum through the air, through the white space at the end of the text” (Albright 50). Furthermore, the destruction of Troy and the death of Agamemnon in the poem seem unrelated to Leda’s assault although the Greek myth is sufficiently known that one can flesh out the narrative.

The rape of Leda causes her impregnation – Clytemnestra and Helen of Troy are conceived. From there, I can follow “history” down the path leading to the destruction of Troy and the death of Agamemnon. Yeats, however, does not summarize the documented chains of events that propel this calamitous catastrophe. The reader is left disconcerted by the sudden shifts of scenes. He too is pummelled by the “sudden blow” that subdues Leda – assaulted both by the abrupt imagery of

violence and the prophetic testimony of the speaker who recounts the Greek myth with all the sibylline authority of one to whom the future is as knowable and unchangeable as the past itself no matter what path the present may take towards or, more critically, even *away* from it. In the process, what is elided is the middle of the “narrative” – the causal chain of signifiers that may connect the first event to the last – the process of historical determinism. What remains is an absence of symbolic cohesion, the anxiety-inducing machinations of chaos which ineffably link one point of time with another and which Edward Said, by equating Leda’s rape with Yeats’s British-colonized Ireland, interprets as a violence that heralds the unarguable necessary “birth of change” in the country (Said 90).

In a similar vein, the beast of “The Second Coming” moves inevitably with “slow thighs” disregarding the reeling “shadows” of the “indignant desert birds” flying out of its path (16-17). Above its head, the falcon moves farther and farther away from the fixed centre towards the skies of chaos even if it does so by taking a path that appears to be correlative with order. The “Second Coming” is, thus, partly “about tensions between order and chaos, where disorder... and ‘anarchy’ is seen to exist within a shape” (Ebury 58). The “widening gyre” that traces the raptor’s movements is a funnel or cone geometry where the falcon’s position with respect to spatial time is inevitable and can be determined. Yet, what is paradoxically charted is not any species of order, whether symbolic or otherwise, but chaos. Rather, the paradox is that chaos becomes somewhat *automated* via the gyre much like the symbolic order is *automated* by the repetitive compulsion. The laws of order itself, impossibly or at least strangely, traces disorder and chance as a seemingly unavoidable destiny. The falcon flies away from the centre in a mathematically determined pattern and this corresponds in the

poem to chaos, to “mere anarchy” and the “blood-dimmed tide” being “loosed upon the world” to flood and drown civilization and culture (4-5).

As in “Leda and the Swan,” in the “Second Coming” there is no historically-constituted signifiers that link the past to future events – at least not in the conventional sense. I have already argued there are no *sufficient* symbols that “order” and link Leda’s rape to Troy and Agamemnon’s downfall. There are also none that determine the rough beast’s incarnation as an effect of the falcon’s widening flight. There is an apparent void where some form of symbolic history should exist – a void where the “narrative” of the poems is elided. This, I believe, correlates with the subjective inability of an individual to make sense of the tragic outcomes in the two poems.

The “sparsity” of symbolic history in the poems create a *proximity* to the event that is without effective symbolic mediation. What I mean by *proximity* is an absence of a functioning stable symbolic order that provides a differential buffer of signifying chains that would encircle any experience or desire that the two poems unleash. Without such buffer, the unresolved experience is rendered more immediate to the senses and more disruptive of the “normative” function of the unconscious whose operations, in accordance with the name-of-the-father, cannot in this instance enforce enough order to anticipate the rules and social contracts a person uses to navigate the threatening world around him. What the subject is left with is a symbolically undifferentiated event that fills him with *dread*, that disrupts any order the symbolic enforces, that makes him experience the horizons of chaos.

The event also opens his world to the register of the *réal*, or to the “Yeatsian sublime” to take Jahan Ramazani who links this concept to the Freudian repetition compulsion, the death drive, entropy and the second law of thermodynamics, i.e. to the

“endless return to the blindness of inorganic matter” (“Poetry” 264). As such, what *appears* as order in Yeats’s system and notion of history, or at least delineated disorder, becomes *chaos*. Michael Wood is right in writing that the systems in *A Vision* do not really impose order on the world: “It is a defence against chaos, not a defeat of chaos. Chaos, at any given moment, is always likely to win, and the question, for the system and for virtually any poem, is about degrees and styles and effects of defence” (56).

Of Myths and Mythical Methods

I believe that the chaotic aspect that *A Vision* and Yeats’s poems divulge must also negate T. S. Eliot’s opinion that Yeats’s poetic technique “adumbrates” Joyce’s “mythical method.” Perhaps “negate” is too strong a word since Eliot’s use of the verb “adumbrate” is highly suggestive. It implies a concept that is not fully formed, is still inchoate and not fully fleshed out. Donoghue gives an example by assessing Yeats’s “No Second Troy” where he writes that the parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity is not as “continuous” as Eliot would have it, having been established not throughout the poem but only in the last line: “Was there another Troy for her to burn?” (“No Second Troy” 12). The parallel is sudden and the link between the “planes” of antiquity and contemporaneity is not a systemic relation or allusion where the myth establishes the solid foundation that bolsters the cohesion of a fragmented or chaotic present.

Donoghue argues that the connection between the woman of the poem to Helen of Troy is not relational from the perspective of a myth that precedes the poem to stabilize the “contemporary” events therein. The link between the woman and Helen cannot be “divined in the few seconds it takes to read the line: it is enough if we sense

that there is a relation, or that there may be. But, if there is, it is because Yeats has posited one, not because it has preceded him.” This is because Yeats “saw relations mainly as they amounted to a contrast and made a conflict, or when the recognition of a posited likeness was strengthened by having to overcome a prior sense of discrepancy in one's mind. So he liked to place one object of attention beside another without specifying why they were to be associated” (220).

There is, then, a difference in Yeats's understanding of myth in comparison to Eliot. Donoghue writes that to Eliot, a myth is “a story told for the benefit of the community to which it is addressed: it tells the members of that community how to live, what to do, which forces they should dread.” It “is not just a story like any other: it embodies a comprehensive ambition, to clarify human life as such, or at least to clarify as much of life as members of the community are likely to encounter.” It proposes a “foundational understanding” and has the ambition “to speak truly of life, so far as that truth is known – not of life freed of constraint, but of the forms of life that persist in a community through diverse conditions.” Myth presents “local truths so fundamental as to appear perennial.” The story that it tells is “told from a level of understanding higher because [it is] more comprehensive than that on which people otherwise live their lives from day to day. There is a difference of perspective.” The aim therefore “is to embody in a story a mature knowledge of life, not merely the local quality of living it and suffering its accidents” (Donoghue 208-209).

Based on Donoghue's assessment, I argue that myth to Eliot is a form of *symbolic* history, i.e. myth-as-history, since the “immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history,” when buttressed by the dependable scaffolding of a “historical” myth, produces a “lucid” “symbolic” narrative. Eliotic myth “orders” the present and serves in the capacity of the name-of-the-father since it

rebukes “the low dream of one’s life,” i.e. one’s own egotistical inclination. It is a “source of discipline, illumination and order... [where] values of the long perspective are brought to bear upon the contingencies of one’s daily life.” A Yeatsian myth, on the other hand, is used to “set astir indefinitely extensive reverberations and resonances by setting one figure in latent relation to another” (Donoghue 211). It is the name for “forces and energies which will give themselves to no form but their own” (Donoghue 213).

Yeats’s use of myth in “No Second Troy” creates “reverberations” that go beyond the “order” that it may impart to the poem. Since myth and poem are not continuous with one another, the Homeric Helen impinges on the poet’s verses, sending the tale of the woman in the poem spinning in a direction that is not entirely congruent with any stability that a fully formed mythical method may convey. Even the form of the poem supports this argument. By the assessment of Patrick Keane, the 12-lines, which are divided into rhythmic quatrains, and which revolve around five questions, are a “masterpiece of form writhing with power” (168). These questions attempt to stave the chaos and destruction that the unnamed woman unleashes: “Why, what could she have done being what she is?” (“No Second Troy” 11). The questions, however, are clearly rhetorical and can only relay that the woman herself is “unquestionably destructive” – she can only be what she is (Keane 169). These questions are not posited with the intent of seeking a resolution but with the intention of highlighting that no resolution is possible. Here, chaos is destiny.

I believe the convergence of the Homeric Helen and the tale of the unnamed woman in the poem creates at once a contemporary and an “ahistorical” non-continuous particularity – a “myth” that is not of the Lacanian symbolic order – that straddles both order and disorder, stability and chaos. My claim here is contingent on

Claude Lévi-Strauss's notion of myth which I will interpret through a Lacanian lens. Lévi-Strauss's concept of the symbolic order, although closely related to Lacan's own, contains some elements that I believe are more related to the register of the real. It is the difference between the two Frenchmen's formulations that will help me build my argument that Yeatsian myth is a "force" that pushes the boundary of symbols to birth a "structure" that gives itself to no form but its own.

Theorizing the Yeatsian Myth: Lévi-Strauss and Lacan

To Lévi-Strauss, a myth "refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future" (229). A myth that belongs to one culture with its own symbolic order can be similar to another's – containing similar structures which Lévi-Strauss calls "gross constituent units" or "mythemes." The dissimilarity between the two myths arises due to a differentiation that occurs in the process of a civilization's formation, i.e. the intersection of history with human "eventualities," necessitating a specific myth with a specific configuration to contend and resolve such eventualities. This is the "diachronic" axis of the myth which is particular to the cultural and historical event that gives rise to it. Lévi-Strauss associates this axis with what he calls "non-reversible" time precisely because this facet of myth is determined by historical occurrences. Crucially, he compares this aspect to any past incident that constitutes an unalterable "series of events the remote consequences of which may still be felt at present" (Lévi-Strauss 209).

The diachronic aspect of myth may be critical to an anthropologist's evaluation, but not more so than its *synchronic* aspect. This feature of myth repeats across history and is timeless, belonging to "reversible time." The synchronic can only

be assessed by reducing the different versions of the myths to their gross constituent units. The assessed myths are then perceived as having the same “motifs” – as being a version of the same *one* myth – containing the same “building blocks.” The corollary is that a myth can be reduced to its “mythemes” which are then tabulated according to their relationship to each other. In doing so, a “bundle of relations” can be disclosed which, according to Lévi-Strauss, informs the reader of ahistorical timeless unconscious “themes” that repeats in humanity’s histories and are not determined by them.

One such myth that Lévi-Strauss assesses is one of the central pillars relevant to Freudian psychoanalysis – that of King Oedipus. Like Lévi-Strauss, Freud finds in the tale of Oedipus something “synchronic” or at least timeless which apparently transcends the culture which produces it: “It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father.... We live in ignorance of these wishes, repugnant to morality, which have been forced upon us by Nature” (*Interpretation* 280).” Lévi-Strauss ironically does not consider the Oedipal complex as belonging to a timeless “Nature” but to the culture and the historical circumstances that empower Freud to fashion it. The Oedipal complex is merely another version of the Oedipal myth. By reducing any of the myth’s versions, including Freud’s, to its mythemes and tabulating them appropriately, Lévi-Strauss reveals the “true” timeless synchronic aspect of myth – not Freud’s interpretation, but his own:

The myth has to do with the inability, for a culture which holds the belief that mankind is autochthonous, to find a satisfactory transition between this theory and the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of man and woman. Although the problem

obviously cannot be solved, the Oedipus myth provides a kind of a logical tool which relates the original problem: born from one or born from two? – to the derivative problem: born from different or born from same? By a correlation of this type, the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it. Although experience contradicts theory, social life validates cosmology by its similarity of structure. Hence cosmology is true." (Lévi-Strauss 216)

To Lacan, the Oedipus complex is a function that is integral to a child gaining access to the symbolic order. The Oedipal triad of child, mother and father is explicated by him in terms of a child's narcissistic imaginary relationship which is regulated by the symbolic order. As such, Lacan does consider the iterations of the Oedipal complex historically dependent, but its deeper triadic structure appears, for the most part, historically resistant. It is not necessarily the father who forms one part of the triad, but the name-of-the-father, i.e. any authority that sets down the Law or has the function of maintaining and reinforcing the symbolic order by regulating or prohibiting a subject's desires. The same goes for the mother, or to use another term, the "motherer." The motherer is not necessarily dependent on gender or biology inasmuch as "she" indicates an entity that the child imaginarily perceives as someone who is beloved by him and who loves him narcissistically, unconditionally and without the strictures of the Freudian reality principle. A conclusion can be drawn that from a Lacanian perspective, the Oedipus complex, which heralds the child's acceptance of the symbolic order, has a certain "mythical" timelessness to it.

In his essay "The Neurotic's Individual Myth," Lacan is careful to coach the structure of the Oedipal complex in a manner which is reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss. I

have already introduced Straus's interpretation of the Oedipal tale as an anthropological myth that comes into being in an attempt to resolve the issue a culture is contending with. In the Oedipal scenario, the issue is whether humankind is "autochthonous" or not. The resolution of the posited "cosmogenic" / synchronic problem is undergone through a correlation with a "social" / diachronic issue. Yet, since those two axes are not the same, no true socio-cultural resolution is ever found. As such, a myth "is a way of treating an impossibility" and "responds to the initial situation of impossibility or contradiction not with a solution but by finding new ways of formulating" (Leader 39).

In "The Neurotic's Individual Myth," Lacan assesses the result of the Oedipal psychic structure in what he calls obsessive neurotics. Such analysands' obsessions compel them to "shuffle" the psychic events of their lives into the structure of a myth. A contemporary critical event that occurs in their lives is *analogously* superimposed onto a *past irresolvable* and painful event that is reminiscent of the first – all in an attempt to *resolve* the latter by resolving the former. This potential resolution occurs when the obsessive neurotic finally pays the unpaid symbolic debt of the historical event by manipulating the contemporary incident to create the same circumstances that leads to the formation of another unpaid debt – one which he subsequently pays. The obsessive hopes that somehow the payment of the "current debt" will, on the symbolic level on which such "bills" register, also wipe out the former debt. This, of course, does not happen since the element of the two debts, according to Lacan, "is placed on two different levels at once, and it is precisely in the light of the impossibility of bringing those two levels together that the drama of the neurotic is played out" ("Neurotic" 415). The inability of the two debts to coincide actualizes the motifs of obsessive neurosis. Lacan goes on to say that the cause of obsessiveness on the level

of the Oedipal complex is a splitting of the name-of-the-father or motherer / love object into two – making those two elements unable to coincide with their function and creating in the process a fourth element to the typical triadic structure of the Oedipal complex, an element which Lacan calls “death.”

The malfunctioning split name-of-the-father or motherer / love object creates a “deadly” relationship between them and the obsessive subject – a psychically fatal death struggle qua Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel where the “slave” struggles against the “master” to be “recognized,” or alternatively, struggles against his own semblable, his mirror image, which he perceives as “more advanced, more perfect than he” (“Neurotic” 423-425). The obsessive neurotic’s Oedipal relationship clearly has the structure of Lévi-Strauss’s myth. In this sense, it is not only historical but timeless, at least this is how it can be interpreted through Lacan. Like Lévi-Strauss’s myth, it has a quaternary structure – and like Lévi-Strauss’s myth, it employs two events where one of them attempts to resolve the issue posited by the other to no avail.⁴⁵

In regards to obsessive neurosis, Lacan uses Lévi-Strauss’s own structure of myth to make the structural relational elements of the Oedipal complex “timeless,” mythical and ahistorical: “If there were a necessary discrepancy between real fathers and the symbolic function of the father, the Oedipus complex could be elaborated as a myth to allow the child a positioning in the symbolic” (Leader 40). If I combine both Lacan and Lévi-Strauss, it seems that every myth invented to resolve a communally critical and historical event *implies* an obsessional neurotic structure underlying it inasmuch as every obsessive neurotic’s action employs a “myth” to resolve his neurosis. In other words, as Lévi-Strauss has attempted to formulate the Oedipal

⁴⁵ Lévi-Strauss’s Oedipal myth is quaternary because it is constituted of four elements divided into two pairs which are the underrating of blood relations / the overrating of blood relations and the possibility of autochthony / impossibility of autochthony.

complex into a historical iteration of the anthropological myth, one can go the other way by stating that a myth has the psychical signature of the obsessive neurotic subject stamped on its structure.

Yeats's Obsessions

Can I say that Yeats's employment or creation of myths, whether in *A Vision* or in his poetry, implies that his psyche is configured in an obsessive structure? My provisional answer to this question will be a conditional affirmation. Since this answer will have consequences on my interpretation of Yeats's work, I will have to assess any evidence that indicates obsessive neurosis. Donoghue has already examined the manner in which there is no concrete relationship between what I have called the "planes of antiquity and contemporaneity" in Yeats's "No Second Troy." The two events do not truly exist on the same level for a mytho-psychical resolution to be actualized. As such, Yeats not only uses the myth of the Trojan Helen to unsuccessfully "resolve" or elucidate the posited dilemma of the contemporary event but his whole poem, from a structuralist perspective, becomes a myth which employs myth-as-history in its guise as the symbolic order to fashion something that only an obsessive can think of – a means to escape history and symbolic debts through the ultimate mediation of "death."

A Vision itself may be submitted as proof of Yeats's disposition. It is, as stated earlier, a text whose intention is to create for the world and its chaos a system of intelligibility in which everything can be explained. This implies on Yeats's part a prodigiously developed organizational impulse that relates to the second Freudian stage of psychosexual development, i.e. anality, and consequently to obsessive

neurosis.⁴⁶ In *A Vision*, Yeats also renders that which appears chaotic from one level of reality to an ostensibly more orderly one. *A Vision* acts as a dizzyingly comprehensive “analogy” or “myth.” It is an “analogy” or “myth” of history where specific eras are ushered by *primary* (dove) or *antithetical* (swan) annunciations relating to the actual history of Europe, an “analogy” or “myth” of personality types according to the location of the *Will* on the lunar calendar, an “analogy” or “myth” of the transcendent world and the *Principles* that preside over it, an “analogy” or “myth” of the universe which is governed by the *Great Year* that encapsulates one cycle of the Cosmos’s destruction and reconstitution, and an “analogy” or “myth” of the period between the death and rebirth of the self which is further divided into six subperiods. In other words, in *A Vision*, actual history and the actual character-traits of individuals are shifted from one level to another much like a myth shifts the cosmogenic / synchronic to the social / diachronic, much like an obsessive employs an analogous event to resolve another that exists on a different level than the latter.

If Yeats’s psyche shows an inclination to obsessiveness, it does not help his case that a classical Lacanian assessment would yield the same conclusion. An essay by Paul Murphy draws attention to the “fatal” manner in which his famous hero Cuchulain views the women he loves. Murphy argues that the women Cuchulain pursues are not “real” women but idolized objects that are raised to the level of *das Ding*, the Freudian Thing in all its alien otherness. The Thing is described by Lacan as having no representation in the symbolic order. It is the “sovereign good” whose impossible attainment is considered evil by the psychoanalyst as it results in a *jouissance* that is beyond the biological limits of the body to experience as pleasure

⁴⁶ Anality and the obsessive character correlate with each other and have become “practically synonymous” in psychoanalytic literature. However, Vincent Dachy warns that the scope of obsessive neurosis goes beyond anality and may be impacted by the effects of other drives (122).

and beyond the ability of the symbolic order to regulate. Should a subject ever be able to access the black hole that is *das Ding*, “death” would be the result. Murphy asserts that this is what happens to Cuchulain in the play *On Baile’s Strand*. His death emphasizes something more insidious – “the fact that [he has] ... completed his transition from the Symbolic order to the Real” (Murphy 80) – that he has, in other words, extinguished his symbolically-constituted being.

Murphy believes that Cuchulain is used by Yeats as a mask and mouthpiece. He is a representation of Yeats and is ventriloquized by him to express his own opinions – whether about aristocratic individualism, the Protestant Ascendancy or his relationships with people (Murphy 85). I can link Cuchulain’s fatal idolization of women with Yeats’s own – particularly when it comes to Maud Gonne. If I consider the actual woman of “No Second Troy” to be Maud Gonne as many critics do, I can see how Yeats has split his love object into two. One half of the object is Maud Gonne – a Helen of Troy whose face has launched a thousand ships and changed the course of destiny, a woman who only exists in her idolized unreal aspect, a woman who has been raised to the dignity of the Thing, who is “pursued in a more or less phantasmatic way, in a style analogous to that of romantic love, and which grows, moreover, into an identification of a fatal kind” (Lacan, “Neurotic” 417). The other half is any of Yeats’s other lovers of which I will take his wife George Hyde-Lees as an example – a flesh and blood woman whose relationship with Yeats is regulated and exists on the plane of the symbolic, a woman who is not pursued with the same deadly ardour as Gonne because she cannot be positioned by him as *das Ding*. Precisely because she is attainable, she could not maintain Yeats’s desire since in an obsessive neurotic, for desire to be maintained, desire should be impossible (*Écrits* 682).

One of Yeats's foremost biographers, Richard Ellman, has written extensively about the poet's passion for Gonne. "Can true love be sacrificed through artifice?" writes Ellman. "So long as love is unsuccessful it satisfies [Yeats's] dreaming nature; once it is successful it is no longer wholly honest... The only solution was to love her in vain. Because that indeterminate state suited him" (83). If Ellman's opinion is subjected to a Lacanian interpretation, love fits the criteria of impossibility that defines an obsessive's desire. To maintain itself in Yeats's heart, love should be unfeasible – a love akin to that of an "Arthurian knight dedicated to his lady's service unto the death" (Ellman 159) – a love that "transcends itself and 'is made / Imperishable fire under the boughs of chrysoberyl and beryl and chrysolite'" (Ellman 134) – or alternatively, a Lacanian "courtly love" where the feminine object is "emptied of all substance... surrounded and isolated by a barrier" and introduced "through the doors of privation or inaccessibility" (Lacan, *Sem. VII* 149).

The much more tender poem "When You are Old," which does not associate Gonne with some generically-idealized beauty, still invokes both an obsessive love and a woman-object for which there is no real equivalent – even if Elizabeth Cullingford believes that this poem subverts the themes of courtly love by associating Gonne's "pilgrim soul" with the "journeying quester of male mythology rather than with the... maiden of courtly tradition" (*Gender and History* 25). In the poem, Maud Gonne is "grey" and "nodding by the fire" (1-2). She has lost her youth and is no longer, to use a different poem with similar themes, a "burning cloud" ("Fallen Majesty" 8). She appears to no longer hold the position of *das Ding* in Yeats's psyche. Unlike other poems, her beauty is no longer a "tightened bow" nor is she "high and solitary and most stern" ("No Second Troy" 8-10). Regardless, Yeats insists that, even

if age has robbed her of her allure, he still loves her “pilgrim soul” and the “sorrows of [her] changing face” (“When You are Old” 7-8).

In a poem whose title is similar to Yeats’s own, Terri B. Joseph’s poetic rebuttal provides the flipside and the truth beneath Yeats’s narrative. Yeats does not love Gonne for who she is. She is still the Thing, and as the Thing, she is inaccessible and “terrifying, an inhuman partner” (Lacan, *Sem. VII* 150). Joseph strips away the disguise Yeats has veiled her in to reveal her true aspect. In the process, she weaponizes her to both, undermine Yeats’s narrative and subversively disturb and reveal to those who pursue an idealized romance with a symbolically empty woman-shaped vessel that their love is not as unique as they think it is:

When you are old and grey and full of sleep
Take down this verse and dream beside the fire
Of one beyond the reach of your desire
And how her eyes were reticent and deep.

For many loved her sympathy and grace
And loved her beauty falsely or loved true
Yet each believed as faithfully as you
He loved the sorrows of her changing face. (1-8)

Joseph’s deeply ironic poem reveals the psychic impetus beneath Yeats’s poetic declaration. Gonne is desired precisely because “she is beyond the reach of his desire.” Desiring her and “attaining” her is impossible since here, as everywhere else in his works, Yeats’s structure of desire is dependent on the inverse of such a psychic economy. Maud Gonne has to remain out of reach, an idealized being described in Yeats’s *Autobiographies* as a “classical impersonation of the Spring, the Virgilian commendation ‘She walks like a goddess’ made for her alone” (123). She is the aloof

Queen in the “Cap and Bells” who spurns the jester’s heart and soul and only consent to the possibility of an actual relationship at the exact moment when such a relationship is impossible – when he dies by giving up to her his cap and bells, the very instruments that would kindle her love for him – the symbols of his identity, his self and very being (Kiberd, *Inventing* 307).⁴⁷ She is the mermaid whom no lovers can call their own: Here too, Yeats entwines love with death (Dyson 98), or with the Thing to use Lacan. Should the mermaid reciprocate her lovers’ sentiments, her embrace would drown them as she would forget “in cruel happiness / That even lovers drown” (“The Mermaid” 5-6). She is the unattainable shapeshifting Sidhe who, when caught by a fisherman, changes back from a silver trout into a woman and disappears from the world, but not before kindling through her very disappearance the desire of the fisherman – which is now impossible to be realized – consigning him to wander in search of her until he is “old with wandering” (“Song of Wandering Aengus” 17). In the poems, Maud Gonne becomes an allegory existing at a level that is removed from the one the actual woman occupies much like the two aspects of a myth exist on separate levels.

All those poems can be relayed as proof of Yeats’s obsessiveness. His accession of his “virile function” which is undergone by him through a ceding of control over his life to proxies – characters to whom he “delegates the responsibility of representing him in the world and of living in himself” – can also be added as evidence (Lacan, “Neurotic” 416-417). Such proxies are usually perceived as having what the obsessive neurotic lack, a certain “virility.” If Lacan in the “Neurotic’s Individual Myth” points to an actual real life subject tasked to represent a neurotic obsessive

⁴⁷ Lacan talks about the obsessive’s “Lady” and the impossible tests she sets for him to prove “the worthiness of his love, his loyalty and his commitment” (*Sem. VII* 162).

unwilling to represent himself in real life, in Yeats, I can point to the many characters that litter his oeuvre who serve the same function – Crazy Jane, Aherne, Robartes, Giraldus, Red Hanrahan to name but a few.

Ellmann considers Aherne and Robartes, for example, as masks for Yeats – either as representations of a divided self where each character is the obverse of the other – or as personas that Yeats assumes in attempting to win the affection of Maud Gonne (Ellmann 86). Although a lot of scholars contest Ellmann’s interpretation, and even Ellman has distanced himself from his assessment (Harper 5), I believe that even if those two characters are not “masks” in the sense that Yeats employs the term, they are still used as proxies to express some of Yeats’s own opinions.⁴⁸ They are “virile personalities” who cloak his true subjectivity and who can do for him what he cannot do for himself – pursue Gonne, express his opinion, engage in problems he is unwilling to face, etc.

Through her assessment of Giraldus in *A Vision*, Claire Nally in *Envisioning Ireland* validates my argument. Nally links the character to the historical Giraldus Cambrensis, and she affirms that he correlates with Yeats’s own life in that he represents, much like Yeats does, a figure belonging to a marginal group / ruling class in an invaded country strongly associated with the invading force, i.e. the English, and which, furthermore, has ruled said country for centuries (81-129). In hiding behind the persona of Giraldus, Yeats appears to be able to more fully express his credos and beliefs now that he has the mask of the Anglo-Norman to use as a disguise. Here too he has used a proxy to express himself instead of directly doing so.

⁴⁸ Yeats’s concept of the mask will change over the decades. I am using Ellman’s own interpretation in this instance. Later in this chapter, I will use Yeats’s notion of the *Mask* as it is defined in *A Vision* and delimited by the systems found therein. For a better understanding of how the concept of the mask changes in Yeats’s writing over time, see *Yeats’s Masks*, edited by Margaret Harper and Warwick Gould.

Since he cannot assume his “virile function,” an obsessive neurotic’s actions are always filled with doubt, hesitations and deadly procrastinations (*Écrits* 314). Maud Gonne’s rejection of Yeats’s many proposals is well known, but Deirdre Toomey suggests that in December 1898 Maud Gonne herself might have been soliciting a marriage proposal. Depressed by personal and political failure at the time, Toomey believes that Gonne had felt a new-found appreciation for Yeats whose affection and ardour had not flagged. In 1898, she told him of a dream she had where they were married, then kissed him. The next day, she informed him of one of her most intimate secrets – her affair with Lucian Millevoye. Toomey argues that Gonne’s manipulation of events in this manner created a position of “extreme intimacy” that should indicate to Yeats her vulnerability and amenability to a marriage proposal (3). Yeats, however, did not immediately propose and spent a long-time procrastinating, leaving Maud Gonne waiting for days and possibly adding to her general feeling of malaise. Slighted by his hesitation, Gonne rejected Yeats when he finally gathered his courage and proposed ten days later.⁴⁹

My final assessment relates to Yeats’s labour and actions in conjunction with “anality.” According to Lacan, “the sense of forced labor” that envelops the obsessive neurotic “is only too well known” (*Écrits* 314). His labor is a useless enterprise that yields nothing productive precisely because this labor proclaims his attempt to dissociate himself from the Other and the Other’s desire. This, of course, is impossible since desire itself, according to a famous Lacanian maxim, is the desire of the Other.⁵⁰ One encounters in the psychical structure of the obsessive a paradox. He chases desire but he rejects the symbolic order and the signs of the Other’s desire (Lacan, *Sem. VIII*

⁴⁹ For another example of Yeats’s hesitation and inability to act, see pp. 33-35 of his *Memoirs* where he recalls his shame at hesitating and not speaking out when money was demanded from an acquaintance of his – an act that he considers, in that particular instance, a breach of protocol.

⁵⁰ See Lacan’s *Seminar XI* p. 235, for example.

247). He wants to divest his subjectivity of the chains of symbols that aggregate to create his very self – he wants to escape the symbolic order: “‘It is not so much because what I think... is culpable that it is difficult for me to sustain myself and to progress thereby,’ the obsessive says. ‘It is because it is absolutely necessary that what I think come from me and never from my neighbour, never from someone else’” (*Sem. VIII* 254). To Lacan, the irony is that the obsessive has “no greater fear, in the end, than of what he imagines he aspires to: to act freely and to live in the state of nature, if I may put it thus. Natural tasks are not his thing, nor is anything else that leaves him master of his own ship, so to speak, along with God – namely, functions where he has extreme responsibility” (*Sem. VIII* 306).

The obsessive’s psychical myth will never resolve the critical historical encounter – and shifting it from one level of existence to another will accomplish nothing. Whatever “excrement” he produces in an attempt to assert his own freedom, his “anal” desire to impose onto the world a semblance of order avails him nothing. His need to justify his own existence, “to make you eat, so to speak, his own being in the form of a piece of shit” should not be encouraged since this would prevent any psychoanalytic progress in his treatment (*Sem. VIII* 207). His labour does not yield any fruit, it is merely a means to maintain and pursue a pointless motivation whose aim, much like Cuchulain, is oriented towards the realm of the real – that place where there is no desire, merely death.

A Vision itself may serve as an example of such an “excremental” labour if I am to interpret it through some of Yeats’s critics. Auden’s own materialist opinion of Yeats’s esoteric predisposition bears to the fact that his interest in the occult is neither productive nor useful. “How on earth,” writes Auden repressively, and his opinion may as well relate to *A Vision*, “could a man of Yeats’s gifts take such nonsense seriously?”

(188). Yeats's friend George Russel, who believes *A Vision* may come to be regarded as the greatest of his works, also states that it may also be viewed as "his greatest erring from the way of his natural genius" (716). Harold Bloom, in agreement with Russel, writes that Yeats has "suffered in *A Vision*, a failure in vision" (212). My point is that the great effort that Yeats has put in *A Vision* does not seem to be warranted. Even Eliot's opinion that Yeats's usage of the mythical method is "adumbrated" could be interpreted as a criticism of *A Vision*, Yeats's "logorrhoea" and his anal inclinations.

Yeats, Eliot writes, has "not arrived at a central and universal philosophy" in his life or his oeuvre (46-47). Rather, his "supernatural world" is the "wrong" supernatural world: "It was not a world of spiritual significance, not a world of real Good and Evil, of holiness or sin, but a highly sophisticated lower mythology summoned like a physician, to supply the fading pulse of poetry with some transient simulacrum so that the dying patient may utter his last words" (*After* 46). To interpret Eliot's opinion, Yeats's "fruitless labor" *A Vision*, a text which he had spent nearly decades obsessively writing, revising and correcting, merely serves the function of buttressing the ego and reinforcing imaginary fantasies. What sense can I make, for example, of his description of the personality of *Phase Seventeen* of the *Great Wheel* – the phase that Yeats situates himself in? Yeats writes cryptically: "The *Will* is falling asunder but without explosion and noise. The separated fragments seek images rather than ideas, and these the intellect, seated in Phase 13, must synthesize in vain, drawing with its compass-point a line that shall but represent the outline of a bursting pod" (*AVB* 105).

Yeats's words appear meaningless – fruitless labor – sentences that digress and go on tangents, especially within the larger context of the text: "The effect is like

entering a conversation halfway through.... The introductory sections did not ready us for this in the sense of gently moving us towards knowledge, but rather by systemically initiating us into confusion” (Cormack 138). *A Vision* may as well be “‘dear gorgeous nonsense’... if a strict account be taken” (Donoghue 219). It does not help matters that Yeats’s usage of the image of “a bursting pod” combines that which is expelled out, i.e. feces, and that which produces fruits or vegetations. Here is the obsessive’s greatest desire, that his labor is “fruitful” – that in his excrement “there may be fruit seeds still capable of growing if they’re buried in the ground” (*Sem. III* 171). Yet, such a subject will never find any germinating seed, nor reap any “harvest.” His deadly desire is a barren wasteland where nothing flourishes save the illusion of fecundity and fruitfulness – the illusion that invests him with a narcissistic refusal to engage with the Other. In Eliot’s words, he turns “to a world of symbolic phantasmagoria about which he is desperately uncertain” where his “revelations,” bolstered by his lower mythology, are “insufficiently connected with normal experience” (*After* 46).

I have reached the end of my argument. If the preceding examples demonstrate that Yeats has certain traits common to the obsessive neurotic, then he is stuck outside history, neither moving forward nor progressing in any “fruitful” manner. He is ahistorical, but not in the sense that he has pushed from him the yoke of history. Rather, *he is stuck outside time* since he is unwilling to engage with the symbolic order – and unwilling to accept that symbols are what fashion his being, that he must conform to their edicts. His deadly procrastinations and his fruitless labors are an indication of both his denegation and his ahistoricism. He believes he can attain absolute freedom, i.e. from history or the symbolic, even if he himself is afraid of such

freedom since it is accompanied by a responsibility whose burdens he has to assume without any help or directives from culture, from symbols, from the Other.⁵¹

Should Yeats ever be able to transcend the chains of signifiers that aggregate to create his unconscious, should he ever attain what he desires, should he have access to chaos or the register of the real – then he would surely “die” much like Cuchulain does when granted access to *das Ding*. His attempt to order his universe in *A Vision*, “The Second Coming,” “No Second Troy” or “Leda and the Swan” – his attempt to elide the chains of cause and effect which the symbolic order produces and impose his own reality and version of cyclical history, is merely that, an attempt. It is a futile effort which discloses an anal character whose labor of expelled excrement yields no fruits, no order, no freedom – and no overcoming of the signifiers which history has inserted like chains into the core of his being. Torn, on the one hand, between his desire for the “unlimited satisfaction of his need,” and, on the other hand, his life as “a subject who is present, who protests, who argues, who seeks to defend himself,” he endeavors to endow his excrement with “a soul, with life” (Melman 87).

Misrecognitions against Misrecognitions

To say that the “chaos” manifesting in Yeats’s works is the result of obsessive neurosis is reductionist to the extreme. I argue that there is *something* else going on in Yeats’s texts that is not entirely accounted for by a Lacanian formulation which dismisses the obsessive neurotic for his propensity to ever reduce irresolvable reality

⁵¹ “The Rome Report” or “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” is one of Lacan’s major essays on history as it relates to the symbolic order (*Écrits* 237-323). There, the psychoanalyst discusses the implication of ahistoricism as it pertains to cultures, ego psychology and object relations theory. Lacan claims that all schools of psychoanalysis or communities that strengthen the ego on the expense of the subject compels the latter to ignore his own history. This results in a strengthening of his symptoms instead of an attenuation of his neurosis. Needless to say, Lacan’s assessment of the obsessive neurotic in this essay is one of its centre-points.

to irreconcilable myth, to never progress in his life in any meaningful way, to be stuck outside time and symbolic history, to create from his laborious efforts nothing fruitful, to pursue a desire as deadly as it is impossible and to refuse to acknowledge the futility of what he wants and most covets. For all the traits that have me label Yeats an obsessive neurotic, there are, nevertheless, discrepancies in his actions and his works that have me question whether a strict Lacanian formulation is possible.

To begin with, according to Lacan, it is difficult “to back the obsessive neurotic up against the wall of his desire” (*Sem. VIII* 254). I understand by this that since the obsessive does not want desire to vanish, his excremental effort and his actions are oriented towards obfuscating and repressing the essence of his desire for fear that as soon as he comes face to face with what compels and motivates him, his desire would be extinguished under the realization of his own subjective truth which runs contrary to said desire. His misrecognitions of desire’s true function are precisely so that he can maintain it in perpetuity. As long as he lacks awareness or refuses to engage with the factors which drive him to be the person he is, he needs not change his excremental efforts. This is why an obsessive is all too happy to employ myth which “provides a discursive form for something that cannot be transmitted through the definition of truth” (Lacan, “Neurotic” 407).

Be as it may, Yeats *has* been backed against the “wall of his desire.” He is *enlightened* to the actuality of his symptoms. Revealing to him his own subjectivity hidden behind his own ego will not yield a mitigation of his “neurosis.” He knows his *truth*, so to speak – he knows that his desire is unobtainable. He is aware and has confronted the fact. In “The Tower,” he writes: “Does the imagination dwell the most / Upon a woman won or a woman lost?” (114-115). It is a rhetorical question that discloses his own cognizance of his subjective constitution. It is Maud Gonne, the lady

lost to him, which the imagination dwells upon the most (Sarker 226). Alternatively, it is the protean female of the Sidhe, the mermaid who drowns her lovers, the jester's aloof queen or the Trojan Helen.

The question is repeated in "The Three Beggars:" "Do men who least desire get most, / Or get the most who most desire?" (13-14). The poem proceeds to specify the rules of a contest between three beggars where whoever goes to sleep before the other gets what he most desires. In the true fashion of the obsessive, when desire is at hand, it becomes impossible to fulfil. Anxious and eager to sleep first, the beggars all become frenetic excremental self-sabotaging insomniacs who simply cannot shut their eyes – they all lose. The poem ends with an anthropomorphic crane, who may as well stand for an all too aware poet, tellingly commenting that the only way he can get what he desires, a fish to eat, is not to desire it: "It's certain there are trouts somewhere / And maybe I shall take a trout / If but I do not seem to care" (65-67).

What "The Three Beggars" and the "The Tower" reveal is that Yeats has been backed against the wall of his desire. Otherwise, he would not be able to articulate and describe the nucleus of impossibility around which said desire circulates. In "The Three Beggars," far from an unwillingness to confront desire and its "excremental" nature, there is "a savouring of energy, a delight in filth and blood," writes Michael Sidnell (90). A "delight in filth," far from proving Yeats's uninspiring anal-obsessive propensities, brings to mind, in this instance, Bakhtin's theory of the material carnival in which bodily functions, specifically filth and excrement, are intentionally employed to disrupt the social order and the hierarchies found therein. Bakhtin writes that in the images of excrement is preserved "the essential link with birth, fertility, renewal, welfare" (*Rabelais* 148). It represents "the death of the old and the birth of the new

world” (*Rabelais* 149). Unlike Lacan, to Bakhtin there is something both renewing and chaotically disruptive in the nature of waste.

Through Bakhtin, Elizabeth Cullingford in “Historical Poetics of Excrement” argues that Yeats’s use of excrement in the Crazy Jane poems is an effort to challenge the “cultural exclusions through which the [Irish] Free State was attempting to assert its body/boundary/identity.... Ireland must symbolically accept the orifices and excreta of the body as part of the body politic” (38). During the early twentieth century, Yeats was deliberately countering the stabilization and reification of the Irish symbolic order with the images of dung and waste. Cullingford claims that Yeats, who came to find the influence of the church on Irish politics too restrictive, made it his mission to argue for a need for the “heteroglossic voices” of “women, the rural poor, the Anglo-Irish and even Ulster Protestants” to be heard. Such voices disturb the “monoglot discourse of Irish Catholicism” which had striven, during his life and tenure as a poet and Irish statesman, to prevent divorce, censor “immoral” books such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, suppress foreign dances and prohibit contraception (38).

If Yeats is all too aware of his desires, and if it is “excrement” that provides the means to disturb the “monoglot” discourse of the Irish state, I can say that Yeats’s “anality” indicates something not in conformation with the operations of the symbolic order. For Yeats to confront his desires is for him to confront his “truth” – but to refuse giving up on his desires while simultaneously confronting them is also to refuse being subordinated to the symbols which constitute his truth on the level of the unconscious. I believe that Yeats’s “excremental actions,” far from revealing a “sterile” obsessiveness, are very much “fruitful.” I argue that what bears fruit, in this instance, is not necessarily one’s symbolic truth. After all, “to die into the truth, is still to die,” (*AVB* 197). For Yeats to confront the truth, the impossibility and “harshness of ...

desire,” does not extinguish said desire. When the speaker in “On Woman” is brought again “to life” by “the pestle of the moon,” he still pursues the same deadly course of action knowing full well the impulse behind it (25-36). Indubitably then, Yeats’s psychic economy goes beyond the classical structure of obsessive neurosis.

In Gregory Castle’s essay “W. B. Yeats and the Dialectics of Misrecognition,” another clue to Yeats’s psychic economy is revealed. Castle, like me, appears to realize that Yeats is all too aware of his misrecognitions. He claims that Yeats “intentionally” produces a misrecognition in his poetry or work, all in an attempt to cast a “corrective” gaze back at it and rectify the mistakes it had produced over the course of his history: “His own misrecognitions, bound up with questions concerning the relation between ethics and aesthetics, are cunning and calculated, designed... to call into question his own imaginary investments” (Castle 77).

Castle evaluates a panoply of Yeats’s works and discerns the functions of what he calls “tactical misrecognition” in a prodigious amount of them. A tactical misrecognition is properly defined by him as an “‘improper’ move in the strategic spheres; it resists both ‘a spatial or institutional localization’ and ‘the constraining order of the place or of language’” (67). A tactical misrecognition confounds and counters what Castle calls a “strategic misrecognition which is “a ‘calculus of force-relationships’ in which institutional, i.e. symbolically sanctioned, power becomes ‘isolated from an environment’ and acquires a ‘mastery of time through the foundation of an autonomous place’” (67).

Misrecognitions against misrecognitions – Castle’s argument, in this regard, is fascinating. I would like to modify it to fit my own understanding as to how Yeats’s obsessive methodology operates. Although I will retain the knowledge that one misrecognition attempts to correct another, I will remove the notions of “strategy” and

“tactic” from the equation. What can be tactical in one instance can be strategic in another. As such, there can be no final truth to be recognized – something that Castle “solves” by projecting the realization of the penultimate truth, that is, the tactical misrecognition that corrects all (strategic) misrecognitions, into the future. It never happens in the here and now but it *can* happen. Furthermore, Castle’s splitting of misrecognition, even if it provides the tools to view Yeats’s stance from a political or a postcolonial perspective, is not psychoanalytically viable.

To fully understand Yeats’s psychic economy, I will have to return to both Lévi-Strauss’s notion of myth and Lacan’s postulation of the tetradic structure of the obsessive neurotic. By shedding a light on some aspects of Lévi-Strauss’s and Lacan’s works and reworking an element of the myth into the quaternary structure that Lacan, in his postulation of the obsessive’s psyche, has neglected, I hope to reveal the manner in which the symbolic order and history can go in directions that no symbol or signifier can entirely account for.

Retheorizing the Yeatsian Myth Part I

In the “Neurotic’s Individual Myth,” Lacan proposes that the obsessive engineers an analogical event to resolve the original historical event, but since the latter exists on a different level from the former, no resolution occurs. This theory, as assessed earlier, is taken from Lévi-Strauss’s own conjecture of myth where the social / diachronic axis attempts to resolve and reconcile with the cosmogenic / synchronic axis. An ensuing logical failure transpires since the timeless is not “in sync” with the historical – they do not exist at the same level. I can say this is one reason a myth has so many variations – it attempts to redo itself across time, histories and cultures, attempts to find the “perfect” solution and it is always unsuccessful in doing so.

I have viewed how Lacan launches his argument from Lévi-Strauss's own using the synchronic and diachronic axis of the myth to formulate the two asymmetrical levels on which an obsessive's psyche unsuccessfully operates to rectify the critical historical event around which his being clashes against and revolves. There is, however, another "axis" to the myth that Lacan never uses, and it only reveals itself when one studies a myth in its different iterations. It is my belief that to understand Yeats's drives and motivations, I need to assess this additional aspect of myth in conjunction with his psychological economy. I will attempt to do so in the hope of demonstrating an extra-symbolic dimensionality to both Yeats's poetry and *A Vision*.

What I call the "third axis" of the myth is a composite formation of the diachronic with the synchronic that reveals itself when one assesses a myth in all its variations. Through my own interpretation of Lévi-Strauss, I can say that one variation of a myth, taken at a moment in time in a stable symbolic order, reveals only two "fixed" axes. The "diachronic" axis of the myth, however, being unable to resolve the "synchronic" aspect of the critical event that gives birth to it, may alter over time as the symbolic order of a culture alters. This produces new variations in the myth, variations based on new cultural-historical elements which engage with the issue of the cosmogenic – again and again and again in an attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. Thus, the myth reveals that it is changing, transforming, altering itself in its singular aim to divulge to itself the truth of the timeless and the cosmogenic. The third element therefore creates a "'slated' structure, which comes to the surface, through the process of repetition." According to Lévi-Strauss, "the function of repetition is to render the structure of the myth apparent" (229).

Lévi-Strauss is more interested in the sameness of the repetitions occurring across all variations of the one myth rather than the differences unique to a particular

variation. It is through what repeats that the myth can reveal its “timeless” truth to the anthropologist. Yet, if Lévi-Strauss stresses what consistently repeats throughout the variations of a myth, I, on the other hand, am more interested in the difference between them. It is this difference that creates, after all, the slated discontinuous structure that allows the myth to continuously grow. It is this difference that compels a myth to expand “spiral-wise until the intellectual impulse which has produced it is exhausted” (Lévi-Strauss 229). I will argue it is also this difference that allows Yeats’s psychic economy to go beyond what symbols determine of history.

Before I proceed in my assessment, I would like to set the foundations from which I will launch my argument by examining and theorizing certain aspects of myth-as-history. I have already stated that a myth cannot truly settle the issue that it sets to resolve. Since this is the case, a myth should destabilize the very fabric of a culture that it is considered part of, it should not act as the purveyor of its truths and the guardian of its laws since it offers no true resolution. Yet, I have already argued that it does, at least in its capacity of myth-as-history. What then stabilizes a myth, and why is myth-as-history used within the boundaries of the symbolic order as if it truly is a part of it, as if it can truly provide answers and directions in the same manner a signifier does?

Both queries have the same answer. I argue that a myth, in isolation, is not stable. It cannot reconcile itself completely with the event it attempts to illuminate. It will always be dangerous to the culture that has witnessed its birth. It will ever introduce chaos to the symbolic order and introduce death to the realm of the signifier. For a myth to reconcile, or appear to reconcile with the event, it needs the very laws and directives that a stable symbolic order produces to gain widespread acceptance and utility, hence stabilization, in the community that it arises from. This is to say, myth-

as-history ultimately depends on the injunctions of the name-of-the-father to give it the “order” necessary to be a part of the symbolic order. The father’s injunction may as well be a command and a commandment: *You may have doubt, but you will cast them aside and you shall obey my will and know this fable, this myth, to be true – that it explains and resolves everything perfectly.*

As stated in the introduction to the thesis, the name-of-the-father is what protects the symbolic order from chaos. The myth’s danger, its chaotic charge, its irreconcilability with the critical event that it arises from is therefore mitigated. An irreconcilability still exists but since the name-of-the-father states otherwise, then across the axis of the symbolic order, no irreconcilability will be detected, and any individual who detects it is unsurprisingly disciplined and punished to the extent of the law. By gaining its stamp of approval from the name-of-the-father who assesses any new myth for its dangers and utility, the myth then becomes myth-as-history and enters the symbolic. Instead of inciting chaos, it bestows order.

An example that substantiates my hypothesis is recounted by Lévi-Strauss who gives an account of a “sorcerer” or what I will call a mythmaker whose use of “magic” or myth is seen as a threat. This mythmaker would have been executed by his community had he not used his ingenuity to escape death. Rather than explaining his “magical” acts as myths that stand on their own, the sorcerer relates the mythical event he has instigated to the fables of his culture – that is, his symbolic order. Instead of threatening the fabric and function of his society and its organizations, he does the exact opposite and validates the beliefs that govern his region. In doing so, the danger of his “sorcery” is attenuated and the myth he utilizes becomes one of the very pillars that props up his community. He then takes his privileged place in the symbolic order

– he who was once a threat to its customs and norms becomes one of its foremost guardians:

[He] gives the group the satisfaction of *truth*, which is infinitely greater and richer than the satisfaction of justice that would have been achieved by his execution... By his ingenious defense which makes his hearers progressively aware of the vitality offered by his corroboration of their system (especially since the choice is not between this system and another, but between the magical system and no system at all – that is *chaos*), the youth, who was a threat to physical security ... became the guardian of its spiritual coherence. (Lévi-Strauss 174; my emphasis)

The name-of-the-father chooses which myth to absorb into the fabric of the culture “he” guards and regulates. There is, indubitably, a process where the myth is altered by him to some degree to fit the “narrative” of the society that adopts it. The sorcerer knows that his people would not have allowed his myth to stand on its own; they would have rejected it and executed him. By relating his myth to the ones already extant within the symbolic order, by modifying it or explaining it somewhat in order to claim that his “mythical” action conflates with the symbolic directives of the already pre-existing myths of his society, he is able to survive the ordeal of his trial and even gain recognition, renown and fame – cultural currencies that are, to most individuals, motivational forces that shape their actions along the axis of the symbolic.

Yeatsian myths, however, are not historical myths but *myths-as-becoming*: They are myths that are conceived, not myths that already exist and can be used through symbolic intercession. They do not entirely relate to history, to the realm of the signifier. All myths are mediators of chaos – but whereas myth-as-history is an established symbolically-sanctioned mediator, myth-as-becoming merely mediates

chaos for the individual who fashions it into being. In other words, myth-as-becoming mediates the chaos apparent in the modern world by engaging with the unsymbolisable *r  el* event, but since it provides a “solution” that does not relate to the typical stockpile of signifier-configurations found within a culture, it paradoxically also *produces* chaos at the level of the symbolic since it transgresses the Laws. As such, to remove its threat from the fabric of culture, it is automatically and unconsciously rendered into an *imaginary* enterprise – a fantasy, an illusion, a lower mythology. Furthermore, because it is also linked to chaos, to the domain of the *r  el*, it also disturbs and threatens as it moves *beyond* history by rearranging, altering, reshaping and remaking the symbolic order itself – with different degrees of success.

Yeatsian myths are myths-as-becoming, but this is not the only thing they are. Myths-as-becoming are subjected to the symbolic order’s judgement. They are either absorbed within its fabric or rejected. Whatever threat they are to the symbolic, to history itself, will always be annulled. They will either be ejected as “excreta” from the community they are born in or accepted and changed into myth-as-history. Whatever “reverberations” they may cause will be short-lived as symbolic elements will be marshalled to take measure of the danger they cause and extinguish it.

I contend that there is *something* else going on in Yeatsian myths that prevents either their absorption or their utter rejection from the demesne of the symbolic order. Donoghue states that Yeatsian myths “set astir *indefinitely* extensive reverberations” and are the names for “forces and energies which will give themselves to no form but their own” (211, 213; my emphasis). As such, Yeatsian myths are not merely myth-as-becoming, they are also myths that show the *slated spiraling structure of the overall myth*. They are myths compiled on myths, myths-as-becoming launching themselves from myths-as-history, from the configurations of symbols that they have turned into

excreta, hoping that in doing so there may indeed be fruit seeds found in such manure that are still capable of germinating should they be buried in the ground. To direct Bakhtin, what Yeats will do is “mediate upon his excrement and see what divinity is contained in them” (*Rabelais* 300).

Yeats’s “The Magi,” for example, uses the slated spiralling structure of myth to disseminate its substance to the reader. The poem utilizes myth-as-history, but its end-formation is a spiralling myth-as-becoming that consumes and excretes the historical symbolic myth it is founded on, then launches itself from its “faecal matter” in a gyral line that moves away from its diachronic axis *but along the same synchronic axis* – only to divulge in the place of the already established myth-as-history a second myth that all but takes the place of the former. Yeats’s myth in “The Magi” simultaneously uses, subverts and replaces myth-as-history and the symbolic order by something that only Yeats could have fashioned from his “fruitful” labour.

The poem launches itself from the “myth” of the Magi, the three kings who herald the coming of Christ in Christianity and are witness to his birth. They are forerunners of the change that is yet to come, harbingers of a religion and a new cultural order that will be born with the newly born avatar. Here is myth-as-history functioning with all the prediction one can expect from it – a validation of the current symbolic order that retrospectively narrates a continuous historical progression of one of its major symbolic elements so that, as the myth unfurls, it appears that the events that lead to its realization shall come as a foregone conclusion – not because it has already happened, but because it is also fated to happen. Mythical symbolic history becomes proof of fate – and this projects onto the future the inevitability of the myth realizing itself – a prophecy of sorts that the symbolic order, by giving the myth its validity through the name-of-the-father, makes it self-fulfilling since the symbolic

order *does* determine history. In Michael Wood's words, Yeats's "Magi are not waiting for the news. They know the news. They are waiting for the violent performance of the news" (13).

The symbolic order proclaims that the myth has already happened and has successfully reconciled with the event, but it also asserts that in the future, it will always reconcile with the *events that have not happened yet* and make sense of them all as well. The Irish reader of Yeats's time may relate the myth to his own symbolic order. Through this relation, history can progress forward with the certainty that what comes can be *reconciled* with what had happened and what will happen. This is the manner in which myths-as-history shape and determine the future, guard the Law, and give security and comfort to those who follow their edicts. This may be another reason that Eliot believes in the validity of the mythical method which attempts to make sense of a fractured contemporary world by buttressing the daunting event with the scaffolding of such historical myths.

There is, however, *something* else going on in Yeats's poem – and this something is not about history, it is not about an expected birth. A first reading of "The Magi" may not make this clear due to the presence of a first-person speaker whose odd syntactic and linguistic usage of language impinges on the recounted account more than it narrates it. The speaker interjects himself into the myth even though there should have been no requirements for him to do so. Had the myth been purely historical, a first-person account would be nonessential. The reader would already know the myth from the cultural elements that disseminate it – there would be no need to mediate a knowledge that is already familiar. The speaker's "interjection" in the poem then becomes proof of *something* else, something which may not exist within symbolic parameters. The speaker's very existence is to bear witness and flesh out a

“narrative” that is not entirely sanctioned, sanctified or disseminated by the symbol. What he will give form to is not the expression of an historically resolved incident but something that history, at least the history of the present era, cannot account for – what he needs to make sense of is *chaos* itself, the “uncontrollable mystery” (“The Magi” 8):

Now as at all times I can see in the mind’s eye,
In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones
Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky
With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,
And all their helms of silver hovering side by side,
And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,
Being by Calvary’s turbulence unsatisfied,
The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor. (“The Magi” 1-8)

The first-person speaker’s account, and his odd usage of syntax and sound, indicates to the reader a potential anomaly in the expected recounting of the Magi’s tale. According to Charles Altieri, it causes the Magi’s typical role and myth to be subverted. The wise kings are “taken out of historical context and put into another, more perplexing psychological and mythic state” (Altieri 202). This new perplexing psychological and mythic state impinges on the reader’s expectations of the tale. Only near its end, keeping the reader’s sense of symbolic cohesion intact until the last few lines, even as the body of the poem deepens an anxiety that foretells of an event that the symbolic order cannot be reconciled with, the poem divulges that the Magi are not there at the birth of Christ but at his death – Cavalry being the site on which he was crucified.

It is a startling and sudden reversal of Christian motifs. Here, like in “Leda and the Swan,” “The Second Coming” and “No Second Troy,” the shift is abrupt and occurs in the last lines and without a symbolic narrative that can be used to make sense of the disturbing event and pin it in its place with signifiers. The security and safety of myth-as-history in its guise as the symbolic order is taken away. One is left with an event that is radical in its alterity, threatening in its lack of symbolic intelligibility, an event that reveals the chaos beneath the myth, that reveals a chaos that is not encircled by symbolic chains inasmuch as it has been hidden by them. Myth-as-history reverts to myth-as-becoming as the myth itself spirals into a *different* variation of itself. The observer or speaker in the poem can sense the process of the myth’s own creation as the authority of the name-of-the-father elides to divulge, not the “givenness” of the myth, not its “self-evident” “truth,” but the fashion in which myth and truth have been produced. What is revealed beneath the historic myth that protects the symbolic is both, the sheer unvarnished reality that a myth *can fail*, which would disrupt the culture and all the symbolic chains that are marshalled to protect it, and the irreconcilable chaos hidden beneath the thin veneer of the symbol that, with the symbol’s erosion, is now threateningly visible at the level on which culture itself manifestly operates.

The myth in “The Magi” shifts in a new direction and becomes in the process myth-as-becoming. This is not to say that the myth can now radically affect the symbolic order and the history which it determines. I have stated earlier that the names-of-the-father or the symbolic elements that act in their names provide a buffer against such a myth. Either they expel it or modify and reabsorb it back into its folds. I would like to posit here that there is an attempt at reabsorption. The observer, who knows the conclusion to the myth, whose psychical structure is configured by such a

myth, would automatically and unwittingly reinterpret the new threat by relating it to the stock of signifiers he knows – his symbolic history thereby determining the present and projecting onto his own future the expected reconciliation between myth and witnessed event. The logic of the poem may be rendered by him as follows: The Magi are witnesses to a birth, but they are here witnessing the death of Christ at Calvary. Therefore, what the Magi are truly witnessing is the *birth of Christianity*.

With his demise, Christ will become a martyr, his banner will be taken by people who will disseminate his message all across the Roman empire. His death will become the birth of faith until finally, the rest of the world, which has rejected his myth, will acknowledge the truth given by him to his followers and accept it as their own. The chaos manifesting in the poem is merely the ineffable projection of the expected chains of symbolic cause and effect whose ultimate reverberations will stabilize themselves as the Roman empire adopts Christian values. What seems like apocalypse and death is merely a birth. It is the birth of the symbol in all its materiality – a birth occurring *through* apocalypse, death and disorder – through the reconciliation of the event with the social order, and there is no greater myth than order retrospectively triumphing over chaos.

At this juncture, when myth-as-becoming is about to lose its entropic charge and revert back to myth-as-history, that the myth in “The Magi” *spirals again* into yet a different variation, thereby preventing its reabsorption back into the realm of symbols onto which it is inscribed. A myth-as-becoming, which has lost its ability to become malleable, which exists merely along its synchronic and diachronic axis, may be negated or assimilated. On the other hand, a myth with a third axis still in effect will *spiral into another variation* as soon as the one it manifests becomes surrounded by

cultural elements whose function is to return the experienced event back into the demesne of the symbolic.

As soon as one variation is dealt with, another one is introduced. One needs only return to “The Magi” to see that the kings are “unsatisfied” with this birth / death. The word “unsatisfied” is used twice by Yeats, at the beginning and the end of his poem. It has a certain performative quality to it in that as soon as the observer realizes that the Magi are unsatisfied, he too will be disaffected and start to look for the cause of this dissatisfaction. The word itself interjects on the events of the poem from the very beginning creating a sense of anxiety and dread as it skews the observer’s understanding of the posited myth-as-history. *All* the Magi are unsatisfied, they are not pleased with what is going on. They will never be satisfied, for “all times.” Coeval with the repetition of “unsatisfied,” the word “all” is repeated four times in the poem thereby generating an irreconcilable tension that pits itself against any form of resolution.

The last line divulges the third variation of the myth – the disaffected Magi are neither awaiting the birth of Christ nor a death that projects and confirms the inevitable birth of his message. What they are “hoping to see once more” is the birth of *another* avatar, a bestial avatar of an *antithetical era* who is the counterpart to the Christ avatar of the *primary era*. They are awaiting the beast of “The Second Coming,” or Leda’s third egg which will hatch with the help of Robartes (*AVB* 37), or the equivalent of Oedipus who sank “body and soul into the earth” thereby balancing “Christ who, crucified standing up, went into the abstract sky body and soul” (*AVB* 20-21). Which is to say, the Magi are awaiting an avatar who will herald a new era whose religious dispensation is polytheistic and *antithetical*, not monotheistic and *primary*. An era that will bring new forms of religious expression: “It will be concrete in expression,

establish itself by immediate experience, seek no general agreement, make little of God or any exterior unity” (*AVA* 177).

The myth, spiralling for the third time, has broken away from its established variation of myth-as-history. Such a spiralling myth-as-becoming does not bind cultural elements together by offering to the Irish an event that can be symbolically entrenched. Such a myth cannot validate culture, a subject’s self-assertion or a stable Irish symbolic order. Rather, it intensifies “what is involved in the demand to confront humanity’s absolute other” (Altieri 203) – and this engagement with humanity’s absolute other is precisely what leaves the Magi unsatisfied: They must confront a myth-as-becoming and realize the very machination that leads to its formation. They cannot be entirely persuaded by the absoluteness of its truth because its truth is being shaped in the here and now, without history and without stable symbolic support and under their very eyes.

In other words, if the myth is positing itself as a resolution, then this resolution is *unsatisfactory* since it cannot entirely reconcile with the event. After all, a myth reflects its symbolic order – and if a myth is spiralling, the Irish symbolic order is spiralling as well and cannot support it. Barry Sheils argues that “The Magi” indicates that the new nation of Yeats’s Ireland, being postcolonial, is fluctuating and changing into a different variation of itself – much like my assessment of Yeatsian myth does. It is not stable or “imperial whole, since it is bothered by the old nation of which it was once a part, the possibility of further new nations which are as yet but a part of it” (15). I can therefore say that the Irish nation’s symbolic order may be structured like a spiralling myth, and this is why it varies and fluctuates with the violent events it witnesses.

Another way the spiralling myth impinges and alters the symbolic order is by its *mimicking* of myth-as-history. I use the word “mimic” in the same sense that I did in my assessment of Walcott’s works. The spiralling myth mimics its historical counterpart because it appears to fulfil the same function of myth-as-history. It appears to propose a reconciliation with the event, and it contains elements of the same signifier-chains and motifs as the original myth, i.e. the Magi as indication of a momentous birth. However, these elements are sundered from the typical configuration found within the cultural order. I can say that the spiralling myth in the poem has changed the arrangements of signifying symbols into detritus, into “manure.” In doing so, it has created a “fertile ground” from which it can launch itself forth in another threateningly malleable variation. There are still symbolic elements within it that corresponds to the cultural ones it has devoured and excreted. The Magi still herald a significant birth, and there are still elements of Christian motifs in place, but these elements do not function or signify a symbolically comprehensible world that belongs to a given cultural order.

Homi Bhabha argues that postcolonial mimicry produces an ambivalence that both ruptures the colonial’s discourse and transforms it into an “uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject into a ‘partial’ presence” which is simultaneously incomplete and virtual (Bhabha 123). I have provisionally “translated” Bhabha’s ideas onto Yeats’s works, but in doing so, something is lost in the translation. What I intend to do now is to resynthesize Bhabha’s notion of mimicry through Lacan to better express the “ethos” of the Yeatsian myth. In doing so, I do not intend to return to Lacan’s own concept of mimicry which, at any rate, is not fully fleshed out in his seminar.⁵² Rather,

⁵² See p. 99 of Jacques Lacan’s *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.

what I will do is propose how mimicry may come into play within the fabric of an unstable culture.

I have argued that the spiraling myth consumes the symbolic elements of the historical myth and changes them into “manure” – manure that still contains components of the latter – chains of signifiers that still have certain significations that can be related to the former myth. The Magi’s heralding of a coming avatar who will change the world, in addition to the motif of Calvary as being the site of a calamitous death and the potential birth of a new religion, are themes found in the former myth. In the spiraling myths, there are then facets that are still congruent with myth-as-history, facets that *mimic* myth-as-history in some of its aspects and which act as a camouflage of sorts by insidiously suspending a potential observer’s judgement in the poem until it is too late for him to realize that the event which he is witnessing is not something that he can resolve or negate through his own symbolic order. The observer sees something familiar in the chaos. His experience, informed by his symbolic order, enlightens him that the chaos will resolve itself into a fathomable form given time and effort. He is already finding certain significations that he can relate to, certain symbolic chains that appear all too familiar, that look exactly like something that he knows: Christian tales of the Magi, the site where Jesus was crucified....

The observer suspends his *moment of concluding* in the hopes that in doing so, he will still find the “truth” – a knowledge that leads him back to a symbolic order he knows and that discloses a judgement that is sanctioned by the Law. Yet, what looks familiar merely *mimics* familiarity – and as the myth fully expresses itself and becomes more unambiguous, what it reveals are Magi who have turned their backs on the baby in the manger, and turned away from a crucifixion which heralds the birth of Christianity. The elements of the old symbolic order that is expressed in the spiraling

myth is merely *camouflage*. It is a mimicking technique which allows the new spiraling myth to come into close proximity to what the historical myth signifies only to subvert this signification and reveal, in its place, a set of kings looking for guidance and directions, not to the heavens or to the star of Bethlehem, but to the bestial floor where the newborn avatar shall usher in an *antithetical* era.

The familiar elements of the spiraling myth seduce the observer into thinking that the witnessed event can be resolved, but those familiar elements are merely a disguise which is stripped away when enough proximity is gained. When the spiraling myth's "true colors" show themselves, when it suddenly appears from behind its veil, it cannot be effectively "fought against," negated or rejected because the observer is not given enough *time for comprehending* to assimilate it. The observer is left with a myth whose "truth" both threatens and eludes him. This myth mimics and undermines the chains of symbols that mark his subjectivity and the historical myths of his own culture and community. With its deleterious presence finally revealed, the subject's own symbols can do nothing but prove their ineptitude and deficiency in containing and reconciling with the witnessed event. The chaos and violence the spiraling myth unleashes and which the subject expects to be tamed by the intelligible symbolic world of Christ, is revealed to be a "Dionysiac energy which explodes rationalism, and gives the lie to that 'pragmatical, preposterous pig of world'" – a world or a symbolic order (Watson 138).

The spiralling myth, by mimicking myth-as-history, threatens and elides the symbolically manifested truth. Through mimicking other aspects of the symbolic order, it has other far-reaching effects. It also mimics myth-as-history by positing itself, not only as something that will contend with any future event and engage with it, but also as something whose "reality" is a given for all time – as something that had

already happened and therefore, as something that will always determine what will happen. Like the symbolic order, it posits itself as fate and destiny but the manner of it doing so is through turning the symbols it is consuming into “faecal” matter, not by using them in a way sanctioned by culture. If the poem depends on an individual’s expectations that the symbolic myth of the Magi, through its guise as history, will herald a reconciliation with every potential future event, then the poem’s actual spiralling myth merely *mimics* this trait, it does not actualize it. The Magi are not hoping to find something “ahistorical,” even if the spiralling myth is exactly that – ahistorical – at least in the symbolic sense. Rather, they are hoping “to find, *once more...* // the uncontrollable mystery” (6,8; my emphasis).

From a cultural standpoint, the spiralling myth, by mimicking order, reveals unsymbolisable chaos. In mimicking the given signifier and replacing it, it functions differently in that it simultaneously erases the projected future, destabilizes culture and reveals a synchronic axis that cannot be reconciled with. Its continuous variations which cannot coincide with the catastrophic event no matter what permutations and iterations it mutates into is proof of this. The only analogy I can think to what is happening here is that the spiralling myth is acting as a virus. It is, via mimicry, fooling the “cultural” body into thinking that it is part of it even as it is infecting and shutting it down. The individual, whose certainty is dependent on the “robust” body of the symbolic, will be left with chaos spreading and altering the cultural order in an unforeseen entropic manner. The symbols, which constitute his being and allow him to contend and make sense of the world from the security of a symbolically-fashioned “truth” – a truth which posits the unsymbolisable chaotic *realness* of the world as coinciding with the chaos-negating elements of a culture that exists within said world, will be elided.

In the following section, I will undertake an in-depth assessment of the spiralling myth in relation to Yeats's psychic structure. If Lacan has neglected the spiralling aspect of the myth in his formulation of the obsessive neurotic's psyche, in the subsequent part of the essay I will endeavour to "translate" its "slated structure" onto Lacan's Oedipal tetrad – with the expectation that the operations of Yeats's psychic economy can then be exhibited. I believe that "death," the fourth component of the tetrad, should not have been posited as a "given" stable point around which the differential organization and connections between subject, love object / motherer and symbolic / name-of-the-father arrange themselves. In doing so, Lacan has short-changed a subject's own "struggles" with death by relegating it to a domain which signifies a neurotic pathology without signifying anything else. I intend to inspect how death influences and creates a "malleable" structure that appears similar in its gyral movement to the spiralling structure of a myth.

Retheorizing the Yeatsian Myth Part II

Beyond the "Neurotic's Individual Myth," Lacan never engages or elaborates on the Oedipal quaternary structure that fashions the obsessive's psyche. The tetrad does not appear in any of his other works on obsession – certainly not in his seminars. This is an unusual move on Lacan's part, particularly since he saw it as a truly revolutionary formulation whose far-reaching consequences will alter individuals' core assumptions on psychoanalysis. By taking into consideration the quaternary structure of the obsessive instead of the classical Oedipal triad, one will be lead "to question the general anthropology derived from analytic doctrine as it has been taught up to the present. In short, the whole oedipal schema needs to be reexamined" ("Neurotic" 422).

The whole Oedipal schema needs to be re-examined... and yet, Lacan never returns to the quaternary structure. I can understand why: “The Neurotic’s Individual Myth” reveals some masterful assessment of obsessive neurosis, but it is in itself an anomaly that divulges some Lacanian concepts that are not yet fully formed. For example, the fourth point of the quaternary structure, “death,” is an inchoate and contradictory concept that seems to be burdened with over-signification if one is to read Lacan’s paper carefully. It appears to me that it is death which makes the obsessive operate on two different levels by shifting the Oedipal triad from one plane to two planes that cannot entirely interact with each other or resolve any posited dilemma. It is death which prevents the symbolic “circuit” from closing and stabilizing by shunting symbolically sanctioned signifiers, which limit the danger of the imaginary register / motherer / love object, into its fatal abyss.

“Death” is an ambiguous term in Lacan’s paper. It relates to one half of the split object of desire which a later Lacan may call the woman-as-Thing and one half of the split name-of-the-father, i.e. the impotent father-figure who does not coincide with his symbolic function. Death also implies both the fatal struggle with one’s own semblable and the Hegelian death struggle between slave and master. Furthermore, in his later works, death is often related to the concepts of Heidegger and Sartre. It is also related to the death drive which an even later Lacan will link with the register of the real. Death can also be a designation for any experience that goes beyond the injunctions or demesne of the symbolic as I have seen in Paul Murphy’s argument on Cuchulain.

The list goes on – if the “Neurotic’s Individual Myth” implies that obsessive neurosis is linked to the Hegelian death struggle, his later works such as those found in

Écrits state the exact opposite. The obsessive does not engage in the Hegelian death struggle, he just passively awaits the master's death instead of "killing" him:

Indeed, the obsessive manifests one of the attitudes that Hegel did not develop in his master / slave dialectic. The slave slips away when faced with the risk of death, when the opportunity to acquire mastery is offered to him in a struggle for pure prestige. But since he knows he is mortal, he also knows that the master can die. Hence he can accept to work for the master and give up jouissance in the meantime; and, unsure as to when the master will die, he waits. (*Écrits* 314)

My attempt to understand Lacan's concept of death in relation to the "Neurotic's Individual Myth" has led me to certain conclusions: Liran Razinsky may be right in saying that the "intermingling of [Lacan's] references to death with those to the symbolic and the imaginary makes it difficult to extract discrete, independent positions and ideas about [it] from [his] system" (221). However, it seems to me that "Death" is a word that is a placeholder to anything that appears to threaten the coherence of the symbolic order. If it is a deadly love object, i.e. the Thing, this is because the Thing, *das Ding*, does not exist within the symbolic and compels the subject to move without cultural mediation. If it is the register of the real, this is because the real is unsymbolisable and its psychic manifestation usually heralds the unravelling of the symbolic order. If it is an impotent weak name-of-the-father, it is because such a name cannot truly regulate the Law and the injunctions of the Other and as a consequence, is a sign of the unravelling of signifier-chains. If it is a Hegelian "death struggle," then this is because the need for recognition and prestige that arises from such a conflict is a threat to the symbolic order whose complex arrangement of intersubjective relationships produces the role each subject is to assume within the

symbolic order. A struggle is therefore not necessary and, indeed, may cause the symptoms of neurosis in the individual whose unconscious is configured to know precisely what “role” he is to play in relation to the Other. If it is *not* a Hegelian death struggle, then this is because a later Lacan relegates “struggle” to the demesne of the symbolic order. One cannot expect of individuals after all to “know their place” – every subject hopes to gain prestige, recognition and acknowledgement. The symbolic order has created entire systems where such a struggle is actualized. The symbolic order, as I have already stated, regulates desire, and what is desire but a desire for *recognition*, as Lacan is wont to say (*Écrits* 431).

My point is “death,” particularly in relation to the obsessive neurotic, appears to be a threat to the symbolic. It does not appear to have an intelligible signification in the “Neurotic’s Individual Myth” inasmuch as it acts as a nexus point around which one can see the symbolic order unravelling, its symbols eroding, its Laws breaking up and its signifiers losing cohesion and materiality. Death’s many guises are not so much an immutable essence as explicit particular manifestations which occur in their various interactions with the symbolic order. Death may as well be another name for chaos – it certainly causes neurosis when the obsessive subject has access to it, but it also produces *something* else.

I will not go into the various manifestations of death in Lacan’s seminars. It is beyond the purview of this chapter. However, Lacan’s notion of death as it is linked to the obsessive neurotic is of particular interest. In his third seminar, *The Psychoses*, he states that “the question of death is another mode of the neurotic creation of the question – its obsessional mode” (*Sem. III* 180). This is because Lacan claims the signifier puts the subject beyond death:

There is something radically unassimilable to the signifier. It's quite simply the subject's singular existence. Why is he here? Where has he come from? What is he doing here? Why is he going to disappear? The signifier is incapable of providing him with the answer, for the good reason that it places him beyond death. The signifier already considers him dead, by nature it immortalizes him. (*Sem. III* 179-180)

It seems that what Lacan is saying is that the obsessive's "question" relates to a conflict that cannot be resolved by the symbolic order – a Sartre-style existential crisis where "being" encounters its own "nothingness." The signifier puts an individual beyond death – that is, beyond the domain of the real or "nothingness." It does so by encircling and "shrouding" the real, by allowing him to subsist merely within the injunctions, the security and the solace of the symbolic. The signifier gives him comfort, gives him myth-as-history to explain that which is irreconcilable, that which cannot be resolved. Except in the obsessive, the symbolic order fails due to a deadly love object, a weak name of the father, a desire for absolute freedom, etc. The result is that the door of death which has been closed opens wide, and the obsessive starts to question his very existence.

If I am to use the "Neurotic's Individual Myth" if not the rest of Lacan's seminars, I believe this is the reason that a typical individual without a "mental disorder" shows a triadic Oedipal structure.⁵³ The name-of-the-father is intact in such an individual. It can still regulate the imaginary register. My hypothesis is that the triadic Oedipal structure comes into being from a quaternary structure as a result of a conflict between death and the name-of-the-father who guards the symbolic order,

⁵³ I cannot use the rest of Lacan's seminars here. This is purely an interpretation based on the "Neurotic's Individual Myth" for the simple reason that in the essay, the conflict arising in the obsessive is actualized by death and not the imaginary register. In addition, and to the best of my knowledge, nowhere in the rest of Lacan's works is the Oedipal complex tetradic.

proclaims the Law, and imposes stability. The name-of-the-father “conquers” death, or at least ejects its influence from the realm of the symbolic. He collapses death into himself – that is, he collapses the fourth part of the quaternary into the part that represents him and thereby removes it from the Oedipal complex. The tetrad becomes a triad. In the process, nothing can impinge on the symbolic order. The imaginary may try as in the case of the Minister in Poe’s tale, but the symbolic order effectively marshals its elements against the threat he represents, and the stolen letter / signifier returns back to the symbolic circuit.

How is this relevant to my understanding of the Yeatsian myth, or the psychic economy which manifests itself in Yeats’s work? I shall argue that it is precisely the relationship between the name-of-the-father and death that creates in Yeats’s poetry and *A Vision* a psychic economy that relates to the spiraling myth. What I will do is reformulate Lacan’s tetrad using Lévi-Strauss’s notion of myth to account for its third axis. I do not believe that the relationship between death and the name-of-the-father is as “fixed” as Lacan’s structural approach to the Oedipal tetrad may imply. Nor do I believe that death and its manifestations as waste are a harmful force that merely induce or indicate neurosis. According to Kristeva, excrement is a marker of death and abjection and as such, “these bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death” (*Powers* 3).

Only by being a marker of death does excrement play its part in disturbing order, impinging on the symbolic and the life it bestows, rearranging the real of the body and re-symbolizing it. In a position similar to Kristeva’s, Bakhtin also links death to excrement and the lower stratum of the body whose laughter is a “regenerating and laughing death” (*Rabelais* 22). Death to him is “not a negation of life but part of life as a whole – its indispensable component, the condition of its constant renewal and

rejuvenation. Death is here always related to birth; the grave is related to the earth's life-giving womb" (*Rabelais* 50). In "The Magi," the site of Christ's death is also the location of a new disturbing alien birth.

I will take Yeats's "The Circus Animals' Desertion" from his *Last Poems* to clarify the importance of death since the poem appears both to employ a sequence of "Yeatsian myths" that are "variations" of each other and divulge a psychic economy which is congruent with the manner in which those myths operate. I can consider the poem, which is one of the last Yeats ever published, as an *ars poetica* of sorts. I can also consider it as a thinly veiled allegory of Yeats's own life and disappointments, representative of a poet who is looking back, not merely at his own artistic oeuvres, but also on his political, public, social, ideological and personal failures. As such, the importance of this poem, to my mind, is that I can view it as the fusion of the aesthetic with the historical, the myth with the chronicled event, the poetic creed with the human psychic experience.

In the poem, Yeats appears to have reached an existential crisis of sorts. "Death" is very much manifest in the mental exhaustion that permeates the poem. The speaker Yeats has finally realized that his labor is fruitless – that it has amounted to nothing, that it is merely waste and refuse. His "circus animals," those "wild creatures" that he has aspired to tame, has proven to be "as 'ungovernable' as the sea" (Spencer 80). All he can do, after a writer's block that lasted six weeks, is "enumerate old themes" ("Circus" 9) – plays and poems he wrote that, much like his claims for *A Vision* in the letter sent to its illustrator, had been relevant to his sense of security at the time of their conception. However, his recollections of his epic poem "The Wanderings of Oisín" and his plays *The Countess Cathleen* and *On Baile's Strand* are different in retrospect than what he has envisioned for them. He is disenchanted with

them now. He realizes they are *excrement, unsatisfying* myths that *cannot reconcile* with some event or crisis.

In “The Circus Animals’ Desertion,” Yeats states a general malaise which he then elaborates upon in the second section of the poem through his use of the “myths” which are listed there in the chronological order in which they were conceived. In the third section, Yeats reaches a certain conclusion which, I argue, has far-reaching consequences relating, not just to his art, but to his life as well. Yeats’s assessment of his “myths” begins with “The Wanderings of Oisín,” the titular character being a pagan Irish mythical hero in dialogue with St. Patrick: hero and saint, *antithetical* polytheistic pagan in conflict with his *primary* monotheistic counterpart. To use Yeats’s definition of the hero in “Per Amica Silentia Lunae,” Oisín’s actions in the epic poem are tragic and fated to bring him “defeat, disappointed love and the sorrow of parting” (13). The man recounts his life, the woman of the Sidhe he falls in love with, his wanderings and his journey to the land of faerie and finally, his tragic accidental return to Ireland after three hundred years. He has, through a devastating accident, lost his preternatural youth, his access to fairy and his bride. He has also lost his beloved country to a *primary* religion.

Oisín’s epic poem gives way to *The Countess Cathleen* and *On Baile’s Strand*. In the former play, Yeats, in seeming contrast to “The Wanderings of Oisín,” extols the virtue of the *primary* Christian religion through the figure of the countess Cathleen who sells her soul to the devil – but since she does so to save her tenants from starvation and damnation, she is saved in return. As for the latter play *On Baile’s Strand*, it follows, in dramatic form, the events listed in “Cuchulain’s Fight with the Sea,” a poem I have assessed at some length previously and whose protagonist

Cuchulain is another *antithetical* pagan hero whose grief for unwittingly killing his own son has him, in his madness and despair, ceaselessly fighting the sea.

All the works which Yeats mentions have a tragic element to them that would have appealed to him once. Indubitably the “enumerated themes” expounded in them would have gripped his imagination and passion, but he is no longer fascinated by them. Retrospectively, Oisín’s journeys have lost their ability to reconcile with the crisis. They have turned to refuse and waste. Instead of the hero fighting destiny no matter what destiny has in store for him, in the “Circus Animals’ Desertion,” he is being “led by the nose” (“Circus” 10). Instead of Yeats remembering him for his tragic heroism, the poet barely recalls his deeds, and, to add insult to injury, merely lusts for “the bosom of his fairy bride” (“Circus” 16).

The myth Yeats has fashioned, and which has gained its stability through his belief in its themes, is being inundated with death and chaos. I can argue that “The Wanderings of Oisín” started as myth-as-becoming. Through Yeats’s faith in the myth, it has gained a modicum of stability. The myth-as-becoming has turned to a proto-myth-as-history. The conflict between the name-of-the-father in Yeats’s psyche and death, i.e. the fourth part of the tetrad, or alternatively, the synchronic axis of the myth, is resolved to the side of the name-of-the-father. The Oedipal tetrad collapses into its triadic aspect and the myth is stabilized now that nothing can reveal that the mythic narrative does not coincide with the “meaning” of chaos.

There is, however, something else going on in “The Circus Animals’ Desertion.” The Oisín myth that reveals itself there no longer gives Yeats comfort. Whatever “truth” this myth divulges is a “truth” which is not grounded in a stable symbolic order. Consequently, one’s faith in such truth is bound to erode. The name-of-the-father has failed, perhaps due to the existential crisis that Yeats is being

subjected to. In “The Wanderings of Oisín,” the titular character despite his tragedy, seeing that his country is unable to realize its nationhood or social order through an apathetic Christian faith, “vows to revive a godless and passionate Ireland” (Monteith 103). The defeatism that permeates the “Circus Animals’ Desertion,” however, makes Oisín’s stance a futile effort that may as well stand for the futility of Yeats’s own hopes for Ireland in his later life.

One feels that there is nothing heroic left for Yeats or Oisín to do. As such, Ellman’s belief that Oisín is a representation of Yeats’s own personality, that the hero is “a part of the grand confession of his life,” takes on a different connotation here (Ellman 52). One realizes that both poet and hero have failed in “The Circus Animals’ Desertion.” Both have “lost” their youth, both have lost their love, and both have lost the dreams they have for Ireland. With the myth’s failure, the Oedipal triad once more becomes a tetrad. The Oisín myth turns into fecal matter and filth. From the waste that it becomes, from the chaos that alters, shifts and break down the significations and signifier-chains that give the “symbolic order” of the Oisín myth its stability and prevents its degradation into refuse, another myth takes its place to contend with the irreconcilable event that represents its synchronic axis.

I have previously argued through Lévi-Strauss and Lacan that even if an Oedipal complex’s configuration is historical, there is, underlying it, a timeless structure which is tetradic in the case where chaos reveals its machinations – or triadic when the symbolic order is stable. It is this timeless structure(s), related to the name-of-the-father, that will be relevant to my understanding as to the manner in which a stable symbolic order can be subverted by the spiraling-like manifestation of a psychic economy whose structure relates to the slated spiraling myth that Lévi-Strauss postulates.

The Oisín myth in the “Circus Animals’ Desertion,” when it provisionally acts as myth-as-history, discloses a stable symbolic order which functions as it should by maintaining the triadic Oedipal triangle. The symbolic name-of-the-father prevents chaos from undermining the symbolic order by pushing death to the borders of the Oedipal complex. It also prevents chaos from the “inside” of the complex by stonewalling the ego’s imaginary attachments. Another way to put this is that the triadic Oedipal complex, correlating with a stable symbolic order, maintains a culture or an individual’s psyche in its “proper” historically determined and determining configuration.

When the triadic structure becomes tetradic. When it opens the symbolic to chaos, symbolic elements are threatened by volatility. Signifiers elide or are altered, the bonds they forge between each other are broken or reform into chains which appear to be meaningless, or do not signify as they should, or inasmuch as they “signify,” they transgress the Law. In existentialistic terms, life becomes meaningless. This is one postulation as to why Lacan considers the neurotic, including the obsessive neurotic, ahistorical and stuck outside time. He refuses to march in the path determined for him by the signifier – and since, to Lacan, there is no other path, he is then suspended in limbo.

However, the Oedipal structure has a “timeless” ahistorical aspect to it. Even if the symbolic order collapses, there is something which creates the conditions for it to begin anew – even if it has to be created, not from the symbol, but from chaos. This is possible since the name-of-the-father is not only inscribed in the register of the symbolic. Even if he is “destroyed,” there is still an aspect of him that exists outside the insistence of the symbolic order and from the side of the real. From that side, he is represented by the dead father of the primal horde whose death phylogenetically

stamps his name into the psyche of those who murdered him (*Sem. VII 176,309*). The “timeless” name-of-the-father, from the borders of the real, attempts to impose the Law once more. “He” attempts to fashion the symbolic order again. Yet, since signifiers have mostly turned to detritus and waste, the name-of-the-father cannot depend on the symbolic order that his symbolic aspect once maintained.

He will have to work with the “timeless” structure of the other elements of the tetrad to create a symbolic order unique to the particular manifestation of chaos. He will use this Oedipal structure as a “template” to find “new relations” and fashion from the “fecal” matter and detritus of the old symbolic order new significations that follows this “template.” In other words, he will create a new symbolic order where he will have a new symbolic guise. He will be represented by new and different symbolic entities than those found in the Oisín myth. Although his symbolic names will be different, he will nevertheless still have the “timeless” function of regulating the symbolic, of staving off chaos and prohibiting any desire that proves dangerous to it. He will still work alongside, against or around the other elements of the tetrad – imposing new norms, ethics, cultural elements and moral laws. As such, the configuration of the new symbolic order will be different than the old one to simultaneously account for all these particular chaotic variables and still create “timeless relationships” which “order” these variables into a potentially new diachronically contingent Oedipal structure that, although different from the old one, nevertheless still coincides or appears to coincide with its “timeless” aspect.

The “new myth” that is now posited by the new symbolic order as that which can reconcile itself with the event, that can stave off death or Yeats’s existential crisis or his deadly desire, is his play *The Countess Cathleen*. The truth it proposes, the truth it inscribes in its fold is not the same as that of the Oisín myth but a “counter truth”

that the Oisín myth / old symbolic order would have judged as a falsity (“Circus” 29). Where the Oisín myth celebrates the heroic individual who is suspicious of saints and *primary* religions, the new myth represented by the countess Cathleen is dependent on a symbolic configuration that extols the creed of Christ and His faith. Here, a pious woman whose destiny is intertwined with her tenants and community replaces a pagan hero whose destiny is an acutely lonely and personal endeavor.

One sees in the new myth evidence of a new symbolic order – new laws, new norms, morals and injunctions – all the elements of the *primary* disposition which Yeats contrasts with the *antithetical* disposition in *A Vision*. More critically, the new order, its new signifiers and configurations, is different from the symbolic order represented by the latter myth. What has arranged it as such, what has determined this new order *is chaos* and death, not history. Now that it has been fashioned anew from the detritus of the old order and the influence of chaos, history, launching itself from the new order, can begin again to determine the future – except the myth spirals once again.

Like the Oisín myth, the Cathleen myth cannot indefinitely stave off death from the Oedipal triad. In “The Circus Animal’s Desertion,” Yeats’s faith in it has lessened. Perhaps he feels that the mercy Countess Cathleen exhibits is tinged with pious stridency and fanaticism. “In *The Countess Cathleen* the commandment of mercy is followed to the forgetting of all else,” he complains in “The Freedom of the Theater” (94). Regardless as to the reason why he has become unenthusiastic, the speaker Yeats forsakes the Cathleen myth. His attention is deflected from it to a dream – and soon enough “this dream had all [his] thought and love” (“Circus” 24). The play itself, its “counter truth,” does not appease the speaker. There is still an irreconcilability between one event and another, between the “dream” and the “heart” to use Yeats, or

between the character and his deeds to use Helen Vendler's interpretation in *Our Secret Discipline* (275-276).

It is also possible that Yeats's disappointment in the actual play stems from the fact that its political message was not widely accepted in Ireland when it was performed in the late nineteenth century. Adrian Frazier considers the first version of *The Countess Cathleen* a "sociological propaganda" that calls for an "integrationist" class-unity between Catholic (tenants) and Protestant (landlords) against England (Frazier 1-23). I can say that, much like Walcott in *Drums and Colours* attempts to create a West Federation from disparate social groups, Yeats too was striving to forge in his play a stable symbolic order for Ireland that resolved seemingly *irreconcilable* sectarian and class tensions to produce, in the process, a unified nation where the Catholic-Protestant divide is all but effaced. That the play was not well received when it was first performed in 1899 in the Abbey Theatre foreshadows some of the conflicts and tensions that had shaped the Ireland of the early twentieth century and which stood in opposition to Yeats's own dreams, cultural projects and political ambitions.

In the "Circus Animals' Desertion," the failure of the Cathleen myth, which reveals to the speaker its irreconcilability with the event, opens the Oedipal triad. Once more death enters to be the fourth partner, changing the Oedipal complex into its tetradic aspect. The myth spirals into yet another variation, that of the Cuchulain myth. This variation will eventually have the same fate as its predecessors. Instead of appreciating and accepting its "truth," its "heart-mysteries," Yeats only uses its substance to generate an illusory "dream" he can be enchanted by, and which ultimately leads him away from its emblems and themes (28-29). Instead of him retaining his fascination with the motif of a Cuchulain fighting the invulnerable tide,

Yeats turns away from this “fantasy” that, I have argued in the introduction of my thesis, nourishes his imagination.

With this last variation, the myth discloses the sequence that underpins the overall influence of death and chaos: (Oisín myth / Oedipal triad) – (Oisín myth / Oedipal tetrad) – (Cathleen myth / Oedipal triad) – (Cathleen myth / Oedipal tetrad) – (Cuchulain myth / Oedipal triad) – (Cuchulain myth / Oedipal tetrad). In other words, one sees a spiral with a repeating sequence of history and order followed by chaos and the subversion of history. The symbolic order forms and with it, history can continue. Then, chaos and death intrude once more and symbolic history is elided. Subsequently, through the mediation of the “timeless” Oedipal complex and the real name of the father, history and order find a new “balance.” In Kristeva’s words, the waste of the old symbolic order, when pushed aside, “begets purification and systematizations, a horror that civilizations seize on in order to build themselves up and function” (*Powers* 210). A new Irish symbolic order arises from the waste of the old – then the cycle continues.

In “The Circus Animals’ Desertion,” the speaker is cognizant of this cycle of order and chaos. By the end of the poem, he appears to be aware that his “myths,” which grew out of “pure mind,” began as waste and excrement, as a “mound of refuse or the sweeping of a street, / Old kettles old bottles and a broken can, / Old iron, old bones, old rags” (35-37). According to Helen Vendler in *Poets Thinking*, this last stanza is significant because it is flooded with new images not found in the previous parts of the poem (118). To my mind, this implies that something new has been created from the “desiccated” excremental material of the former stanzas. Indeed, Yeats’s arrangement of the “waste material,” the stanzas and the themes in “The Circus Animals’ Desertion,” in the first two sections is revealed to be for the sake of an

alchemical process that will transmute all these feces into *something new* in the *last section* of the poem. The speaker, far from giving up on his “excrement,” *changes, yet again*, all this filth into another myth. In Rached Khalifa’s words, in the poem, “the pure must be born from the impure – *inter feces et urinas nascimur* (257).⁵⁴ One realizes that even as Yeats acknowledges his “death” and failure, the myth is paradoxically altering yet again to find a different resolution that is not sanctioned by its current symbolic order(s).

Again, the speaker will attempt to find another diachronic axis – another permutation of the myth, another variation of a “counter truth” that may finally reconcile with the event: *On Baile’s Strand* is not the last myth in the poem – “The Circus Animal’s Desertion” itself acts in the capacity of yet another variation of the Yeatsian myth – its fourth variation. The poem concludes with a new myth-as-history that is formed from the spiralling myth’s continuous becoming. The counter truth that it posits is that excrement and death, the “foul rag and bone shop of the heart,” is the nexus from where the speaker must release his creative energies and not the “ladder” of the pure mind (39-40). Here, Yeats’s passion for the purity of destruction “has given way to a vision of desire as powerfully inconsistent, magnificently adulterated [and] built upon refuse and waste” (Mahaffey 6). Thus, the spiralling myth is stabilized for a while until some future event will have death knocking at the gates of a symbolic order whose “timeless” paternal guardian must prepare himself again for the destruction of the Law, the elision of a historically determined symbolic destiny and the erosion of the signifier into excreta.

⁵⁴ Latin for: “We are born amidst faeces and urine.”

The Spiral beneath the Spiral

What sense can I make of Yeats's *A Vision* in relation to a psychic economy where death continuously opens and closes the Oedipal structure, preventing one symbolic order from gaining mastery? In *A Vision*, Yeats writes that the time cycles found therein are not actual cycles. If they have seemed to him once "miraculous" and literal, his "reason has soon recovered." He merely regards them now as "stylistic arrangements of experience" that help him produce metaphors for poetry (*AVB* 19). When he writes that they are merely "stylistic arrangements of experience," Yeats, I believe, is preemptively anticipating and countering the opinions of his detractors. He is marshalling a defense even before an attack will occur. It is a cunning strategy on his part but, as Harold Bloom informs me, I "must be wary of Yeats when he shows his own uneasiness by grotesque self-referential ironies in the introductory part of the book" (210).

I do think that *A Vision* is a stylistic arrangement of experience, but I also believe that Bloom has a point. The cycles of history in *A Vision* are a mode of poetic expression which helps Yeats generate metaphors for his poetry. The spiraling cycles of history may be figurative expressions – they may not be actual in Yeats's mind. Regardless of whether they are actual or not, they are similar in expression to my notion of the spiraling myth fashioned from Lévi-Strauss and Lacan. If my assessment of the Yeatsian myth discloses successive symbolic orders with their respective histories being destroyed and reborn – changed again and again into excreta, and born again and again into new signifiers, I cannot but see the historical cycles that Yeats proposes in *A Vision* but as a mimetic stylistic expression of the slated discontinuous structure of the spiraling myth.

In *A Vision*, Yeats writes that the twelve cycles “constitute a single great cone or year of some twenty-six thousand years” (*AVB* 149). Each cycle or “month” of the great year is about 2200 years and each alternates between the Lunar and the Solar Months. The latter is represented by the annunciation of the swan – the raping of Leda by Zeus which gives birth to the multiple avatars of the *antithetical* age including Helen of Troy. The former is represented by the annunciation of the dove – the holy spirit descending on the Virgin Mary in the form of a dove resulting in the birth of Christ, the avatar of the *primary* age.

Each month is radically different from the other. Even the alternate months that have the same tincture, whether Solar or Lunar, do not have the same symbolic order and manifest in different ways. Thus, the difference between the *antithetical* age that gives birth to Leda and the projected *antithetical* age that will be ushered in 2100 CE will contain similarities to each other and yet will be, as Neil Mann informs, “entirely new, so that its influx ‘will arise after a long preparation and as it were out of the very heart of human knowledge, and seem when it comes no interruption but a climax’” (“Cycles of History”). More critically, the alternating ages of *antithetical* and *primary* mirror each other in that “the representative of that age’s *Will* looks upon its *Mask* and sense its own destruction” (De Forrest 153). “Have I proved,” asks Robartes, “that civilizations come to an end when they have given all their light like burned-out wicks, that ours is near its end?” – to which Aherne corrected, “Or transformation” (*AVB* 36).

Death is transformation – between one variation of myth and another, a symbolic order arises, is violently destroyed and out of its waste another symbolic order or civilization is born through the “transformation” of the excreta of the old order into new signifiers – creating in the process, new symbols, new rules and new morals. “So, the great year,” writes Yeats in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” “whirls out

new right and wrong, / Whirls in the old instead” (54-55). Yet, the old is also new as Mann argues – and the reversal of morals that I find here cannot exist but with the existence of a new symbolic order, born out of violence, chaos, and the mediation of the name-of-the-father.

It is my belief that in Yeats’s gyres, violence is a major indication of a chaotic spiraling symbolic order. As such, I would like to assess the historical cycles in conjunction with it. I shall begin by giving an example of an instance when Yeats defended violence. As a means to ensure the power of the newly independent nation of Ireland, Yeats endorsed the acts of Kevin O’Higgins, a leader in the Free State provisional government who was responsible for the execution of Anti-Treaty republican prisoners-of-war between 1922 and 1923 (Bradley 133). “The government of the Free State has been proved legitimate by the only effective test,” Yeats wrote in approval back then. “It has been permitted to take life” (*Later Articles* 231). Yeats’s support for O’Higgins brings to mind Walter Benjamin’s work *Toward the Critique of Violence* where law-positing and law-preserving violence are shown to be immanent within the legal system of the state and are meant to maintain its authority and, to use Lacanian terminology, also meant to defend the name(s)-of-the-father: “Law’s interest in monopolizing violence vis-à-vis the individual is explained by the intention ... of preserving law itself” (Benjamin 42).

Despite his support of O’Higgins’s consolidation of power for the Irish Free State, Yeats’s fascination with violence comes from the knowledge that it can change the world, not that it entrenches state power. Its importance in his works is that it heralds the birth of a new order and the death of old symbolic “truths.” To Yeats, violence may “wreck ideas certainly, but it might open the door to a new order” (Wood 15). Thus, the revolutionary violence of the Easter Rising is a promise of “liberation

and rebirth for Ireland” that delivers, through history’s gyral spire, a “terrible beauty,” to quote Yeats’s “Easter, 1916” (Bradley 84; “Easter, 1916” 16).

The point I am trying to make is not whether violence is supported or condoned by Yeats, or whether his endorsement or rejection of violence is to be condemned. His fascist tendencies in his later life, and his support for war as a means to implement eugenics policies against the “gangrel stocks” of Europe are problematic, to say the least (*Later Essays* 231). Joseph Valente is right to consider this position a form of “systemic violence” which indicates Yeats’s fear that his own ideals and assumptions are threatened with erasure – that he, an aging poet, is all too aware of his *impotence*, of his loss of influence and relevance in an Ireland turning towards more narrow sectarian policies (176). When Yeats is all too willing to direct violence against others as a means of wrecking their symbolically constituted assumptions that he fails to recognize that it is a double-edged sword that can wreck and undermine his own beliefs. The new order to be delivered into the world, like the beast in the “Second Coming” or the bestial “uncontrolled mystery” in “The Magi,” will come despite his opposition or support.

Whether violence is state-sanctioned or state-opposed, the mere fact that it exists implies that the symbolic order cannot defend itself with its mere symbolically configured elements. As I have proved in my assessment of Lacan’s seminar on Poe’s letter, the symbolic order *autonomously* functions to maintain itself. That it needs, through the police, to resort to violence implies that it is threatened by chaos and cannot function properly. The checks and balances, the name-of-the-father, the socio-cultural institutions, the political powers and the Law have decayed to an extent that they cannot self-regulate the symbolic. This would be equivalent in Lacan’s seminar to the Queen’s letter becoming unable to mobilize societal and psychical forces against

the self-serving culturally deleterious actions of the Minister. It is then that, in the absence of symbolic regulation, police violence, for “security reasons,” becomes the law and this “denotes the point at which the state... from *impotence* ... can no longer guarantee through the legal order the empirical ends that it wishes to achieve at any price.” (Benjamin 48; my emphasis).

I argue that violence is an indication of chaos by the mere fact that it exists when the signifiers are volatile, the name-of-the-father is *impotent*, and death breaches through the Oedipal complex. Its existence denotes that the socio-symbolic order, since it cannot maintain its former structure, is spiralling into another different variation of itself. Thus, the new symbolic order, the new myth or the new historical cycle in *A Vision* is delivered from the old through war and violence. Yeats makes Michael Robartes say in *A Vision*: “Dear predatory birds, prepare for war... for how can a nation or a kindred without war become that ‘bright particular star’?... Love war because of its horror, that belief may be changed, *civilisation renewed*. We desire belief and lack it. Belief comes from shock and is not desired... Belief is renewed continually in the *ordeal of death*” (*AVB* 37; my emphasis).

This statement is notoriously reused by Yeats in his preface of *On the Boiler* to comment on the need of violence to revamp the blood of European nations so that they do not fall into “racial” decay (*Later Essays* 231). However, I argue that Robartes’ speech, inasmuch as his words underline Yeats’s fascistic tendencies and his championing of eugenic policies, is nevertheless still a commentary on the motion of the historical cycles whose revolutions must eventually contradict Yeats’s own autocratic beliefs when they give rise to chaos. As such, Robartes’ speech can be read against the grain and against the manner in which it is used in *On the Boiler*: Shock is not desired, and it is Yeats, not his countrymen, who does not desire to be shocked.

His endorsement of violence is paradoxically a reaction to the “violence” done to his psyche – dreams that never came to fruition, an Ireland that never moulded itself to his whim, war and strife that made him revise his position times and times again, etc.

The presence of violence indicates that there is an *irreconcilability* between Yeats’s symbolic assumptions and the contemporary event he is subjected to which throws these assumptions to the wind. This is commensurate with Alistair Cormack’s claim that there is a discrepancy between the gyres in *A Vision* whose arrangements in relation to each other attempt to concretize experience and Yeats’s own array of memory (Cormack 150). The corollary is that Yeats is at a crossroads in the spiral, between one revolution and another. It is he who is being subjected to violence and it is he who has to unwillingly ride the winds of chaos once more. His desire for order is the very desire which prevents order from reifying his system. The gyres of history in *A Vision* will keep on revolving and violence will continue to irrupt at the end of every revolution to engender chaos and to cause an “apocalyptic moment” that is “midwife to a deeper sense of reality” (Watson 138). This sense of reality will always challenge Yeats’s own symbolic assumptions. Ironically, had he lived long enough, war and violence may very well be the very forces that compel Yeats to change his stance and position on... war and violence.

It is for this reason that I consider Yeats’s historical gyres a “stylistic arrangement” of experience. The gyres and the entire Yeatsian system of cyclical history, through this stylistic arrangement, recreate and reproduce the very conditions of violence and irreconcilability that riddle his own symbolic order thereby compelling it to revolve. Ultimately, the entirety of *A Vision* is a stylistic arrangement of the spiraling myth – a myth that attempts to exist in all its variations, in its multitudinous symbolic orders where destiny may follow history for a while until the signifiers that

history figures are destroyed. Then, it is up to death and chaos to jumpstart history again.

Nor are the historical gyres the only example of this stylistic arrangement of the Yeatsian spiraling myth. There is a dizzying plethora of terminology in *A Vision* that implies an irreconcilability, and often, a certain kind of psychic tension that can be synonymous with violence, particularly between one element of *A Vision*'s complex system and another. "Opposition," for example, is a relationship between the antithetical *Faculties* of *Will* and *Mask*, or the *primary Faculties* of *Creative Mind* and *Body of Fate*. The former is an "emotional Opposition" while the latter is an "intellectual Opposition." In addition, the relationship between the two Oppositions is called a Discord, and there may be "Deception" in this relationship such as when the *Creative Mind* offers the *Will* in its *antithetical* phase a *primary* image of the *Mask* (*AVB* 69). One may believe that such irreconcilability, in accordance with Lacan's notion of obsessive neurosis, is deleterious to the manner in which one views or interacts with the world. As Yeats informs us, however, such interactions are not something negative. Without them, without, for example, the "continual Discord through Deception there would be no conscience, no activity" (*AVB* 70).

To give another example, I can point to the fact that the emotional Opposition between *Will* and *Mask* is highly suggestive. *Will* is defined by Yeats as "the first matter of a certain personality" that "has not become desire because there is no object to desire" while *Mask* is described as "the image of what we wish to become, or that which we give our reverence" (*AVA* 15). Frederic Jameson respectively conflates *Will* and *Mask* qua Lacanian psychoanalysis with desire and the object it pursues, i.e. desire and *objet petit a* (*Modernist* 274). To my mind and as per Yeats's description, *Will* and *Mask* can also respectively fit the criteria of the symbolic "subject," i.e. what one truly

is, and the “ideal ego,” i.e. what one narcissistically imagines or desires to be. I believe this to be the case since the conflict between the subject and the ego is what classically leads to neurosis. This is commensurate in Yeats’s text with the *Will*, i.e. symbolic subject, becoming out-of-phase with itself if it tries to “live in the *Mask*” – going against the essence of its nature in the process (*AVB* 42).

Be as it may, Yeatsian concepts in *A Vision* cannot be fully transcribed onto Lacan’s system. To Yeats, for example, what is critical is the Opposition between the two *Faculties* which always produces tension between *Will* and *Mask* much like a tension is always produced between subject and ego. The individual continuously pursues his ideal ego while seemingly dismissing his subjectivity. From a Lacanian perspective, he will always be a “neurotic” and he will always ignore his symbolically-fashioned truths – and he will do so whether he is *in-* or *out-of-phase*. Yet, in *A Vision*, neurosis is not what occurs to the personality that is in-phase. This personality has a *Will* which ineffably pursues the ego and yet, paradoxically, is never “neurotic” enough to “wear” it like a *Mask*. In such a personality, I can posit that the tension or Opposition between *Will* and *Mask* is “fecund” in a manner that Lacan cannot account for since it does not produce any mental disorder.

If, as I have proposed, *Will* is subject and *Mask* is ego, it may be useful here to posit qua Homi Bhabha that what is happening for the personality living in-phase is that the tension between *Will* and *Mask* engenders a para-symbolic “third space” that opens up between the subject of the enunciation / *Will* – the individual who takes his directives from the symbolic order, and the subject of the proposition / *Mask* – the person who heeds the dictates of his ego and imaginary order. As Bhabha informs his readers, this widening fruitful space transcends both the imaginary and the symbolic

registers by giving rise to a locus “where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences” (Bhabha 312).

Using Kristeva, I can also assess Yeats’s psyche and text to reveal something similar in effect to Bhabha’s third space, *something* chaotically impinging on normative symbolic function. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva reminds the reader that repression is a common psychic structure in obsessive neurosis. For example, I have discussed at length the obsessive’s denegation of the truth of his desire – a strategy his psyche employs to keep desire perpetually and pointlessly active. I have also elaborated upon the obsessive’s refusal to acknowledge that his thoughts are not free and fully his own but determined by his relationship to the symbolic order and the Other. The individual *rejects* and represses his helplessness and impotency when forced to face the symbolic truth of himself. He denies that his entry into the symbolic order causes his “castration.”

I have argued that, unlike a typical obsessive, Yeats is all too aware of the structure of his impossible desire even if he is unwilling to forsake it. If *A Vision* is any indication, Yeats is also cognizant of the machinations of his ego even if he still pursues the perfection of the image which the *Mask* represents. I can say that the manner in which Yeats is engaging with his “obsessive ideas” is not in the typical manner propounded by Lacan, i.e. by allowing the thoughts he has denied to reach his consciousness. He is not *denying* his symbolically constituted thoughts or truths. He is *acknowledging* them even as he is *rejecting* living by their dictates. To use Kristeva, he is not unclogging “the passage of the repressed element... into the symbolic function” (Powers 163).

Yeats is not relinquishing his “feces.” In *A Vision*, his rejections operate not by denial but by “[*marking*] *signifying material* with the repressed.” Rejection “*arranges*

the repressed in a certain way” that “constitutes a post-symbolic (and in this sense anti-symbolic) hallmarking of the material that remained intact during first symbolization. This ‘material,’ expelled by the sign and judgment from first symbolizations, is then withdrawn from the unconscious into language.” In the process, the “repeated death drive (negativity, destruction),” or the real to use Lacan, or chaos to use my own idea, or excrement, “takes up a position as already positivized and eroticized in a language that... is organized into prosody or rhythmic timbres.” Those “rhythmic timbres” then upend the “normative” rhythm of the symbolic order (Kristeva, *Powers* 163).

Whether Yeats’s para-symbolic proclivities come into being via his marking of signifying material with the repressed qua Kristeva, or opening up Bhabha’s third space, or his employment of the spiraling structure of myth, there is no doubt that irreconcilable conflict between two elements in his system is what provides the conditions for chaos to influence the symbol. Tensions, moments of crisis, Discords, Oppositions, Deceptions, strife, opposing gyres – all these words denote a lack of resolution where the multiple spiraling myths interpenetrate the Yeatsian system, heightening the sense of chaos by making it ordered and visible and irresolvable. All these concepts denote a “stylistic arrangement” where irreconcilability exists between one gyre and another, between the traumatic *r  el* and the signifier, between life and death, between order and chaos, between opposing forces whose conflict inspires creativity but not necessarily resolution.

I have reached the end of my chapter on Yeats. Wit Pietrzak in *Myth, Language and Tradition* claims that Yeatsian myths proffer a “mythical hermeneutics whose prime task is the perpetually ongoing process of the unconcealment of truth” (125). He reaches his conclusion through subjecting Yeats’s “Lapis Lazuli” to the philosophy of

Heidegger and Nietzsche. I have reached a conclusion that is both paradoxically different and congruent with Pietrzak. If the “ultimate truth,” the truth beneath all truths, is in the domain of the synchronic axis of the myth – a domain obfuscated by the presence of chaos and death – then Yeats’s constant variations of the overall myth has for its purpose to discover the truth that chaos conceals in its unintelligibility – not by turning to a symbolic order and affirming the truth given to him therein – but by making the symbolic order into a fecund wasteland where chaos can plant the seeds of a truth in all its symbolic variations.

Eventually, Yeats will reap the fruits of this strange harvest. His symbolic truths will never be entirely satisfying. Through Gregory Castle, I have called them misrecognitions compiled on misrecognitions. Slowly, however, bit by bit, by mapping every new symbolic order that chaos, not history, configures, Yeats will gather different symbolic diachronic aspects of the “timeless” truth. In relations to each other, such truths may seem contradictory, but they have beneath them the synchronic “entropic truth” which exists purely in the demesne of chaos. This is the truth that Yeats tries to “unconceal” – and his successive failure takes him one step closer to a success that will nevertheless always be out of reach.

He will substitute one symbolic history / order for another – time and time again – pursuing death with the awareness that will have him refashion the symbol when his activities and desires become too deadly or futile. In the process, no singular symbolic history will appear to determine his path or the path of his characters – and his future will ever be the spiral that takes him closer and closer to that which he cannot attain, but which he desperately and impossibly desires. The truth he will find, to use his poem “The Song of the Happy Shepherd,” will always be, in the last analysis, an uninspiring “Grey Truth” akin to a “painted toy” – and his dance to “the

cracked tune that Chronos sings” will always yield nothing more than tormenting untruthful “new dreams” that will remain unfulfilled and unfulfilling. However, he will keep on compiling misrecognition on misrecognition, one myth arising out of its variation until its grey unsatisfying symbolic truth realizes another unfaithful dream – a dream that is, despite the chaos it engenders or the order it cannot maintain, “also sooth” (4-9,57).

Conclusion

Postcolonialism and the Particular

Universality of Chaos

In the *Repeating Island*, Benítez-Rojo finds in the geography of the Caribbean archipelago the complex pattern of chaos that underlies and ties the islands together despite certain socio-political and historical differences. A journey gravitating towards a centre that remains out of reach, a search for origins ending in failure even as the search itself traces the sea currents that tie the meta-archipelago together, a body in conflict with itself and its skin, an identity caught between Europe and Africa, an all too present desire to have the future and the past all at once – all these aspects of chaos all but drown the Caribbean subject in his journey to find a self that will, nevertheless, remain lost. What is discovered is that wherever a Caribbean is, he “finds himself suspended in a void... between a floor that travels from here to there and a ceiling that moves from there to here” (Benítez-Rojo 252).

So far in my thesis, I have not tried to find an “underlying pattern” to the three regional locales whose literature I have assessed through Walcott, Yeats and Adonis. My intention is not to expand the scope of chaos Benítez-Rojo has detected by stretching it to the other side of the globe. The chaos that belongs to the Caribbean is its own. If Benítez-Rojo derives his critique from the science of complexity theory which can be applied to different fields, geographies and regions, I will not use the grounds of his argument to invite the reader to see that the currents, vortexes, whirlpools, waves and tides which connect the “meta-archipelago” also connect to Ireland or the Greater Syrian region.

Nevertheless, having finished my thesis, a general definition of chaos will be useful. *My definition of chaos, in the last analysis, is any panoply of circumstances or events that affect the symbolic order in a way that shift, erode, transfigure or alter its configurations of signifiers, permanently pushing them into a malleable “structure” unsanctioned by symbolic history.* I believe that chaos provides a useful conceptual tool to look at the flux and upheaval within a post-independent postcolonial symbolic order – and if the effects of chaos are particular to the geographic zones from which chaos arises, there are, nevertheless, certain “phenomena” that are common to all of them if not unified. “The instability of time,” which Edward Said claims exists within such societies, certainly operates in all of the three writers’ works, albeit in different ways (Said 86). The Falcon has suspended time as he journeys towards the “Andalus of the depth,” Walcott’s Achille has undergone a circular voyage back into the past and forward into the present and future, while Yeats’s *A Vision* has time fluctuating in a spire, beginning and ending again and again.

The instability of time is not the only indication of chaos. “Death” plays its part, and not only in Yeats’s spiralling myth. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s journey, according to the title of one section of the poem, is an ascension to the “towers of death.” The Falcon, as I have already assessed, dies and lives many times, each of his lives is like a tree or the branch of a tree territorializing chaotic space. Similarly, in Walcott’s *Omeros*, Philoctete’s healing necessitates a death of sorts while the birth of Helen’s child, in Paul Breslin’s words, is an indication of a “West Indian birth-in-death” (258). As for Yeats, the revolution of the spiral in his poetry and *A Vision* also indicates a death, making it necessary for him and his characters and speakers to restart again from the “foul rag and bone shop of the heart” (“Circus” 40).

I can list other common themes that indicates the influence of chaos on the signifier. The open loop of the symbolic order in *Omeros* and *Drums and Colours* can find its approximation in the Yeatsian myth whose spiral does not trace a closed circuit but an open gyral cone that fluctuates and resonates with disorder. In Adonis's poem, the journey undergone by 'Abd al-Raḥmān also indicates an open-circuited symbolic order which does not find a true resolution or conclusion, or a "symbolic truth" that would have the quester end his quest. The Falcon will always seek the "Andalus of the depth," that continuous space of becoming and *transforming* which lies across the diverging chaotically-branching paths of his history.

An instability and a suspension of time, the manifestation of death as a psychic phenomenon, signifiers that cancel their signification, a birth in death, the presence of violence, an open-circuited symbolic order – all these qualities indicate a common ground from which chaos launches its attack on the symbol. To this, I can add my rendition of anxiety, the Lacanian real, the Kristevan semiotic, Fanon's zone of nonbeing, complexity theory and much more besides. The mere fact that chaos has many faces is indubitably something inherent to its own nature and inherent to postcolonial societies whose search for an identity pushes them beyond the intelligible symbols that create a stable culture.

Having gone so far in my assessment of chaos, having provisionally defined it and having found certain points of commonality that suggests a delineated aspect beneath its many protean guises, can I claim that chaos is universal to postcolonial societies? A universality to chaos implies an order to chaos that can be imposed in all of its transregional manifestations. However, to say that chaos is paradoxical is to say nothing new about it. I am inclined to allow chaos its claim to universality by dint of

its ability to generate contradictions – but in doing so, I would be ignoring the elephant in the room.

Universality has been systemically attacked by postcolonial theorists who argue that it is only western ethics and philosophy which lay claim to the categories of the “universal” in an attempt to render the postcolonial experience into an inferior copy of the western one. To claim a universality to chaos is to fall in the trap of reductionism and the application of western conceptual and epistemological paradigms on postcolonial practice. Bill Ashcroft writes: “The universal is the province of the discourse which imposes its criteria. In the evaluation of post-colonial literatures, it is the centre which imposes its criteria as universal and dictates an order in terms of which the cultural margins must always see themselves as disorder and chaos” (186). Even Fanon, according to Homi Bhabha, opposes (western) universalism since its notion of anti-racism, for example, can be deconstructed to reveal that it hides within its folds the very form of racial supremacy needed to claim and construct a “universal humanism.”

What Fanon shows up is the liminality of those [universalist] ideas – their ethnocentric margin – by revealing the historicity of its most universal symbol – Man. From the perspective of a postcolonial ‘belatedness,’ Fanon disturbs the punctum of man as the signifying, subjectifying category of Western culture, as a unifying reference of ethical value. Fanon performs the desire of the colonized to identify with the humanistic, enlightenment ideal of Man: ‘all I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and build it together.’ Then, in a catachrestic reversal he shows how, despite the pedagogies of human history, the

performative discourse of the liberal West, its quotidian conversation and comments, reveal the cultural supremacy and racial typology upon which the universalism of Man is founded: ‘But of course, come in, sir, there is no colour prejudice among us.... (Bhabha 340)

In Bhabha’s estimate, Fanon refutes universalism since it does not relate to the African or postcolonial experience. My disagreement with Bhabha is contingent on the definition of universalism and is therefore twofold: Is Fanon truly against universalism? Must universalism merely be a western concept related to a classical liberal ideology derived from the philosophers and western writers of the Age of Enlightenment, or can it be *something* else? To answer those questions, I will use *Postcolonial Lack* where Gautam Basu Thakur disagrees with Bhabha. He claims that Fanon’s project is not to assert the particular experience of the postcolonial subject, but rather, the universal one. Thakur’s argument is dependent on his definition of universality – a definition which does not have a positive, language-inscribed and symbolically determined meaning. In other words, it does not rely on a western symbolic order or any symbolic order for that matter.

To Thakur, universality does not fit any narrative, whether western or non-western. Rather, it is an absence within identity and the symbolic order: “What does it really mean to be truly universal and truly free? To be outside is to be *the* Nothing or to realize fully the condition of being (non-)human. To be nothing or exist without inscription in the symbolic suggests that the subject is excluded from the demand of shared positives (identity) realized only via negated absolutes” (103). As such, universality is what dissolves all identities in the “*night of the absolute.*” This type of universality gives rise to a humanism founded on “the suspension of all certainties of being” (xvii). Only when one can understand that the universal is “not founded in a

common positive element but a shared excluded one, that is, a universal of negated subjects, [is one] freed from thinking in terms of symbolic difference” (xviii).

Thakur’s argument is intriguing in that what he considers universal is related to Fanon’s zone of nonbeing which he equates with Lacan’s lack-in-being, i.e. that which is absent from the intelligible world of the symbol. Yet, if Thakur, while elaborating on Fanon, is saying that a subject’s lack-in-being is universal to the human condition as a *whole* and not just the postcolonial world, does this mean that chaos is also universal? In the Walcott chapter, I have linked the zone of nonbeing to chaos, and it is possible that if everyone has a “lack in being,” then this engenders some form of chaos in all individuals. As such, the “lack” the colonial centre observes in itself and the lack the postcolonial margin manifests may reflect each other. The uncivilized “black hollow” in the European unconscious that is repudiated by being projected onto the African continent and the fringe of empire (Fanon, *BSWM* 146-147) – is mirrored by the phenomenon of “subalternity.” Subalternity is defined as the feeling of mental “inferiority” and habits of subservience and obedience the postcolonial subject develops in situations of domination (Jameson, “Third World” 76) – and in relation to the “the Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth... [and] self-esteem” (Fanon, *Black Skin* 119).

Be as it may, a lack-in-being does not typically produce chaos and, indeed, is necessary to the stable structure of the symbolic order. The whole point of a stable symbolic order is to simultaneously obfuscate a person’s lack-in-being and use it to generate desire.⁵⁵ As such, if the colonist becomes aware of a lack, it is usually *momentary* and would occur in certain moments when he is forced to confront his

⁵⁵ The ultimate manifestation of a lack in Lacan’s writing is represented by castration. This is what allows any human being to become a symbolic subject.

nonbeing vis-à-vis the seemingly unsymbolisable actions of the subaltern other:

“Confrontation with the subaltern act is therefore a confrontation with something extremely traumatic, a negative positivized or the coming face-to-face with nonbeing. This results in momentary lapse of reason and evisceration of the logic for differential identities, symbolic power struggles, libidinal economies, and commodity cultures” (Thakur 7).

I argue that chaos, inasmuch as I define it as a force that permanently affects the symbolic order and prevents it from reasserting its dominance, is, for the most part, universal only to the postcolonial world where a symbolic order is not stable enough to regulate and obfuscate this lack-in-being. The result of chaos is a subject whose engagement with the symbol is not entirely within the domain of the symbolically-positivised world. As such, there is always a para-symbolic beyond to the actions of the postcolonial individual. This para-symbolic beyond can manifest as temporary excess or an acute feeling of lack-in-being related to the ego’s refusal to acknowledge symbolic subjectivity, but it also manifests as the necessary amalgamations of entropic psychic forces that precede the symbolic order to determine it instead of the other way around.

Adonis’s Falcon, with his lack-in-being becoming manifest with the death of his brother and the loss of his heritage, can only find a path whose “symbolic” landmarks are necessarily chaotic because it is he who has “fashioned” and “invented” them out of his own tragedy. The speaker in Yeats’s “The Circus Animal’s Desertion,” whose lack-in-being becomes pronounced with his disenchantments, has to reproduce another symbolic order out of the excreta and destruction of the old system in yet another attempt to hide this lack. Nowhere in his poem does he depend on the “old” symbolic order to plug this existential hole in his self. The coin in Walcott’s *Drums*

and Colours cannot act as a pure signifier to obfuscate and shroud the Caribbeans' lack-in-being precisely because it travels a symbolic circuit marked with chaos.

I do not claim that there are no other "versions" of chaos extant on the global map. The fragmentation of the contemporary world and its alienations is perhaps another form of chaos which has been expressed in modernist writing. It is a form of chaos that is usually felt as alienation, dispossession, a sense that certain unshakeable values held as sacrosanct have lost their truth, the encroachment of scientific discovery on the domain of religion whose totalizing ability to explicate the world has given solace and certitude to generations of humanity (Childs 48). In such an environment, the approach many modernist writers have taken to combat chaos is in fashioning it "into an order of some kind, expressing the mind's unique subjective view in an essentially purposeless universe without authority or structure" (Childs 59).

It is my belief that "modernist" chaos and "postcolonial" chaos are not mutually exclusive. However, the major distinction between the two is dependent on the particularities of their circumstances. In the postcolonial world, there is a greater engagement and awareness by a writer of the political and social forces that shape a person's life – to such an extent that Frederic Jameson invites his readers to view postcolonial literature, or at least "Third World literature," as a "national allegory" where a character's actions reflect the chaos, upheaval and sociopolitical factors which form his embattled nation ("Third-World" 69).⁵⁶

According to Jameson, if there is disorder evident in the texts of "First World" writers, it is usually tackled as a private endeavor – as a modernist-style chaos that is

⁵⁶ Aijaz Ahmad has accused Jameson of a reductionist westernized universalism. In his opinion, national allegory does not take into consideration the "highly differentiated" nature of Third-World texts (Ahmad 23). Imre Szeman rebuts Ahmad by stating that Jameson's concept enables readers to consider these texts "as the extremely complex objects that they are and not just as allegories of one kind or another of the Manichean binaries produced out of the encounter of colonizer and colonized" (Szeman 812).

representative of a “rigorously private and subjective ‘mood,’ which can only be designated by recourse to an aesthetic of *expression* – the unspeakable, unnameable inner feeling, whose external formulation can only designate it from without, like a symptom” (“Third-World” 70-71). In “Third World” or postcolonial nations on the other hand, a writer, cognizant of the cultural and political circumstances that make literature dependent on one’s own particular social order, is aware that whatever chaos or symptoms infest the inner self is merely a reflection of the outer symbolic world and its social, political and economic realities.⁵⁷

I believe that the result of such awareness is that there is a dialogical engagement by postcolonial writers with chaos at the level of their political sphere and social-psychic order. The lack of one-on-one correlation that Jameson perceives between the social order and the postcolonial character is indicative of a subject who does not entirely operate through the symbols of his social order.⁵⁸ What this produces is a recognition that chaos is not only a pathological symptom, it is also a panacea of the very disease it seems to manifest – a means to alter the symbolic order in a manner that will, nevertheless, never be entirely successful or in accordance with the dictates of the ego. Thus, the entropic wound – the injury, the “symptom” itself, is the very locus of the cure in *Omeros*. There, the wound is not conquered or fashioned qua modernism “into an order of some kind” inasmuch as it is dialogically engaged with to deliver to the postcolonial subject a path out of the rut of symbolic history. Similarly, the Falcon’s trauma creates the very space where social redemption and symbolic

⁵⁷ Of the three writers assessed, Adonis usually defends literature from nationalists and Marxists who want it to be a representation of social reality. Adonis’s stance, however, does not fall between the binaries of aesthetics and realism as I have proven in my chapter on him. The same can be said for Yeats and Walcott.

⁵⁸ National allegory is not “an elaborate set of figures and personifications to be read against some one-to-one table of equivalences: this is, so to speak, a one-dimensional view of this signifying process, which might only be set in motion and complexified were we willing to entertain the more alarming notion that such equivalences are themselves in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text” (Jameson, “Third World” 73).

rejuvenation is possible while the destruction of civilizations at the end of a historical cycle in *A Vision* is also the place where civilizations are renewed.

In conclusion, I can say that chaos, inasmuch as it can be perceived as a panoply of psychic and social forces, is a universal category to the postcolonial world. By claiming for chaos a universalism, I am not implying that chaos is the same everywhere. The conditions for the manifestation of chaos are different due to different events, regions, cultures, histories, symbolic order, etc. The corollary is that chaos, like the symbolic order it affects, has different aspects in different locales. The very nature of chaos is that it is protean, that its repetition is never the same. If it is universal, its manifestation is unique to the grounds from which it arises and the sociopolitical environment it affects as well as the texts that engage with it and reproduce it. In other words, what is universal to chaos is not merely the qualities that I have listed in the beginning of this chapter. What is universal to chaos is its ability to become particular to the locality it finds itself in even as the very nature that allows it to do so stays the same.

Chaos pushes postcolonial writers to write the nation and the self. It makes them aware of the process that forms the symbolic order and the means in which symbols are simultaneously created, transformed, transfigured and elided. It brings forth unbearable pressure on the signifier, on the authorial self, on the characters and even on the political and spiritual reality that forms the social order and the postcolonial unconscious. It reflects the formation of the nation as a national allegory – as a birth and a disturbance that is asymmetrically repeated and mirrored in its subjects and texts. It fractures and fragments the symbol's link to history, taking its position to both free and determine the events taking place in postcolonial space. It produces and reproduces contradiction – death becomes birth, birth turns to death and decay, decay

transforms to excrement from which new signifiers arise. Chaos attempts to push the limits, to allow for new relations to form between a subject and his environment, to create new “paths” between history and the future, to find a new relationship between life and death or time and space or ego and subject. Finally, chaos is the catalyst that alchemizes the nothing of the void with the materiality of the signifier – all in the hope that new possibilities may arise and be synthesized into the “identity” of a postcolonial nation undergoing the process of its own becoming.

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