

**THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY:
CULTURE, NATURE, AND THE MODERNIST
YEARNING FOR AUTHENTICITY**

**Dissertation zur Erlangung der Würde
einer Doktorin der Philosophie**

**vorgelegt der Philosophisch-Historischen Fakultät
der Universität Basel
und
der Faculté des Lettres, Langues et Sciences Humaines
der Universität Orléans**

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Basel 2007

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Basel, den 6. Juli 2004

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research and writing of this study were assisted by the generous financial support of the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Uarda Frutiger Foundation. For their trusting generosity, I am very grateful. Their fellowships took me to the University of Oregon, Eugene, where I was warmly welcomed by a remarkable community of "green" scholars. I owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. Louise Westling, who gave me valuable suggestions, encouragement and guidance. For conversation and companionship I must thank the members of the Mesa Verde (in- and outdoors) research group and Prof. George Wickes. For supporting my work, I would like to thank the James Fenimore Cooper Foundation. The Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities favoured me with a fellowship making possible the collaboration between the University of Basel and the University of Orléans. For their financial support, I am grateful. I am grateful also to the careful readings and the valuable reactions Prof. Thomas Pughe has given to various drafts of this study. Special thanks are due also to Prof. Hartwig Isernhagen, who has provided crucial support, advocacy and literary advice. I am also deeply indebted to my family for support and encouragement beyond description. Finally, I want to thank Xavier, whose varied contributions and generosity helped me along the pathways of research.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
1. MODERNITY	6
1.1. Modernism: Di- and Convergences	6
1.1.1. Modernity and Crisis	8
1.1.2. Formalism as a Redemption of the Crisis of Modernity	13
1.1.3. A Pathology of Modernity	20
1.1.4. "Cancer and Delirium": Henry Miller's Diagnosis of Modernity	22
1.1.5. Henry Miller's Response to the Modernist "Universe of Death"	26
1.1.6. "The English Death": Lawrence Durrell's Diagnosis of Modernity	32
1.2. Ecocriticism: An Environmental Response to Modernity	37
1.2.1. Ecocriticism: Rethinking Cultural Conceptions of the Nonhuman World	41
2. MODERN CULTURE'S DUALISTIC CONCEPTIONS OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD	51
2.1. Metropolis: Modern Imaginations of Urban Environments	51
2.2. Miller and Durrell's Images of the Urban Waste Land	60
2.2.1. Paris versus New York	67
2.2.2. Diseased Habitats	71
2.3. Seasonal Dysfunctions and Circular Time	80
2.3.1. Oriental Time and Western Concepts of Linearity	87
2.3.2. Mechanical Time and Social Control	98
2.4. Rationality and Self-Analysis	104
2.4.1. Enlightenment	107
2.4.2. The Dissected Organism	113
3. BACK TO NATURE	123
3.1. Nature as Antithesis of Culture	123
3.2. 'Simulacra of Life'	128
3.3. 'Nature's Flawed Mirror': Rhetorical and Representational Restrictions	133
3.3.1. From Universal Identity to Difference	146
3.4. Pastoral Instances in <i>The Black Book</i>: England, Corfu, Tibet	157
3.4.1. Tarquin's Pastoral Ideals	159

3.4.2. Corfu: Arcadia or Artifice?	163
3.4.3. Tibet	169
3.5. Miller's American Pastoral	170
3.5.1. An Anti-Pastoral Critique of the American Environmental Imagination	173
3.5.2. "A sort of divine stuttering"	175
3.5.3. An Urban Pastoral	179
4. BACK TO THE WOMB	187
4.1. The Importance of Place in Henry Miller's Urban Novels	187
4.2. Lawrence Durrell's Recourse to Myth	206
4.3. Reclaiming the Sexual Body	211
4.3.1. Durrell's Vision of Sexuality	214
4.3.2. Miller's Obscene "dance over the dirty corpse" of the Ideal	224
5. THE BODY AS PASTORAL SPACE	238
5.1. Djuna Barnes and the Crisis of Modernity	242
5.1.1. Alienation in <i>Nightwood</i>	244
5.1.2. Textual and Bodily Defects: <i>Nightwood's</i> Enactment of Crisis	247
5.1.3. The Marked Bodies of the 'Other'	250
5.1.4. The Nature-Culture Dualism in <i>Nightwood</i>	254
5.1.5. Robin Vote's Body as Pastoral Space	257
5.1.6. 'The Ruin of Representation!': O'Connor's Obscenity and Robin's Iconoclasm	264
5.2. Harlem and Primitivism	271
5.2.1. The Harlem Renaissance and Claude McKay	274
5.2.2. Pastoralism and Ray's Quest for a New Artistic Expression	278
5.2.3. Jake and Banjo, or Nomad Space and the Dissolution of Binary Oppositions	285
CONCLUSION	294
ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS CITED	300
BIBLIOGRAPHY	301
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INTRODUCTION

The various Modernist movements of the beginning of the twentieth century are generally adjudged to be aesthetically innovative and urban. It is under the impact of the formalistic experiments of Modernist art that authors, like Henry Miller and Lawrence Durrell, began to claim that the art-for-art's-sake credo proved to be ineffective in terms of healing the *malaise* of modern life. Their vitalistic quest for authenticity seeks a new approach to the predominant view that modernity constitutes a crisis. Instead of embedding my approach to the **crisis of modernity** in a traditional context of Modernist epistemology and poetics, I have decided to change the perceptual ground by looking at the intertwined notions of **alienation** and **authenticity** in the light of **ecocritical** theory. My chief concern lies in tracing the analogies between ecocriticism's emphasis on the **nature versus culture dualism** with the vitalistic concern for the opposition between the natural self and the cultural self. To elaborate on this suggestion, I shall first take a close look at the problem of modernity and its environmental implications.

As indicated above, to gain recognition of the environmental aspects underlying the Modernist thematization of the crisis of modernity, I will explore texts by Henry Miller and Lawrence Durrell. Their work demonstrates with a particular vehemence the tensions that trouble modern culture's relations to the natural world. This study's main focus is on Henry Miller's first novel, *Tropic of Cancer* (1934), and Lawrence Durrell's first novel, *The Black Book* (1938). While I will limit my focal point to Durrell's *Black Book*, Miller's monothematic oeuvre will lead me into further consideration of the critique of modernity as we find it described in his early novels, such as *Black Spring* (1936), *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939), *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945), and *Quiet Days in Clichy* (1956).

In chapter 2, I will examine the Modernist fascination for the **metropolis**. I will argue that the metropolis offers these authors a highly evocative frame for dramatizing the individual's struggle with the "machine age" and the urbanite's profound sense of alienation. From an ecocritical perspective the urban settings of Modernist novels are particularly interesting insofar as they mirror western civilization's problematic relation to the natural world. Erected in opposition to nature, the modern metropolis is a realistic reminder of the growing distance between **nature and culture**. Hence, this examination will lead to the conclusion that the **crisis of modernity** can indeed be viewed as an **environmental crisis**. Moreover, I shall study how both Miller and Durrell pay attention to the philosophical

heritage of rational humanism to highlight their critique of technological progress. Among the aspects to be covered here are Miller and Durrell's rejection of western civilization's **major dualisms**.

The analysis of threatening urban habitats sets the stage for chapter 3, which explores the question whether Miller and Durrell advocate a classical **return to nature** to overcome their suffering from enculturation. The ensuing argument will center around the notion of the **pastoral**, which both Durrell and Miller recognize as the traditional mode to express the urban yearning for a utopian counterpoise to civilized life. An ecocritical inquiry into this presumption will draw in a discussion about the artificiality of cultural conceptions of nature and the difficulty to represent the nonhuman environment within the confines of predetermined modes of artistic expression. Accordingly, I will study how authors who wish to integrate a reconfiguration of the dominant discourse and its idealized pastoral representations of nature are challenged to rethink their rhetorical devices. This analysis of Miller and Durrell's **subversion of representational norms** will lead to the conclusion that rather than using nature as an ideological screen for acting out urban desires, they seek to recover an immediate vital connection to their nonhuman environment.

In the following chapter I shall trace ecocritical theories of **place-experience**. To reveal the full impact of place-experience as a vital relationship between human beings and the material world, I will propose a reading that focuses on sensorial aspects of experiential reality. An analysis of the protagonists' multi-sensory interaction with their urban habitats allows us to deduce that Miller and Durrell do not promote an illusory return to primordial nature as a solution to the Modernist preoccupation with self-estrangement. Rather, their search for authenticity draws attention to the individual's **embodied experience** of human and nonhuman environments. Drawing on the ecocritical assumption that only a re-evaluation of the human body as a natural organism will yield a new balanced perception of the natural world, I will examine the degree to which the vitalistic attempt to reappropriate the human body as a natural entity seeks to reach beyond the nature-culture divide. By focusing on the human body as a reminder of humankind's original affinity with nature, these authors propose a solution to the Modernist preoccupation with self-estrangement, while at the same time they offer a new artistic response to the physical world.

Ultimately, I will ask myself to what extent the vitalistic recourse to the eroticized **female body** as a **mediator with nature** genuinely undermines the binary structures of the pastoral impulse. My purpose here is to delineate how an ecofeminist consideration of dominant culture's traditional exclusion of **women** and **nonwhites** through association with **naturality** and **animality**, raises the question whether African American and women authors

opted for a similar solution to heal their traumatic experience of modernity. To answer these questions I will first turn to Djuna Barnes. Her novel, *Nightwood* (1936), offers a useful contrast with Miller and Durrell in her treatment of the female body as a new pastoral space. Resistance to **symbolical domination** is also at the heart of Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928) and *Banjo* (1929). In his attempt to adapt some elements of the white Modernist fascination for **primitivism** to his search for a new cultural self-expression, McKay touches on central themes of the Harlem Renaissance.

1. MODERNITY

1.1. Modernism: Di- and Convergences

In 1935 Lawrence Durrell initiated his life-long correspondence with Henry Miller by expressing his appreciation of the *Tropic of Cancer* which he deemed "the only really man-size piece of work this century can really boast of" (McNiven 1989:2). In his youthful enthusiasm Durrell particularly praised the book's antiliterary stance. Durrell relished to "see the canons of oblique and pretty emotions mopped up" and consequently greeted Miller's *Zeitgeist* and the way *Tropic of Cancer* "really gets down on paper the blood and bowels of our time" (McNiven 1989:2). Indeed, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, first published in Paris in 1934 and immediately banned in all English-speaking countries, is a virulent exposure of the exhaustion of modern art. Here, as throughout his oeuvre, Miller's literary project is fuelled by a wish to liberate itself from literary conventions. At the beginning of *Tropic of Cancer* he thus declares: "[t]his is not a book, in the ordinary sense of the word. No, this is a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art" (TCN:10). But Miller's offence is not only directed against 'Art.' Considering the fact that this novel's reputation is based on its obscenity and sexual liberty, it is obvious that it also aims at social codes.

Inspired by this radical rejection of conventional restrictions upon literary expression Lawrence Durrell wrote his first important novel, *The Black Book* (1938).¹ Durrell's preoccupation with the notion of art becomes evident if we consider the fact that in its preface, written in 1959, he retrospectively describes *The Black Book* as "a two-fisted attack on literature by an angry young man of the thirties" (BB:9). Like Miller, Durrell throughout this novel draws attention to his countertraditional literary project. Durrell's account of the emergence of the emancipated artist, who tries to "escape from the chaste seminary of literature in which [he has] been imprisoned too long" (BB:66), is undeniably reminiscent of Miller's reflections on the theme of art.² However, not only his view that modern art needed a radical renewal is congruent with Miller's viewpoint. Due to the violent subversion of formal and linguistic conventions *The Black Book* met the same opposition as Miller's novels. The

¹ Durrell had written two apprentice novels: *Pied Piper of Lovers* (1935), and *Panic Spring* (1936), the latter under the pseudonym of Charles Norden. However, both novels received little critical attention.

² In his correspondence with Miller Durrell admits that *Tropic of Cancer* had influenced his own writing. In a letter written in 1937, for instance, he comments: "[a]nything positive I have as a writer I owe to your books" (McNiven 1989:65).

novel's obscenity was condemned as pornography and, as a consequence, was considered unpublishable in Britain and America.³

In order to delineate the arguments which led to Miller and Durrell's desire to subvert literary conventions, I need first to sketch the aesthetic framework which was established by the various Modernist movements of the first three decades of the twentieth century. For it is this tradition of Modernism towards which Miller and Durrell had developed a curiously ambiguous relationship. Several critics have commented upon the difficulty to classify Henry Miller's work within American literary history. Indeed, as Malcolm Bradbury observes, "it was entirely typical of Henry Miller that he should drift into Paris just at the moment when most other American expatriate writers [...] were packing up their things and going home" (1995:360). Bradbury therefore points out that while by the 1930s the Modern movement's artistic experiments started to fade, Miller's decision to discover himself as an artist in Paris, was a conscious move "in the opposite direction to the cultural tide—and that was just how he meant it to be" (1995:367). In contrast, Bartlett defines Miller as an outsider whose work focused on themes, such as individualism, which were out of fashion but who, nevertheless, must be classified as "a full member of the generation of modernists" (1992:317). Finally, Ihab Hassan argues that Miller "was one of the first writers [...] to make a break with the tradition of the modern and to establish an outlook more 'schismatic' than any adopted by the literary masters of his day" (1967:29).

These critical attempts to situate Miller in relation to the Modernist movement should suffice to demonstrate that his work can neither be clearly in- nor excluded from Modernism. Both Miller and Durrell, define their artistic project as a violent refusal to conform to established forms of literary expression. However, definitions of Modernism, which generally relate to new and extraordinary features in the use of subject matter, form and style emerging in the literature of the early decades of the twentieth century, reveal that Modernists too, aspired a literary revolution. Yet, as Frank Kermode has observed, studies of Modernism tend to limit their focal point to "the period between 1907 and, say, 1925" (1971:40). In other words, *Tropic of Cancer* and *The Black Book* were written after Modernism had reached its apex. Miller and Durrell's revolt against "Art," may therefore also be directed against their Modernist predecessors. Thus I shall now proceed to briefly describe the main tenets of Modernism as a background for understanding, on the one hand, whether Miller and Durrell's literary project is a negative response to the enormous impact of Modernist art. On the other

³ Both *The Black Book* as well as Miller's novels were officially made available in Britain and the United States in the 1960s.

hand, I shall endeavor to highlight to what extent Miller and Durrell's perspectives are congruent with certain aspects of Modernist literature.

1.1.1. Modernity and Crisis

To begin with, it is important to note that the term "Modernism" itself raises a number of problems.⁴ As a historical designation, Modernism tends to provoke contradictory conclusions. While some critics have traced back significant influences to the late nineteenth century, theorists of Anglo-American literature mostly focus on the artistic outbursts that followed the first World War. Accordingly, Peter Nicholls has pointed out that "[t]he beginnings of modernism, like its endings, are largely indeterminate, a matter of traces rather than of clearly defined historical moments" (1995:1). Also Bradbury and McFarlane have tried to explain the difficulty confronted by literary historians who try "to find a clear place or date for" this movement by pointing out that it might be the "oblique nature of Modernism" (1991:30) which has led to such vague explanations. Put differently, in order to analyze the complex structures of Modernism, the definition of this movement needs to be expanded beyond clear-cut historical categorizations or aesthetic and ideological commitments.

Indeed, Bradbury and McFarlane deplore that a single term like "Modernism," or "The Modern" is being used uncritically to distinguish a phenomenon which involves a variety of diverging principles.⁵ This delimited perspective they deem particularly unfruitful because the term is being used as a stylistic abstraction to encompass a multiplicity of artistic movements such as Impressionism, Futurism, Imagism, Vorticism, Dadaism and Surrealism. It goes without saying that this wide array of artistic credos contains a number of conflicting viewpoints. Consequently Bradbury and McFarlane stress that many of these *isms* are "forbiddingly intertwined and overlapped producing a doubtful synthesis of many movements radically different in kind and degree" (1991:44-5).⁶ Nevertheless, in spite of these semantically problematic distortions, Modernism, as a designation, alludes to one of these movements' common denominators. Namely, that to a certain extent they all involve a distinct

⁴ The ensuing discussion focuses upon Modernism only insofar as it sustains my analysis of Miller and Durrell, but also Djuna Barnes and Claude McKay. In this sense, I do not intend to analyze the various attempts that have been made to define Modernism as a generic term.

⁵ Their argument is reminiscent of Frank Kermode's statement that the term "modernism" is used in an "unexamined way and nobody notices how nearly meaningless it is until called to order by some pronouncement about The Modern" (1971:39).

⁶ For a more detailed discussion see Meschonnic, Henri. *Modernité, modernité*, 1988. He maintains that especially in the Anglo-American literary tradition the term Modernism does not refer to a particular movement. Quoting Jean-Michel Rabaté, he adds that the term is used retrospectively by critics who desire to identify, classify and reassemble a number of diverging movements (1988:65).

relation to traditional foundations of western art and culture. Modernism in this sense is committed to a specific affinity with the past.

Broadly speaking it may be said that the claim to be modern always implies a sense of rupture from an obsolete state of affairs. Kermode is one of a number of critics who have focused on the implications of the word 'modern.' He opposes the different usage of the words 'modern' and 'new,' and concludes that whereas the 'new' is a simple "criterion of novelty," the 'modern' entails, "or at any rate permits a serious relationship with a past, a relationship that requires criticism and indeed radical re-imagining" (1971:65). From a similar perspective the French sociologist of science, Bruno Latour, suggests that

[t]he adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word 'modern,' 'modernization,' or 'modernity' appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past. Furthermore, the word is always being thrown into the middle of a fight, in a quarrel where there are winners and losers, Ancients and Moderns. 'Modern' is thus doubly asymmetrical: it designates a break in the regular passage of time, and it designates a combat in which there are victors and vanquished. (1993:10)

Such a definition reveals that the term 'modern' exhibits a decisive rupture with preceding frames of reference. What is more, Latour draws attention to the tensions and conflicts that arise when the modern is juxtaposed to the old. From this perspective, modernity implies not only a departure from the past, but also a sense of historical crisis, which may ultimately sever any organic connection with "premodern" history.⁷ This view is also shared by Bradbury and McFarlane, whose analysis of the Modernists' particular sense of contemporaneity sheds light on the individual's sociohistorical understanding of this epoch. They observe that the individual's experience of modernity evokes such phenomena as the sense of participating in "totally novel times," of finding individual significance in contemporary history, rather than tradition, or the insight that it constitutes a "new consciousness, a fresh condition of the human mind" (1991:22).

This sense of novelty, which assumes the role of a radical rupture with the past, can be attributed to a series of revisions of traditional world views and concrete social and environmental transformations. Already in the nineteenth century, modernity was associated with a rapidly changing environment. Berman describes these new circumstances as a dynamic "landscape of steam engines, automatic factories, railroads, vast new industrial zones; of teeming cities that have grown over night" (1988:18). The significance of these industrial transfigurations for Modernism is laid bare in Adorno's analysis of modern fiction. He argues that "[a]rt is modern when, by its mode of experience and as the expression of the crisis of experience, it absorbs what industrialization has developed" (1997:34). The creation and destruction of socially organized environments and their industrial transmutations

provoked already among the Romantic poets a lot of critical responses.⁸ However, concurrent with the establishment of increasingly technocratic structures, which have altered modern society, we find a growing number of scientists and thinkers who cast doubt on accepted beliefs of Western civilization. Important precursors of this emerging epistemological shift are scientists such as Charles Darwin whose theory of evolution by natural selection had a profound impact on the understanding of natural history and humanity's place in it. Also Friedrich Nietzsche's devastating criticism of western civilization and his philosophical renunciation of morality gave him, according to McFarlane, "a uniquely influential role in the Modernist period" (1991:79). Further momentous re-examinations may be attributed to James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and other important publications by Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Albert Einstein or Henri Bergson, to name but a few. Bradbury and McFarlane assert the immense effect these significant cultural transformations had on modern art by concluding that Modernism

is the art consequent on Heisenberg's 'Uncertainty principle,' of the destruction of civilization and reason in the first World War, of the world changed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, of existential exposure to meaninglessness or absurdity. It is the art consequent on [...] the destruction of traditional notions of the wholeness of individual character. (1991:27)

Put differently, Modernist art is intricately related to the modernization of western civilization.⁹

The profound revision of accepted systems of belief draws in a discussion about the desperation underlying the Modernist experience of modernity. The fact that notions of an established order have been undermined and that the interrelation of the individual's rational mind with a knowable universe has been questioned has obviously affected the Modernist attempt to capture modern experience in literature. Indeed, when both the empirical frame of reference and language fail to absorb this new experience of modern life, "a crisis of culture and with it the inauguration of a wholly new 'civilizational phase' is inevitable" (McFarlane 1991:93). The notion of crisis is noteworthy because it pervades the literary theory of Modernism. Leo Bersani, for instance, attributes Modernism's "incomparable aura [...] of being spiritually stranded" (1990:47) to the above-mentioned dissolution of universal

⁷ Here, as throughout, I am using the term "premodern" figuratively. That is to say, I am not using the term to designate a specific historical epoch.

⁸ For commentary on analogies between Modernism and Romanticism see Randall Stevenson. By referring to Frederic Jameson's definition of Modernism as a "[u]topian compensation' for the dehumanising nature of daily life in a late phase of industrialism," he observes that "it allows Modernism to be seen as a late expression of Romanticism, or perhaps a modified replacement for it" (1992:78).

⁹ Here I follow Henri Meschonnic, who argues that "[o]n ne peut pas séparer la modernité dans l'art, la littérature, et la modernité du monde, technique" (1988:39). However, not only recent scholarship has concentrated on the influence of the aforementioned discoveries on Modernist art. Lawrence Durrell's critical investigation of Modernist poetry, *A Key to Modern British Poetry*, traces the influences of various scientists as for instance Darwin, Frazer, Freud, Jung, Rank, Groddeck, Whitehead or Einstein (1952:xii).

principles. This view is shared by Bradbury and McFarlane, who argue that those Modernists who "see in the modern human condition a crisis of reality, an apocalypse of cultural community," also tend to claim "that the age demands a certain kind of art, and that Modernism is the art that it demands" (1991:27). Modernism is, then, the art of accommodating destabilizing aspects of modernity by finding accurate literary strategies which will "contain new, radical challenges in the life of the early twentieth century" (Stevenson 1992:163).

As evidence of this sense of crisis, we can note that these artists often felt alienated from the established order and that, as a consequence, their creative commitments "frequently began in sensation and outrage, or else displacement and exile" (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991:11). Bradbury and McFarlane call this the art "of a time when all frontiers were in vital and often dangerous flux" (1991:13), hereby additionally drawing attention to the big number of expatriate artists who gave Modernism its unique transnational character. The outrage and despair of this era is exemplified by a number of recurrent motifs of anxiety which characterize the Modernist encounter with modernity. Bradbury and McFarlane's observation that Modernist experiments with form and style, do not merely indicate a "new mode or mannerism in the arts, but a certain magnificent disaster," reinforces the necessity to look at this era's collective pessimism. Accordingly, they continue, "experimentalism does not simply suggest the presence of sophistication, difficulty and novelty in art; it also suggests bleakness, darkness, alienation, disintegration" (1991:26).

However, even if Modernist literature exhibits a sense of crisis in its attempt to imagine the experience of modernity, it is of paramount importance to stress that Modernists regarded this crisis not only as a creative dilemma, but also as a historical crux. Indeed, Modernist literature was "disposed to apocalyptic crisis-centered views of history" (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991:275). As pointed out by Lawrence Buell, the "rhetoric of apocalypticism implies that the fate of the world hinges on the arousal of the imagination to a sense of crisis" (1995:285). By stressing that it is related to the crisis of imagination, Buell's analysis of the rhetoric of apocalypticism reveals the despair behind the Modernist confrontation with modernity.¹⁰ As Buell's analysis is devoted to the theory of ecocriticism, he highlights to what extent the theme of apocalypse constitutes a useful tool to embrace a profound sense of anxiety.¹¹ Hence, as will be elaborated in an ensuing chapter, the predominance of apocalyptic

¹⁰ Buell, who stresses the literary tradition of apocalypticism, sees *The Waste Land* as largely focused on such a sense of crisis. He has even gone so far as to maintain that T.S. Eliot has written "one of the first canonical works of modern Anglo-American literature to envision a dying society" (1995:288).

¹¹ The premise in Buell's line of reasoning is that "[a]pocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" (1995:285). His analysis of the literary tradition

themes in Modernist literature renders the preoccupation with modernity as a threat to humankind particularly relevant for an ecocritical approach to these issues.

What is more, the theme of apocalypse returns discussion to the disconcerting experience of rupture which is intrinsic to the concept of modernity. Bersani has made clear that the notion of discontinuity is integral to the apocalyptic outlook advocated by Modernists because it mirrors their "mournful sense of the break itself as unique" (1990:48). Also Adorno's consideration of the modern as a concept, suggests that "its origins are more the negation of what no longer holds than a positive slogan." In this view, the abstract concept of novelty implies such a radical sense of loss that, in Adorno's words, "the new is akin to death" (1997:21). The predominance of apocalypticism reveals not only the Modernist fear of a culture in decay, it also illustrates that a clear sense of an ending pervades modern thought. Meschonnic has observed that in the aftermath of the Modernist pronouncement of the death of God, a fascination for similar declarations such as the end of art, or even the end of humanism and culture became popular.¹²

Furthermore, the central function of Modernism's essentially apocalyptic rhetoric serves as a useful frame for understanding the concrete relation between the notion of crisis and a sociohistorical sense of alienation. If modernity is experienced as a distressful concatenation of threatening phenomena characterizing modern life, it seems evident that the sense of crisis may also be linked to reflections upon important Modernist themes such as reification, urbanization or the mechanization of industrial society. As has been mentioned earlier, the experience of modernity is entwined with the growing importance of technology. Unlike Modernist movements as, for instance, Futurism which celebrated the new technological age, a lot of Anglo-American Modernists were more often worried about the menace of what Nietzsche terms "the machine age." Berman is one of a number of critics who have focused on the importance of the theme of technology. He advocates a view of technology which has become commonplace, namely that "modernity is constituted by its machines, of which modern men and women are merely mechanical reproductions" (1988:29). Concurrent with the theme of mechanization comes an intensified conviction that the historical disaster of world war accurately exemplifies the atrocious results of "the West's obsession with technological advance and the over-estimation of reason" (Short 1991:293).

All these factors conspire to produce an apocalyptic sense of disorientation and disintegration. Alienation and the terror of life in a late phase of industrialization generate a

of apocalypse, therefore, allows us to draw a parallel between the Modernist anxiety about modernity and the ecological despair about the negative effects of modern progress.

¹² Meschonnic writes, "[d]epuis que les anti-modernes déclarent la fin de la modernité, les déclarations de fin sont devenues à la mode" (1988:168).

particularly pessimistic undertone of powerlessness and incoherence. Hence, it goes without saying that the "rhetoric of apocalypticism" has a profound impact on the Modernist critique of civilization. Indeed, closer examination of this critique reveals that many Modernist authors exhibit a sense of anguish about their own culture which verges on self-destruction. Northrop Frye helps us to understand this agony in his definition of anxiety as a "terror without an object, as a condition of mind prior to being afraid *of* anything," a symptom which "is now conceived as *Angst*" (1969:66). Taken as a reference to the human condition, this *Angst* occasions the popularity of the theme of death in life. Modern woman or man, "as ghastly simulacrum of life," as D.H. Lawrence calls it (1986:2149), thus experiences modernity as a malady.

1.1.2. Formalism as a Redemption of the Crisis of Modernity

To experience modernity as a malady, means that the rupture with the past is perceived as a profoundly destabilizing event. Also Buell's aforementioned explanation that the "rhetoric of apocalypticism" is intertwined with a "crisis of imagination," insinuates that the Modernist intention to embrace the experience of modernity cannot situate itself in any "premodern" frame of reference. The fact that the interrogation of universal values have undermined notions of an established order, and that the individual's experience of modern life bears overtones of anxiety, has obviously affected the Modernist attempt to capture modernity in literature. Critics, such as Randall Stevenson, have therefore pointed out that the aforementioned "epistemological shift [...] led, in Modernism, to questioning and experiment which reflect uncertainty about how reality can be known or assimilated by mind or text" (1992:196). This apparent change from a positivistic outlook to a sense that the individual's apprehension of reality is likely to be fallible is certainly a crucial aspect governing critical attempts to explain Modernism's formal and stylistic inventions. In *The Modes of Modern Writing*, David Lodge observes that "a total alienation from history leads to solipsism and, in literary terms, the abandonment of realism" (1977:41). The subversion of realistic modes of writing is necessary because, according to Lodge, realism is "consistent with historical fact"(1977:25) as mediated by dominant culture. What is more, the failure of traditional systems of ideas to account for modern experience culminates in a proliferation of aesthetic experiments which try to exemplify this rupture. To cite Lodge again, Modernists "in their pursuit of what they took to be real found it necessary to distort the form of their discourse until it bore less and less resemblance to the historical description of reality" (1977:46).

The Modernist conviction that their aesthetic project must be based on a distortion of "premodern" modes of discourse led to a proliferation of experiments. As Maria DiBattista observes, "high moderns," such as Eliot, Joyce or Woolf, "are generally characterized as self-conscious formalists wrestling with newly perceived instabilities of language and meaning" (1996:3). Consider, for instance, Virginia Woolf's widely acknowledged essay "Modern Fiction" (1919/1925). This classic exploration of the crisis of literary expression illustrates the refusal of Modernist writers to use dominant culture's explanations of reality. She replaces the term "reality" with the vague notion of "life," because "the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide" (1986:1995). To stress the complexity of creative attempts to render the sensation of modernity, she proposes her often-cited comment: "[l]ife is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope" (1986:1996). Such Modernist experiments, which ultimately try to reconcile the gap between past and present orders, have instigated, according to Bradbury and McFarlane, a desire to "[turn] from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life" (1991:25).

Modernist experimentalism may thus be interpreted as an incorporation of the crisis of imagination into aesthetic practices. McFarlane has retraced the development of the Modernist struggles to account for the unsettling apprehension of modernity by means of new aesthetic tools. He distinguishes three crucial phases of artistic attempts to accommodate the preoccupation with modernity. In the early stages, McFarlane observes a focus on "fragmentation, on the breaking up and the progressive disintegration" of traditional explanations which claim to be conclusive, as well as a "destruction of the belief in general laws" (1991:80). In accordance with this fragmentation of previous frames of reference, the second phase is founded on a "re-structuring of parts, a re-relating of the fragmented concepts" (1991:80). Eventually, in the third stage modernity is experienced as a phenomenon which by means of dissolution and amalgamation of disparate entities yields a new "sense of flux, the notion of continuum, the running together of things in ways often contrary to the dictates of simple common sense" (1991:80-1). In other words, the apprehension of modernity is not explicable in rational terms. A sense of plurality, rather than unity, seems to govern the historical and the artistic experience of modernity.

For the moment two aspects of Modernism's disintegration of universal values are most pertinent. On the one hand, the Modernist urgency to abandon literary conventions and cultural traditions in order to create new aesthetic ideals is clearly crystallized in McFarlane's commentary. On the other, it calls attention to a widely accepted definition of Modernism

which describes Modernist art as a reflection of "formal crisis—in which myth, structure and organization in the traditional sense collapse, and not only for formal reasons" (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991:26). However, McFarlane's exploration of the shifting artistic answers to the crisis of modernity may also serve as a useful frame for situating Miller and Durrell's confrontation with modern life. While I here want to discuss some early reactions to the crisis of modernity, I will come back to McFarlane's model in the following chapter, in order to understand whether Miller and Durrell's contributions are congruent with the third phase of McFarlane's model.

The shock emerging from the disintegration of accepted systems of belief did from the beginning lead to a prolific aesthetic atmosphere in which de-creation, crisis, and innovation became essential factors of the era's creative power.¹³ As mentioned above, the Modernist quest for a new sense of reality does not allow for a single approach to the problem of modernity. As McFarlane's model has made clear, the re-structuring of fragmented parts yields a multitude of new possibilities. From an analogous point of view, Meschonnic's argues that these movements do not advocate a unique meaning because Modernism in itself is a quest for meaning and therefore tends to favor heterogeneity (1988:47). Hence, he stresses that Modernist art has invented techniques of intermingling and miscellany that reveal "*la non-unité de l'unité*" (1988:100)—the non-unity of unity. Furthermore, by establishing a link between the modernity of technical inventions and the modernity of aesthetic revisions, Meschonnic alludes to the same system of fragmentation as McFarlane and adds that in keeping with the acceleration of technical inventions Modernists produced increasingly ephemeral literary experiments.¹⁴ The rapidly changing environments and the growing artistic focus on experimentalism illustrate that modernity and Modernism are both marked by patterns of excess. Or, to use Meschonnic's pithy statement "*[m]odernité, modernisme: un caractère, et son excès*" (1988:65).

To compare Modernism's excessive use of artistic experiments with the acceleration of technological inventions, emphasizes that the crisis of imagination is integral to the ambiguous Modernist apprehension of the modernization of society. Bradbury and McFarlane assert that the torsion between artistic excess and the preoccupation with existential ailments of modern life, ultimately gives shape to literary responses to modernity. They pursue the thesis that Modernism "was a celebration of a technological age and a condemnation of it; an

¹³ I derive the terms "de-creation and crisis" from Bradbury and McFarlane, who argue that they are important Modernist "elements of style" (1991:24).

¹⁴ To reinforce this analogy between technological progress and aesthetic redemption Meschonnic enumerates an impressive array of Modernist movements. He lists up fifty-one *isms*, such as Cubism, Dadaism, Impressionism, Machinism, Surrealism, Vorticism, Cubo-futurism etc. (1988:59-60).

excited acceptance of the belief that the old régimes of culture were over, and a deep despairing in the face of that fear" (1991:46). When the despair about the menacing aspects of modern industrial environments is combined with a crisis of literary expression it is evident that the paradoxical experience of modernity is rarely articulated in a simplistic way. Most Modernist attempts to reconceive modern life in terms of artistic innovations, therefore, avoid mere rejections or approvals of contemporary phenomena. To cite Bradbury and McFarlane, once more, they state that Modernists prefer "ambiguous images" such as "the machine, a novel vortex of energy, and a destructive implement," or "the apocalyptic moment itself, the blast or explosion which purges and destroys" (1991:49). Also, this commentary reminds us that the latter notion of explosion is tantamount to the Modernist process of artistic creation, which dissolves previous modes of discourse in order to obtain a new world view. The Modernist venture to "defamiliarize and dehumanize the expected, [...], to define the psychopathology of *everyday* life" (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991:48), is thus not only a symptom of the malady of modernity, but also an artistic struggle to come to terms with the disintegration of "premodern" forms of literary expression.

With regard to Modernism's artistic excess, Kermode remarks that this era's literary production is in general "characterized by a kind of formal desperation." This desperation to find new forms that will successfully replace "premodern" modes of discourse, Kermode interprets as a proof that Modernists still believe in "an inescapable relationship between art and order" (1990:48). There may be a civilizational crisis and modernity may be experienced as a traumatic event, but the artist, by means of his or her visionary aesthetic restructurations, may transcend this cultural impasse. Bradbury and McFarlane call this a "highly aesthetic response," which is based on the crucial premise that "the registering of modern consciousness or experience was not a problem in representation but [...] a problem in the making of structures" (1991:28-9). From this perspective, the desire to overcome the crisis of imagination has contributed to the marginalization of the literary preoccupation with the materiality of modern environments and the individual's relation to them. As a result, they conclude that in Modernism "[t]he act of fictionality thus becomes a crucial act of imagining" (1991:50) which endows the artist with a special aesthetic responsibility. Discussion of the increasingly important role attributed to art and the artist has also influenced Randall Stevenson's reasoning. From an analogous point of view, he has argued that the various Modernist movements celebrated the function of art "as an almost unique, surviving domain of order." However, he hastens to add, "at the same time this sort of order seemed more than ever difficult to create out of a reality increasingly shapeless" (1992:163).

Given the fact that Modernist artists claim credit for meaningful re-imaginings of modernity, it is little wonder that their creative revisions do not only have the alleged merit of imposing a new order on reality, they also offer redemption for the individual who suffers from the new conditions of modernity. In *The Culture of Redemption*, Leo Bersani analyzes the formal and stylistic inventions of Modernism against the background of his hypothesis that "[a]rt redeems the catastrophes of experience—of individual and collective histories—by the violence of its symbolic reconstructions of experience" (1990:97). Hence, the task of art is to fulfill several expectations of salvation. Modernism, in this sense, is not only based on the redemption of the destabilizing experience of modern life, it is also compelled to establish explanatory structures which simultaneously stress the epistemological difficulty of such a task. Arising from the growing sense of the inaccessibility of reality, art in the early decades of the twentieth century thematizes its own aesthetic production in a manner that recalls Gérard Genette's statement that these developments "mark [...] a progress not so much in the quality of esthetic achievement as in the awareness of the difficulties, or at least of the conditions, of such an achievement" (1982:208). Ultimately, the Modernists' self-conscious struggle with the structural frameworks of their artistic expression reminds us that the versatile engagements of formalism imply that "Modernism is less a style than a search for style" (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991:29).¹⁵

Technique and style are therefore predominant features of Modernist fiction. Subsequently, many Modernist novels treat formal issues not only as mere elements of creation but also as specific themes. Stevenson has examined the predominant self-reflexiveness of Modernist texts, noting an increasing tendency either to "talk about their own methods," or to integrate artists who "discuss or demonstrate problems and priorities that also figure in the construction of the novel in which they appear" (1992:165). The striving after authority of art and the social function of artists themselves manifests itself in the Modernist preference for the *Künstlerroman*. Stevenson alludes to the self-consciousness that characterizes Modernist works and points out that the *Künstlerroman* exemplifies this "move towards self-examination," where "portraits of an artist are more often self-portraits"

¹⁵ The issue of the various Modernist attempts to create new styles by subverting the basic conventions of "premodern" fiction is a complex and important aspect of Modernism, but is emphatically not the subject under discussion here. However, we may very briefly summarize the general results of David Lodge's investigation of Modernist innovations as follows: (1) Modernist fiction subverts established modes of discourse. (2) It is interested in various states of consciousness. (3) As a result, introspection and other modes of introversion outweigh the significance of "external, 'objective' events essential to traditional narrative." (4) Due to its focus on individual experience Modernist novels have no real beginning and tend to have open endings. (5) The dissolution of narrative structures leads to "alternative methods of aesthetic ordering," such as the reference to "mythical archetypes and the repetition-with-variation of motifs, images, symbols." (6) Chronological ordering and the use of reliable narrators are replaced with fragmentating perspectives (1977:45-6).

(1992:164). Arising from this solipsistic self-examination of Modernist texts, there is the suspicion that art becomes "a self-contained alternative to reality" (Stevenson 1992:212).

In fact, Modernist authors tended to judge their artistic achievements more and more in terms of aesthetic and rhetoric exploits rather than in terms of sociohistorical contributions to the understanding of modernity. The Modernism propounded by authors such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound or Wyndham Lewis, offers such a self-referential perspective of aesthetic engagement.¹⁶ As Peter Nicholls explains, not only their literary work focuses on issues of artistic techniques, also their critical publications "contain a sort of self-narration which associates formal experiment with a history of successful individuation" (1995:194). The experience of modernity, in short, is not mediated by means of subjective imagination. Quite to the contrary, Nicholls maintains that for the authors, mentioned above, the "'true' modernist aesthetic [...] exhibits a related concern with outlines and borders which protect against the 'chaos' of subjectivity" (1995:196). It goes without saying that Eliot and Pound's highly aesthetic outlook risks what Adorno calls "aesthetic regression" (1997:38). The resulting discrepancy, namely that "[t]he mistake of aestheticism was aesthetic: It confused its own guiding concept with the work accomplished" (Adorno 1997:36), helps us to elucidate these author's theoretical writings.

Evidence of the Modernist turn from subjective reconceptions of modern experience to questions of technique, presents itself in T.S. Eliot's famous essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1920). Writing of the significance of poetry and the poet, T.S. Eliot maintains that poets should not be concerned with questions of "personality." For Eliot the "progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice," indeed a "continual extinction of personality" (1985:1062). Moreover, "this process of depersonalization" is intricately related to a "sense of tradition" (1985:1062). As the title of his essay implies, Eliot expresses a desire to evaluate the work of art in relation to a cultural tradition. What is at stake in this debate about the need to engage in one's cultural heritage is that formalist experiments should not content itself with individual attempts to render modern experience or to subvert ancient modes of artistic practice.¹⁷ Peter Nicholls sees this kind of Modernism as being focused on the intention to "correct the apparently amnesiac tendencies of modernity by reconnecting it

¹⁶ The aesthetic movements centered around Pound and Eliot is only one among several, but as Peter Nicholls points out, it certainly still is "the hegemonic one" (1995:167). As a matter of fact, Nicholls traces two main artistic developments which seem to emerge in the 1920s. One emphasizes the need for "authorial impersonality" (1995:253) and objectivity and is exemplified by Ezra Pound's explicit use of style "against the mere 'drift' of desire" (1995:193). The "other (perhaps best represented by Virginia Woolf) is characterised by an interest in the contents of consciousness and the self's labile existence in time" (1995:253-4). Unlike Poundian Modernism, Woolf's literary experiments "produce a sort of loosening of the self's boundaries" (1995:265).

to a valued cultural tradition" (1995:167). In this sense, the Modernism of T.S. Eliot diverges profoundly from Modernist movements, mainly on the European continent, which advocated an affirmative perspective of modernity. Peter Nicholls takes care to distinguish "continental avant-gardes [which] had defined modernism as a phenomenon of rupture, the absolutely 'new' appearing over the corpse of the old," from the Modernism presided over by Eliot and Pound which was "inextricably enmeshed with cultural tradition" (1995:253). Retrospectively then, T.S. Eliot's essay does not only illustrate the growing aestheticism of Anglo-American Modernism, it also hints, to use Nicholls' words, at a profound "*critique* of modernity." Especially "since cultural renovation was frequently projected as a *return* to the values of a previous age" (1995:166).

Nicholls has even gone so far as to show that the intention of Anglo-American Modernism to impose a new order on modern experience is essentially "anti-modern" because it is "based on a model of cultural decline and a compensatory 'return'" to traditional values (1995:166-7). It seems to me that Nicholls is justified in this focus on the anti-modern aspects of this particular Modernist movement. However, the complex dimension of Modernism's ambivalent relation to history is more fully explored by Leo Bersani. He accurately notes that the desire to establish discontinuities between ancient and modern forms of experience is "never ideologically neutral" (1990:47). Consequently, he claims that the primal motivation of the Modernist preoccupation with the past is propelled by a "need for historical celebration or historical mourning" (1990:47). These opposing but complementary attitudes towards the experience of modernity, exposes, in turn, Modernism's typically "apocalyptic sense of loss [which] gives an unprecedented glamor to the notion of modernity" (1990:47). The notion of elitism is especially noteworthy in this context. For Meschonnic stresses that such an anti-modern stance implies an allegedly superior intellectual perspective, which is grounded on the fact that anti-moderns need a sophisticated theoretical framework of history and meaning to overcome the paralysis of modernity (1988:203). In other words, while a simple affirmative attempt to embrace modernity can do without sophisticated re-evaluations of tradition, an anti-modern perspective requires a kind of intellectualism which can be observed in Eliot, Pound or Lewis's work.

To sum up, the Anglo-American Modernist reaction to the crisis of modernity is a highly aesthetic and often elitist venture. The High Modernist trend has been to emphasize that formalist experiments must be embedded in an intellectual discourse which re-evaluates a fading cultural heritage. Moreover, in spite of the fact that modernity is understood as an

¹⁷ It is important to emphasize that even though T.S. Eliot highlights the importance of tradition and the "great labour" that is involved to obtain it, he also argues against a form of tradition which consists of repeating the

intellectual and historical crisis, most of the above-mentioned artists were convinced that their aesthetic contributions may redeem the menacing aspects of modernity. Art as a redemptive order therefore acquires paramount importance. However, critics of Modernism stress that in the course of artistic excess the notion of art became so important that Modernist literature evolved into a self-contained project which failed to address the crisis of modern life.

1.1.3. A Pathology of Modernity

Now that I have outlined the scope of some dominant Modernist reactions to the crisis of modernity, I can begin to examine what the definition of the term "modern" as a rupture with the past, can offer for an understanding of Miller and Durrell's iconoclastic revolt against literary traditions. As I have suggested in the previous chapter, McFarlane's model—which distinguishes early artistic reactions to the crisis of modernity, such as fragmentation and re-structuration, from the subsequent insistence on overabundance which refutes common sense—allows us to consider whether Durrell and Miller's preoccupation with modernity is congruent with the late Modernist distrust in the artistic capacity to establish redemptive orders. This view suggests that late Modernists also conceive of modernity as a moment of profound crisis, or even apocalypse, but they doubt whether aesthetic orders promise a solution to the widespread apprehension of modern life as a malady. The persisting themes of alienation and apocalypse insinuate that the crisis of modernity is still marked by a high degree of pessimism with regard to the distressful attempt to come to terms with the destabilizing experience of modern life. Here I am touching on a question already delineated in an immensely suggestive essay by Jed Rasula: how does the excess of artistic innovations influence the Modernist confrontation with the *malaise* of modern life?

In "The Pathic Receptacles of Modernism," Rasula plausibly asserts the pathological aura characterizing modernity, while he simultaneously offers a re-definition of Modernism as a generic term. As Rasula explains, literary theory presents a concept of Modernism which primarily centers around its aesthetic experiments and thus reduces it to "artistic excess or extremity" (1999:143). But Rasula argues, and I believe rightly so, that this focus on the poetics of excess make Modernist texts "seem paradoxically comfortable with the agonies they signify, at repose in their distress" (1999:143). As a response to this abstract concept of Modernist art, he draws a parallel between the abundance of aesthetic experiments and the symptomatic theme of anxiety, and thus offers an analysis of Modernism that differs from previously mentioned accounts of Modernist literature's play with multiplicity. The contrasts

artistic practices of preceding generations (1985:1060-1).

between Rasula's thinking and the previously analyzed thesis that fragmentation and restructuration are basic structural elements of Modernist literature are revealing. Especially since Rasula's analysis of the same situation of "crisis and [...] jubilation" (1999:149) highlights the despair behind Modernist experiments, rather than its aesthetic preoccupations.

Rasula speaks of the "vocabulary of purification" as stimulating the "modernist drama of decomposition of forms"; the recombination of fragmented parts becoming a new aesthetic venture which is based on despair and excess (1999:149). The primary sensations that emerge are both "amputation and abundance, collapse of a reassuring order and exuberant discovery of new orders" (1999:151). Rasula converts here the images of pathology into a more complex account of Modernist projects. Accordingly, his diagnosis of the Modernist response to decaying orders of the past and emerging alternatives of the present is that "[t]he excessive challenge of such claims is registered in trauma" (1999:151).

The effect of this shift in emphasis from mere aesthetic experimentalism to productive trauma is, on the one hand, that it draws attention to the transmutation "from humanist subject to modernist monster" (1999:150). Against the background of the emergence of new orders, Rasula emphasizes the fact that from a "premodern" perspective a rupture of established orders signifies a defect, even "a monstrous excrescence" (1999:151). At the same time, this discord between a harmonious old order and the discovery of new orders acquires paramount importance in literary practice which, as Rasula observes, has incorporated this issue "as the grotesque, deliberately preserving [...] the monstrous as *monstrare* or demonstration of limits, [...], breaches of the harmonious boundary" (1999:151). Artistic experiments thus function as desperate illustrations of a collapsing cultural framework.

Apart from offering insight into the agonizing project of imposing a structure on the emerging superabundance of fragmented new orders, Rasula's analysis also allows recognition of the generic mutations which are symptomatic of modern literature. A remedial consideration of formal innovations suggests that "aesthetic receptacles hurt when they undergo developmental transfiguration" (1999:153). In other words, Rasula's argument is based on the parity of body and text. His study is thus intended as an investigation of bodily and textual defects arising from contamination by the malady of modernity. In this view, the body is central to creative production because it registers how "subjectivity is spread out across a grid of cultural transmitters, freestanding receptacles endowed with the power of sentience" (1999:153). It goes without saying that the sentient individual is not immune to the cultural and technological transformations of his or her environment. Indeed, according to Rasula it is the encounter with modern progress, "from which the body emerges as

biologically unfit for what we now call the 'future technologies'" (1999:153), that is at the heart of the Modernist sense of despair and pathos.

Responding to this difficult physical adaptation to modernity, the text, too, reflects a lack of resistance to the epidemic aspects of modernity. Rasula writes, "what happens to the body does not pass undisturbed into art." On the contrary, the "labour of creation extends pathic sensitivity from artist to work" (1999:154).¹⁸ The question of cultural adaptations to rapidly changing environments and excessive productions of new orders, then, is related to somatic and rhetorical distress. This signals the end of "the secure expression of the autonomous subject in a freestanding artifact." Instead, the work of art is transformed into a "pathic sanctuary—receptacle of corporeal damage, but *also* a space of shelter" (1999:154-5). Rasula, therefore, dismisses the classical argument that Modernist authors, who confronted the "psychopathology" of modern life, merely attempted to imitate the feeling of distress. He contests such explanations because they express a sense of "compensatory mimicry" which implies that by evoking the sense of cultural disintegration "the artist damages the artform" (1999:156). By contrast, Rasula ventures an alternative argument which stresses that the excessive "disfiguration" of old modes of discourse must be understood as a "plastic measure by which the artists attempted to heal not themselves but their damaged media" (1999:156). Ultimately, this suggests that Modernism is not a "reflection of crisis in form: modernism is the enactment of crisis, and this enactment works through a legacy of somatic distress" (1999:157). Alluding to the Modernist fascination for the myth of Osiris, Rasula concludes that Modernist literature seeks to assemble the dispersed elements, which "like the dismembered parts of Osiris, are deputized to bear witness to a whole which is inconceivable, presenting the enigma of a totality grown exorbitant in droplets" (1999:159).

1.1.4. "Cancer and Delirium": Henry Miller's Diagnosis of Modernity

Could there be a better image mirroring the dis-ease resulting from the decay of old systems and the continual emergence of new dispositions, than the metaphor of cancer which permeates Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*? Indeed, Miller's vision of modernity is by no means in a state of repose. On the contrary, disintegration and decay propel his literary venture. His view is that "[t]he world is rotting away, dying piecemeal. But it needs the *coup de grâce*, it needs to be blown to smithereens" (*TCN*:33). This, of course, is a deeply apocalyptic vision of modernity. As pointed out by Ihab Hassan, "Miller presents us with a

chaotic world constantly on the verge of transformation." He places his readers at the heart of the crisis where "we are witness to the rage of apocalypse" (1967:8). Henry Miller's depicts a dismal picture of the modern world as a menacing totality. Sociohistorical transformations, which are perpetuated in the name of modern progress, are not only incomprehensible, but also continually multiplying its threatening factors. In this sense, Miller's response to modernity differs from the previously analyzed Anglo-American Modernists who attempted to impose a redemptive order on the experience of modern life. In stark contrast, Miller's work reflects a desire to fully embrace the utterly destabilizing processes of modernity.

Symptomatically, the apocalyptic perspective governing the *Tropic of Cancer* appears in the form of physical suffering. Miller exclaims: "[w]e're all dead, or dying, or about to die" (TCN:46). Bradbury is one of a number of critics who have stressed that "everywhere in Miller disease is the startling referent, the pervasive metaphor" (1995:379). The omnipresence of disease is particularly interesting if we read it in the light of Rasula's analysis of Modernism. In accordance with Rasula's hypothesis that Modernist texts function as 'receptacles of corporeal damage,' Miller's narrative is disfigured on several levels by pathological phenomena which illustrate the consequences of modernity. As evidence of his somatic distress, we can note the importance he places on the epidemic dimension of this anxiety: "[i]t's in the blood now—misfortune, ennui, grief, suicide. The atmosphere is saturated with disaster, frustration, futility. Scratch and scratch—until there's no skin left" (TCN:19-20). The enumeration of diverse pathological reactions towards modern life, as well as the explicitly physical act of damaging the surface of the human body—i.e. destroying what Rasula calls "pathic receptacles"—both reemphasize the traumatic link between the loss of premodern orders and the exuberant growth of new ones. A more explicit example of this traumatic response to the fragmentation of modern life can be found in *Black Spring*:

The plague of modern progress: colonization, trade, free Bibles, war, disease, artificial limbs, factories, slaves, insanity, neuroses, psychoses, cancer, syphilis, tuberculosis, anemia, strikes, lockouts, starvation, nullity, vacuity, restlessness, striving, despair, ennui, suicide, bankruptcy, arteriosclerosis, megalomania, schizophrenia, hernia, cocaine, prussic acid, stink bombs, tear gas, mad dogs, auto-suggestion, auto-intoxication, psychotherapy, hydrotherapy, electric massages, vacuum cleaners, pemmican, grape nuts, hemorrhoids, gangrene. (BS:46)

The exhaustive character of this list, which contains images of disease, industrialization, and western civilization's proclivity towards self-destruction, exemplifies the physical despair evoked by the excessive patterns of modernity that have replaced the "premodern" sense of harmony.

¹⁸ In his attempt to draw a parallel between body and text Rasula proposes that the work of art functions as a "pathic receptacle, transmitting in its own 'lower frequencies' the animating episodes of corporation, incorporation, and discorporation" (1999:154).

Yet, another point worth considering is the extent to which Miller's poetic practice, which is based on a deliberate formlessness that actually subverts the coherence of his narrative structure, points towards Rasula's argument that rhetorical and physical damage are intricately related to each other. From this perspective, Miller scratches not only dermatological but also textual surfaces. The role of rhetorical and formal damage in Henry Miller's work is pervasive and not to be ignored. Roberto Limonta, for instance, stresses that Miller's novel does not only thematize the apocalyptic atmosphere of modernity, it also exhibits modern culture's semantic disintegration by means of violent rhetorical outbursts, especially in the form of obscenity.¹⁹ Ultimately, it is in this spirit of rhetorical violence that Miller's insistence on the exhaustion of art arises. Indeed, the novel goes much farther than damaging rhetorical conventions by insisting that his literary project "will exhaust the age" (TCN:33). On the basis of such comments, Everman concludes that Miller's work is part "of a history of art-against-art, of anti-art, if you will" (1992:330). Hassan, likewise, holds that "[l]iterature, turning against itself, aspires to silence, leaving us with uneasy intimations of outrage and apocalypse" (1967:3). The damage that Miller inflicts on his artwork, then, is so violent that it risks not only disfiguration but annihilation. To put the point I am making in yet another way, Miller's unrestrained subversion of narrative conventions allows us to draw a parallel between his response to modernity and Rasula's argument that somatic and rhetorical distress is a manifestation of the Modernist struggle with the crisis of modernity. Miller's representation of modernity as an amalgamation of pathologies and the texts' subsequent re-enactment of this distress, therefore, allows us to conclude that Miller's novels function, essentially, as 'enactments of crisis' as opposed to mere 'reflections of crisis in form.'

This understanding assumes that Miller's work does not merely try to represent the threat of modernity by applying a rhetoric of apocalypticism. On the contrary, Miller's enactment of crisis is also indicated by his focus on the individual's struggle with modernity. George Wickes has explained that Miller's thematization of the crisis of modern life has influenced his subversion of literary conventions. He argues that "[t]he chaos is deliberate, for Miller wanted to put down the impressions and thoughts as they occurred to him, to depict man 'in the grip of delirium'" (1992:118). From the range and variety of pathological deformations touched upon thus far, it will be apparent that Rasula's theory of Modernism as trauma yields a promising approach to an understanding of Henry Miller's vision of

¹⁹ Roberto Limonta's essay traces the influence of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* on Henry Miller's work. Hence, he focuses primarily on such themes as decadence and apocalypse. Nevertheless, in several ways his argument that "[m]a una cosa è riflettere ponderatamente sul problema, un'altra è manifestare i tratti della decadenza, per così dire, sulla propria pelle, tradire la perdita di espressività della cultura occidentale con la propria superficialità di pensiero" (1997:135), can be linked to Rasula's explanation why Modernist authors mutilate their medium.

modernity. Although Rasula focuses on High Modernists, and thus never refers to the work of Henry Miller, it seems to me that passages like: "Nobody thinks any more how marvelous it is that the whole world is diseased. No point of reference, no frame of health. [...] No absolutes. Only light years of deferred progress" (*BS*:22), perfectly illustrate this trauma of modernity.

Furthermore, Rasula's argument helps us to elucidate how corporeal and textual damage are transmitted in the form of violent gestures of despair and outrage. As pointed out by Limonta, the scandalous content, the violence of its language, as well as the destruction of narrative structures are measures Henry Miller applies in order to turn the *Tropic of Cancer* into an enactment of the book's theme of apocalypse and decadence (1997:135). One of Miller's most conspicuous tools of rhetorical violence is obscenity. In *The World of Lawrence*, Miller points out that "obscenity is only one of many forms of violence. It is the expression of the insufficiency of the symbol" (*WoL*:177). Miller rethinks literary obscenity as a reflection of despair or anxiety about the adequacy of literary tools. By opposing the insufficiency of rhetorical strategies to the violence of obscenity, Miller reminds us, on the one hand, of the deep despair that lurks behind the crisis of imagination. On the other, his preoccupation with obscenity exhibits his skepticism about the success of formalism, which by emphasizing technique and style endeavors to master the crisis of modernity.

Ultimately, Miller's defense of obscenity as a necessary form of violence is also tantamount to Rasula's reflections on the Modernist monster. In keeping with the previously discussed literary tradition, which uses the grotesque as an exemplification of the transgression of a harmonious natural order, Miller's representation of modernity seems to be based on similar ruptures of boundaries.²⁰ Saturated by a multiplicity of pathological reactions to the crisis of modernity, Miller's novels depict a sense of modernity which is based on a complete rupture with a "premodern" order. Moreover, his narrative strategies operate as a monstrous demonstration, or warning, of the dissolution of the allegedly harmonious "premodern" order. Miller's monstrous rhetorical and physical disfigurements we find incorporated in his novel, therefore, suggests that he proposes an "artistic Anarchy," to borrow and extend Hassan's term, which is "in deeper complicity with things falling apart" (1984:59). In other words, while the preceding generation of Anglo-American Modernists still advocated highly aesthetic and elitist remedies against the disintegration of traditional

²⁰ As a matter of fact, in Henry Miller's study of Rimbaud, entitled *The Time of the Assassins*, he proposes a definition of the monstrous that can be compared to Rasula's argument on the same subject. After defining the word as follows: "any organized form of life greatly malformed either by the lack, excess, misplacement or distortion of parts," he adds that "[t]he root is from the Latin verb *moneo*, to warn." And finally adds that literary representations of the monstrous "upset the norm, the balance" (*TA*:31).

values, the crisis in Miller's work is irreparable. To extend his principal metaphor, the *Tropic of Cancer's* diagnosis of modernity has reached metastasis.

As Miller's apocalyptic vision of modernity is based on a complete rupture with the past, he also refuses any engagement with a decaying cultural heritage. Hassan, for instance, interprets Miller's apocalypticism as "a total rejection of Western history and civilization" (1967:6). Trachtenberg also calls attention to the pessimism underlying Miller's "vision of modern society as unredeemable, unchangeable, except through some form of apocalypse or shattering revelation" (1992:244). Passages, such as: "There will be more calamities, more death, more despair. Not the slightest indication of a change anywhere. The cancer of time is eating us away" (*TCN*:9), suggest that for Miller the destructive process of modernization is irreversible. From this perspective, a return to lost cultural values is clearly not feasible. Old orders need to be destroyed before a new reality may appear. Henry Miller, therefore, writes:

To fathom the new reality it is first necessary to dismantle the drains, to lay open the gangrened ducts which compose the genito-urinary system that supplies the excreta of art. The odor of the day is permanganate and formaldehyde. The drains are clogged with strangled embryos. (*TCN*:170)

Art, like civilization, is diseased and no plastic or therapeutic measures present themselves to restore a new balance. Indeed, Miller's claim that "the new reality" can only be fathomed by erasing old structures, shows to what extent Miller's attack on literary conventions is also directed against early Modernist attempts to find new aesthetic orders that would put an end to the crisis of modernity. The passage quoted above, thus, insinuates that the excessive efforts of Modernist art to heal itself by means of formalistic inventions has only produced an increase of abortive creativity. By contrast, Miller's predominant vision is an ambiguous longing for apocalypse. This visionary despair he paraphrases as "cancer and delirium" (*TCN*:13). In other words, Miller's apocalyptic literary project is instigated by "destructive and visionary impulses." The remarkable fact about his 'visionary' sense of an ending, therefore, is that "it prepares for rebirth" (Hassan 1967:6).

1.1.5. Henry Miller's Response to the Modernist "Universe of Death"

The preceding discussion of Miller's enactment of the trauma of modernity does not clearly answer the question raised at the outset of this chapter. However, I would like to propose that Rasula's theory that modernity inflicts physical and generic damage on the artist and his artwork, helps us to cast new light on Miller's response to modern progress. From this perspective, the question whether Miller must be categorized as a Modernist, or rather as an anachronistic peculiarity, seems to me less important than the recognition that, even a decade after the apex of High Modernism, the conviction that modernity ushers in a moment of crisis

for western civilization continues to be a crucial issue.²¹ Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that Miller's literary project is galvanized into action by similar circumstances, it is important to bear in mind that his literary response to modernity differs fundamentally from the formalist experiments proposed by his predecessors.

Miller's refusal to apply formalistic methods against the chaos of modernity is itself a symptom of the growing disillusionment of the 1930s. Like other artists of this period, Miller's literary project is insofar a reaction against the preceding excess of artistic experimentalism, as it denies any positive values to their artistic remedies. However, even if Miller is not alone in his condemnation of High Modernist formalism, it is important to note that his response to the shortcomings of his predecessors is quite unique. The fact is that the most prominent disavowal of Modernist art came from socially involved writers. At a time of social and economic decline, the Modernist engagement with experimental concerns had started to fade. Concurrent with the advent of totalitarian regimes came an intensified interest in political questions. David Lodge alludes to the changing cultural atmosphere, and remarks that "[t]he politically engagé writers of the 1930s [...] criticised the modernist poets and novelists of the preceding generation for their élitist cultural assumptions" (1977:47). DiBattista also notes that the new historical situation "challenged the hegemony of the high bourgeoisie as arbiters of culture" (1996:6). Indeed, Miller's point of view was unique. Especially, if we consider that from the perspective of artists who focused on the great political issues of the time, Miller's apocalyptic visions of the world was condemned.²²

Yet Miller's literary project, in spite of its lack of political engagement, exemplifies some of these new cultural tensions. For it is under the impact of the chasm between modern art's exclusive focus on aesthetic issues and the growing claim that art must respond to social concerns that Henry Miller disputed, what Bersani calls "the willed isolation and alienation of art from the rest of life in the art-for-art's-sake credo" (1990:1). As Lodge explains, the development of Modernism followed the path from believing that "art offers a privileged insight into reality [...] to the view that art creates its own reality and from there to the position that art is not concerned with reality at all but is an autonomous activity" (1977:48). A strikingly similar point of view is ventured by Henry Miller in his analysis of the work of D.H. Lawrence, entitled *The World of Lawrence*.²³ In this study, Miller explains in a long

²¹ Ihab Hassan insists that Miller's work does not fit any "categories of American literary history. Written mainly against the background of the thirties, it echoes the raucous note of private disillusionment fashionable in the twenties" (1967:35).

²² Such seems to be the case for George Orwell, who in his famous essay, "Inside the Whale" (1940), examined Miller's lack of political insight.

²³ Henry Miller was asked already in 1932 by the publisher of Obelisk Press, Jack Kahane, to write a critical work on D.H. Lawrence. *The World of Lawrence*, however, was only published in 1980. After noting that it

chapter, named "The Universe of Death," why Modernist artists divested Modern art of its vital powers. In his view, the aestheticism of certain Modernist writers has established "[a] worship of art for its own sake—not for man" (*WoL*:91). He claims that they have substituted art for life, thereby producing an intellectualism that risks suffocating any vital experience of life. Miller does not simply dismiss this Modernist "machinery of the mind turned loose upon a dead abstraction" (*WoL*:107), he also claims that these authors' excessive aestheticism has created "a *fear of life*" (*WoL*:89). All the more disclosing are his remarks that, as a consequence, modern art has generated an "empire of neurosis," which "instead of urging man to revolt, to upset the system," has only encouraged adjustment "to an impossible condition of things. With the result that what once was regarded as disease becomes the norm" (*WoL*:89).

The extracts I have cited from Miller's critical writing, all testify to his deliberate resistance to the Modernist art-for-art's-sake credo. Using, once again, images of pathology, he accuses High Modernists of having failed to tackle the disease of modernity. Moreover, he goes on to observe that by having produced a "literature of flight, of escape" (*WoL*:91), they have actively contributed to the devitalization of art and life. Such a recognition endows Miller's own literary project with the task of revitalizing the aesthetic representation of life. Hence, Miller's work may be interpreted as a revolt against those aspects of Modernism that "[aestheticize] experience with its formalism" (Berthens 1991:126). Specifically, I wish to suggest that Miller's resistance to formalism reveals that his critique of modernity validates vitalism over intellectualism, authenticity over idealism. From Miller's point of view, High Modernists have failed to address western civilization's real problems. Their excessive experimentalism has evaded the dilemma of modern life, the anxiety about the "machine age," and the destabilizing experience of modernity. Their exclusive focus on art did, eventually, only "substitute abstract thought for vital energy, dogmatism for experience" (Fertile 1990:71). Miller therefore disagrees both with the Modernist use of aestheticism and its ratiocinative tendencies. The primary concern that emerges in Miller's treatment of the task of Modern literature, thus, is to authentically record the disintegrating experience of modern life.

In stark contrast to Anglo-American Modernists, like Pound and Eliot, Miller returns to notions of authenticity and individualism which were eschewed by the formalistic

"offers no sustained and coherent argument," Charles Rossman argues that nonetheless, "one can deduce from its sometimes brilliant fragments [...] Miller's view of early modernist literature and its ethos" (1992:249). Writing about Miller's study of Rimbaud, Bradbury remarks that "like most books he would write, [it] is ostensibly about one subject but really about another, the great subject, Henry Miller himself" (1995:367). It seems to me that Bradbury's observation may also be applied to Miller's study of Lawrence. This might be also one of the factors which contributed to the previously mentioned 'incoherence' of Miller's analysis.

experiments of early Modernists.²⁴ It is in this spirit—and in explicit reaction against formalism—that Miller develops his own narrative strategies based on "a more or less fictionalized account [...] of a character named Henry Miller" (Wickes 1992:118). Miller calls this poetic practice "auto-novel," or "autobiographical romance." In spite of the fact that his novels are obviously based on verifiable incidents and people, or in Bradbury's words, "an extremist fiction based on fact" (1995:375), it is important to emphasize that in Miller's work fictional and autobiographical accounts converge into a narrative of a special kind. Perhaps the epigraph to *Tropic of Cancer*, taken from Emerson who stresses that the attention to autobiographical fact is a necessary predisposition to attain authenticity in fiction, helps to elucidate Miller's special interest in the relation of fiction and life. With regard to Miller's reaction against Modernist formalism one aspect of Miller's auto-novels is most pertinent. Namely, that his technique primarily intends to express authentic experience as it is lived at a moment of crisis. From an analogous point of view, Hassan has argued that Miller's "work is less an effort to record and comprehend his life than it is an attempt to *live* it," by trying to grasp "the flux of human experience and respond to its random compulsions" (1967:30).

Closer examination of this particular evaluation of authentic experience, reveals that it contains a desire to outflank the abstract dimension of the High Modernist approach to the crisis of modernity. For Miller the aestheticism of Modernist literature shows that his predecessors have substituted real experience with intellectual abstractions. Consider, for example, Miller's reflections on the "discrepancy there is between ideas and living." Analogous with the previously analyzed demand to revitalize art by recording the flux of life, Miller concludes that "[i]deas cannot exist alone in the vacuum of the mind. Ideas are related to living: liver ideas, kidney ideas, interstitial ideas, etc." (TCN:243). This is a particularly revealing statement. For the human body is here summoned not only to reflect the corporeal damage of modernity, it also is re-evaluated as a unique witness of authenticity. Miller's disapproval of ideas created "in the vacuum of the mind" stresses that a ratiocinative approach to life misses the organic complexity of authentic experience. For this reason, only a focus on embodied experience can embrace the reality of modern life and thereby revitalize art.

Similarly, although on an entirely different terrain, John Dewey's *Art as Experience* rethinks aesthetic premises in terms of vital experience. Dewey, who was a contemporary of Miller's, condemns "theories which isolate art and its appreciation by placing them in a realm of their own, disconnected from other modes of experience" (1980:10). Significantly, Dewey's argument is also based on a re-evaluation of the human organism. He explains that

²⁴ For commentary on the Modernist tendency to discard "notions of authenticity and spontaneity" by stressing the self's "embeddedness in a complex cultural tradition," see Nicholls (1995:251).

"sense" can only be fully established by acknowledging the organic human body. On the basis of his semantic observation that "'[s]ense' covers a wide range of contents: the sensory, the sensational, the sensitive, and the sentimental, along with the sensuous," Dewey maintains that "sense, as meaning so directly embodied in experience [...] is the only signification that expresses the function of sense organs." From the understanding that "senses are the organs through which the live creature participates directly in the ongoings of the world about him" (1980:22), a clear insistence on embodied experience arises. Dewey therefore pursues the thesis that a genuine aesthetic experience must reflect the origins of human experience, that is to say, the multiple sensory human interactions with the environment. As a consequence, Dewey maintains that "[e]xperience in the degree in which it *is* experience is heightened vitality" (1980:19).

Vitality, here, I take to be the acknowledgment of embodied experience as a crucial factor of life and art. What is at stake in this debate about the importance of revitalizing art is that instead of imposing order by means of formalistic experiments Miller, amongst others, considers the return to primal physical impulses to be a perfectly ahistorical alternative to confront the crisis of modernity. Berthens calls this the "desire for non-intellectual immediacy of experience" (1991:128). Furthermore, behind this reevaluation of embodied experience lurks the conviction that the repression of the sensual body, as a basic premise of western civilization, has been reinforced by modern life.

The thesis that the contempt for the sentient body has been encouraged by "the excessive cultivation of the will and the conscious powers of the mind which technological society requires" (Sheppard 1991:327), is so widely understood to be central to the rise of vitalism that it need not be dwelt on at length here. This growing desire to return to the roots of vital experience was eloquently expounded by Roberto Limonta. He delineates the progressive appeal to substitute the rational with the intuitive, as a development which starts with Nietzsche's study of Dionysian impulses in an Apollonian world, later reappears as Bergson's *élan vital* or as D.H. Lawrence's celebration of Eros. As Limonta explains, this return to primal impulses presents a radical solution to the problem of modernity. By opposing the simplicity of natural instincts to the increasingly complex structures of modernity it seeks to overcome the decay of western civilization (1997:146). But while I believe that Limonta's analysis is correct, I would like to suggest that passages like the following excerpt from *Tropic of Capricorn*:

I wanted something of the earth which was not of man's doing, something absolutely divorced from the human of which I was surfeited. I wanted something purely terrestrial and absolutely divested of idea. I wanted to feel the blood running back into my veins
(TCP:76)

do not merely use nature as a metaphor for simplicity in an age characterized by oppressive structures of socialization. Miller's wish to reconnect the flowing of his bloodstream with vital processes of the nonhuman world, illustrates an understanding of the human body as a natural organism which implicates more than a dichotomy of simple, and thus authentic natural structures versus complex, and therefore alienating civilizational structures.

I would like to propose that against the background of Rasula's thesis that the anguish evoked by modernity is based on the fact that industrial environments engender a modern way of life which inflicts severe corporeal damage, the human being as a sentient organism plays a very important role in the vitalistic approach to the crisis of modernity. Considering the fact that the collapse of orders, which characterizes the crisis of modernity, puts the body in the unique position of active witness and victim of the self-disintegrating spectacle of modern progress, it is obvious that the healing of the human organism becomes of paramount importance. This becomes evident if we consider that the body as healthy organism constitutes a meaningful assemblage, or to use Deleuze and Guattari's terms, "a signifying totality" (1987:4) and therefore offers a powerful symbolic antidote to the fragmentation of modernity.²⁵ Yet, the human body does not merely reflect the longing for a lost sense of wholeness. McFarlane points out a further crucial aspect stressing the parallels between organicism and the disintegrating spectacle of modernity. He observes that Modernism is propelled by a "centripetal" rather than a "centrifugal" force, "and the consequence is not disintegration but (as it were) superintegration" (1991:92). In sum, the human organism perfectly illustrates the various ways in which Miller's use of organicism constitutes an effort to fully embrace the crisis of modernity.

But Miller also presents the human body as a victim of modernity. The omnipresence of pathological disfigurements, which are all related to typically modern surroundings, such as mechanical, industrial and urban environments, reveal that somatic distress is a symptom of modernity. Recall Rasula's argument that the body is biologically unfit for the increasingly industrial cityscapes of modernity. In like manner, Miller highlights that the human body, as a natural organism, suffers from the environmental conditions of modernity. Indeed, as a physically embodied being, the individual's confrontation with modernity raises more problems than western civilization's repression of sensual instincts. As the previously analyzed abundance of pathological reactions to modern life has demonstrated, it is primarily through embodied experience that the symptoms of modern progress are incorporated into Miller's texts. Miller's celebration of the "organic relatedness, the wholeness, the oneness of life" (*WoL*:181), therefore, seems to be attuned to a widespread distress about the effects of

modernity, in its industrial, urban and technological transfigurations, on human and nonhuman organisms. The acknowledgment that the human body as a natural element is living in symbiosis with its environment, reinforces the necessity to have a closer look at the reasons why a vitalistic perspective tries to redefine the human being in natural terms. In other words, instead of postulating that vitalism is a reaction against the repression of the sensual body, or a sexual liberation in a Puritan context, I want to approach the matter from a slightly different angle by stressing that environmental awareness remains at the heart of literary responses to the trauma of modern life.

1.1.6. "The English Death": Lawrence Durrell's Diagnosis of Modernity

I now want to briefly examine Durrell's thematization of modernity in the light of these arguments to discover if it is possible to develop a more general argument about the recurrent theme of pathology. Beginning with this section, it is significant to reemphasize that one of the most important influences on *The Black Book* is Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. Of course, there are a lot of elements in Durrell's book which owe nothing to Henry Miller. But even if Durrell's claim that art needs a radical renovation, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, aims at slightly different artistic ideals than the ones implied in Miller's project of art-against-art, the parallels between the two novels are obvious. Morton Levitt is one among many critics who stress that Miller and Durrell share several major aesthetic persuasions. He notes that *The Black Book's* "denial of convention and its affirmation of individual freedom," as well as the "ego-centered voice" of its narrators, hint at Miller's influence. Also, the novel's structure, which is "largely plotless, almost impressionistic—characterized by a forthright vocabulary and by an undisciplined, 'poetic' prose style" (1967:302), is reminiscent of Miller's.

For the purposes of the argument here presented—i.e. that the theme of pathology is diagnostic of the crisis of modernity—Durrell's rhetoric of apocalypticism is most relevant. Durrell's preoccupation with an apocalyptic vision of history is evident in his use of the "English Death" as the book's main metaphor. The "English Death" illustrates a typically Modernist response to the desperation and anguish of "a death within life; a life in death" (*BB*:213). Hence, critics have often pointed out that *The Black Book's* protagonists all suffer from the "English Death" and therefore "exhibit all the century's feverish desire for [...] meaning when significant human meaning is exactly what they suspect their world and universe may lack" (Nichols 1995:104). But while the characters' sense of alienation is

²⁵ Rasula's aforementioned allusion to the Modernist attraction to the myth of Osiris supplements this hypothesis.

certainly accentuated by the theme of death in life, it is important to stress that Durrell also associates the crisis of modernity with somatic images of distress, hereby emphasizing that the "English Death" additionally alludes to the physical suffering evoked by modern life. Durrell speaks of the "English Death" as being "so much part of us that we are unable to dissociate—to distinguish it from our other diseases" (*BB*:219). Disease, once again, appears to be the main symptom of modernity.

Furthermore, sentences such as "[t]hat is an England I am going to kill, because by giving it a quietus once and for all, *I can revive it!*" (*BB*:136), illustrate that Durrell's use of apocalypticism aspires to a concept of rebirth that is akin to Miller's vision of destruction and renewal.²⁶ From this perspective, the problem of the "English Death" implies that in order to revitalize the moribund English society, established orders must be destroyed so that a new understanding of life may arise. While Durrell's exemplification of crisis insinuates a profound critique, even denial, of civilizational structures, his vision of destruction also implies a specific attack on literary traditions. The aforementioned subversion of literary and stylistic conventions offers a violent realization of the theme of death and rebirth. In this sense, Durrell's countertraditional reflections as, for instance, the insistence that "my ancestors" are "influencing my *dying*, not my life. [...] Instead of nourishing us they are the umpires of our defeat, our decline and fall" (*BB*:157), may also be interpreted as a reaction against literary traditions. The defamation of his literary heritage signals that Durrell refuses to create a harmonious order by returning to lost cultural values.

This line of thought returns discussion to Miller's attack on early Modernists who, in his view, have contributed to devitalize art by constructing an abstract "Universe of Death." Durrell's claim that "we must start building again with new implements, a new tongue" (*BB*:157), suggests that *The Black Book* too, proposes to construct an alternative to the formalist innovations of the preceding generation of Modernists. Rather than using traditional frames of reference, Durrell seeks to establish a new aesthetic outlook which effaces the influence of the dominant culture. This radical position additionally signals that Durrell's enactment of crisis is centered around an explicitly aesthetic response to the trauma of modernity.

Durrell's literary project, which uses images of somatic distress to highlight his effort to overcome the crisis of modernity, reminds us of Rasula's thesis about the Modernist trauma of modernity. It seems to me that a yearning to heal both the rhetorical and somatic damages, which the destabilizing experience of modern life has inflicted on the artist and his or her

medium, is also at the heart of Durrell's vision of art. The multiple references to physical suffering notwithstanding, Durrell's struggle with modernity, the collapse of "premodern" forms, and the quest for new ones, appears to be primarily related to the theme of art. The predominance of aesthetic concerns is also stressed by the fact that *The Black Book* absorbs the traditional theme of the *Künstlerroman*.²⁷ Considering the paramount importance that questions concerning art, artist, and production of art acquire in Durrell's narrative, it is little wonder that a lot of critical response has called attention to those aspects of *The Black Book* which specify it as a *Künstlerroman*. Hollahan, for instance, explains that Durrell presents a vision of the artist whose "maturation process" involves a relentless commitment to aesthetic creation (1990:124). In like manner, McNiven alludes to the theme of "the artist and his escape from the stifling conventions, [which] is carved out with flashing knives: blood flows in this *Künstlerroman*" (1995:19). Finally, Brown emphasizes the violence underlying Durrell's view of art, by stating that "*The Black Book* describes the narrator's initiation into life and art through the painful exercise of the writing itself." Hence, he adds that "[f]or Durrell, both art and life needed renovating. Literature was dead and life in London was 'the English Death'" (1967:323-4). By establishing a link between art and life, Brown's commentary reminds us of the previously analyzed preoccupation of authors like Henry Miller, who disapprove of Modern art's lack of vital engagement with authentic experience.

The leitmotif of the lack of authenticity in writing and living is laid bare on *The Black Book's* opening pages. As the ensuing excerpt shows, the novel's narrator and artist figure, Lawrence Lucifer, stresses that his motivation to start writing is closely related to his apocalyptic perception of modern life. He writes, "[t]his is the day I have chosen to begin this writing, because today we are dead among the dead; and this is an *agon* for the dead, a chronicle for the living" (*BB*:20). The act of writing is not only associated with the attempt to escape from a moribund literary tradition, but it expresses also a desperate desire to evade the pathology of modern life. In other words, the interconnection between the damage that modernity inflicts on the artist and his or her creative endeavors, appears to be at the heart of Durrell's preoccupation with the creative process. Indeed, Lucifer's claim that "[a]ll this is an evasion of the true disease, the disease which I try to drown in books" (*BB*:156), illustrates clearly that the relation between somatic and generic suffering is of paramount importance. That Durrell's literary project is propelled by a wish to surpass the defects of art and by a

²⁶ Indeed, in a letter written on March 15, 1937 Miller alludes to Durrell's thematization of death and rebirth and points out that "[y]our rebirth is the most violent act of destruction." Emphasizing the rhetorical and thematic violence of Durrell's texts, he calls *The Black Book* "a surgical operation, a self-birth" (1989:58).

²⁷ Similarly, throughout Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, as well as in his other novels, there are repeated references to the theme of the artist and his or her artwork. Nevertheless, Durrell seems to use the *Künstlerroman* as a specific tool that allows him to reflect on the possibility of healing, what Rasula calls the 'damaged medium' of art.

desire to find a means of self-expression, which allows him to recuperate a vital sense of authenticity, becomes clear in one of his letters tentatively dated August 1936. Here Durrell condemns surrealism as one amongst many dogmatic movements based on a "quibble over a technique," while he insists that authentic art "is the man. Art is merely the chart of his diseases" (McNiven 1989:19).

The creative act of writing, then, constitutes a very complex effort to revitalize and liberate the artist at the same time as it endeavors to restore literary authenticity. Jacques Pelletier has theorized that in *The Black Book* Durrell uses the theme of the quest to elaborate on his reflections on the artist's relationship with his art and himself. Accordingly, Pelletier maintains that this quest oscillates between negative assumptions such as the attack on literary traditions, and a positive perspective which validates writing as a medium that allows the artist to escape from the repressive structures of dominant culture symbolized by the "English Death." Thus, Pelletier explains that at the heart of the creative process we find the notion of apprenticeship (1994:123). The numerous references to the act of writing, therefore, exemplify a vital experience of maturation; a quest for meaning which transforms the novel into a "savage battle conducted in the interests of self-discovery" (*BB*:9). Accordingly, Pelletier concludes that writing for Durrell aims not at representing reality, but becomes an expression and exploration of the self. In this respect, the creative act is represented as a vital experience rather than a production of an aesthetic object. Writing, in other words, seeks to establish an intimate connection with life (1994:129).

Yet while Pelletier's accurate analysis reemphasizes the necessity to view Durrell's vitalistic reflections on the theme of art as a reaction against his High Modernist precursors and their art-for-art's-sake-credo, it is also significant to emphasize that Durrell's quest for meaning confronts substantial obstacles. *The Black Book's* artists never cease to deplore the fact that "the fine logical borders of my reality completely disappear when a word comes to seize them; I attempt to put myself in jail, as it were, in the padded cell of language" (*BB*:114). Language as a Nietzschean "prison house," impedes its function as the sole medium for the quest of artistic self-discovery, and thus seems to be responsible for the loss of artistic authenticity. Short alludes to the Modernist anxiety about language and claims that it was based on the belief that "words—by definition instruments of public communication, continuity and order—deformed and betrayed life's authentic character" (1991:292). In this sense, the artist's quest for authenticity is frustrated by the fact that "language ceases to exercise control over [...] reality and comes to lie like a thick crust over his imagination." Therefore, it is important to stress that language "ceases to be a luminous vehicle for self-expression and turns into something like an oppressive super-ego" (Sheppard 1991:328).

In view of the fact that Durrell aspires to revitalize art by means of a corrupt medium, it is little wonder that his artistic project is directed against such oppressive influences of dominant culture. Put differently, even if the theme of cultural productions of art plays an important role in Durrell's *Künstlerroman*, he advocates an aesthetic outlook which is based on the liberation of cultural restrictions. The previously quoted notion of creativity, as a "battle conducted in the interests of self-discovery," insinuates that Durrell's literary project involves, on the one hand, a conflict with the alienating literary and semantic restrictions of his medium, and on the other, a opposition to oppressive social influences. From an analogous point of view, Pelletier has argued that Durrell's attack on literary conventions go hand in hand with a more general questioning of western civilization and its repressive structures. At the center of his critique is western culture's tendency to validate instrumental reason over physical instincts (1994:128). Congruent with Miller's appeal to vitalism, Durrell believes that by inhibiting human desires and spontaneity dominant culture has generated the devaluation of vital experience.

From this perspective, the "English Death" may be interpreted as an accusation of western civilization. By reinforcing the denaturalization of human instincts, the process of enculturation has created a menacing sense of alienation that is symptomatic of modern life. Such an understanding expresses the anxiety that culture corrupts the artist and his or her medium and thus leads to a lack of authenticity in the artist's expression and experience of modern life. Durrell calls attention to the artist's suspicion of dominant culture's alienating influence, by stating that the quest for meaning consists of "acceptance, the depersonalization of self, of the society which one has absorbed. It is not only a question of art, but a question of life" (*BB*:146). From this perspective, modern civilization's contribution to the self-estrangement of the individual leads to the conclusion that only a questioning of cultural values enables the artist to revitalize art and aesthetic experience. "Acceptance," therefore, seems to refer to the acknowledgement of the sentient individual's primal and thus nonsocietal existence as a being enmeshed in the modern world. Acceptance of the individual's vital instincts, castigates the repressive structures of civilization and favors the immediacy of embodied reality. Durrell's vitalism thus leads to a radical concept of individuality: he endeavors to obtain authenticity by replacing the social context of individuation with the individual's primal instincts.

Compared to Miller's strategy, which uses the physically embodied being's struggle with a menacing environment to draw attention to the destructive aspects of modernity, Durrell's endeavor to revitalize art and life works toward a similar re-evaluation of the human body as a natural organism. Even though Durrell's thematization of modernity deals

preeminently with aesthetic concerns, the central question of authenticity exhibits an intensified interest in the individual's physical apprehension of modernity. In other words, I am suggesting that behind the theme of authenticity there is an awareness that the individual's physical response to modernity is of paramount importance for a vitalistic renovation of art and life. Having delineated the dilemmas underlying the artist's quest for a meaningful response to the menacing industrial environments of modern society, I would now like to focus on environmental aspects governing Durrell and Miller's critique of modern progress. Indeed, Durrell and Miller's attack on western civilization—which is based on the premise that modern culture has denied the physical body while at the same time it has propagated a form of technological progress which they deem responsible for the pathology of modern life—illustrates that environmental awareness is a substantial element of Miller and Durrell's response to the crisis of modernity. After having tried to locate the theme of authenticity within a vitalistic critique of western civilization, I now propose to concretize the entwined notions of alienation and authenticity by analyzing them in the light of contemporary environmental theory.

1.2. Ecocriticism: An Environmental Response to Modernity

As has been delineated in the previous chapter, Modernism, defined as a variety of aesthetic responses to the crisis of modernity, cannot be dissociated from the technological progress which has profoundly altered western societies. The diverse distressful references to the malady of modernity, the characteristic sense of agony, and the excessive use of a rhetoric of apocalypticism all emphasize the Modernists' difficulties to adapt themselves to their rapidly changing environment. The mechanization of modern society and the runaway growth of industrial and urban environments, thus, contribute to the understanding that modernity ushers in a problematic rupture with the past. The degree to which the trauma of modernity is linked to industrial progress, can be observed in Henry Miller's *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945). Although the preoccupation with the threat of modern progress is dispersed throughout Miller's texts, in this novel's critique of American society the theme of technology is exhibited from a particularly pessimistic perspective. For Miller, the United States represent the apotheosis of industrial progress. Accordingly he wonders, "[w]hat have we to offer the world beside the superabundant loot which we recklessly plunder from the earth under the maniacal delusion that this insane activity represents progress and enlightenment" (ACN:20). Here and elsewhere Miller has made clear that technological progress is integral to modern society's sense of crisis. Miller's rejection of western

civilization may therefore also be interpreted as a negative response to the delusory ideologies which made the project of technological progress possible.

Although rarely recognized in critical assessments of the Modernist preoccupation with questions concerning technology, urban sprawl, and industrial progress, conceptions of the human relation to nature are foundational to such anti-technological critiques of western civilization. We have seen that it is usually assumed that Modernism is a reaction to the artistic crisis of modernity. This view assumes that Modernists use the distressful context of industrial landscapes only to emphasize the era's apocalyptic aura. Yet as Rasula's argument that some of the Modernist pathos derives from the fact that the body is biologically unfit to survive in these modern contexts has made clear, the trauma of modernity raises the question whether we should not consider these issues from an environmental perspective. Clearly, the overabundance of pathological images, used to stress the distressful relation between the individual and his modern surroundings, insinuate that the Modernist reaction to modernity expresses an anxiety about the impact of industrial progress on modern society *and* its rapidly changing environment. Consider the preceding passage from *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* from an environmental perspective, and the importance of modern conceptions of nature, which actually enabled the technological inventions of modernity, become an essential factor of the Modernist preoccupation with the *malaise* of modern life. Furthermore, such environmental concerns seem to be confirmed by the fact that a recourse to nature is at issue in Miller and Durrell's re-examination of the human body.

Thus, my concern here is with those conceptions of the human relation to the physical world that enabled, what Miller calls, the "maniacal delusion that this insane activity represents progress." It is widely acknowledged that modernity and modern progress depend on a profound shift of paradigms that radically altered our understanding of the physical world. From a historical perspective, Max Oelschlaeger defines modernity as a

complicated concatenation of ideological presuppositions, including ideas that progress is inevitable, that the power of science and technology is unlimited, that humankind represents the apex of creation, and that the natural and cultural world can be understood on the basis of the machine metaphor. (1991:202)

In other words, what is at stake in my ecocritical reading of the Modernist answer to modernity is the question whether the recognition that in the name of modern progress western civilization has modified its conceptual relation to the nonhuman world actually sustains the Modernist preoccupation with the "machine age." Closer examination of philosophical reflections on the theme of technologism, reveal that Modernist thinkers like Martin Heidegger were well aware that the modern understanding of nature ultimately enabled industrial progress. The challenge of industrial progress is taken up by Heidegger in "The Question Concerning Technology." He argues that "modern technology [...] puts to

nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such" (1977:14). The modern conception of nature reduces the nonhuman environment to a resource of energy, in which "everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand." As a result, modern society claims nature as its "standing-reserve [*Bestand*]" (1977:17). Moreover, Heidegger observes that through modern science, which "sets nature up to exhibit itself as a coherence of forces calculable in advance" (1977:21), this new utilitarian understanding of nature achieves authority.²⁸

Other Modernist thinkers have called attention to the importance of this new conception of the nonhuman world for articulating the theoretical implications of modern progress. Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for instance, is a study of modernity which is imbued with cultural pessimism. Their critique of modernity, despite having ultimately quite different interests and aims, concurs with Heidegger's thesis that technologism and modern science are entwined with an exploitative view of nature. Dana Phillips epitomizes their line of reasoning as follows: "[t]hat science is totalitarian and wants to dominate the whole world is the basic premise of many of the views expressed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*." Accordingly, he maintains that "this view reduces all science to the crass exploitation and consumption of natural resources and men's lives" (2003:99).²⁹ In an effort to indicate the alienating aspects of modern industrial societies, Horkheimer and Adorno point out that "[t]he individual is wholly devalued in relation to the economic powers, which at the same time press the control of society over nature to hitherto unsuspected heights" (1979:xiv). In contrast to Heidegger's argument, their critique of modern progress is not restricted to an analysis of nature as "standing reserve." The premise in Horkheimer and Adorno's line of reasoning is that industrial society's utilitarian conception of nature has contributed to patterns of exploitation which have enabled the oppression of nature and human beings alike. They

²⁸ Meschonnic refers to Heidegger as one of the first Modernist thinkers whose work on modernity contains a critical view of technologism. However, Meschonnic stresses that Heidegger's anti-modern stance is not as unproblematic as it appears. By alluding to Heidegger's implication with the rise of fascism, he maintains that "[l]e ton mystique unit, chez Heidegger, dans la continuité de discours de toute son oeuvre, en un même champ sémantique, la santé, la régénération, l'assainissement, le peuple, la terre, la nature et la vérité, dans une essentialisation du langage." Hence, he concludes that Heidegger's anti-modern and anti-technological outlook promises a, "[m]alsaine santé. Mauvaise situation du thème" (1988:43). But while I agree with Meschonnic's argument that an anti-modern perspective which values a healthy relationship to nature bears fascist undertones, I believe that Heidegger's observation on the altered perception of nature, which made technologism possible, should not be condemned as fascist ideology. This is a complex matter which because of limited space cannot be elaborated any further. For a detailed analysis of the fascist re-evaluation of nature see Biehl, Janet and Staudenmeier, Peter. *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience*, 1995.

²⁹ Dana Phillips criticizes Horkheimer and Adorno's reductive view of science. However, his statement that "the book's authors are making a plea for the liberation of men and nature in a voice tinged with antidemocratic and antinatural sentiment" (2003:103), basically underlines the incompatibility of Horkheimer and Adorno's cultural pessimism for an ecocritical approach to our contemporary ecological crisis. Phillips's argument notwithstanding, it seems to me that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, usefully illustrates that the demand to rethink our conceptions of nature propelled the Modernist critique of modernity.

write, "[w]hat man want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men" (1979:4). From this perspective, the shifting world view of modernity has shaped not only our relation to the nonhuman environment but also our social foundations. Subsequently, both human beings and the physical world suffer from the exploitative framework of modern progress.

As these early philosophical reactions to modernity suggest, modern culture's reconfigured conceptions of nature are considered, at least partly, to be responsible for the crisis of modernity. Western culture's exploitative understanding of the physical world has certainly contributed to the success of technological developments and the consequent growth of urban and industrial areas. That these typically modern surroundings aggravate the sense of anxiety about the "machine age" is, therefore, not surprising. However, the fact that Horkheimer and Adorno use western civilization's new conception of nature as a foundation for their exploration of the individual's alienating experience of modern life, signals that modern culture's problematical relation to the natural world is at the heart of such philosophical responses to modernity. From the environmental philosopher Arne Næss, we learn that the traditional critique of modernity has always pointed at the distorted relation to nature underlying the technocratic structures of modern society. He maintains that the "critique of western industrial society stresses the alienation caused by a kind of technology that reduces everything to mere objects of manipulation" (1989:172). If the reconception of nature, which ultimately enabled technological progress, is used to explain the Modernist preoccupation with menacing industrial landscapes and the theme of alienation, it is evident that these philosophical considerations deserve critical attention.

After having tried to locate the significant theme of progress within an anti-technological critique of western civilization's conceptions of nature, I now propose to analyze Modernism's response to modernity against the background of cultural analyses and literary criticism which have tried to integrate an ecological consciousness into their conceptual framework. As the previously quoted passage from *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* has illustrated, Miller's reflections on modernity are to a large extent congruent with ecological theories about the consequences of western civilization's exploitation of the nonhuman world. Therefore, it seems to me that a literary theory based on environmental awareness may offer a fruitful field to unfold the required discussion about Miller's artistic response to the crisis of modernity. This field of literary studies, called "ecocriticism" or "green studies," might be loosely defined as an attempt to find new ways of "studying the concrete conditions of life, space, and *habitus*" (Andermatt Conley 1997:2) as they are represented by fictional and nonfictional texts. I shall contend that ecocriticism may elucidate

the Modernist response to the threatening environments of industrial societies. Ultimately, I would like to suggest that a 'green' reading of Modernist responses to the crisis of modernity sheds new light on the substructures which propel Miller and Durrell's radical critique of western civilization and their subsequent interest in vitalism as a basis for renovating authenticity in art and life.

1.2.1. Ecocriticism: Rethinking Cultural Conceptions of the Nonhuman World

An ecocritical approach to Modernist literature may supply a theoretical frame which should allow us to approach the Modernist preoccupation with the menacing environments of modern progress from a new perspective. Ecocriticism has variously been defined as the "study of the mutually constructing relationship between culture and environment" (Bennett and Teague 1999:3) or, more specifically, as the "study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty 1996:xvii). Accordingly, we may expect that ecocriticism yields useful insights into the complex Modernist thematization of the alienating experience of the industrial landscapes of modernity.

Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* was one of the first major attempts to suggest a preliminary approach to ecocritical interpretations of literary texts. Buell suggests that environmental perception has been neglected by literary history, and that ecocriticism endeavors to retrace "the place of nature in the history of western thought" (1995:1). In an essay, entitled "The Ecocritical Insurgency," Buell observes that,

[a]lthough the term was coined twenty years ago,³⁰ although critical readings of literary texts [...] in relation to ideas of nature, wilderness [...] and spatial environments of all sorts have been pursued for the better part of a century, only in the last decade has the study of literature in relation to environment begun [...] to assume the look of a major critical insurgency. (1999:699)

In other words, Buell stresses that even though human ideas about nature and landscape have played an important role in literary history, our new ecological understanding of the human relation to the nonhuman environment has encouraged a growing number of scholars to redefine their approach to literary representations of these issues.

Richard Kerridge asserts the importance of our new ecological viewpoint by stating that "[t]he starting-point for the ecocritic is that there really is an unprecedented global environmental crisis, and that this crisis poses some of the great political and cultural questions of our time" (1998:5). The notion of crisis is especially noteworthy because in some respects it is tantamount to the Modernist preoccupation with modernity. Both ecologists and

³⁰ According to Glen Love "[t]he word 'ecocriticism' was originally coined in 1978 by William L. Rueckert, in his important essay, 'Literature and Ecology: an Experiment in Ecocriticism'" (1992:196).

Modernists condemn western civilization's negative impact on human and nonhuman forms of life. As Kerridge explains, our ecological catastrophe is often understood as "punishment for human transgression; the necessary consequence of going too far" (1998:4). Another point worth considering is the extent to which the ecological crisis is also a crisis of imagination. To cite Kerridge, once again, "[t]he real, material ecological crisis, then, is also a cultural crisis, a crisis of representation. The inability of political cultures to address environmentalism is in part a failure of narrative" (1998:4). Similar to the Modernist crisis of meaning, ecocriticism asks whether our current environmental crisis is anchored in cultural constructions of meaning.

In like manner, Buell's working hypothesis is based on the premise that our modern environmental crisis necessitates more than a simple redefinition of our relation to nature. According to Buell the current ecological problems should also make us aware that this "environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity's relation to it" (1995:2). Ecocriticism has in the following tried to develop solutions to the crux of imagining our relation to nature in a manner that would replace the dominant discourse which has allowed our exploitation of the physical world. However, as Dana Phillips remarks, we must be careful not to simplify the subject matter by simply seeking to return to a preindustrial—i.e. an allegedly harmonious—perception of nature. This point of view allows us to infer that it is important to emphasize that "our understanding of the environment has come about through the disruption of nature by agriculture and industrialism." Consequently, Phillips adds that "[w]ithout environmental crisis, in other words, there might be no 'environmental imagination'" (1999:598).

Bill McKibben was one of the first thinkers to take up the challenge of the modern environmental crisis. In *The End of Nature* he argues that modern industrial societies have exploited and polluted the earth to such a degree that it has altered our physical reality. Therefore, we must adapt our patterns of perception to our changing environments (1990:48). Jonathan Bate has incorporated this increasing environmental awareness into his methodology of literary analysis, advocating the view that "[a]s political and moral visions change, so literary criticism will change too" (1991:1). Analogously, Terry Gifford explains the growing ecological consciousness within literary criticism as follows:

Ecocriticism may be the frame of our age, informed with a new kind of concern for 'environment,' rather than 'countryside' or 'landscape' or the 'bucolic,' but we cannot pretend that there have not been changes in our knowledge, attitudes and ideology. (1999:5)

Ecocriticism, in other words, addresses traditional accounts of the human relation to the nonhuman world from a new point of view. Indeed, as Roy Willis has observed, "[s]ince the

mid-1970s, the academic debate about humanity's relation with the natural world" has been profoundly influenced by "what is generally called ecology" (1990:6).

Yet, even if there is no doubt that ecological consciousness has altered the way we think and perceive the world, it is important to point out that ecology as a scientific discipline is rarely used by ecocritics as a basis for explaining natural processes.³¹ The term "ecology" was coined by the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel, who during the last decades of the nineteenth century contributed to the extension and popularization of Darwin's theory of evolution. Ecology, which at the outset was used as a classification of species, slowly shifted its focus to the interrelation between organisms and their habitat.³² As a consequence, ecology understands the world as an ensemble of interrelated ecosystems. From the growing evidence that modern technology and industrial growth has allowed human beings to radically change the environment, the fear arises that our modern industrial societies risk disrupting the basic premise of interrelatedness. Taken as a corrective to this destructive attitude toward the nonhuman environment, ecology stresses the interdependence between human beings and their habitat. Thus ecocritics, such as Pogue Harrison, often stress that "ecology names far more than the science that studies ecosystems; it names the universal human manner of being in the world." Hence, he claims that "[w]e dwell not in nature but in the relation to nature" (1992:201).

In view of the fact that warnings of an impending ecological catastrophe galvanized environmental movements into action, it is not surprising that a growing number of philosophical and historical studies have addressed the question concerning the origins of the ecological crisis. Most responses stress that modern society's problematic conceptions of nature have sanctioned the exploitation of the physical world. The attempts to explain our destructive relation to the nonhuman world, thus entail critical assessments of western civilization's discourse about nature. David Abram has summarized some of these philosophical attempts to explain humanity's exploitative understanding of the nonhuman world. Abram reminds us that some theorists have traced the origins of this unbalanced relationship between humans and their environments to Judeo-Christianity, while others have "turned toward the Greek origins of our philosophical tradition [...] in their quest for the roots

³¹ Dana Phillips has criticized the ecocritical tendency to exploit "the authority of ecology [...] rhetorically as a moral and philosophical sanction for their own discourse" without paying any attention to the latest developments within ecological theory (1999:580).

³² Axel Goodbody has retraced the history of ecology. He explains that "[a]us dieser zunächst reinen Pflanzen- und Tierwissenschaft entstanden allmählich seit den zwanziger Jahren dieses Jahrhunderts die Humanökologie und die Landschaftsökologie, die sich mit dem Einfluss des Menschen auf ihre natürliche Umwelt beschäftigen" (1998:17).

of our nature-disdain" (1997:94).³³ There have been many other attempts to explain our distorted relation to nature. But the German philosophers Ruth and Dieter Groh argue, and I believe rightly so, that the complexity of our environmental crisis cannot be explained by a single cause. They emphasize that historical and natural processes do not follow the principle of causality (1991:16).

Similarly, the question regarding the origins of environmental awareness should be historicized. Andermatt Conley is one of several ecocritics who have pointed out that even though the first "massive evidence of physical and mental pollution caused by technological and scientific revolutions" only appeared in the 1960s, the threat of pollution was already denounced in the nineteenth century (1997:49). Similarly, Bate has attempted to historicize environmental awareness. He maintains that the Romantic tradition is based on proto-ecological viewpoints such as the belief that "a respect for the earth and a scepticism as to the orthodoxy that economic growth and material production are the be-all and end-all of human society" (1991:9). Axel Goodbody has proposed a more profound analysis of the historical roots of modern ecological consciousness. He notes that not only Greek naturalists but also modern philosophers of nature as, for instance, Rousseau, Baader, Schelling, as well as critics of technology such as Nietzsche, Spengler, Adorno, Heidegger, and Marcuse, have significantly influenced our modern environmental awareness (1998:17-8). Consequently, Goodbody proposes that the modern environmental movements constitute a third phase of a historically embedded resistance to modernity. The antecedent reactions against modern progress, exemplified by the Romantic tradition and the cultural pessimism which marked the first decades of the twentieth century, may, therefore, directly be linked to our contemporary preoccupation with our environmental crisis.³⁴

Insofar as ecocriticism concentrates on culturally determined perceptions and explanations of nature in terms of the interrelation of humans and their environment, its scope of inquiry should integrate a critical examination of traditional aesthetic representations of the nonhuman environment. Buell also notes the degree to which an ecocritical approach is not constrained to interpretations of fictional (and nonfictional) accounts of our modern

³³ Abram points out that many theorists have concluded that the "otherworldly God" of Judeo-Christian traditions is responsible for our exploitative attitude toward the earth. Such explanations often quote passages from the biblical book of Genesis, like "[b]e fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it," as evidence. Those theorists who focus on the Greek philosophy of nature "have attempted to demonstrate that Plato's philosophical derogation of the sensible and changing forms of the world [...] contributed to [...] our consequent estrangement from the earthly world around us" (Abram 1997:94). On that account, Max Oelschlaeger has theorized that "[o]ur modern idea of Nature originates with the Pre-Socratics" who, according to him, have initiated "the quest for rational understanding of and thereby control over Nature" (1991:60).

³⁴ Emphasizing a German perspective, Goodbody argues that "[e]ine kritische Sichtung dieser Tradition, die geistigen Verlust und moralischen Verfall als notwendige Folgen von Modernisierung und Technologie

ecological crisis. He argues that "human beings are inescapably biohistorical creatures who construct themselves, at least partially, through encounter with physical environments they cannot not inhabit," and concludes that "any artifact of imagination may be expected to bear traces of that" (1999:699). Buell plausibly asserts that the human interaction with the nonhuman environment has influenced our aesthetic patterns of perception. However, it is even more important to emphasize that nature and environment are culturally constructed concepts. And it goes without saying that aesthetic creations had a crucial effect on the constitution of these concepts. From this it follows that an ecocritical approach to literary accounts of the material world seeks to determine whether such aesthetic patterns of perception elucidate our complicated relation to nature. The ecocritical revision of neglected aspects of literary history basically functions on two levels.³⁵ First, it surveys literary representations of the nonhuman world in order to locate alternative—i.e. environmentally conscious—attempts to describe the human relation with nature.³⁶ Such an approach "seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis" (Kerridge 1998:5). Second, an ecocritical approach to aesthetic conceptions of nature must also reckon with pathologies which bear witness to our distorted relation to the nonhuman world. Such interpretations try to expose the inadequacy of certain culturally determined patterns of perception. In other words, ecocriticism analyzes the shortcomings of past and present conceptions of nature, while at the same time it endeavors to rediscover alternative apprehensions of nature that are part of our cultural tradition.³⁷

Nevertheless, a discrepancy emerges from this ecocritical concern with discerning aesthetic representations of the nonhuman world which are in keeping with the ecological respect for "a world with its own independent, nonhuman reasons for being as it is" (Cronon 1998:492). At this stage of the discussion it is appropriate to note the main problem that any cultural response to the nonhuman implies. From an ecological perspective, we may ask ourselves whether cultural reconstructions of the nonhuman environment are able to represent nature in a manner that respects its alterity and its inherent values. Jean-François Lyotard's definition of ecology offers a frank realization of the dilemma of thinking or writing about the

betrachtet, ist in diesem Zusammenhang wichtig, insofern sie das heutige Naturverständnis mitbeeinflusst" (1998:23).

³⁵ Here I follow Axel Goodbody, whose "Literatur und Oekologie: Zur Einführung" remains one of the best introductions to this field of research.

³⁶ In this context, Jhan Hochman has theorized that "green cultural studies is the examination of nature through words, image, and model for the purpose of foregrounding potential effects representation might have on cultural attitudes and social practices which, in turn, affect nature itself" (2000:187).

³⁷ Environmentally aware readings of literary texts require examinations of the text's reference to traditional aesthetic patterns of perception. Not only questions regarding the text's critical adaptation of aesthetically stylized landscapes and topoi are important, but also its allusions to the pastoral tradition, the sublime, the anti-modern critique of civilization or the theme of wilderness, to name but a few.

nonhuman world when he concedes that an ecological approach has "to fight the heritage of meaning implicit in words and phrases in order to make words and phrases appropriate to what we need to say" (2000:136). Lyotard's definition of ecology as a discourse is based on an etymological interrogation of the word "ecology." His analysis of its Greek components—i.e. *oikos* and *logos*—assumes that ecology refers to everything that has not become public.³⁸ In contrast to the political or public realm, Lyotard's understanding of ecology assumes that the ecological realm has remained "secluded" and, therefore, has neither become "communicational" nor "systemic" (2000:135). As mentioned above, Lyotard maintains that writing about the secluded is difficult because we have to deconstruct the "heritage of meaning" which the public has imposed on words. Such comments express a sense of doubt about the accuracy of the dominant discourse and its capacity to address those realms that western culture has neglected. Indeed, in Lyotard's view, culture is a filter which prevents us from hearing, what he calls, "the discourse of the secluded" (2000:136).

I interpret this definition of the discourse of ecology as relating to two distinct dimensions. On the one hand, Lyotard raises the question whether the ideological and epistemological constraints of language inhibit cultural contacts with the nonhuman world. Dana Phillips, likewise, asks: "what is the truth of ecology in so far as that truth is addressed by literature." He additionally raises the question, "[h]ow well does literature address that truth" (1999:578). These thoughts on the social construction of human responses to the nonhuman environment pervade ecocritical theory. Michael Bennett, for instance, argues that since "we can never definitively know something outside of the language we use to describe it," a strictly "unmediated way of existing in harmony with Nature" is impossible (2001:34-5). On the other hand, Lyotard's "discourse of the secluded" also reminds us of the dualistic structures which have determined western civilization's understanding of nature. His claim that ecology comprises the realm denied by the public is tantamount to the widely accepted presumption that nature is seen as the "other" against which humanity is defined. The fact that nature has traditionally been understood in contradistinction to culture, implies that Lyotard's discourse of the secluded must be understood as an attempt to recuperate those aspects that have been subject to western civilization's dualistic powerstructures. Given the fact that binary oppositions—such as nature versus culture or man versus beast—provide the basic framework for our conceptions of the nonhuman world, it is little wonder that ecocriticism

³⁸ When ecocritics focus on the etymology of the word "ecology" they tend to assign high values to the fact that *oikos* means home. From this perspective, ecology suggests that our treatment of the earth, as our home, should be based on respect rather than exploitation. Lyotard, however, juxtaposes the *politikon* to the *oikeion*, and explains that the latter designates "everything that can be called 'domesticity' in the old Latin sense, that which is in the *domus*" (2000:135), including women, children and servants, thereby expanding the structural implications of the term ecology.

understands itself as a reaction against western civilization's dualistic separation of nature and culture.

Finally, Lyotard's choice of the term "secluded" directs our attention to the fact that the nature-culture dualism is a cultural construct shaped by social, political and economic hierarchies. Discussions of the inherent powerstructures underlying western civilization's binary oppositions have mainly influenced the reasoning of ecofeminists. Ecofeminist criticism points out that western culture has grounded its conquest of nature on the same dichotomous discourse that has authorized other hierarchies which are based on the seclusion or the 'otherization' of social groups. Ecofeminists thus question the structural dichotomization of patriarchal powerstructures which have led to the subordination of nature to culture, woman to man, or nonwestern cultures to western civilization. Indeed, Campbell's remark that the "structures of interwoven thought and power, [...] in which humans matter more than other creatures, men more than women, Europeans more than Africans or Asians or Native Americans, logic more than emotion, reason more than dreams or madness" (1996:127), indicates that these conceptual structures deserve critical attention. As a matter of fact, it is under the impact of this critical concern with western civilization's major dualisms that ecocritics refer to the basic ecological premise of interrelatedness. Carolyn Merchant notes the degree to which the ecological attempt to view "people as integral components of the larger ecosystem," ultimately tries to "break down the dualism between humans and nature" (1993:95). As a result, ecocritics aim at undoing binary oppositions by trying to establish relational patterns of perception. Yet, the social construction of western civilization's conceptions of nature casts doubt on the possibility of eliminating our dualistic relation to the nonhuman environment. As David Shumway has theorized, the desire to deconstruct the nature-culture binary cannot efface those terms. Hence, he argues that ecocritical theory must draw our attention to the "dependence of these terms upon one another," and "take into account their inseparability" (1999:258). From an ecocritical point of view, it is important to stress that the "nature-culture distinction is both a distorting and a necessary lens" (Buell 2001:5) that determines our understanding of the nonhuman world.

It is this attempt to rethink the nature-culture dualism that ultimately gives shape to the two major tendencies within ecocritical theory. Some ecocritics define their new approach to literature as a direct reaction against literary theory. They maintain that much literary criticism has perpetuated the nature-culture dualism by insisting that language constructs reality. Raglon and Scholtmeijer explain that the idea that "language molds the perception of the world," has been "a corrective to earlier concepts that held that certain unproblematic correlations existed between the natural world and language." Nevertheless, they maintain

that literary theory has contributed to the fact that "this insight has been distorted by those who are willing to proclaim that there is no relationship between language and the world and that all meaning is human meaning" (2001:261). As a response to this cultural effacement of the material world, this sphere of ecocritical research wishes to establish textual connections with nonhuman environments. Ecocritics like Jonathan Bate, therefore, tend to formulate their methodological definitions as a corrective to the view that nature is an artifact of language. Bate writes, "[l]ocked in the prisonhouse of language, dwelling in the *logos* not the *oikos*, we know only the text, not the land" (1998:65). In this context, Coupe advocates that ecocriticism "does not challenge the notion that human beings make sense of the world through language, but rather the self-serving inference that nature is nothing more than a linguistic construct" (2000:3). Such attempts to restore the nonhuman meaning of the land have been particularly relevant for interpretations of texts focusing on nonmetropolitan environments as, for instance, the genre of nature writing. Considering the fact that "nature writing has tended to show nature eluding human control by minimizing the human presence and focusing attention on the nonhuman world" (Raglon and Scholtmeijer 2001:254), one might even go so far as to say that this strain of ecocriticism aspires to counterbalance the nature-culture dualism.

In stark contrast, ecocritics such as Dana Phillips question some of these general assumptions shared by theorists who wish to reconnect with "some beyond of literature, call it nature or wilderness or [...] environment" (1999:585). Phillips does not try to dismiss the reality of the nonhuman environment, but is critical of "nature" as a discursive term. The premise in his line of reasoning is that "[n]ature is thoroughly implicated in culture, and culture is thoroughly implicated in nature" (1999:577-8). Such a recognition has a profound impact on the human perception of the nonhuman environment. By reminding us that "nature cannot deliver one from the constraints of culture, any more than culture can deliver one from the constraints of nature" (1999:585), Phillips highlights the complicated structures determining our responses to the nonhuman world. Along similar lines, Michael Bennett expresses a disapproval of ecocritical attempts to efface the nature-culture dualism by simply focusing on texts which represent pristine natural environments. He points out that "one of the major flaws with" this approach is that it "tends to engage in a form of wilderness fetishism" (2001:32-3) that fails to address the complexity of our interactions with nonhuman environments.

While I understand the ecocritical yearning to question some theoretical assumptions which deny the extralinguistic reality of the physical world, I tend to agree with the charge that an ecocritical approach to literary representations of the human relation to nonhuman environments must take into account the multiple transactions between culture and nature. It

seems to me that reducing ecocritical theory to the explicit focus on literary depictions of natural environments, which deny the cultural transfigurations of landscapes, would, on the one hand, sustain the dualistic structures of the dominant discourse. On the other hand, it would neglect the fact that any human intervention with the nonhuman world is determined by cultural conceptions of nature. Hence, I agree with theorists who claim that ecocriticism should expand its focus on culturally transmuted environments. As Bennett reminds us, "[w]ilderness areas, as much as cityscapes, are shaped by complex socio-political, economic, and philosophical discourses" (2001:35). Moreover, by paying attention to the interface of what Buell calls "the landscapes of exurbia and industrialization" (2001:7), ecocriticism may avoid perpetuating western civilization's binary frames of reference.

It is part of the project of this study to suggest that an ecocritical reading of the problematic human relationship with the threatening cityscapes of modernity may elucidate the tensions at work in the crisis of modernity. As may be observed in recent studies, ecocriticism has started shifting its focal point and, as a result, has increasingly incorporated literary descriptions of urban environments into its field of research. Buell, for example, has extended his pivotal principle of "environmental imagination," by remarking that the term "environment(al) [...] refer[s] both to 'natural' and 'human-built' dimensions of the palpable world" (2001:3). Accordingly, he demands that "environmental studies must reckon more fully with the interdependence between urban and outback landscapes, and the traditions of imagining them" (2001:8). Bennett and Teague, in *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments*, likewise endeavor to "sharpen this focus on the nature of cities by exploring the components of urban ecocriticism" (1999:4). In this study I am taking a similar position. I wish to demonstrate that an ecocritical approach to the industrial cityscapes of Modernist literature can produce a working method of analysis. Utilizing ecocritical methodology, this study examines the hidden processes of the discourse of nature and its impact on the Modernist anxiety about modern progress. I postulate that environmental awareness, in its Modernist transfigurations, is of paramount importance for issues concerning alienation and authenticity. Indeed, the fact that the notion of alienation can be linked to the consequences of modern progress, while authenticity is often defined in terms of a re-evaluation of the human being as a natural organism, reinforces my hypothesis that these Modernist themes are intricately related to western civilization's debatable conceptions of nature.

From an ecocritical perspective, we may additionally ask ourselves whether Modernism's aforementioned skepticism about modern progress, its destructive patterns and pathologies, point to the emergence of a redefinition of the human relation to the nonhuman

world. The fact that Lawrence Coupe has theorized that "green studies addresses the consequences of the technological project of modernity" (2000:7), suggests that Modernism may have paved the way to environmental awareness. A further example supporting this direction of interpretation comes from Ihab Hassan. His famous essay, "POSTmodernISM," is particularly interesting because this attempt to define Postmodernism as a response to themes raised by Modernism, traces the development from a Modernist preoccupation with "Dehumanization" to a Postmodernist response to reality which focuses on the "Denaturalization of the Planet and the End of Man" (1984:53). Hassan illustrates that the heritage of the Modernist reconception of nature was acknowledged before ecocriticism theorized the relation between literature and the environment. Clearly, both the Modernist reaction to the crisis of modernity and the current preoccupation with our environmental crisis can be enriched by exploring their common grounds. Even more so, since Goodbody's aforementioned study has called attention to the fact that our modern ecological consciousness constitutes a renewed critique of modernity whose preceding Romantic and Modernist modes of discourse have influenced our current patterns of perception. All these factors conspire to produce an accurate sense of the importance of the question concerning western civilization's problematic relation to nature for the Modernist response to the pathologies of modernity. Ecocriticism may, therefore, provide a promising framework for interpreting the crisis of modernity.

2. MODERN CULTURE'S DUALISTIC CONCEPTIONS OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD

2.1. Metropolis: Modern Imaginations of Urban Environments

It should be obvious from the preceding exploration of the Modernist preoccupation with the traumatic experience of industrial progress that the city is of paramount importance for Modernist literature. The modern metropolis is not simply a scene of industrial domination. It is a scene of emerging technological and cultural transformations that are characteristic of modernity. To incorporate the modern city into fiction, therefore, allows the author to give material representation to the overabundant development of new orders that have led to the crisis of modernity. Furthermore, as a habitat, and not an abstract idea, the modern city provides a useful frame for depicting the individual's problematic struggle with modern environments. No doubt, the industrial transmutations of urban environments provide a powerful setting for distressed individuals suffering from the consequences of the "machine age." Regarded as an emblem of environmental degradation, the city may be used to delineate the problematic human interaction with habitat and environment. However, the city as the ultimate home of the Modernist artist may also play a positive role. In its capacity to deliver a material illustration of modernity, it may embrace the individual's positive and negative reactions to modernity. Perhaps most crucially, as a highly complex context with which the narrators and artist figures of Modernist literature are confronted, the city may be used to illustrate the author's crisis of imagination. In this sense, the city is basic to the ambivalent experience of modernity, since it is the urban context that provides an illustration of both the despair and hope underlying the crisis of modernity. Against the background of Rasula's argument that Modernist texts bear traces of somatic and rhetorical distress to illustrate the *malaise* of modern life, the question arises whether Miller and Durrell use urban imagery to underline their anxiety about modernity.

After having established the framework in which the modern metropolis needs to be evaluated, I want to discuss Miller and Durrell's fascination for alienating cityscapes in detail. However, in order to comprehend the crucial role that the metropolis plays in Miller and Durrell's novels, I need briefly to sketch the narrative structures and the general settings of the novels under scrutiny here. This allows me to draw a few distinctions that will help to clarify the lines of my argument. At the outset of this chapter it is important to emphasize that most of Miller's novels are distinctly urban. No doubt, the modern city is Miller's home. Repeated

references to the urban neighborhood, in which Miller grew up, illustrate the importance he attaches to the modern city as a cultural milieu that has profoundly shaped his character. Miller never ceases to stress that he "was just a Brooklyn boy [...] which is to say one of the last and the least of men" (*TCP*:48). Of particular interest in this respect is a chapter entitled "The Fourteenth Ward" in *Black Spring*.³⁹ Here the Miller persona tells us that "I was born in the street and raised in the street. 'The post-mechanical open street where the most beautiful and hallucinating iron vegetation', etc." (*BS*:3). This tribute to Brooklyn stresses not only that Miller explicitly defines himself as an urbanite, but it also insinuates that the city constitutes more than a simple background for his novels. Far from offering a demonizing description of an industrial environment, Miller's use of images such as "iron vegetation," suggest that the metropolis constitutes a moment of crisis. Indeed, this oxymoron mirrors not only the collapse of harmonious old orders, but it also exemplifies the shift from a preindustrial order to modernity. In other words, underlying Miller's celebration of his urban childhood there is a preoccupation with an environmental crisis.

But before pointing out the way in which Miller's reflections on the city reflect the crisis of modern life, we should first pay attention to the specific urban context we find depicted in *Tropic of Cancer*.⁴⁰ Indeed, to underscore the hypothesis that the modern city epitomizes the crisis of modernity an analysis of Paris, as it is set forth in *Tropic of Cancer*, may help to elucidate Miller's response to modernity. As noted earlier, Miller's novels are written in the first person. The narrator in *Tropic of Cancer*, and elsewhere, is named Henry Miller. The novel's highly fragmented nature basically portrays the narrator's struggles to survive as an artist in Paris. Involved in this process of enduring the disintegrating experience of modernity, we find "a gallery of grotesque or desperate figures [...] who move on the edges of the city" (Hassan 1967:60). These desperate protagonists accompany the Miller persona's sexual, artistic, philosophical and existential confrontation with the modern metropolis and its inhabitants. As I have suggested earlier, Miller's desire to capture the destabilizing experience of modernity is reflected by the deliberate lack of form and plot.

³⁹ As critics like to point out, *Black Spring* circumvents generic definitions. Hassan, for example, argues that *Black Spring* "is perhaps harder to categorize than any of Miller's books. It is a mixed bag of tricks and treats, ten essays or sketches—call them what you will" (1967:67). In light of this circumstance, it is clear to me that by using the term 'chapter' I am not doing justice to the important question concerning form.

⁴⁰ For purposes of the argument here presented this novel is particularly interesting. For, in contrast to most of Miller's novels, *Tropic of Cancer* focuses more exclusively on the vehement experience of modernity and, therefore, does not incorporate long passages on his childhood in Brooklyn. Nevertheless, as most of Miller's novels tend to operate with juxtapositions—such as the shock of the present moment to accounts of his past, or descriptions of Paris to descriptions of New York—I will also take into account passages using the modern metropolis as a symptom of modernity from *Tropic of Capricorn*, *Black Spring*, *Quiet Days in Clichy*, and *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*. This incorporation of several different texts seems justified because all of these novels focus on similar themes and, with the exception of *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, tend to operate with similar techniques of literary subversion.

But Paris does not function as a mere backdrop for the spectacle of urban experience. As Roberto Limonta explains, Paris exceeds the commonplace function of the city as a literary image and becomes one of the novel's protagonists. The French metropolis thus provides Henry Miller with a privileged place of observation at the heart of the crisis which grinds down modern society (1997:139). In point of fact, by attributing universal values to Paris, the novel at times goes much farther than using it as a highly evocative cityscape. It becomes "[a]n eternal city, Paris! More eternal than Rome. [...] The very navel of the world" (TCN:186). At this stage of the discussion it is appropriate to note that it is under the impact of Oswald Spengler that authors like Miller began to use the city as a metaphor for the degradation of western civilization. Spengler's theory of the city as a "Megalopolis" was expounded by Edward Hundert, who points out that the term was used to "designate the new pattern of our urban life wherein the 'city is a world, is *the* world" (1968:107).⁴¹ Others have called attention to the evident usefulness of Spengler's *The Decline of the West* for articulating the theoretical implications of Miller's depictions of Paris.⁴² Limonta offers the fullest justification for this connection in his discussion of *Tropic of Cancer*. He claims that Miller transforms the French metropolis into the very stage on which the west enacts its own decline (1997:139). Bradbury also stresses that Miller's work is "permeated with many dominant Thirties ideas: of contemporary Spenglerian decline, historical debasement and sterility, the Waste Land and the Dead City" (1995:380). Not surprisingly then, Bradbury speaks of Paris as signifying "the great European decay, acknowledging its own disorder, the cosmopolitan capital of contemporary exposure and inhumanity" (1995:381).

Indeed, in Miller's novels the reader is led into an urban universe, where "[t]he city sprouts out like a huge organism diseased in every part" (TCN:47). It is the novel's principal frame of reference which guides the narrator's philosophical and physical rambles on and through modern life. But Paris, the transient home of Strindberg, Matisse and many other artists Miller admires, is also a source of inspiration.⁴³ As Limonta has observed, the French metropolis arouses in the narrator a paradoxical feeling of attraction and repulsion (1997:140). In George Wickes's words, "[p]icturesque and sordid, this is Miller's Paris" (1992:108). Moreover, Wickes praises Miller as being the only American expatriate writer

⁴¹ The scope of Spengler's thoughts is a very important subject. However, because of limited space, the ensuing discussion focuses only upon his thesis that the city, as a symbol of modernity, perfectly mirrors the historical development of industrial progress.

⁴² As a matter of fact, Miller acknowledges the influence of Spengler when he writes, "I think of Spengler and of his terrible pronunciamientos" (TCN:14).

⁴³ After visiting the Pension Orfila, where Strindberg wrote *The Inferno*, he adds "[i]t was no mystery to me any longer why he and others (Dante, Rabelais, Van Gogh, etc., etc.) had made their pilgrimage to Paris. I understood then why it is that Paris attracts the tortured, the hallucinated, the great maniacs of love" (TCN:186).

whose radical depictions of Paris "[make] its ugliness symbolic of private and universal anguish, a sordid modern-day inferno, a labyrinth of cancer and despair" (1992:118).

As these extracts suggest, the role of Paris is pervasive and not to be ignored. However, before examining Miller's use of urban imagery in detail, I need to compare his version of the metropolis as a symptom of the crisis of modernity, to Durrell's vision of the city.⁴⁴ To begin with, it is important to stress that *The Black Book's* setting is not exclusively urban. This is due to the narrative structure which is composed of several different units. The narrative flow alternates between the accounts given by Lawrence Lucifer, the novel's main narrator, and excerpts from Horace 'Death' Gregory's diary. Whereas Lawrence Lucifer reminisces from his new home on Corfu about his past life in the suburbs of London, Durrell uses excerpts from Death Gregory's diary to provide an alternative account of the gloomy life in the Regina Hotel from which Lawrence Lucifer has escaped.⁴⁵

Like Miller's collection of grotesque protagonists, Durrell assembles a group of alienated figures. Some of these protagonists are unsuccessful artists as, for instance, Tarquin and Chamberlain. Others, such as Lobo, Clare, Grace, Miss Smith, or Hilda exemplify the senselessness of metropolitan existence. A further parallel can be established between Miller's deliberate formlessness, and Durrell's subversion of traditional techniques of narrative linearity. However, this sense of crisis is not only mirrored by the complex structures of the novel. As a large number of the protagonists share artistic goals and aspirations, the crisis of modernity is additionally reflected by their artistic struggle to make sense of modern life. Finally, the novel's predominant metaphor of the "English Death" suggests that even if Lawrence Lucifer's escape to the Greek island—on which he actually writes his novel—reduces the impact and importance of the urban environment, London still plays an important role for Durrell's depiction of the *malaise* of modern life.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ As I stated in the introduction, in this study I have made Durrell's first novel, *The Black Book*, central to the discussion of the Modernist response to the crisis of modernity. Although similar themes and preoccupations recur in his later novels, this first novel can be considered to be a direct response to Miller's work. Moreover, the fact that *Justine*, the first novel of *The Alexandria Quartet*, was published in 1957—i.e. almost twenty years after *The Black Book*—insinuates that on a general level, the question of modernity, and on a more personal level, the influence of Miller have been modified. A comparison between Miller and Durrell's later novels, therefore, seems less relevant to my discussion of the crisis of modernity.

⁴⁵ Apart from Death Gregory's personal accounts of his morose existence in the Regina Hotel, there are extracts from the equally distressful diaries and work of other artists such as Tarquin, who is living in the same hotel. Furthermore, Durrell interpolates the "Dear Puck" and "Dear Alan" letters into *The Black Book*.

⁴⁶ Considering the fact that Durrell wrote *The Black Book* on Corfu, it should be mentioned that Durrell's technique of intermingling autobiographical and fictional accounts has most probably been influenced by Miller's auto-novels. His incorporation of autobiographical details is, however, less radical as he mentions his own name only marginally. With regard to the notion of the modern city, it is interesting to note that in a letter written in October 1949, Henry Miller remarks: "[s]ometimes I think that you, Larry, never really knew what it was to live in our modern age—of asphalt and chemicals" (MacNiven 1989:242). If Miller is right, then we must regard the diminished stress that Durrell puts on the theme of the modern metropolis as a consequence of his detachment from city life.

By juxtaposing Corfu to London, Durrell doubtlessly absorbs the widespread Modernist fascination for the metropolis as a backdrop for dramatizing the diseases of modernity. Like T.S. Eliot's London in "The Waste Land," Durrell uses powerful urban imagery to underline the drama of modern society which finds itself paralyzed by anxiety and a feeling of death in life. Symptomatically then, in Durrell's novel the industrial cityscape and the omnipresent theme of "the English Death" are complicit. As the following passage shows, metropolitan imagery is often associated with somatic distress:

The city is beating around me like a foetus, chromium, steel, turbines, rubber, chimneys. The nights are dizzy with fog, and the trains run amok. [...] The world is speaking outside me, in the night, luminous with snouts of vomiting steel and chimneys. The new world, whose choice is strangling the fragile flame of the psyche. (*BB*:160)

The threatening aspects of such urban representations express a sense of fragmentation and violence, which insinuates that the narrator experiences his modern habitat as a menacing burden. Considering the fact that this description situates the narrator at the very heart of this industrial city, it seems obvious that he feels overwhelmed, or even paralyzed by this environment. By emphasizing that the narrator feels psychologically and biologically unfit to cope with this threatening environment, this passage illustrates how Rasula's drama of modernity finds in the city its perfect expression.

A striking symptom of this preoccupation with modern life presents itself in the allusion to the excess of modernity. By itemizing a seemingly endless amount of components, which make up this industrial scenery, Durrell underlines the contrast between the highly animated city and its inert denizens who feel unable to come to terms with the excessive patterns of modernity. Compare, for example, the personified mechanical world, which 'speaks' and 'vomits,' to the passive perceiver, who bemoans the pathological impact of his surrounding. Rhetorically, Lucifer struggles to make sense of this urban scenery while, physically, he feels threatened. Finally, also the reference to the panic discharged by the city itself—i.e. the dizziness and the trains running amok—shows that such descriptions dramatize the city dwellers' anxiety about losing control over the urban environment which they have built. In this view, the metropolis has become an active super-organism, a Moloch that risks destroying its inhabitants. The fact of the matter is that Durrell converts urban imagery into a more complex image of the narrator's desperate experience of modern life. Accordingly, it is the capacity of urban imagery to highlight the narrator's embroilment with modernity that heightens the reader's awareness of the reasons why it is perceived as a malady. By examining some of Durrell and Miller's descriptions of the modern metropolis, it is possible to indicate that the modern city constitutes the necessary context for these authors' re-enactment of the crisis of modernity. Moreover, as both novels portray the city as a zone of physical

disintegration and rhetorical despair, the concern with menacing cityscapes becomes central to the discussion of Miller and Durrell's quest for authenticity in life and art.

Strikingly similar functionalizations of urban contexts have been ventured by many modern authors. For this reason, I now want to turn to some general reflections on the city in modern fiction. Ihab Hassan, for instance, alludes to the increasing pessimism that lurks behind the incorporation of urban environments into modern fiction. He goes so far as to maintain that the majority of urban novels use the city as an embodiment of disaster (1981:108). One of the critics most centrally identified with urban fiction, Raymond Williams, has described the influential role of the city in modern fiction as a historically embedded phenomenon in which "the modern wasteland, and through it a powerful convention of urban imagery became almost commonplace" (1985:239). In his influential study, *The Country and the City*, Williams embraces the Marxist thesis that literary production should be viewed in relation to social circumstances and technological transformations. In applying this insight to fictional accounts of "the ugliness and meanness of industrialism and urbanism," he argues that the city in fiction symbolizes "the cancerous results of an outgrown but still rigid and stupid system" (1985:230). In short, Williams's line of reasoning associates urban imagery with a critique of a modern form of life which at a time of urban and industrial transformation started to gain impetus. Accordingly, Williams explains the Modernist fascination for the city as follows:

Struggle, indifference, loss of purpose, loss of meaning, [...] have found, in the city, a habitation and a name. For the city is not only, in this vision, a form of modern life; it is the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness. (1985:239)

Williams's argument demonstrates that the city in fiction may be used to epitomize vast themes such as the impact of modernization on social structures, human nature, or, more specifically, the individual's embodied experience of an increasingly artificial environment.

Yet it bears repeating that Modernist literature tends to propose ambiguous reactions to modernity. As we have seen, by juxtaposing a positive evaluation of emerging new orders to a profound despair about a collapsing preindustrial harmony, Modernist texts exemplify their sense of crisis. Hence, theorists like Burton Pike warn us that reductive explanations of the literary use of urban imagery tend to efface the complexity of the subject matter. He maintains that "[a]s an image, the city is too large and complex to be thought of as only a literary trope" (1981:ix). Accordingly, he points out that the city in fiction perfectly mirrors "man's contradictory feelings—pride, love, anxiety and hatred—toward the civilization he has created and the culture to which he belongs" (1981:26).⁴⁷ Phrased differently, the city in

⁴⁷ Pike does not question the validity of Raymond Williams's work on the city in fiction. The work of Williams is still relevant to understanding how urban imagery came to be conceptualized; even if critics, like Edna

Modernist fiction reflects the paradoxical celebration and condemnation of one's cultural existence. Broadly speaking, it may be said that literary representations of urban environments may be used to highlight the despair and the alienation experienced by the isolated inhabitant of the modern metropolis. Yet simultaneously it may offer the modern artist a perfect locale for his or her creative endeavors. The city in fiction, in short, functions as a mirror reflecting the individual's confrontation with his or her cultural framework.⁴⁸

In this context, it is important to re-emphasize Spengler's aforementioned ideas about the "cycle of the decay of civilization from the peak of primitive agrarianism to the decadence of the modern megalopolis" (Pike 1981:125). Earlier we noted the importance of Spengler's theories to the Modernists' ambivalent fascination for the modern metropolis. As a result, critics have pointed out that the role of the city in fiction is not limited to providing a setting for the individual's struggles with urban existence in the industrial era. To the contrary, Spengler's ideas reveal that underlying this preoccupation with metropolitan existence is the insight that this form of human habitat illustrates western civilization's growing distance from the nonhuman world. It goes without saying, that the technological revolutions and demographic changes of the early decades of the twentieth century have transformed the city into an assemblage of social and economic power which diminished the impact of the exurban world. From an ecocritical point of view the question, therefore, arises whether Miller and Durrell's aforementioned tendency to depict urban environments that are laced with images of pathology, points to the belief that modernity has ushered in an environmental crisis.

As Ihab Hassan has admitted "the city has always been a 'crime against nature'" (1981:107). Just as Hassan draws attention to the problematic relation between the city and nature, so ecocritics have theorized that the city reflects modern society's desire to dominate the physical world. Marian Scholtmeijer's analysis of urban imagery, for example, argues for a concept of the city in fiction as a symbolical realm which reflects western civilization's increasingly conflictual relation with the physical world. Scholtmeijer, therefore, reminds us that underlying the extraordinary variety of urban settings in modern fiction, there is a desire to use the city as an "expression of antipathy to the civilizing process" (1993:143). Invoking

Longley, have pointed out that "the unreal city of American poetic modernism—cosmopolitan London or Paris refracted through 'the simultaneity of the ambient'—does not meet the political demands that Raymond Williams (in *The Country and the City*) sees cities as making on the literary imagination" (1996:107).

⁴⁸ That an urban setting may also offer an immensely rich frame of reference may be observed in, what Buell calls, the nineteenth-century "poetics of the urban flâneur" (2001:8). As Buell observes, in the city the *flâneur* is confronted with a "discontinuous welter of fleeting, incoherent encounters with a barrage of stimuli conceived as a semipathological condition." In this manner, the city dramatizes "individual disorientation or civic degradation" (2001:88), thereby stressing alienation as a paradigm for modern existence. We will return to the importance of the *flâneur* in an ensuing chapter.

the city to express a critique of enculturation, suggests that the city is a crime against nonhuman as well as human nature. Hence, after reminding us that cities have been "[e]rected in opposition to nature," Scholtmeijer argues that "cities undermine the feeling of athomeness in the world" (1993:144). Such an explanation addresses a number of essential features of the recurrent theme of urban alienation; especially when it is raised within a vitalistic context. One immediate implication is that the city in fiction may be used to express a fear that "humans are alienated from the natural world by virtue of their enculturation" (Phillips 2003:vii). By establishing a link between alienation and the metropolis, or rather the disturbing experience of urban life and the loss of a meaningful natural environment, Scholtmeijer offers a new approach to urban imagery.

Scholtmeijer's argument that "[t]he cities we have built to shut out the world seem not to free but to oppress us," and that, as a consequence, "[i]dentity scrambles to find a foothold in the city" (1993:143), reinforces the necessity to have a closer look at the notion of alienation. In the Modernist context alienation is preeminently defined in Marxist terms, as the individual's understanding of the self in a capitalist "system of *machinic enslavement*" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:428). This system of "machinic enslavement," transforms the industrial worker into a commodity hereby creating "the typical psychic set of industrial man which Marx calls alienation" (Leo Marx 1967:177). In conformity with this understanding of the capitalist system, Leo Marx defines alienation as "experiencing the world and oneself passively, receptively, as the subject separated from the object" (1967:177). Of course, it is in the growing technosphere dominating urban contexts that this sense of alienation becomes most evident. However, Scholtmeijer's ecocritical analysis of cities alters the Marxist understanding of alienation as the outcome of the individual's subjection to the forces inherent in technological development.⁴⁹ Her claim that "[t]he city asks of the human being that he or she become fully domesticated yet removes content from the idea of domestication" (1993:144), implies that alienation arises from the distance the city has created between itself and nature. Her ecocritical analysis of urban contexts, suggests that it is culture's negation of nature which creates this sense of alienation because it denies that human beings, as natural

⁴⁹ The various definitions of the term 'alienation' can be found in Raymond Williams's *Keywords*. Williams points out that the term has been used for several centuries and that some of its original meanings are still found in contemporary usage. He maintains that alienation is still used in a theological context to describe "a state [...] of being cut off, estranged from the knowledge of God." This version, he observes, "sometimes overlaps with a more general use, with a decisive origin in Rousseau, in which man is seen as cut off, estranged from his own original nature" (1976:30). The latter variant thus tends to promote ideas of "primitivism or a cultivation of human feeling and practice against the pressures of civilization" (1976:30) to overcome alienation. Williams also emphasizes the importance of Marx's understanding of alienation, as a process anchored in "the history of labour, in which man creates himself by creating his world, but in class-society is **alienated** from this essential nature by specific forms of **alienation** in the division of labour, private property and the capitalist mode of

organisms, are dependent on the physical world as a healthy and meaningful habitat. Cities thus exemplify the self-destructive impact of western culture's domination of nature. Especially the modern metropolis then, reflects how "[t]he ultimate in human domination of nature [...] escapes human control and puts to exile vital aspects of the psyche" (1993:145). Indeed, when Scholtmeijer asks us: "[h]ow can the individual be 'naturalized' to the urban environment" (1993:144), she clearly argues for a definition of alienation which focuses its attention on the nature versus culture dualism, rather than "machinic enslavement."⁵⁰

As I have delineated in a preceding chapter, ecocritics believe that western civilization's tendency to define nature in contradistinction to culture has contributed to our current environmental crisis. Against the backdrop of this dualistic conception of nature and culture, I would like to suggest that Scholtmeijer's ecocritical definition of alienation, which pays attention to this binary opposition, provides a useful frame for thinking about the impact of environmental concerns on the Modernist sense of crisis. For it seems to me that an ecocritical perspective, which assumes that the city in fiction operates as a symbol of western civilization's denial of nature, and that alienation is a result of this process, helps us to cast new light on the vitalistic approach to modernity advocated by Miller and Durrell. In other words, the ecocritical argument that by denying the natural needs of human beings the city engenders alienating forms of life, offers a fruitful field to unfold the vitalistic yearning to depict human beings as natural organisms who suffer from their metropolitan habitats.

Gernot Böhme confirms the view that the modern city is intricately related to the nature-culture dualism. He has observed that since the beginning of modernity the trend has been to reduce the focal point of classical dichotomies to such oppositions as nature versus civilization, culture, or simply the city. On that account, Böhme emphasizes that through the growing concentration of economic and intellectual power in the city, the city-dweller acquires paramount importance for the definition of culture. Böhme therefore maintains that ultimately it is the urban intellectual who also defines what nature is (1989:60). Just as Böhme draws attention to the reciprocal relation of city and country, so Leslie Fiedler invites us to reconsider the city as a symbol of western civilization's opposition to nature. Fiedler analyzes the literary imagination of "The City, Metropolis, Megalopolis," by pointing out that we have forgotten the conceptual nature of the city. He reminds us that

the memory is preserved in the frozen etymology of certain words: 'civilization' (the creation of human culture by clustering together in the *civis*, which is to say, the city); and

production" (1976:31). From William's analysis we may deduce that Scholtmeijer's ecocritical focus on alienation is closer to Rousseau than it is to Marx.

⁵⁰ This does not mean that an ecocritical interest in industrialism and its impact on human nature marginalizes the problem of technology. Quite to the contrary, as will be elaborated in an ensuing chapter, most ecocritics agree that the machine is emblematic of western culture's exploitation of nature for human profits.

'politics' (the science of living together in large numbers, creating communities bigger than the family or the tribe in the *polis*, once more the city). 'Outside the *polis*,' Aristotle taught, 'no one is truly human, but either a god or a beast.' And for a long time we believed him, or at least acted as if we did. (1981:113)

Although Fiedler does not directly refer to the nature-culture dualism, his explanation is based on the insight that the city embodies western culture's foundational principle of defining itself in contradistinction to nature.

Now that I have outlined the importance of the city for depicting the Modernist sense of crisis I can begin to examine Miller and Durrell's thematization of metropolitan experience. As I have tried to show, urban imagery has frequently been used to amplify the character's sense of dislocation and alienation. The contradictory image of "the city as a new possibility and an unreal fragmentation" (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991:49) has therefore often been highlighted as a major theme of Modernist literature. From an ecocritical perspective however, we may ask ourselves to what degree the threatening aspects of urban life and the metropolis as a super-organism, or a diseased habitat, can be grounded on the previously analyzed nature-culture dualism. Hence I now want to examine some of Durrell and Miller's descriptions of urban environments in the light of these arguments.

2.2. Miller and Durrell's Images of the Urban Waste Land

As Maria Mies explains, ecocritics share the premise that western culture's "distancing from Nature has been considered a necessary precondition for emancipation, as a step from Nature to Culture" (1993:156). The cleft that consequently has been created between humans and the nonhuman world is in the case of cities particularly patent. The extent to which the city symbolizes western civilization's rupture with the nonhuman environment is laid bare in a section of *Black Spring* entitled "Megalopolitan Maniac." Miller opens this section, in which he constructs a menacing technosphere to match his vision of the modern city, as follows: "[t]he city is loveliest when the sweet death racket begins. Her own life lived in defiance of nature, her electricity, her frigidaires, her soundproof walls. Box within box she rears her dry walls" (BS:243). Here and elsewhere, Miller explicitly defines the city as a conquest of nature. It functions not only "in defiance of nature," but the double reference to the "walls," which through association with claustrophobic images such as "soundproof" and "box," seem to imprison the urban individual, also marks the city's hostility towards and exclusion of the nonhuman environment.

Yet this passage also shows that Miller's personified city problematizes metropolitan experience insofar as this highly artificial environment constitutes a menace to its inhabitants. The city is represented not as an amalgamation of buildings and crowds, but as an active and

autonomous organism. The fact that Miller radically effaces the presence of human beings, reveals that the city-dwellers have lost control over the city they have built. Indeed, Miller claims that the loss of control has reached a point where the personified metropolis continues its industrial growth without any human contribution. In keeping with Miller's previously analyzed desire to embrace the collapse of the modern world and the individual's delirious experience of this process, he applies a rhetoric of apocalypticism to demonstrate that modernity has yielded a "sweet death racket." Indeed, that the city is a menacing super-organism is additionally emphasized when Miller writes that "[t]omorrow every world city will fall. Tomorrow every civilized being on earth will die of poison and steel" (*BS*:246). In other words, the city as a menacing Moloch illustrates not only that western civilization's belief in progress is based on the conquest of nature, it also shows that industrial growth is a menace to humankind.

From an ecocritical perspective, it is crucial to point out that Miller explicitly juxtaposes the urban context to nature in order to dramatize his preoccupation with alienation and modern progress. That the city in Miller's novels epitomizes the effects of industrial progress can be observed in numerous representations of metropolitan contexts. Consider, for example, how Miller applies the stylistic figure of lists to illustrate the cancerous growth of modern progress:

The city itself strikes me as a piece of the highest insanity, everything about it, sewers, elevated lines, slot machines, newspapers, telephones, cops, doorknobs, flophouses, screens, toilet paper, everything. Everything could just as well not be and not only nothing lost but a whole universe gained. (*TCP*:103)

Listing up items that seem to be characteristic of modern life, but which, nonetheless, constitute an assemblage that reveals no coherence, Miller presents us with a city of fragments and meaningless excess. The fragmented picture of the modern city thus reflects not only the problematic experience of a disintegrating urban life, it also denies meaning. From this perspective, the belief in progress has effaced nature only to transform it into a metropolis—i.e. a self-propelled super-organism that risks suffocating the city-dweller by offering a meaningless habitat.

That the city in Miller's fiction mirrors the technological transformation of the physical world is also revealed by the fact that he incorporates into his urban setting the image of the railroad. The immense popularity of the railroad as a "favorite emblem of progress" (Marx 1967:27) has been acknowledged by many critics of modern literature. Buell, for instance, calls the railway the "predominant, polymorphous industrial leitmotif" (1995:411), while Joanne Gottlieb stresses that it "both defined the modern city and was instrumental in the nineteenth-century transformations of space and time," because "the conquest and control of space require [...] networks of transport" (1999:235). By using this

popular "emblem of progress," Miller utilizes his literary heritage and, in doing so, dramatizes his concern about the impact of technology on the nonhuman environment.

The remarkable fact about Miller's reference to the railroad is that it operates with the same strategies that characterize his descriptions of the city. The railroad is not only personified, but it also represents a menace to the observer: "I hear the trains collide, the chains rattle, the locomotive chugging, snorting, sniffing, steaming and pissing. All things come to me through the clear fog with the odor of repetition" (*TCN*:283). This brief passage, which begins with an apocalyptic image of trains colliding, contains most of the elements characterizing Miller's anti-technological critique of progress. Miller transforms the railroad, as the emblem of modern progress, into an anthropomorphous organism. By using a vocabulary that refers to the multiple sensorial impacts of the train on the observer, Miller stresses the uncontrollable pathological effects of modern progress. Hence, like Miller's descriptions of urban contexts, the description of the train is juxtaposed to the narrative space occupied by the observer. The list of active verbs that describe the sounds of trains is especially noteworthy. This rhetorical strategy, which is based on lexical proliferation, amplifies the expansion of modern progress by refusing closure. Analogous to the city as super-organism which escapes the control of the city-dweller, the railway's multiple sensorial intrusion upon the observer stresses the overwhelming force of industrial progress. In stark contrast, the passivity of the observer is exemplified by the fact that the narrator's confined perspective reduces his reaction to a recording of the effects of industrial progress. The intrusion of the signs of progress on the individual's isolated existence highlights the vulnerability of the city-dweller who suffers from his or her existence in an increasingly harmful surrounding. Indeed, Miller's use of the rhetoric of apocalypticism implies that the city-dweller is a victim of the inescapable march of industrial progress. What is more, Miller's reference to the railroad affirms that the crisis of modernity does not only evoke somatic but also rhetorical distress. A striking symptom of the narrator's rhetorical struggle to make sense of this meaningless habitat presents itself in the use of oxymorons and absurd images—e.g. "through the clear fog with the odor of repetition"—to describe this modern environment.

A strikingly similar use of the railroad as a symbol of modern progress can be noticed in Lawrence Durrell's descriptions of urban contexts. In *The Black Book* we encounter a variety of references to trains marking the English landscape. Death Gregory, who contemplates the "customary madness of the suburban evening," for instance, notes "[i]n the distance trains burrowing their tunnels of smoke and discord" (*BB*:37). Like Miller, Durrell's use of the railroad combines elements of rhetorical and somatic distress. What these descriptions share are the characteristic association of "madness" with rhetorically disfigured

images such as "tunnels of smoke and discord." However, even if such passages express a preoccupation with modern progress that is similar to Miller's understanding of this industrial motif, it is important to point out that Durrell strives for a different effect. The most visible difference is that Durrell's introduction of the train does not rely on a sensorial assault on the observer. On the contrary, the above passage focuses primarily on environmental degradation. In this context, it is interesting to note that the distance between the train and the observer illustrates the spatial expansion of industrial progress. Rather than stressing the menacing effects of industrialism on the individual, Durrell depicts how technological progress profoundly transforms the English landscape. The extent to which the physical world is subject to this cultural transmutation is amplified by the "tunnels of smoke and discord" which perforate the environment.

Durrell's reflections on modern progress, as symbolized by the railroad, bear on the aggressive cultural appropriation of the natural environment. As the ensuing excerpt shows, industrial progress is clearly represented as a menace to the natural world: "See! Trains running out into the night. The world is bleeding trains" (*BB*:165). Congruent with the preceding image of perforation, this reference to the lacerated environment expresses a concern about the impact of technology on the physical world. While the first phrase alludes to the spatial expansion of progress, the ensuing metaphor re-emphasizes the view that modern culture's belief in progress is based on an exploitative conception of nature. Indeed, the personified earth, which is "bleeding trains," insinuates that the world suffers from modern culture's industrial transgression, which has reduced the nonhuman environment to an ugly stock of resources. Moreover, the metaphor's antagonistic opposition between the organic process of blood flowing and the mechanical movement of trains, reinforces the necessity to explore whether the underlying nature-culture dualism helps us to elucidate *The Black Book's* urban imagery.

Considering the fact that Durrell's reflections on modern progress convey a conflictual relationship between nature and culture, we may ask ourselves whether the preoccupation with this binary opposition is also laid bare in descriptions of the city-dwellers' interactions with the modern metropolis. The ensuing excerpt illustrates how Durrell's urban imagery operates with dualistic structures to dramatize the individual's distorted experience of urban life:

It is so silent here at night. This tomb of masonry hems us in, drives us in on ourselves. [...] Here in these metal provinces, we are like dead cats bricked in the Wall of China. The winds turn aside from us in the dead land, the barren latitudes. I tell you the trams plough their furrows every day, but nothing springs from them. [...] Overhead in the darkness the noiseless rain is shining down over the countries. The pavements are thawing back to black asphalt. (*BB*:85)

Lawrence Lucifer's lamentation about the misery of urban life clearly demonstrates how the text relies on a dichotomous structure to accentuate the isolation the narrator experiences in the suburbs of London. The contiguity between the spatial and sensory confinement Lawrence Lucifer endures at night, and the claustrophobic apprehension of his urban dwelling, insinuates that isolation is understood as a rupture with, or estrangement from, one's environment. The cleavage between the individual and his or her environment is aggravated by the claim that the urban habitat "drives us in on ourselves." This sequence of prepositions, which itself mirrors the recoiling movement of isolation, stresses that the individual's sense of alienation is perceived as a symptom of modern culture's dialectical disposition to define itself in contradistinction to nature.

Closer examination of the passage cited above, reveals that the nature-culture dualism is of paramount importance for Durrell's vision of the city. In point of fact, the description of the alienating habitat operates with a structural dichotomization of city versus nature. The simile referring to the Great Wall of China—i.e. one of the largest fortification constructions ever completed—illustrates how culture is based on dualistic powerstructures that prevent the intrusion of the nonhuman world.⁵¹ Not surprisingly then, the ensuing images such as the winds which "turn aside," or the "dead land" and "barren latitudes," and, finally, the rain that does not heighten the earth's fecundity but is absorbed by the "black asphalt" all testify to the city's effacement of the nonhuman environment. Moreover, by specifying that this urban habitat is "dead" and "barren," the narrator indicates that the *malaise* of urban life is the direct outcome of western civilization's conquest of nature. From this perspective, the city's struggle with nature is congruent with the individual's struggle with his or her habitat. This struggle is reflected by the text itself whose metaphors and imagery re-enact the conflict between nature and culture. By applying the previously analyzed technique of combining antagonistic cultural and natural values, Durrell reminds us of the inherently inharmonious character of

⁵¹ The extent to which the reference to the Great Wall of China perfectly mirrors Durrell's preoccupation with the nature-culture dualism, can be understood best by placing it in a historical context. Symptomatically, the Great Wall was built as a defense against invading nomadic tribes. In this context, Deleuze and Guattari's theory of nomadology has made clear that the repression of nomads is integral to the dualistic powerstructures of the State apparatus. The contrast between the functioning of the State and the nomadic essence Deleuze and Guattari circumscribe on the basis of the *nomos*, which as they explain, "is the consistency of a fuzzy aggregate: it is in this sense that it stands in opposition to the law or the *polis*, as the backcountry [...] or the vague expanse around a city" (1987:380). By quoting Paul Virilio's thesis that "'the political power of the State is *polis* [...],' and that 'the gates of the city, its levies and duties, are barriers, filters against the fluidity of masses, against the penetration power of migratory packs,' people, animals, and goods" (1987:386), Deleuze and Guattari's theory of nomadology ultimately explains how the State, the city, or simply culture defines itself in contradistinction to the human or nonhuman "other." In occupying an analogous position of defense against exterior forces, the Great Wall of China is, indeed, a nice example of the way in which dichotomous powerstructures are a necessary precondition for the modern metropolis.

cityscapes. In this sense, the "metal provinces" and the "trams" which plough their sterile "furrows" I take to be illustrations of the disfiguring impact of culture on nature.

As a matter of fact most of Durrell's descriptions of urban scenery operate with such conflicting combinations of antagonistic cultural and natural values.⁵² It is this torsion that ultimately also gives shape to the various descriptions of the Regina Hotel. On the opening pages we thus read:

I am dying again the little death which broods forever in the Regina Hotel: along the mouldering corridors, the geological strata of potted ferns, the mouse-chawed wainscoting which the deathwatch ticks. (*BB*:21)

Although the allusion to the "English Death" and the theme of alienation is linked to the discordant atmosphere of the Regina Hotel, it is important to point out that the dualistic structure of this description does not intend to illustrate how the city as a concept excludes the physical world. The nature-culture dualism underlying the aforementioned references to the "geological strata of potted ferns" and the "mouse-chawed wainscoting," seems to insinuate that western civilization's negation of the nonhuman world has created an artificial atmosphere which contributes to the narrator's anxiety about modern life. The artificiality of potted ferns and the mice as the last traces of nonhuman life, suggest that modern culture's increasing elimination of the nonhuman environment constitutes an essential element of Durrell's reflections on alienation.

Dealing with Durrell's dualistic structures, the question arises whether Miller's texts operate with a similar structural dichotomization to emphasize the way in which western civilization has created artificial habitats that render urban life problematic. Compared to the preceding examination of Durrell's description of the Regina Hotel, the opening lines of *Tropic of Cancer* reveal some arresting parallels:

I am living at the Villa Borghese. There is not a crumb of dirt anywhere, nor a chair misplaced. We are all alone here and we are dead.
Last night Boris discovered that he was lousy. I had to shave his armpits and even then the itching did not stop. How can one get lousy in a beautiful place like this? But no matter. We might never have known each other so intimately, Boris and I, had it not been for the lice. (*TCN*:9)

Clearly, both *The Black Book's* Regina Hotel and *Tropic of Cancer's* Villa Borghese are depicted as places of death and sterility. Significantly, Miller emphasizes the barren character of this place by pointing out that the antiseptic effacement of the intruding physical world contributes to the fact that "[w]e are all alone here." This is a particularly revealing remark insofar as it mirrors how this form of urban dwelling contributes to the utter isolation of the

⁵² In a letter written on February 27th, 1958, Durrell explores the reasons why the English language lacks the "metaphysical resonance" that can be found in the Japanese and Chinese languages. In this letter he describes his own poetic practice as follows: "I work hot to cold like a painter. Hot noun, cold adjective ('mathematical cherry' rather than 'sweet cherry'). Or on a sour abstract word like 'armature' a warm and sweetish one like 'melodious'"

inhabitants. The artificiality of this place, notwithstanding, it is the capacity of lice to resist the urban desire to eradicate, or at least control, nonhuman life that enables the transgression of the isolation endured by Boris and the narrator.⁵³ The allusion is a clue to how Miller's vision of the *malaise* of urban life should be interpreted. For it seems evident that the exclusion of the nonhuman world has not only created unlivable habitats but has also led to the individual's sense of deficiency and solitude. Phrased differently, while Miller's description of the Villa Borghese does not directly operate with the dualistic structures we have observed in Durrell's constructions of metaphors, the theme of the alienating experience of modern life is intertwined with the nature-culture dualism all the same.

Nevertheless, a certain degree of formal resemblance may be detected in the following passage, where the reader is reminded of the artificiality characterizing metropolitan environments:

Along the boulevards there is a cold electrical imitation of heat. *Tout Va Bien* in ultraviolet rays that make the clients of Dupont chain cafés look like gangrened cadavers. *Tout Va Bien!* That's the motto that nourishes the forlorn beggars who walk up and down all night under the drizzle of the violet rays. Wherever there are lights there is a little heat. (TCN:242)

Here, the text works toward an oscillation of antagonistic values that functions according to dualistic structures. Such seems to be the case for the oxymoron—i.e. the "cold electrical imitation of heat"—Miller uses to accentuate the artificiality of this urban scene. In like manner, the name of the place, "*Tout Va Bien*," is juxtaposed to the "gangrened cadavers," hereby denouncing the pathological conditions of life engendered by the city. Finally, the "drizzle of the violet rays" fuses into one image antagonistic natural and technical phenomena to highlight the urban effacement of nature. Indeed, the ensuing phrase, which replaces the sun as a natural source of heat with the mechanical term "lights," confirms the interpretation that this excerpt achieves a sense of artificiality by highlighting the conflictual relation between the city and the diminished traces of the nonhuman world.

Compared to the previously analyzed strictly dualistic structure that characterizes Durrell's description of the city, Miller's accounts of Paris seem to insist less radically on a structural dichotomization of natural and cultural realms. Despite these inconsistencies we must not forget that Miller's fascination for Paris is itself rather ambiguous. Recall George

(1988:308). Although Durrell merely acknowledges that he works with dualistic structures, his descriptions of urban contexts reveal that he is concerned with the nature-culture dualism in particular.

⁵³ What is to be noticed here, is that both Miller and Durrell draw attention to western civilization's distorted relation to the nonhuman world by incorporating animals into their urban contexts that have been categorized as "pests." This designation itself reflects our refusal to grant these animals any place or value within any kind of culturally defined habitat. From an ecocritical perspective, the linguist Alvin Fill has noted that only the inherently anthropocentric character of our language make such categorizations possible. For a more detailed discussion of the anthropocentrism underlying most western languages, see Fill, Alvin. *Oekolinguistik: Eine Einführung*, 1993.

Wickes's synopsis of Miller's Paris as "picturesque and sordid," and it seems evident that such a perspective does not tolerate any unequivocal positions, which a strictly dualistic structure would entail. Yet, to read the novel as a fluctuating celebration and condemnation of the French metropolis, would be to miss the dialectical subtlety with which Miller juxtaposes Paris to New York.

2.2.1. Paris versus New York

In order to comprehend the complexity of Miller's vision of the modern metropolis it is important to survey the contrasts between descriptions of New York and accounts of Miller's life in Paris. I dwell thus on the disparity between these two cities in an effort to indicate that the conflict, which emerges from this confrontation, offers a fruitful field to delineate Miller's preoccupation with the growing impact of industrial progress. The urban life of New York, which in the novel's topography is an empty place evoking horror, is based on notions of progress and futility. Again and again Miller declares that:

New York is cold, glittering, malign. The buildings dominate. There is a sort of atomic frenzy to the activity going on; the more furious the pace, the more diminished the spirit. A constant ferment, but it might just as well be going on in a test tube. Nobody knows what it's all about. Nobody directs the energy. Stupendous. Bizarre. Baffling. (*TCN:74*)

In accordance with instances I have cited above, Miller denounces the menace of modern progress by listing up an intimidating number of characteristics. New York is "cold, glittering, malign" and the narrator's apprehension of this anonymous spectacle is redundantly expressed as "[s]tupendous. Bizarre. Baffling." While descriptions of Paris still preserve a place for the city dweller, who registers the pathological effects of modernity, this excerpt refuses to subsume the individual's suffering. Indeed, New York as a metropolitan super-organism, whose artificial "atomic" activities remind us of a scientific experiment, drastically diminishes the significance of its inhabitants. Miller's repetitive use of "nobody" and his allusion to the domination of the material city, clearly illustrates how modern progress ultimately turns against its inventors.

Immediately after this passage, we read that when thinking of New York "a blind, white rage licks" the narrator's "guts." The overwhelming power of industrial progress is additionally accentuated when Miller alludes to "[t]he White prisons, the sidewalks swarming with maggots" and concludes that this city was "erected over a hollow pit of nothingness" (*TCN:74*). For Miller the American metropolis is a perfect example of the absurd belief in progress and the resulting debasement of humanity. Elsewhere in Miller's oeuvre he reflects on the different aspects of industrial progress which ultimately distinguish New York from

Paris. In *Tropic of Capricorn*, for instance, he describes how in his youth he witnessed how Brooklyn became metropolitan:

Even when a town becomes modernized, in Europe, there are still vestiges of the old. In America, though there are vestiges, they are effaced, wiped out of the consciousness, trampled upon, obliterated, nullified by the new. [...] In America the destruction is complete, annihilating. There is no rebirth, only a cancerous growth, layer upon layer of new, poisonous tissue, each one uglier than the previous one. (*TCP*:217-8)

Here Miller converts apocalyptic images into a grim vision of industrial progress. The industrial transformation of American cities reveal that modernization is indeed, to come back to Adorno's words, "akin to death" (1997:21). For the American city, imagined here as a menacing technosphere that is propelled by the radical conquest of nature, does not only destroy the physical world but also human beings who are dependent on the earth for survival. The pleonasm, which is centered around the notion of extinction, clearly dramatizes this process of conquest. As a contrast to the American scene of destruction, Miller exhibits a view of the European relation to the process of modernization which is based on a refusal to sever the original connection with one's environment. While the notion of rebirth insinuates that in Europe an almost organic equilibrium seems to persevere, the cancer of progress is violently destroying Miller's American home.

In several significant ways the American and European cities we find depicted in Miller's novels, represent polar extremes of industrial progress. But as Roberto Limonta explains, the rift that separate these two forms of metropolitan life amounts to a difference in degree and not in kind. From a Spenglerian perspective, Limonta examines how Miller's urban scenery mirrors the progressive development from the organic growth of preindustrial cities to the increasingly artificial and abstract contexts that make up the modern metropolis (1997:141). If Limonta is right, then Miller's Paris embodies the struggle between the preindustrial city and the overpowering repercussions of the modern industrialized metropolis. New York, on the other hand, epitomizes the completion of this evolution. From the numerous descriptions of the French capital we should, therefore, be able to discern that it re-enacts this struggle of modernization. The following excerpt may serve as a nice example of this intermediary position of Paris. Here Miller's attention is drawn to a court that he discovers accidentally, by

glimps[ing] through the low passageways that flank the old arteries of Paris. In the middle of the court is a clump of decrepit buildings which have so rotted away that they have collapsed on one another and formed a sort of intestinal embrace. The ground is uneven, the flagging slippery with slime. A sort of human dump heap which has been filled in with cinders and dry garbage. The sun is setting fast. The colors die. They shift from purple to dried blood, from nacre to bister, from cool dead grays to pigeon shit. (*TCN*:47)

What is to be noticed here is that this passage has an organic strand running through it. Because of this focus on organic metaphors such as the "arteries" or the "intestinal embrace,"

rather than the abstract elements which dominate Miller's depictions of New York, we are reminded that this kind of cityscape is still anchored in a preindustrial sense of connectivity between the city-dweller and his or her habitat. On that account, it is important to note that the organic metaphors illustrate that this kind of city still functions as an organically responsive habitat for its denizens. For an ecocritical reading of the metropolis in Modernist fiction, the contrasts between the mechanosphere Miller depicts as New York and this vivid account of Paris, are revealing.

But this passage lends itself to a further comparison. In addition to highlighting the clash between the American pursuit of progress and the French rootedness in vital habitats, this description hints at a number of tensions when set in opposition to the previously quoted account of the "*Tout Va Bien*" café. The remarkable fact about these rather divergent faces of the French cityscape is that both descriptions rely on colors to symbolize their unequal stages of modernization. Whereas "ultraviolet rays" and the lack of natural light stress the artificiality of the café's surroundings, the description of the court registers the fading impact of the sun and the resulting optical nuances. All the more telling are the narrator's classification of the colors themselves. The shifting shades between the abstract color, "purple," and the organic denotation, "dried blood," or the nuance between "grays" and "pigeon shit," exemplify not only the tension between natural, or rather preindustrial, environments and the technosphere that can be found in the modern metropolis. The use of this optical effect has the further advantage of reminding one that Miller's Paris is always represented in the process of transmutation and thus deliberately discloses the effects of its growing embroilment with modern progress.

A final example demonstrating Miller's subtle use of optical effects to denounce diverging aspects of urban progress can be found in *Quiet Days in Clichy*. This account of Miller's life in Paris is framed by the reminiscences of the first-person narrator, who expresses his frustration about living in New York. Hence, at the outset the topographical place of the narrative alternates between New York and Paris. What in the present context I especially want to stress is how the opening of *Quiet Days in Clichy* exhibits the differences between Paris and New York by limiting its focal point to colors. To begin with, the recollection of his past life in Paris is introduced through the association with the color gray. Miller writes, "[i]t's been a grey day, such as one often sees in Paris." But the narrator immediately reminds us that the gray predominating the urban scenery of New York "has little in common with that *gris* which, to the ears of a Frenchman, is capable of evoking a world of thought and feeling." Meditating on such a blank substance, a mixture of black and white, which both by

definition are not actual colors, Miller still succeeds to evoke the wide range of impressions which characterize "this immense world of grey which I knew in Paris" (*QDC*:5).

From the previously cited instances of urban scenery, it will be apparent that Miller introduces these reflections on the different qualities of gray, not only to stress the sterility of New York as opposed to the multiple sensations evoked by Paris. Sentences like "American painters use this made-to-order grey excessively and obsessively," whereas "[i]n France the range of greys is seemingly infinite" (*QDC*:5), illustrate that industrial progress has not only transformed New York into an austere megalopolis, but that it has also contributed to the narrator's alienation and, as a consequence, to the devitalization of his creative work. That the mechanical wasteland of New York intensifies the artist's sense of alienation and consequently diminishes his or her artistic creativity, is revealed in the following passage:

[In Paris] my day would be over, and I would instinctively set out to mingle with the crowd. Here the crowd, empty of all colour, all nuance, all distinction, drives me in on myself, drives me back to my room, to seek in my imagination those elements of a now missing life which, when blended and assimilated, may again produce the soft natural greys so necessary to the creation of a sustained, harmonious existence. (*QDC*:6)

Familiar themes like isolation, urban anonymity, and devitalization are all epitomized in terms of the observer's optical sensations. The advantage of this focus on colors is that it allows Miller to demonstrate the diverging stages of urbanization that distinguish the two cities. By the same token, the text points out the varying degrees of alienation that these two cities evoke in the narrator. The chosen focus on external rather than conceptual aspects of this urban scenery, permits Miller to register whether artificial or natural phenomena predominate in the two urban contexts. In this way, Miller's urban representations remind us that what basically differentiates the two metropolises is the varying degree of distance that has been established between the city and nature. While in New York only the narrator's "imagination" may provide any kind of organic vitality, Paris is still able to produce "natural" impressions which ultimately grant a "harmonious existence." Nevertheless, by using the color gray as the main subject of his comparison, Miller also insinuates that Paris is by no means a pristine environment. Quite to the contrary, the infinite range of grays may be interpreted as a symbol for the growing urbanization transforming the French capital.

Once the structures of Paris and New York have been exposed and compared, it becomes clear that from Miller's point of view the emergence of the modern metropolis entails a number of distinct phases that reflect the growing distance that culture has established between itself and nature. As a result, most of Miller's fictional accounts of New York are used to forewarn the reader of the disastrous effects of industrial progress. Indeed, the pattern that emerges through examining the two different cityscapes conveys that Miller's American home has become uninhabitable because the relentless pursuit of industrial progress

and urbanization has created an artificial mechanosphere. Miller's description of Broadway, where he can detect "no fire, no heat—it is a brilliantly illuminated asbestos display" (*QDC:7*), perfectly mirrors the artificiality of the modern metropolis. Paris, on the other hand, provides a livable habitat because, its repulsive aspects notwithstanding, Miller discovers there a certain kind of organic connection to the nonhuman world. By comparing Broadway to Montmartre, he reveals that despite the fact that "Montmartre is worn, faded, derelict, nakedly vicious, mercenary, vulgar," it still is "glowing with a smouldering flame" (*QDC:7*). Analogous to previously examined excerpts, Miller metaphorically juxtaposes the natural heat emitted by Paris to the cold electrical imitation of heat that dominates New York.

2.2.2. Diseased Habitats

From the range and variety of urban imagery touched upon thus far, it will be apparent that the city in fiction serves as a useful frame for expressing the crisis of modernity. Regarded as a meaningless habitat, it evokes in artist figures such as the Miller persona or the various protagonists of *The Black Book* rhetorical distress. Regarded as a material representation of the traumatizing rupture with a natural habitat, it influences the individual's physical experience of an increasingly artificial environment. Moreover, by drawing attention to the city's conquest of nature, Durrell and Miller emphasize the artificiality of urban habitats and thus accentuate the city-dwellers' feeling of self-estrangement. After having discussed how these artificial urban environments are used to illustrate the *malaise* of modern life, I now propose to survey the extent to which the nature-culture dualism is present in descriptions of the metropolis that do not primarily thematize urban existence.

It is under the impact of the nature-culture dualism and its resulting environmental degradation that an analysis of modern cityscapes, as they are rendered in Miller and Durrell's novels, brings to light a number of interesting aspects. A comparison of Miller and Durrell's representations of cities, actually shows that both authors operate with the same imagery suggesting that western civilization's technological developments will eventually eradicate 'nature.' Let me therefore briefly enumerate some of the salient features illustrating the destructive trajectory of industrial society. One of the most conspicuous peculiarities highlighting the assumption that cities embody civilization's conquest of nature are the extinguished traces of nature which disfigure both authors' urban descriptions. The various accounts of trees serve as a striking example. Durrell's descriptions, for instance, feature either organically extinct trees, or personified trees which try to escape from the iron grip of the industrial city. Durrell's references to urban plant life include "[c]adaverous [...] trees"

(*BB*:69), as well as trees that "chafe, as if eager to up roots and away" (*BB*:119). By the same token, personified and maimed trees dominate Miller's urban scenery. Into his portrayal of Paris he incorporates, "[i]ntellectual trees, nourished by the paving stones" (*TCN*:45), or "[g]aunt, bare trees mathematically fixed in their iron gates" (*TCN*:73).

Apart from creating a cityscape that is negatively marked by the absence or disappearance of natural organisms, both authors take care to represent industrial progress as a spatially expanding menace. Throughout *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller denounces modern progress by drawing attention to its devastating effects on the environment. Using the previously acknowledged technique of adding up numerous symptoms of industrial progress, Miller writes, "[o]ver all the earth a gray desert, a carpet of steel and cement. Production! More nuts and bolts, more barbed wire [...] more poison gas, more soap [...]" (*TCN*:267). Earlier we noted the rhetorical importance of Miller's use of catalogues in which he lists up items of capitalist overproduction. Their insistence on lexical proliferation symbolizes the uncontrolled expansion of modern progress by refusing closure.

But the omnipresent menace of industrial progress and its continuous transmutation of human and nonhuman environments can also be observed in various other adaptations. Miller's use of personifications represents a further strategy stressing the uncontrollable and menacing effects of progress. As a result, representations of urban sprawl are often illustrated as follows: "[t]he streets turn away on their crooked elbows; [...]. They hobble away [...] uprooting the trees, stiffening the grass, sucking the fragrance out of the earth. Leaves dull as cement" (*TCN*:282-3). Whereas Miller's personifications draw attention to the organically devastating effects of technology, Durrell uses the symbol of roads to dramatize the ever-expanding environmental threat of industrial progress. Contemplations of "this fatal world which you can see if you stand at the window," accordingly, gain dramatic impetus through references to spatial expansion: "[t]he long concrete road, its pure white nap now gouged and muddied by the rubber lips of the buses" (*BB*:28), or "there are only these metal roads along which we scream all night" (*BB*:69).

Although Miller and Durrell's urban imagery convey common preoccupations with the theme of environmental degradation, it is Henry Miller who offers the most frank realization of the gradual extinction of the nonhuman world. In spite of its distinctively urban character we find throughout Miller's work references to the devastating transformations of natural environments. In *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, Miller presents a grim vision of the decaying world by simply reflecting on the "American park." A cultural reconstruction of nature which, according to Miller, "is, as they so rightly call it, 'just a bit of breathing space,' an oasis amidst the stench of asphalt, chemical fumes and stale gasoline" (*ACN*:59-60). But

for Miller it is only a small step from the pollution that envelops the last reproduced signs of nature, as symbolized by the American park, to the complete annihilation that have shaped "Myrtle Avenue," i.e. "one of the innumerable bridled paths ridden by iron monsters which lead to the heart of America's emptiness." On Myrtle Avenue there are no signs of life by "any species of human genius, nor did any flower ever grow there, nor did the sun strike it squarely, nor did the rain ever wash it" (*TCP*:298). Such phrases express how "the magnificent emptiness of progress and enlightenment" (*TCP*:298) create sterile environments which may only be negatively circumscribed by registering the absence of any form of life.

In such ways, these industrial cityscapes manifest an understanding of industrial progress which is based on the extinction of the physical world. Clearly, a preoccupation with environmental degradation is at the heart of Miller's dystopian thinking. These apocalyptic representations of industrial metropolises testify, however, also to an anxiety that Buell describes as a common "fear of environmental poisoning" (2001:33). The sway this fear holds over industrial culture's environmental imagination is adequately expounded by Buell in his *Writing for an Endangered World*. Buell proposes that imagery which uses toxicity as a way of "dramatizing the violence and excess of techno-transformation" (2001:5), should be "discussed as a discourse" (2001:30). This "toxic discourse," he argues, functions "as an interlocked set of topoi whose force derives partly from the anxieties of late industrial culture" (2001:30). Retrospectively then, the kind of toxic environment Miller has created through his "American park" exhibits, likewise, an "anxiety arising from perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification by human agency" (Buell 2001:31).

If instead of focusing only on the way in which Miller's urban imagery reflects culture's negative impact on nature, we recognize the narrator's underlying anxiety about 'environmental poisoning,' it becomes evident that for Miller technological developments risk not only destroying the physical world but also human beings. Once one grasps the implications of toxic discourse within such apocalyptic urban imagery, it becomes easier to see how Miller depicts city-dwellers as organic beings who are psychosomatically, if not physically, endangered by the technological transformations of their habitats. As Buell confirms,

the nature that toxic discourse recognizes as the physical environment humans inhabit is *not* a holistic spiritual or biotic economy but a network or networks within which, on the one hand, humans are biotically imbricated (like it or not), and within which, on the other hand, first nature has been greatly modified (like it or not) by *techne*. (2001:45)⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Buell's explicit emphasis on the technological transformation of first nature is a reaction against "the model often favored by ecocriticism" whose insistence on "'ecological holism' to which acts of imagination have the capacity to (re)connect us," seems to ignore the fact that our most intimate perceptions of the physical world are encounters with a modified nature rather than pristine nature (2001:45).

In accordance with the previously discussed symptoms of pathology, the threat of toxification reinforces the necessity to analyze whether the city as an unsound habitat contributes to the crisis of modernity. For one implication of toxic discourse is that modern progress creates environments that traumatize its denizens, who feel physically threatened by environmental hazards.

Clearly, both the thematization of the *malaise* of modern life as well as the bleak urban imagery that can be found in Miller's novels can be enriched by Buell's concept of "toxic discourse." By examining *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, a text that is ostentatiously about anxieties generated by industrial progress, it becomes obvious that toxic discourse offers a useful frame of reference for articulating the environmental implications of Miller's fiction. However, before looking more closely at Miller's account of his journey through the United States and his discovery of a wide range of environmental degradations, we should give some consideration to the main tenets of Buell's concept of "toxic discourse." To begin with, Buell takes Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) as an example of the effectiveness of toxic discourse to express environmental concerns. On the basis of his observation that "one of the first of its several defining motifs or topoi" is "the shock of awakened perception" (2001:35), Buell examines how other texts, written after and before *Silent Spring*, use similar images of environmental comprehension.

The primary issue that emerges in Buell's analysis of the rhetoric used to describe hazardous environments is the recurrent picture of "an awakening to the horrified realization that there is no protective environmental blanket, leaving one to feel dreadfully wronged" (2001:36). The opening of *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* operates with strikingly similar images. In the preface, Miller explains that initially he had decided to write a book about America because he "felt the need to effect a reconciliation with [his] native land." Miller continues, "I wanted to have a last look at my country and leave it with a good taste in my mouth" (ACN:10). Significantly, Miller's wish to return to his homeland in order to feel reconciled is grounded on a view of America, that Louise Westling finds exemplified by "many central characters in twentieth-century American literature haunted by the lost dream of Eden in the New World" (1996:4). Miller's preliminary remark that "I remember distinctly the thrill I had when putting down such words as Mobile, Suwanee River, Navajos, Painted Desert, the lynching bee, the electric chair" (ACN:10), clearly constructs and finally subverts expectations that Westling describes as a desire to "worship and feel healed in a natural world that is crashing down" (1996:5).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that by featuring Navajos in his list of American subjects that he had intended to write about, Miller seems to thematize what Westling calls "the imperialist nostalgia that has always been at the heart

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Miller's representation of his eventual arrival in America operates with images that may indeed be described as a "shock of awakened perception." Instead of returning to a "lost Eden," Miller returns to a toxic wasteland. Indeed, his account of Boston, his first stop before arriving in New York, dramatizes this cityscape of "railroad tracks, warehouses, factories, wharves," by insisting on the devastating effects of industrialism which have marked his American home. Miller writes, "[i]f I could only have seen a horse or a cow, or just a cantankerous goat chewing tin cans, it would have been a tremendous relief. But there was nothing of the animal, vegetable or human kingdom in sight." Miller awakes to a toxic nightmare, "a vast jumbled waste created by pre-human or sub-human monsters in a delirium of greed" (ACN:11-12). The threatening impact of this hazardous industrial environment is aggravated in New York, where Miller is paralyzed by a "familiar feeling of terror" (ACN:12).

Like Westling, Buell calls attention to the importance of "a long-standing mythography of betrayed Edens" (2001:37) for understanding the implications of such "awakenings," especially when found in American literature. His analysis of this "naïve doublethink that allayed incipient anxieties about the techno-economic progress [...] with escapist fantasies of inexhaustible natural beauty" (2001:37) rearticulates much of Leo Marx's examination of the American pastoral tradition. Marx distinguishes the naïve application of this "doublethink," from the one thematized by "independent-minded creative thinkers like Thoreau and Melville who recognized the inherent contradiction" (Buell 2001:37) between technological progress and the identification of American culture with pastoral values.⁵⁶ "Toxic discourse" then, expresses this awakening from a naïve belief in the compatibility of technological progress and the definition of America on the basis of secure images of pastoral oases.

When Miller condemns the American belief in technological progress he shows an accentuated version of this debate. Miller's awakening to the industrial transmutation of America leads him to question the ideological implications underlying this widespread belief in "pastoral-utopian innocence" (Buell 2001:37). Instead of representing himself as a victim who is mourning a "lost Eden," he takes care to point out the paradoxical arguments sustaining this "naïve" standpoint:

We tell the story as though man were an innocent victim, a helpless participant in the erratic and unpredictable revolutions of Nature. Perhaps in the past he was. But not any

of American pastoral" (1996:52). However, in order not to complicate my line of reasoning, I will return to hegemonic aspects underlying American pastoralism in an ensuing chapter.

⁵⁶ As Buell reminds us, "[t]he predominant mentality Marx terms 'simple pastoral,' the contrarian vision of awakened intellectuals 'complex pastoral'"(2001:37). Leo Marx's theory of the pastoral will be elaborated in an ensuing chapter.

longer. Whatever happens to this earth to-day is of man's doing. Man has demonstrated that he is master of everything—except his own nature. If yesterday he was a child of nature, to-day he is a responsible creature. [...] Destruction now is deliberate, voluntary, self-induced. (*ACN*:175)

The accuracy of Miller's environmental apprehension matters less than his focus on the literary tradition of imagining the human interaction with the physical world. By questioning the traditional adherence to betrayed pastoral promises, Miller problematizes western culture's conceptions of the nonhuman world. From his point of view, the dominant discourse has not only facilitated the ruthless exploitation of nature, but it has also aided industrial societies to deny their responsibility. The "[t]raumas of pastoral disruption" (Buell 2001:37) we find depicted throughout Miller's work, are thus clearly associated with western civilization's exploitative and self-destructive relation to the physical world.

In keeping with the theory of "toxic discourse," Miller's reflections on this disillusionment arising from the trauma of awakened environmental apprehensions, testify not only to the disintegration of environmental imagination, it also expresses a deeply destabilizing concern with environmental degradation. One expression of this anxiety is the apocalyptic imagery Miller uses to dramatize industrial transmutations of the earth. This is a second foundational element of "toxic discourse," which Buell defines as follows: "[d]isenchancement from the illusion of the green oasis is accompanied or precipitated by totalizing images of a world without refuge from toxic penetration" (2001:38). As we have seen, Miller's reference to the "American park" also builds on a symbolical extinction of nature through toxification. If we reconsider this passage in the light of Buell's theory of "toxic discourse," it becomes evident that the "chemical fumes," which invade this last "oasis" (*ACN*:60) or "breathing space" (*ACN*:50), are perceived as a profoundly menacing aspect of metropolitan life.

"Toxic discourse" helps to cast new light on Miller's preoccupation with the technical transformations which have profoundly altered urban habitats. But "toxic discourse" may also be linked the theme of somatic distress, which as Rasula has demonstrated, is based on the anxiety that our human bodies may eventually not be able to adapt themselves to these modern cityscapes. The trauma of being physically unfit to survive in these metropolitan technospheres sustains both Buell's analysis of toxification and Rasula's analysis of Modernist despair. That the city-dwellers in Miller and Durrell's novels suffer from these artificial urban habitats, has been delineated in the preceding analysis of their descriptions of Paris, New York or London. However, it seems to me that the theory of "toxic discourse" helps us to elucidate the frequency with which Miller and Durrell incorporate images of physical decay to describe the urban settings themselves.

In keeping with the previously discussed anxiety about environmental hazard, it is crucial to point out that both Miller and Durrell heighten the effect of their dystopian rhetoric by describing the habitats of their alienated city-dwellers in terms of disease. As noted earlier, the carcinomatous destruction of the body is one of Modernism's favorite metaphors exemplifying their preoccupation with urban sprawl. Hence, when Miller writes, "[t]he city grows like a cancer" (*TCP*: 123), he utilizes a popular simile which expresses the widespread concern about the menacing impact of industrial progress on the deterioration of urban habitats. But Miller and Durrell's descriptions of the disease that disfigures urban environments are by no means restricted to the analogue of cancer and urban growth. Apart from the previously acknowledged symptoms of modernity, we are presented with a multitude of descriptions that rely on the notion of disease to stress the problematic status of urban environments. Durrell, for instance, refers to "long rays of evening paralysis over tenements" (*BB*:55), while sentences such as "[t]he day is sneaking in like a leper" (*TCN*:165), or allusions to "leprous streets" (*TCN*:48) reveal Miller's belief that the natural cycles and habitats are diseased.

Yet even if these examples demonstrate that Durrell and Miller tend to use images of disease to dramatize their dystopian vision of the modern city, it is obvious that if we recognize the similarity between their descriptions and Buell's theory of "toxic discourse" the picture begins to change. Indeed, from an ecocritical perspective we may ask ourselves whether these mutilated cityscapes testify to a concern with environmental pollution and its fatal effects on humanity. The ensuing excerpt demonstrates that the notion of disease is intricately related with industrial transformations of environments:

I am glad I had the chance to see these Ohio towns, this Mahoning River which looks as if the poisonous bile of all humanity had poured into it, though in truth it may contain nothing more evil than the chemicals and waste products of the mills and factories. I am glad I had the chance to see the color of the earth here in winter, a color not of age and death but of disease and sorrow. (*ACN*:32)

Such comments express a concern about the impact of industrial progress on the environment and thus allows us to infer that distorted cityscapes are not merely used to dramatize the city-dweller's dismal experience of urban life. Clearly, underlying the variety of urban forms of disease there is an acute preoccupation with environmental pollution. One might even go so far as to say that the numerous personifications of the metropolis illustrate that these novels exhibit an anxiety about the pathological effects of modern progress that are not limited to the recording of human ailments. Quite to the contrary, personified cityscapes that are imagined in terms of disease, remind us not only of the way in which industrial progress exploit and devastate human and nonhuman environments, but it also draws attention to the fact that we are organically dependent upon our environments. What I am attempting to show is that such

personifications of cities operate with images of organic diseases in order to converge the city as a suffering organism with city-dwellers as embodied beings who fail to physically adapt themselves to their deteriorating urban environments. The omnipresent theme of disease thus raises a number of provocative ideas. For instance, we may speculate whether by establishing a link between human and nonhuman suffering these texts insinuate that as organic beings we must take environmental pollution seriously.

It is also clear that such an understanding of the human interaction with the nonhuman environment is diametrically opposed to the dominant belief that humanity must be defined in contradistinction to nature. Indeed, the common source of distress— i.e. industrial progress— and the congruent pathological reactions, insinuate that the individual's physical apprehension of reality cannot be dissociated from the nonhuman environment. Such seems to be the case for the ensuing description of Paris:

A deep fog has settled down, the earth is smeared with frozen grease. I can feel the city palpitating, as if it were a heart just removed from a warm body. The windows of my hotel are festering and there is a thick, acrid stench as of chemicals burning. Looking into the Seine I see mud and desolation, street lamps drowning, men and women choking to death. [...] The universe has dwindled; it is only a block long and there are no stars, no trees, no rivers. (*TCN*:70)

Although this excerpt bears traces of Miller's experiments with the surrealist trope of the city, which according to Caroline Blinder "constitutes a setting for narratives in which the unconscious is represented as a phantasmagoric landscape" (2000:50), it seems to me that, regardless of the dream-like quality of this urban scenery, "toxic discourse" still establishes the necessary conditions for his vision of the city.⁵⁷ Analogous with the previously analyzed parallels between urban and human disfiguration, Miller fuses here the city and the human being into an image of physical mutilation. However, the city, as a "heart removed from a warm body," does not only hint at the dismal effects of industrial progress. The simile, which eventually merges the city and the human body into one single organism, also illustrates the organic interdependence between human beings and their habitats. By the same token, the symptoms of pollution enfold both the urban environment and its human inhabitants. Enveloped by a "deep fog," the narrator, for instance, observes how the physical world is smothered by the corrosive omissions of industrial production.

The oscillatory movement between the narrator's registering of the way in which he is enclosed by environmental pollution and accounts of the same process affecting the nonhuman environment is even more explicitly expressed in the ensuing reference to the hotel. Here, the notion of the window, which ultimately functions as an artificial barrier

⁵⁷ Blinder's analysis allows recognition of Miller's tentative surrealist trajectories. Yet while her reading of Miller's urban imagery convincingly explores how surrealist tropes helped Miller to express "the city's

between the narrator and the exterior world, is particularly noteworthy. For it is this vitreous boundary, functioning as an interface between the interior space occupied by the observer and the exterior world of the city, which is represented in terms of physical suffering. Even though these "festering" windows should protect the narrator, his senses are exposed to chemical substances all the same. It is crucial to point out that the reference to the odor of these chemicals stresses that the narrator perceives pollution as an invasion of the senses and a menace to his body. Moreover, by applying organic images to the narrator and his environment, the interconnection between these two realms are highlighted. Considering the fact that in this passage Miller stresses the organic disintegration of the boundary—i.e. the windows—between the human and nonhuman world, we may indeed ask ourselves whether this passage should be understood as a subversion of the nature-culture dualism.

The following phrase sustains this reading insofar as it collapses the disintegration of the urban environment and its inhabitants into the image of the polluted Seine, hereby effacing any opposition between human and nonhuman nature. The river, the surrounding cityscape, and the city-dwellers are all going under in an apocalyptic scene of desolation. Whereas at the beginning of this passage we may still observe binary structures, which by spatially opposing the narrator's dwelling to the city, mark a separation between the observer and his environment, the dismal image of the river dilutes any boundaries between nature and culture. Indeed, such sentences insinuate that neither human nor natural organisms are invulnerable to the harmful effects of modern progress. What is more, Miller's deep-rooted anxiety about toxification eventually escalates in an image which transforms the entire universe into an urban wasteland. The final annihilation of nature, symbolized by the lack of trees and rivers, suggests a grim vision of apocalypse that renders any division between nature and culture illusory.

In sum, the primary issues that emerge in Miller's treatment of the notion of disease are all linked to the nature-culture dualism. The first issue bears on aspects of the common pathological suffering exhibited both by city-dwellers and their urban habitats. This view suggests that the dichotomous frame of reference western civilization has established to emancipate itself from nature and to propel progress does not protect modern society from harmful industrial by-products. The second issue reveals a real concern for environmental degradation, which is based on a condemnation of the exploitative attitude of modern culture and seems to operate in accordance with Buell's theory of "toxic discourse." The focus on the nature-culture dualism permits Miller to construct dystopian images of environmental

ephemeral quality" and its "mystical force" (2000:61); this generic approach misses Miller's environmental concerns.

destruction. In point of fact, on the basis of the nature-culture dualism Miller envisions an urbanization of the entire planet.

2.3. Seasonal Dysfunctions and Circular Time

From the preceding analysis of urban scenery we have discerned that anxieties about pollution and its hazardous effects on humanity dominate Miller's thematization of the modern metropolis. As we have learned from Buell's theory of "toxic discourse," descriptions of menacing environments testify to a profound anxiety about the toxicity of such habitats. Yet Miller and Durrell's endeavor to denounce industrial civilization's devastating conquest of nature by accentuating the desperation of city-dwellers can be observed in various other adaptations. A further dominant feature worth considering is centered around the notion of natural cycles. A comparison of Miller and Durrell's texts discloses that both novelists attribute great importance to the cyclical structure of the seasons. With regard to the increasingly artificial environment of the metropolis it is interesting to note that various references to distorted natural cycles occur both in Miller and Durrell's novels. Miller's claim that "[t]he seasons are come to a stagnant stop, the trees blench and wither" (*TCN*:283), is a case in point. Taken as a symptom for environmental degradation such seasonal dysfunctions raise a number of important environmental issues.

It is a truism that "seasons, next to the alternations of day and night, are the environmental cycle most perceptible in everyday life" (Buell 1995:220). That is why Gernot Böhme's thesis is important when he shows that our confidence in the cyclical structure of the seasons and our belief in the reliability of other natural phenomena such as the climate, demonstrate to what extent we conceive of nature as a dependable background for our existence. Indeed, the regenerative capacity of nature is a foundational principle of our most common interactions with the nonhuman environment (Böhme 1992:58). But this imperturbable faith in the cyclical regeneration of the nonhuman environment also draws attention to the fact that as embodied beings, we are alert to processes of growth and decay which remind us that our lives are congruent with the larger rhythms of the environment. Indeed, Buell states that in fiction "seasonal representations tease us toward awareness of ourselves as environmental beings" (1995:251). However, as our industrial society continues to destroy nature as a meaningful habitat, we risk "[losing] direct experience of seasonal changes," which, in turn, raises the question: "how are we [henceforth] to understand growth and decay in ourselves" (Gifford 2000:173). The notion of seasonal dysfunctions, therefore, returns discussion to Scholtmeijer's ecocritical redefinition of alienation. Whereas the notions

of pollution and toxicity has shown that the city constitutes a physically menacing environment, the disappearing patterns of growth and decay, exemplify that artificial environments undermine the human dependence on a meaningful environment for an understanding of the self.

As these reflections on seasonality demonstrate, allusions to distorted natural cycles crystallize a number of relevant aspects regarding our relation to the nonhuman world. Take, for instance, the following excerpt from *The Black Book*:

If spring ever breaks in this district it is with an air of surprised green. A momentous few weeks of fruition in which the little unwary things come out in their defenceless, naïve way. The soot and the metal paralysis soon eat them. The canker of steel rusting slowly in the virginity of the rose. (*BB*:109)

There are several distinct yet related ways to describe the role of such accounts of springtime. In accordance with the previously examined negative impact of industrialism on the physical world, such passages obviously exemplify Durrell's concern with environmental degradation. It hardly needs repeating at this stage that modern progress is described in terms of pathological images which all illustrate how nature's regenerative structures are seriously endangered. Moreover, the subjunctive mood raises doubt about a natural phenomenon which, as Böhme has made clear, is deeply anchored in our environmental perception as a stable component. However, whereas our environmental perception is based on the hope that the biosphere is still intact, for the very reason that seasonal rhythms continue to exist in spite of environmental destruction, Durrell plainly denies this possibility. Indeed, if seasonal changes ever appear in *The Black Book*, they are immediately arrested by the overpowering signs of industrial expansion. In this manner, Durrell undermines our environmental experience to depict a bleak picture of modern life.

In point of fact, a paralyzing atmosphere governs *The Black Book*, where the circular course of nature is reduced to "the doldrum, the icy limbo between seasons, between the new self and the old, between death and the being born" (*BB*:214). This indeterminate comparison between seasonal and organic rhythms of growth and decay converges neatly with Gifford's claim that natural rhythms make us aware of ourselves as environmental beings. In this sense, Durrell's reflections on the decay of the regenerative structures of nature do not simply raise questions concerning environmental degradation. It also draws our attention to the fact that these disintegrating urban habitats propel the city-dwellers' experience of self-estrangement. The theme of seasonality, thus, allows Durrell to thematize the devastating environmental consequences of industrialism, at the same time as it provides a perfect frame of reference to illustrate how modern progress has severed human beings from their natural habitats. Put differently, the distorted seasons emphasize the extent to which modern urban contexts

undermine the city-dwellers' experience of themselves as embodied beings who are determined by the same cyclical patterns as their natural environment.

In like manner, Miller focuses on the seasons either to emphasize how industrial society tampers with the regenerative forces of the physical world, or to simply highlight the symptoms of the diseases caused by industrial progress. Significantly, Miller also pays attention to spring and undermines its connotations with fertility by pointing out that it is "a poisonous, malefic spring that seemed to burst from the manholes" (*TCN*:48). What is more, whereas Durrell raises doubts about the reliability of the cyclical patterns of nature, Miller actually effaces natural phenomena that help distinguishing the different seasons of the year. As a matter of fact, throughout *Tropic of Cancer* there are numerous instances which seem to operate as seasonal representations, but which ultimately refuse categorization. Phrases such as "[t]he rainy season has commenced" (*TCN*:28), confuse the reader's expectations of seasonal representations. Elsewhere, Miller shifts directly from summer to winter by registering how "[t]he rainy season was coming on, the long, dreary stretch of grease and fog and squirts of rain that make you damp and miserable" (*TCN*:221).

The repeated references to dysfunctional seasonal representations certainly emphasize the increasingly devastating effects of industrial progress on the nonhuman environment. They may thus be considered as one of several tools Miller and Durrell use to demonstrate the artificial, and hence alienating quality of the modern metropolis. However, it is important to bear in mind that seasonal representations are rarely found in urban fiction. As Buell reminds us, seasonal representations are primarily used in "[e]nvironmental texts" which "seek to order natural phenomena either as a perceiver might encounter them or as the environment manifests itself" (1995:219). By applying this literary recognition of the natural rhythms to the amorphous cityscapes of modernity, Miller and Durrell add yet another aspect to their thematization of the city's conquest of nature. Nevertheless, to confine the role of the cyclical structures of nature in Miller and Durrell's fiction to an illustration of the city's conquest of nature would be to miss the complexity of the subject matter. Even if attention to natural rhythms perfectly illustrate how urban habitats undermine the essential "synchronization between an organism and the rhythms of its natural environment" (Frye 1969:106), it is of paramount importance to stress that fictional accounts of such phenomena have traditionally used "seasonal categories as loose containers for reflective as well as for descriptive purposes" (Buell 1995:231). Indeed, when critics focus on seasonal representations, as Buell does, they tend to assign high values to the fact that "seasons are also an aesthetic discipline that enforces a certain sense of shape and continuity" (1995:250). As many ecocritics have

pointed out, the assimilation of a book's structure to natural cycles yields "a sense of wholeness, as opposed to the fragmentary time of the city and history" (McDowell 1992:66).

As a matter of fact, it is interesting to note that both Miller and Durrell's novels work toward a similar result. In spite of the fact that the urban context appears to hamper seasonal manifestations to such a degree that they "come and go without any sense of change" (*BB*:22), the structures of *Tropic of Cancer* and *The Black Book* are based on the cyclical design of the seasons. However, before looking more closely at Miller and Durrell's handling of cyclical structures, it seems appropriate to shift emphasis to some general reflections on the Modernist preoccupation with cyclical notions of growth and decay.

The notion of cyclical structures returns discussion to the Modernist sense of crisis which, as we have noted earlier, assumes that modernity constitutes a problematic rupture with "premodern" orders. Recall Rasula's examination of the despair underlying the Modernist venture to come to terms with decaying orders of the past and the superabundance of new emergent symptoms of modernity, and it becomes evident why cyclical structures of regeneration attract the attention of Modernists. To begin with, cyclical structures obviously relativize the "exploitative, linear mentality of forward progress" (Merchant 1993:xxi). As Randall Stevenson has observed, "[t]ime's forward impulse is limited by the cycle" (1992:144). As a consequence, attention to natural cycles may "soothe somewhat the ache of modernism, the lost faith in erstwhile truths, previously assumed as timeless as natural phenomena" (Bulsterbaum 2002:89). To what extent cyclical structures may, indeed, offer a relief from modernity has been elaborated by Northrop Frye, who maintains that "cyclical theories [...] help to rationalize the idea of return" (1969:62). When applied to the trauma of modernity, this idea of a cyclical return promises to yield a new sense of harmony that might substitute the excess of modernity.

As a matter of fact, Frye's thesis that the "abstract structural principle of the cycle" is intricately related with the regenerative hope of rebirth (1969:159), provides a useful context for studying Miller's conceptions of modern art. In *The World of Lawrence*, Miller theorizes that the artist must aspire to embrace cyclical structures in order to create a new vision of the world. Such cyclical structures are obviously not intended to record events that seem to repeat themselves. Quite to the contrary, the visionary gift of the artist should enable him or her to veer the cycle into a new dimension. In other words, the visionary movement idealized by Miller follows the trajectory of a spiral rather than a circle. Accordingly, Miller portrays the artist as somebody who "[b]y his divination of *Being* [...] breaks the time-continuum" and

thus "transcends the dead biological movement of birth and becoming."⁵⁸ To defend the artist's visionary trajectory along its spiral course, Miller insists that "[t]he repetitious cyclical law still operates"; but it "operates on another place," because the artist's "divination" ultimately "provides the axis of a new life" (1980:148).⁵⁹ Miller's vision of the creative act is based on the belief that attention to the cyclical structures of nature is a necessary predisposition for the discovery of a new holistic sense of order.

Miller's desire to use the regenerative patterns of nature as a basis for his endeavor to find an artistic antidote to the disintegrating experience of modern life, seems to be attuned to the Modernist fascination for mythical accounts of natural cycles. Indeed, his focus on the theme of death and rebirth absorbs the mythological lessons of James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. As Robert Crawford has illustrated, Frazer's analysis of various ancient deities of vegetation and rituals which bear witness to the "death and revival of vegetation," had a profound impact on the Modernist struggle with modernity (1990:93). Consequently, gods of vegetation such as Dionysus and Osiris, who were not only "believed to have died a violent death, but to have been brought to life again" (Frazer 1981:322), were often used as perfect symbols for the Modernist struggle with a decaying culture. Moreover, the implicit promise of symbolical rebirth enabled them to imagine a restoration of order.

As we have learned from Rasula's analysis of the traumatic Modernist confrontation with the disintegrating spectacle of modernity, the myth of Osiris is a good example. Osiris, whose severed limbs have been a mythical expression of sowing grain or fertilizing fields (Frazer 1981:306), offers an allegorical representation of the experience of the fragmented patterns of modernity. One sees this in *The Black Book*, which contains several allusions to the myth of Osiris. Consider, for example, Durrell's juxtaposition of the fertility of Egypt to the decay of England:

I am reminded of Ishtar going down every year into the territories underground, the atmosphere of dust and ashes and silence; and the slow vegetative revival of life, the corn springing from the navel of Osiris. [...] The English Seasons, so nostalgic in death, cherishing their decay in heavy loam and delicate rain! (*BB*:121)

Of course it may be argued that this use of the myth of Osiris, the Egyptian god of vegetation, should be interpreted as an symbolical account of the decaying patterns of modernity. Such a reading would deny the ecocritical conclusion that the focus on mythical representations of vegetative patterns are linked to environmentalist preoccupations. However, the fact that

⁵⁸ Italics in original.

⁵⁹ Such a vision of art endows the artist with divine capacities of creation. Miller's idealization of the artist is often described as follows: "[the artist's] appearance is always synchronous with catastrophe and dissolution; he is the cyclical being which lives in the epicycle" (*TCP*:320). However, Miller's understanding of the artist as a god, who destroys old worlds in order to create new ones, does not appear pivotal to my discussion. Even if Miller's theories use the natural world as an analogy with the work of art such reflections seem less relevant to environmentalist preoccupations than other aspects sustaining his critique of modern progress.

Durrell and other Modernists use myths which are based on regenerative cycles of growth and decay, suggests that the focus on nature as an antidote to modernity is not only used for its symbolical potential. In this sense, it seems to me that even if the myth of Osiris is used as an allegorical representation of the experience of modernity, the problematic relation between modern culture and nature remains at the heart of such representations.

That much of the Modernist concern with seasonal cycles derives from industrial civilization's problematic relation to nature is laid bare by Northrop Frye. He examines the impact of Spengler on Modernist artists whose representations of "civilized life is frequently assimilated to the organic cycle of growth, maturity, decline, death, and rebirth." Frye maintains that such cyclical structures, often glorify the past by bemoaning the loss of "pastoral simplicity," or else, thematize "a millennium in the future" (1969:160). In this view, cyclical structures are intertwined with a critique of modernity which casts doubt on the civilizing processes and its inherent separation from nature. From Miller and Durrell's recourse to organicist themes touched upon thus far, it will be apparent that their thematization of urbanism and industrial progress exemplifies this questioning of the civilizing process. However, in order not to complicate matters I will return to the question whether Miller and Durrell aspire to return to a sense of pastoral harmony and carry the argument further in an ensuing chapter.

What in the present context I especially want to stress about the cyclical structures which shape Miller and Durrell's texts, is that they function as a corrective to the previously analyzed dysfunctional accounts of the seasons. By opposing cyclical structures of artistic creation to the distorted natural cycles of urban environments, Miller and Durrell's text seem to strive for a universal antidote to the *malaise* of modern life. In point of fact, most of Miller's novels operate with cyclical patterns that undermine any principle of narrative linearity. When these circular patterns of time are associated with numerous seasonal representations—as it is the case in *Tropic of Cancer*—we may indeed infer that the theme of regenerative rhythms of nature serves as a foundation for Miller's attempt to heal not only himself, as an embodied being living in a diseased habitat, but also his art. Similarly, Durrell's artistic project seems to comply with the hypothesis that cyclical structures are used as a remedy to heal what Rasula calls the Modernists' "damaged media" (1999:156). As Sharon Lee Brown has observed, the entire oeuvre of Durrell is centered around cyclical theories. She maintains that "[t]he form Durrell believed best suited to convey this cyclic motion was the trilogy or tetralogy" (1967:321). As critics like to point out, Durrell's most widely acknowledged work—i.e. *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957-60)—operates with such a cyclical design. Nevertheless, cyclical theories have not only determined the structural characteristics

of Durrell's advanced novels. It is important to stress that Durrell had initially intended to integrate *The Black Book* into a trilogy.⁶⁰ In a letter written in March 1937, Durrell tells Miller: "I have planned AN AGON, A PATHOS, AN ANAGNORISIS? If I write them they should be: The Black Book, The Book of Miracles, The Book of the Dead." (MacNiven 1989:65).⁶¹

Even if at first sight this reflection on narrative design seems to lack any associative link with the theme of the organic process of growth and decay, Northrop Frye's study of cyclical patterns in literature helps us to establish this connection. His definition of the very terms that Durrell applies, reveals that underlying the structure of this classical form of romance there is a cyclical design. Frye alludes to this circular structure, when he explains that the classical theme of the quest is based on three stages which are best described by applying the corresponding Greek terms "the *agon* or conflict, the *pathos* or death-struggle, and the *anagnorisis* or discovery."⁶² If the final stage of the quest—i.e. discovery—is understood in terms of a rebirth, the circular pattern of this theme becomes evident. What is more, Frye emphasizes the analogy between the narrative design and seasonality by insisting that the general development of the quest is often assimilated with the "opposite poles of the cycles of nature." The hero is associated with spring, while the enemy is described in terms of winter (Frye 1969:187).

By comparing the structural design of the theme of the quest with Durrell's allusion to the myth of Osiris—i.e. a god of vegetation following the same path of struggle, destruction and rebirth—we may discern that the notion of the regenerative patterns of nature are indeed of paramount importance for Durrell's literary project. This is particularly true if we consider that Durrell's quest is intricately related with his attempt to heal the diseases of modernity. This line of reasoning returns discussion to Pelletier's analysis of Durrell's preoccupation with the creative act of writing. As I have suggested in chapter 1, Pelletier argues that Durrell uses the theme of the quest to dramatize his understanding of writing as a creative act which, if successful, revitalizes the artist and restores literary authenticity. Durrell's quest for authenticity follows the same natural patterns of decay and growth. As a result, allusions to the rhythms of nature and cyclical structures of creation are dispersed throughout *The Black Book*. The central function of these notions is laid bare in the very first sentences of the novel: "The *agon*, then. It begins." (BB:19). This elliptic opening already evokes the cyclical course of Durrell's creative project. By confining the conflict to the past, the writing of the novel

⁶⁰ Considering the fact that during World War II, Durrell's literary production had almost ceased, we may speculate that it was the historical circumstances which prevented the completion of Durrell's initial project.

⁶¹ Capitals in original.

⁶² Italics in original.

itself is understood in terms of a rebirth, or a resurrection of the artist who after having suffered from existential dilemmas succeeds in creating something new. Durrell's allusions to his vision of art thus often refer to the same cyclical patterns: "I tell myself continually that this must be something without beginning, something which will never end, but conclude only when it has reached its own genesis again" (*BB*:66).

Also, congruent with Frye's analysis of the traditional theme of the quest, Durrell validates spring over winter. Indeed, spring and winter form the climactic poles of *The Black Book's* struggle with modernity. Hence, the narrator never ceases to associate winter with "the panic world" which "is quite done for, quite used up and lost" (*BB*:20). Winter, in other words, symbolizes the "English Death" and, as a consequence, is condemned as "the season we all hate so much" (*BB*:22). By contrast, spring evokes notions of creativity. However, compared to the crushing impact of winter, the regenerative force of spring is so feeble that it already begins to fade in the summer. Lawrence Lucifer, for instance, states that "I could not have begun this act in the summer," because "[t]he sun dries up what is fluid of agony in us, laps us in a carapace of heat, so that all we know is nothing" (*BB*:20). Such comments stress the analogy of Durrell's literary project with natural cycles of regeneration. At the same time, it emphasizes his preoccupation with organicism and his belief that nature as a model may offer a solution to his conviction that both the artist and art need to be revitalized.

2.3.1. Oriental Time and Western Concepts of Linearity

The complexity of Durrell and Miller's use of seasonal representations reveals that cyclical structures are of paramount importance for their artistic projects. As we have seen, distorted natural rhythms are used to exemplify the extent to which modern culture has created unnatural habitats and to remind us that we are environmental beings whose sense of self is dependent on a meaningful environment. To complicate matters further, Durrell and Miller's exploration of cyclical structures are intertwined with a number of reflections on the creative process. These reflections, in turn, reveal that cyclical structures do not merely provide a framework for discussing abstract thoughts on creativity. Cyclical structures are also of paramount importance for the narrative design and the handling of time in the novels of Durrell and Miller. As a matter of fact, in addition to stressing the importance of cyclical structures Miller has made clear that in his novels he has "chosen to adopt a circular or spiral form of time development which enables me to expand freely in any direction at any given moment." Miller's diagnosis is that "[t]he ordinary chronological time development seems to me [...] artificial, a synthetic reconstitution of the facts of life" (Moore 1964:120).

By casting doubt on the artificiality of linear conceptions of time, Miller expresses a widespread concern about traditional understandings of this issue. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there are two foundational pillars upon which a radically new understanding of time rests. One is modern physics whose most fundamental laws have been restructured by Einstein. The other is biology for which Darwin's theory of evolution has provided a theoretical framework for rethinking the common ground of human and nonhuman history. Both theories have contributed to introduce a new dimension of flux to the traditional understanding of time. For the purpose of this chapter Albert Einstein rouses our interest in particular. For it was due to Einstein, who "challenged the Newtonian view of absolute time and space with his 'special theory of relativity'"(Abram 1997:204), that a completely new understanding of time emerged. As Brian Greene explains, Einstein's theory of relativity has "completely overturned the traditional notions of space and time and replaced them with a new conception whose properties" are often in discord with common experience (2000:23). Indeed, our perceptual experience of time and space fails to grasp the conclusions which "emerge from Einstein's reworking" of these notions "as malleable constructs whose form and appearance depend on one's state of motion" (Greene 2000:5). Nevertheless, even if Einstein's theory of a unitary continuum which he termed "space-time," is a "highly abstract concept unthinkable apart from the complex mathematics of relativity" (Abram 1997:204), its impact on Modernism should not be underestimated. Randall Stevenson stresses that the spectacular discoveries of modern physics encouraged Modernists to develop a suspicion towards "conventional views of time." This evolving understanding of time and space incited Modernists to challenge "any means by which consciousness envisages and establishes its place within nature" (1992:109).⁶³

Yet, there remains another aspect of time that deserves critical attention. It is important to emphasize that Miller and Durrell's interest in these issues cannot be reduced to the popularity of Einstein's insights. As a matter of fact, it seems to me that eastern philosophies such as Zen Buddhism and Taoism, are particularly relevant to understanding how Miller and Durrell's specific views of time came to be conceptualized. Hence, before looking more closely at Durrell and Miller's handling of time, we should give some consideration to some of the eastern philosophies which fascinated both Miller and Durrell.⁶⁴

⁶³ In *A Key to Modern British Poetry*, Lawrence Durrell draws attention to the fact that Einstein's theory of relativity and other scientific discoveries have inspired Modernists to rethink their conceptions of time. Durrell, thus, theorizes that "[w]e have seen how time as history received its deathblow from geology and Darwin; now we see that time as process, as extension along a series of points, has been halted, has been, so to speak, dammed up" (1952:36).

⁶⁴ Miller and Durrell's belief in eastern philosophies is a vast subject. As my approach to this issue is based on a definition of time as a phenomenon that can be understood in cyclical terms, I have limited this study to a brief

The distinction between western and nonwestern conceptions of time is worth making. While western time is based on a linear trajectory of progress, to many nonwestern cultures "the ceaseless flux that we call 'time' is overwhelmingly cyclical in character" (Abram 1997:185). David Abram has examined the assumptions of some nonwestern understandings of time, noting that "[t]ime, in such a world, is not separable from the circular life of the sun and the moon, from the cycling of the seasons." And he adds that this sense of time implies that "to fully engage, sensorially, with one's earthly surroundings is to find oneself in a world of cycles within cycles" (1997:185-6). Such comments reinforce the necessity to examine whether Miller and Durrell's fascination for oriental philosophies had any impact on their reflections on the subject of cyclical time.

As we have seen, Miller attempted to replace traditional notions of sequential time with cyclical structures. From his point of view, cyclical structures do not merely provide a more adequate tool to express the fluid dimension of experiential reality. Cyclical time also appears to be less artificial than western conceptions of linear time. His endeavor to grasp the flow of life is especially noteworthy. For it is the idea of a ceaseless state of flux which ultimately also helps us to elucidate both Miller's preoccupation with eastern philosophy and his perception of time. In point of fact, this state of flux is of paramount importance for an oriental vision of the world. As Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki's influential study, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, has demonstrated, the concept of constant change is an essential element of Zen. Suzuki explains that to understand the essence of Zen it is necessary to recognize that "anything that has life in it is an organism, and it is in the very nature of an organism that it never remains in the same state of existence" (1964:32). Accordingly, he reminds us that since "Zen aims at preserving your vitality [...] and above all the completeness of your being" (1964:64), the fundamental "idea of Zen is to catch life as it flows" (1964:75). It is this insistence on organic analogies to express the ceaseless flow of time that distinguishes a Zen Buddhist understanding of temporality from western conceptions. Indeed, since Aristotle advocated that time "is what is counted whenever we measure a movement between earlier and later moments of its unfolding," the western sense of time has become "inseparable from number and sequence" (Abram 1997:198). From a Zen Buddhist perspective, however, the

sketch of oriental conceptions of time which seem to have influenced both Miller and Durrell. That is to say, the comprehensive enquiry this subject deserves can not be provided. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Miller's wide-ranging interest in eastern philosophies contain two focal points. On the one hand, he admires the philosophy of Lao-Tse, and, on the other, he is devoted to Zen Buddhism. His correspondence with Durrell contains many allusions to his belief that "Zen is my idea of life absolutely—the closest thing to what I am unable to formulate in words" (MacNiven 1989:122). In the letters which were eventually published as *Art and Outrage* (1959), Miller also states that Lao-Tse has profoundly influenced his vision of the world (MacNiven 1989:314). Durrell's letters reveal a clear preference for Lao-Tse's philosophy of the Tao. Durrell's book, *A Smile in the Mind's Eye* (1980), allows recognition of his fascination for Taoism.

flow of life and the inherent experience of temporality cannot be abstracted into a series of fragmented phases. Quite to the contrary, Zen's insistence on the flow of life refutes such western notions of linear time.

Also Cyrille Javary's study of the *Yi Jing*, one of the most important texts of classical Chinese philosophy, shows that the Chinese sense of time differs fundamentally from western perceptions of sequential time. Javary stresses that change constitutes the sole universal law accepted by Chinese philosophy. It is therefore crucial to note that while sequential time is merely a distance between the past and the present, time conceived as ceaseless change validates the present as a foundational element of reality. Yet another point worth considering is that the notion of change can be linked to the theme of seasonality. Significantly, in the *Yi Jing* the seasons of the year exemplify the law of change insofar as their perpetual transformations perfectly illustrate the flux of time. Change thus seems to be intricately related with cyclical, or nonlinear, conceptions of time.⁶⁵

In Taoism such nonlinear perceptions represent the very essence of this philosophy. In the *Te-Tao Ching*, Lao-Tse teaches the philosophy of the "Tao," or the "Way," which is a reality that cannot be expressed in words. This reality is based on the oneness in all things and thus constitutes a dimension beyond any differentiation. Peter Mathiessen describes the "Tao" as a vision that allows the disciple of Taoism to grasp the essence of things. Mathiessen explains that "classical Chinese philosophy names" this desire to achieve a total experience "the interior way 'Tao,' and likens it to a flow of water that moves irresistibly towards its goal" (1998:50). Mathiessen's comment reminds us that nature plays a very important role in Taoism. Yet it is important to stress that nature is not only used to provide analogies. On the contrary, to experience the Tao means to be one with nature, i.e. to allow the inner self and the physical world to dissolve. But the image of the river also deserves attention because it is intricately intertwined with important concepts like fluidity and change. From the Taoist point of view then, the flux of life can only be circumscribed as a constantly changing reality.

All these features—the idea of fluidity and change, the importance of the present moment, and the necessity to perceive oneself as an integral part of nature—link Taoism to Zen Buddhism (at least from a western perspective). For this sort of framework sustains both the Taoist and Zen Buddhist endeavor to obtain a total experience, or what C.G. Jung calls a "*Ganzheitserlebnis*" (1964:26).⁶⁶ These parallels become evident when we consider

⁶⁵ Although Javary's study explores the complexity of the notion of time and duration as it is presented in the *Yi Jing*, the purpose of this brief reference to Chinese conceptions of time is to emphasize Javary's conclusion that "[v]oilà qui est net, la seule chose qui dure, c'est que tout change toujours tout le temps. [...] Le changement est la seule loi immuable dans tout l'univers" (1989:23).

⁶⁶ In his "Foreword" to Suzuki's *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, C.G. Jung stresses that the Oriental endeavor to experience the oneness in all things is based on conceptions which are "so very different from our Western ones

Mathiessen's attempt to describe the Zen Buddhist vision of a complete experience in which "the individual existence, ego, the 'reality' of matter and phenomena are no more than fleeting and illusory arrangements of molecules." When successful, this experience undermines elements which prop up individual existence to such a degree that they "may suddenly fall away, dissolve into formless flux where concepts such as 'death' and 'life,' 'time' and 'space,' 'past' and 'future' have no meaning. There is only a pearly radiance of Emptiness, the Uncreated, without beginning, therefore without end" (1998:90).

For Taoism, on the other hand, the goal to become one with the universe can only be reached by dismissing any selfish desires to interfere with the course of things. Taoism thus demands that virtuous people should act without acting. To put it very simply, Taoism stresses the importance of merging the self with the flowing totality of the immediate reality, hereby accepting to fully experience the oneness in all things. Zen Buddhism and Taoism alike are based on a vision of the world that dissolves past and future into an immediate present, or, to use Mathiessen's terms, a "formless flux." As such, they are diametrically opposed to western civilization's dichotomous understanding of the world. This total experience embraces both space and time in a manner that may hardly be compared to the western understanding that space and linear time constitute two distinguishable realms.

The preceding accounts of Taoist and Zen Buddhist visions of the world and their conception of time is obviously a crude simplification of the actual philosophical debate. But I have primarily tried to delineate some basic elements of Taoism and Zen in order to cast new light on Miller and Durrell's handling of time. That Miller was influenced by oriental philosophies can be observed throughout his oeuvre. The central function of eastern notions of fluidity and change is, for instance, laid bare in Miller's often-quoted statement, "I too love everything that flows: rivers, sewers, lava, semen, blood, bile, words, sentences" (*TCN*:258). It is difficult to overstate the significance of the fluid quality of reality that Miller illustrates in this and numerous other celebrations of rivers, which in general tend to evoke a "great exultation" (*TCN*:73) in the narrator. Such celebrations of rivers and fluidity are clearly reminiscent of the river symbolizing the Tao. Yet it is equally important to emphasize that Miller's aforementioned attempt to create a description that mirrors the formless flux of reality radiates a nondualistic vision of the world. Note, for instance, that his celebration of fluidity includes natural and cultural elements. By using, in the passage above, the stylistic figure of the list to grasp the formless flux of reality, Miller creates an image of the world that refuses to be separated into nature and culture. In other words, when Miller applies the Taoist

that even the very translation of the words brings one up against the greatest difficulties." He quotes the "Tao" as an example that refutes translation and adds that "[t]he original Buddhist writings themselves contain views and

or Zen Buddhist concept of complete experience, he does not only dissolve elements such as rivers, sewers and semen into a constantly changing totality, but he also abandons the dualistic substructures of the dominant discourse.⁶⁷

Further evidence of Miller's absorption of the teachings of Zen and Taoism presents itself in numerous reflections on time. Consider, for instance, his remark that "[w]e are here of the earth never to end, the past never ceasing the future never beginning, the present never ending" (*BS*:26). Such examples should suffice to demonstrate that the concept of the universe as a formless flux, which as Mathiessen has explained effaces space and time, seems to have influenced Miller's understanding of time. Clearly, the emphasis in these quotations is upon the immediacy of the moment as it is experienced when the universe is envisioned as a constantly changing totality. By letting the past and the present dissolve, Miller yearns for a pure present which eclipses western notions of historical time. In this sense, Miller's repeated exclamations as, for instance, "[n]o past, no future. The present is enough for me. Day by day. Today! *Le bel aujourd'hui!*" (*TCN*:57), demonstrates that eastern conceptions of time may help to elucidate Miller's celebration of the present. Another point worth considering, then, is the extent to which the question of temporality has influenced his own handling of narrative time. As has been noted earlier, Miller has replaced the traditional linear flow of the narrative and its inherent chronological order with spiral or circular developments. Thus, when he additionally stresses that "I had just made the realization that life is indestructible and that there is no such thing as time, only the present" (*TCP*:287), it becomes evident that Miller's concern with eastern conceptions of temporality has also shaped his own poetic practice.

With regard to Miller's handling of time, Tony Tanner has made clear that Miller practices an extreme form of temporal denial and consequently seems to conceive of "life as an unrelated experience of spasmodic 'nows'" (1987:43).⁶⁸ Indeed, arising from Miller's nonlinear recording of incidents and events there is an impression of chaos and spontaneity. Time in Henry Miller's novels "moves obedient to the rhythm of emotions, not the logic of

ideas which are more or less unassimilable by the average Western understanding" (1964:9).

⁶⁷ One might even go so far as to develop a link between Miller's celebrations of rivers and other fluid phenomena to the previously examined cyclical theories. As Northrop Frye has observed, "[w]ater-symbolism has also its own cycle" (1969:160) and thus can be linked to the literary use of the cyclical course of the seasons. Clearly, the common denominator characterizing Miller's encomium of fluidity is that they depend on cyclical courses of development.

⁶⁸ Tony Tanner's immensely suggestive study of American conceptions of space and time uses Miller as an example for the denial of memory which seems to be a symptomatic feature of American literature. Tanner explains that this "flight from the past which is a flight out of time" and, as a consequence, a flight into space, has its roots in the experience of American wilderness. However, Tanner raises the doubt "whether the pure present, a series of spatial moments utterly cut off from the past, can mean anything at all" (1987:43). But while Tanner's exploration of American concepts of time and space raises a number of highly provocative ideas, I believe that Tanner's interpretation of Miller misses the subtlety with which Miller opposes eastern concepts of nonlinear time to the western belief in linear time.

history" (Hassan 1967:66), and thus seems to undermine the basic frame of reference which supports the western sense of sequential time. As pointed out by Hassan, "chance and improvisation," as well as a refusal to rely on "order imposed or discovered" govern Miller's texts. As a result, Miller's textual characteristics are "non-telic; its world is the eternal present" (1967:13). Ultimately, it is exactly in this respect that a consideration of eastern conceptions of time offers a promising latitude to analyze Miller's peculiar concern with temporality. Therefore, I would like to suggest that Miller's reflections on this subject such as "[t]he hero, then, is not Time, but Timelessness" (*TCN*:9), should be read in terms of Miller's assimilation of the eastern yearning to capture the flow of life, rather than in terms of western conceptions of logical sequence and linear time.⁶⁹

Eastern philosophies have also shaped Lawrence Durrell's vision of the world. However, even though the distinction between eastern and western concepts of temporality may serve as a useful frame for thinking about Durrell's preoccupation about time and space, the impact of Taoism on questions of time is rarely recognized in critical examinations of his work. Given the fact that Durrell's later work—e.g., *The Alexandria Quartet* or *The Avignon Quintet*—absorbs the lessons of Einstein's theory of relativity, it is little wonder that critics have often focused on the notion of space-time for articulating the theoretical implications of Durrell's fictional practices. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that already in *The Black Book*, Durrell tries to rethink western notions of linear time and chronological order in terms of alternative methods of nonlinear narrative time. Sharon Lee Brown has maintained that in *The Black Book*, Durrell "appears to be working toward a conception of time which is basically Einsteinian," i.e. time is understood "as an indissociable dimension of space" (1967:321). But while I believe that Lee Brown's suggestion is correct, the influence of Taoism should not be neglected. Indeed, against the background of the preceding delineation of eastern conceptions of time, it seems probable that Durrell's understanding of these issues has been shaped by Taoism as much as by Einstein's discoveries.

As mentioned above, from Durrell's highly diversified influences, we may discern a sincere fascination for the Taoist philosophy taught by Lao-Tse. In a letter to Miller, tentatively dated August 1936, Durrell deduces from Lao-Tse that art should be defined as "pure selfless action." As a consequence he stresses that the goal of the artist is "[t]o be spatialised. TO BE WITHOUT MEMORY. To flow from the original spring of living—not

⁶⁹ I am, of course, aware that the preceding examination of Miller's use of time does not embrace the profundity of this subject. However, as I want to approach the matter from a slightly different angle, I have decided to limit my analysis to an investigation of the way in which alternative conceptions of time may challenge our environmental imagination.

writing" (MacNiven 1989:19).⁷⁰ Congruent with Miller's attention to eastern perceptions of the world, Durrell's interest in Taoism leads to explicit reflections upon time and space. Like Miller, Durrell works towards a vision of experience which validates the pure present, or what he describes as being "without memory" over historical considerations. By contrast, however, he exhibits a particular understanding of space. David Abram's exploration of nonlinear conceptions of time, which replace sequential time with the pure present, helps elucidate the important connection between space and nonlinear time. Abram observes that when "the past and the future [...] dissolve, imaginatively, into the immediacy of the present moment, then the 'present' itself expands to become an enveloping field of *presence*" (1997:203).⁷¹ Space thus becomes an integral part of the experience of time.

The Taoist idea of total experience may help us to understand why *The Black Book* operates with a "cyclical time scheme" that reinforces the idea of "simultaneity" (Levitt 1967:312), while at the same time it accentuates spatial rather than temporal dimensions.⁷² The aforementioned letter to Miller reveals the general framework of Durrell's ideas on temporality. He continues his thoughts on this issue as follows:

I have discovered that the idea of duration is false. We have invented it as a philosophic jack-up to the idea of physical disintegration. THERE IS ONLY SPACE. [...] Time, that old appendix, I've lopped off. So it needs a new attitude. An attitude without memory. A spatial existence [...]. (MacNiven 1989:19)⁷³

The problem with this "attitude without memory" is that it obviously does not eliminate time, as this passage might suggest. But it establishes a new perception of nonlinear time that replaces memory, or the past with the pure present. Durrell thus converts the Tao—i.e. an experience of space and time that instead of separating these two realms perceives them as intertwined aspects of a physical present—into a more complex image of the universe.

In order to achieve the effacement of memory, Durrell's handling of time tries to eliminate the historical dimension by exclusively using the present tense. Both narrators—i.e. Lawrence Lucifer as well as Death Gregory—allude to this particular understanding of temporality which they alternately call "the historic present" (*BB*:74) and the "gnomic aorist" (*BB*:42).⁷⁴ As a consequence, the text establishes a form of synchronic time that relates past

⁷⁰ Capitals in original.

⁷¹ Italics in original.

⁷² David Abram's analysis of nonlinear concepts of time illustrates why the concept of space is of paramount importance for cyclical time. He insists that "[u]nlike linear time, time conceived as cyclical cannot be readily abstracted from the spatial phenomena that exemplify it—from, for instance, the circular trajectories of the sun, the moon, and the stars. Unlike a straight line, moreover, a circle demarcates and encloses a spatial field" (1997:188-9).

⁷³ Capitals in original.

⁷⁴ Both terms reflect Durrell's concern with time. However the latter designation, "gnomic aorist," seems to reflect his thought on duration in particular. Both, the "gnome" as an aphorism which avoids the implication of time to express a general truth, and the "aorist" as a particular form of the past tense found in Greek which lacks any reference to duration, reveal the structural principle of Durrell's handling of time.

and present events in the present tense, hereby effacing any clear historical distinctions. As Middleton has observed, in Durrell's narrative "time is treated subjectively. Things, that is, do not happen in their chronological order." Rather than developing a "straightforward presentation of events in the preterite tense," Durrell demands that the reader must engage with the narrator's subjective and indeterminate "reconstruction of the past" (1987:17). Moreover, the impression of simultaneity is additionally intensified by the interpolation of extracts from Death Gregory's diary.⁷⁵ In this manner, Durrell's use of the "historic present" allows him to undermine the linear sequence that distinguishes the realistic novel, which as Lodge has explained is "based on a linear concept of history" and therefore favors a "linear plot" (1977:50). But the Taoist background of Durrell's reflections on time also insinuates that such a perception of simultaneity subverts binary structures and, therefore, should be understood in terms of the Taoist desire to experience the oneness in all things. For the idea of simultaneity is tantamount to the Taoist belief that a total experience implies an effacement of any differentiation between human identity and other components of nature. That is to say, space, time, and the individual merge into an image of the universe whose sole attribute is constant change. It hardly needs repeating at this stage that this fusion of elements can only be experienced in, what Hassan has termed, the "eternal present."

Ultimately, notions, such as synchronic time and the Taoist idea of total experience, constitute crucial elements of what Durrell calls the "Heraldic Universe." Critics usually assume that Durrell's "Heraldic Universe" forms the basic framework for his vision of art. As Ray Morrison has observed, "[t]o delineate Heraldic Reality, Durrell selects certain metaphors from Taoism that he links with space-time" (1987:506). Accordingly, Morrison describes the "Heraldic Universe" as a vague concept revealing Durrell's "preoccupation with a mystical unity resting behind phenomena and lives, which he delineates through a confluence of Eastern metaphysics and Western physics" (1987:500). Broadly speaking, it may be said that the "Heraldic Universe" tries to capture the moment of artistic creation in terms of Taoist assumptions of total experience. These thoughts seem to prop up various reflections of *The Black Book's* artist figures. Lucifer, for instance, writes, "I live only in my imagination which is timeless. Therefore the location of this world, which I am trying to hammer out for you on a blunt typewriter [...] is the location of space merely" (*BB*:56). Lawrence Lucifer, as narrator and artist, seems to insinuate that what he endeavors to create

⁷⁵ Hartwig Isernhagen points out that in *The Black Book* we find "three levels of reality: Corfu, at the time of writing; London, at the time of reading Gregory's diary; London, at the time of Gregory's writing this diary. The first two are connected in time, as the narrator relives his London experiences in the act of writing, the second two in space, by having the same locale" (1969:55).

in literature is congruent with the Tao, that is, a reality that contains the essence of all things as they are united in a total universe.

Given the fact that the Tao cannot be expressed in words, it is interesting to note that the designation "heraldic" also insinuates that Durrell desires to establish a "mode of perception highly attuned to symbolic modes of meaning" (David Woods 1990:105). In this respect, Donald Kaczvinsky has made clear that the term "*heraldic* suggests a transforming of imaginative or mystical experience that gives meaning to one's private life, and can be best represented through emblems of symbols arranged spatially, like the devices in heraldry" (1995:35).⁷⁶ This is a complex matter, but for the moment one aspect of the Heraldic Universe is most pertinent, i.e. the timeless quality of this mode of perception. Clearly the attempt to replace linear time with spatial arrangements of heraldic symbols implies that Durrell's perception of the world is based on radically different notions of time and space than the ones prevailing in western civilization's understanding of the world.

Therefore, to come back to our point, I propose that this brief discussion of Durrell's "Heraldic Universe" helps us to fathom Durrell's vision of the world. From Durrell's attempts to rethink western constructions of linear time and static space, we may discern that "Heraldic Reality" is linked to environmental preoccupations. Clearly, the desire to achieve a total experience is based on an understanding of humanity's place in nature which hardly bears any resemblance with western civilization's tendency to define itself in contradistinction to nature. Of particular interest for an ecocritical reading of Durrell's fiction is the fact that his focus on cyclical structures and nonlinear time enables him to contemplate several environmental issues. On the one hand, it draws attention to modern culture's increasing alienation from the regenerative patterns of the nonhuman world. This view assumes that metropolitan life undermines the individual's understanding of his or her interdependence with the physical world. On the other hand, it questions western concepts of time and space and its inherent binary structures. The remarkable fact about the "Heraldic Universe" then, is that it offers a new approach to the crisis of modernity. Its basic premises such as direct experience and the pure present, may be understood as an antidote to the alienation caused by western civilization's dichotomous understanding of nature. Indeed, with his concept of the "Heraldic Universe" Durrell intends, I think, to subvert binary oppositions in order to re-establish a connection between the individual and his or her human and nonhuman environment. As

⁷⁶ Once the basic contours of the "Heraldic Universe" have been exposed it becomes clear that Durrell's concept amalgamates a variety of reflections on nonlinear or synchronic time, experience and creation, while at the same time it entails a reevaluation of symbols and myths. This brief reference to the "Heraldic Universe" therefore should reveal that it is a very complex subject. Hence, in order not to complicate matters further I will come back to the mythical dimension of the Heraldic Universe in a ensuing chapter.

Christopher Burns suggests, Durrell uses the "Heraldic Universe" in order to present a vision of the world which is based on "the full consciousness of the universe and one's self within that universe" (1967:377).

Whereas the preceding examination of "toxic discourse" has revealed that pollution is perceived as a menacing aspect of industrialism, Durrell and Miller's questioning of linear concepts of time has laid bare additional facets sustaining the problematic nature of modern life. Although the ecocritical trend has been to emphasize the importance of space, it is crucial to note that a critical assessment of western concepts of time may also elucidate our problematic relation to nature. As Michel Serres has demonstrated, conceptions of time have a deep impact on the understanding of humanity's relation to the nonhuman world. In his study, entitled *L'incandescant*, he argues that western conceptions of time and space have contributed to our estrangement both from the earth and from ourselves as beings whose evolutionary past links us genetically to the biosphere. Accordingly, Serres argues that as human organisms we are physically enmeshed in temporal and spatial dimensions of the world that cannot be reduced to our limited view of history.⁷⁷ For Serres, the problem with the western understanding of historical or linear time, is that it confines its scope to the history of western culture. Such a limited definition of history is, of course, based on anthropocentric (as well as Eurocentric) premises. The denial of the history of the earth and our implication in its evolutionary developments leads, according to Serres, to an estrangement from the world, life, and 'human nature.'⁷⁸ Therefore, he raises the question whether this amnesiac understanding of time incites us to forget our vital connection to the earth. From Serres's point of view then, enculturation has not only estranged us from the physical world, it has also contributed to the fact that we understand ourselves as cultural beings rather than natural beings. Indeed, Serres goes so far as to maintain that western culture's distorted relation to time has turned human beings into 'monsters of oblivion,' and thus wonders whether we should redefine the human species as "*Homo negligens*" (2003:66).⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Serres's critique of time, or history, takes into account the individual's sense of temporality, as well as the individual's genetic heritage that due to biological evolution connects us to prehistorical dimensions of the earth. As a consequence, he argues that "[n]ous dépassons de loin notre histoire. Nos gestes, sensations, désirs, intuitions, sentiments, connectent, en temps réel, mille dates incomparables" (2003:18). In other words, western civilization's definition of history as sequential time, or as a linear development from the beginning of culture to the present, fails to grasp the complexity that characterizes the individual's sense of temporality. Such comments express a refusal to rely on linear time that is akin to Miller and Durrell's reflections on the subject of time.

⁷⁸ He writes: "[n]ous ne comprenons rien au ciel, à la terre, à la vie, à nous-mêmes enfin si nous continuons à référer nos perceptions au temps de l'histoire, court, et à construire notre culture sur sa brièveté" (2003:22).

⁷⁹ Serres maintains that historical time has made us efface what he calls: "*la mémoire de l'espèce*" (2003:56). Human beings have therefore become a cultural species rather than a natural species. Serres's redefinition of self-estrangement can be linked to Scholtmeijer's reflections on the subject matter. Whereas Scholtmeijer grounds her argument on the loss of a meaningful habitat, Serres focuses on the loss of a historical dimension, which prevents us from reconnecting to a meaningful habitat. He maintains that "[n]ous survivons en espèces culturelles, en quelque sorte suradaptées, parce que nous vivons comme un genre organiquement ou

By neglecting humanity's interdependence with the nonhuman world, western civilization has created increasingly artificial environments. As we have seen, the grim images of the modern metropolis arouse the anxiety that as embodied beings we fail to organically adapt ourselves to these new technospheres and toxic wastelands. However, western civilization's negligence of its relation to nature, has also contributed to the fact that conceptions of nature and our place in it have become increasingly artificial. From this perspective, the individual's sense of time and space, but also his or her experience of the self are perceived to be in discord with the abstract concepts that western civilization has provided. Serres's argument may thus be linked to the vision of Miller and Durrell who also point out that artificial concepts of time and space are symptoms of our distorted relationship to nature. Whereas Serres asks us to reconsider time beyond our limited ideas of history, Miller and Durrell seek to eliminate any sense of linear time in order to fuse with the greater scheme of things; or what they, in keeping with Taoist and Zen Buddhist concepts, call the universe. Even though Serres's argument may be contrasted to Miller and Durrell's belief in eastern philosophies, they all concur on the conclusion that a redefinition of western concepts of time and space may yield a new relation to the nonhuman world. Furthermore, despite having quite different lines of reasoning, they all suggest that as a cultural species that has replaced its natural needs with abstract ideas we have become increasingly alienated from 'human nature.'

2.3.2. Mechanical Time and Social Control

The subject of time has already called for a detailed account in this analysis of metropolitan environments and I do not want to prolong it unduly. This chapter, accordingly, will, to begin with, contain a mere sketch of the way in which Durrell and Miller's conceptions of time can be linked to the omnipresent theme of modern progress and then move on to the theme of alienation. I thus propose that Durrell's attempts to achieve a synchronic, rather than a linear mode of time, as well as Miller's creation of an eternal present, may also be interpreted as a direct reaction against industrial progress and its inherent structures of linearity. Joanne Gottlieb has examined the increasing dominance of linear time in the industrial age. In her ecocritical study she delineates "a large trend in modernity toward historical and projective thinking" which is best reflected in "the modern mode of thought that

naturellement inadapté" (2003:76). Ultimately, it is because "*l'homínisation fit de nous des monstres d'oubli [...]* les plus amnésiques d'entre les vivants" (2003:43) that western civilization was able to develop ecologically disastrous conceptualizations of nature. Humanity's amnesiac relation to the earth definitely complicates the problem of overcoming self-estrangement.

privileges time over space and that fundamentally informs the very periodizing notion of modernity itself." The paramount importance of linearity becomes evident if we take into account that in modernity "time connotes progress and movement and technological changes," thereby measuring modern culture's emancipation from pre-industrial ways of living (Gottlieb 1999:236). The modern belief in progress, in other words, is based on notions of linear time. Leo Marx alludes to this "idea of history as a record of progress" and points out that for modern culture it was and continues to be "intrinsically appealing" (1986:40).

The emergence of nonlinear concepts of time can therefore be seen as an attempt to cast doubt on such optimistic prognoses about progress and its inherent structures of linearity. As a result, the frequency with which Modernists express a "reluctance to rely on chronological sequence as the basis of their construction" (Stevenson 1992:86) is often interpreted as a strategy to counter the dominance of linear time. Randall Stevenson, for instance, has observed that "anxieties, specifically about clocks and clockwork, appear with a striking frequency in modernist texts" (1992:84). Explanations of this widespread hostility to clocks focus on two different subjects. On the one hand, it is often understood as expressing a "sense of the unnaturalness—even the actual hostility to nature—of the clock as a time-measurer" (Stevenson 1992:113). As we have seen, Miller and Durrell's recourse to cyclical theories was based on a similar insight. Namely, that the "unearthly openness of linear time within nature's closed cycle of generation and decay is what underlies, at the deepest level, the enduring hostility between the institutional order" and the individual's experience of temporality (Pogue 1992:8).

A further crucial aspect governing the critical response to the Modernist hostility to clocks is centered around the problem of industrial work. According to Stevenson, concurrent with the socio-historical shift from rural labour to factory work there is a radical restructuring of the sense of time and space. Stevenson speaks of "[f]actory work and city life" as creating conditions which cannot be compared to the rhythms of rural labor (1992:113-4). It was, of course, Karl Marx who offered the most influential analysis of the conditions of labor which subordinate the worker to the machine.⁸⁰ Marx's critique of industrial labor is echoed by Stevenson when he concludes that "the clock occupied a unique position, as a symbolic as well as an actual focus for concern" because it "functioned as a crucial agent of the new rule of the machine" (1992:115). Leo Marx, likewise, held that the clock is of paramount importance for any critique of industrial progress. He maintains that

⁸⁰ The thesis that the industrial worker's conditions of labor provoke a sense of alienation is so widely understood to be central to Marx's analysis of the capitalist system, that it need not be dwelt on at length here.

[i]ts function is decisive because it links the industrial apparatus with consciousness. The laboring man becomes a machine in the sense that his life becomes more closely geared to an impersonal and seemingly autonomous system. (1967:248)

The debate about the Modernist hostility to clocks returns discussion to the aforementioned definition of alienation as the outcome of the individual's confrontation with "machinic enslavement" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:428).

Recall that the critique of modern progress as it is, for example, expressed in Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology," or Frankfurt School critical theory, is grounded on an understanding of technology as a form of domination and exploitation. As Andermatt Conley reminds us, Heidegger's analysis of "the rapport between humans, *techné*, and machines has been so long debated that the dilemmas he inaugurated have become stereotypes. Does technology expropriate and denature humans" (1997:77)? The repression of individual needs was also explored by Adorno and Horkheimer. In their influential study of the structures of domination and oppression underlying the capitalist system, they argue that industrial labor "requires the self-alienation of the individuals who must model their body and soul according to the technical apparatus" (1979:29-30). Horkheimer and Adorno's commentary reminds us that the clock is indeed emblematic of the growing impact of technology on the individual. For it illustrates how technology propagates a system of social control, whose structures affect not only social behavior but also the individual's primary impulses.

A strikingly similar preoccupation with the clock as a symbol of the negative impact of industrial society on the individual can be observed in Lawrence Durrell's account of urban existence. Analogous to the previously analyzed notion of nonlinear time, Durrell expresses a dislike of metropolitan life by contrasting the artificiality of western concepts of linear time to his alternative understanding of temporality. Not surprisingly then, in *The Black Book* we detect repeated attacks on clocks and other symbols of chronological time. In fact, most of his protagonists face a vast array of struggles with the city's unnatural time. Take, for instance, Death Gregory who observes how he and Tarquin are both suffering "from this malady, this geometrical insanity of day followed by night followed by day, etc." (*BB*:40). As Brown Lee has observed, even the "'you' figure, to whom the fantasized dithyram of *Black Book* is addressed" bears witness to the preoccupation with the artificiality of chronological time (1967:326). Indeed, the narrator's observation, "[y]ou are sitting out there, under the sweeping skyline of country, with time strapped to your wrist by a leather thong" (*BB*:60), operates with an opposition between an image of the natural world that connotes unrestrained freedom and the confinement of urban time. The reference to chronological time, which is "strapped to your wrist," symbolizes the enchainment of the body to the conformity of urban existence.

Also Lawrence Lucifer refers insistently to the artificiality of chronological time. His remarks on the subject matter are often ironic. The sentence, "On that portion of time that is a Saturday printed on paper, over a quotation from Genesis, I go and inflict myself on the Chamberlains (*BB*:89), is certainly a case in point. A more radical attack can be observed in his statement that "[o]n the mantelpiece is a clock. The hands stand to a quarter past six, and it is striking twelve. *By these tokens I know exactly that it is ten past ten*" (*BB*:118).⁸¹ In accordance with Durrell's belief in eastern concepts of time, Durrell subverts chronological time in order to replace it with a static present. Hence, the narrator's own sense of time is expressed as "[t]onight followed by tomorrow, followed by tonight" (*BB*:153). Lucifer's insistence on nonlinear time enables him to overcome the crushing impact of western culture's belief in sequential time. Rather than subordinating his life to the "eight-hour timepiece divided into illogical portions, telling me when to eat, work, sleep" (*BB*:119), Lucifer insists that "I am living out hours which no chronology allows for" (*BB*:87). In such ways, Durrell shows that his promotion of nonlinear time is not simply a reaction against the alleged artificiality of linear time. It is also directed against "the total structural regimentation and ordering of everyday life by the industrial [...] society" (Mies 1993:140).

As we have already noted that Miller's preoccupation with modern progress is intricately related to the theme of technology, we may hazard the claim that the same revolt against industrial society is crucial for Miller. Indeed, he describes "that world which is peculiar to the big cities," as a "world of men and women whose last drop of juice has been squeezed out by the machine." His anti-technological critique is emphasized when he calls the denizens of the modern metropolis "the martyrs of modern progress" (*TCN*:166). Nevertheless, Miller's reflections on the theme of industrialism and its negative effects on individuals appear to be less specifically related to the motif of the clock. The following passage on the senselessness of modern existence serves as an example:

Behind the gray walls there are human sparks, and yet never a conflagration. Are these men and women, I ask myself, or are these shadows, shadows of puppets dangled by invisible strings? They move in freedom apparently, but they have nowhere to go. (*TCN*:246)

The emphasis in this quotation is upon the disintegration of the self due to abstract external forces, rather than the individual's subordination to artificial concepts of time. From this description of alienated city-dwellers we may discern that, from Miller's perspective, self-estrangement is propelled by complex social structures which "manipulate psychosocial expectations with strategies of repressive normalization that impose false needs on individuals and collectivities" (Luke 1997:141). The preceding passage indicates that Miller's critique of technology is grounded on a concern about technocratic society's establishment of structures

⁸¹Italics in original.

of social control.⁸² That is why Deleuze and Guattari's thesis is important when they show that industrial society's increasing "social subjection" must be linked to the fact that "[c]apitalism [...] arises as a worldwide enterprise of subjectification" (1987:457). Notice how this growing "social subjection" implies that definitions of self-estrangement, must take into account a vast array of forms of social control that may not be contained by the modernist thematization of the machine as a menace to humankind. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari hint at these complex structures when they write that, "[a]ttention has recently been focused on the fact that modern power [...] implies processes of normalization, modulation, modeling, and information that bear on language, perception, desire, movement, etc." (1987:458).

Behind Miller's description of alienated city-dwellers lurks an anxiety about the impact of modern society on the individual which is directly linked to such strategies of normalization. Consider, for example, the following passage from *Tropic of Capricorn*. Here and elsewhere, Miller's reflections on his childhood are haunted by the fear of normalization:

[w]ith the entrance into life these traits of difference fell away and we all became more or less alike and, of course, most unlike our own selves. And it is this loss of the peculiar self, of the perhaps unimportant individuality, which saddens me. (*TCP*:130)

Such passages clearly show that for Miller the process of enculturation is intertwined with notions of normalization that sustain the experience of self-estrangement, insofar as it effaces the individual's "peculiar self." Significantly, Félix Guattari's recent work, entitled *Les trois écologies*, rearticulates some of his and Deleuze's earlier reflections on the capitalist enterprise of subjectification. Guattari proposes to draw a parallel between our modern ecocatastrophe and the deteriorating forms of human life engendered by the capitalist system of subjectification.⁸³ To establish this link he focuses on the relation between the individual and his or her exterior world and concludes that the primordial interdependence between subject and exteriority has been transformed by systems of social control.⁸⁴ He therefore points out that an ecological approach to the subject's relation to its human and nonhuman environment must pay attention to the fact that capitalist forms of social control have

⁸² Miller's most extended exemplification of this kind of alienation can be found in *Tropic of Capricorn*, where his tale of the "Cosmodemonic Telegraph Company" illustrates the absurdity of the capitalist system. As Kenneth Rexroth has remarked, here Miller presents "an orgy of human self-alienation, a cesspool of it, and Miller rubs your nose in it" (1963:131).

⁸³ Guattari proposes that the seriousness of western civilization's ecocatastrophe demands that we analyze this problem with regard to its involvement with the complex structures of capitalism. He thus points out that traditional ecological approaches are not sufficient. Guattari condemns ecological approaches that "*se contentent [...] d'aborder le domaine des nuisances industrielles et, cela, uniquement dans une perspective technocratique, alors que, seule, une articulation éthico-politique—que je nomme écosophie—entre les trois registres écologiques, celui de l'environnement, celui des rapports sociaux et celui de la subjectivité humaine, serait susceptible d'éclairer convenablement ces questions* (1989:12-3).

⁸⁴ For Guattari the ecological menace to modern culture is most accurately reflected in what he calls "*le rapport de la subjectivité avec son extériorité—qu'elle soit sociale, animale, végétale, cosmique—qui se trouve ainsi compromis*" (1989:12).

profoundly influenced not only all aspects of social existence but also the subconscious impulses underlying the individual's experience of life.⁸⁵

Ultimately, Guattari's theory of the "three ecologies" helps us to elucidate in how far Miller's critique of technology and technocratic forms of social subjection may be linked to environmental concerns. From the previously examined excerpts we may discern that his critique of technological progress does, indeed, address the same phenomena of social control. What is more, Miller's claim that an alternative understanding of the universe—based on eastern concepts of total experience—may offer a new approach to the crisis of modernity, suggests that the individual must rethink his or her perception of the external world. Social subjection, in other words, arises from the individual's identification with a technocratic society and its dualistic discourses. However, as the following excerpt shows, a total experience is extremely difficult to realize:

For the fraction of a second perhaps I experienced that utter clarity which the epileptic, it is said, is given to know. In that moment I lost completely the illusion of time and space: the world unfurled its drama simultaneously along a meridian which had no axis. In this sort of hair-trigger eternity I felt that everything was justified. (*TCN*:102)

The ephemeral quality of this momentary vision suggests that Miller does not represent the idea of a total experience as a simple way to overcome alienation. The difficulty of the task is stressed by the fact that this vision of "utter clarity" constitutes an almost utopian moment whose conclusions remain unclear. This does not necessarily mean that compared to Durrell, Miller marginalizes the importance of total experience and nonlinear time. On the contrary, by problematizing the endeavor to grasp this alternative understanding of time and space, Miller draws attention to the fact that it is almost impossible to escape from dominant culture's systems of social control. As Guattari has made clear, systems of social subjection should not be underestimated. In this sense, total experience remains "[t]he great incestuous wish [...] to flow on, one with time, to merge the great image of the beyond with the here and now." For Miller this is a highly problematic wish because it is associated with rhetorical failure. He thus concludes that it is "[a] fatuous, suicidal wish that is constipated by words and paralyzed by thoughts" (*TCN*:259).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ By linking environmental issues with the capitalist system of subjectification Guattari proposes yet another exploration of alienation. His line of reasoning, however, allows us to bridge the ecocritical definitions of alienation, such as William Kittredge's observation that "[i]nvolvement with biological complexity helps us feel connected to [...] meaningfulness" (1999:67), and those definitions whose focal point is technology.

⁸⁶ On that account Hassan states that Miller's handling of time is ambiguous. In his analysis of *Black Spring*, he observes that in this book we find "an attitude toward time even more unresolved than *Cancer's*" (1967:71). The section entitled "Walking Up and Down in China" serves as an example for the "unresolved" nature of Miller's attempt to integrate oriental conceptions of time. Here Miller describes the wish to seize a total experience of space and time in increasingly utopian terms. Instead of describing the narrator's perception of nonlinear time, Miller presents us with the narrator's abstract reflections on these issues: "I am in the dead center of a changing reality for which no language has yet been invented. According to the map I am in Paris; according to the calendar I am living in the third decade of the twentieth century. But I am neither in Paris nor in the twentieth

2.4. Rationality and Self-Analysis

An ecocritical analysis of the metropolis in Miller and Durrell's novels leads to the conclusion that urban representations are used to draw attention to the fact that western civilization's emancipation from nature has brought down a vast array of afflictions upon the individual. As we have seen, the violent impact of the city on the urbanite evokes several different forms of alienation. On the one hand, the artificiality of the urban habitat highlights the extent to which modern culture negates the individual's need for a sound environment. At its worst, the toxic menace of the industrial city foreshadows the auto-destructive trajectory of industrial progress. On the other hand, the city as technosphere shows that the individual is also subject to growing structures of social control that reinforce the sense of alienation. Arising from these circumstances, there are numerous portrayals of neurotic city-dwellers, which, in turn, dramatize the bleak picture Miller and Durrell paint of modern society. In fact, most of the protagonists in *Tropic of Cancer* and *The Black Book* fail to cope with urban life. Consequently, their principle activities consist of desperately trying to find meaning in life. These virtually "uprooted and alienated individuals searching for abstract identities" (Shiva 1993:99) are physically and mentally unfit to confront urban existence. Particularly Miller's portrayal of Van Norden and Durrell's portrayal of Tarquin reveal the despair with which modern city-dwellers try to come to terms with the *malaise* of modern life. Consider, for instance, how Tarquin, who tries to be an artist himself, spends his life "lying on his back [...] catechizing himself" (*BB*:28). He has reduced his existence to an "endless game of chess with his psyche" (*BB*:28). Indeed, Tarquin's inability to master his increasing sense of self-estrangement is exemplified by his adherence to psychoanalytical modes of introspection. Although Tarquin is convinced that "[w]e must reduce our lives to some sort of order" (*BB*:53), he sees himself defeated by the "terminologies of theology and psychology running neck and neck, each outdoing the other in vagueness" (*BB*:40).

At this stage, it seems useful to recall Durrell's metaphor of the "English Death." As has been adumbrated in a preceding chapter, "the English Death" illustrates Durrell's preoccupation with the way in which dominant culture has generated a devaluation of vital experience in life and art.⁸⁷ When Tarquin's "study of himself is so strenuous" that his

century. I am in China and there are no clocks or calendars here" (*BS*:197). Rather than representing an antidote to the problem of modernity, this passage creates an attitude toward time whose "pervasive sense is one of loss" (Hassan 1967:197).

⁸⁷ In chapter 1, I have suggested that Durrell uses the "English Death" to condemn the decadence of modern art and the devitalization of modern life. Because of limited space, the ensuing discussion of "the English Death" focuses only upon those aspects that elucidate the theme of alienation. On that account I agree with David M.

obsessive bouts of introspection "have been rapidly making a wreck of him" (*BB*:40), he certainly represents an ironic example of the "English Death." In Thomas's analysis characters such as Tarquin "represent failure [...] to make the real search for oneself. They are victims of the English Death" (1995:58). While the "English Death" adequately mirrors the protagonists' anxiety about "the disruption of the unity of self" (Briganti 1990:42), it is also important to stress that Durrell's critique of modern life is directed against the overestimation of ratiocination, or what he ironically calls the "fatal nurse of the ego" (*BB*:40). Woods alludes to this critique of rationality and points out that "[t]he English Death generally implies an exaggerated ratiocinative aspect of consciousness, a numbing of the emotional and intuitive aspects" (1990:96). In other words, Woods reminds us that self-estrangement is enhanced by modern society's promotion of the mind as the unique valuable source of experience. The validity of this view, of course, is based on the annihilation of bodily instincts as a vital component of experience.

The excessive cultivation of ratiocination is at the heart of Durrell's ironic portrayal of Tarquin. For Tarquin, who is "grateful for Science having made [introspection] possible" (*BB*:168), is eventually dissolved into a lifeless being who "sits all day alone, wrapped in rugs, afraid to walk, his bones are so brittle; afraid to talk, his tongue is so dry" (*BB*:242). Lucifer's remark, "I just don't know what the hell he is all about" (*BB*:242), culminates this description of Tarquin. Rather than achieving a new sense of authenticity such rational modes of introspection seem to aggravate Tarquin's self-estrangement.⁸⁸ By applying psychoanalysis in order to get "to the bottom of myself" (*BB*:53), Tarquin defines himself as a purely rational and disembodied being. His search for an authentic experience of the self is centered around "a vast storehouse of scientific formulae, historical data, hieroglyphs, runes, dogma" (*BB*:168). This phrase, which is based on lexical abundance, exemplifies the fragmentation experienced by the individual, while at the same time it mirrors how desperately Tarquin tries to conceive of himself as a purely cultural being. It is therefore not surprising that Tarquin's efforts lead him "down the one-way street of introspection and psychoanalysis" (*BB*:53)

Woods who maintains that "'the English Death' should not be regarded as a clearly definable label, but as the central phrase to which are connected, in a very loose and ambiguous manner, a number of related ideas and attitudes" (1990:94-5).

⁸⁸ With regard to Durrell's critique of psychology it is important to bear in mind that Durrell was highly influenced by D.H. Lawrence, who, according to Stevenson, was opposed to psychoanalysis. Stevenson reminds us that "in Lawrence's view, Freud's work suggested the existence of areas of mind and self beyond complete rational, intellectual control, but it was exactly these areas which Freud sought to *submit* to rational, intellectual analysis. For Lawrence, this was a threat to the deepest sources of spontaneity" (1992:66). While I believe that the issue of psychoanalysis is an important subject, both in Durrell and Miller's work, I have limited my focal point to the ways in which self-estrangement can be linked to western culture's promotion of binary oppositions — i.e., body-mind, nature-culture, reason-intuition, etc.

rather than to a revitalized sense of self that is based on an equilibrium between body and mind.

That Durrell's ironic portrayal of Tarquin's failure to find his true identity is not only directed against psychoanalysis but also against an exaggerated belief in instrumental reason may be disclosed in a comparison between the novel's main narrators, i.e. Death Gregory and Lawrence Lucifer. Death Gregory, follows a path of desperate introspection that bears a lot of resemblance to Tarquin's psychoanalytical preoccupations. The endless nights he spends "in the laboratory which I have made of my ego," corrupt his yearning to find his true identity. Rather than recovering repressed instincts, his analysis produces a schismatic conception of his identity which he describes as a state in which "I am always aware of myself as an actor on an empty stage, his only audience the critical self" (*BB*:196). From the description of Death Gregory's search for his true identity, "all filtered, limited, through the wretched instruments of the self" (*BB*:41), we may conclude that it is the notion of "the self," or to use Dorothea Olkowski's terms, the rational "unity of the ego," that disrupts the process of subjectification. In this sense, Death Gregory's exclusive focus on instrumental reason perfectly exemplifies a schismatic understanding of the self, which Deleuze and Guattari have described as, "[a] new form of slavery [...] namely, being slave to oneself, or to pure 'reason,' the Cogito" (1987:130).

The definition of the human being as a purely rational being also bears on Death Gregory's understanding of his embodied existence. Sentences such as "I am again standing naked in front of the mirror, puzzled by the obstructing flesh. The great problem is how to get at the organic root of the trouble," clearly indicate how his subjugation to "the Cogito" has contributed to the negation of his body. The use of the synecdoche—"obstructing flesh"—illustrates how Death Gregory's conception of his identity denies the body because he is convinced that his personality "is concentrated in some disrupted recess of the body, a precious cocoon, separate from the world of matter" (Evernden 1996:98). While his body may be contemplated in the mirror, a process which Elaine Scarry has described as the registering of "externalized objectifications" of oneself (1985:256), it is denied any function as a vital part of the self. As a rational being, Death Gregory's self-consciousness is based on a separation of mind and body which rejects the latter as something inferior. Accordingly, it is the 'obstruction' of this objectified body, which ultimately also renders the task of seizing the "organic root of the trouble" so difficult.

In contrast to Tarquin and Death Gregory's dualistic understanding of the self, Lawrence Lucifer refuses to rationalize his existence by turning it into "an object of the rational, self-certain, self-grounding human subject" (Zimmerman 1993:201). Lucifer clearly

rejects what Louise Westling, in another context, calls "the reductionist dualism of Western philosophy" and "the sterility of the kind of rational humanism that came down to us from Plato and triumphed in Cartesian and Newtonian mechanistic models of the cosmos" (1999:855). Lucifer condemns this philosophical heritage of rational humanism as a "modern disease looming in the world." The symptoms of this disease he describes as "the terrible disintegration of action under the hideous pressure of the ideal" (BB:222). The persuasion that "[u]ntil the Platonic poison is out of your system" (BB:134) you cannot achieve an authentic experience, indicates that for Durrell the philosophical system of logics and rationality has contributed to the individual's sense of self-estrangement. Lucifer's determination to surmount "the trauma of the ideal" by concentrating on "the timeless action in the immediacy" (BB:221), illustrates, once more, that Taoist notions of total experience represent an antidote to the unbalanced experience of the rational being whose understanding of the self has been polarized into a thorough dichotomy between mind and body.

2.4.1. Enlightenment

Durrell and Miller's skepticism about the overestimation of instrumental reason expresses a concern about its influence on the disintegration of the self. When viewed from an ecocritical perspective, this inherent splitting of spirit from matter can be seen as the foundation of the nature versus culture dichotomy. As a consequence, when theorists focus on the problematic status of the human body, they tend to draw a parallel to the equally problematic status of the physical world. Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of the human body certainly is a case in point. In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* they argue that the separation of body and mind resulted in a perception of human identity in which

[t]he body is scorned and rejected as something inferior, and at the same time desired as something forbidden, objectified, and alienated. Culture defines the body as a thing which can be possessed; [...] as the object, the dead thing, the "*corpus*." In man's denigration of his own body, nature takes revenge for the fact that man has reduced nature to an object for domination, a raw material. (1979:232-3)

This understanding assumes that both the body and the physical world have been devalued by the paradigm shift instigated by Enlightenment-thinkers like Descartes, who advocated the separation of mind and matter—*res extensa* and *res cogitans*. To elaborate on this suggestion I will outline some basic premises governing the debate about the impact of Enlightenment on modern conceptions of nature.

Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of Enlightenment, whose program according to them "was the disenchantment of the world" (1979:3), is only one among several philosophical attempts to explain western civilization's exploitative relation to the physical

world. Indeed, discussion of the paradigm shift arising from the Enlightenment and the scientific revolutions has influenced a vast number of thinkers. From David Abram, for instance, we learn that "it was only after the publication of Descartes's *Meditations*, in 1641, that material reality came to be commonly spoken of as a strictly mechanical realm" (1997:32). It follows that what defines nature as something separate from humanity is "the rigorous realm of *res extensa*" (Casey 1998:161). The Cartesian separation of mind and matter, precisely because it establishes this distinction, perfectly reflects modern culture's estrangement from the physical world.⁸⁹ Oelschlaeger, likewise, argues that the scientific revolutions introduced "a *paradigm shift* so radical that the very meaning of the word *nature* was changed" (1991:76-7).⁹⁰ Indeed, the distance western civilization has established between itself and nature has reduced the physical world to an object to be exploited and subjected to human interests. Also Mies and Shiva have pointed out that Descartes facilitated western civilization's exploitation of nature by denying that human beings are dependent upon the natural world. They maintain that "Western rationality, the West's paradigm of science and concept of freedom are all based on overcoming and transcending this dependence, on the subordination of nature to the (male) will" (1993:18).

However, it is Carolyn Merchant's seminal study, entitled *The Death of Nature*, that offers the most thorough analysis of the influence of the Enlightenment on our present understanding of the physical world. The historian of science Merchant, pursues the thesis that in the aftermath of the Enlightenment the "nature-culture dualism" became "a key factor in Western civilization's advance at the expense of nature." Merchant explains that the project of the Enlightenment and its inherent ideal of progress depended on the fact that "European culture increasingly set itself above and apart from all that was symbolized by nature" (1993:143). Such a domination of the natural world was enabled by a new mechanistic model of the earth. Merchant writes that during the scientific revolutions "the image of an organic cosmos [...] gave way to a mechanistic world view in which nature was reconstructed as dead and passive, to be dominated and controlled by humans" (1993:6). No doubt this mechanistic model is only feasible if humanity sees itself as wholly set apart from the nonhuman world.

Maria Mies also notes the degree to which "progress means a *going away* from Nature" (1993:156). She explains that since the Age of Enlightenment "Man's freedom and

⁸⁹ From Abram we learn that Descartes' dualism is based on a distinction between "mechanical, unthinking matter (including all minerals, plants, and animals, as well as the human body) and pure, thinking mind (the exclusive province of humans and God). Since humans alone are a mixture of extended matter and thinking mind, we alone are able to feel and to experience our body's mechanical sensations. Meanwhile, all other organisms, consisting solely of extended matter, are in truth nothing more than automatons, incapable of actual experience, unable to feel pleasure or suffer pain" (1997:48).

⁹⁰ Italics in original.

happiness" has been defined as an *"ongoing process of emancipation from nature."*⁹¹ Moreover, modern "Man's [...] independence from, and dominance over natural process by the power of reason and rationality," justified technological progress at the expense of nature (1993:6). Along similar lines, Neil Evernden has examined the assumptions of the dichotomous understanding of nature. He stresses the impact of this new conception of the nonhuman environment by maintaining that "we have rigorously defended a dualism that permits us to think of ourselves as fundamentally unlike anything else on the planet [...] and to establish a concept of Nature through which to characterize all else" (1992:93-4). Such comments illustrate that the nature-culture dualism has not only severed the individual from his or her environment, but has also encouraged "the post-Cartesian trend that invents and launches into the world the fully conscious, self-possessed, supremely rational, male subject that conquers the world" (Andermatt Conley 1997:43).⁹²

This "post-Cartesian" belief in the separateness of humanity has obviously also shaped a new conception of 'human nature.' Gernot Böhme's study of the dualism underlying Western philosophy delineates how the definition of humans as rational beings has profoundly altered the individual's sense of the self. He argues that the nature-culture divide has assigned to nature the role of denoting all that is external to our human condition. That is to say, nature constitutes the opposite of the true inner life of human beings.⁹³ The Cartesian insistence on a disembodied consciousness as the true essence of human personality therefore perfectly mirrors the human denial of its dependence on the physical world. Accordingly, Böhme points out that with Descartes the human realm has been differentiated from the natural world most radically (1992:38). However, by opposing the body to the soul, Descartes has obviously also instigated a completely new understanding of the human body. Therefore, Böhme advocates that this new dualistic world view has first and foremost modified the individual's relation to his or her own body, which as a physical, or rather, natural element must be exterritorialized and submitted to the rational mind (1992:52). Having defined "the self, our innermost essence, as something incorporeal" (Abram 1997:45), the rational being treats the body as it treats nature. Michael Zimmerman carries the argument further by examining how such dualistic patterns of thought determine the process of individuation. He maintains that the belief in binary oppositions "leads Western humanity to split off its 'dark

⁹¹ Italics in original.

⁹² The gender bias in Andermatt Conley and Mies's arguments is deliberate. It reflects the assumption that the nature-culture dualism was a useful tool to establish further hierarchies within western civilization. Recall that from an ecofeminist point of view, the structural dichotomization underlying the patriarchal powerstructures tends to subordinate nature to culture, woman to man, or nonwestern cultures to western civilization.

side'—its mortality, dependence, and finitude—and to project it upon the body and nature, which it then attempts to 'dominate' and 'control'" (1990:140).

Böhme's immensely suggestive study is grounded on the hypothesis that the human relation to the natural world manifests itself, before all else, in the human being's relation to his or her own body (1992:39). Just as the paradigm shift has shaped our negative responses to the physical world, so the human body *qua* nature has been exterritorialized, objectified and instrumentalized (1992:79). What is more, Böhme assumes that modern society's tendency to give priority to scientific analysis has provoked a profound ignorance of embodied experience. Against the background of the scientific reduction of the body to an object of analysis, the individual's uncanny experience of his or her own body evokes an uneasy feeling of estrangement (1992:18). From an analogous point of view, Abram has argued that science has propagated that "[t]he living, feeling, and thinking organism is assumed to derive, somehow, from the mechanical body whose reflexes [...] have been measured and mapped, the living person now an epiphenomenon of the anatomized corpse" (1997:34). Ultimately this anatomized body is necessarily an alienated object because the scientific model does not correspond to the individual's embodied experience.

In other words, with modern culture's dualistic conceptions of nature and the human body *qua* nature, the rational being became alienated from him- or herself as a natural organism. Moreover, the same understanding of nature has resulted in a denial of the biosphere as a habitat upon which the human organism depends. As John Dewey has demonstrated the separation of body and mind sustains the belief that "mind, soul, and spirit can exist and go through their operations without any interaction of the organism with its environment" (1980:263). Yet the mind-body divide does not only deny human experience as formed in reciprocation with the nonhuman environment. In fact, in splitting spirit from matter, embodied experience itself is also divided. According to Böhme, the process of individuation is complicated because it is based on a dialectics of having a body and being a body (Böhme 1992:87).⁹⁴ On that account, Berger and Luckmann, have pointed out that the human being's understanding of the self must continually try to establish an equilibrium between having a body that may be used, as an instrument may be used, and being a body with whom one cannot identify oneself (1977:53).

⁹³ The crucial importance of the nature-culture dualism for the understanding of individuation is evident in Böhme's remark that "*Natur wurde verstanden als etwas Äusserliches, äusserlich zum Innenbereich menschlichen Selbstverständnisses und menschlicher Selbsterfahrung*" (1992:11).

⁹⁴ Böhme explains that the individual's struggle with embodied experience is caused by the fact that the anatomized body leads to a sense of self that is not based on "*Selbsterfahrung sondern Fremderfahrung*" (1992: 80).

Retrospectively then, Adorno and Horkheimer's hypothesis that the philosophical heritage of the Enlightenment allows us to draw a parallel between our distorted relation to the human body and our exploitative conception of the physical world may indeed help us to elucidate the notion of self-estrangement. Their conclusion that "[i]t is not merely that domination is paid for by the alienation of men from the objects dominated: with the objectification of spirit, the very relations of men—even those of the individual to himself—were bewitched" (1979:28), is echoed by many environmental thinkers. Maria Mies, for example, stresses the reciprocal relation between technological progress, the growing distance between humans and nature, and the human being's alienation from his or her "own organic, mortal body" (1993:137). Andermatt Conley, likewise, holds that the growing chasm between humans and nature has provoked an omnipresent sense of self-estrangement. She writes, "[t]o cut humans from Nature, as Western history has done, is tantamount to cutting them off from themselves" (1997:49).

Summing up, we may state that when Durrell objects to the self-imposed alienation that stems from the exaggerated reliance on rationality, he continues to explore the extent to which western civilization's dualistic world view has provoked the *malaise* of modern life. From his description of urban existence we may discern that whereas the nature-culture dualism has created artificial and hazardous urban environments, the mind-body dualism has promoted a cerebral existence that denies the importance of embodied experience. The portrayal of Tarquin exemplifies the overestimation of the rational mind, which according to Hartmut Böhme, has been transformed into a spastic entity, which desperately tries to stay intact out of fear of everything it has exterritorialized as 'the other' (1988:10).

As the ensuing excerpt shows, binary oppositions have not only marked Durrell whose disturbing descriptions of Tarquin and Death Gregory clearly evoke a preoccupation with the overestimation of rationality and the denial of embodied existence. Also Miller uses the body-mind dualism to amplify the alienation endured by the denizens of the modern metropolis. Take, for instance, Miller's portrayal of Van Norden. Like Tarquin, Van Norden's need to define himself as a purely rational being foments a denial of the body. Although Van Norden desperately tries to find sexual fulfillment, his dualistic perception of the self leads him to the conviction that "[i]t was the soul of him that women were trying to possess" (*TCN*:134). Underlying this distorted perception of his personality as a disembodied consciousness, there is a growing sense of self-estrangement. Congruent with Tarquin's psychoanalytical introspection, Van Norden's attempts to fathom his true personality are undermined by his dualistic understanding of himself. He complains, "[i]t's like I'm two people, and one of them is watching me all the time" (*TCN*:135). Hence, when the narrator points out that Van Norden

"cannot escape" the schizophrenic "prison which he has created for himself" (*TCN*:134-5), he obviously denounces the self-estrangement resulting from the individual's belief in the body-mind dualism. This attack on the major dualisms of western philosophy is more openly expressed in *The World of Lawrence*. Here Miller writes, "[f]or just as the soul of man is walled up in the megalopolis, so the personality is found to be walled up in the fossilized brain" (*WoL*:89).

Given Henry Miller's vitalistic intention to cast doubt upon modern society's repression of the physical body as a source of meaning, it makes sense that his thematization of these issues are grounded on a repudiation of such dualisms. The narrator's attempts to undermine the body-mind split motivate many reflections on embodied experience. Take, for instance, Miller's vast array of condemnations such as "[b]y what he calls the better part of his nature, man has been betrayed." Indeed, the ensuing statement that "[o]ne must burrow into life again in order to put on flesh," and his final declaration that "I am only spiritually dead. Physically I am alive. Morally I am free" (*TCN*:104), perfectly illustrates the narrator's endeavor to emancipate himself from a perception of the self that is based on a Cartesian separation of mind and matter. In like manner, the narrator's declaration that, "[i]f I am inhuman it is because my world has slopped over its human bounds, because to be human seems like a poor, sorry miserable affair, limited by the senses, restricted by moralities and codes, defined by platitudes and isms" (*TCN*:257), reveals that at the heart of Miller's outrage against modern civilization we find a nondualistic perspective.

One might go so far as to say that at the center of Miller's critique of modernity is the concept of the binary opposition itself. Hence, it is important to point out that Miller's attack on the foundations of western philosophy is not only directed against the body-mind dualism, but against the dualistic premises underlying rational humanism. A nondualistic perspective, for example, seems to galvanize the novel's numerous allusions to the Platonic system. For it is in a spirit of revolt against binary oppositions and their intrinsic relation to the growing sense of self-estrangement that Miller's attacks on the notion of the ideal arise. Consider, for instance, the fierceness with which Miller attacks the alienation produced by western culture's dichotomization of reality: "[f]or some reason or other man looks for the miracle, and to accomplish it he will wade through blood. He will debauch himself with ideas, he will reduce himself to a shadow if for only one second of his life he can close his eyes to the hideousness of reality" (*TCN*:102).

The violence underlying the western desire to accomplish a vision of the world that rests upon artificial notions of the ideal, is further accentuated when Miller continues, "out of the endless torment and misery no miracle comes forth." Instead, there are only "ideas which

come forth like bile, like the guts of a pig when the carcass is ripped open" (*TCN*:103). Miller's account of the dualistic substructures dominating western culture anticipates much of the ecocritical questioning of the Enlightenment. In fact, his condemnation of the ideal provides us with a further illustration of how the sense of crisis can be conjoined with our dualistic conceptions of nature. Broadly speaking, it may be said that the passage quoted above, mirrors the distance western culture has established between itself and nature, thereby undermining the human understanding of the real. Notions of the ideal, which are clearly connoted with the Platonic tradition of rational humanism, have severed modern society from an authentic understanding of human and nonhuman nature. Furthermore, the ensuing reference to the slaughtered pig evokes notions of scientific analysis, whose methods of anatomization of the objectified body is rejected here with a particular violence. Strikingly similar condemnations of the analytical models promoted by a society based on purely rational principles can be found throughout the novel; the most violent formulation being: "logic runs rampant, with bloody cleaver flashing" (*TCN*:186).

2.4.2. The Dissected Organism

Against the background of western civilization's philosophical tradition of rationalism a more complicated picture of the human body emerges. As we have seen so far, the body in Miller and Durrell's novels is represented as being in a constant state of conflict with the excesses of modernity. Indeed, from the fear underlying toxic discourse we may deduce that the interaction between the body and industrial transmutations of urban environments is perceived as a hazardous intrusion from without. Finally, the Cartesian vision of a disembodied mental realm, as the essence of human identity, goes beyond any concern with the physical interaction with environments by simply refusing to grant any value to embodied experience. As John Dewey observes, the conception of the pure "[m]ind that bears only an accidental relation to the environment occupies a similar relation to the body. In making mind purely immaterial (isolated from the organ of doing and undergoing), the body ceases to be living and becomes a dead lump" (1980:264). The resulting discrepancy provides a good context for studying the distorted descriptions of human bodies, which occur with an astonishing frequency in both Miller and Durrell's novels.

A brief analysis of some additional theoretical aspects should help us to elucidate Miller and Durrell's thematization of the dissected body. It is important to note that one of the most intensely debated of all issues surrounding the critique of Enlightenment has been the rational model of science. As indicated in the preceding chapter, western culture's conceptions

of nature and the body have been shaped by particular systems of analysis. The body is thus analyzed in the same manner as nature: as a dissectible organism. Adorno and Horkheimer remind us that "Enlightenment [...] is the philosophy which equates truth with scientific systematization" (1979:85). Ever since the Enlightenment, modern science has assumed the role of a "universal, value-free system of knowledge, which by the logic of its method claims to arrive at objective conclusions about life, the universe and almost everything" (Shiva 1993:22). Modern science's tradition of thought has variously been described as positivist, logical, analytical, objective, mechanistic or reductionist, and has thus often been blamed for legitimizing the appropriation of the natural world.⁹⁵

If we look at this scientific way of seeing the world, we may better understand why the notion of science is intricately linked with a particular understanding of the body. Carolyn Merchant observes how

[t]he rise of mechanism laid the foundation for a new synthesis of the cosmos, society, and the human being, construed as ordered systems of mechanical parts subject to governance by law and to predictability through deductive reasoning. A new concept of the self as a rational master of the passions housed in a machinelike body began to replace the concept of the self as an integral part of a close-knit harmony of organic parts united to the cosmos and society. Mechanism rendered nature effectively dead, inert, and manipulable from without. (1993:214)

For all of these reasons, the scientist's objective detachment from the physical world, or, to use Shiva's terms, the observer's "alienation and non-participation" (1993:24) from the object observed, is regarded as indispensable by modern science. By its emphasis on scientific objectivity, this view is confined to a model of knowledge "from which all other sources of knowing, linked to the carnal existence of human beings, are eliminated" (Mies 1993:98). It goes without saying that such models of rational science "consistently overlook our ordinary, everyday experience of the world around us" (Abram 1997:32).

A direct corollary of scientific systematization is that modern science must work with "context-free abstractions of knowledge". By this method, "uniformity permits knowledge of parts of a system to stand for knowledge of the whole" (Shiva 1993:24). Letting abstraction take the lead in this way, allows us to grasp more clearly a pattern implicit in the rationalistic conception of the physical world. The pattern is a tendency toward increasing the fragmentation of the universe as a whole. As Neil Evernden shows, abstraction entails an atomization of totality. Evernden refers to C.G. Jung in order to exhibit the implications of

⁹⁵ In *L'oubli de l'air chez Martin Heidegger*, Luce Irigaray advances the thesis that this new scientific model promoted by the rational being creates "[u]n monde où il se porte à la rencontre de la nature pour la ployer à sa mesure, et non la laisser être. Un monde où il se soucie moins d'assurer sa subsistance, de trouver réponse à ses besoins, d'aménager un lieu vivable, que de transformer le tout en son univers. Le rapport à la phusis étant déterminé par un projet d'appropriation plus que par un désir de vie, ou de survie" (1983:19).

abstraction as a scientific method and as a fundamental component of the western vision of the world. He writes:

When we abstract we 'take away' or 'withdraw—we remove something from the totality.' Abstraction is not only a noun, [as] we commonly use it, meaning 'the idea of something which has no independent existence' or 'a thing which exists only in idea.' It is also a verb: 'the act or process of separating in thought, of considering a thing independently of its association'; it is an action, not simply an idea divorced from reality.' (1993:47-8)

Abstraction replaces a holistic perception of nature with a model of the physical world as an object which may be dissected into fragments. Only by eliminating the complex associations that determine a thing in a living context scientific truth may be established. The exclusion of subjective attributes, which, as we have seen, is essential to an embodied experience of the world, creates a fragmented knowledge of nature as dead material.

Resistance to this model of scientific systematization is at issue in Durrell's description of Doctor Bazain. Significantly, Doctor Bazain's belief in abstract knowledge results in an understanding of the human body as an anatomized corpse:

His universe consists of the frontal lobe, the temporal lobe, and the occipital lobe; not to mention of the parietal lobe, or the medulla. Any phenomena which exist outside this domain puzzle him. Even simple phenomena like Morgan, for instance. (*BB*:224)

Here Durrell uses a catalogue of medical terms to illustrate Doctor Bazain's fragmented conception of the human brain. By representing the medical perspective of the body as an assemblage of isolated elements, Durrell illustrates on a general level, how scientific systematization produces a conception of the universe which may only be described as a hopelessly fragmented totality rather than a unified whole.⁹⁶ Doctor Bazain's failure to grasp "any phenomena" that do not fit his medical frame of reference, hints at the main problem of abstract knowledge. Namely, a vision of the body as a complex unity is substituted for a understanding of the body as an assemblage of fragmented elements. Accordingly, Morgan the Welshman who, as an example of "simple phenomena," is neither represented as a rational being who is split into mind and soul, nor as an assemblage of organs, preserves a potent place that cannot be subsumed by scientific discourses. In such passages, Durrell creates a resistance to an understanding of the human body as a "complex machine whose broken parts or stuck systems are diagnosed by our medical doctors and 'repaired' by our medical technologies" (Abram 1997:46).

⁹⁶ If we compare Durrell's use of this medical list to Miller's technique of catalogues, we may discern a slight difference. Whereas Miller seems to apply this stylistic figure to illustrate the excess of modernity, Durrell seems to use it in order to exemplify the fragmented universe produced by rational conceptions of the world. Without blurring the differences between Miller and Durrell's techniques, both authors use lists to exemplify fragmentation as a outcome of progress or scientific schematism, respectively.

Doctor Bazain's perspective obviously illustrates an abstract account of the body as it is conceived by biomedical sciences.⁹⁷ It may thus be read as a protest against such scientific dissections of the human body. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that similar accounts of corporeality can be found throughout Durrell's text. That it is not only the biomedical sciences, but a whole legacy of rational humanism that has conspired to produce such fragmented conceptions of the body, becomes evident if we consider Evernden's observations on the subject of embodiment. Evernden notes that "we think of our physical bodies as merely the material containers of the real human person." Such an understanding of the body as a material object, implies that it shares the same status and "characteristics with other parts of Nature." Evernden concludes that from this perspective "[b]odies are no longer truly *human* at all" (1993:54); they are a material object that may be explained through scientific systematization. As John Dewey points out, the exclusion of the body as a significant part of the self also affects embodied experience. He maintains that, "[w]hen the linkage of the self with its world is broken, then also the various ways in which the self interacts with the world cease to have a unitary connection with one another. They fall into separate fragments of sense, feeling, desire, purpose" (1980:247).

As mentioned above, not only Doctor Bazain's medical discourse is grounded on fragmentary conceptions of the human body. Most of the descriptions of the novel's self-estranged characters express a sense of deformed corporeality. Take Tarquin, who is introduced to the reader as follows: "Tarquin, for example, six-foot, frost-bound, jack-knifed, yellow with jaundice; Tarquin pinned to a slab of rufous cork, etherized, like a diseased butterfly" (*BB*:22). Here the rhetorical and somatic dimension converges into a fragmented description of Tarquin. Durrell's catalogue of metonyms illustrates the collapse of the narrator's system of representation, which in turn, exemplifies the failure of scientific knowledge to grasp the essence of human nature. The monstrosity of this description is grounded on the fact that the narrator fails to represent Tarquin's body as a unitary whole. As a demonstration of the inadequacy of scientific concepts of human nature Tarquin's portrayal remains an enigmatic assemblage of labels of disease and anatomy.

The question whether analytical discourses are capable of describing the body as a whole, has been examined by Elaine Scarry in her influential study entitled *The Body in Pain*.

⁹⁷ A strikingly similar protest against the biomedical system of anatomization can be found in *Tropic of Cancer*. Miller's ironical reflections on the dubious science of craniology, illustrates how the discovery of a particular bone in American skulls—i.e. "the epactal bone, or *os Incae*, in the occiput"—is a sign of "arrested development and indicative of an inferior race." Miller then goes on to compare the cranial capacities of Parisians, African and Native Americans only to conclude that "from all of which I deduce nothing" (*TCN*:158). Significantly, both Durrell and Miller use anatomical features of the cranium or the brain to draw attention to what they assume to be the exaggerated cerebrality of modern culture.

Scarry points out that "[t]o conceive of the body as parts, shapes and mechanisms, is to conceive of it from the outside" (1985:285). Scarry's commentary affirms that resistance to biomedical systematizations of the anatomized body is at the heart of Durrell's descriptions of the body as an object exhibited on a dissection table. The rhetorical failure to grasp Tarquin's body is a good example insofar as Tarquin's body is turned into an object of analysis, hereby undermining "the felt experience of being a sentient being" (Scarry 1985:285). From a similar perspective, Margot Norris has underlined that scientific systematization and analytical language have profoundly shaped our representations of the body. Norris refers to Roland Barthes to illustrate the deficiency of analytical discourses to represent corporeality:

'Being analytical, language can come to grips with the body only if it cuts it up; the total body is outside language, only pieces of the body succeed to writing; in order to *make* a body *seen*, it must be either displaced, refracted through the metonym of clothing, or reduced to one of its parts.' (Barthes, quoted in Norris 1985:145-6)

Durrell exhibits a similar concern about analytical discourses to represent the body as a whole. His highly fragmented accounts of Tarquin illustrate that abstract systems of analysis have not only shaped the biomedical understanding of the body. Fragmentation shapes the most intimate aspects of embodied experience, insofar as we use language to describe them.

The failure of language to express felt experience is dramatized in *Tropic of Cancer*. Miller's preoccupation with the problem of narrativizing the complexity of embodied experience resembles Durrell's breakdown of representation. In their efforts to draw attention to the negative impact of abstract systems of knowledge, Durrell and Miller each resort to strategies of fragmentation that reflect the failure of western culture to account for a total vision of the world. Far from being a simple matter of critique, Miller the narrator and artist figure, illustrates how his confinement to systems of abstract representation renders the expression of felt experience almost impossible. He insists that "[i]f any man ever dared to translate all that is in his heart, to put down what is really his experience, what is truly his truth, I think then the world would go to smash, that it would be blown to smithereens." Rather than blaming scientific systematization, Miller suggests here that it is the impossible act of narrativizing authentic experience which produces this hypothetical vision of a disunited world. Nevertheless, Miller points out that if it were possible to capture the totality of felt experience, the abstract systems of thought would fail to "assemble the pieces, the atoms, the indestructible elements that have gone to make up the world" (*TCN*:250). Similarly, Durrell's critique of abstract conceptions of bodies as dissected organisms contains reflections on the impossibility to represent the world without recourse to abstract modes of thinking. He expresses his rhetorical despair in an image of universal fragmentation: "[d]ay by day we are breaking down, boring down, into the pulp chamber of matter, and day by day the world becomes less integral, less whole; and the unison with it less pure. This is the ice

age of components" (*BB*:229). In sum, Durrell and Miller's preoccupation with scientific systematization is motivated by a fear that the overestimation of abstract thought has led to a misunderstanding of the human body and a fragmented perception of the physical world.

The decomposition of the world into fragmented elements returns discussion to the metaphor of nature as machine, which, as we have seen, is integral to western conceptions of science. Conceiving nature as a machine has allowed modern science to found its research on "uniformity, perceiving all systems as comprising the same basic constituents, discrete, and atomistic, and assuming all basic processes to be mechanical" (Shiva 1993:23). In like manner, Horkheimer and Adorno explore how this utilitarian perception of nature has facilitated western civilization's domination of the world. They insist that "[t]he man of science knows things in so far as he can make them" or "manipulate them" (1979:9). Having defined the object of research along the lines of its mechanistic schemes, such systems of analysis have effaced "[t]he multitudinous affinities" between the observer and the observed and have replaced them "by the single relation between the subject who bestows meaning and the meaningless object" (1979:10). As a consequence "for enlightenment the process is always decided from the start" (1979:24), insofar as the scientist tries to apply his or her predefined system. Adorno and Horkheimer, therefore, conclude that abstraction "makes everything in nature repeatable" (1979:13) precisely because the scientific reliance on abstraction, confines all things to the same scheme.

Given the fact that scientific systems of abstraction reduce "organic wholes to fragmented, separable and substitutable parts" (Shiva 1993:28), it becomes evident that the human body is subject to the same process of systematic abstraction. It is revealing to note that one of Death Gregory's most desperate attempts to grasp the essence of his self is described as follows:

The masked face of myself leans down over my body, selects and instrument, and begins. A long bloodless slit in the band of yellow. [...] The gutters are slowly, noiselessly brimmed with blood. Discarded livers, kidneys, tracks of coloured guts drop away from under the sheet and plop into an enamel pail. The yellow envelope of flesh which is my belly becomes ever more flaccid, more empty. [...] I am thoroughly opened and explored. My guts are emptied. And to no purpose. It is no good whatsoever. Today I am still what I was yesterday or the day before. (*BB*:187)

Significantly, Death Gregory's body is represented as an alienated object. A "yellow envelop of flesh" perceived by the analytical gaze of the observer. Although Death Gregory tries to explore the depths of his personality, his disembodied and abstract approach does not allow him to reach beyond this "yellow envelop." Just as this metonymy illustrates the fragmented perception of the body, the result of this "introspection" emphasizes the extent to which scientific systems reduce the body to an assemblage of organs. It is thus not surprising that Death Gregory's objectified body is "bloodless" and "empty" and that his self-analysis leads

him nowhere. This passage then, shows how even the body may be transformed into a set of objectified elements.

The biologist Richard Lewontin helps focus the impact of the machine metaphor on the understanding of the body. Lewontin stresses that the "analytic mode of understanding" is exemplified by the "very word *organism*." After describing how the word is based on an "analogy [...] between the living body and the musical instrument composed of separate parts that work together to produce a variety of final functions," he highlights that this fragmentation of the body reflects our understanding of the physical world. He thus concludes that the word *organism*, "first used in the eighteenth century," is the outcome of "a radical departure from the holistic pre-Enlightenment view of natural systems as indissoluble wholes that could not be understood by being taken apart into bits and pieces" (2000:72). If we take this definition of the organism, as a paradigm of the scheme underlying abstract knowledge, and combine it with the preceding analysis of the anatomized body we may deduce a valuable framework for analyzing Durrell and Miller's disturbingly persistent references to operations, plastic surgery, and decaying bodies. Miller and Durrell's preoccupation with anatomy perfectly reflects their fear that abstract systems of knowledge have contributed to the fragmentation of unitary wholes. Such a perspective assumes that just as the earth is understood as a machine made up of components, so the body emerges as a set of replaceable organs. Throughout *The Black Book* we find a number of fragmented depictions of human bodies, which all testify to Durrell's preoccupation with scientific systems of abstraction. One of several examples is the following passage, in which an "embalmer" uses his "kitchen knives" to "open the abdominal wall, and extract the guts, cure them, wrap them in brown-paper parcels, label them—and put them back" (*BB*:174).

A phenomenon closely related to this scientific fragmentation of the human body is the replacement of organs with artificial organs. As Scarry has pointed out, our modern conception of the body allows the presence of "man-made implants" without fearing that it may "compromise or 'dehumanize' a creature who has always located his or her humanity in self-artifice" (1985:254). In contrast to the lived body, the body as an alienated object may easily be modified through replacing any organ with its artificial replica. The fact that throughout Durrell and Miller's novels we find numerous references to artificial limbs reflects that rather than experiencing their bodies as unitary wholes these alienated characters possess manipulable organisms. Tarquin, for instance, constructs his body by buying "cheap powders and face creams, had a false tooth put in where the canine was missing, even wonders whether a wig...." Significantly, the ensuing phrase reminds us that "[i]t is the beginning of the disintegration which he has been announcing for so long" (*BB*:167).

The same references to artificial teeth and limbs permeate Miller's novels. To cite but a few examples, in *Tropic of Cancer* Van Norden is "all aflutter" because he "[l]ost a plate of false teeth" (TCN:60). The same is true for Peckham whose involvement in an accident demonstrates his denial of his own body. His negation of the lived body is highlighted by his absurd fixation on his recently purchased set of artificial teeth:

Despite the fact that his legs were broken and his ribs busted, he had managed to rise to all fours and grope about for his false teeth. In the ambulance he was crying out in his delirium for his false teeth he had lost. The incident was pathetic and ludicrous at the same time. (TCN:141)

Finally, also Carl, one of the many protagonists to be afflicted by a wide array of diseases and malfunctions, contemplates how "[m]y hair's falling out too...and I ought to see the dentist. I feel as though I were falling apart" (TCN:121). In all of these instances, an obsessive scrutiny and manipulation of the body as an object has replaced the individual's experience of the lived body. If anatomy has contributed to the utter fragmentation of the body into its organs, the biomedical invention of artificial organs has facilitated the conception of the body as a machine made up of replaceable elements. Instead of experiencing the body as a whole, the astonishing number of diseased protagonists in Miller and Durrell's novels are all literally "falling apart."⁹⁸

The anatomized body returns discussion to Miller and Durrell's visions of total experience, or what Jung has accurately termed "*Ganzheitserlebnis*." The Taoist and Zen Buddhist understanding of the universe as a constantly changing totality, which fuses all things into one flux of life, is diametrically opposed to the fragmentary systems of abstraction that prop up western science since the Age of Enlightenment. The Tao as a fusion with the oneness in all things, obviously casts doubt on the western tradition of perceiving the physical world as a fragmented assemblage of elements. As we have seen, philosophical assessments of the resulting anatomized understanding of the human body are manifold. However, especially pertinent for the problematic experience of one's anatomized body is a chapter entitled "November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?" in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. Here Deleuze and Guattari attempt to rethink the human body in terms of a dynamic flux of forces that contrasts the stable notion of the organism. As their starting point they take the conception of the body that has been produced

⁹⁸ The body as machine also pertains to the threat of modern technology which, according to Donna Haraway has, "made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial." Her conclusion that "[o]ur machines are disturbingly lively, and we are frighteningly inert" (1991:152), may be linked to the Modernist preoccupation with reification. As maintained by Stevenson, the theme of reification—i.e. "while things are personified, people are reified, made thing-like"—permeates Modernist literature (1992:75). Although the issue of reification is an important subject, due to limited space, the preceding discussion of the body has focused upon the consequences of the anatomized and thus fragmented body, rather than the interface between the organic and the mechanic body.

by the Cartesian dualism. Their conclusion that "[s]ignificance clings to the soul just as the organism clings to the body," postulates that this dualism must be challenged. The critical question for Deleuze and Guattari thus is "how can we unhook ourselves from the points of subjectification that secure us, nail us down to a dominant reality" (1987:160). The answer, they propose, is the "body without organs," or, to use their abbreviation, the "BwO." Invoking the "BwO" they propose a different way of conceiving the human body as a "living body all the more alive and teeming" because "it has blown apart the organism and its organization" (1987:30). Contrary to the "organized, signified, subjected" body, the "BwO" provides an understanding of the body as a whole. As a lived body, rather than an anatomized corpse, it is "opposed less to organs as such than to the organization of the organs insofar as it composes an organism" (1987:30).

Like the previously analyzed critique of abstract systems of knowledge and its inherent fragmentation of the world, the "BwO" is based on "speeds and intensities, productive flows of forces seeking to escape the authority of unity, organization, and hierarchy" (Olkowski 1999:57). I would like to propose that the "BwO," as a lived body based on "[f]lows of intensity" (1987:162), may be linked to Miller and Durrell's fascination for Zen Buddhist and Taoist assumptions of the formless flux which constitutes the nature of the universe. Clearly, both the "BwO" and the notion of total experience try to rethink the human body in terms of a new understanding of the physical world which is diametrically opposed both to the scientific systematization and the dichotomous discourses promoted by western philosophy. As Dorothea Olkowski has made clear, Deleuze and Guattari undermine scientific schematism by focusing on "the unformed, unorganized, nonstratified or destratified body of the earth with all its flows of subatomic and submolecular particles" (1999:101). The "BwO" points to a vision of the world in which everything flows and thus is very close to the Tao and its claim that by experiencing the oneness in all things we may become one with nature. Ultimately, both ideas aspire to do justice to the complexity of the lived body. If we acknowledge that such a lived body is completely immersed in the ceaseless processes of its environment, then it obviously becomes impossible to scatter it into its separate parts.

From the range and variety of existential dilemmas touched upon thus far, it will be apparent that both the body and the physical world are central issues of Durrell and Miller's thematization of the crisis of modernity. We have seen that the notion of self-estrangement and the endless ailments provoked by life in the modern metropolis is founded on a critique of the philosophical tradition of Enlightenment and its heritage of the nature versus culture dichotomy. Whereas the numerous forms of pathology have revealed that the crisis of modernity is also an environmental crisis, all of the previously quoted attempts to find an

alternative way of imagining the self and the physical world points to a desire to cast doubt on western civilization's major dualisms. Since the most evident solution to conquer this unbalanced state of affairs would be a reversal of the binary oppositions, which have shaped the western conception of the world, we may ask ourselves whether Miller and Durrell advocate a return to nature to overcome the *malaise* of modern life?

3. BACK TO NATURE

3.1. Nature as Antithesis of Culture

The yearning for a more genuine—i.e. authentic—way of life has traditionally sought relief in 'nature.' It thus seems fitting to begin this chapter with a brief look at Jean Jacques Rousseau, who more than anyone else epitomizes the "belief that the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to simpler, more primitive living" (Cronon 1998:479). Rejecting the privileged position attributed to the "arts and sciences," which "he asserted, lead not to happiness nor to self-knowledge, but to distraction and corruption" (Solnit 2000:17), Rousseau delivers a new impulse to the system of thought established in the Age of Enlightenment. In contrast to thinkers who advocate that human supremacy is based on the emancipation from nature and that, as a consequence, self-fulfillment may only be achieved through enculturation, Rousseau reverses this path to happiness. As Max Oelschlaeger has pointed out, Rousseau's idea that "the true path to happiness and well-being lay in finding the way back to a natural existence," is based on "the thesis that culture and happiness are inversely related" (1991:111). From a similar perspective, Rebecca Solnit observes how the "Rousseauian reversal that insists that men and nature are better in their original condition is, among other things, an attack on cities, aristocrats, technology, sophistication" (2000:18).⁹⁹ By casting doubt on the merits of enculturation, Rousseau laid the groundwork to a view in which "[w]ild nature was idealized as an oasis free of the ills of civilization, a retreat to which the harried and battered, the suppressed and oppressed, might turn for relief" (Oelschlaeger 1991:111).

While it is true that "Rousseau's equation of virtue with simplicity with childhood with nature" (Solnit 2000:109) primarily influenced Romanticism, its underlying ideological framework still props up modern ideas of nature. Indeed, to come back to Oelschlaeger's terms, nature as an "oasis free of the ills of civilization" continues to exert its powerful symbolical function as a place where the city-dweller may "correct many neuroses caused by harried urban existence" (Scholtmeijer 1993:180). Gernot Böhme affirms the paramount importance of nature as a realm untouched by civilization. He does so by taking us back to the premise that for modern urban society nature represents first and foremost the 'other' (1989:62). Hence, he points out that the pressures of civilization have generated an

⁹⁹ Solnit reminds us that "Rousseau developed these ideas further in the *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality* (1754) and in his novels *Julie* (1761), and *Emile* (1762)" (2000:18).

enthrallment for nature as a realm of life that exists autonomously, free from human restrictions and ideals (1989:92). The wish to return to nature is therefore a symptom of the individual's suffering from enculturation. Along similar lines, Adorno has explored the role of nature in the industrial age. His claim that "the subject's powerlessness in a society petrified into a second nature becomes the motor of the flight into a purportedly first nature" (1997:65), also links the alienation experienced by the modern city-dweller with a Rousseauian need for nature as a place of reconciliation with authentic human nature.

The theme of the dualistic substructures underlying western conceptions of nature resounds here. Clearly, the "natural" as an "antithesis of an unnatural civilization" (Cronon 1998:484) does not necessarily express a desire to reconnect with the physical world. As Adorno has made clear, "[n]atural beauty, such as it is perceived unmediated in appearing nature, is compromised by the Rousseauian *retournons*" (1997:68). The Rousseauian view of nature is compromised insofar as it constructs an image of nature that serves as a "place of freedom in which we can recover the true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives" (Cronon 1998:484). Indeed, as Cronon maintains, nature from this perspective is "the ultimate landscape of authenticity" (1998:484), or, in Hassan's words, the supreme "condition of some fabled disalienation" (1981:107) rather than an expression of the need to define the human being as an integral part of the biosphere.

Adorno displayed a particular alertness to the special meaning of nature arising from its definition as an antithesis to culture. According to Adorno, the modern yearning for nature focuses "exclusively" on nature as "appearance, never the stuff of labor and the reproduction of life" (1997:65).¹⁰⁰ The result is that nature is aesthetically appreciated for its value as an antidote to civilization. After reminding us that whenever "nature was not actually mastered, the image of its untamed condition terrified" (1997:65) human beings, and therefore lacked any positive connotations, Adorno draws attention to the tacit role nature plays in its modern reevaluations. He writes, "[l]ike the experience of art, the aesthetic experience of nature is that of images" (1997:65). Adorno's line of reasoning emphasizes the extent to which nature is socially constructed. "For in every particular aesthetic experience of nature," he insists, "the social whole is lodged. Society not only provides the schemata of perception but peremptorily determines what nature means" (1997:68).

Adorno makes it clear that aesthetic representations of nature value the physical world because it is representative of some meaning we attach to it. Art, in Adorno's view, is limited to depict "Natural beauty" as "an allegory of [the] beyond" (1997:69), as a symbol of an

unreachable realm. At its worst, art degrades nature "to a deceptive phantasm" (1997:68). In all of these instances nature appears as a simple symbol for utopian values. Adorno, accordingly, draws radical conclusions about the possibility to represent nature other than by making "landscape present in the expression of its own negativity" (1997:67).¹⁰¹ With respect to these conclusions, Gernot Böhme observes that for Adorno nature, as an antithesis to society, has been transformed into a topos of the unattainable. By regarding the social construction of nature as the crucial clue, Adorno's argument permits us to see the utopian dimensions underlying modern conceptions of nature (Böhme 1989:23). Similarly, Böhme insists that this modern yearning for nature illustrates how humanity has denied its own ties to nature and, therefore, seeks to find in the nonhuman environment a utopian counter-representation to its own societal existence (1989:45).

Ideology is of special import for cultural conceptions of nature, insofar as behind such theoretical "assertions there does lie a certain view of human beings as constructors of their respective environment, imposing their symbolically constituted designs upon a world 'out there' [...] which may be bent to any social purpose whatever" (Ingold 1988:11).¹⁰² "Ideology," Buell confirms "is one of several filters through which literature sifts the environments it purports to represent" (1995:84). However, even if cultural constructions of nature contribute to the protean meaning of the concept of nature itself, one dominant feature characterizing western ideas of nature may be circumscribed as a nostalgic longing for an allegedly lost nature. The work of Raymond Williams is particularly relevant to understanding the decisive role this view plays in literary representations of the natural world. True to its title, *The Country and the City* discusses the reciprocal relation between urban and rural life. Noting that the desire for a more natural way of life is anchored in a nostalgia for a vanishing rural way of life, Williams proposes that this longing is propelled by the "well-known habit of using the past, the 'good old days,' as a stick to beat the present" (1985:12).

Subsequently, the critical question for Williams is whether the antecedent and allegedly preferable conditions of life may actually be historically located. Williams's answer

¹⁰⁰ On that account it is interesting to note that Solnit's analysis of Rousseau's novels highlights that "[b]oth novels portray, in various ways, a simpler, more rural life—though none of them acknowledge the hard manual labor of most rural people" (2000:18).

¹⁰¹ Dana Phillips summarizes Adorno's point of view as follows: "[o]ur culture treats nature as nothing more than raw material, and yet nature also serves our culture as the ultimate metaphor by means of which it identifies itself" (2003:103). Phillips points out the extent to which our understanding of nature is distorted by a number of profound contradictions. Adorno's line of reasoning, Phillips claims, is therefore shaped "on the one side by a chronic case of *Kulturpessimismus*, and on the other, by an equally debilitating case of *Naturpessimismus*" (2003:103).

¹⁰² Ideology in this study's usage refers to the way in which the literary text reflects how meaning is socially constructed insofar as whatever "we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in" (Eagleton 1992:14). The corollary of this assumption is the doubt whether "it is possible to perceive the world independently of the conventional ways in which it is represented" (Belsey 1988:14).

is that by its emphasis on the discord of modern life, this nostalgic longing for a rural past was "reduced to a convention," whose foundations rest upon a "part-imagined, part-observed rural England"(1985:261) and thus raise questions of historical accuracy. Referring to what he calls the "escalator" effect, Williams draws attention to the utopian patterns underlying this nostalgia:

The apparent resting places, the successive Old Englands to which we are confidently referred but which then start to move and recede [...] all these, in fact, mean different things at different times, and quite different values are being brought to question. (1985:12)

From this perspective, the yearning for a lost contact with nature primarily seeks to satisfy biased interests. Williams, therefore, rightly points out that the patterns underlying this nostalgia "raise questions" both "of historical fact and perspective," as well as "literary fact and perspective" (1985:12). Rather than advocating a need to re-evaluate the human relationship with the natural world, it purports the traditional idea that "man was happiest in the beginning—in the golden age—and that the record of human activity is a record of decline" (Marx 1967:55).¹⁰³

From an ecocritical perspective it is of paramount importance to assess the impact of this ambivalent nostalgia on cultural conceptions of nature. Maria Mies, is one of a number of thinkers, who has tried to change the perceptual ground by looking at this longing for nature in the light of ecofeminist theory. Mies alludes to "this desire for nature" and points out that it "is not directed to the nature that surrounds us." On the contrary, "[i]t is rather fixated on the nature which has explicitly been externalized" (1993:132). Mies's ecofeminist response to this "desire for nature" is centered around the problem of binary oppositions. According to Mies, it is western civilization's structural dichotomization which has modified our understanding of the natural world and, as a consequence, turned it into an "idealized, unreal nature" (1993:133). In claiming this, Mies leads us back to the utopian dimension of the modern yearning for nature.

From her ecofeminist perspective, Mies does not hesitate to draw a parallel between western conceptions of the "other" and modern ideas of nature:

Industrial capitalist-patriarchal society is based on the fundamental dichotomies between Man and Nature, Man and Woman, City and Village, Metropolises and Colony, Work and Life, Nature and Culture and so on. I call these dichotomies colonizations. The desires analysed are all directed towards that part of these dichotomies which has been amputated, externalized, colonized, submerged, repressed and/or destroyed. This is one reason why the longing for these colonized parts can only be sentimentalized; they must be romanticized and added on to the existing modern paradigm. (1993:143-4)

¹⁰³ It is interesting to note that in Adorno's analysis, this nostalgia is a direct outcome of modern progress. Nevertheless, his examination of this nostalgia also highlights the ambiguity of its frame of reference: "[s]o long as progress, deformed by utilitarianism, does violence to the surface of the earth, it will be impossible—in spite of all proof to the contrary—completely to counter the perception that what antedates the trend is in its backwardness better and more humane" (1997:64).

This passage makes it clear that conceptions of culture and nature are reciprocally related. Indeed, only by defining culture in contradistinction to nature, has a desire for this repressed natural realm become possible. From a similar perspective, William Cronon's analysis of the American notion of wilderness dismisses this cultural fascination for nature as a place of authenticity. "Only people whose relation to the land was already alienated," Cronon alleges, "could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature." For, as Cronon further suggests, this idealized view of nature, which is anchored in "the romantic ideology of wilderness," is intrinsically paradoxical because it "leaves precisely nowhere for human beings [...] to make their living from the land" (1998:484).¹⁰⁴ This longing for nature, then, does not aim at "creat[ing] a new and peaceful and harmonious relationship with Nature," rather it wishes to "maintain the beautiful *image* of nature, a metaphorical nature, not nature as a subject" (Mies 1993:155).¹⁰⁵

According to these suggestions, all representations of nature risk being tainted by anthropocentric interests. Mies's exploration of modern conceptions of nature echoes Adorno's skepticism about the possibility of any culturally transmitted contact with primordial nature. Both Adorno and Mies, insinuate that nature is represented for what it means rather than for what it is. From a similar perspective, Neil Evernden has discussed at length the way in which the yearning for nature is grounded on a coalescence of paradoxical ideas. He points out that even if we "resist the possibility of there being anything human in nature," we do not hesitate to "use nature as a refugium for social ideals." But what is most important, is Evernden's claim that "nature becomes, in effect, a social creation, and 'the passage from the real to the ideological is defined as that from an *anti-physis* to a *pseudo-physis*'" (1992:24). The idea is that the structural dichotomization underlying our understanding of the natural world renders the "dialogue with a world that both breathes through us and remains very elusive, other, nonidentical with our conceptions" (Coles 1993:230) almost impossible. To face this challenge is imperative for an ecocritical approach as it raises fundamental questions of literary representation. It shows that the environmental crisis is, indeed, a crisis of imagination which must seek to supersede traditional tendency toward imprisoning nature into a beautiful image. What is more, the resulting dilemma serves

¹⁰⁴ What is to be noticed here, is that the American notion of wilderness is a more radical expression of the ulterior interests underlying the desire for nature. Unlike the Rousseauian idea of nature, 'wilderness' is defined negatively as a realm lacking any traces of human interaction. Cronon's argument thus highlights the paradox underlying this particular definition of nature as a secure place where the individual may recover a sense of authenticity. Suffice it to say that both the Rousseauian return to nature and the notion of wilderness operate with binary oppositions.

¹⁰⁵ Italics in original.

as a useful frame for examining whether the problematic concept of nature may satisfy Miller and Durrell's yearning to overcome alienation and revitalize literature.

3.2. 'Simulacra of Life'

As indicated in chapter 1.2.1., the question concerning cultural responses to the nonhuman world is of special import for ecocriticism. Recall that while some theorists are more critical than others about the possibility of representing nature within the confines of discourse, it is generally agreed upon that human attempts to know the physical world are always mediated through our cultural value systems.¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, even if we are conscious of the fact that nature has always been used for abstract human desires, we must acknowledge that "to be human is to be linguistically and historically enframed" (Oelschlaeger 1991:ix). As a consequence, any relation to the physical world, even if critical of nature as a discursive term, is, on the one hand, organized in accordance with cultural frames of reference, and, on the other, shaped by the language we use to describe our experience of the nonhuman world. To use Andermatt Conley's words, "[i]t is through social organization, through languages and customs, through *ethos* and *habitus*, that humans attempt to make sense of the world that, in the last analysis, escapes them" (1997:52). In attempting to solve this issue it will thus not suffice to denounce the cultural ideals attached to our ideas of nature. Considering the fact that even the most genuine attempts to rethink nature are dependent on language—a human artifact—raises the question whether any contact with the nonhuman world is possible.

Taken as a question about literary representation, this focus on culturally transmitted contacts with the physical world occasions a renewed consideration of the problem of language. In view of the fact that "nature, like everything else we talk about, is first and foremost an artifact of language" (Chaloupka and McGregor 1993:5), it is evident that language constitutes a major difficulty in the effort to affirm the alterity of nature in literary representations. Yet with regard to the work of Miller and Durrell, another point worth considering is the extent to which similar problems of representation motivate the Modernists' doubts about the human capacity to enjoy any authentic contact with reality. Thus, when Miller writes, "I must have the ability and the patience to formulate what is not contained in the language of our time, for what is now intelligible is meaningless. My eyes are useless, for they render back only the image of the known" (*TCP*:123), his statement can be compared

¹⁰⁶ Dana Phillips, is one of several ecocritics who insist that we deal with culturally defined interpretations of nature, rather than nature as it is in itself. Buell, on the other hand, opts for an "ambidextrous response" in order to avoid a "reductionism at the level of formal representation," which "compels us to believe either that the text replicates the object-world or that it creates an entirely distinct linguistic world" (1995:13).

both to Modernist as well as ecocritical assumptions about the difficulty to represent the natural world. In other words, this passage does not only echo the Modernist assumption that "reality cannot be grasped by the concepts that we construct to describe it" (Miller Robinson 1980:17), it also anticipates the ecocritical claim, which holds that the challenge to rethink our perception of nature implies a radical questioning of language and value systems.

References to the problem of language permeate not only Miller's but also Durrell's novels. Just as the narrator of *The Black Book* invites us to reconsider the problem of language when he laments "[t]he unbearable poignance of being inarticulate—or do I mean only too articulate?—for I have words enough" (BB:58), so Miller claims "[i]n the beginning was the Word. ... Whatever this was, the Word, disease or creation" (TCP:53). In his insistence on the fundamental question whether language is a creative force or a disease, Miller illustrates his profound anxiety about the possibility to represent a vision of the world that does not simply replicate the paradigms of the dominant discourse. Furthermore, by referring to the Old Testament and its narrative of cosmic creation, the passage cited above reveals that Miller's reflections on language bear explicitly on the problem of describing the world, or the universe. In this connection, Edward Casey has made it clear that in "[c]osmogony"—i.e. accounts "of how the created universe came to be"—the problem of language is crystallized insofar as "the genesis of the *cosmos* already contains highly configured and densely conjunctive elements that at least portend *logos*" (1998:5).

From a similar perspective, Luce Irigaray expresses a view of human conceptions of the world that offers a comprehensive exploration of the difficulties of describing nature. In *L'oubli de l'air*, Irigaray examines the assumption that the human being is 'topo-logical.'¹⁰⁷ In this study of Heidegger, Irigaray proposes that the human need to make sense of the world submerges all elements that cannot be subsumed by the *logos*.¹⁰⁸ As a result, the use of language has transformed the human relation to the physical world. Phrased differently, this view supposes that what is not subject to the process of naming, describing, or representing does properly speaking not exist. "*En dehors de sa langue*," Irigaray insists, "*il n'y a rien*" (1983:39). Such an understanding of the 'topo-logical' relation to the world is based on the assumption that language, rather than establishing a dialogue with the world, appropriates the world. It is under the impact of this anthropocentric (or androcentric) perspective that Irigaray

¹⁰⁷ Like Casey, Irigaray calls attention to the fact *cosmos* and *logos* are intricately related. According to Irigaray the paramount importance of this *cosmos/logos* nexus becomes evident if we consider that our understanding of the *cosmos* is generated by a "*rassemblement et ordonnancement du tout par et pour le pouvoir de l'homme*" (1983:20). To elaborate on this suggestion she explains that the human relation to the earth is always determined by the *logos*: "*[l]a question d'une topologie de l'être revient donc à celle de l'être comme topo-logique*" (1983:24).

raises questions about language which are reminiscent of Miller's reflections on the word.¹⁰⁹ Like Miller, Irigaray challenges us to rethink the function of the 'word' by asking whether it is a 'life-giving' or a 'life-destroying' force.¹¹⁰

What renders the situation of the artist so problematic, is precisely the way in which language as "a system of forms, a naming and hence an abstracting of the world" (Miller Robinson 1980:17) casts doubt on the possibility to create representations of nature that are neither idealized nor metaphorical. Thus, the critical question is, how does a writer describe the nonhuman environment without imposing human constructions of 'nature' on it. Indeed, how does a writer create an authentic picture of reality when his or her creative endeavors are perpetually undermined by the suspicion that language is a disease? The central function of this quandary is laid bare in Miller's *Time of the Assassins*. Significantly, Miller's study of Rimbaud and modern art culminates in the realization that "the poison of culture had transformed beauty and truth into artifice and deception" (TA:134). This comment shows that for Miller the problem does not lie in the acknowledgement of an extratextual reality but in the worn out cultural forms of expression.

For artistic creation this implies that the artist who wishes to produce authentic representations of his or her interaction with the nonhuman world is continually confronted with the dilemma that "[t]he constraints of human perception, and of art, make zero-degree interference impossible" (Buell 1995:81). In the face of such complexities, the yearning to overcome, what Miller calls, "artifice and deception," and to revitalize art with the prospect of creating authentic descriptions of the world, shows itself to be grounded on delimited possibilities. If the human perception of the physical world is always mediated, we may go so far as to wonder whether anything can be said about nature. Or as Cole puts it, the ungraspable meaning of nature's language is reflected by the fact that it is

mute,[...] indeterminate, hostile to all definition [...] its substance is precisely 'non-generalizability, non-conceptualizability and yet through our bodily entwinement with the world it seems to be trying to say something. (1993:238)

Clearly, these assumptions suggest that an authentic experience of primordial nature cannot be assimilated into art.

All of the paradoxes I have been delineating reflect the ambiguous circumstances whereby representations of nature epitomize the difficult issue of art and truth. The constraints of language and culture that interfere with the artist's responses to the natural

¹⁰⁸ Irigaray describes this model as follows: "*L'indit ou l'indicible d'un rapport de l'homme à une nature échappant à son logos*" (1983:129).

¹⁰⁹ The evidence supplied by Irigaray is open to interpretation: "*Quel est le pouvoir de la parole sur une autre vie? Un autre vivant? Ne s'est-il pas exercé, jusqu'à présent, sur un mode d'appropriation captatrice plutôt que sur celui d'un échange—et de vie?*"(1983:141).

world, shadow forth the extent to which Miller and Durrell's pursuit of authenticity is highly problematic. Max Oelschlaeger, for example, notes that attention to the cultural creation of nature will give us a concrete sense of the scope and limits of human responses to the nonhuman world. He thus concludes that attempts to represent the physical world may be limited to simply "[affirming] the presence of what can never be revealed through words" (1991:ix). In *Black Spring*, Miller chooses a similar perspective to circumvent the problem of representing nature. Here he insists that we must learn to accept that the world "*is*—and that suffices. The world is what it is and I am what I am." Admitting the deficiencies of his modes of expression he concludes: "[t]his out there and this in me, all this, *everything*, the resultant of inexplicable forces. A chaos whose order is beyond comprehension. Beyond *human* comprehension" (*BS*:25).¹¹¹

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that the role of art in relation to nature is problematized. Adorno aptly summarizes the crux of the matter, when he points out that "[w]holly artificial, the artwork seems to be the opposite of what is not made, nature" (1997:62). Adorno's point is that art, as a cultural product, cannot incorporate a genuine imitation of nature because "appearing nature wants silence" (1997:69). Not surprisingly then, he claims that "[a]s indeterminate, as antithetical to definitions, natural beauty is indefinable" (1997:72). In maintaining this, Adorno grants the work of art an extremely limited capacity to represent nature:

With human means art wants to realize the language of what is not human. [...] If the language of nature is mute, art seeks to make this muteness eloquent; art thus exposes itself to failure through the insurmountable contradiction between the idea of making the mute eloquent, which demands a desperate effort, and the idea of what this effort would amount to, the idea of what cannot in any way be willed. (1997:78)

Far from being a simple statement about the impossibility of art to make nature speak, this passage reveals that the artist constantly risks merely reproducing culturally deformed and idealized images of nature. Adorno therefore considers that the crucial relation of art to nature "denominates not only the aporia of natural beauty but of aesthetics as a whole. Its object is determined negatively, as indeterminate" (1997:72).

In the face of such complexities, we may start to wonder whether Miller and Durrell's critique of western civilization, and its inherent re-evaluation of our relation to the nonhuman world, can be addressed by literature without falling back upon anthropocentric conceptions of nature. In *Beasts of Modern Imagination*, Margot Norris discusses the consequent dilemma of artists who want to reach beyond the limits of human perception. In her study of the

¹¹⁰ Irigaray asks, "[l]a langue prend-elle ou donne-t-elle la vie? Cette question essentielle-a-t-elle trouvé sa réponse" (1983:141).

"biocentric tradition"—i.e. a group of writers and thinkers, whose motivations were galvanized by a critique of "culture as the product of *homo significans*" and of "the human being as a cultural creature" (1985:3)—Norris examines how a biocentric perspective presupposes new modes of representation.¹¹² As we have seen, Miller and Durrell's projects of art worked toward a similar result. Their approach to the crisis of modernity casts doubt on the possibility to return to traditional norms of literary representation.¹¹³

Yet the purpose of this reference to Norris's immensely suggestive work is to emphasize that the biocentric critique of culture cannot "be accommodated by traditional art and will require modes that further frustrate communications, [...], that rupture representation and rebuff interpretation" (1985:3). Norris's analysis, therefore, allows recognition of the way in which a questioning of human conceptions of the world can, in its radical rejection of culture, only lead to "tormented generic and rhetorical experiments" (1985:3). In other words, the inherent crisis of imagination entails the writer's conscious demonstration of rhetorical distress. Furthermore, Norris's observation that for biocentric authors mimesis becomes a problematic term is particularly relevant for an approach to Miller and Durrell's quest for authenticity. Norris argues that, from a biocentric point of view, mimesis becomes "the negative mark of absence, castration, and death," which ultimately challenges artists "to re-evaluate the ontological status of their media as a negative being, as mere simulacra of life" (1985:5). Like Adorno, Norris proceeds from a concept of the nonhuman that can be determined only negatively.

It is under the impact of this impossibility to represent the nonhuman world without recourse to culturally transmitted images and values that the artist figures in Miller and Durrell's novels begin to reflect on the difficulty of writing. Lawrence Lucifer's wish to create an authentic representation of the world, for example, is often described in the form of unreality. His quandary about writing is exemplified by fundamental questions such as "[h]ow

¹¹¹ This passage reveals that Miller's notion of acceptance is not simply an expression of his desire to embrace the decay of the modern world; it also contests the cultural imposition of values and orders on the nonhuman world.

¹¹² Norris traces this "short-lived tradition" back to Charles Darwin, and signals that "one finds little evidence of it after the 1930s" (1985:3). In her exploration of the biocentric tradition, she pays attention to philosophers like Nietzsche and writers like Kafka.

¹¹³ Apart from expressing a similar critique of modern culture a further parallel between the biocentric tradition and Miller and Durrell's outlook may be discerned. This second parallel is centered around a common rejection of the "cold objectivity of *l'art pour l'art*" (1985:13). Indeed, the way in which the biocentric tradition condemns the formalism of certain Modernist movements—i.e. "[t]he very prestige of art is [...] a symptom of its divorce from living vitality" (Norris 1985:14)—is tantamount to Miller and Durrell's wish to revitalize art. Nevertheless, it is important to note that neither Miller nor Durrell are mentioned in Norris's work. As the title of Norris's study implies, she is primarily interested in writers whose work focuses on the "ontological nature of the animal." Accordingly, her study is limited to "artists who create *as* the animal—not *like* animal—but with their animality speaking" (1985:1). Even if the status of the animal in western civilization is thematized by Miller and Durrell, it is only treated marginally in their novels.

can I spend the rest of my time here once I am convinced that life is really imagination" (BB:159). As a result, the insufficiency of language and modes of representation play a very important role in Lucifer's artistic quandaries. Lucifer's attempts to revive art by "skimming the vertebrae of the canon, articulating the skeletons of old systems to examine them, and destroying them," fails precisely because traditional forms of expression lack vitality. Lucifer's anatomy of literary representation, then, reveals that traditional literary descriptions of reality can only produce, what Norris calls, a "mere simulacra of life." Lucifer's conclusion: "[t]his fiendish activity has left me alone in a treasure of images, so barren in their value, that just to write them makes me weary" (BB:159), confirms the despair arising from the crisis in referentiality. Accordingly, Lucifer's prison of 'barren images' raises the question whether Durrell's, but also Miller's, focus on the insufficiency of traditional modes of representation are limited, as Norris suggested, to distorted rhetorical experiments, or whether their texts reveal other strategies to express the inexpressible.

3.3. 'Nature's Flawed Mirror': Rhetorical and Representational Restrictions

By proclaiming fundamental anxieties about the referential competence of language and the worn out character of cultural forms of expression, Miller and Durrell's artistic projects express the Modernist concern with representation and its incapability to express reality. Reflections on our cultural attempts to represent or reproduce nature therefore perfectly exemplify the question concerning art and authenticity. As we have seen, the idea of nature as an antithesis to society has led to an understanding of the world that is mediated through cultural representations and images which clearly serve anthropocentric interests. Furthermore, the idea that nature as a nonhuman realm raises the "problem of how to describe a reality beyond description" (Miller Robinson 1980:17), sustains the suspicion that in works of art nature is condemned to remain tacit. Hence, when writers like Miller or Durrell emphasize the crucial problem of representing nature, it may be a necessary means towards recognition of the vast array of dilemmas which their quest for authenticity implies.

In *Tropic of Cancer*, the Miller persona's pervasive reflections on the status of modern art provides a commentary on Miller's own endeavors to fathom a reality beyond comprehension. By drawing attention to artists whose creative effort consists of "ransacking the universe, [...] always clutching and grasping for the beyond" (TCN:256), he contrasts his artistic project, which is based on the notion of acceptance, to artistic endeavors that try to grasp the ideal meaning of the natural world. Invoking artistic attempts to make sense of the world, Miller illustrates that this effort is an essential function of art, while he simultaneously

demonstrates its utopian undertones. From Miller's point of view art is a desperate attempt to "comprehend, to seize" what must remain "forever unattainable" (*TCN*:256). Even so, for Miller "anything that falls short of this frightening spectacle," of manifesting the quest for an unattainable meaning; indeed "anything less shuddering, less terrifying, [...] is not art" (*TCN*:256). Miller's definition of art as an attempt to express the inexpressible implies that it is confined to thematize its own deficiencies. What is most striking about this dilemma of representing reality then, is its focus on the "frightening spectacle" art creates. This emphasis on the illustration of its own limits expresses a positive evaluation of art as a medium that allows the artist to represent the inadequacies of language.

Thus, rather than claiming that art must fail because it cannot represent reality, Miller proposes that art must give expression to the human struggle to make sense of the world. Miller Robinson has made clear that this paradox is integral to modern fiction. After examining how modern fiction exhibits an anxiety about language, Miller Robinson points out that "while the writer is aware that language creates an illusion of reality, he recognizes that it is a *necessary* illusion." According to Miller Robinson, the insight that "language is all the reality we can know *at the same time that* we sense a reality beyond language" (1980:19) constitutes a crucial element of modern fiction.¹⁴ As Gérard Genette has made clear, this preoccupation with language assumes that we must rethink traditional notions of representations. From this perspective, modern fiction must not merely "challenge [the] distinction between the act of mental representation and that act of verbal representation between the *logos* and the *lexis*," but it must also take into consideration "the very theory of imitation, which conceives of poetic fiction as a simulacrum of reality" (1982:132). The notion of imitation is particularly noteworthy, as Genette reminds us that "the only thing that language can imitate perfectly is language, or, to be more precise, a discourse can imitate perfectly only a perfectly identical discourse; in short, a discourse can imitate only itself" (1983:132).

From an ecocritical perspective, we may therefore assume that rather than imitating the physical world modern literature seems more concerned with rhetoric. After delineating how our anthropocentric vision of the world determines "our reconstructions of environment," which "cannot be other than skewed and partial," Lawrence Buell states that "even if human perception could perfectly register environmental stimuli, literature could not" (1995:84). Literature cannot reproduce the physical world because, as a cultural expression, "art removes itself from nature" (Buell 1995:84). Against the background of the preceding reflections on the notion of mimesis it becomes evident that Miller and Durrell's creative projects are based

on the assumption that art cannot imitate nature. Their reflection on the nature of reality, or the reality of nature, thus primarily consist of the re-enactment of the conviction that "[t]here is much to be said, but no possible way of saying it" (*BB*:236)—i.e. the exhibition of their rhetorical distress. Yet, when this pronouncement is combined with the explicit wish to reach beyond that "boundary which we are all forbidden to cross"; to become an "exciting skater, covering the thin crust above fathomless blue water" (*BB*:100), then the creative act itself, is confined to register the way in which discourse has covered the surface of the world. In this connection, Norris underlines the corollary that to pronounce one's endeavor to establish a new vision of the nonhuman world "plunges writers, thinkers, and artists into an ontological crisis about their work." A crisis, in other words, which "requires solution both at the representational and at the rhetorical level" (Norris 1985:222).

Throughout Miller's and Durrell's novels the various artist figures never cease to stress their awareness that they are embedded in a cultural tradition that aesthetically as well as ideologically predetermines their responses to the nonhuman world. The previously cited quotation from *The Black Book*, in which Lawrence Lucifer is represented as a "skater covering" the thin surface of a fathomless reality, perfectly illustrates Durrell's vision of art. By describing the creative act as a liminal experience, Durrell does not only express the anxiety that as an artist he will never be able to master reality. But he also shows us that, due to the confinements imposed by modes of representation and rhetoric, he will never be able to penetrate the preconceived images of reality, nor will he reach this realm lingering beyond our concepts of the world. As we have seen, Adorno's argument that the aesthetic experience of nature is confined to the production and consumption of images was based on a similar conclusion (1997:65).

It is under the impact of this confinement to images and appearances that Lucifer expresses his struggle with literary accuracy. Indeed, his despair can be found "[a]mong these hesitating pages, scribbled with emendations and images" (*BB*:118). As a matter of fact, from the beginning of *The Black Book* Durrell draws our attention to his preoccupation with modes of representation that reduce the physical world to images, or, to come back to Norris's terms, "mere simulacra of life." Durrell's often-quoted allusion to mirrors, expressed in sentences such as "[t]he gardens have many mirrors, shining up on the drawn blinds, in a chaotic, withering flare of imbecility" (*BB*:22), clearly cast doubt on the validity of mimesis and representation as literary tools that claim to grasp the essence of reality.¹¹⁵ But Durrell not

¹¹⁴ Italics in original.

¹¹⁵ Thomas K. Gordon, for example, refers to this sentence in order to examine Durrell's concern for images and reflections (1995:56). However, given the importance Durrell attaches to mirrors in his *The Alexandria Quartet*, it goes without saying that much more has been written about this issue with reference to his later novels.

only incorporates the metaphor of the mirror to thematize the mimetic capacity of fiction. He also subverts this allusion to Hamlet's speech about art,¹¹⁶ whose end, according to Durrell, is not to "hold, as t'were, the mirror up to nature," but to culturally transmuted "gardens."¹¹⁷ By emphasizing western civilization's classification and transformation of nature into the manageable and controllable concept of the garden, this passage insinuates that literature does not reproduce a facsimile of primordial nature. Quite to the contrary, it merely reflects preconceived images that accentuate the way in which our understanding of the world is necessarily filtered through culturally defined—and therefore idealized—representations of the physical world. From this perspective, literary representations are artificial because they are based on the use of images that tend to become so conventional that their original message will sooner or later start to wither. On that account Thomas K. Gordon explains that for Durrell "words like *image* and *reflection*" fail because they "do not quite get at the heart of what is sought."¹¹⁸ Therefore, the "quest embarked upon in *Black Book* must both penetrate and surpass the world of appearances" (1995:56).¹¹⁹

Gordon's focus on this "world of appearances" reinforces the necessity to have a closer look at the way in which Durrell represents external reality—i.e. the surface covered by his text. From the preceding exploration of the representational restrictions of art, it should be evident that Durrell cannot "surpass the world of appearances" by simply trying to create authentic descriptions of the nonhuman world. However, by giving material representation to the human perception of the world, the text may raise essential questions about our mediated understanding of nature. Consider, for example, the opening of *The Black Book*. Here Durrell's description of Corfu problematizes literature's striving after a direct access to the nature represented:

Today there is a gale blowing up from the Levant. The morning came like a yellow fog along a roll of developing film. From Bivarie, across the foaming channel I can see from the window, the river god has sent us his offering: mud, in a solid tawny line across the bay. The wind has scooped out the very bowels of the potamus across the way, [...]. The fishermen complain that they cannot see the fish any more to spear them. [...] Deep-water life utterly shut off, momentarily obscure behind the membrane of mud. (*BB*:19)

¹¹⁶ Here and elsewhere Durrell refers to Hamlet to discuss larger themes such as the pressure of social and literary norms. According to Isernhagen, Durrell "discards the system, the "ideal" (201) that made Hamlet incapable of action, because it was a norm imposed from without" (1969:67).

¹¹⁷ Because of limited space, the ensuing discussion does not focus on the complex issue of mimesis. However, to avoid simplifying the subject matter we may add that according to Northrop Frye Hamlet's speech implies that "the poem is not itself a mirror. It does not merely reproduce a shadow nature; it causes nature to be reflected in its containing form" (1969:84). Furthermore Frye concludes that mimesis must be understood as a "emancipation of externality into image, nature into art. From this point of view the work of art must be its own object: it cannot be ultimately be descriptive of something, and can never be ultimately related to any other system of phenomena, standards, values, or final causes" (1969:113).

¹¹⁸ Italics in original.

¹¹⁹ Here it is necessary, however, to add that Durrell's concept of the "Heraldic Universe" does use images to create an alternative approach to reality. In order not to complicate matters further I will return to this paradoxical condemnation and evaluation of images in an ensuing chapter.

This is a particularly revealing passage. Not only does it illustrate the naming and signifying processes underlying our attempts to make sense of the world, it also exhibits how these methods involve a distancing from the objects described. In point of fact, there are several important issues emerging from this description.

First, although Durrell's text announces a description of Corfu's maritime scenery it ultimately circumvents any mimetic relation to external reality by replacing the nature it tries to describe by its geographical denomination. Rather than representing a Mediterranean landscape, Durrell reduces material reality to its geographical name—i.e. the "Levant." In *Scenes of Nature, Signs of Men*, Tony Tanner advances the thesis that the process of superimposing names on nature raises questions about western culture's tendency to appropriate the world. By applying "a taxonomic nomenclature on nature," or by believing that the complexity of the biosphere "can be transplanted into the cartographic signs of the 'map'" (1987:2), western culture seeks to impose meaning on the natural world. Thus Tanner reminds us that "[n]aming—to spell it out—pins things down: it fragments and atomizes the flowing totality of nature into static appellations." Naming, in other words, contributes to our conception of nature as a world of appearances, or as a collage of culturally transmitted images. As a matter of fact, Tanner goes so far as to claim that "[t]here is always a danger of reality's ebbing from the thing into the name so that the primary reality is lost in exchange for a fixed, arbitrary secondary reality of nominations and signs" (1987:3).

By employing geographical names to designate this landscape, Durrell shows us that, despite his desire to explore new literary modes of expression, he fails to gain direct access to the nature he tries to incorporate into his novel. Language, but also nature itself—represented here as an opaque sea whose churned up mud prevents us from fathoming that "[d]eep-water life utterly shut off" (*BB*:19)—confines the scope of literature to covering the material world with images that hide the fact that the two realms can never be identical. The use of mythical personifications, such as the "river god" or the "potamus," is an extension of Durrell's concern with the incongruity between external reality and the images he employs. Just as the idea of naming operates with a reduction of material reality, so these personifications exemplify the way in which literature produces an abstract "secondary" vision of the world. Indeed, Durrell intends, I think, to draw attention to the fact that "man is an animal who covers/conceals nature with riddles, enigmas, cryptograms. Because he is uniquely a creature of language he can overlay any one given scene with an infinity of increasingly mythifying signs" (Tanner 1987:15). As a result, the image the writer projects upon the nonhuman world always indicates a certain degree of absence, which, in turn, mirrors the chasm between culture and nature.

A further evidence of Durrell's engagement with the super-imposition of images on nature can be noted in the importance he places on the simile which compares the morning to "a roll of developing film." Before examining the extent to which this allusion to photography implies a very specific relation to the physical world, it is important to point out that references to photography and film permeate this novel. The same simile, for example, reappears in a later chapter, albeit with a slight difference of tense: "[t]he morning came like a fog along a roll of developed film" (*BB*:114).¹²⁰ Given the fact that "[p]hotography has the unappealing reputation of being the most realistic, therefore facile, of the mimetic arts" (Sontag 1977:51), this allusion may indeed be interpreted as a further factor emphasizing the stylized and highly self-conscious character of this description of the Mediterranean scenery.

Even if photography cannot be compared to literature, the ensuing excerpts from Susan Sontag's essay on photography allow recognition of the way in which the production of images have sustained a particular perception of the nonhuman world. From Sontag we learn that the photographic replication of the world is, contrary to what might be expected, not merely offering an instant and unmediated access to reality, it also expresses "another way of creating distance." For, as Sontag points out, "[t]o possess the world in the form of images is, precisely, to reexperience the unreality and remoteness of the real" (1977:164). Sontag concludes that, "[i]t is not reality that photographs make immediately accessible, but images" (1977:165). The photographic perception of the world and the appropriation of nature through the process of super-imposing names and signs upon nature may thus be understood as closely related phenomena. Generally, we may say that both Tanner's analysis of the "signs of men," and Sontag's exploration of photography, permits us to see that perceiving the world as a collection of images indicates a detachment from it. Or to use Sontag's words, when "[r]eality is summed up in an array of casual fragments," the production of photographic images becomes "an endlessly alluring, poignantly reductive way of dealing with the world" (1977:80).

It follows that both the classification of nature through language, or photographic image, promotes a specific perceptual experience of the world. Both processes bespeak the struggle to make sense of the world in a reductive and abstract manner that ultimately also constitutes a compelling "way of imprisoning reality" (Sontag 1977:163). This particular experience of reality is, according to Sontag, symptomatic of modernity. "A society becomes 'modern,'" she writes, "when one of its chief activities is producing and consuming images,

¹²⁰ Further references to the influence of photography and cinema on the experience of reality are dispersed throughout the novel. We may quote, for instance, Lucifer's remark that "[o]ur lives stop here like a strip of cinema film," (*BB*:63), or Chamberlain's desperate conclusion that he has imagined his entire life as though it were "running through his mind like a strip of film" (*BB*:226).

when images that have extraordinary powers to determine our demands upon reality and are themselves coveted substitutes for firsthand experience" become the principal medium through which we perceive and experience the world (1977:153).

Like Durrell, Miller exhibits an anxiety about the incongruity between the image, or sign, and the natural object it designates.¹²¹ But instead of merely re-enacting this rhetorical entrapment by employing arbitrary images that illustrate the incoherence of his attempted representations, Miller additionally focuses on the specific problem of perceiving nature without reducing this experience to an image. Miller's account of his visit to Grand Canyon, as we find it described in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, is a good example for the resulting crisis of imagination. The following excerpt exposes the alienating experience of being caught between an unmediated access to the physical world and the overpowering influence of images that menace to efface any direct experience in favour of a photographic souvenir. Mocking the shortsightedness of a couple of wilderness tourists, the text constructs a dilemma around the problem of representation:

an old spinster with a plate of ice cream in her hand remarks to her escort, a seedy-looking professor, as she licks the spoon: 'Nothing so extraordinary about this, is there?' It was about seven in the evening and she was pointing to the canyon with her dripping spoon. Evidently the sunset hadn't come up to her expectations. It wasn't all flamy gold like an omelette dripping from Heaven. No, it was a quiet, reserved sunset, showing just a thin rim of fire over the far edge of the canyon. But if she had looked at the ground beneath her feet she might have observed that it was flushed with a beautiful lavender and old rose; and if she had raised her eyes to the topmost rim of rock which supports the thin layer of soil that forms the plateau she would have noticed that it was a rare tint of black, a poetic tinge of black which could only be compared to a river or the wet trunk of a live oak or that most perfect highway which runs from Jacksonville to Pensacola under a sky filled with dramatic clouds. (ACN:220)

Neither Durrell's nor Miller's descriptions of nature insist on mimetic accuracy. To the contrary, as this passage reveals, Miller's surrealistic description of the Grand Canyon conveys not only the way in which the tourists' photographic approach prevents them from establishing an authentic contact with the surrounding landscape, it also illustrates in a self-parodic manner its own poetic restrictions.

To begin with, Miller's emphasis on the tourist's disappointment about the scenery outside the "Bright Angel Lodge" perfectly illustrates what Sontag terms "the habit of photographic seeing—of looking at reality as an array of potential photographs." A habit, that

¹²¹ Miller's concern about the limited array of representative possibilities is not confined to the process of imposing images on nature. In *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller dedicates a long passage to the powerful impact of "images" on accounts of erotic experience. Miller uses the very embellished description of a love scene, which Carl gives to Van Norden, to illustrate the chasm between reality and the image used to transmit it. Although Van Norden "doesn't seem to mind so much that it's a fabrication," he insists that "[i]t's the 'images' as he says, which Carl left in his mind, that get him." And he adds that "[t]he images are real, even if the whole story is false" (TCN:123). Although this passage contains many allusions to the way in which images distort reality, yet influence our experience, it obviously does not thematize the problem of representing nature. I therefore propose to analyze an excerpt from *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, which raises questions about the possibilities to produce a genuine representation of Grand Canyon.

according to Sontag "creates estrangement from, rather than union with nature" (1977:97). Not only does the text indicate the tourists' alienated perspective, it also denounces the inherent appropriation and consumption of nature. Miller's parody, which culminates in a surrealistic image of the sun as a 'dripping omelette,' thus denounces not only the inaccuracy of the images we impose on nature. When juxtaposed to the tourist's ice cream, it also discredits this kind of perception as a mode of experience that allows us to possess nature as an object of consumption. Indeed, as Adorno has maintained the tourist industry has "overlaid [nature] with images of being a commodity." Therefore, Adorno concludes that "[p]lanned visits to famous views, to the landmarks of natural beauty" are falsifying our experience because "Nature's eloquence is damaged by the objectivation that is the result of" such a sightseeing perspective (1997:67).

After this diagnosis of the exploitative attitude characterizing the tourist's mediated experience of nature, the text seems to propose a more accurate description of the environmental particularities of this landscape. Whereas the beginning of this description insists on the distance between the Grand Canyon and the observers who are seated inside the "Bright Angel Lodge," Miller slowly undermines this divide in the following sentences. By shifting its attention from abstract and even absurd images to a more nuanced account of a visual relationship with nature, we are reminded that an authentic experience of the world cannot be mediated through images. As in his descriptions of Paris, the emphasis on colors allows Miller to elaborate a more nuanced visual perception of external reality. Yet even if this passage insinuates that a genuine human experience must explore spatial horizons and one's lived interconnections with landscape, the ensuing phrase frustrates the reader whose expectations of a more authentic representation of the Grand Canyon are clearly rejected. Although the text embarks upon a more detailed visual approach to nature, it metamorphoses into an increasingly artificial landscape. Indeed, the reference to the repertoire of possibilities lending themselves for a simile—i.e. "a river or the wet trunk of a live oak or that most perfect highway"—suggests that literary representations necessarily distort reality.

The incoherence of the images Miller proposes for the construction of a literary representation of Grand Canyon, as well as the ironic reference to the "dramatic clouds," illustrate how the image as a conventional tool of representation subverts the author's ambitions to render an authentic picture of nature. By denying any reciprocity between the image and the object it tries to designate, such descriptions illustrate "the way in which the world exceeds concepts we have employed to grasp it." Miller thus seems to suggest that the "world is richer than and non identical to our concepts that seek its identity" (Coles 1993:232). Retrospectively then, this passage does not only cast doubt on the mimetic values

of photography as a pursuit of collecting souvenirs and its negative impact on our perception of the world. Miller's conscious use of rhetorical distortions also exhibits his belief in the mimetic limitations of literary representations.

A particularly patent instance illustrating Miller's anti-mimetic stance occurs in an ensuing paragraph. Rambling about the places that attract sightseers Miller meets "the son of a curio-shop-keeper" who tries to sell films and souvenirs. After Miller tells him that he is neither interested in taking photographs, nor in buying post cards, the boy asks: "Have you seen the large painting of the Canyon in my father's shop" (ACN:221). Again, Miller rebuffs the boy's offer who, in turn, "looked aggrieved, wounded, utterly amazed that I should not care to see one of the greatest reproductions of Nature by the hand of man" (ACN:221). Miller's ironic rejection of this reproduction of nature's grandeur is motivated by his belief that pictorial, literary, or photographic attempts to reproduce nature, produce a fake image of the world. Adorno, likewise, holds that "[n]atural beauty, in the age of its total mediatedness, is transformed into a caricature of itself." As a consequence, Adorno maintains that when artistic reproductions of nature are judged to be kitsch, "[w]hat is innervated in the response is, unequivocally, that natural beauty cannot be copied" (1997:67).

Significantly, Miller's belief that nature cannot be copied—at least in the form of beautiful images—reverberates in his conclusion: "Coney Island, foul as it is, is more honest. Nobody raves about the salt in the water" (ACN:222). In thus proposing that the amusement industry of Coney Island is more genuine than the tourist's objectification of nature, Miller clearly points out that nature cannot be represented other than as an artificial series of picturesque images. Furthermore, he is claiming that while the aestheticization of landscape prevents us from establishing a lived experience of nature, the intrinsically artificial world of Coney Island permits the visitor to be more closely attuned to his or her surrounding. The salinity of the water, as an invisible yet bodily felt element of this environment, suggests that Coney Island offers a more immediate access to nature than the stylized nature the tourist expects to find in nature parks. Therefore, even if the comparison between photography and conventional modes of literary representation is disputable, it still offers a useful frame for thinking not only about the problem of representing but also of perceiving nature.

This concern with the mediated perception of the world also pervades John Dewey's *Art as Experience*. In Dewey's argument, the issue of perception arises from a concern with understanding how perception involves more than recognition. Phrased differently, Dewey is contesting the assumption that a perceiver "merely takes in what is there in finished form, instead of realizing that this taking in involves activities that are comparable to the creator" (1980:52). What "taking in" discloses, is a vital experience that "involves reconstruction

which may be painful" (1980:41). The perceiver's lack of involvement would, according to Dewey, imply that "there is not perception but recognition." And recognition which, in Dewey's terms, is "perception arrested before it has a chance to develop freely," cannot be reconciled with his basic claim that art must be experiential. What is at stake in Dewey's rejection of such an unidimensional understanding of perception is that "[i]n recognition we fall back, as upon a stereotype, upon some previously formed scheme" in which a "detail or arrangement of details serves as cue for bare identification" (1980:94).

Dewey helps us to realize that the act of perception, as opposed to mere recognition, is at the heart of Miller and Durrell's quest for authenticity. Clearly, their endeavor to revitalize art may be regarded as an effort to reclaim genuine perception. Indeed, just as Dewey insists on the painful quality of genuine perception, so Miller and Durrell violently expose the despair underlying their creative attempts to describe the nonhuman world. By contesting the limited access to external reality, such a renewed interest in perception endows the artist to create a representation of external reality that does not content itself with stereotypical and preconceived details which evoke an immediate recognition. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the constraints of literary representation cast doubt on the writer's capacity to create such a revitalized representation of the natural world.

As Michel Serres maintains, even if we wish to go beyond formulaic and identifiable descriptions of the world, language, as a medium shaped by the human "*libido dominandi*" (2003:55), renders the idea of an immediate access to nature illusory. Language functions, according to Serres, as an intermediary between human beings and the world, as a 'parasitic noise' that alienates us from the nonhuman world (2003:58). Serres is explicitly concerned with signification as a process which overlays codes on one another. Each new code induces a rectification, or a slight change of the original meaning insofar as it hides its precedent function (2003:302).¹²² In this manner, the production of an infinite number of signs, or codes, creates an increasing chasm between signifier and signified and therefore leads to the opacity of language. In short, Serres examines how language and signification have alienated us from nature. As I noted earlier, a similar process seems to motivate the distance between reality and image.¹²³ Accordingly, Serres maintains that it is not the external world that is subsumed by the referential capacity of language but, rather, language itself. Language does not only hide the object it designates, but it modifies the function of the sign itself, which, in turn, becomes

¹²² Serres writes, "[s]ous ce sur-codage ou ce redressement, chaque bifurcation oublie son angle, son virage, donc l'état précédent, sa fonction, sa pertinence, son utilité" (2003:302). The efficiency of this system sustains our oblivion of the nonhuman world.

¹²³ One might even go so far as to argue that a similar development of a growing opacity motivates Miller and Durrell's belief that old symbols and expressions must be rejected because they have lost their meaning.

purely autoreferential: "[u]ne fois le phénomène imprimé, l'on ne voit ni ne lit plus que l'impression" (2003:304).¹²⁴

With this last statement, we return not only to the problem of the images we project upon nature, but also to Dewey's concern about recognition. For underlying Serres' argument is the assumption that language necessarily entails the use of identifiable and stereotypical images. This means that literary representations can only address the reader's recognition and leave unexplored true perception, as Dewey understands it. From a similar perspective, Philippe Hamon's *Du descriptif*, explores the extent to which descriptions operate with predetermined modes of discourse. Hamon pursues the thesis that literary descriptions are grounded on a 'linguistic utopia.' Descriptions, Hamon argues, ascribe to language the role of imposing a nomenclature on the world. That is, descriptions are based on a utopian understanding of language as a medium that allows us to denominate and designate external reality.¹²⁵ By delimiting the function of language to a system of nomenclature, the reader of a descriptive text is expected to exhibit a reciprocally related knowledge both of the world and of words designating this external reality. In this sense, descriptions always allude to a discourse that has already been employed elsewhere. Therefore, descriptions favour intertextuality and rewriting. Or as Hamon points out, "de-scribere, *rappelons-le, étymologiquement, c'est écrire d'après un modèle*" (1993:48). This means that the imposition of a nomenclature upon the world implies that the descriptive text must take into account conventional systems of classifications and patterns of signification.¹²⁶ Being dependent upon conventional forms of expression, the descriptive text may therefore only reproduce the way we think and write about nature. Confined to the repetition of what has already been said and already been thought it may indeed fail to evoke a vision of the world that involves true perception rather than mere recognition.¹²⁷

For artists who wish to revitalize their literary exploration of external reality these constraints of literary representation raises a number of crucial problems. As art and literature cannot represent the world without recourse to traditional forms of intelligibility, we may ask ourselves whether descriptions of nature can eschew the use of clichés as a recognizable unit.

¹²⁴ That this very foundation of language is responsible for our alienation from the nonhuman world becomes evident in Serres' statement that "[a]ussi autoattractive que leurs langues, les cultures tendent à se refermer sur soi" (2003:304-5).

¹²⁵ Literary descriptions, Hamon says, convey not only a particular understanding of language, they are also based on a particular vision of the world. The referential realm that descriptions aspire to create require an understanding of language that Hamon defines as: "une langue monopolisée par sa fonction référentielle d'étiquetage d'un monde lui-même «discret», découpé en «unités»" (1993:5).

¹²⁶ To use Hamon's words: "[a]vant de classer le monde, d'être écriture du monde, la description classe d'autres systèmes de classement" (1993:60).

According to Tanner, the problem for writers struggling with the loss of referential capacities of language is "how to break out of the circle into the spiral: in going round in a circle, narrative degenerates into cliché and language disintegrates into a purposeless jumble of letters and empty spaces, the remnants of a code no longer transformable into messages" (1987:190). That such a "breaking out" implies a violent gesture of liberation becomes evident if we put Tanner's claim in the context of the crisis of modernity. As we have seen in a preceding chapter, Miller's own definition of art aspires exactly to this flight from the circle into the spiral. Nevertheless, before turning to Miller and Durrell's texts I would first like to outline some basic premises concerning the notion of clichés .

By retaining the French meaning of the word cliché which, as Sontag points out, "means both trite expression and photographic negative" (1977:173), it becomes evident that clichés exemplify the way in which our perception of reality is necessarily filtered through culturally defined images. The cliché is the outcome of our conventionalized patterns of perception which, as Hamon has reminded us, depend on a recycling of classifications and significations of the nonhuman world. In this connection, Ruth Amossy and Anne Herschberg Pierrot's concise study, entitled *Stéréotypes et clichés*, offers some interesting observations on the use of clichés in literary texts. After maintaining that our perception of reality is based on the recognition of images and culturally transmitted models that facilitate the understanding of the world, Amossy and Herschberg Pierrot stress that clichés and stereotypes play a fundamental role, not only as mediators between the individual and society, but also as filters and traces indicating the social nature of the text (1997:67). The cliché as a "communicable unit" (to borrow Frye's term) can only be efficient if the reader is familiar with the inherent associations of the cliché.¹²⁸ By the same token, the reader can only recognize the cliché because as a reductive image and repeatable unit it plays a fundamental role for our perception of reality. From this perspective, the cliché as a reductive image that may be recycled to become what Sontag terms "meta-clichés"—i.e. "[i]mages of real things are interlayered with images of images" (1977:175)—invites reflections not only on

¹²⁷ Indeed, Hamon emphasizes that "*la déclinaison d'un système descriptif sollicite davantage une reconnaissance de la part du lecteur qu'une compréhension, qu'un système descriptif fait appel à un déjà-connu lexical plutôt qu'il ne construit un objet formel jamais-vu*" (1993:99).

¹²⁸ Frye uses the term "communicable unit" to describe his concept of the "archetype: that is a typical or recurring image." (1969:99). Frye's concept of the "archetype" can be compared to the cliché insofar as his examination of archetypes is based on its relation with intertextuality and ideology. Accordingly, he stresses, on the one hand, that the "archetype" is "a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience" (1969:99). On the other, he emphasizes that "[s]ome archetypes are so deeply rooted in conventional association that they can hardly avoid suggesting that association" (1969:102). Similarly, Amossy and Herschberg Pierrot claim that the cliché is anchored not only in the dominant discourse: "[e]lles sont le prêt-à-dire, prêt-à-penser, prêt-à-faire, prescrit par le discours social" (1997:24), but also in its relation to other texts: "[l]e cliché est ce qui marque la spécificité générique d'une oeuvre littéraire, et sa relation à d'autres textes" (1997:61).

conventionalized and therefore worn out forms of expression, but also on the chasm between image and reality. Taking into account the relation between literature and environment, we may conclude that the cliché functions as a rigidified demonstration of the nature-culture divide produced by our systems of signification.

Whereas these premises seem to be symptomatic of cognitive perception—indicating that nature indeed cannot be perceived independently of conventional anthropocentric and culturally determined patterns—Philippe Hamon points out that the very nature of the literary description is based on the application of clichés. On the basis of the observation that descriptions 'classify classifications' hereby structuring a reality that has already been organized by other discourses, Hamon proceeds to draw three conclusions.¹²⁹ First, this focus on the dominant discourse suggests that descriptions are more concerned with intertextuality and the establishment of cultural norms than with reality. Second, in the light of the description's dependence upon conventional patterns of signification, the cliché, but also tautology and pleonasm, become a necessary means toward creating intelligible representations of the world (1993:162). Third, its inherent preoccupation with norms of signification enables the description to embrace forms of irony and parody (1993:119). This kind of intertextual parody and irony arises when the writer wants to express his or her distrust of language and signification. An ironic use of the cliché, in short, enables the writer to cast doubt on established norms of description. As Frye states, "ironic convention, including parody" is "often a sign that certain vogues in handling conventions are getting worn out" (1969:103).

Hamon's examination of descriptive texts and their use of images and clichés helps us to cast new light on the problem of creating an authentic perception of the nonhuman world. In this chapter I have primarily tried to outline some basic premises governing the theory of description in order to emphasize that literary representations of the human and nonhuman world are filtered through predetermined patterns of signification. For a study of literary attempts to describe the natural world, this means not only that literature cannot create an authentic access to primordial nature, but also that modern society's production and consumption of images and codes increases the chasm between culture and nature. The cliché, as the outcome of this distancing, therefore perfectly illustrates the alleged lack of authenticity characterizing traditional literary representations of nature. It is thus not surprising that authors like Durrell and Miller, whose literary project is itself motivated by a questioning of the literary tradition, pay attention to the cliché as a notion foregrounding the

¹²⁹ For Hamon the description is a "*méta-classement*," that is a "*texte de classement classant et organisant une matière déjà découpée par d'autres discours*" (1993:56).

worn out character of established models of expression. Against the backdrop of the writer's confinement to language, an ironic handling of the cliché may prop up the writer's desire to give a material representation of the inadequacies of literary representations of the physical world.

3.3.1. From Universal Identity to Difference

We have seen that Lawrence Lucifer, as one of the main narrators and artist figures of *The Black Book*, sees himself forced to operate within a context of culturally predefined responses to the world. Subsequently, his creative efforts fail to reach beyond this world of appearances. Lucifer is thus not only aware that the images he has learnt to impose on the world contribute to a fake reproduction of reality, but he also knows that language does not permit him to describe nature as it is in itself. Hence, even if Lucifer complains that "I sit for whole days in a vomit of images" (*BB*:153), he simultaneously takes care to stress that by using language, as a cultural mode of signification, he will never be able to create an authentic imitation of reality. "Writing," as Lodge reminds us, "can only imitate ways of thinking and speaking about reality, and other ways of writing about it" (1977:25). By admitting that "our world is a world of strict boundaries, outside which we dare not wander, not even in our imagination" (*BB*:22), Lucifer consciously places himself within this restrictive tradition of his cultural existence.

Once Lucifer, as a writer, admits that despite his efforts to revitalize literature he must "operate from culturally nuanced repertoires of habits, thoughts and vocabularies, such that the 'finished' work involves not mastery so much as adjudication of discourses" (Buell 2001:27), he has to face a second major issue. This is the difficulty of working within and against a tradition of literary representation. Norris remarks that the fundamental contradictions of traditional forms of representation should have incited "biocentric" writers, whose work is motivated by a contestation of cultural conceptions of nature, to pursue a "total abolition of representation and the invention of a nonrepresentational mode." However, as most of these writers condemn the formalistic experiments of High Modernists for having produced a lifeless art, this recourse to a purely nonrepresentational mode seems flawed. As Norris explains, "the purely formalistic concerns of much abstract art [...] suggest that such a strategy might have exacerbated the problem by simply producing more abstraction" (1985:16). As a consequence, writers of the biocentric and vitalist tradition opted for a "technical solution" that, according to Norris, "lay in the skillful use of the critique, which invokes representation only to dismantle it" (1985:16). As we have seen, Durrell and Miller

seem to apply a similar technique illustrating that when art aspires to express the inexpressible it can only do so by exhibiting its own deficiencies. In sum, rhetorical breakdowns may be interpreted in Rasula's terms, namely as monstrous demonstrations of the author's rhetorical limitations.

As a reductive and highly conventionalized image, the cliché may thus serve as a perfect object of critique. For by demonstrating the rigidity and artificiality of the cliché, the writer may draw attention to the problem of signification. A careful use of the cliché may illustrate "the ambiguities, the ambivalences, the anguishes, involved in the relations between nature and language, thing and name, scene and sign" (Tanner 1987:6). Moreover, when approached from an ironical point of view, the cliché as a marker of intertextuality may express a critique of literary traditions and their respective norms or representation. In view of these many-layered problems of the cliché it is hardly surprising that Durrell incorporates a vast array of stereotypical English images into his novel. Durrell's preoccupation with the artificiality of traditional modes of representation may not only be observed in numerous allusions to classic texts of English literature, it is also reflected in a conscious use of clichés and stereotypes.¹³⁰ Ultimately, this ironic use of the cliché enables Durrell to "disclose that our inherited symbols of order and beauty have been divested of meaning" (Marx 1967:364), within the intrinsic representational and rhetorical confines of literature.

However, before looking more closely at Durrell's subversion of traditional images, we should first give some consideration to formal aspects. As pointed out by Hamon, the use of irony and parody, two devices which are closely related to intertextuality, may hint at the necessity to reform the norms of the descriptive text (1993:119). Accordingly, an ironic commentary on the norms of representations may be accomplished when "there is an *unmasking* of the deceptive appearance" (Pogue Harrison 1992:79). In such ways, an ironic reversal of the cliché's surface may produce a comic reaction which operates with negation. A negation, whose comic effects Frye summarizes as follows: "whatever reality is, it's not *that*". Hence the importance of the theme of creating and dispelling illusion" (1969:170). In like manner, Miller Robinson in his study of the comedy of language defines the essence of the comic effect as a revelation of "how we, as individuals, create our sense of the world through language" (1980:2).

Miller Robinson proposes a theory of comedy that reveals the "contradictions between the nature of reality and the nature of language, the subject and the medium" of the modern

¹³⁰ The examination of the novel's vast number of intertextual allusions is beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, from an ecocritical perspective an analysis of Durrell's subversion of stereotypical images seems to yield a more fruitful approach to the way in which this text problematizes literature's relation to the physical world.

writer suspecting the referential capacity of language (1980:ix). A double denunciation of traditional norms of representation may thus be achieved: first, an ironic stance allows the text to convey the "perception of the falsity of form" and, second, it draws attention to "the intuition of what makes these forms seem false" (1980:9). For the artist who wishes to thematize the artistic dilemma of trying to express the inexpressible, an ironic perspective may indeed provide a promising stratagem. This becomes especially obvious if we consider that a text that demonstrates "the destruction of order and the creation of order as two contraries brought together and held in suspension as one" (Miller Robinson 1980:13), may use this ironic perspective to re-enact the problem of representation.

With Miller Robinson's statement we return to Durrell's belief that traditional literary orders must be destroyed so that a revitalized form of art may emerge. The same denunciation of the inadequacy of established orders is at work in Durrell's concern about images, whose uncritical use has furnished stereotypical accounts of English landscapes. A perfect example illustrating the aforementioned textual strategy of critique, involving the destruction and creation of forms, can be found in the recurrent image of the red robin. Closer examination of the numerous references to the red robin reveals that the diverse contexts within which the robin appears contribute to the "aesthetic experience of paradox stated, the paradox of form dissolved and form created" (Miller Robinson 1980:14).

Notice that at the outset the robin appears as a confirmed cliché. In the following sentence, "This carol of snow, when the robin sits importantly on the rose bushes which line the deserted gardens" (*BB*:22), the robin confirms its function as a detail embellishing this description of an English winter. In an ensuing chapter Lucifer remarks, "[i]f I find a dead robin under the bushes I slip it in my pocket with a preoccupied air" (*BB*:69). In spite of the fact that the robin in this conditional sentence is dead, the phrase itself does not manifest a contradiction between the signifier and the signified. Even if the situation appears absurd the dead bird still seems to be congruent with the sign imposed on it. Nevertheless, in the ensuing attack on nature poets, we find a radically altered perspective:

All the old invocations served up in metre: I can never understand this frightful brand of
Englyshe Countrie sentiment, with its inevitable false rhyme which is so much more
annoying than no rhyme at all.

*The robin hangs upon the bush
A jewel in the winter hush. (BB:103)*

And he adds:

*The robin twirls upon the bough,
The postman has a nasty cough. (BB:104)*

Here the robin is clearly ridiculed as an empty formula. As a cliché it is deprived of any valid meaning. The final blow, however, the robin receives when it is reduced to "the fistful of feathers my brother murdered last winter with his gun" (*BB*:232). Such sentences suggest that

the dissolution of the cliché as a lexical form—i.e. the synecdoche reducing the bird to a "fistful of feathers"—may in its destruction of the rigid image retain a vital connection to the concrete reality of the animal.¹³¹

From the instances cited above, we may discern that the subversion of a cliché may indeed provide a useful frame for expressing one's discord with established discourses. As Tanner confirms, "unless a writer overtly accepts and celebrates the value system and reality picture of the society in which he writes, he must inevitably move towards complicity or contestation." As a result, "[c]ontestations become more radical as they increasingly refuse any complicity with what they are describing" (Tanner 1987:176). Whereas the preceding analysis of the robin demonstrates that the recycling clichés is a matter of producing an intelligible, rather than an authentic picture of the world, the ensuing excerpt shows that Durrell does not hesitate to incorporate more explicit techniques of contestation:

The country was alive in the sense that a playing card is alive. We are entering into fiction, and all this is merely the paraphernalia of ballet, the insignia of clowns or swans strutting before some too stylized backcloth. (*BB*:162)

In its radical rejection of mimesis this passage conveys the impossibility of creating an authentic picture of nature. By demonstrating his own failure to describe the nonhuman world, the narrator clearly points out that his confinement to representational norms can only reproduce a "stylized backcloth."¹³² In other words, instead of representing nature, literature seems to create stereotypical descriptions that operate with the superimposition of images and therefore fail to articulate a lived experience of the countryside.

Behind such contestations of representational norms, there lurks the conviction that "[l]anguage comes infinitely short of paralleling the variegated surface of nature" (Dewey 1980:215). Attempts to grasp the in itself of nature fall short of success, for reasons explained by Dewey: "words as practical devices are the agencies by which the ineffable diversity of natural existence as it operates in human experience is reduced to orders, ranks, and classes that can be managed" (1980:215). Looking at it from this perspective then, Durrell's contestations of our rigid systems of signification can be linked to his interest in Taoism. As indicated in chapter 2.3.1., Durrell was particularly attracted to a Taoist vision of the universe

¹³¹ As further example demonstrating Durrell's subversion of the robin as a cliché can be found in numerous references to birds that seem to be at the heart of Lobo's nostalgia of Peru. The sight of "a garish cockatoo," painted on a box "reminds him of Peru, though why, he cannot think. In his childhood there were boxes of oranges with this bird painted on them" (*BB*:33). Although this bird does not appear to be endemic of the Peruvian fauna, as Lobo remembers it, it still plays an important role in Lobo's nostalgic accounts of Peru: "[a]h the Rimac twisting under the bridges, the shawls, the parrots (damn those parrots!), the family" (*BB*:94). Finally, Lobo himself is compared to the bird: "Lobo sitting like a disconsolate robin (a Peruvian robin) by the locked door" (*BB*:114).

¹³² Durrell's reference to the function of nature as a "backcloth" anticipates the ecocritical premise that literary descriptions of nature have often been reduced to a mere "setting." Such a perspective, Buell alleges, "deprecates

as a formless flux. Against the background of Durrell's endeavor to grasp the flow of life, the problem of language and signification reemphasizes the difficulty of the task. If Dewey is right, then language imposes on a constantly changing reality, orders, structures and abstractions that obviously cannot articulate the flowing totality of the world. From an analogous point of view, Miller Robinson has argued that this search for order "substitutes for the continuous the discontinuous, for motion stability." Miller Robinson also notes the degree to which "[perceiving] in fixed products a reality that is in constant process" (1980:8), casts doubt on the capacity of language to do justice to reality. Thus, he rightly points out that "[g]iven a conception of reality as chaotic energy, a major modern concern is how language frames our perception of reality, and how that perception is an illusion of reality, divorced from how things really are" (1980:17).

Retrospectively then, Durrell's critical use of the cliché perfectly illustrates this process of imposing orders on a constantly changing reality. By its emphasis on the rigidity of the clichés we project upon the earth, such a technique may, in turn, stress the way in which the nonhuman world resists subjugation. As a means of contestation, Durrell's subversion of clichés draws the reader's attention to a reality lurking behind the images that are supposed to designate the world. To use Adorno's terms, such a subtle handling of clichés may indeed hint at the "trace of the nonidentical in things under the spell of universal identity" (1997:73). A conscious demonstration of the representational dilemmas thus allows Durrell to restore value and meaning to nature. Resistance to systems of signification can be observed in other ironical attempts to describe the natural world. A case in point is the following passage about the incompatibility of art with nature:

In England there is an old man who feeds the swans, slowly burning down, damp, rheumy, sour, into the hollow socket of his breast. The poets hymn his simplicity. What does this mean? If he were an old bun-nosed Tibetan feeding the wild swans under the Greek Islands, they would deplore the incongruity of the world. (*BB*:235)

As this passage clearly suggests, the problem of representing the nonhuman world mimetically serves as a useful frame for criticizing rigid representational norms. Durrell's attack on the lack of authenticity notwithstanding, the resulting ambivalence also insinuates that language has estranged us from the nonhuman world. As evidence of this concern about cultural attempts to make sense of the world, we can note the importance Durrell places on the "incongruity of the world" rather than the sign. Yet regardless of the problem of language, it is significant to emphasize that the chosen ironic form permits Durrell to re-evaluate the singularity and concreteness of the physical world by simply exhibiting the incongruity of cultural impositions of meaning upon the world,

what it denotes, implying that the physical environment serves for artistic purposes merely as backdrop,

Whereas Durrell has chosen an ironic perspective to attain an inversion of representational norms, Miller opts for a different form of contestation. Without neglecting the evident differences between the two approaches, I wish to stress that both forms of contestation are directed against the way in which traditional representations imprison reality and estrange us from the nonhuman world. However, before looking more closely at Miller's subversion of representational norms, we should first give some consideration to a contradiction running through Miller's work. This contradiction may be phrased as follows: in spite of the fact that Miller's literary project is motivated by a profound questioning of the referential capacity of language, his texts tend to conjure up modes of lexical excess. As Hassan has remarked, "Miller is driven to put everything into words" (1967:58). The question therefore arises whether such a technique is compatible with his aforementioned wish to re-enact the "frightening spectacle" of art and its inadequate medium. Hassan alludes to this contradiction and invites us to consider the question: "[h]ow then can he, inebriate words, attain the language of silence and push literature beyond its horizons" (1967:58).¹³³

During the course of this study we have seen that one of Miller's favorite stylistic figures is the list. That such lists are often used to highlight the excess of modernity and industrial progress has been discussed in preceding chapters, in the following I would like to approach the topic from a rhetorical point of view. For it seems to me, that Miller's use of lists, which doubtlessly produce an effect of lexical profusion and excess, can be interpreted as a contestation of representational norms. While Philippe Hamon asserts that lists are a traditional feature of descriptions (1993:131), sentences such as "Twilight hour. Indian blue, water of glass, trees glistening and liquescent" (*TCN*:11) illustrate that some of Miller's accumulative structures lead to increasingly complex descriptions of the physical world. Instead of insisting on what Adorno has called "the spell of universal identity," such heterogeneous lists seem to undermine traditional forms of representation that insist on analogy and identity.

To elaborate on this suggestion I shall focus on Dorothea Olkowski's exploration of the "ruin of representation." Her work on representation is an effort to specify how difference is effaced by traditional norms of representation. Olkowski thus argues for a new ontology that moves from a "logic of identity to a logic of difference" (1999:14). In traditional representations, Olkowski maintains, difference can only be established either through

ancillary to the main event" (1995:85).

¹³³ Hassan's *The Literature of Silence*, is an investigation of the radical critique underlying Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett's visions of art. Hassan advances the thesis that when art turns against itself it can only produce silence. Accordingly, when Hassan refers to the "language of silence," in the sentence I have just quoted, he insinuates that Miller's vision of art is grounded on the belief that language is divorced from reality.

identity or analogy (1999:20). "[I]n order to be a representation," Olkowski adds, a "second element, namely *resemblances* that presume the continuity of the sensible intuition in a concrete representation" is necessary. As a result, "this dual system of classification" effaces "*difference* as a concept and as reality" (1999:20).¹³⁴ At stake here is not just accuracy of representation. For to consider the effacement of difference, is to acknowledge that "in the name of custom we replace diversity with simplicity" and that we hereby are alienated from the nonhuman world. Such a system of representation confines us to "endless repetition in which each new situation forgoes its novelty" (1999:116). Miller arrives at a similar conclusion in *Time of the Assassins*, where he states that "[f]reedom is bound up with differentiation. Salvation here means only the preservation of one's unique identity in a world tending to make every one and every thing alike" (TA:49). "Under such conditions, without any reflection on difference," Olkowski explains, "we discover nothing but resemblances" (1999:116). A direct corollary of this reliance on resemblances is that it "succumbs to treating everything it places in relation like inert matter, unorganized solids, thus leaving fluidity unnoticed and without consideration" (1999:123). When compared to the previously discussed problem of grasping the flow of life, Olkowski's reflections on "the logic of identity" allows recognition of the way in which representation fails to do justice to the nonhuman world. Therefore, Olkowski strives for a "ontology of change as opposed to an ontology of static hierarchies and objectified structures" (1999:14).

The critical question for Olkowski is how can difference be acknowledged, when according to representational norms difference can only be subsumed in the form of "a catastrophe, a break in resemblance or as the impossibility of claiming identity, opposition, analogy, or resemblance" (1999:20). The solution to this problem Olkowski finds in Deleuze and Guattari's "acentered systems of multiplicity." Olkowski draws on the work of Deleuze and Guattari in order to illustrate how multiplicities and "fluids resist adequate symbolization and serve as a constant reminder of the powerlessness of representational concepts and their logic to account for all of nature's characteristics" (1999:124). Considering the fact that Miller's lists operate as a stylistic figure of excess, I wish to suggest that an inquiry into these theoretical assumptions of multiplicity may offer suitable latitude to accomplish the required discussion of Miller's contestation of representational norms.

In order to delineate how Miller's lists undermine representational norms, I will briefly delineate the main tenets of Deleuze and Guattari's "acentered systems of multiplicity." What Olkowski has described as traditional forms of representation, Deleuze and Guattari call "[a]rborescent systems." Less a stylistic option than a fundamental premise of semiotics,

¹³⁴ Italics in original.

arborescent systems "are hierarchical systems with centers of significance and subjectification" (1987:16). To draw attention to the ambiguous avail of trying to frame experience within such "centered systems" Deleuze and Guattari propose "acentered systems" that replace hierarchical unities with multiplicities (1999:17). To the arborescent system's metaphor of the tree they therefore contrast the rhizome. What matters is the multiple dimensions of the rhizome insofar as it "connects any point to any other point." Phrased differently, the rhizome "brings into play very different regimes of signs" (1987:21).¹³⁵ The usefulness of the rhizome for articulating the theoretical implications of traditional norms of representation is exhibited in the following passage:

Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction: neither external reproduction as image-tree nor internal reproduction as tree-structure. [...] Unlike the graphic arts, drawing, or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight. [...] In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system [...] without an organizing memory... (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:21)

I daresay that Miller's use of lists as a rhetorical figure of excess may be interpreted as an example of a rhizomatic production of multiplicity.

In sum, lists may provide a useful tool to contest representational norms and to subvert predefined conceptions of the nonhuman world. In a comparison of the list as a stylistic figure with Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome three concrete traits stand out. First, in view of the fact that lists tend to resist closure, they may indeed function as a potent place of multiplicity. Second, lists do not necessarily need to be organized according to hierarchies. Lists can be heterogeneous; as such they are open to combine different regimes of signs. Third, unlike the production of clearly defined images, the list as an amalgamation of an infinite number of variables may subvert the rigidity produced by traditional descriptions of the nonhuman world. The following passage from *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, serves as an example of the way in which lists produce an altogether different account of the nonhuman world:

What tremendous changes between Charleston, Asheville, Biloxi, Pensacola, Aiken, Vicksburg, St. Martinsville! Always the live oak, the cypress, the chinaball tree; always the swamp, the clearing, the jungle; cotton, rice, sugar cane; thickets of bamboo, banana trees, gum trees, magnolias, cucumber trees, swamp myrtle, sassafras. A wild profusion of flowers: camellias, azaleas, roses of all kinds, salvias, the giant spider lily, the aspidistra, jasmine, Michaelmas daisies; snakes, screech-owls, raccoons; moons of frightening dimensions, lurid, pregnant, heavy as mercury. (ACN:98)

¹³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari insist that the rhizome is not a simple imitation of multiplicity; for it "is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple." Moreover, they contend that "[i]t has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and overflows" (1987:21).

Such a representation of the natural world yields a number of implications, all of which can be linked to the aforementioned acentered systems of multiplicity.

To begin with, in this passage the list is used to establish a concordant relation between different systems of classification. While at first glance these lines seem to suggest that lists dissect and fragment reality, the random choice of topographic and biological features produces, in fact, a dynamic rather than a static account of this southern landscape. Take, for instance, Miller's list of towns. Scattered over the southeastern area of the United States, the order in which they are mentioned does not seem to reproduce any linear trajectory which would allow us to retrace Miller's own itinerary. Just as Deleuze and Guattari claim that the rhizome belongs to a map which must constantly be constructed, so Miller expects his readers to find their own paths through this enumerative account of the American Southeast.

It goes without saying that the heterogeneous enumeration of bioregional characteristics is diametrically opposed to rigid representations of the nonhuman world. For in stark contrast to the image which, as we have seen, tends to imprison reality, a description based on the inherently endless dimension of lists conveys an entirely different response to the nonhuman world. Also, there is no doubt that by embracing multiplicity, rather than identity and resemblance, such lists do subvert traditional forms of representation. Closer examination of this form of contestation, reveals that the random choice of biological and topographic features insinuates that literature cannot reproduce the infinity of components that make up the biosphere. As a rhetorical figure of excess, lists imply that even if language intends to establish a system of nomenclature, it will never come to terms with the vastness and diversity of nature. Compared to Durrell, who has chosen the cliché to denounce the deficiencies of language, Miller seems to have chosen enumerative descriptions to re-enact the inadequacies of our systems of signification.

Retrospectively then, Miller's dynamic, almost fluid description of nature may indeed contribute to what Olkowski calls the "ruin" of traditional hierarchical forms of representation. As mentioned above, Olkowski's investigation of the representational restrictions that contribute to an effacement of difference rearticulates much of Deleuze and Guattari's work on the rhizome. Olkowski maintains, in effect, that a series may embrace difference "without threat of representation" (1999:186). Accordingly, she proposes that "[a]ny series is constituted by the differences between each of the terms that enter into it." As a consequence, "rather than representation by means of resemblance, identity, analogy, and opposition, the system of series is a differentiating of differences by means of the coupling of heterogeneous series" (1999:186). When objects of a series are thus put "into contact with one another," they retain their difference because the object "disguises itself in the series, and so

does not unify and cannot be identical with itself" (1999:188). From an ecocritical perspective, such a system of series is particularly noteworthy. For an ecocritical consideration of the preceding line of thought, suggests that such a valuation of difference offers a valid alternative to the hierarchies arising from western civilization's binary oppositions.¹³⁶ As Hartmut Böhme has made clear, when art tries to represent nature without appropriating it for anthropocentric interests it must develop techniques that recognize the "otherness" of nature. Only by becoming aware of the non-identical realm in which nature may truly manifest itself the work of art can do justice to the autonomy of the nonhuman world.¹³⁷

In other words, when lists are used as a form of critique directed against our conceptions of nature and our systems of signification, they do not merely reflect the inefficiency of language. In point of fact, wider implications are at work when lists try to embrace difference, or acknowledge the 'other' without submission to anthropocentric patterns of perception and its appropriative notion of identity. Whereas the passage cited from *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* shows how lists that operate with multiple systems of classifications engender a particular vision of the world, the ensuing description of Paris, from *Tropic of Cancer*, demonstrates that lists can subvert the hierarchies imposed by representational norms:

everywhere the musty porches of cathedrals and beggars and lice and old hags full of St.Vitus' dance; pushcarts stacked up like wine barrels in the side streets, the smell of berries in the market place and the old church surrounded with vegetables and blue arc lights, the gutters slippery with garbage and women in satin pumps staggering through the filth and vermin [...]. (TCN:23)

From such accumulative descriptions we may discern that by bringing into contact a heterogeneous series of human and nonhuman elements, texts may indeed undermine traditional forms of representations. In Miller's text, beggars, lice, pushcarts, vegetables, women and vermin all conspire to produce a dynamic picture of this urban environment, thereby transcending dualistic forms of perception and anthropocentric hierarchies. Phrased differently, the amalgamation of these elements denies the possibility of defining the nonhuman in contradistinction to the human, or culture in contradistinction to nature.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ In point of fact, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome gravitates around the problem of binary oppositions. In a rather abstract sense they stress that "[e]very rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. [...] These lines always tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in rudimentary form of the good and the bad" (1987:9).

¹³⁷ Hartmut Böhme claims that an ecocritical perspective requires a "*Begriff der Schonung: die Fähigkeit, das Andere anders sein zu lassen, Nicht-identisches wahrzunehmen, Fremdes nicht zu entfremden, in Vielheiten und Dissonanzen, Widersprüchen und Brüchen zu handeln*" (1988:33).

¹³⁸ I am, of course, aware that my examination of Miller's lists presents a limited approach to the rhetorical use of lists as a stylistic figure. However, as I have made the concern with dualistic structures central to the discussion

In this connection, a further stylistic feature worth considering is Miller's use of the conjunction "and." As Deleuze and Guattari have made clear "the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and...and...and...'" (1987:25). The remarkable fact about the conjunction "and" is that it functions as an "atypical expression of all of the possible conjunctions it places in continuous variation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:99).¹³⁹ The advantage of "and" as an expression of variation and multiplicity is that it allows us to preserve a potent place between things that cannot be subsumed by traditional hierarchical modes of representation. It thus gives conceptual significance to the "[b]etween things," which, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, "does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a traversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end" (1987:25). What I am attempting to show is that Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic systems help us to elucidate the importance of enumerative descriptions, which by focusing on variation and multiplicity may problematize and, in the final analysis, undermine western culture's dualistic patterns of perception.¹⁴⁰

Yet there remains another reason why the rhizomatic model of representation is of paramount importance for an analysis of Miller's texts. Deleuze and Guattari's insistence on the realm between things returns discussion to Miller's attunement to eastern philosophies. As has been elaborated in a preceding chapter, a strikingly similar point of view shapes Miller's non-telic structures. Recall that for Miller reality can be expressed only in the eternal present, while the future and the past are dissolved into the flowing totality of the universe. From the perspective of rhizomatic systems of multiplicity, the notion of the eternal present as the unique experience of a constantly changing reality, constitutes such a realm between things. We may thus conclude that in addition to Miller's handling of narrative time, his experiments with enumerative descriptions constitute a crucial stylistic feature that seems to reflect his nondualistic visions of the world.

Against the background of western civilization's anthropocentric and positivistic conceptions of the world, such a nondualistic concept of the universe may indeed propose a persuasive alternative. As evidence of the contrast between the exploitative conceptions

of Miller's attempts to achieve a new authentic expression of reality, I have limited my analysis of lists to their subversive potential.

¹³⁹ Deleuze and Guattari's thesis that the conjunction "and" is a crucial element of the rhizome is a complex matter. Even more so, since in the original French text, the conflict between "the verb *être* (to be) and the conjunction *et* (and) between *est* and *et*" (1987:98) is more persuasive.

¹⁴⁰ In the previously quoted description of Paris Miller uses the conjunction "and" to produce a heterogeneous list. Yet Miller also seems to use the conjunction "and" to produce what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the rhizome's intermediary realm. Consider, for instance, the following description from *Black Spring*: "you stand on the Brooklyn Bridge looking down into black funnels belching smoke and the gun barrels gleam and the buttons gleam and the water divides miraculously under the sharp, cutting prow and like ice and lace, like a breaking and

constituting the western vision of the world and the nondualistic eastern perception, we can note the importance Zen Buddhism and Taoism place on the necessity to become one with the universe. Regarded as a contestation of western representations of nature, Miller's lists are positively connoted, as they can be interpreted as an attempt to reproduce the eastern vision of the universe as a formless flux. Nevertheless, even if lists are used to reproduce a nondualistic vision of the world, Miller is aware that the limited scope of language will never enable him to articulate an authentic account of reality. As we have seen, despite the fact that the list as a stylistic figure is based on excess, literature cannot reproduce the multifarious components that make up the biosphere.

The foregoing analysis of Miller and Durrell's critique of representational norms has revealed that both authors thematize the problem of language and signification. We have observed that Durrell denounces the rigid norms of representation by drawing attention to the cliché. Durrell's ironic handling of clichés enables him not only to draw attention to his own rhetorical restrictions, but it also allows him indirectly to revalorize the natural world which refuses to be subsumed by the artificial images we impose on it. Unlike Durrell, Miller does not invoke condensed images to re-enact the problem of language. Quite to the contrary, for Miller the open-ended quality of lists is a necessary means towards recognition of the inadequacy of language as a medium we use to make sense of the world. Even if the disparity between Miller and Durrell's techniques is momentous, it is crucial to point out that neither the ironic reversal of clichés, nor accumulative descriptions yields a solution that would allow these authors to create authentic reproductions of the nonhuman world. To put it very simply, both authors use rhetorical devices to give material representations of the inadequacy of language. In all of these instances, nature can only be approached negatively. That is to say, the text can only insinuate that behind such artificial representations there always lingers a reality that cannot be captured by language.

3.4. Pastoral Instances in *The Black Book*: England, Corfu, Tibet

After having discussed how Durrell's descriptions of the physical world constitute a challenge to representational norms, it is now time to attempt to answer the question whether Durrell tries to gratify his vitalistic yearning for authenticity by advocating a return to nature. The corollary of Durrell's anti-mimetic stance, of course, is that a return is impossible. But Durrell's reflections on literary constructions of the world notwithstanding, his text does not

a smoking, the water churns green and blue with a cold incandescence, with the chill of champagne and burnt gills" (*BS*:13).

seem to deny the existence of a extratextual reality. How, then, is a poet supposed to mediate his or her desire for a more genuine understanding of nature? As pointed out by Jonathan Bate, for western literature "the pastoral is the traditional mode in which this relationship is explored" (1991:19). Considering the fact that the "'pastoral' has become almost synonymous with the idea of a (re)turn to a less urbanized, more 'natural' state of existence" (Buell 1995:31), the question arises whether Lucifer's escape to Corfu can be linked to the pastoral tradition. Before looking more closely at Durrell's response to this tradition, we should first give some consideration to the ecocritical assessment of pastoralism.

The pastoral as a historical form originates in the work of the ancient Greek poet Theocritus and his successor, the Roman poet Virgil. But critics, such as Andrew Ettin, insist that "[t]he pastoral tradition stretches beyond the grove of works using characters and motifs that" these ancient poets introduced (1984:1). Lawrence Buell carries the argument further and asserts that the pastoral, when "used in an extended sense," does "refer not to the specific set of obsolescent conventions of the eclogue tradition, but to all literature—poetry or prose, fiction or nonfiction—that celebrates the ethos of nature/rurality over against the ethos of the town or city" (1989:23). This "extended sense" of the pastoral pervades the theory of American literature in particular.¹⁴¹ It is thus no surprise that Leo Marx, whose groundbreaking study on pastoralism in American literature continues to exert an influence on pastoral theory, confirms that "pastoral is not a genre but a mode—the broadest, most inclusive category of composition." This is to say that the pastoral "derives its identity not from any formal convention but from a particular perspective on human experience" (1986:46). Subsequently, Marx singles out "the yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence 'closer to nature,'" as "the psychic root of all pastoralism" (1967:6).

Apart from these definitions of the pastoral as a literary form or the pastoral as a specific understanding of the nonhuman world, there appears a third, structural, aspect in the theoretical response to pastoralism. It is usually assumed that the pastoral's celebration of rurality provides a structural framework for exploring further binary oppositions. As Ettin has observed, the pastoral "is one way of schematizing a vast body of cultural polarities:

¹⁴¹ The British critic, Terry Gifford, uncovers three distinct uses of the pastoral. Gifford states that "[f]irst, the pastoral is a historical form with a long tradition which began in poetry, developed into drama and more recently could be recognised in novels." Gifford explains that this kind of pastoral often contains "motifs which we can recognise as deriving from certain early Greek and Roman poems about life in the country, and about the life of the shepherd in particular" (1999:1). In addition to this understanding of the pastoral as a literary form, Gifford focuses on a second "broader use of 'pastoral' to refer to an area of content. In this sense pastoral refers to any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban." Finally, the third instance is based on a skepticism which implies that "the pastoral vision is too simplified and thus an idealisation of the reality of life in the country" (1999:2).

spontaneous versus planned, ancient versus modern" (1984:29).¹⁴² From an analogous point of view, Gifford has argued that "[i]t is this very versatility of the pastoral to both contain and appear to evade tensions and contradictions—between country and city, art and nature, the human and the non-human, our social and our inner selves [...]—that made the form so durable" (1999:11). Gifford's argument returns our discussion to the problematic definition of nature as an antithesis to culture. As we have seen, the same conflict between binary oppositions is at issue in the Rousseauian return to nature. Much like the previously analyzed desire to return to nature, the pastoral's celebration of rural life raises questions about the accuracy of pastoral representations of the natural world.

In other words, when pastoral theory met ecocriticism, to use and extend Glen Love's terms, the reevaluation of the pastoral mode incited critics to pay attention to "the many problems which conventional pastoral forms present to an ecologically conscious reader" (McDowell 1992:242).¹⁴³ Indeed, even if pastoralism assumes an increasingly important role in ecocriticism, critics such as Lawrence Buell, have been careful to point out that in pastoral representations of nature there is always "the possibility of reducing the land to a highly selective ideological construct." Nevertheless, Buell insists that ecocriticism must focus on "how compromised the pastoralizing vision thereby can become without losing sight of its constructive power" (1995:32). Despite the manifest importance of the pastoral as a mode paying special attention to the nonhuman world, it is obvious that its binary structures and its literary history may not appeal to Durrell, whose quest for an authentic understanding of the nonhuman world expresses a resistance to such idealized landscapes. After having tried to locate pastoralism's ambiguities within an ecocritical critique of its dichotomous structures, I will now turn to Durrell's response to the pastoral tradition by analyzing it with regard to the novel's recurrent theme of Englishness.

3.4.1. Tarquin's Pastoral Ideals

Given Durrell's intention to highlight the artificiality of traditional representations of the English landscape, it is hardly surprising that Durrell incorporates numerous pastoral motifs. That in addition to the previously acknowledged disintegration of clichés Durrell attacks the pastoral tradition, becomes evident when we regard Tarquin's attempt to "write his musical poem: *To England*" (BB:137). Indeed, it seems to me that Tarquin's attachment to the

¹⁴² By referring to Harold Toliver's examination of the pastoral's dichotomous structures, Ettin maintains that the pastoral "includes numerous antitheses within four general categories: nature versus society, nature versus art, idyllic nature versus antipastoral nature, and earthly nature versus celestial paradise" (1984: 29).

pastoral tradition clearly accounts for his poetic failure and, therefore, is systematically exposed and parodied throughout the novel. The preoccupation with the artificiality of the pastoral is evident in Lucifer's reaction to Tarquin's poem: "in the ballet of countryside, among the Georgian houses weathered to blood, myopic peacocks, dirigible napery of floccus. It is when I think of what the result was that I am disgusted" (*BB*:141). Unmercifully Lucifer adds, "[i]f I began would you hold the bucket under my head for the vomit of Englishry—the images" (*BB*:142)?

The notions of image and artifice are once more central to this passage. Nevertheless, by focusing on images of Englishness, the novel implicitly attacks the pastoral tradition in English literature.¹⁴⁴ As Buell explains, "'Englishness' has traditionally been linked to countryside, just as 'Americanness' has traditionally been linked to heartland, nature, and wilderness" (2001:143). Others have called attention to the usefulness of "Englishness" for articulating the ideological implications of pastoral representations. Jonathan Bate, for instance, points out that "Englishness is a peculiarly powerful but also peculiarly problematic concept" (1991:111).¹⁴⁵ It is this ambiguity of the concept of Englishness that ultimately gives shape to Lucifer's calumny against Tarquin's poem. Specifically, I wish to suggest that what these rigid depictions of the English countryside share are Durrell's characteristic association of pastoral representation with artifice and his equally characteristic resistance to literary traditions.

Yet Durrell's skepticism about the pastoral mode is not limited to depicting its representational and ideological deficiencies. Symptomatically, the conflict of authenticity and art is also at issue in Lucifer's accusation of the pastoral as a form of escapism. Of particular interest, in this respect, are the narrator's comments that "Tarquin is away on holiday," where he expects "to find fulfilment [...]. It is the key word. Fulfilment!" (*BB*:119), as well as the numerous allusions to the fact that "[e]scape is the endless theme of our

¹⁴³ Glen Love's essay, "*Et in Arcadia Ego*: Pastoral Theory Meets Ecocriticism" (1992), was one of the first attempts to re-evaluate pastoral theory for an ecologically conscious approach to literature.

¹⁴⁴ In *A Key to Modern British Poetry*, Durrell theorizes that "[t]he Georgian main tradition was bucolic or pastoral. English literature, when it is at a loss for subject matter, always falls back on the sights and sounds of the English country-side" (1952:12). Although such comments express a critique of the pastoral tradition, he points out that there exists "a very real bucolic tradition in English literature: a tradition which has continued up to today, offering us an unbroken line of nature-poets" (1952:123).

¹⁴⁵ As Bate comments with reference to the problem of Englishness, it "inevitably leads the reader to reflect on the idea of England" (1991:111). Just as Bate points out the implicit nationalism of the concept, so Raymond Williams's study invites us to reconsider how its associations with the English squirearchy has led to "celebrations of a feudal or an aristocratic order" (1985:35). Finally, Terry Gifford has made clear that whereas American literature is centered around the concept of wilderness, "[i]n the English tradition the image of nature as a garden or estate confirms the religiously endorsed right of humans to exploit nature" (1999:33). These examples should suffice to demonstrate that Englishness is indeed a "peculiarly problematic concept." Yet the purpose of this brief reference to Englishness is to illustrate how Durrell's invocation of Englishness constitutes a challenge to the pastoral tradition.

contemplation, escape, escape" (*BB*:160). To affirm the escapism underlying the pastoral vision of the world is to level the traditional charge against its failure to "change or resist the system as it is," by simply proposing to "withdraw in the direction of Nature in search for alternatives" (Marx 1981:78). Jonathan Bate confirms that "[t]he traditional view of Romantic return to nature is that it is a form of escapism" (1991:52); whereas Buell echoes this traditional critique of pastoralism when he asserts that "[t]he retreat to nature *can* be a form of willed amnesia" (1989:19).¹⁴⁶ Such passages make it clear that Tarquin's poem, "To England," enables Durrell to illustrate why the pastoral tradition cannot revitalize literature.

Resistance to the pastoral is also at the heart of Durrell's allusions to the urban disposition which informs Tarquin's understanding of the nonhuman world. Hence, when Tarquin asks Lucifer to "[g]o to the country, [...], and describe it all for me when you get back. He does not want to see it for himself; is happier in town" (*BB*:137), Durrell alludes to a further problematic aspect of pastoralism. As McDowell reminds us, the "pastoral has always been an urban genre, faithful to the urban view of countryside, rather than dedicated to rural landscape" (1992:242). Given the fact that "[f]rom the beginning of its long history the pastoral was written for an urban audience" (Gifford 1999:15), it is not surprising to see that Durrell's reflections on the pastoral mode are explicitly defiant. As the preceding analysis of Rousseau's idealization of nature has revealed, when nature is used as an antidote to civilization, or as an antithesis to the city, the emerging—inherently dualistic—concept of nature cannot satisfy the advocacy of a vitalistic re-evaluation of the nonhuman world.

But Durrell's ironical inversion of the pastoral tradition does not only return discussion to the dualistic substructures sustaining such idealized representations of the nonhuman world. What is more, Durrell exhibits an anxiety about the nostalgic longing for a rural past, which anticipates Raymond Williams's "escalator" of ever-receding "Old Englands." Immediately preceding the previously quoted "vomit of Englishry," we read: "[t]he past is always magical. Store me the images in a velvet casket among the letters with ribbon round them" (*BB*:142). In such ways, Durrell seems to allude to the fact that nostalgia "was a recurring motif and that each period had *its* pastoral values located in an idyllic recent past when things were less problematic than the present" (Gifford 1999:9).¹⁴⁷ In this sense, Lucifer's harsh rejection of "Englishry" expresses a view that is very similar to Raymond Williams's claim that "[a]gainst sentimental and intellectualised account of an unlocalised 'Old England,' we need, evidently, the sharpest scepticism" (1985:10).

¹⁴⁶ Italics in original.

¹⁴⁷ Italics in original.

In the face of such contradictions it is no wonder that for Durrell the pastoral offers neither a solution as a counterweight to civilized life, nor as a mode which would entail a revitalization of literary responses to the nonhuman world. Also, in the light of the modernist rejection of the mimetic capacities of art it is hardly surprising to see that Durrell problematizes the pastoral. Analogous to his rejection of artificial imagery and the recycling of clichés, Durrell dismisses the pastoral's idealization of landscapes. That the pastoral relies on idealized images of the nonhuman world is confirmed by Gifford. He maintains that "[t]he reader recognises that the country in a pastoral text is an Arcadia because the language is idealised." Therefore, Gifford suggests that "pastoral is a discourse, a way of using language that constructs a different kind of world from that of realism" (1999:45).¹⁴⁸ By thus letting his narrator, Lawrence Lucifer, comment on the pastoral implications of Tarquin's poem, it seems that Durrell primarily wishes to dismiss pastoral ideals, which as Leo Marx has observed, tend to create "a self-contained, static world, remote from history, where nature and art are in balance" (1967:228). Accordingly, when Lucifer eventually finds himself "listening to the tone poem, its melodic squirts, its lapses into pathos," he takes care to point out that Tarquin "had not managed to translate his legend of death." Instead, his use of the pastoral discourse has transformed his legend into a static, rather than dynamic, representation of the world. Tarquin merely depicts an artificial "death of a Wagnerian swan: a romantic confection" (*BB*:141). Such phrases, rearticulate Durrell's contestation of representational norms, while at the same time they draw attention to the problematic description "of the green world as nothing more than projective fantasy" (Buell 1995:36).

Beyond his representational failures, Lucifer levels at Tarquin the charge that his delusional ideals have in addition to distorting his art also contributed to his desperate sense of alienation. Durrell's conviction that artists must seek a new path to authenticity both in their life and their artistic productions resounds here. In like manner, Durrell uses the theme of pastoralism to draw attention to Tarquin's alienated existence. Alluding to the pastoral's traditional accounts of "life in the country, and about the life of the shepherd in particular" (Gifford 1999:1), Durrell creates an ironic portrayal of Tarquin "running barefooted on the scorched Cretan rocks, while the dark-eyed shepherd is allowing himself to be overtaken, to be gathered up, covered in kisses" (*BB*:31). Such sentences are, of course, not only about Tarquin's sense of alienation. As Morgan Holmes explains, "[b]oth the elegiac and the

¹⁴⁸ Andrew Ettin shares this view when he states that "[n]ot all nature writing [...] is pastoral. What makes a work pastoral are its attitudes toward the natural world and human experience" (1984:22). Moreover, Ettin confirms that the pastoral is not a realistic form, but an "ironic form based on a perceivable distance between the alleged and the implied" (1984:12).

romantic pastoral have been associated with homoerotic desire from their beginnings in classical literature to their echoes in contemporary literatures" (2003:1).

Apart from affirming the homoerotic tradition of pastoralism, such passages also illustrate how "pastoral circumstances" have often been used to "unearth peculiarities in human attitudes towards sexuality." As Scholtmeijer has observed, "the domain situated between wilderness, with its defiance of human control, and the city, with its obsessive celebration of civilization, invokes that similarly troubled region of the human psyche" (1993:180). Regardless of the conclusions one might make about the sexual implications of the pastoral tradition, Durrell seems primarily interested in depicting Tarquin's adherence to pastoral ideals in order to dramatize his estrangement from reality. Such seems to be the case, when Tarquin suffers from his unrequited love for Clare: "the sight of Clare's room with its snow and littered underpants is a raw awakening from the idyll, the Marlowesque dream of the riverbank." Significantly, Durrell adds: "[a]s usual [Tarquin] does not damn literature, but damns Clare, who cannot live up to the literary reputation which has been invented for him" (*BB*:29).

Yet despite the manifest defaults of the pastoral tradition, Durrell's portrayal of Tarquin and his artistic fiasco allows recognition of pastoral representations as a "literal fact and a cultural force" (Buell 1989:5). Hence, when Lucifer, the narrator, concludes that Tarquin "will never be able to create it, because he is too much a part of that declension himself" (*BB*:141), he insinuates that pastoralism is what Buell has called a "species of cultural equipment," which has dominated "the conceptual apparatus of all persons with western educations" (1995:32). But for all that, Lucifer's commentary, "when I see the material, the rough slag lying ready to hand, the exploded components of a world gathered ready for the artist—then I am ashamed" (*BB*:141), obviously suggests that the pastoral's rigid and idealized depictions of the English countryside may never do justice to a lived experience of the nonhuman world.

3.4.2. Corfu: Arcadia or Artifice?

Tarquin's failure is not merely a parody of the pastoral as an outdated literary mode; still less is it a symptom of a refusal to deal with reality. In spite of Lucifer's objections to Tarquin's idealized depictions of English landscapes, Lucifer finds himself defeated by a similar incapacity to grasp the essence of reality: "[i]f you can understand the fable that this country is creating around us without drawing on false sentiment, you are to be congratulated" (*BB*:141). Again and again, Durrell draws attention to Lucifer's apparently

vain urge to create an authentic representation of the nonhuman world. Frustrated in his pursuit of authenticity, Lucifer continues to insist, "[c]ome, I am always saying to Tarquin. There are still new universes to be inhabited, if you have the authentic disease and the courage" (*BB*:237). Yet Lucifer does not offer a clear rhetorical solution that would allow him to gain access to an unmediated and authentic perception of the physical world. How then can he still have faith in his artistic project?

Lucifer answers this question, in a passage describing his immediate response to the surrounding landscape: "[t]hat is the tenor of this rainy morning; that is what it is telling me, among its polished components of town and valley and farm." His attentive reaction to this landscape, which bears evident traces of the pastoral distinction between the country and the city, leads him to the conclusion that "[a] new language, a new deity, a new indulgence impend from heaven. [...] Forms are dying, becoming obsolete, falling aside" (*BB*:151). The ambiguity that informs this indirect solution is, as I have suggested throughout this study, paradigmatic of the work as a whole. It allows the artists to cope with their representational frustrations by destroying old forms and illustrating why these forms have become obsolete. As an expression of rhetorical distress, such a solution involves critique rather than creation of a new language.

Although Lucifer is keen to explore a new authenticity, his cultural and ideological frames of reference inhibit his wish to overcome his alienation from the natural world. This premise is a clue to how Lucifer's retreat to Corfu should be interpreted. It is evident that Lucifer's escape to this Greek island—i.e., a place where he tries to recover from his traumatic experience of industrialized England—is an act of pastoral disengagement. As Leo Marx remarks, "[m]ovement toward such a symbolic landscape also may be understood as movement away from an 'artificial' world, a world identified with 'art.'" In this view, a pastoral escape expresses the necessity to move "away from sophistication toward simplicity" (1967:9). Considering the fact that Durrell's project of artistic renovation seeks to establish a similar trajectory—from formalism to authenticity—his incorporation of Corfu as a pastoral retreat is understandable enough. But because he is hostile to the pastoral tradition, his use of this pastoral motif seems contradictory. However, once the structure of Durrell's thematization of authenticity has been exposed, it becomes clear that the pastoral retreat is invoked in order to demonstrate its ineffectiveness.

It was noticed in a preceding chapter that Durrell's descriptions of the Mediterranean landscape are highly stylized. Because Durrell assumes that language and reality cannot be reconciled, his handling of such descriptions suggest that literature can only illustrate how humans construct meaning within limited discursive dimensions. That is why Leo Marx's

thesis is important. In his examination of the pastoral tradition in American literature he shows that many writers "increasingly have tended to compose pastoral romances of manifest failure." Marx therefore argues that these authors "continue to enact the retreat/quest, but it would seem that they do so chiefly in order to deny it, and the resulting state of mind is one of structured ambivalence" (1981:75). In *The Black Book*, this ambivalence is enacted on a verbal rather than an experiential level. Consider the following description of Corfu, in which allusions to pictorial representation take precedence over attention to the surrounding natural world: "[t]he cypresses are made of coal: their forms stipple the landscape, like heavy black brush strokes on a water colour whose vitality has been rinsed from it" (*BB*:20). This devitalized picture of Corfu represents a strong disavowal of representational norms. Like his ironic inversion of clichés and images, Durrell's depiction of this Greek landscape, demands that the reader should take seriously the way language expropriates us from the natural world. As Andermatt Conley remarks, in another context, such a technique of representational failure has the effect that the "physical world never completely vanishes. To the contrary, it is seen to persist, even to *win*, over the abstraction of language" (1997:28).¹⁴⁹ Thought of in this way, Durrell's use of Corfu as a pastoral motif can be understood best by placing it in the "anti-pastoral tradition." Terry Gifford defines this "anti-pastoral tradition" as a literary practice which is "based simply upon exposing the distance between reality and the pastoral convention" (1999:128). Ultimately, by revealing the inherent dissonances between pastoral idealizations of rural landscapes and the natural world, an anti-pastoral text suggests that "the pastoral has become not only a 'contested term', but a deeply suspect one" (Gifford 1999:147).

To claim that Durrell's description of Corfu is embedded in an anti-pastoral tradition does not just imply that Durrell is hostile to the pastoral and its conception of the natural world. The implications of the anti-pastoral outlook offer a useful frame for analyzing *The Black Book's* textual characteristics. A striking symptom of this subversion of pastoral representations presents itself, when Durrell distorts conventional descriptions of landscapes. Evidence that the text manifests its problems of representation is not hard to find. Sentences, such as, "wild geese hanging across the moon, and the invisible archer somewhere watching, hand on his empty quiver. Ah! but here we have only the dregs of yellow smeared across the windowpanes, and the unclean sea" (*BB*:21), exemplify Durrell's contestation of representational norms. Symptomatically, Durrell returns to the image of the opaque and "unclean sea" and the "yellow" coloring,—this time not on a roll of developing film but "across the windowpanes"—to evoke the representational problems of language. By thus

¹⁴⁹ Italics in original.

juxtaposing the artificial world of mythology to the world of representational failure, such sentences function as an anti-pastoral critique.

But the novel goes much farther than simply contesting traditional representations. Indeed, Durrell strives for distorted descriptions of nature which challenge the reader to fathom new ways of seeing the world. Such seems to be the case when the narrator asks us, "[c]an you hear what is said in the screaming of the olives, in the dramatic archery of the cypresses" (*BB*:235). In her essay, "The Role of the Writer in Lawrence Durrell's Fiction," Candace Fertile advances the thesis that "[t]he writer must see the world to create it, not to reproduce it. The writer must also destroy the way we perceive the world" (1990:73). Such assumptions are the central issues of a number of works on Modernism. Randall Stevenson, for example, claims that "Modernist fiction challenges its readers to reconsider the nature of fiction and its relation to reality" (1992:216). Modernist fiction, by challenging the conventional responses of its readers, or by "[i]nvolving readers in producing rather than passively consuming texts can help to alert them to devices—and motives—through which meaning is produced and reality made consumable" (1992:218). From an analogous point of view, Tanner has argued that writers contesting the "different modes of discourse which 'systematize' us," have often chosen a negative approach to the subject matter. Accordingly, Tanner points out that their "impulse to confront, conflate, dissolve, or even annul categories can be seen as part of an attempt to desystematize the reader" (1987:179).¹⁵⁰ Phrased differently, Tanner maintains that a "deliberate disorientation may lead to a new reorientation or a state of no-orientation; both are felt to open up the existing possibilities" (1987:179). The premise in this line of reasoning is that a distortion of traditional representations would incite the reader to re-establish a new relation with ungraspable or inexpressible dimensions of reality. In light of Durrell's thematization of mimesis, such a "desystematization," based on a nonreferential rather than a mimetic description of the natural world, might indeed offer a promising form of contestation.

A comparison of the various descriptions of Greek landscapes, actually shows that most of them tend to operate with such a deliberate reversal of conventional associations. Dealing with the textual characteristics of the novel, it becomes clear that Durrell disrupts what Hamon calls the reader's expectations of a paradigm of latent words (1993:41) by adding nonreferential images to the conventional set of imagery. The following passage serves as an example for Durrell's destructions of the reader's expectations of predefined contexts. Lucifer's characteristic reflections on his desperate wish to create an authentic description of

Corfu juxtaposes the stylized language and rigid images of pastoral representations to the disruptive effect of nonrepresentational images:

I am continually forced to stop and marvel at the incongruity of peopling the Ionian with such a ballet; as if, in a clear watery moonlight one night, while the shepherds on the lagoon piped their slow bubbling, curdling quartertones, a fleet of heraldic fish were to swim up under the house, and deploy flashing across the paper, across the bookshelf, the painted peasant woman at the well [...].

And he adds:

Sitting here on the prophetic black rock, where the Ionian comes in and touches, stealthy elastic, like a blue cat's-paw. (*BB*:222)

By thus opposing the artificial world of shepherds to the enigmatic rock in an Ionian sea—likened to a "blue cat's-paw"—Durrell challenges the reader's response to the situation he describes.

Desystematization or defamiliarization, are concepts that have been used by a number of critics to explain the theoretical implications of modern fiction. By referring to the work of Russian Formalist, Victor Shlovsky, David Lodge maintains that "[t]he technique of art is to make things 'unfamiliar,' to make forms obscure, so as to increase the difficulty and the duration of perception" (1977:13). To counter obsolete forms of habitual perception with such a technique of defamiliarization implies that the distorted text evokes in the reader a revitalized perception, rather than a mere recognition. The renewal of perception reemphasizes the kind of artistic experience that Dewey advocates. Namely, that perception involves the perceiver's "painful" interaction, while recognition is merely based on identification of stereotypical accounts of conventionalized situations.

The major part of *The Black Book* is devoted to such techniques of desystematization. We may, therefore, conclude that rather than promoting an idyllic return to nature, Durrell primarily seeks to unmask the deceptive nature of the pastoral enthrallment for the natural world. But Durrell's rejection of outdated literary traditions and their representational norms is obviously not only directed against the pastoral tradition. Contestations of idealized landscapes are not only found in descriptions of Corfu. As a matter of fact, closer examination of Durrell's description of English landscapes disclose that they operate with a more radical form of defamiliarization. As I suggested in a preceding chapter on *The Black Book*'s inharmonious cityscapes, Durrell's poetic practice consists of combining antagonistic cultural and natural values. It is this dichotomous torsion that ultimately also gives shape to his descriptions of English landscapes.

¹⁵⁰ To stress the profounder implications of Tanner's argument, it is important to point out that Tanner refers to Nietzsche's hypothesis that "it may be necessary to devalue categories in order to revalue the universe" (Tanner 1987:179).

Conflicting combinations between the natural and industrial world prop up the following account of Lucifer's meeting with a woman, whose name is never revealed: "[w]e meet at night on the downland, in the last territory of the great arterial road. There is that figure which will break from the dark trees and dance into the glare of the headlights" (*BB*:59). This kind of representation is diametrically opposed to idealized landscapes, insofar as this environment is entirely determined by the car Lucifer uses to join this woman. Situated at the end of "the great arterial road," and made visible by the "headlights," this distorted *locus amoenus* where Lucifer and his lover meet, clearly undermines the reader's expectations of idealized landscapes. On the following page, Durrell tries to go beyond the mere intrusion of cars. Instead of beautiful images of the English landscape, he presents a technologically marked environment: "[a]t your back the aeroplane light swivels its reds and greens on the grass in many hectic windmills. There is no object in life but to reach that lonely cigarette point in the darkness" (*BB*:60).

Just as his deliberately artificial accounts of Corfu invite us to consider the impoverishment arising from representational norms, so this culturally transmuted landscape challenges us to consider whether the pastoral discourse may be employed to describe modern environments. Indeed, as Raymond Williams comments with reference to Great Britain, "[t]here is not much wilderness in this anciently worked island, and most of it is man-made facsimile of the real thing" (1989:236). From *The Black Book's* distorted descriptions we may discern that Durrell's characteristic combination of antagonistic industrial and natural elements enables him to create a more dynamic representation of the natural world. As Adorno has pointed out, "[c]onsciousness does justice to the experience of nature only when, [...] it incorporates nature's wounds. The rigid concept of natural beauty thereby becomes dynamic" (1997:68). On the other hand, as a form of anti-pastoral contestation such descriptions are designed to cast doubt on the reader's pastoral expectations. As such, an anti-pastoral stance forces us to rethink the accuracy of the static descriptions produced by the dualistic structures of the dominant discourse. From the point of view I am trying to establish here, Durrell's distorted landscapes suggest that the pastoral as a persistent frame of reference impedes the urge to establish a heightened awareness of the natural world.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ As I have limited my analysis to Durrell's *Black Book*, it is important to point out that the landscapes he describes in his later novels do not only seem less distorted, but also seem to gain mimetic importance. Most of the novels that make up *The Alexandrian Quartet*, for instance, begin with "landscape tones" such as "brown to bronze, steep skyline, low cloud, pearl ground with shadowed oyster and violet reflections" (*Balthazar*:13). In his, so called "Island Books," Durrell excels in constructions of vivid portrayals of the Greek landscape. As Alan Friedman has maintained, "Durrell's landscape, usually a Greek one, corresponds to a central ideal, emotion or motif. Setting—for Durrell generally closer to a localized version of Yeats's *Spiritus Mundi* (or *Deus Loci* as Durrell calls it in the poem of that name) than Wordsworthian "Nature"—embodies, parallels, even motivates both the intrinsic and extrinsic workings of Durrellean characters" (1987:59). In order to sort out the conflicting

3.4.3. Tibet

The pattern that emerges through examining numerous examples of pastoral motifs in *The Black Book*, conveys a complicated attitude towards the pastoral tradition. From what I have said so far it should be clear that there are several distinct, yet related, ways to describe Durrell's handling of pastoral ideals. Yet for all his anti-pastoral contestations, the narrator's urge to escape from England in order to revitalize his artistic project and establish a more authentic relationship with reality still seems to be propelled by a pastoral impulse of escape. As a final example of Durrell's ambivalent handling of pastoral themes I want to examine the particular importance Durrell attaches to Tibet. My concern here is with the obvious pastoral implications of the various accounts of Tibet as that "revisited childhood which my dreams offer me" (BB:224). I would like to suggest that when Durrell describes that enigmatic Tibetan landscape, he offers an epitome of the traditional pastoral mourning of a "lost childhood and lost unity with nature" (Bate 1991:73).¹⁵²

Lucifer describes his dreams of Tibet as follows: "[a]mong the soft fermenting pastel green Himalayas [...] the hills breathe snow over the deserted playgrounds, a Tibetan panic of winter. The passes glow with eternal malevolence" (BB:147). Notice how the "fermenting" colors of the Himalayas, and the 'breathing' of the Tibetan hills evoke an animated landscape that bears little resemblance to the rigid pastoral idealizations Lucifer depicts of Corfu. But Lucifer's accounts of Tibet are, as mentioned above, first and foremost an expression of mourning for his lost childhood. As Andrew Ettin has theorized, such images of pastoral peace attempt to "link us to our earliest, purest, most natural condition, and to the protected and piously simple way of life that we imagine we remember from our own childhood" (1984:45). Needless to say, such nostalgic pastoral accounts have very little to do with a revitalized understanding of the earth. In fact, the "deserted playground," and the characteristic use of snow and winter as symbols of death, suggest that a return to this allegedly harmonious landscape is impossible; while the 'malevolent' passes insinuate that such a return may indeed not be desirable.

claims about Durrell's attempts to describe the nonhuman world, we should recall that, on a general level, his later novel are less distorted. They lack the violent exposure of the crisis of modernity we have observed in *The Black Book*. But even though Durrell's belief in the determining influence of landscape on personality is an important subject, it is emphatically not the subject under discussion here.

¹⁵² A pastoral nostalgia for the childhood he spent near Tibet is, likewise, an important issue in Durrell's correspondence with Miller. In a letter, tentatively dated 27 January 1937, Durrell describes the passage from his Indian childhood to his English exile as follows: "I was born in India. Went to school there—under the Himalayas. The most wonderful memories—of a brief dream of Tibet until I was eleven. Then that mean, shabby little island up there wrung my guts out of me and tried to destroy anything singular and unique in me" (MacNiven 1988:51).

Lucifer finds himself once more entangled in a quandary. For the yearning to return to Tibet is described as a desperate "reaching out with crooked arms and empty mind towards the inaccessible absolute" (*BB*:230). As a further example of Durrell's anti-pastoral perspective, the text both celebrates and contests Lucifer's pastoral yearning for this lost relation to an almost pristine environment. Because Lucifer insists that Tibet must remain inaccessible, he can only indulge in an eternal "weeping over Everest. Somewhere over there, eternally veiled in blue, the forbidden City is lying, glowing like a stone" (*BB*:148). The fact that such sentences insinuate that Lucifer can only create visions and dreams of Tibet exposes Lucifer's failure to revitalize the language which obstructs access to this forbidden ground. Time after time, Lucifer terminates his reveries with protests such as "[a]ll that is locked up in a dream of Lhasa, [...]. Nothing remains for me but the deaf-mute syllables of a tongue I have yet to learn" (*BB*:148).

To reiterate, Durrell contests the pastoral as a discourse which, as we have seen, produces idealized landscapes rather than authentic depictions of reality. Its dualistic substructures confine the pastoral to static reproductions of conventional images. Thus, it goes without saying that this traditional flight from culture to a metaphorical nature cannot be embedded in Durrell's artistic project. Yet Durrell also acknowledges that the quest for authenticity is propelled by a pastoral impulse which seeks to recover the kind of responses to the natural world he seems to have experienced as a child. But in spite of Durrell's ambivalent insistence on the pastoral tradition, I think it is clear that neither a return to a lost harmony (Tibet), nor his medium (language), will suffice to bring to completion his quest. Durrell hints at the inadequacy of the traditional pastoral frame of reference and the resulting frustrations for the artist's desire to recover an authentic experience of the natural world when he concludes that "[t]here is only trial and error on a journey like this, and no signposts. The end is somewhere beyond even Ethiopia or Tibet" (*BB*:233-4).

3.5. Miller's American Pastoral

Given the fact that Miller's work is distinctly urban, driven by an anti-literary rejection of conventional literary forms, it is little wonder that like Durrell, Miller does not propose a return to nature as an idyllic antidote to the alienation endured in the modern megalopolis. But unlike Durrell's *Black Book*, Miller's novels contain almost no descriptions of the natural environment. In *Tropic of Cancer*, for instance, Miller reduces his accounts of exurban settings to a bleak description of "the barren hills" around Dijon, where "rolling onward toward the great metallurgical regions, the locomotives are pulling their merchant products"

(TCN:287). Nevertheless, Miller raises a number of provocative ideas about pastoral idealizations of nature, some of which are crystallized in the only other reference to nature that Miller incorporates into *Tropic of Cancer*:

We were getting sentimental, as Americans do when it comes time to part. We were getting quite foolish about the cows and sheep and the big open spaces where men are men and all that crap. [...] It's best to keep America just like that, always in the background, a sort of picture post card which you look at in a weak moment. Like that, you imagine it's always there waiting for you, unchanged, unspoiled, a big patriotic open space with cows and sheep and tenderhearted men ready to bugger everything in sight, man, woman or beast. It doesn't exist, America. It's a name you give to an abstract idea.... (TCN:210)

Whereas Kingsley Widmer interprets this "invective about manly America" as "a humorous attack on the mainstream notions of America" (1987:221), I would like look at this "attack" on conventional associations of America with wilderness and "open spaces" in the light of the previously analyzed anti-pastoral tradition.

This discussion leads us first to a distinction between American and English versions of the pastoral tradition. In contrast to the British tradition which, as we have seen, is concerned with Englishness and culturally transformed landscapes, the American tradition is preoccupied with vastness and wilderness. Buell has not only argued that in American pastoralism idealizations of wilderness prevail, but he has also traced a general "tendency among many writers and critics to want to represent the essential America as exurban, green, pastoral, or even wild" (1995:32). For Buell and Leo Marx alike, there is an intimate link between the American environmental imagination and what Widmer has called "mainstream notions of America." Referring to Marx, Buell states that "American pastoral's most distinctive trait, relative to the European version, [is] the identification of America, from the Renaissance onward, as a place where Arcadia could be literalized" (1989:4). When Miller declares America to be nothing but a beautiful "picture post card" and "an abstract idea," he seems to react against this problematic identification of America with this "unchanged, unspoiled" and "big patriotic open space."

As a number of ecocritics have pointed out, there are several serious problems in such an identification of America with wilderness. To begin with, it is obviously motivated by pastoral idealizations of nature which, as William Cronon has argued, depicts wilderness as "an island in the polluted seas of urban-industrial modernity, the one place we can turn for escape from our own too-muchness" (1998:471). More problematic is the fact that by founding a vision of American society upon an idea of nature, American pastoralism itself seems to have been shaped by a "troublesome dichotomy" (Buell 1989:20). Buell insists that "American pastoral has simultaneously been counterinstitutional and institutionally sponsored." In other words, "it was conceived as both a dream hostile to the standing order of civilization [...] and at the same time a model for the civilization in the process of being

built" (1995:50). From this ambivalent idealization of nature and its involvement in the creation of a model for an American society, the question arises whether Miller's aforementioned thematization of "manly America" is limited to delivering a humorous account of established ideas of masculinity, or whether it is shaped as an anti-pastoral critique of the hegemonic implications of American pastoralism.

To elaborate on this suggestion, I need to outline some further premises governing the debate about American pastoralism. What makes this appropriation of nature as a civilizational ideal so problematic is that it raises issues of historical explanation. As Buell suggests in his remarks about the inherent complications of the American environmental imagination, the problem posed by pastoral idealizations of nature has its source in its unacknowledged implication in the American history of conquest. By "reducing all America to a beautiful landscape painting," Buell warns us, we risk "ignoring the legacy of conquest, ignoring the throes of industrial revolution, that new historicist literary studies and revisionist ethnic, immigration, and labor history all lay bare" (2001:10). Like Buell, Cronon realizes that such ideas of nature or wilderness have an ideological legacy. Cronon writes, "[t]he more one knows of its peculiar history, the more one realizes that wilderness is not quite what it seems" (1998:471). It has therefore become evident that "[a]lthough we grossly oversimplify by equating the American environmental imagination with its hegemonic elements, no one can understand its workings without taking account of them" (Buell 1995:16).

Let me, therefore, enumerate some of these hegemonic aspects underlying the American pastoral tradition. Buell has noted that the critique of the American pastoral's ideological implications is a longstanding tradition. He locates the origins of this tradition in D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), and Lawrence's "psychohistorical explanation of the American (male) writer as an escapee from civilization" (1995:33). As another ecocritic, Glen Love, has pointed out, Lawrence's "assertion was refined and enlarged by Leslie Fiedler in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), wherein male self-fulfillment in nature is seen as an immature rejection of the woman-defined social sphere of the towns and cities" (1992:198). Against the backdrop of this masculine pastoral tradition, William Cronon suggests that the idea of wilderness "became a peculiarly bourgeois form of antimodernism" (1998:481).

Needless to say, this gender bias has become equally central to (eco)feminist reconsiderations of American pastoralism. The idealization of nature as a male pursuit is taken to task in Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975). She argues that the pastoral discourse is shaped by a "yearning to know and to respond to the landscape as feminine," and calls this phenomenon "the uniquely American 'pastoral impulse'" (1975:8). This argument

epitomizes a set of negative assumptions about American pastoralism, which Louise Westling sums up as follows: its male heroes "all participate in a cultural habit of gendering the landscape as female and then excusing their mistreatment of it by retreating into a nostalgia that erases their real motives, displaces responsibility, and takes refuge in attitudes of self-pitying adoration" (1996:5).

3.5.1. An Anti-Pastoral Critique of the American Environmental Imagination

Retrospectively then, an ecocritical reconsideration of Miller's humorous account of the "patriotic open spaces," where "men are men and all that crap," suggests that Miller's reflections on American nature may indeed be linked to an anti-pastoral critique. Even more so, since Miller's "tenderhearted men ready to bugger everything in sight" seem to anticipate the "pastoral impulse" which, according to Kolodny, has led to numerous narratives "of a single male figure, living out a highly eroticized and intimate relationship with a landscape" (1975:134). A similar humorous rejection of the "pastoral impulse" can be found in *Black Spring*. Here Miller characterizes the pastoral escape as a purely masculine fantasy:

Every man his own civilized desert, the island of self on which he is shipwrecked: happiness, relative or absolute, is out of question. Henceforward everyone is running away from himself to find an imaginary desert isle, to live out the dream of Robinson Crusoe. Follow the classic flights, of Melville, Rimbaud, Gaugin, Jack London, Henry James, D.H. Lawrence ... thousands of them. None of them found happiness. [...] No desert isles. No Paradise. Not even *relative* happiness.(BS:46)

Although Miller expands his anti-pastoral critique of masculine escapism beyond the "uniquely American pastoral impulse" (Kolodny 1975:8), this passage still demonstrates Miller's resistance to such masculine retreats to nature.¹⁵³

Nevertheless, further evidence of Miller's critique of the hegemonic elements characterizing the American environmental imagination can be found in the following excerpt from *Tropic of Capricorn*. Here Miller offers one of his numerous scathing accounts of American history:

Was not their precious new world reared on the destruction of the innocent, on rape and plunder and torture and devastation? Both continents had been violated; both continents had been stripped and plundered of all that was precious—in *things*. [...]; no race was ever more ruthlessly wiped out than the American Indian; no land was ever raped in the foul and bloody way that California was raped by the gold diggers. [...] And there is no letup to the slaughter and the pillage, as I discovered at first hand traveling throughout the length and breadth of the land. (TCP:287)

This passage makes it even more apparent that Miller's denunciation of the "precious new world" renders an idealization of America as untouched nature impossible. As an act of

¹⁵³ That this critique of escapism is not only directed against the pastoral tradition, has been elaborated in a preceding chapter. Miller's condemnation of the "Universe of Death" arising from the High Modernist response to the crisis of modernity, has revealed that he condemns their artistic projects as escapist.

historical reflection, this passage does not only highlight how the conquest of the "new world" was propelled by a hegemonic oppression and extinction of Native Americans, it also draws attention to the ambiguous theme of "frontier nostalgia." As Cronon has pointed out, this nostalgia implies that "[o]ne went to the wilderness not as a producer but as a consumer" (1998:481), and as the above quotation insinuates, one went there also as a polluter. In addition to dismissing American nature as a historical ideal, Miller's use of words like "rape" and "violation" seems to exemplify what Kolodny has called "the vocabulary of a feminine landscape and the psychological patterns of regression and violation that it implies" (1996:176).

From Miller's treatment of American idealizations of nature we may infer that Miller works in an anti-pastoral tradition. However, where Durrell's anti-pastoral contention prefers to highlight the distance between idealized representations of nature and reality, Miller's American perspective attempts to address the ideological dissonances of the pastoral tradition.¹⁵⁴ In *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, Miller makes it clear that the book itself is designed as an anti-pastoral exploration of American nature. Although Miller's narrative is framed by an obvious pastoral desire to "experience something genuinely American" by traveling across the country in order to "get out into the open" (ACN:12), Miller soon exploits the tensions between his initial pastoral project and his experience of diverse American environments. To illustrate the problematic distance between the pastoral idealization of American nature and its ideological subtext, Miller proceeds to expose most of the aforementioned issues.

Once more, Miller scorns the history of colonialism by stressing that, "though avowedly searching for peace and happiness, for political and religious freedom, they began by robbing, poisoning, murdering almost exterminating the race to whom this vast continent belonged" (ACN:28). Moreover, Miller evokes what Buell has described as the "euphemization of slavery in nostalgic plantation and frontiersman tales" (1995:16). When Miller describes his visit to Louisiana, for example, he juxtaposes his first impressions of the southern landscape to the traces of slavery that he eventually starts to detect. Indeed, it is in explicit acknowledgement of slavery that Miller constructs his description of "the South" where he "had been made aware again and again of the magnificence of a recent past." This enthusiastic celebration of "[t]he days of the great plantations," which "bequeathed to [...] our American life a color and warmth," is suddenly interrupted when he points out that "the living foundation, like a great column of blood, was the labor of slaves." This anti-pastoral reversal

culminates in the observation that "[f]ollowing the bayous the landscape is dotted with cabined shacks of those who gave their sweat and blood to help create a world of extravagant splendor" (ACN:96-7).

As Miller reaches California—i.e. the final destination of his anti-pastoral journey—he negotiates a comparison between what he experiences by driving over the "Cajon Pass" in a car, and what he imagines the "pioneers who came through this pass on foot and horseback" (ACN:245) must have felt. Of course, Miller chooses a comic perspective to highlight the conflict of "frontier nostalgia" and his experience of this Californian landscape:

All the ranges converge suddenly—like a publicity stunt. Then comes a burst of green, the wildest, greenest green imaginable, as if to prove beyond the shadow of doubt that California is indeed the Paradise it boasts of being. Everything but the ocean seems jammed into this mile-high circus at sixty miles an hour. It wasn't I who got the thrill—it was a man inside me trying to recapture the imagined thrill of the pioneers [...]. Seated in an automobile, hemmed in by a horde of Sunday afternoon maniacs, one can't possibly experience the emotion which such a scene should produce in the human breast. (ACN:245)

Far from being a simple comic rejection of nostalgic notions about the "frontier," this passage raises a number of questions about pastoral idealizations of nature. Despite the allusions to California as an Arcadia of superlatives, as a "Paradise" colored in the "greenest green imaginable," Miller describes this landscape as a highly artificial "publicity stunt." What we have here is an insight into the influence of the pastoral legacy on the American environmental imagination. In addition to illustrating how this pastoral perception has contributed to an alienated experience of the nonhuman world, this passage is also about the anachronism of pastoral celebrations of pristine environments as they are perceived from within a car. It is symptomatic that Miller's representation of the Californian landscape is eventually metamorphosed into a mechanosphere, where the "traffic was too thick and there was no parking space," leading the narrator to the conclusion: "I stopped at a drug store and took a Bromo Seltzer—for 'simple headaches'. The real California began to make itself felt. I wanted to puke" (ACN:146).

3.5.2. "A sort of divine stuttering"

After having tried to expose Miller's resistance to the problematic ideological implications of American pastoral representations, I now propose to analyze whether we may draw a parallel between Durrell's defamiliarization of the reader's pastoral expectations and Miller's anti-pastoral reflections. Evidence that Miller's use of an anti-pastoral perspective is not only directed against its ideological origins but is also intricately related to questions of

¹⁵⁴ This divergence between Durrell and Miller's approach is a characteristic marker of difference between their novels. While Durrell's responses to the crisis of modernity tend to focus on questions of art, Miller's response

representation, can be found in numerous accounts of that "huge rectangle which embraces parts of four States—Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona." The American Southwest, which in Miller's novels tends to become an icon of wilderness—"perhaps the secret of the American continent is contained in this wild, forbidding and partially unexplored territory" (ACN:239)—constitutes a perfect environment for Miller to explore the difficulties of representing the nonhuman world.

Take, for instance, the following episode from *Tropic of Capricorn*, wherein Miller describes a train journey to Arizona. After testifying to his pastoral idealization of Arizona: "[i]n the train there was still with me the Arizona which I had brought from New York" (TCP:151), Miller proceeds to create a pastoral of failure. Not only does this episode intend to dispel pastoral illusions about wilderness, it also illustrates the conflict between pastoral imaginations and reality. Still convinced that he will find the Arizona of his urban dreams, the Miller persona slowly becomes aware of the surrounding landscape: "[w]as there not a bridge over the canyon which had startled me out of my reverie? A bridge such as I had never seen before, a natural bridge created by a cataclysmic eruption thousand of years ago" (TCP:151). While Miller leads us to believe that his pastoral dream can be reconciled with the landscape he observes during his journey, it soon becomes clear that the reverse is true. Analogous to most of his anti-pastoral reversals he writes, "[a]nd as the train stops I put my foot down and my foot has put a deep hole in the dream." Emphasizing the chasm between his pastoral imaginings and reality, he expresses his disappointment about this "Arizona town which is listed in the timetable." Because this location "is only the geographical Arizona," his disillusionment is so great that he adds: "I feel so terribly deceived I begin to weep" (TCP:152).

This ambiguous perception of the nonhuman world is echoed in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*. As I have suggested in a preceding chapter, Miller's description of the Grand Canyon offers a frank realization of representational dilemmas. Whereas the previously examined description of the Grand Canyon has revealed that habitual perception tends to imprison reality into images, the following description draws attention to another problem of literary representation:

It's mad, completely mad, and at the same time so grandiose, so sublime, so illusory, that when you come upon it for the first time you break down and weep with joy. *I* did, at least. For over thirty years I had been aching to see this huge hole in the earth. [...] The Grand Canyon is an enigma and no matter how much we learn we shall never know the ultimate truth about it.... (ACN:240).

Invoking the sublime, Miller refuses to deliver any descriptive details of the place he is exploring. Even though this passage seems to confirm both his representational constraints

involves a wide array of philosophical and social problems.

and the ungraspability of the nonhuman world, he does not hesitate to describe other parts of the Southwest. What is more, closer examination of such descriptions reveals that Miller strives for a form of representational distortion that is similar to Durrell's technique of defamiliarization. This becomes evident when we regard some of the surreal landscapes he creates during his journey across the Southwest. Shortly after his celebration of the Grand Canyon we read, "[i]t was sizzling outdoors. The street was just a fried banana flaming with rum and creosote." (ACN:243). Such distortions do not only sabotage the reader's expectations of representational norms. His refusal to operate with conventional imagery forces the reader to rethink his or her rigidified concepts of nature. Elsewhere he writes, "[a]round you rugged, towering mountain ranges fading almost to extinction in the dancing heat waves of mid-afternoon. Some of them, indeed, have completely vanished, leaving only the pink snow shimmering in the heavens—like an ice cream cone without the cone" (ACN:244-5). Much like Durrell's distorted descriptions, Miller's surreal landscapes challenge the reader to question representational norms and traditional concepts of the nonhuman world.

However, in stark contrast to Durrell, Miller does not suggest that a new language will replace our obsolete representations of the nonhuman world. In fact, Miller's project to realize other ways to perceive and acknowledge the nonhuman world offers a unique response to this problem. "The earth," as Miller characterizes it, "is one great sentient being." It is "a live planet expressing itself falteringly and stutteringly" (TCP:33). From what I have said so far, it is clear that traditional forms of representations cannot do justice to this living biosphere expressing itself "stutteringly." In keeping with his anti-pastoral approach, Miller proposes that the artist must make language stutter, too. As the ensuing excerpt from *Black Spring* shows, Miller defines his own artistic endeavor to make sense of the world as a "faltering and groping, my search for any and every means of expressions, is a sort of divine stuttering." Indicating that making language stutter may allow the artist to create a new perception of the natural world, he adds "*I am dazzled by the glorious collapse of the world!*" (BS:24). Just as Miller celebrates his acceptance of the apocalyptic crisis of modernity, so he seems to celebrate the destabilizing spectacle of the crisis of imagination, the 'monstrous' exhibition of his rhetorical despair.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that a strikingly similar proposition is ventured by Gilles Deleuze. In her study entitled *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation*, Olkowski explains that the claim to "make the language system stutter" assumes an important role in Deleuze's contestations of representational norms. By referring to Deleuze's effort to specify dominant discourse as a "homogeneous system in equilibrium," Olkowski argues that his proposition to achieve a "perpetual disequilibrium" permits him to

set the "language system in motion" (1999:229). The remarkable fact about Deleuze's proposition, Olkowski writes, is that "[s]tuttering is not something restricted to individual characters in a novel; stuttering is the performative at work in the language system, the writer causing language as such to stutter" (1999:230). In thus proposing that stuttering is a technique of subverting and destabilizing representational norms, Olkowski is claiming that the term must be used figuratively. Indeed, common to Miller and Deleuze's call to make language stutter is a conviction that as a performative act it may challenge traditional representations of reality. Stuttering, precisely because it creates a "perpetual disequilibrium," undermines rigid forms of description such as pastoral idealizations of the natural world. Or, more generally, as a disturbance stuttering interferes with representations that operate with stereotyped conventions. That Miller strives for a disequilibrium that is attuned to the flowing totality of the earth as a "great sentient being," becomes obvious in a vast array of remarks on his own artistic project. In *Tropic of Cancer*, for instance, he insists that "the task which the artist implicitly sets himself is to overthrow existing values." Indeed, Miller points out that it is when reflecting on this fundamental premise that "I run with joy to the great and imperfect ones, their confusion nourishes me, their stuttering is like divine music to my ears" (TCN:254).

In several significant ways, the claim to make language stutter, can be linked to what Olkowski has called an "ontology of change" (1999:14). Analogous with the previously discussed rhizomatic structures of multiplicity, the model of a language system in disequilibrium enables the writer to contest representational norms and disturb idealized descriptions of the natural world. As we have seen, Miller's contestation of the pastoral tradition works towards a similar result. As a final example supporting the hypothesis that Miller endeavors to undermine pastoral idealizations of the nonhuman world, we may cite the following excerpt from *Tropic of Cancer*:

I want to make a detour of those lofty arid mountain ranges where one dies of thirst and cold, that 'extratemporal' history, that absolute of time and space where there exists neither man, beast, nor vegetation, where one goes crazy with loneliness, with language that is mere words, [...]. I want a world of men and women, of trees that do not talk (because there is too much talk in the world as it is!), of rivers that carry you to places, not rivers that are legends, but rivers that put you in touch with other men and women, with architecture, religion, plants, animals [...]. (TCN:257)

I cite this long passage not only to underscore the fact that Miller rejects idealized representations of nature. More important, this passage makes it clear, that Miller's nondualistic vision of the world is formulated as an objection to western civilization's tendency to define nature in contradistinction to culture. Notice how Miller's ideal universe "[puts] you in touch with" human and nonhuman, cultural and natural aspects of the world. Much like the previously analyzed stylistic features of lists and the conscious use of the

conjunction "and," such descriptions preserve the "in-between" as a potent place that cannot be subsumed by binary oppositions.

The primary issue that emerges in Miller's treatment of the human and nonhuman world is that in order to grasp the flowing totality of a nondualistic universe the writer must disturb neat distinctions between culture and nature. In other words, Miller's diverse techniques such as making language stutter, or creating a deliberate formlessness entail a liberation from dualistic conceptions of the physical world. Because Miller refuses to subject his understanding of nature to dichotomous structures, he also casts doubt on the accuracy of the pastoral tradition. However, his anti-pastoral perspective does not deny the importance of the natural world. Nor does he deny a certain pastoral impulse to reconnect with nature. "Once I thought that to be human was the highest aim a man could have," he exclaims in *Tropic of Cancer* and concludes, "I have nothing to do with the creaking machinery of humanity—I belong to the earth!" (TCN:255). Yet his desire to unsettle our preconceived notions of nature, or any other form of conventional expression, also leads him to other conclusions, such as "I was born in the midst of civilization and I accepted it very naturally—what else was there to do? But the joke was that nobody else was taking it seriously. I was the only man in the community who was truly civilized" (TCP:311). In the end, Miller's reality is a conjoint creation, requiring an oscillation between antagonistic natural and cultural values. It is to this that I now want to turn.

3.5.3. An Urban Pastoral

With Miller's vision of reality, we return to the thesis that the nature-culture distinction is at the heart of our struggle to make sense of the nonhuman world. An ecocritical reading of Miller's anti-pastoral critique therefore could suggest that he undermines the same dualism by challenging our representational and ideological conceptions of the nonhuman world. From such a perspective, it follows that the pastoral tradition cannot yield an authentic description of the nonhuman world precisely because its idealization of nature reproduces western culture's binary oppositions. As Cronon comments with reference to the dualistic substructures of the pastoral retreat to wilderness, "[t]his, then, is the central paradox: wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural." Put differently, if we insist that "nature, to be true, must also be wild," then our idealization of

such wilderness "reproduces the dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles" (1998:484).¹⁵⁵

But Miller's endeavor to destabilize dualistic conceptions of the natural world does not merely amount to a critique of the pastoral tradition. It also takes into account artistic responses to the nonhuman world that do not absorb the pastoral mode. To rethink nature in nondualistic terms is, as some ecocritics allege, a necessary precondition to reaffirm the importance of nature and our interconnections with it. As David Shumway remarks, "if nature is conceptualized and valued, [...], as that which is independent of human culture, then rather little of the environment corresponds to the concept" (1999:257). Buell, likewise, raises the question whether "the model often favored by ecocriticism hitherto, of an 'ecological holism' to which acts of imagination have the capacity to (re)connect us" (2001:45), is not too delimited to do justice to our lived experience of reality. This becomes especially obvious when we recall the previously examined threat of toxification. To avoid pastoral idealizations, Buell proposes that we both "reinforce the deromanticization" and "urge the expansion of 'nature' as an operative category." (2001:45). As a result

physical nature's cultural importance, indeed nature's nature itself, ceases to be located in its promise as past, present, or future sanctuary but rather in its standing as humanity's codependent and coconspirator in coping with the fact/awareness that the nature one engages must now inescapably be—if indeed it has not always in some sense been—not pristine but the effect of 'second' (i.e., modified) nature or (in Derek Jarman's phrase) 'modern nature'. (2001:45)

Buell's commentary reinforces the necessity to have a closer look at Miller's evocation of modern environments.

Miller's desire to explore the physical world located between the metropolis and primordial nature is illustrated in a frequently quoted passage from *Tropic of Capricorn*. Indeed, the endeavor to undermine the nature-culture dualism provides the impetus for this passage, which starts with dichotomous structures, but then shifts its focus to an intermediate ground—i.e. domesticated nature. The passage opens with Miller's explicit wish to overcome the crisis of modernity. He declares, "I am going to die as a city in order to become again a man" (*TCP*:123).¹⁵⁶ But then he adds, "[b]efore I shall have become quite a man again I shall probably exist as a park, a sort of natural park in which people come to rest." That this park, as an intermediate space, asserts the intertwinement of humans with what Buell has called "second" or "modern nature," becomes evident in ensuing sentences, as for instance "I shall

¹⁵⁵ That the concept of wilderness cannot satisfy a vitalistic yearning for authenticity, becomes evident if we consider Dana Phillips's argument that "wilderness has always been more a state of mind than a reality; it has always been a figuration of consciousness, rather than something to be discovered waiting for us outside the bounds of our assumptions" (2003:233).

¹⁵⁶ As Alan Trachtenberg explains, here Miller turns to Spengler, from whom "he gains the conviction that the megalopolis is the last gasp of a dying civilization" (1992:247).

be a ventilator for removing the poisons" or, "I shall be the wild park in the midst of the nightmare of perfection." Moreover, statements such as "I shall make no effort to preserve, no effort to destroy. I shall make no judgments, no criticisms," insinuate that Miller's notion of the park is not subject to anthropocentric projections. As a "deromanticized" environment, it mirrors Miller's insistence that the only way to deal with the problems of modernity is by accepting them. Idealized visions of the world then, fail to address the fundamental conflicts of modernity.

In Alan Trachtenberg's analysis of the passage quoted above, the retreat to "cultivated wildness" exemplifies not only Miller's determination "to awake from the American nightmare" (1992:247). According to Trachtenberg, the "park image" also "confirms Miller's attachment to Romanticism" (1992:248). Indeed, Trachtenberg, has gone so far as to show that "the sentimental underpinning of Miller's romanticism" has led him to create an urban pastoral that bespeaks his obsession with the past (1992:249). My reading of the park image, but also of Miller's urban pastoralism, differs substantially from Trachtenberg's. In contrast to Trachtenberg, who suggests that Miller simply applies pastoral ideals to an urban context in order to escape from the civilizational ills of American society, it seems to me that the concept of an urban pastoral itself exhibits a desire to unsettle the nature-culture opposition of the pastoral discourse. Rather than perpetuating pastoral escapism, the image of the park, but also the notion of urban pastoral, operate with an oscillation between nature and culture that challenges predefined conceptions of the human and nonhuman world.

In ending this chapter I want to discuss Miller's urban pastoral in the light of these arguments. However, in order not to complicate matters let me briefly sketch the extent to which Miller may indeed be characterized as "an urban pastoralist" (Trachtenberg 1992:246). To begin with, it is important to stress that in spite of his pronounced dismissal of pastoral ideals, Miller testifies to a certain appeal to pastoral notions of retreat. Just as Durrell expresses an ambivalent rejection and celebration of pastoral quests for a more nature-attuned existence, Miller feels compelled to depict his own attraction to some pastoral motifs. But whereas Durrell thematizes his yearning to recall his Tibetan childhood, for Miller "this ideal state of self-sufficient freedom was associated with the paradise of this childhood in the 14th ward of Brooklyn" (Gottesmann 1992:16).

In *Black Spring*, Miller evokes a pastoral mourning of his lost childhood. As this typical combination of pastoral feelings and industrialism shows, Miller intends to locate innocent conditions of childhood in the middle of a threatening mechanosphere:

Where others remember of their youth a beautiful garden, a fond mother, a sojourn at the seashore, I remember, with a vividness as if it were etched in acid, the grim, soot-covered walls and chimneys of the tin factory opposite us and the bright, circular pieces of tin that

were strewn in the street, some bright and gleaming, others rusted, dull, copperish, leaving a stain on the fingers; [...]. (BS:5)

Miller's reminiscences of his childhood are not presented as a nostalgic recollection; quite to the contrary, they are "etched in acid." Instead of recalling memories of a beautiful landscape, he remembers colorful "pieces of tin" that stain his hands. Nevertheless, by stressing his visual and physical interaction with this industrial environment, Miller attempts to reconstruct the pastoral longing for a child's allegedly pure contact with the environmental contexts it discovers. Attempts to create a pastoral recollection of his urban childhood can also be found in *Tropic of Capricorn*. Here Miller invokes frontier nostalgia to describe the loss of an innocent world: "[t]he wonder and the mystery of life—which is throttled in us as we become responsible members of society! Until we were pushed out to work the world was very small and we were living on the fringe of it, on the frontier, as it were, of the unknown." (TCP:144-5). Once again, it is the loss of the child's innocent interaction with the physical world that Miller deplores and that thus leads him to the conclusion that "I want to become more and more childish and to pass beyond childhood [...] into a superinfantile realm of being" (TCP:145).

However, Miller's use of what Leo Marx has termed "the trope of the interrupted idyll" (1967:25), is the most poignant example of the urban pastoral Miller tries to create in *Tropic of Capricorn*. In order to help sort out the pastoral motifs underlying Miller's description of his urban youth, we should recall the arguments Leo Marx advances in *The Machine in the Garden*. There Marx summarizes the persistence of a motif characterizing pastoralism "in American writing since the 1840's" (1967:15). In his exploration of numerous works that he defines as complex pastorals, Marx indicates that again and again we find descriptions of a narrator or writer "sitting in his green retreat dutifully attaching words to natural facts, [...] and then, suddenly, the startling shriek of the train whistle bearing in upon him, forcing him to acknowledge the existence of a reality alien to the pastoral dream" (1967:14-5). A strikingly similar episode occurs in Miller's reminiscences of growing up in Brooklyn. In contrast to the previously cited instances, Miller uses the motif of the intruding train, not to describe his childhood, but to recount his first sexual intercourse. "Lying in the grass near the railroad tracks," the young Miller persona spends an evening "just mooning," when he suddenly meets his piano teacher named Lola (TCP:254). After refusing to enter into a conversation with Lola, he penetrates her and remarks, "[i]t was my first fuck, by Jesus, and it had to be that a train would come along and shower hot sparks over us." As both of them are terrified, they retreat "over the highway" and head toward a pond "near the reservoirs" where, their pastoral peace restored, they continue to indulge in their first sexual experiences (TCP:254).

The striking fact is not only that Miller inserts this popular device of "depicting the machine as invading the peace of an enclosed space, a world set apart, or an area somehow made to evoke a feeling of encircled felicity," into Brooklyn. Or, for that matter, that Miller insists on a violent intrusion into "a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction" (Marx 1967:29) in the middle of a technologically modified landscape. As an additional example of Miller's urban pastoralism, it confirms the pattern that starts to complete itself. Namely, that what matters in Miller's pastoral recollections of his youth is not the celebration of the past, but the celebration of embodied experience.¹⁵⁷ Phrased differently, Miller's pastoral recollections of his urban childhood are invariably associated with physical sensations. As evidence of this focus on physical rather than idealized notions of the past, we can note the importance he places on unreasoned modes of being, such as "mooning" about, or refusing to talk to Lola.

This direction of interpretation seems supported by several other symptomatic references to embodied experience. In *Tropic of Capricorn*, for instance, we find a lengthy anecdote evoking his memories of the "sour rye with fresh butter and a little sugar over it" he used to eat with his cousin Gene (*TCP*:124). Not only does the memory of this "thick slice of rye bread [...] possess more potency than any other image of that period" (*TCP*:126), it also illustrates that Miller's nostalgia is motivated by a desire to recapture the intensity with which he discovered his senses. By insisting that "[t]here are times, in fact, when the taste of that big slice of sour rye [...] is stronger in my mouth than the food I am actually tasting" (*TCP*:126), Miller indicates that the taste of sour rye becomes an important element of his pastoral longing for a lost childhood. Accordingly he concludes: "[w]ith the sour rye the world was what it is essentially, a primitive world ruled by magic" (*TCP*:129).

But while the instances cited above show that Miller creates an urban pastoral in order to evoke his childhood and the pureness of embodied experience, it is important to emphasize that in *Tropic of Cancer* Miller strives for a form of urban pastoral that is not associated with his youth. As I noted earlier, Miller arrives at this concept of urban pastoral via the will to unsettle the nature-culture dualism of the pastoral discourse. Resistance to the dichotomous structures underlying our conceptions of the nonhuman world is also at the heart of Miller's ambivalent descriptions of Paris. The conflict of the *malaise* characterizing metropolitan life and exuberant celebrations of urban existence is exemplified in the following description:

¹⁵⁷ My reading of Miller differs from the critical response to Miller's pastoralism, which is often centered around the problem of time. As we have seen, Trachtenberg maintains that pastoral motifs in Miller's novels illustrate his "obsession with memory" and his yearning to "recapture and idealized past" (1992:246). In contrast, Ihab Hassan, finds the combination of "surreal visions of a diseased or mechanized society" and "tender recollections of childhood," symptomatic of Miller's failure to "find for himself a place in this world, between an Edenic past and a utopian future" (1969:76). Although these interpretations seem correct to me, I do not believe that they contain all the truth.

"[t]he rain stopped and the sun breaking through the soapy clouds touched the glistening rubble of roofs," and the ensuing exclamation that "when spring comes to Paris the humblest mortal alive must feel that he dwells in paradise" (*TCN*:74).

A similar oscillation between natural phenomena and images of industrial civilization informs the following description of Montparnasse:

In the blue of an electric dawn the peanut shells look wan and crumpled; along the beach at Montparnasse the water lilies bend and break. When the tide is on the ebb and only a few syphilitic mermaids are left stranded in the muck, the Dôme looks like a shooting gallery that's been struck by a cyclone. (*TCN*:165)

What these distorted depictions of Paris share are Miller's characteristic amalgamation of pastoral motifs with bleak images of the megalopolis, and his equally characteristic focus on culturally transformed environments. By destabilizing predefined responses to both urban and natural environments, Miller's pastoral description of Paris challenges the reader's conceptions of physical reality. Because Miller underlines the importance of rethinking our responses to our modern environments, his urban pastoralism may be interpreted as an example of what Buell has called "environmentally conscious urban writing." As Buell has observed, this kind of urban writing "has oscillated between a sense, whether exuberant or appalled, of the self-evident march of urban triumphalism and a sense, also often ambiguated, of the necessary dependence of urban life on physical environment" (2001:87). In other words, I would like to suggest that Miller's pastoral descriptions of Paris intend to draw the reader's attention to the city-dweller's intimate interaction with his or her physical environment.

Indeed, Paris in Miller's novels is neither presented as a purely romantic nor as a exclusively terrifying setting of the modern megalopolis. On the contrary, Miller creates a constantly changing urban landscape and describes it as it is seen and felt, animated rather than abstract. As I have suggested in a preceding chapter, the human dependence on this industrial environment causes a vast array of diseases. This negative impact notwithstanding, the Miller persona's interaction with this urban environment can also arouse "an erection" by merely "looking at the dumb statutes" in the "Jardin des Tuileries" (*TCN*:23). That this urban environment is "humanity's codependent," to come back to Buell's terms, is also exemplified by Miller's recurrent insistence on "the human physiognomy of the streets" (*TCN*:189). Finally, his preoccupation with Paris as a vital physical environment is evident in his telling remark that it is "a Paris that has to be lived, that has to be experienced" (*TCN*:184), rather than represented in traditional terms.

As we have seen in a preceding chapter, the comparison between New York and Paris reveals that in Miller's novels the French capital still functions as an organically active habitat, whereas New York is represented as an artificial mechanosphere. That the question

concerning the human being's interaction with his or her habitat is of paramount importance is revealed by the fact that Miller condemns New York and glorifies Paris in spite of the growing evidence that the French capital, too, will become a threatening megalopolis. Furthermore, the fact that Paris still is able to provide a meaningful environmental context, also explains why in his accounts of New York Miller can only turn to recollections of his childhood to evoke an embodied interaction and experience of the physical world.

At this point it seems useful to introduce Buell's concept of "place experience." For his assumption that "place always implies active reciprocal relation between inhabitant and context" (1995:267), helps us to elucidate Miller's animated descriptions of Paris. As McDowell has made clear, traditional objective representations of the physical world "deny the truth of our non-stop bodily interaction with our environment" (1992:30). Attention to place addresses the importance of embodiment and re-emphasizes Buell's claim that a deromanticized understanding of modern nature might be a necessary precondition for a re-evaluation of the human dependence on environmental conditions. In like manner, Miller's multifarious embodied responses to Paris suggests that a focus on the lived experience of one's immediate surrounding provides a powerful alternative to the pastoral retreat to an idealized vision of nature. Retrospectively then, embodied experience is not only at issue in Miller's pastoral reminiscences of Brooklyn, it also constitutes the necessary condition for Miller's description of Paris.

As the ensuing passage shows, all of the previously examined features—i.e., embodied experience, the nature-culture dualism, the dichotomous structures of the pastoral discourse, the problem of representational norms, the city-dweller's dependence on physical nature—shape Miller's Arcadian vision of Paris:

Here, where the river gently winds through the girdle of hills, lies a soil so saturated with the past that however far back the human mind roams one can never detach it from its human background. [...]. So quietly flows the Seine that one hardly notices its presence. It is always there, quiet and unobtrusive, like a great artery running through the human body. In the wonderful peace that fell over me it seemed as if I had climbed to the top of a mountain; for a little while I would be able to look around me, to take in the meaning of this landscape.

Human beings make a strange fauna and flora. From a distance they appear negligible; close up they are apt to appear ugly and malicious. More than anything they need be surrounded with sufficient space—space even more than time. (TCN:317-8)

This pastoral description of Paris insinuates that instead of returning to an idealized notion of nature, paying attention to the vital connections between the city-dweller and his or her urban habitat may yield a more authentic understanding of the human response to the nonhuman world.

To conclude, we may briefly summarize the implications of Miller's pastoral vision of Paris as follows: first, as a culturally modified landscape it cannot be detached "from its

human background" and therefore undermines the nature-culture dualism. Second, as a habitat whose presence "one hardly notices" it does not reflect pastoral projections of anthropocentric ideals. Third, as a habitat with which the city-dweller is vitally connected—as the image of the "great artery running through the human body" indeed seems to suggest—the perceiver might absorb the meaning of the landscape rather than limit his or her responses to recognizing conceptions of nature. Finally, the same vital connection also insinuates that human beings as elements of an urban ecosystem—"a strange fauna and flora"—are dependent on their environments. What I have attempted to show therefore, is that both Miller and Durrell distort our culturally predefined conceptions of the physical world in order to dissolve the strict conceptual boundaries that separate the human from the nonhuman world. Rather than, advocating a classical return to nature as an antidote to the *malaise* of modern life, Miller and Durrell demand that we develop a heightened awareness of our physical interactions with a "deromanticized" vision of the natural world.

4. BACK TO THE WOMB

4.1. The Importance of Place in Henry Miller's Urban Novels

Ecocriticism has been determined by an intense interest in the notion of place. That the concept of place is centrally important to ecocritical analyses of textual spaces becomes evident if we consider that a focus on the individual's interaction with his or her immediate surroundings may yield a new awareness of our dependence upon environmental conditions. From this perspective, the notion of place does not only provide a useful approach to interpreting Miller's endeavor to create an urban pastoral, it also constitutes the necessary condition for a new environmental consciousness that entices us to rediscover vital connections with our habitats. Unlike idealized depictions of retreats from our civilizational ills, attention to "place-sense may actually 'connect' us with actual environments" (Buell 1995:253). Moreover, place theory raises crucial ecocritical questions about the importance of the relationship of literature and environment. It therefore serves as a useful frame for thinking about the way in which narrative action is intricately intertwined not only with time but also with space.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, as Gerald Kennedy reminds us, "we speak of plot as what 'takes place,' what assumes localized form, in fiction" (1990:511). In raising these questions about place, ecocriticism reveals that "for a writer constructing a narrative of lived experience," the environmental context is a pivotal issue simply because it "gives that experience definition and sustenance" (Kennedy 1990:513).

Yet place theory is not restricted to acknowledging "the importance of place-sense to literary and cultural imagination," it also helps us to fathom the new understanding of reality that "place-responsive imaginative acts can" produce (Buell 2001:64). The advantage of the notion of place can be understood best by comparing it to the preceding analysis of idealized descriptions of pastoral space. Clearly, descriptions of nature that are based on an understanding of space as an "abstract [...], homogeneous and unitary" (Casey 1998:193) realm tend to miss the full extent of our lived experience of our environments. In contrast to such abstract and idealized representations of the natural world, the notion of place "situates" the individual perceiver, "and it does so richly and diversely" (Casey 1998:201). Place locates the individual in specific environmental contexts. Precisely because "'place' necessarily

¹⁵⁸ Critics interested in place theory tend to stress that while the notion of time has been taken for granted, the role of place in literature has been neglected. Kennedy, for instance, notes that whereas place has been "disposed of [...] with the concept of 'setting,'" most "critics have thus far concerned themselves mainly with temporality" (1990:497).

includes the human presence and in fact is centered around it" (Cantrell 2000:275), it may prepare the way for an important new development in our understanding of the natural world. The ecocritical valorization of place provides a model for a new ecological reassessment of nature. The new conception of the natural world that is thus being "uncovered is one of becoming"—i.e. it refuses to grant value to "the image of a regression to a pristine stage of things" (Andermatt Conley 1997:70). In sum, paying attention to the experience of place may constitute a promising mode of "feeling our way back into a balanced relationship with external nature" (Gifford 1999:161).

One important corollary of this shift in outlook, from a focus on idealized landscapes to the individual's apprehension of place, concerns the fact that "life goes on in an environment; not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it" (Dewey 1980:13). It is exactly in this respect that the notion of place offers a promising latitude to accomplish the required analysis of Miller and Durrell's struggle with the crisis of modernity. As we have seen the primary symptoms that emerge from the individual's confrontation with modernity can all be situated in the individual's interaction with the growing mechanization of modern environments. Both Miller and Durrell's thematization of the threat of toxic poisoning, physical decay and rhetorical despair use the individual's experience of a specific place to re-enact the crisis of modernity. The notion of place is therefore particularly relevant to understanding why Miller and Durrell reject the traditional pastoral retreat to nature. As both authors ultimately aspire to achieve a new authentic approach to reality, attention to place-experience enables them to demonstrate why as organic beings we cannot overcome the *malaise* of modern life by returning to some idealized notion of natural existence. Indeed, by shifting the focal point on place as a vital context, which defines the human being as an organism that depends on its interchanges with its environment, such anti-pastoral texts are motivated by the belief that the aesthetic recourse to pseudo-nature cannot compensate for the distress caused by the crisis of modernity.

As the environmental philosopher Gernot Böhme has made clear, attention to the individual's intimate interaction with place bears directly on our understanding of the human relation to the nonhuman world. According to Böhme, traditional concepts of nature that operate with the nature-culture dualism can only be challenged if we become aware of the way in which the current environmental crisis constitutes a direct hazard to the human being as a physical organism. Becoming conscious of our own embodied existence, in turn, results in the recognition that we are natural beings who cannot be dissociated from their

environmental conditions.¹⁵⁹ For purposes of the argument presented here, Böhme's theory is particularly noteworthy. For his conviction that instead of trying to return to nature we must endeavor to arrive at human nature (1992:99), serves not only as a useful frame for thinking about Miller and Durrell's rejection of pastoral ideals, but promises also to cast new light on their vitalistic affirmation of the human body.

However, before looking more closely at Miller and Durrell's vitalistic affirmation of body instincts, we should first give some further consideration to the way in which the notion of place allows recognition of a particular mode of inhabiting the world. That through a renewed sense of place we may overcome the nature-culture dualism, which seems to be responsible for western civilization's failure to recognize the human interrelatedness with the natural world, becomes evident if we consider some basic premises governing place theory. As the following extract from Edward Casey's philosophical study, entitled *The Fate of Place*, suggests attention to place is indispensable for any attempt to describe lived experience:

To be at all—to exist in any way—is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. [...] We live in places, we relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced. How could it be otherwise? How could we fail to recognize this primal fact? (1998:ix)

This passage makes it clear that wherever the experience of place is taken seriously, we are likely to find an affirmation that human beings "are no longer independent agents who act on Nature," but that "they are *a priori* in exchange with their environment" (Andermatt Conley 1997:57).

That for Henry Miller a focus on place yields a richer and more authentic account of the lived experience of reality than pastoral discourse, while at the same time enabling him to stress that human beings are determined by environmental conditions, can be observed in many of his descriptions of urban environments. A case in point is the following passage from *Black Spring*. Centered around the narrator's sudden awareness of his physical interaction with his urban habitat, it reveals that unlike romanticized notions of nature the vital experience of place reconnects him with the natural world. Describing that "fair city of Paris, soft, gemlike, a holy citadel whose mysterious paths thread beneath the clustering sea of roofs to break upon the open plain"; the narrator suddenly locates himself in this urban environment: "I sit in the dead center of traffic, stilled by the hush of a new life growing out of the decay about me. My feet are touching the roots of an ageless body for which I have no name. I am in communication with the whole earth" (*BS*:198). In thus proposing that the narrator's vital response to his immediate urban surrounding allows him to reconnect with

¹⁵⁹ Böhme maintains that ecocriticism, or what he terms "*ökologische Naturästhetik*," "*kann nicht dazu dienen, die verleugnete eigene Natur verklärt im Anderen seiner selbst aufzusuchen. Sie hat vielmehr den Menschen*

"the whole earth," Miller is claiming that place-sense can lead to a redefinition of human beings as a natural beings interacting with their habitats. Put differently: while Miller's attempts to describe famous natural sites such as the Grand Canyon failed because he could not dissociate them from idealized notions of nature, his direct experience of modern urban environments allows him to feel his vital interconnection with his immediate physical surrounding.

Miller's intense attachment to place may also be interpreted as a symptom of his status as an expatriate American in Paris. Indeed, the importance of place is not just that it allows recognition of our lived experience of environments, but also that it is a crucial basis for the formation of one's identity. From this perspective, Miller's keenness to explore the streets of Paris appears as an expression of a certain kind of "universal compulsion for humans to seek to connect themselves with specific places of settlement" (Buell 2001:74). On the basis of the observation that for writers "marked by a prolonged absence or even permanent exile from homeland" the adaptation to new environments "produces the perspective of displacement," Gerald Kennedy emphasizes that a "study of place" is of paramount importance for an interpretation of Henry Miller's description of Paris (1990:514).

Closer examination of Miller's narrative of exile reveals that his descriptions of the French capital do not only mirror the Miller persona's sense of homelessness, they also "reflect both an intensified awareness of place and an instinctive preoccupation with the identity of the alienated self" (Kennedy 1990:515). Consider, for instance, how the following passage from *Tropic of Cancer* is shaped by a double sense of exile. Both his separation from his lover, whom he alternately calls Mona or Tania, and his exile from New York determines his perception of the various sites he discovers in Paris:

Walking down the Rue Lhomond one night in a fit of unusual anguish and desolation, certain things were revealed to me with poignant clarity. Whether it was that I had so often walked this street in bitterness and despair or whether it was the remembrance of a phrase which [Mona/Tania] had dropped one night as we stood at the Place Lucien-Herr I do not know. 'Why don't you show me that Paris,' she said, 'that you have written about?' One thing I know, that at the recollection of these words I suddenly realized the impossibility of ever revealing to her that Paris which I had gotten to know, the Paris whose *arrondissements* are undefined, a Paris that has never existed except by virtue of my loneliness, my hunger for her. (TCN:183)

Once again, it is the Miller persona's physical interaction with his urban environment—i.e. the act of "walking down the street"—which makes him recognize the impact his intimate sense of place exerts on his apprehension of this metropolitan environment. That the pivotal issue of place is accentuated both by his sense of homelessness and his separation from Mona/Tania is stressed by the final remark that his experience of Paris has been fundamentally shaped by his "loneliness" and his "hunger for her."

Nevertheless, that Miller's alert descriptions of Paris do not only "raise the question of how place functions in the formation of identity, implying that the sense of self and apparent pattern of a life depend crucially upon one's perceived relationship to an ambient reality" (Kennedy 1990:496-7), is highlighted in an ensuing passage. Immediately after the narrator's conclusion that the attachment he has formed to the streets of Paris cannot be congruent with Mona/Tania's own processes of orientation, we read: "it is a Paris that has to be lived, that has to be experienced each day in a thousand different forms of torture, a Paris that grows inside you like a cancer" (*TCN*:184). According to Kennedy, such sentences suggest that "one's sense of place is determined less by geographical features than by experiential associations" (1990:499). However, if we take into account Miller's attention to environmental issues, the insistence on his lived experience of the urban environments he discovers in the French capital seems to have wider implications than the relation between place and the expatriate's alienated sense of self.

Against the backdrop of the ecocritical re-evaluation of place, I would like to suggest that while Miller's sense of exile certainly intensifies his need to develop new attachments to place, we may also interpret his wish to conquer the feeling of displacement and exile as an attempt to define himself as an environmentally dependent being. Such an expanded explanation of exile, which defines the separation from the earth or the *oikos* as a state of homelessness, addresses a number of essential features characterizing Miller's sense of place, that Kennedy's focus on the social and platial formation of identity misses. One advantage of this ecocritical interpretation, for example, is that it allows us to stress that Miller's Paris is not simply a metaphorical setting enabling the Miller persona to develop a new sense of identity. Quite to the contrary, the Paris we find depicted in *Tropic of Cancer* and elsewhere is not static. It is an active environment capable of evoking euphoric as well as tormented reactions. But above all, an ecocritical perspective allows us to grasp the extent to which Miller constructs vivid descriptions of urban environments whose main impetus arises from the narrator's physical embroilment with his immediate surroundings. In an active and troubled urban environment, like the one Miller again and again describes, it is not surprising that the concept of place-sense should affect not only the urbanite's sense of identity, but also the recognition that human beings are "creatures immanent to their environment" (Andermatt Conley 1997:74).

If instead of focusing only on the expatriate narrative of displacement, we recognize that Miller's place-sense is intricately intertwined with the human beings' physical dependence on environmental conditions, it becomes easier to see why in the passage quoted above Miller introduces once more the metaphor of cancer. What the metaphor of cancer

suggests, is that in paying attention to place Miller tends to merge images of sick bodies with images of sick environments. Miller's use of the metaphor of cancer to express the unity of body and environment is not surprising if we consider the fact that "metaphorically, cancer is [...] a disease or pathology of space. Its principal metaphors refer to topography (cancer 'spreads' or 'proliferates' or is 'diffused'[...]), and its most dreaded consequence, short of death, is the mutilation or amputation of part of the body" (Sontag 1991:15). A phenomenon confirming the body/environment nexus underlying the metaphor of cancer, is the fact that whereas cancer is often associated with environmental hazards, the disease itself remains invisible because "[t]he fight is all inside one's body." As such it becomes a symbol of the neglected body. The fatal consequences of the definition of ourselves as disembodied beings, then, are that "once cancer is present, it cannot be reversed or diminished by a move to a better (that is, less carcinogenic) environment" (Sontag 1991:16).

In other words, if the metaphor of cancer permits us to see the bond between body and environment, the hidden dimension of cancer as a disease—expressed in Miller's previously quoted phrase, "Paris grows *inside* you like a cancer"—also allows us to conjoin Miller's attention to place with his belief that we have denied or forgotten that the human body is an environmentally dependent organism. As Sontag has pointed out, when cancer as a metaphor is incorporated into fiction it is used not only to reveal that "the body is, all too woefully, just the body," (1991:19), but also to express a sense of "self-betrayal"—i.e. "[o]ne's mind betrays one's body" (1991:41). As Miller's representations of place are linked to the reciprocity between body and environment, we may wonder whether for Miller the theme of exile and the desire to establish intimate connections to place is grounded on the belief that livable habitats are indispensable not only for one's psychic, but also for one's physical existence.

Taking into account the environmental concerns underlying Miller's preoccupation with exile and the need to develop a new sense of place, a more complicated picture of Miller's struggle with the crisis of modernity emerges. One immediate implication of such a reading of place-sense is that the crisis of modernity can indeed be interpreted as an environmental crisis. In an ecocritical reading of Miller's particular attention to place three traits stand out. All of these traits seem to confirm that the *malaise* of modern life is the result of modern society's problematic conceptions of nature. First, as I suggested in an earlier chapter, industrial society's belief in technology (which itself is a symptom of western civilization's tendency to define itself in contradistinction to nature) has not only produced unlivable habitats, it has also contributed to the denial of the human body and its dependence on a healthy environment. Second, by defining selfhood in terms of the individual's psychic existence, modern society has neglected both the individual's sense of place and the

importance of embodied existence. The failure to take corporeal existence seriously may, therefore, also account for the failure to overcome the Modernist sense of self-estrangement. Finally, Miller's urge to return to a revitalized sense of place seems to anticipate Gernot Böhme's claim that only a redefinition of the human being as a natural and physical being may deliver a new impetus to western civilization's distorted relation to nature.

In *Black Spring* Miller makes it clear that his preoccupation with place-sense is much more concerned with the ability to reestablish the bodily interconnectedness with place that he claims to have experienced as a child, than with his separation from his lover or his homeland. Once again, it is by stressing the physical act of walking, that the Miller persona suddenly realizes the discrepancy distinguishing his present sense of place from the one he remembers of his youth. Registering how the "memories" of his childhood "intrude, rise up like ghosts and permeate every fiber of one's being," Miller all of a sudden understands why he must overcome "[t]he great fragmentation of maturity" (*BS*:10). By stressing that "[i]n youth we were whole and the terror of pain of the world penetrated us through and through," Miller insinuates that modern society's denial of our embodied experience of the world has produced a fragmented sense of self. Indeed, for Miller it is due to western civilization's binary oppositions that we fail to grant value to physical experience. Refusing to admit our intimate connections with nature we "walk against a united world, asserting our dividedness" (*BS*:10). Clearly, Miller's denunciation of the adult's or the modern individual's incapacity to assert the unity of bodily existence demonstrates that the attempt to re-establish a sensuous apprehension of environment is at the heart of Miller's reflections on place.

Miller's desire to return to his childhood's allegedly unmediated experience of place is a desire to acknowledge his body as a natural organism. It is thus interesting to analyze Miller's insistence on the necessity to return to this lost unity in terms of Böhme's claim that the awareness of the body *qua* nature helps us to rethink our alienation from the nonhuman world. Miller's preoccupation with this lost recognition of our physical interaction with the world, is evident when in the following paragraph he laments that "[w]e live in the mind, in ideas, in fragments. We no longer drink in the wild outer music of the streets — we *remember* only" (*BS*:10).¹⁶⁰ It is revealing that Miller's vision of a new physically alert perception, that ought to replace his present confinement to cerebral experience, operates with metaphors that stress the intensified sense-perception of animals and plants. Consider, for instance, how the following surrealistic passage is best understood in terms of this desire to re-evaluate the body as a natural organism. Deploring the loss of the original organic relation between body and environment, Miller writes, "[w]e walk the streets with a thousand legs and eyes, with furry

antennae picking up the slightest clue and memory of the past. In the aimless to and fro we pause now and then, like long, sticky plants, and we swallow whole the live morsels of the past" (*BS*:12). Here the quest for authenticity clearly avoids the traditional return to an idealized image of nature. Instead, authenticity is sought in the human body and its capacity as a natural organism to shape the cognizance of our environments. However, this new quest is not as easy as it appears. For Miller never ceases to deplore that "[w]e are never whole again, but living in fragments, and all our parts separated by thinnest membrane" (*BS*:12).

Edward Casey demonstrates why the notion of place provides a particularly promising means of emphasizing the importance of physical existence. Evidence that attention to place-sense is not restricted to elucidating the understanding of one's social sense of selfhood but also to one's intimate bodily existence, presents itself in Casey's assertion that "there can be no being-in-place except by being in a densely qualified place in concrete embodiment." "Indeed," Casey asks, "how can one be *in* a place except *through* one's own body" (1998:204).¹⁶¹ Casey's fundamental observations that "on the one hand, to have a place is necessarily to exist, that is, to exist as a sensible body; on the other hand, to exist as a sensible body is to have a place" (Casey 1998:204), re-emphasize the usefulness of place theory for articulating the vitalistic implications of Miller's attention to place. This becomes especially clear if we consider that its basic premise, i.e. that "implacement entails embodiment" (Casey 1998:340), helps us to elucidate why throughout Miller's books his narrator feels his attention to urban surroundings give way to epiphanies in which a sense of unity is achieved through his sensuous apprehension of place. A case in point certainly is his contemplation of the Seine which, as I suggested earlier, functions as Miller's favorite symbol for the flowing totality of the universe. Significantly, in *Tropic of Cancer* the narrator's first allusion to the Seine is about trying to reconnect to one's lost sense of unity between body and environment: "[f]or the moment I can think of nothing—except that I am a sentient being stabbed by the miracle of these waters that reflect a forgotten world" (*TCN*:14).

Yet the importance of place is not just that it acknowledges that the body is of paramount importance for human experience, but also that it is a crucial basis for addressing modern society's lack of attention to the lived body. Indeed, "[t]he more we reflect on place," Casey reminds us, "the more we recognize it to be something not merely characterizable but actually experienced in qualitative terms." That such an experience of place yields a new understanding of the body as an active organism is confirmed by the fact that "[t]hese terms, for example, color, texture, and depth, are known to us only in and by the body that enters and

¹⁶⁰ Italics in original.

¹⁶¹ Italics in original.

occupies a given place" (1998:204). The remarkable fact about such a renewed recognition of the lived experience of place is that it forces us to "realize that the perceiver's body is not a mere mechanism for registering sensations but an active participant in the scene of perception" (Casey 1998:213). Phrased differently, just as the notion of place challenges us to rethink our conception of the body, so the notion of place-experience invites us to "undertake a new appreciation of the agency of the human body in enlivening and shaping the entire perceptual domain" (Casey 1998:213).

Evidence that for Miller "place is where our embodied selves experience the world" (Cantrell 2000:275) is not hard to find. When Miller describes his excursions through the modern metropolis he often expresses the desire to find a place that would arouse "the sort of experience which I knew as a child, one of intense immediacy." That it is not only the sense of immediacy that Miller craves for, but a situation in which the body and his environment is fully present to his senses is highlighted when he explains that "in the little old neighborhood from which I was uprooted as a child there were these parallel vertical planes on which everything took place [...] as if through osmosis" (*TCP*:214). Most important to notice here is that Miller does not merely try to rediscover an intimate connection to his environment. The reference to "osmosis" suggests that a genuine sense of place implies a full recognition of one's many-layered sensuous interactions with one's immediate surrounding. As a result, a number of instances in which Miller describes his apprehensions of urban place have to do with his effort to reach a genuine expression of the narrator's symbiotic relationship between his body and his urban environment.

On one such occasion Miller briefly experiences the full dimension of his physical engagement with his immediate surrounding:

My whole being was responding to the dictates of an ambience which it had never before experienced; that which I could call myself seemed to be contracting, condensing, shrinking from the stale, customary boundaries of the flesh whose perimeter knew only the modulations of nerve ends.

And the more substantial, the more solid the core of me became, the more delicate and extravagant appeared the close, palpable reality out of which I was being squeezed. (*TCN*:101)

Such rare moments of unrestrained interaction between body and environment confirm the pivotal role of place-experience. Apart from the celebration of his body's sensuous engagement with the external world, Miller's insistence that this bodily way of perceiving the world yields a new understanding of selfhood, is especially significant here. Where his old (ratiocinative) sense of self was limited by the "boundaries of the flesh" and could thus only register the "modulations of nerve ends," his new (bodily) sense of self allows the narrator to perceive himself as a "whole being." What is more, this new vision of a united self allows him to be engaged with a "more delicate and extravagant" reality. Taken as a model of authentic

experience, this representation of the body's active responses to its environment occasions a renewed recognition of the fact that "[e]xperience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment, which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication" (Dewey 1980:22).

With Dewey's remark in mind, we may speculate that what is at stake in Miller's particular conception of place-experience is not merely the desire to validate bodily experience over cerebral existence. As a matter of fact, Dewey's claim that "[t]he real work of art is the building up of an integral experience out of the interaction of organic and environmental conditions and energies" (1980:64), supports the view that Miller's attention to the human body's rich interaction with its environment may be interpreted as a crucial element of his yearning to explore new forms of authentic experience and expression. When place-experience is thus used to illustrate that "[t]he moments when the creature is both most alive [...] are those of fullest intercourse with environment" (Dewey 1980:103), the inherent claim of authenticity is, in fact, paradigmatic of Miller's artistic project as a whole. Apart from offering a relatively new and highly evocative context to address the problem of self-estrangement, attention to the notion of place might endorse Miller's urge to revitalize art by means of authentic accounts of lived experience.

No less clear is that in trying to resolve the problem of alienation by reversing western civilization's insistence on "the subordination of all discrete phenomena to *mind*" (Casey 1998:203), Miller's focus on the bodily apprehension of the world reveals his involvement with modern philosophy. At the beginning of the twentieth century there appears a philosophical preoccupation about the inadequacy of abstract concepts to explain lived experience. Where traditional philosophical investigations of experience tried to locate its origin in "the pure mind of an austere transcendental subject," a new philosophical discipline called phenomenology set out to insist that the "origin is found straightforwardly in the body of the individual subject" (Casey 1998:229). As Louise Westling's study of Virginia Woolf's attunement to phenomenology has demonstrated, the thinking of such phenomenologists as "Maurice Merleau-Ponty," can be viewed as "responding to the same modernist intellectual milieu," and "the same twentieth-century impulse to overthrow or move beyond the Cartesian separation of subject and object, and its complicity with the Newtonian mechanistic metaphors of the cosmos" (1999:856). Despite the fact that Miller's novels bear hardly any resemblance to Virginia Woolf's poetic practice, it is important to emphasize that

phenomenology helps us to fathom the extent to which the Modernist struggle with the crisis of modernity represents, what Westling calls, a "cultural ecosystem in flux" (1999:857).¹⁶²

By shifting my focal point from place-experience to phenomenology my chief concern lies in tracing how the urge to do justice to experience at the level of bodily interaction with the world, contests not only the rigid dualism of body and mind, but also constitutes an important effort to reclaim the role of lived place. However, before looking more closely at the phenomenological implications of Miller's celebration of sensual awareness, we should first give some consideration to the basic premises of phenomenology. The philosophical investigations of Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, were motivated by his persuasion that philosophy must re-evaluate the lived experience of "what Husserl calls technically 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*)" (Casey 1998:217). And, as the preceding discussion of place-theory has made clear, to "return to the life-world" implies a return to "the lived-living body that animates it" (Casey 1998:217). Just as Husserl challenges us to rethink our embodied experience of the world, "so Merleau-Ponty (following the lead of Husserl) invites us to reconsider the lived body as something other than a mere instance of *res extensa*" (Casey 1998:233). Because Merleau-Ponty accords primacy to "a specifically corporeal intentionality," he goes farther than Husserl by insisting that "every activity of the body is closely attuned with its circumambient world" (Casey 1998:233). Not only does this phenomenological approach to the world "put us in a better position to account for the specifically human experience of place" (Casey 1998:332), it also allows recognition of the way in which phenomenology challenges traditional conceptions of the nonhuman world. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty maintains that phenomenology is "a philosophy for which the world is always 'already there' before reflection begins—as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world" (1968:vii). In other words, phenomenology may be understood both as an attempt to rethink our understanding of the nonhuman world and to overcome our alienation from nature. For Merleau-Ponty "[l]ooking for the world's essence is not looking for what it is as an idea once it has been reduced to a theme of discourse; it is looking for what it is as a fact for us, before any thematization" (1968:xv).

Given the fact that phenomenology in its striving to attain an authentic expression of lived experience turns to "the world as we organically experience it in its enigmatic multiplicity and open-endedness" (Abram 1997:40), it is little wonder that some ecocritics

¹⁶² Margot Norris confirms the historical importance of phenomenology for understanding the Modernist questioning of traditional systems of belief. In her analysis of biocentric artists and thinkers, she stresses that "biocentric thinking depends upon an epistemological stance that resembles a phenomenological approach to Nature in its nonrational, nonempirical, nonmetaphysical method" (1985:231).

have started to focus their attention on this philosophical tradition.¹⁶³ In his book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram attempts to offer a phenomenological approach to environmental issues. After explaining why phenomenology has singled out the body as the ultimate subject of experience, Abram stresses that this phenomenological attention to sensual awareness allows us "not to explain the world as if from outside, but to give voice to the world from our experienced situation *within* it" (1997:47).¹⁶⁴ Whereas traditional philosophical approaches to the nonhuman world have tended to reduce it to a "passive object," thereby "deny[ing] its ability to engage us" (Abram 1997:56), a phenomenological approach promises an entirely new way of viewing the world and our relation to it. According to Abram, a phenomenological re-evaluation of our experience of the nonhuman world "bring with it a recuperation of the living landscapes in which we are coporeally embedded" (1997:65).

Needless to say, for an ecocritical approach to Modernism a focus on phenomenology allows us to address the environmentalist implications of Miller's attempt to solve the crisis of modernity by representing embodied experience as a phenomenon that might revitalize the understanding of 'human nature.' But above all, an ecocritical use of certain phenomenological assumptions makes available for critical study a greater number of physically relevant situations characterizing Miller's descriptions of Paris as a living, albeit carcinomatous, organism. Indeed, focusing on phenomenological aspects of urban representations that give primacy to the narrator's visual, olfactory and auditory perceptions of his immediate surrounding, permits us to recognize the importance Miller attributes to the body as an active participant in the construction of place. As we have seen, in numerous accounts of his discovery of Paris Miller attests that it is through bodily interaction with one's environment that the most profound sense of place is formed. That his attention to place ultimately fuses perceiver and the place perceived in a vocabulary reminiscent of "the lush lyricism of phenomenological prose" (Phillips 2003:214), can be noticed in numerous descriptions of Paris.

Consider, for instance, how in the following excerpt from *Black Spring* it is the narrator's body that constructs place, or, to borrow Casey's terms, "links the diverse appearances of place" and thus "renders them all incarnate, part of the history of the body

¹⁶³ It is important to emphasize that there are a number of ecocritics who are critical of the growing impact of phenomenology on ecocritical theory. Terry Gifford, for instance, reminds us that the promise of achieving an authentic experience of the world through "our direct sensuous apprehension of it that is prior to language" is problematic insofar as "we use language to describe" this experience and are, thereby, "inevitably using a semiology that is socially constructed and has certain inescapable cultural connotations" (1999:161-2). Along similar lines, Dana Phillips dismisses phenomenology as an aesthetic approach to the world, in which the world serves the perceiver "as props for a scene played out in his own self-consciousness, despite his emphasis on bodily awareness" (2003:214).

¹⁶⁴ Italics in original.

itself" (1998:340). Roaming the streets of Montmartre the narrator delights in finding "[e]verything staggeringly alive, a swarm of differentiated matter." Becoming aware of how "[t]he streets swarm through my fingers" (*BS*:202), the narrator stresses that his excitement is produced by his own embodied experience of the city. By thus paying attention to the sensual perception of this vivid urban surrounding—accentuated by the narrator's exclamation that "[a]t the very core is the body. [...] The body is the fundament, the imperishable" (*BS*:203)—Miller does indeed create an urban environment in which the Miller persona is corporeally embedded. As a matter of fact, Miller stresses the organic interconnection between body and environment to such an extent that the cityscape itself is described in organic terms. Miller thus creates a vivid sense of place, in which "[t]hrough the coiling, sliding intestines of Montmartre the street runs like a jagged knife wound." A few sentences later, the Miller figure discovers "the Rue Lepic" which evokes the sensation "as if a flood tide had receded and left behind a rich marine deposit" (*BS*:202).

It is not clear what exactly this metropolis means. But it is all the more evident that Miller's sensual perception of this urban environment creates places that are continually interacting as if in "osmosis" (to come back to Miller's terms) with his narrator's organic body. Paris becomes organically alive and, as a consequence, is transformed into a female body: "Paris is rubbing her belly. Paris is smacking her lips. Paris is whetting her palate for the feast to come." And in the middle of this personified city we find the narrator's "body moving always in its ambiance" (*BS*:202). The narrator's growing physical response culminates in his observation that "[a]long the Rue d'Orsel, the sun [is] sinking. Perhaps it's the sun sinking, perhaps it's the street itself," and finally "[m]y blood is sinking of its own weight" (*BS*:203). And as "suddenly, presto! all is changed," as the "street opens wide its jaws and there, [...] the Sacré Coeur rises up," the continual sensual interaction is intensified as "[b]ack and forth the blood ebbs" (*BS*:203). As these extracts suggest, Miller's description of this urban environment has a phenomenological strand running through it which stresses the sensation of being a body responding to a world that is alive. Arising from such vivid descriptions, is a resistance to western civilization's tendency "to think of space as an already present emptiness filled by things and data, as a paradoxically negative object [...] or as a transparency laid out over the ground of reality" (Roberts 1999:40).

That both the environment and the perceiver's organic body become alive in such phenomenological descriptions of urban habitats, is additionally stressed by the fact that this sense of place is almost exclusively created by the Miller persona's act of walking. That the spatial complexity of the modern metropolis can be best perceived by walking or wandering seems to be confirmed by the fact that this "street-level vantage point is the most common in

city literature" (Pike 1981:35). According to Raymond Williams, "[p]erception of the new qualities of the modern city had been associated from the beginning, with a man walking, as if alone, in its streets" (1985:233). But walking has not only been singled out by literary historians to analyze the way in which writers convey the physical complexity of modern city-dwelling. Phenomenologists have also called attention to the importance of walking as a state in which the body is actively engaged in building up the individual's apprehension of the world. From a phenomenological perspective, walking is "something that would show *in concreto* just how lived body and lived place link up with each other" (Casey 1998:224). For phenomenologists like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, walking shows that motion "can be a way to experience this continuity of self amid the flux of the world and thus to begin to understand each and their relationship to each other" (Solnit 2000:27).

When the narrator of Miller's urban novels spends a considerable time wandering through Paris, the urban places that are being described become events rather than settings. Place in Miller's urban spectacle is "not entitative—as a foundation has to be—but eventmental, something in process, something unconfined to a thing" (Casey 1998:337). Thus formulated, the poetics of walking seems to confirm Buell's argument that "place-consciousness in literature" ought to be understood "not as a *fait accompli* but as an incompleteness undertaken in the awareness that place is something we are always in the process of finding, and always perforce creating in some degree as we find it" (1995:260). It is difficult to overstate the significance of walking for Miller's descriptions of the modern metropolis. As "a process that, instead of taking place *inside* an inevitably preexisting urban space, produces urban space itself" (Roberts 1999:49), walking constitutes a challenge to traditional accounts of the human perception of the nonhuman world.

Indeed, arising from the numerous accounts of the narrator's enthusiastic exclamations that there is "[n]othing better between five and seven than to be pushed around in that throng, [...], to move along with the tide"; or a few lines later: "wandering along the Seine at night, wandering and wandering, and going mad with the beauty of it" (*TCN*:23), there is a new representation of external reality. Instead of producing an aesthetic evaluation of reality, Miller's sense of place creates environments that are not simply perceived as objects but sensually experienced as symbiotic contexts. The use of poetic walking thus enables Miller to embrace reality as he experiences it "in ante-predictive knowledge" (Merleau-Ponty 1968:71). As a matter of fact, it is during the act of walking that Miller feels most inspired. Affirming the associative quality of walking Miller writes, "[a]long the Champs-Élysées, ideas pouring from me like sweat. I ought to be rich enough to have a secretary to whom I could dictate as I

walk, because my best thoughts always come when I am away from the machine" (TCN:56). In sum, Miller, the writer and narrator, wanders the city on a quest for authentic experience.

As a result, critics have often pointed out the important role walking plays in Miller's rhetoric of urban representation. Limonta, for example, asserts that Miller's emphasis on walking proves him to be an epigone of that literary tradition which used the urban *flâneur* as a paradigm of metropolitan existence (1997:139). Limonta is justified in this focus, because the figure of the *flâneur* has traditionally been associated with Paris. Referring to Walter Benjamin's study of the modern city, Rebecca Solnit observes that the *flâneur* has been identified "with leisure, with crowds, with alienation or detachment, with observation, with walking" (2000:199). Emerging at "a period early in the nineteenth century when the city had become so large and complex that it was for the first time strange to its inhabitants" (Solnit 2000:199), the *flâneur* expresses a particular mode of experiencing the complexity of modern life. Yet by its emphasis on the psychic response to modernity, rather than the embodied interaction with modern habitats, Limonta's recurrence to the tradition of the *flâneur* is confined to a reading of the urban environment either as a fixed place or a metaphor for modern existence. In fact, such interpretations of the *flâneur* as a traditional figure of metropolitan literature fail to address some of the most essential features of Miller's urban environments. Namely, that the narrator or walker's perception of the modern city is primarily an act of sensual response to a world that is alive.¹⁶⁵

Even if the *flâneur* allows us to recognize that "urban environments are socially produced spaces in which walkers perform a set or series of metonymical moves to represent a 'here' and now" (Roberts 1999:52), such an approach still misses the extent to which Miller's organic descriptions of Paris seems to be motivated by his anti-pastoral distrust of traditional literary responses to the natural world. Given Miller's tendency to cast doubt on the pastoral's capacity to either create an authentic picture of the nonhuman world, or to incite a new awareness of human nature, it might be interesting to read his insistence on urban place-

¹⁶⁵ In order not to simplify the subject matter it should be added that the problem resides not in the fact that Limonta establishes a link between Miller and the literary tradition of the *flâneur*. Rather, it is the simple identification of walking with the figure of the *flâneur* that fails to recognize the deeper implications of Miller's embodied experience of Paris. That this goal can also be met by identifying Miller as a *flâneur* becomes evident in Buell's study of the subject matter. He observes that "certain writers endow their *flâneurs* with something like an environmentalist consciousness," that is often expressed as "a state of vulnerable, porous transpersonal reciprocity with people and with place" (2001:89). In other words, an ecocritical reading of the *flâneur's* interaction with environment makes available for critical study a more complex account of the rhetoric of urban representation.

experience in terms of the picaresque. To elaborate on this suggestion I shall briefly focus on Phillips's discussion of the contrast between the pastoral and the picaresque.¹⁶⁶

Phillips reminds us that the pastoral's attempt to find a retreat from civilization in an "intermediate landscape somewhere between the rawness of wilderness and the refinement of civilization," severs the pastoral hero from "both of the things that might sustain him" (2003:146). The pastoral hero's desperate attempts to find a balanced existence between the two ideal realms of nature and culture thus forces him to retreat to an isolated existence, where he will neither define himself as a natural nor as a social being. For the "picaro," in contrast, the conflict between culture and nature, wilderness and civilization, does not exist, because "in his eyes, even the city is a wilderness." According to Phillips, "[t]he balance that the pastoral hero tries to maintain is overthrown by the incipient chaos that the picaro senses and celebrates wherever he goes" (2003:146). It goes without saying, that Phillips's reflections on the picaro's "carefree improvisation, making do, and scraping by" (2003:146), and the fundamental contrast between the pastoral and the picaresque can be linked to the work of Henry Miller.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, there are several possible parallels we may draw between Miller, the expatriate writer driven by a revolt against literary and social norms, and the "picaro," who "as a rogue, is defined by his fluid sense of place and by his savoir-faire," and whose "sensibility is chameleonic and his ethics are situational" (Phillips 2003:153).

A strikingly similar opposition between the pastoral and the picaresque is ventured by Miller himself in *Black Spring*. In the chapter entitled "A Saturday Afternoon," which bears the significant epigraph: "This is better than reading Vergil," Miller uses the opposition between the pastoral and the picaresque in a radical way. Indeed, the question: "[w]hat is better than reading Vergil," becomes the central preoccupation of this chapter, and Miller proceeds to answer it in a way that entices the reader to compare the artificiality of Virgil's pastoral with the vividness of Miller's picaresque adventures. Miller's answers to the question range widely and chaotically from "eating outdoors under an awning for eight francs" (*BS*:38), to the celebration of Walt Whitman's Manhattan "turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding" (*BS*:39), to "[t]his expanding moment which has not defined itself in ticks or beats, this eternal moment which destroys all values, degrees, differences. This gushing upward and outward from a hidden source" (*BS*:39), to "Rabelais, Villon, Boccaccio—all the fine lusty genuine spirits who recognized dung for dung and angels for

¹⁶⁶ Phillips's discussion of the pastoral and the picaresque rearticulates much of Joseph Meeker's attempts to use these literary traditions as a basis for what Meeker, in his *The Comedy of Survival* (1974), calls "literary ecology."

¹⁶⁷ In an ensuing chapter we will observe that this distinction can also be applied to the work of Claude McKay.

angels" (BS:49), or to his belief that "[n]early always the French have chosen the right spot for their urinals" (BS:52).

Significantly, the climactic instance validating Miller's vagabonding life over "reading Vergil," is described in an image evoking, once more, his fascination for the Seine. Crossing the "bridge at Sèvres" on a bicycle, Miller instinctively compares the Seine to other rivers. He enumerates a great number of rivers, such as "the Loire, the Lot, the River Shannon or the Liffey, [...], the Mississippi, the Colorado, the Amazon, the Orinoco, [...]," only to come to the conclusion that "this that passes under me, this Seine" affords the ultimate stimulus to become one with the universe. Indeed, unlike reading Virgil, this intense sense of place results in an epiphany. Affirming his attachment to eastern philosophies, he describes this moment as an intense feeling of being united with the universe: "rushing on and on and on while between the mirror and the clouds moving transversally I, a complete corporate entity, [...], I and this that passes beneath me and this that floats above me and all that surges through me, I and this, I and that joined up in one continuous movement" (BS:41). From this description we may discern that Miller's vagabondage allows him to establish a vital contact with the earth. Or to use Hassan's words, Miller's spontaneous exploration of the modern world "reads very much like a cosmic picaresque" (1967:59).

It is under the impact of the question whether Miller, the writer and narrator, should be defined as a picaro that an analysis of his urban novels brings to light a number of interesting aspects. We may, for instance, draw a parallel between the picaresque and Miller's desire to create autobiographical novels. An argument supporting this parallel can be found in Blinder's statement that the "autobiographical document is by nature an example of something permanently unfinished, resting on the progression of the artist as he or she is creating it." If we read the autobiographical progression of the artist in terms of the picaro's improvisational discovery of the world, we may come to the conclusion that "the use of the urban landscape as a metaphor for the writer's journey" and the picaro's vagabonding "allows for a graphic rendition of a life in flux" (Blinder 2000:85). However, such an interpretation leaves open the question why Miller attaches so much importance to the physical experience of his urban habitat. In other words, in attempting to solve this issue it will not suffice to merely claim that the narrator Miller creates is either a picaro or a *flâneur*.¹⁶⁸ Whereas the focus on the picaro may help us to highlight that resistance to the pastoral's idealized return to nature is at the

¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Phillips comes to the conclusion that the study of literature and environment is too complex to permit categorizations of the picaresque versus the pastoral. He holds that "[a] context in which either the pastoral or the picaresque might have an impact without being subjected to gross deformations is lacking in contemporary culture, as are well-defined landscapes of the sort that are necessary backdrops to the actions of pastoral and picaresque characters" (2003:146).

heart of Miller's urban vagabondage, an analysis based on Miller's revival of the *flâneur* may draw attention to the fact that the physical act of walking constitutes a crucial element of Miller's desire to capture the lived experience of the modern metropolis. However, none of these traditional notions of literary history succeeds in addressing the reason why Miller juxtaposes the purely physical interaction with the urban environment to the pastoral retreat to an idyllic image of nature.

It should be obvious from what I have said so far that the missing link may be provided by an ecocritical analysis of Miller's particular sense of place. As we have seen, such an ecocritical approach, premised on the reinvigoration of the sensual awareness of one's corporeal interconnection with the environment, allows us to grasp more clearly a pattern implicit in Miller's description of urban landscapes. Let me therefore reiterate the primary issues that emerge from an ecocritical reading of Miller's place-experience. First, Miller's rhetoric of urban representation is based on his narrator's sensual awareness of his immediate urban surrounding. The emphasis on place as experienced by our bodies bears directly on the description of the nonhuman world. Instead of incorporating settings that bespeak the western conceptions of abstract space, Miller describes places that are created by the active human body itself. Second, this sensual awareness of the immediate surrounding entails a revalorization of authentic experience. On the one hand, place-experience, defined as a pre-conceptual perception of the nonhuman world, challenges us to rethink the dominant culture's idealized and exploitative conceptions of nature. On the other hand, place-experience, defined as one's bodily interaction with the world, yields a promising resource for the individual's desire to overcome his or her sense of self-estrangement—hence its potential for a vitalistic rediscovery of one's sense of self. Third, because place-experience renders visible the human dependence on environmentally healthy habitats, an ecocritical reading of Miller's urban representations allows us to establish a link between Miller's insistence on the sensual awareness of his habitat and the recurrent symptoms of physical and rhetorical distress.

We may thus conclude that the excitement and despair characterizing the Miller persona's experience of the modern metropolis, is a manifestation of Miller's belief that while it is impossible to return to nature, it might be necessary to return to a fuller comprehension of the organic needs defining human nature. Indeed, that Miller's representation of urban life anticipates Gernot Böhme's previously quoted argument, is reaffirmed by the fact that most of the epiphanies we find in Miller's novels can be read in terms of a phenomenological recapturing of the individual's sensory perception. So pronounced is this yearning to re-evaluate his body that Miller does not hesitate to incorporate numerous passages emphasizing a sudden recognition of his sensual capacity of perception. Such seems to be the

case, when, during a concert, he states that "[n]othing escapes me, not even the tiniest pin falling. It's as though I had no clothes on and every pore of my body was a window and all the windows open and the light flooding my gizzards" (TCN:81). Elsewhere, he contemplates the work of Matisse: "[t]he whole run of flesh, from hair to nails, expresses the miracle of breathing, as if the inner eye, in its thirst for a greater reality, had converted the pores of the flesh into hungry seeing mouths" (TCN:168).

From such descriptions, we may discern that Miller's enthusiastic celebration of sensory perception is motivated by the urge to revitalize both the experience of perception and the artistic representation of reality. But the remarkable fact about this appeal to the body is that it constitutes the necessary condition for Miller's project to recapture a sense of authenticity, not only in art but also in life. Rediscovering the body thus calls for recognition that "[w]e have been educated to such a fine—or dull—point that we [...] don't trust our five senses" (ACN:166), or that "[o]ur instruments are but clutches that have paralyzed us" that instead of liberating us have contributed to the fact that we have lost "touch with the earth" (ACN:229). This direction of interpretation seems supported by several symptomatic themes that pervade Miller's texts. Further examples demonstrating Miller's preoccupation with corporeality are his obsession with food and sex. Or to use George Wickes's terms, "[p]hagomania, his chronic complaint, is as prominent as lust" (1992:109) in Miller's novels.

Food is not very frequently treated as an important theme in literature, but in Miller's novels it is pervasive and not to be ignored. Repeated references to Miller's indulgence in eating, show that it is in explicit acknowledgement of the body and its primal functions that his obsession with food arises. The narrator never ceases to stress that "[f]ood is one of the things that I enjoy tremendously" (TCN:12), and is, as a consequence, exasperated when Boris refuses to invite him for dinner. On one such occasion, Miller rants: "it's not clear what his idea of me was, or at any rate, it's clear that I was just pure idea, an idea that kept itself alive without food" (TCN:174). In addition to emphasizing the body's needs and processes, Miller expands the notion of food into a symbol of his hunger for authentic experience. Quoting Emerson's epigram: "Life [...] consists of what man is thinking all day," Miller concludes that "[i]f that be so, then my life is nothing but a big intestine. I not only think about food all day, but I dream about it at night" (TCN:76). This passage, moreover, harmonizes nicely with Limonta's synopsis that for Miller eating constitutes a fundamental condition of life, while at the same time it becomes a metaphor of his yearning to revitalize art "*attraverso il contatto con la materia e con i bisogni elementari del corpo*" (1997:149-50). Broadly speaking, it may be said that underlying the extraordinary variety of references to the theme of food there is a

desire to define the human being as a natural organism.¹⁶⁹ As suggested above, sex is a second subject that can be linked to Miller's vitalistic desire to challenge western civilization's conceptions of human nature and its denial of corporeal existence. However, before looking more closely at the vast theme of sexuality, we should first turn to Durrell's rediscovery of authenticity.

4.2. Lawrence Durrell's Recourse to Myth

Although Durrell's dismay at the difficulty of his project to surmount traditional representations of reality does not keep him from striving for a better understanding of the human relation to nonhuman nature, his attempts to reach his goal often lead him to express a deep sense of despair. Lucifer's claim that "[t]here is a supreme logic behind this life which I can sense but cannot understand" (*BB*:175), seems to insinuate that in *The Black Book* nature, or reality, "is distance in its ungraspability, but it is always that in which we live as what we are" (Phelan 1993:56). Nevertheless, in contrast to Miller, Durrell does not explore this felt affinity to the nonhuman environment in the material realm of place. In view of the fact that his later novels, and especially his "Island Books," stand out for their ability to create a particular sense of rootedness in place, *The Black Book's* reduced interest in place comes as a surprise. But the reasons why the impact of the immediate surrounding upon the novel's characters seem to have been abandoned may, according to Sharon Brown Lee, be found in *The Black Book's* structure and Durrell's attempts to create a timeless reality based on "the simultaneity of all things" (1967:325). The resulting detachment from a sense of "here" and "now," which provides the framework of experience both in literature and in life, is but one facet of the novel's neglect of place. Even more salient, especially in a comparison with Miller, seems to be the fact that in their attempts to deal with the crisis of modernity there exists a disparity between Durrell and Miller. The distinction is worth making, because while in Miller's confrontation of modernity recourse is taken to philosophical, historical, and autobiographical considerations, Durrell tends to opt for a more artistic and intellectual approach to the subject matter by treating these issues as problems of art. In the light of this circumstance, it is hardly surprising that Durrell concurs with many Modernist artists in

¹⁶⁹ A more explicit example sustaining this interpretation can be found in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, where eating is turned into a physical interaction with the earth. Sitting in an American restaurant, "air-conditioned, heavily carpeted, elegantly jammed, discreetly lit" (*ACN*:63), Miller compares the American relation to food to the one he indulged in during his stay in France. In America, he complains, "[o]ne could not think of the food as being made of such crude, coarse things as parts of animals or vegetables buried in the filthy earth. The food was rather some sort of synthetic nectar smothered with whipped cream, something to swallow with eyes closed and nostrils stopped" (*ACN*:63-4).

affirming that myth might provide a highly effective device for creating a new, distinctly artistic, vision of reality.

If it is true that modernity constitutes a crisis of imagination, then myth becomes all the more important for creative artists entangled in efforts to capture a new sense of reality. Even more so, since myth's resistance to rational explanation "challenges reason, disclosing the ways in which historical and scientific approaches to life have resulted in fabrications of truth rather than substantial realities" (Scholtmeijer 1993:221). In other words, the revival of a vision of the world based on myth promises to "return us to the sources of reality beneath language and theorizing" (Scholtmeijer 1993:221). Looking at it from this perspective, myth becomes a useful device for Modernist projects that seek to overcome the crisis of modernity. After old orders have been discarded and new ones continue to emerge, myth might offer a new sense of unity. Or to put it very simply, myth might provide the precondition that could lead to a new holistic perception of reality. At a time when the human relation to the nonhuman world is being questioned, reclaiming myth has the further advantage of opening vistas to new ways of perceiving the earth.

That Durrell seizes the theme of myth is symptomatic of a shared sense of "yearn[ing] for the holistic integrity of the loss of mythic consciousness" (Scholtmeijer 1993:221), that might make life in the 'disenchanted' modern world more bearable. Indeed, it is in explicit acknowledgement of this yearning that the various artist figures of *The Black Book* insist that "[t]he world is crying for it to be restored, but we are offering it only regression—an escape out of the geometrical rat-trap which is really only temporary. It is not only a question of going back to myth. The myth will come back to us" (*BB*:151). Thus formulated, the revival of a mythical vision of the world might indeed provide an antidote to the *malaise* of modern life. However, even if myth appears to be a fruitful device for returning to sources of reality beneath the rational mind, Durrell stresses the difficulty of reclaiming myth when he writes that "the healing mythologies are so etherized that they float away elusive, before the mind can grasp them" (*BB*:150). Here we find exemplified the despair behind the recourse to myth. Precisely because the sense of unity has been lost, the artist can only *speak* of a mythical reconciliation.

Accordingly, we find numerous allusions to the necessity to rediscover a new myth. But the contents or the true nature of this myth remain unclear: "[t]hat evening I was so certain of the age which lies beyond all this, the new dimension, the novel being—a dim gnosis" (*BB*:150). Although this vagueness is never discarded, it is difficult to overstate the significance of myth for Durrell's endeavor to find an artistic response to the crisis of modernity. Clearly, myth for Durrell is the clue to all problems of art. However, as Isernhagen

stresses, "it is defined not by its contents, but by its having form" (1969:61). That is to say, for the modern artist's struggle with an environment and culture that is diseased, debilitating and chaotic, myth in its capacity to create a mystic visionary unity might sustain the artist's quest for wholeness. Repeated exclamations such as "Isis where are you?" (*BB*:171), insinuate that myth might create a new whole out of the fragments of modernity. As a result, critics have often pointed out that unity is achieved through vision or imagination.¹⁷⁰ Or as Bynum puts it, in Durrell's fiction "the artist heals by 'recreating a myth' that imposes a new order on an otherwise chaotic experience" (1995:96).

The preceding discussion of Durrell's use of myth is obviously a crude simplification. As limited space does not permit a detailed survey of this important theme, I suggest that although myth might be used as a tool to enhance a new awareness of the nonhuman world, Durrell's refusal to define its contents invalidates its potency as an example illustrating how exactly he endeavors to revitalize our understanding of human and nonhuman nature.¹⁷¹ As a matter of fact, it is neither clear whether this impending myth is based on a renunciation of modernity (industrialized England), nor whether it will arise from a revival of a lost culture more closely attuned to a mythical world view (Corfu), or from a return to a more natural way of life. In a central passage describing Lucifer's desperate attempts to rediscover a new myth, he fuses fragments of past and prehistorical cultures with contemporary and futuristic phenomena. From "[a]pes with extosis, and the forty-foot dinosaur with toothache" (*BB*:158), to the "pyknic from Mars" (*BB*:159), everything becomes a potentially significant element of this new myth. Indeed, in his search, which leads him "from the age of Bronze to the age of Demons," he claims to "follow the myth wherever it burst forth" (*BB*:159). Seized by regular fits of despair, he wonders "how do I know it is not one of the defunct idealisms" (*BB*:158) that are thus being revived; and eventually imagines "[a]cross the fatal pantheon of the panic world, so irrationally mourned—not for its own sake, but because we have no pantheon of our own—slides the figure of Mickey Mouse, top-hatted maniac with the rubber pelvis" (*BB*:160).

Thus considered, Durrell's focus on myth would seem to reveal more about imagining a new reality than about recovering a more authentic experience of lived reality. To this

¹⁷⁰ Myth, which according to Isernhagen, is "perceived to represent, in an image or figure, an archetypal pattern of coherence" (1969:61), is, of course, intricately related to Durrell's "Heraldic Universe." However, since my approach is based on an ecocritical examination of *The Black Book*, I have limited my discussion of the "Heraldic Universe" (in chapter 2.3.1.) to environmental, rather than aesthetic, issues.

¹⁷¹ In view of the fact that ecocritics have often stressed the "mythic capacity to penetrate through rational discourse to the underlying connectedness of nature and culture" (Scholtmeijer 1993:221), it is clear that a mythical world view can be used as a tool to develop a new, environmentally conscious, understanding of the world. In this manner, it has been frequently used to express the wish to direct the "human consciousness back to a reenchanting world and animate resubjectified Nature," and "to overcome man's alienation from and domination of Nature" (Luke 1997:8). In other words, it is not the notion of myth *per se* that invalidates an ecocritical approach to Durrell's treatment of myth.

extent, Miller's preoccupation with a sensual apprehension of place differs fundamentally from Durrell's desire to recover a mythical vision of the world. But a more complicated picture emerges when we look at the diverging artistic achievements of *The Black Book's* main protagonists. To begin with, it is important to stress that not only Lucifer and Gregory, but also Tarquin and Chamberlain are convinced that myth will help them to overcome the crisis of modernity. However, while Death Gregory ponders over the fact that his "imagination has become a vast lumber room of ideas. There is no dogma which does not find an echo from myself," and thus contemplates how to "establish my identity—that myth which is supposed to exist behind the scuffle of words in my brain" (*BB*:181); Lucifer clearly denies the possibility to recover myth by means of rational introspection. From the passage quoted above, we may discern that Lucifer's frantic efforts to grasp a new sense of myth amidst the scattered fragments of traditional and contemporary phenomena are based on his belief that "[o]ne should never write of accomplishment, because nothing is ever finally accomplished. That is the trauma of the ideal" (*BB*:221).

In other words, in their efforts to create more adequate expressions of reality both Gregory and Lucifer resort to myth. However, the contrasts between Lucifer's approach and Gregory's are revealing. As I have suggested in a preceding comparison of Gregory and Lucifer, these two characters are diametrically opposed with regard to their understanding of the self. Therefore, it could be said that Gregory's failure to liberate himself from his cerebral existence also accounts for his artistic failure to find a new myth, or, more specifically, to express a new sense of authenticity. Although Gregory desperately tries to reawaken some sense of spontaneity, his despair—expressed in pathetic exclamations such as "[p]ity me, I was born dead"(*BB*:186)—reveals that "there is not, has never been, and never will be, one morsel of spontaneity in me" (*BB*:182). In such ways, Gregory's diary allows us and Lucifer, who discovers the diary, to follow Gregory's withdrawal from his ambitions. Indeed, it is in the diary's omnipresent sense of despair that the reason why Gregory eventually agrees to accept the fate of the "modern world"—"[w]hy are we afraid of becoming insects? I can imagine no lovelier goal" (*BB*:211)—becomes visible.

No doubt, the reading of Gregory's diary galvanizes Lawrence Lucifer into action. Unlike Gregory, who thinks that "[t]he singularity of the world would be inspiring if one did not feel there was a catch in it" (*BB*:41), Lucifer decides that his success depends on his ability to rediscover the "love which we dare not offer to the world" (*BB*:162). Moreover, inspired by his recognition that authenticity may only be achieved by choosing "to go [his] own bloody way" (*BB*:233), Lucifer becomes aware of the chasm that separates his own views on art from the ones advocated by his fellow artists. He writes, "I knew then that the

whole thing was fake—the legend that Tarquin is trying to create, the myth which Chamberlain hourly expects to speak from his stomach like a devil" (*BB*:161).¹⁷² As we have seen, Tarquin will eventually disintegrate. Chamberlain's existence is equally doomed, as he cannot break the hold of his cultural value systems. According to Lucifer, "Chamberlain would like to take his own cage with him, and pitch it in the deserted stratosphere of life. He is nothing but a spiritual colonizer, to whom wilderness is intolerable until it is cultivated" (*BB*:218).

As these examples suggest, artists such as Death Gregory, Chamberlain or Tarquin succumb to the "English Death" because their ratiocinative existence in a "deserted stratosphere of life" has severed them from any kind of sensuous experience. Their attachment to western civilization's dualistic understanding of the world, and the rationalistic belief in the body-mind dualism, seems to account for their failures to achieve a new sense of authenticity. In contrast, Lawrence Lucifer, whose escape to Corfu symbolizes his successful detachment from the debilitating ideologies of modern England, is determined to bring his quest to an end. Instead of accepting the sterility of the modern world, he admits that "the ravening at the bottom of all this [...] is not a thirst for love or money or sex, but a thirst for living" (*BB*:230). As a reaction against the cerebral existence of his fellow artists, Lucifer's thirst for living aims to recover the importance of corporeal existence. However, before attempting to draw a parallel between Durrell and Miller's vitalistic revalorization of the human body, we should first give some consideration to Durrell's interest in the ideas of the psychologist Georg Groddeck.

Various critics have called attention to the usefulness of Groddeck's theories for understanding why Durrell perceives modern life as unhealthy and diseased. As Woods explains, "[d]isease, to Groddeck, is always a symptom of schism between the inflated and repressive consciousness and the irrepressible 'It'" (1990:99). In his own observations on Groddeck, as set forth, for example, in *A Key to Modern British Poetry*, Durrell points out that the "It" constitutes "[t]he sum total of an individual human being, physical, mental and spiritual, the organism with all its forces, the microcosmos, the universe which is a man" (1952:74). As the "It" is connected to bodily experience, disease is the symptom of the growing disequilibrium arising from the repressive intellect. Hence, Durrell does not hesitate to claim that "[w]ith Groddeck we learn the mystery of participation with a world of which we are part and from which the pretensions of the ego have sought to amputate us" (1952:78).

¹⁷² By denouncing Tarquin and Chamberlain's artistic projects, Durrell implicitly attacks various Modernist movements. Chamberlain, for example, is doubtlessly a Lawrencian character.

Clearly, Durrell's desire to reclaim the "mystery of participation with" the world as our bodies experience it can be linked to Miller's endeavor to reclaim the importance of bodily interaction with the nonhuman world. While Durrell and Miller's strategies for re-imagining sensual experience may diverge, they concur in the belief that only an affirmation of nature in the human being can lead to a new sense of authenticity. For both writers then, self-estrangement and the vast array of other symptoms arising from the crisis of modernity must be understood as an outcome of the human being's distorted relation to him- or herself as a natural organism. Accordingly, when Lucifer's refusal to submit to the "English Death" brings him closer to a mythical vision of the world, this vision is expressed in terms of his unity with the nonhuman world. "Day by day now," he writes, "I can feel the continents running in my veins, the rivers, the oceans balanced in a cone on my navel" (*BB*:232). Yet this growing awareness of his organic sense of wholeness does not only determine his mythical vision of the world. A promotion of embodied experience as a physical perception of the world can be detected in his claims that "[t]here is nothing to lose. All the hope in the world is here, between my legs, between the joints of my fingers, in the eye, the liver, the reins" (*BB*:239).

4.3. Reclaiming the Sexual Body

The preceding analysis of Miller and Durrell's re-evaluation of the human body as a living organism that shapes our spontaneous and intuitive experiences of the world, is based on the assumption that the body delivers the crucial clue to authenticity. The body can assume such importance because it shifts attention to a mode of experience that is not to be confused with intellectual explanations of external reality. Where western civilization accords priority to the mind, such a vitalistic recourse to the body contests the opposition of body and mind. The desire to dissolve this binary opposition, which is rooted in a more general critique of the nature-culture dualism, in turn, shows that the body may help us to uncover the nature we have refused to acknowledge in ourselves. As a consequence, the original connections between human beings and the nonhuman world, that are supposed to have been lost during the process of enculturation, are sought in the human body itself. Or, more exactly, the solution to the individual's sense of self-estrangement is henceforth no longer found in an escape to an idyllic idea of nature but in the individual's revalorization of physical experience.

After having tried to locate the significant theme of authenticity within a vitalistic critique of the body-mind dualism, I now propose to concretize the notion of physical experience by analyzing it with regard to the notorious issue of sexuality in Miller and Durrell's novels. Given the fact that sex has traditionally been interpreted as a phenomenon

that "represents the body in its pure state" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979:235), it is little wonder that the theme of sexual repression was frequently used to express an accentuated concern about western culture's denial of the human body. As a purely physical phenomenon, the issue of sexuality has been subject to the Cartesian ideal of a disembodied consciousness and western culture's insistence that the "affective and intellectual life" must be "differentiated with the formation of the individual" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979:188). Because the functions of the human body have been so radically subdued, both by Christian stylizations of the body as a source of sin and evil¹⁷³ and modern society's rationalistic foundations (Hartmut Böhme 1988:61), thinkers such as Nietzsche have tried to bring out the concealed history of sensorial experience.¹⁷⁴

What such philosophical attempts to retrieve the sexual body from the "underground history" of "the fate of the human instincts and passions which are displaced and distorted by civilization" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979:231) share, are the association of eroticism with western civilization's problematic conceptions of nature. Situated in between the biological and the cultural foundations of the human being, sexuality is often viewed against the background of the nature versus culture dualism (Guillebaud 1998:229).¹⁷⁵ Indeed, according to Georges Bataille's Nietzschean analysis the anxiety about eroticism arises from western culture's radical denial of sensorial experience and its refusal to grant value to the human body as a natural organism (1957:242). For Bataille, the moralistic negation of sexuality is the direct outcome of western civilization's definition of enculturation as a process of emancipation from nature. By reminding us that the idea of humanity is expressed in the way in which humans can be distinguished from animals, or nature, Bataille shows that the problem with this denial is that it leads to a complete ignorance of human nature (1957:95).¹⁷⁶ The erotic aspects of the human body terrify us because we fear the beast within. Bataille writes:

De se fondement, l'humanité se détourne avec horreur, mais en même temps elle le maintient. L'animalité est même si bien maintenue dans l'érotisme que le terme d'animalité,

¹⁷³ The fact that Christianity declared the body to be the source of all evil has often been used to define Miller and Durrell's treatment of sexuality as an expression of their revolt against Puritanism. However, that Miller and Durrell "belong to a tradition in fiction that uses sexual action to assert an anti-Puritan position" (Woolf 1992:166) is so central a premise that it need not be dwelt on at length here.

¹⁷⁴ As the environmental philosopher, Gernot Böhme, remarks "[s]eit Nietzsche ist versucht worden, die philosophische Leibvergessenheit rückgängig zu machen und der vom Ideal des philosophischen bios theoretikos sich herleitenden Verdrängung leiblicher Erfahrung entgegenzuwirken" (1992:77).

¹⁷⁵ Guillebaud situates sex "au centre de la fameuse opposition entre l'inné et l'acquis, entre ce qui est fourni par la nature et ce qui est conquis par la culture" (1998:229).

¹⁷⁶ To illustrate how the opposition of man and animal has been polarized into a thorough dichotomy it suffices to briefly consider Mary Midgley's argument that words such as "human' and 'humane' are words of praise. Being 'inhuman' is something terrible." Indeed, "words like 'brutal, bestial, beastly,' shows" how thoroughly we rely on this distinction (1980:35).

ou de bestialité, ne cesse pas de lui être lié. C'est abusivement que la transgression de l'interdit a pris le sens de retour à la nature, dont l'animal est l'expression. (1957:104)

In other words, eroticism is defined as a transgression of the boundaries that have been established between culture and nature. Accordingly, the various attempts that have been made to find a less tormented approach to the issue of sexuality tend to use sex as the key to a reacquisition of carnal existence which, in turn, is supposed to reconnect us to the nature we have denied in ourselves.

Just as Bataille's analysis of eroticism is based on the belief that the rejection of bodily experience has contributed to an alienated perception of the human body, so ecofeminists have started to direct their attention to the sexual body in order to determine how the nature-culture divide has enhanced the negation of the human being as a natural organism.¹⁷⁷ Maria Mies, for example, maintains that the environmental crisis distorts modern man's relation to himself.¹⁷⁸ Accordingly, she argues that "[t]he more technology progresses the greater this distance," between the human being and the natural world, "and the more alienated man becomes from his own organic, mortal body" (1993:137). Because, on the one hand, technological progress has replaced the body by machines, and, on the other, the growing industrial transmutation of the environment has severed us from the natural world, Mies insists that "the sexual act has become virtually the only direct contact to nature available to civilized man." Mies therefore concludes, that "[t]he growing sex obsession apparent in all industrialized societies is, in my view, a direct consequence of alienation from nature" (1993:37).

Although it is unclear whether Mies's conclusion is a suggestion or an accusation, it seems to me that her argument is particularly relevant to understanding how Miller and Durrell's view of sexuality came to be conceptualized. As we have seen, one finds arresting parallels between these different bodies of philosophical assessment of the issue of sexuality, all of which can be linked to western culture's problematic conceptions of the physical world. However, insofar as Mies's critique of technological progress rearticulates much of the Modernist preoccupation with the "machine age," her explanation allows us to address a number of essential features of Miller and Durrell's vitalistic approach to the crisis of modernity. Clearly, both Miller and Durrell's critique of modernity and the omnipresent theme of sex can be enriched by such an ecocritical reading of, what Gifford in another context has called, the hope that "Arcadia might be located within the body" (1999:166). One

¹⁷⁷ Ecofeminists have often promoted a variety of ecocriticism based on a feminist critique of binary oppositions. Their interest in the "otherization" of the sensual and the natural aspects of human life is grounded on the fact that these repressed phenomena have traditionally been associated with women (Ricarda Schmidt 1998:297).

immediate implication of such an explanation is that the desire to undermine the nature-culture dualism is foundational to Miller and Durrell's thematization of sexuality. Furthermore, Mies's commentary reminds us that there exists an intimate link between the *malaise* of modern life, as it is experienced in industrial societies, and the promotion of sex as a key to re-establish a more balanced and therefore healthy existence.

4.3.1. Durrell's Vision of Sexuality

I now want to re-examine the distinction between Death Gregory and Lawrence Lucifer in the light of these arguments. Against the backdrop of this ecocritical attempt to interpret the vitalistic recourse sex, I would like to suggest that in their divergent approaches to sexuality we find the root cause for Death Gregory's failure and Lawrence Lucifer's successful liberation. By thus focusing on Durrell's emphasis on sex, I am touching on a topic already adumbrated by various critics of Durrell's work. Kaczvinsky, for example, has pointed out that because "in the act of sexual intercourse man's instinctual needs find their greatest, most perfect expression," Durrell considers that "all aspects of man's life, his entire understanding of the world, must be based on his bodily functions" (1990:144). Nichols, likewise, holds that love, in the widest sense of the word, "has been the major medium through which Durrell has explored human experience" (1987:463). However, rarely recognized in critical assessments of his work is the fact that Durrell's focus on his protagonists' sexual activities enables contemplation of the various symptoms of disease arising from modern culture's unbalanced—i.e. dualistic—relation to the physical world.

As I suggested above, evidence of such wider implications presents itself in Durrell's juxtaposition of Gregory and Lucifer. To the extent that Gregory's aforementioned adherence to a purely cerebral form of life undermines his spontaneity, it is clear that his view of sexuality bears similar traces of social conformism. Gregory's intellectualism notwithstanding, his relationship with Grace, a woman whose "stupidity made [him] feel safe" (*BB*:49), seems to be motivated by a desire to liberate himself from his public role and social status. As he introduces Grace to his friends, he indulges in his friends' "mutual embarrassment" (*BB*:47) and congratulates himself to his successful exhibition of Grace's clumsy performance. In spite of the fact that Chamberlain expresses his repugnance against this "piece of self-gratification" (*BB*:48), Gregory continues to abuse Grace like "a sort of pet" (*BB*:47). Yet his confession that his cruelty stems from "[t]he intellectual superiority of the

¹⁷⁸ In keeping with ecofeminist theory the gender bias is deliberate. Although I tend to disagree with the ecofeminist tendency to depict only men as alienated exploiters of "mother Earth," it seems to me that for a

emotionally sterile," reveals that, at heart, he is "grateful to Grace, more grateful than inky words can express" (*BB*:48).

As a matter of fact, it is only due to his relationship with Grace that Gregory finally manages to modify his understanding of himself as a purely rational being, defined by social conventions and norms. "The cage I inhabited," he writes into his diary, "was broken wide open by our experience" (*BB*:49). Through Grace he seems to discover a more simple and spontaneous way of life that values corporeal existence over intellectual evaluation. That Grace provides the crucial connection to a more natural existence is accentuated by the fact that her female body is associated with the natural world. Gregory's recognition that "[s]he was alive, after all, deep down: at the temperature which melts metals; the boiling point at the earth's centre where the beds of ore clang together, and the hot magma liquefies iron and rock" (*BB*:42-3), insinuates that it is in Grace's body that Gregory experiences his interconnection with the physical world.¹⁷⁹ Consequently, Grace's death does not so much evoke Gregory's mourning for her, but for the unfinished process of overcoming his sense of self-estrangement. As the balance between his intellectual and sensorial experience has not yet been restored, he does not grieve for her "dissolution, but for [his] own" (*BB*:187). Frustrated by this uncompleted process of self-discovery, he gets engaged to Kate. With Kate he chooses not only "the most ordinary person [he] could find," but also resignation. Kate thus becomes his "sanctuary" of social respectability, or worse "the monastery in which I am about to be interned" (*BB*:208). Instead of renewal, whose inherent "struggle," he decides, "is too hideous," he accepts to "suffer the disease to run its course" (*BB*:209).

His relationship with two different women—Hilda and the enigmatic figure to whom the narrative is addressed—is likewise the crucial factor determining Lawrence Lucifer's quest for embodied experience. Yet, in several significant ways Death Gregory and Lawrence Lucifer stand at polar extremes with respect to sexuality. Where Gregory refuses to renunciate his intellectual judgment of his sexual relations with Grace and Kate, Lucifer does not hesitate to explore sexuality as the purest form of sensorial experience. Especially in his relation with the good-natured prostitute Hilda, Lucifer expects to rediscover his sensing body. The result is a purely physical relationship based on the precondition that Lucifer and Hilda "do not understand each other" (*BB*:96). As for Lucifer the rediscovery of the basic physical processes of existence must entail a liberation from social forms of repression, his relation to Hilda is described in terms of the gradual effacement of those aspects that define him as a cultural being. His desire to return to the origins of his physical existence is so pronounced that love is

reading of the theme of sexuality such a distinction is necessary.

replaced by regression. By thus erasing the cultural foundations of his existence, Lucifer's ever-receding attempts to grasp the origins of his bodily existence leads him from a sense of "convalescent childhood" to the belief that "Hilda is the genesis from which I shall be born again on the third day" (*BB*:98).

In point of fact, Lucifer's regression leads him back to the womb. What distinguishes Lucifer's relation to Hilda is the thoroughness with which Durrell transforms Hilda into an emblematic figure. While most of the women are represented as mediators with nature, Hilda is mythologized. She is not only "lying there like Tibet" (*BB*:162), she also becomes "the whale, the exterior universe" (*BB*:175). "With Hilda as the whale," Lucifer, who "[f]or purposes of simplification" henceforth calls himself "Jonah" (*BB*:173), attempts to bring his quest for pure sensation to completion. As Lucifer "step[s] down into the red tunnel, to begin the journey" (*BB*:173), we follow his gradual return to a state of prenatal unconsciousness. On his journey to a condition "prior to acquired language, selfhood, and world content" (Scarry 1985:216), we observe how he regains a new "dimension of sensibility I have not hitherto cultivated" (*BB*:175), how "Jonah" remains "the only word left from the dead vocabularies" (*BB*:175), and how in the womb "[t]here is no reality. Only phenomena" (*BB*:176).

From these passages we may discern that the use of the back-to-the-womb allegory is not merely a celebration of sexuality as a state in which Lucifer may recover pure sensation. Quite to the contrary, it becomes a leitmotif that enables Durrell to emphasize the necessity to completely overturn our western conceptions of human and nonhuman nature. Indeed, as the following excerpt suggests, Durrell's use of the erotic is based on a conversion of the womb into a more complex image of his quest for authenticity:

Inside I am weeping for my generation. I am devising in my mind a legend to convey the madness which created us in crookedness, in dislocation, in tort. We are a generation enwombed. A stillbirth. Like blind puppies we are seeking the way back to the womb, we are trying to wipe away the knowledge of our stillbirth, by a new, a more glorious, more pristine event. We have been expelled from the uterus blind and marrowless, and we grovel back towards it in a hysterical regression of panic. Look, I am burrowing in your lap with my mouth, like an animal. I am hammering down the doors of the womb. Screaming to get back. (*BB*:138-9)

This passage shows that the deep sense of alienation underlying the issue of sexuality can be linked to two different subjects. On the one hand, the narrator's account for his regressive desires indicates that his various sexual encounters can be read as frenzied attempts to "return to the womb," hereby creating the conditions for a disengagement from social norms. Yet the use of this intellectual attempt to create 'in his mind' a vision that would allow him to cope with his sense of self-estrangement, suggests that authenticity presupposes not a purely physical existence but a more balanced relation between body and mind. By thus defining the

¹⁷⁹ As will be elaborated in an ensuing chapter, from an ecofeminist perspective this identification of the female

sexual act as a "pristine event," that helps to "wipe away the knowledge of our stillbirth," it seems obvious that the principal virtue of these "hysterical" attempts to reclaim the sexual body are their capacity to restore a momentary unity between body and mind.

It is at this point that the broader implications of the back-to-the-womb allegory become visible. For a further implication, clearly, is that this reappropriation of the living (male) body is based on a reconnection with the female body as a place that seems to offer an antidote to the universal sense of "dislocation." In other words, because modern life has estranged men from a sense of embodied interaction with their immediate surrounding, it is the female body that supplies the vital place they lack in the modern world. A strikingly similar proposition sustains Luce Irigaray's theory of place. As Edward Casey points out, Irigaray's exploration of place is based on the assumption that the "body itself *is* place and that place is as body-bound as the body itself is sexually specific" (1998:326).¹⁸⁰ From her feminist perspective, Irigaray stresses that "being empty of place himself, man desperately seeks place elsewhere" and thus finds it in "the female body," which either "as mother or as lover, all too often becomes a place *for man*" (1998:327).¹⁸¹ Symptomatically, the desperate yearning to find in the female body "a microcosmic dwelling place" (1998:327) is accentuated by the modern environmental crisis. In this connection, Irigaray claims that "[p]recisely because Western man has built 'a world that is largely uninhabitable,' he is all the more obsessed with turning woman into a habitable home-body" (Casey 1998:328).

Against the backdrop of Irigaray's theory of the female body-as-place, I would like to suggest that Durrell's tendency to mythologize the female body can be linked to a similar notion of despair about placelessness. Such an analysis returns us to the question, why *The Black Book* is marked by a frightening absence of place. Taken as a symptom of modern culture's destruction of habitat, such an approach occasions an environmental consideration of the back-to-the-womb allegory. That the place in which man can reappropriate authentic experience of the human body should be located within the female body, reflects the fact that in Durrell's novel the theme of sexuality is intricately intertwined with the crisis of modernity. From what has been said so far, it should be evident that only sex is capable of restoring significance to the human interconnection with the physical world and place as a life-giving habitat. As this same physical process allows *The Black Book's* protagonists to rediscover

body with nature—as a place to be inhabited and exploited by man—is highly problematic.

¹⁸⁰ Italics in original.

¹⁸¹ Casey reminds us that Irigaray's exploration of "bodies-as-places" is presented in the form of a commentary on Aristotle's philosophy. More precisely, her theory of the female body as place is grounded on "Aristotle's metaphor of place-as-vessel." Casey writes, "Irigaray affirms the fact that not only is a woman in a place (e.g., a home) but 'place, in her, is in place, not only as organs [within her], but as vessel or receptacle. It is a place twice over: as mother and as woman'" (1998:323).

their sensual interactions with the natural world, it becomes increasingly clear that behind the issue of sexuality lurks the desire to discover a new understanding of reality which is directly linked to the theme of artistic creation.

By defining the womb as the place where a new vision of reality can emerge, Durrell reminds us that narratives of creation have traditionally used the womb as the arena for the appearance of world-creation. Once again, it is in Casey's philosophical history of place that we find the fullest justification for this connection. Casey explains that place is of paramount importance for "cosmogonic models," insofar as "[t]here is no creation without place. This is so whether place is considered to preexist [...] or is brought forth out of Chaos as one of 'ten thousand creations' (as the Taoists would put it)" (1998:16).¹⁸² Just as creation is dependent upon place to come forth, so the mastering of original matter constitutes a crucial element of narratives of creation. "To master," Casey maintains, "is not to bring into being in the first place but to control and shape that which has already been brought into existence" (1998:23-4). Furthermore, this pre-given "matter connotes, *matrix*," which "[i]n its literal sense of 'uterus' or 'womb'" becomes "the generatrix of created things" (1998:24). This understanding assumes that "[c]reation becomes a matter of mastering matter." As a consequence, the meaning of matrix is expanded beyond its "anatomical sense," as it is transformed into a "place or medium in which something is bred, produced, or developed, a place or point of origin and growth" (1998:24).

I would like to suggest that in several significant ways Casey's account of ancient narratives of creation can be linked to Durrell's return-to-the-womb allegory. This interpretation seems justified not only because "both the mythic and the philosophic entities require that creation involve a return to the womb, the womb of Nature (*phusis*) itself" (Casey 1998:32), but also because it is during his sexual intercourse with his unnamed lover that Lucifer comes closest to creating a new myth. From the outset, it is only during his meetings with his lover "among the cattle, by the river" (*BB*:148), that Lucifer gains confidence in the possibility to vanquish his despair about modernity.¹⁸³ In his lover's body he discovers a place that by engaging his sensorial body allows him to reconnect with the physical world in a manner that the pastoral did not. This is the reason why Durrell conflates the female body with the natural world: the "walls of the cunt [are] lined with quilts and membranes of gum, resin, foxgloves, puffballs, wheat." What he expects from sexual intercourse with his lover, therefore, is to "go out together [...] and re-create the legend of kingcup which Tarquin missed" (*BB*:148).

¹⁸² Italics in original.

¹⁸³ I will return to the reasons why Hilda cannot provide the same conditions for creation later on.

Even more central than the female body as a new Arcadia, however, is the fact that Lucifer achieves a new vision of reality. "When I am covering you," he insists, "my cranium is packed with images, the whole body of the lost worlds is being poured down that narrow slipway to the absolute" (*BB*:151). That his lover's womb is eventually transformed into the arena of a new creation is affirmed by the book's ending. Here Durrell concludes his narrator's quest for authenticity with a sexual act during which Lucifer's Dionysian state of ecstasy leads him to a new vision of the universe. In this final sexual scene, the female body is transformed into a tree that intrudes Lucifer's body and eventually transforms him. "In bed it is a tree that grows upward from the scrotum, choking me, stuffing soft tentacles and flowers into my arms, into my throat, into my knees." This interaction culminates in a metamorphosis, which completes itself as his "throat is lined like bark, and my tongue is soft rotten juniper-loam, cloying" (*BB*:240). That here we are confronted with the beginning of a new creation becomes obvious if we consider that, in its traditional sense, "metamorphosis" was used "to express a materialist philosophy of reality, which holds that all embodied substances partake of the same primal matter." From Robert Pogue Harrison, we learn that "[m]etamorphosis itself (from the Greek words *meta* and *morphé*, meaning change of form) is a kind of birth, or rebirth, as one material form returns to its matrix in order to assume a new form." Needless to say, this vision of reality is based on the presumption that "all things come into being—assume form and appearance—from out of the womb of some primordial, undifferentiated matter" (1992:26-7).

For purposes of the argument here presented, Pogue Harrison's argument is particularly noteworthy. On the one hand, it allows us to elucidate why for this last sexual act Durrell does not content himself with a description of the female body as a place in which nature can be experienced, but turns it into "the dark sump of the vagina, brewing vegetable history, sewing continents in whom I am the reaper" (*BB*:243). On the other hand, by reading this scene as a narrative of creation it becomes easier to see how this "Dionysian state of ecstasy" constitutes a "visionary moment of seeing, even more than [a] metamorphosis" (Pogue Harrison 1992:33). In order to highlight the gradual building up of this visionary moment, Durrell takes care to assemble the fragments that will yield a new vision of the world. From the observation that this "dancing of fibers along the skin," promises "a new action, a theme as fresh as seed" (*BB*:241), Lucifer slowly starts to master the undifferentiated images that rise up in his imagination, hereby achieving a new form of unity. That he eventually manages to master primal matter becomes clear when he notes that "[a]ll that comes out of me is a landscape," that is a coherent form of reality, "in which you are

everything, tree, bee, flower, toast, salt; you are the hard bright stamen of the kingcup, the Greek asphodel" (*BB*:241).

Equally clear, though, is that only during this brief moment of orgasm, Lucifer sees "whole universes open silently for me" (*BB*:240). Durrell's celebration of this Dionysian moment of ecstasy, which seems to be motivated by a "promise of rebirth in the intimate implication and correspondences of all living things" (Pogue Harrison 1992:194), suggest that the new vision of the world that is thus being achieved is based on a unity between human and nonhuman nature. Instigated by a return to primal matter—i.e., the female body symbolized in terms of the primordial world—Lucifer's new vision of the world arises from an acknowledgment of the fundamental interconnection between human beings and the natural world. Indeed, the sensual experience of the female body-as-place, affords a view of the human interrelation with the primal elements of nature that is liberated from the dualistic structures of modern culture's conception of reality.

But Durrell does not merely use the female body as a symbol to assert a physical recourse to the authentic foundations of human existence. Significantly, the climax of Lucifer's final sexual act is the appropriation of a new condition for artistic creation. While the preceding exploration of Lucifer's reaching out "like a drunken man towards the million fathom universes" (*BB*:241), indicates that it is only through the sexual act that a new mythical vision of the world may be captured, the following passage makes it clear that the very foundations of authentic artistic creation must be grounded on such a vitalistic approach to reality: "[i]t is not words which grow in me when I see the tendrils of muscle climbing your trunk; it is not words at the fingers laid about your face and still: these delicate cartridges of flesh and bone. Not words but a vocabulary which goes through us both" (*BB*:240). The womb of his lover does not merely allow him to discover new words, but an entire vocabulary. In short, the female womb as a place of creation yields the foundations for the new production of authentic art.

It has been frequently noted that the "ending of the *Black Book* cannot explain [...] how the vision of love can be meshed with the new religious/artistic mythology" (Christensen 1995:32). Yet it seems to me that the promise of both a new vocabulary and a new mythical vision must be interpreted as a healing of the crisis of modernity. Rather than claiming that Durrell fails to account for the content of this new mythology, I would like to suggest that the successful effacement of the dualistic structures of the dominant discourse enables him to reclaim the primal conditions for artistic creation. Indeed, the inherent promise of rebirth affirms that the ending is not supposed to afford a new mythology, but, in keeping with the novel's circular structure, to reset the frame for a new artistic approach to reality.

In this sense, I would argue that the numerous allusions to the notion of chaos, that appear with a striking frequency at the end of *The Black Book*, confirm the interpretation that what Durrell attempts to describe here is the first moment of creation. Indeed, the narrator himself explains why this original moment of creation cannot deliver clearly defined contents of the emerging new myth: "this is the new vocabulary which I am learning with ease. I am beginning my agony in the garden and there are too many words [...]. It is on the face of this chaos that I brood" (*BB*:243). As Casey explains, chaos is a crucial element of most narratives of creation. Reminding us that "[t]he ancient notion of chaos as primal abyss or gap," must be understood as "an opening *between* two already existing things (e.g. earth and sky)," Casey states that as "gap, Chaos is a primordial place within which things can happen." Even more important, therefore, is the fact that chaos "is a scene of *emerging* order." That is to say, "[t]o be chaotic [...] is not to destroy order but to create it" (1998:9).¹⁸⁴ From this point of view, Durrell's use of the womb as a symbolical place from which a new creation may emerge is a direct response to the crisis of modernity. Recall that it is the abundant discovery of new orders which gave rise to the notion of crisis. Given the fact that the exuberant appearance of new orders resulted in a traumatic crisis of imagination, Durrell's back-to-the-womb allegory and its inherent promise of an emerging new order must indeed be read as a commentary to the traumatic experience of modernity.¹⁸⁵

That the ending of *The Black Book* can be understood as a healing of the crisis of modernity is additionally confirmed by the fact that both the physical and the rhetorical distress of modern life seem to have been surmounted during the course of Lucifer's vitalistic reacquisition of his sensing body. As we have seen, whereas Death Gregory's resignation is based on the acceptance of "disease" (*BB*:209), Lawrence Lucifer's successful recovery of sensorial experience insinuates that he has found the equilibrium necessary both for artistic creation and a healthy life. Lucifer's healthy constitution is confirmed by the fact that unlike most of the novel's disintegrating protagonists, he does not suffer from any pathologies. Earlier we noted the importance of Groddeck's arguments to Durrell's understanding of the diseases of modernity. Retrospectively then, Lucifer's health must be understood as the absence of any schismatic distortions of the relation between body and mind. In point of fact, it is necessary to stress that health is not the outcome of defining the human being in purely natural terms. Quite to the contrary, for Durrell a healthy existence presupposes the

¹⁸⁴ Italics in original.

¹⁸⁵ This discussion of the notion of chaos is obviously a simplification. While I have primarily tried to underscore the fact that the ending of *The Black Book* can be read as the original moment of creation (where order starts to take form, rather than appears in a finished form of myth), it is clear that Durrell's use of the notion of chaos deserves to be treated more thoroughly than place permits here.

destruction of binary oppositions. This is also the reason why Lucifer's sexual encounter with Hilda, which appears to be based on a reversal from a purely intellectual to a purely physical experience, did not suffice to create a new vision of the world. As Sharon Spencer has pointed out, Lucifer's complete retreat to Hilda's "womb-like ambience that fosters peace, harmony, and unity," is not a valid option insofar as it results in "narcissistic stagnation and death" (1987:445).

As Durrell arrives at his vision via the will to undermine western civilization's binary oppositions, which, of course, include not only the body versus mind but also the nature versus culture dualism, the question arises whether he proposes a similar solution to the environmental crisis of modernity. As we have seen, Durrell's rejection of the pastoral tradition is a resolute condemnation of the romantic idea that authenticity might be found by simply retreating to an idealized image of nature. However, by trying to rethink the status of the human being, not as a purely cultural and intellectual being, but as a natural and organically dependent being, a better understanding both of the human and the nonhuman world may be achieved. The novel's predominant sexual content thus becomes an expression for Lucifer's rediscovery of sensorial experience, rather than erotic desire. As a consequence, the descriptions of sexuality tend to be laced with reflections on a new understanding of the human relation to the nonhuman world. Such seems to be the case, when during one of his encounters with his unnamed lover Lucifer insists that his new vision of the world "will not be difficult [to achieve] if we practice humility: humility from the roots upward, all-devastating, all-devouring, omni-passionate" (*BB*:148). In other words, the underlying refrain of Durrell's environmental preoccupations is that the Taoist goal of a complete fusion with the universe, expressed here by the use of universalizing—i.e. nondualistic—prefixes, must be based on acceptance and humility.

Finally, the fact that his sexual activities bring him in contact with "this fertile vocabulary running out of you, rich, sappy, evocative as musk" (*BB*:243), suggests that the narrator's rhetorical distress, too, is solved by this vitalistic redefinition of the human and nonhuman world. It is crucial to note that at the end of *The Black Book*, Durrell's use of rhetorical distortions and breakdowns disappear. As we approach the final scene of creation, the text re-enacts the healing of the crisis of imagination by expressing its new sense of spontaneity in a discontinuous welter of images and sensations. Congruent with the symbolical representation of creation, the text operates with accumulative descriptions that in its amalgamation of incoherent images illustrates the slow process of creating order. Subsequently, sentences such as: "[t]here is you dancing, and the million yous who persist in matter, echo, weep, cry, exult, in flower powder, smaragd, Italy, moon, veins of rock"

(*BB*:243), can not only be read as the primordial creative attempt to master matter, but also as a slow recovery of the rhetorical capacity to represent reality. One way of grasping the representational implications of the novel's ending, is to recall that the use of the list as a stylistic figure may help to destabilize rigid representations of reality. Like Miller, Durrell seems to accentuate a new sense of fluidity by capturing his response to reality in the form of a heterogeneous accumulation of cultural and natural phenomena.

4.3.2. Miller's Obscene "dance over the dirty corpse" of the Ideal

Let us return to Miller and to what I have been referring to as his desire to reclaim the human body as the foundation for his quest for authenticity in art and life. There is no doubt that the core of Miller's search for a more genuine expression of the lived body, than that provided by modern culture's Cartesian separation of body and mind, is his characteristic focus on sexuality. To reaffirm the body as an essential, albeit repressed and therefore problematic part of our existence, Miller suffuses his novels with a pronounced sexual content. Yet as we saw in Miller's particular sense of place, such a reappropriation of the human body is not simply connected to modern culture's overestimation of the intellect and its idealized forms of perception, but to a belief that the crisis of modernity necessitates a redefinition of human nature. The use of the erotic in Miller's novels is, according to Roberto Limonta, a crucial element of his critique of modernity. For it allows him to dramatize, in a manner that is highly reminiscent of D.H. Lawrence's celebration of *eros*, the decadence of modern civilization. In Limonta's analysis this decadence is characterized by western civilization's overestimation of instrumental reason and technology that, in turn, have resulted in artificial forms of life. In such a bleak context, sexuality represents the last domain capable of reinvigorating the primal impulses of modern man (Limonta 1997:150).

Miller's way of demonstrating that sexuality, as the purest form of bodily experience, can lead to a redefinition of the human body as a natural organism, is to keep describing women as mediators with nature. The primal virtue of Germaine, one of *Tropic of Cancer's* numerous prostitutes, for instance, is that she "glowed down there between her legs where women ought to glow, and there was established that circuit which makes one feel the earth under his legs again" (*TCN*:53).¹⁸⁶ But Miller's desire to illustrate that the original union with nature has been lost, and that the human "body [is] but a means of renewing that contact, a symbol of lost unity" (*WoL*:192), is by no means reduced to depicting women as emblematic forces that afford men a renewed contact with nature. Miller takes pains to show us that the slow reappropriation of his sexual body yields a discovery of a more authentic experience.

That such forms of sensual experience do not simply constitute a new literary technique, which aspires to construct a reality that is more or less congruent with dominant discourse, but try to develop a more original perception of the world is precisely Miller's

¹⁸⁶ Like Durrell, Miller seems to use women as a place for a male reconnection with the physical world. That from Miller's perspective, women are actually closer to nature becomes evident in his various theoretical reflections on the subject matter. In *The World of Lawrence*, for example, he quotes Spengler to prop up his argument that "[w]oman allies herself with Nature. 'The feminine stands closer to the Cosmic,' says Spengler; 'it is rooted deeper in the earth and it is immediately involved in the grand cyclic rhythms of Nature'" (*WoL*:69). As

point. Hence, this new carnal experience of reality, Miller insists, is "a far older world than any we have known" (*TCP*:286). Ideally, then, sensual experience leads Miller beyond "the superficial physiognomy of skin and bone" to "the indestructible world which man has always carried within him." A world that is "neither old nor new, really but the eternally true world which changes from moment to moment" (*TCP*:287). In this connection, it is of paramount importance to insist that Miller does not try to replace an idealized notion of wilderness with another equally Arcadian, and as a consequence, equally rigid notion of the female body-as-place. As the previously quoted sentences suggest, Miller seeks to create a new authentic form of embodied experience that aspires to present a universe in constant flux, rather than a simple readjustment of western civilization's dualistic conception of the world.

In other words, while at first glance none of this vitalistic celebration of sexuality appears to be unique to Miller, a closer examination of his attempt to achieve a more authentic experience of reality reveals that his vision of sexuality is more complex than the one advocated by D.H. Lawrence. As Margot Norris reminds us, "in Lawrence's fiction, its conceptual movement appears to be a simple switch from one axis of a traditional binary system (nature/culture, body/mind, spirit/ideal, Dionysus/Apollo, and so on) to the other" (1985:170). In stark contrast, Miller's nondualistic vision of the world resists such a reversal of western culture's hierarchical systems of signification. Hence, Kate Millett is right when she points out that "[t]he liturgical pomp with which Lawrence surrounded sexuality bears no resemblance to Miller's determined profanity" (1992:146). But while Millett's famous study of Miller condemns his use of the erotic as a symptom of the masculine "disgust" with, and "contempt" for sexuality, I would like to suggest that Miller's profanity is based on the belief that we cannot turn back to the body and pretend that it has never been influenced by prevailing ideologies.

Indeed, just as nature cannot be retrieved as a pristine realm of authenticity, so the human body cannot simply be reclaimed by "'returning' to the presignifying and presubjective semiotics of primitive peoples" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:188). For the notion of a return to the body itself echoes those dualistic "analytic categories we ordinarily use to enter and accommodate human experience," whose use only arises once we are "deeply immersed in made culture" (Scarry 1985:182). As Donna Haraway has pointed out, neither nature nor the human body present themselves as innocent realms "waiting outside the violations of language and culture. Just as nature is one of culture's most startling and non-innocent products, so is experience one of the least innocent, least self-evident" aspects of one's lived

I have suggested earlier, this conflation of nature and women can be found in many different conceptions of the natural world.

body (1989:109). Furthermore, it is clear that although western civilization may have diabolized the notion of sexuality as a source of evil, it has retained control over sexuality by embedding it in a variety of normative discourses. In his study of the institutionalized discourses of sexuality, Michel Foucault emphasizes that due to its multiple implications in such diverging fields as education, medicine or justice, there is no such thing as an unmediated form of sexual experience (1976:45-6).¹⁸⁷ Miller's profanity then, is symptomatic not of his masculine disgust with sexuality, but of his conviction that only a destruction of such normative discourses may yield a new approach to those aspects of reality that have been subject to western culture's dualistic discourse.

What distinguishes Miller from authors who asserted a primitivistic celebration of the body, I believe, is that he was self-conscious about what he did. His sexual accounts, therefore, cannot be read as naïve recitals of the narrator's sexual adventures; they are also a dramatization of his own rhetorical confinements and his desire to break out from prevailing patterns of perception. Hence when at the beginning of *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller exclaims that "I am going to sing for you, a little off key perhaps, but I will sing. I will sing while you croak, I will dance over your dirty corpse" (*TCN*:10), he draws attention to his limited scope of rhetorical possibilities that, as we have seen, consists of destroying established codes of representations. Congruent with his frustrations about not being able to create an authentic description of the nonhuman world, his endeavor to create authentic descriptions of sexuality, or the human body, is determined by his awareness that his goal can only be expressed within and against the codes of literary representation. By thus proposing to draw a parallel between Miller's previously examined manifestations of his incapability to represent the nonhuman world and his desperate attempts to verbalize the sexual act, my reading of Miller's use of sexuality is based on the assumption that in both realms (body and nature) his quest for authenticity takes the form of a destruction of representational norms.

Two factors must therefore be kept in mind as we approach Miller's theme of sexuality. One is that, the desire to reclaim the importance of bodily experience is never a question of a return to a precultural existence. Miller admits that he has incorporated dominant culture's patterns of signification and subjectification. Because he knows that no one can withdraw from the dominant discourse into a purely physical relation to reality, he demonstrates that the stage on which this liberation from western culture's normative

¹⁸⁷ As a matter of fact, Foucault goes so far as to maintain that "*sous la grande série des oppositions binaires (corps-âme, chair-esprit, instinct-raison, pulsions-conscience) qui semblaient renvoyer le sexe à une pure mécanique sans raison, l'Occident est parvenu non pas seulement, non pas tellement à annexer le sexe à un champ de rationalité, [...], mais à nous faire passer presque tout entier—nous, notre corps, notre âme, notre individualité, notre histoire—sous le signe d'une logique de la concupiscence et du désir*" (1976:102-3).

discourses must be fought, must be language itself. As a result, the second factor is that Miller's obscene representations of the sexual body are not merely a liberal defense of sexual freedom, but excessive contestations of representational norms.¹⁸⁸ "My idea," Miller writes in *Tropic of Cancer*, "has been to present a resurrection of the emotions, to depict the conduct of a human being in the stratosphere of ideas, that is, in the grip of delirium" (*TCN*:244). Phrased differently, his attempts to reaffirm the importance of embodied experience entails the "delirium" of the rational being who re-enacts his struggle within "the stratosphere of ideas."

What I should like to note is that the traditional refusal to grant significance to the nonhuman world in literature has contributed to the fact that this connection, affirmed by Miller himself in sentences such as "the world of fuck which is in itself a being limitless and undefinable, like our world the world" (*TCP*:240), has been overlooked by criticism. That is not to say that traditional approaches, stressing that Miller's illustration of sexuality constitutes a "rebellious gesture against moral order" (Woolf 1992:170), are invalid. However, an ecocritical perspective highlighting how western culture's dualistic discourses have distorted our conceptions of the body and nature alike, allows us to discern that sexuality is used as "a battle field to fight" not simply "bourgeois ideas of what constitutes 'normality'" (Blinder 2000:53), but also ideas of what constitutes literary codes of representation. But before looking more closely at the way in which Miller's distorted descriptions of nature can be linked to his obscene depictions of the sexual body, it seems appropriate to recall Miller's specific efforts to subvert traditional representations of the nonhuman world.

As I have argued in a preceding chapter, Miller's subversion of traditional systems of representation is tied to the problem of describing the fluidity of lived experience. As Olkowski has demonstrated, representational norms operate with a "logic of identity" that fails to acknowledge novelty or difference. One of the first tasks of Miller's resistance to such representational norms is to replace hierarchical systems with, what Deleuze and Guattari have called, "rhizomatic productions of multiplicity." Miller's abundant use of lists as a stylistic figure of excess is especially interesting here. For its capacity to produce heterogeneous enumerations unsettles traditional descriptions of reality by validating the fluid realm in-between the polarities of western culture's dichotomous discourses. The second thing to note about Miller's efforts to undermine representational norms is his notion of stuttering.

¹⁸⁸In this sense I agree with Mary Kellie Munsil, who claims that because most feminists' "response to Miller has proved little more sophisticated than that of his actual would-be censors, addressed as it has been primarily or exclusively, to this sexual content" (1992:285), a new approach premised on the necessity to "go beyond the superficial and 'apparent' meaning of its language," that asks instead "of the text what it is 'doing'" (1992:292), promises to be more fruitful.

As we have seen, a theoretical account of this phenomenon occurs in Olkowski's discussion of Deleuze. She reminds us that stuttering, when used figuratively, disrupts homogeneous systems of signification by producing a perpetual disequilibrium. As an example of Miller's rhetoric of resistance, "stuttering" expresses his desire to disrupt rigid literary codes and its inherent dualistic substructures.

All of these strategies of contestation are relevant to Miller's obscene descriptions of sexuality. To begin with, it is important to emphasize that although Miller's attempts to unsettle the reader's idea of sexuality can be observed in various adaptations, his principal value of shock is based on the excessive accumulation of sexual scenes. Miller incorporates and multiplies references to copulation in a form that is comparable to his accumulative descriptions of the nonhuman world. In striving after an analogous effect, the sheer frequency of sexual encounters can be understood as an attempt to destabilize normative discourses. Or to come back to Deleuze and Guattari's reflections on the subversive potential of such productions of multiplicity, Miller's endless attempts to verbalize the sexual act "open a rhizomatic realm of possibilities effecting the potentialization of the possible, as opposed to arborescent possibility, which marks a closure, an impotence" (1987:190). "More obscene than anything," Miller insists, "is inertia. More blasphemous than the bloodiest oath is paralysis" (*TCN*:251).

In a passage alluding to his excessive accumulation of vulgarities, Miller indicates that the notion of fluidity is at the heart of these "bloated pages of ecstasy slimed with excrement." That the accumulative production of a reality in flux intends to destabilize dominant views of reality becomes evident in the ensuing sentence. Here Miller adds, "[a]nd I join my slime, my excrement, my madness, my ecstasy to the great circuit which flows through the subterranean vaults of the flesh. All this unbidden, unwanted, drunken vomit will flow on endlessly through the minds of those to come" (*TCN*:255). Reflecting the cumulative character of his lists, this commentary suggests that Miller's subversions of literary codes of decency try to replace the simplicity and repetition produced by western culture's normative discourses, with multiplicity and variation.

A particularly blatant example of this production of multiplicity can be found in Miller's omnipresent reflections on female genitalia. Comparable to the previously studied attempts to make sense of the natural world by imposing a nomenclature on it, Miller claims that although "[e]verybody had at one time or another planted the flag in this territory" of the female sex, "nobody was able to lay claim to it" (*TCP*:192). To highlight this parallel, Miller overlays this "territory" with an endless number of new signs. His descriptions vary from "cunt," to "unstitched wound," to "crack," to name but a few. Yet not only this process of

naming strives after a production of multiplicity. As the ensuing paragraph shows, also the descriptions of female genitalia tend to evoke a similar effect: "[t]here are cunts which laugh and cunts which talk; there are crazy, hysterical cunts shaped like ocarinas and there are planturous, seismographic cunts which register the rise and fall of sap; there are cannibalistic cunts which open wide like the jaws of the whale[...]" (*TCP*:194). It goes without saying that such sentences have not found a lot of approval among feminists. As Kate Millett has pointed out, while the "male anatomy" does not really interest Miller, "since 'prick' is power," the female anatomy is reduced to "a 'crack,' a 'gash,' a 'wound,' a 'slimy hole'—but really only emptiness, nothingness zero" (1992:156). I would not go so far as to claim that Miller's novels are not sexist, after all the female body functions primarily as a place that allows man to renew his contact with his lost body and nature. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the multiplicity underlying Miller's endless accounts of female genitalia does not attempt to debase women, rather it tries to exhibit the inadequacy of representational norms. This interpretation is confirmed by Munsil who maintains that Miller's venture "fails again and again, in a way that is less misogynistic than pathetic, because for all his attempts to understand 'cunts' by describing, describing, describing, they remain 'a hole without a key'" (1992:156).

Looking at Miller's use of obscenity from this perspective, implies that it can be interpreted as a particularly violent form of making language stutter. As a catastrophe in producing resemblance, as a failure to correspond to the logic of identity—to come back to Olkowski's exploration of subversive practices—obscenity exemplifies the inadequacy of our systems of signification. It is therefore of paramount importance to point out, as Bataille did, that obscenity is not intrinsic to any aspect of reality. Rather, it arises from a discrepancy between an established "idea" of a phenomenon and the disorienting actuality of what is being described.¹⁸⁹ Because it is the outcome of a language system in turmoil it should not be confused with any moral evaluations. In fact, Miller wants us to see how his deliberate use of obscenity derives from the limitations of language. Again and again, he emphasizes that "[i]f now and then we encounter pages that explode, pages that wound and sear, [...], know that they come from a man with his back up, a man whose only defenses left are his words" (*TCN*:250).

As a result, critics have often pointed out that obscenity in Miller's novels is "primarily a literary phenomenon" (Isernhagen 1969:82). It is being treated as such, for example, in Hassan's discussion of Miller's novels. Pointing out the dual function of

¹⁸⁹ Bataille writes, "[l]'obscénité est une relation. Il n'y a pas 'de l'obscénité' comme il y a 'du feu' ou 'du sang', [...]. Ceci est obscène si cette personne le voit et le dit" (1957:240).

obscurity, he argues that it is "a mode of purification, a way of cleansing human sensibilities from the sludge of dogma, the dross of hypocrisy," as well as a means "to recover the original power of language" (1967:37). More recently, Dianne Chisholm has urged that we "reevaluate obscene modernism as a specific mode of artistic transgression, one that employs language to forge a textual space within sexual discourse" (1997:17). In short, a definition of obscenity as a contestation of representational norms helps us, on the one hand, to avoid the somewhat simplistic reduction of obscenity as a symptom of Miller's misogyny. On the other hand, it allows us to confirm the previously suggested parallel between stuttering, as a model of language in disequilibrium, and obscenity, as a disruption of the reader's expectations—i.e. the cultural insistence on the endless repetition of the ideal that prevents the recognition of anything new.

Against the backdrop of the preceding exploration of Miller's subversive techniques, I would like to suggest that the cathartic virtue of obscenity implies that the painful recovery of the human body, which after all is at the heart of Miller's interest in sexuality, must be preceded by a gesture not simply of liberation but of destabilization of the dominant discourse. For only the latter is able to accommodate Miller's nondualistic perception of reality. Thus considered, both the production of multiplicity (the overabundance of sexual encounters) and the monstrous (obscene) demonstrations of the impotence of representational concepts to acknowledge difference, remind us of the similarities between Miller's despair about the incapacity to represent nature and his desperate attempts to describe the sexual (female) body.

One striking example that permits us to illustrate the profounder implications of Miller's handling of sexuality, while at the same time it allows us to analyze how these subversive strategies affect the portrayal of women, is his obsession with his wife and muse. As we have noted earlier, Miller alternately calls this woman Mona, Tania, and in later novels, Mara. Although this character is hardly ever physically present in any of Miller's novels, she has more weight in *Tropic of Capricorn* whose events, from an autobiographical point of view, antedate the ones described in *Cancer*.¹⁹⁰ In *Tropic of Capricorn*, the Tania/Mona/Mara character functions "on a wider level as the pathway to Miller's own creative instinct and the one inexhaustible topic which he can circle around" (Blinder 2000:64). By the time that Miller meets her it has become painfully clear to him that he has

¹⁹⁰ This does not mean that one must minimize the importance of the Tania/Mona/Mara character for a reading of *Tropic of Cancer*. As Caroline Blinder has observed, in *Tropic of Cancer* she is turned into "the woman whose self-sufficiency forms the catharsis for Miller's necessary removal from America." Moreover, in *Cancer* "Miller is not only fixated on her absence, but also financially dependent on the money she never sends from New York" (2000:54). Although in *Cancer* it is Tania/Mona/Mara who inspires and supports his artistic creation, the profounder implications of her character are more clearly exhibited in *Capricorn*.

"adapted [himself] to a world which never was," his and that he must "break through this enlarged world and stand again on the frontier of an unknown world which will throw this pale, unilateral world into shadow" (*TCP*:145). It is crucial to note that his life in this "unilateral world" has equally unilateral consequence on his understanding of the self. One example, is his recognition that "[t]he body had been stolen from me because I had no particular need of it. I could exist with or without a body then" (*TCP*:198). Another example, is the fact that "[u]ntil the one for whom this is written came along [i.e. Tania/Mona/Mara] I imagined that somewhere outside, in life, as they say, lay the solution to all things" (*TCP*:13).

Significantly, his belief in traditional notions of a disembodied mind and Platonic notions of the ideal are severely challenged as he encounters Tania/Mona/Mara:

I thought, when I came upon her, that I was seizing hold of life, seizing hold of something which I could bite into. Instead I lost hold of life completely. I reached out for something to attach myself to—and I found nothing. But in reaching out, in the effort to grasp, to attach myself, left high and dry as I was, I nevertheless found something I had not looked for—*myself*. I found that what I had desired all my life was not to live—if what others are doing is called living—but to express myself. (*TCP*:13)¹⁹¹

I cite this long passage to underscore the fact that Miller's very failure to understand the Tania/Mona/Mara character is presented from the very beginning of *Tropic of Capricorn* as the crucial cataclysm for his own artistic project. Given the fact that his struggle to make sense of this character is at the very heart of the discovery of himself as an artist, it seems accurate to suggest that his creative efforts are instigated by his desperate attempt to try to acknowledge her difference.

At the center of his contest of preconceived conceptions of the world then, is this unfathomable character whose multiple names symbolize the narrator's rhetorical and ideological combat to afford her a place within the dominant discourse's logic of identity. This combat is evidently bound to fail. For Tania/Mona/Mara's versatile character can only be acknowledged by developing, what Olkowski has called a "logic of difference." Accordingly, behind Miller's confusion arising from the fact that "[e]verything she had done was enigmatic and exasperating, done apparently without purpose. It was like a symbolic and ironic commentary on life," there is always an allusion to the gradual dissolution of his dualistic patterns of perception. Again and again, he points out that during his relationship with Tania/Mona/Mara he "lived the life of a full-blooded schizerino" (*TCP*:245-6). That this logic of difference must be based on a capacity to replace resemblance with multiplicity is additionally stressed by the narrator's incapacity to construct a coherent portrayal of her:

Even her body went through radical change, not once but several times. At first she was big and velvety, like the jaguar, with that silky, deceptive strength of the feline species, the crouch, the spring, the pounce; then she grew emaciated, fragile, delicate, almost like a cornflower, and with each change thereafter she went through the subtlest modulations—of

¹⁹¹ Italics in original.

skin, muscle, color, posture, odor, gait, gesture, et cetera. She changed like a chameleon.
Nobody could say what she really was like [...]. (*TCP*:237)

True, Miller here applies the traditional association of women with nature. According to Blinder, this is one of the reasons why "feminist critiques of Miller often share the proposition that women are simply marginalized in the form of an uncomfortable 'other'" (2000:56). Yet it seems to me that Miller's self-consciously failed attempts to describe her, expressed here by the discrepancy between the two metaphors—"jaguar" and "cornflower"—draw attention to themselves as artificial constructions. As such they reveal more about his rhetorical despair than his wish to discard women as 'other.'

If Miller's associations of women with nature were merely reproducing the dualistic structures of dominant discourse, we would be justified in regarding his descriptions of women as a symptom of his belief in male supremacy.¹⁹² However, Miller's obstinate endeavor to make sense of this character does not gain its impetus from a desire to preserve hierarchical oppositions, rather it is perpetuated by an endless negotiation of the realm in-between binary oppositions. Analogous with the previously discussed subversive practices, which seek to validate the realm in-between polarities as a dynamic and therefore potent place, Miller attempts to come to terms with Tania/Mona/Mara's difference by concluding that "[t]he only thing that seemed to have permanency was the 'zone between' idea" (*TCP*:192). An excellent example of his willingness to undermine western culture's rigid binary structures can be found in his accounts of their inability to define their couple in terms of prevailing ideas about conjugality. Emphasizing the distressing disequilibrium of their relationship, Miller writes: "she tried to commit suicide and then I tried and then she tried again, and nothing worked except to bring us closer together, so close indeed that we interpenetrated, exchanged personalities, name, identity, religion, father, mother, brother" (*TCP*:237). The mutual suicide, as a symbolical destruction of opposites, leads to a vague intermediate realm which operates with notions of multiplicity rather than with clearly definable notions of identity.

However, this recourse to the "zone between idea" is not simply a matter of destroying binary oppositions. As the following excerpt suggests the recovery of this realm in-between challenges his entire vision of the world. As he meets her for the first time he observes that "[s]he seemed blue-black, white as chalk, ageless," and thus decides that "[t]he time has come, [...], to wander back from the periphery. I made a move toward the center, only to find

¹⁹² Caroline Blinder also questions the previously quoted feminist critique of Miller. She insists that although Miller's descriptions of women often contain problematic implications, in feminist condemnations of Miller "[t]he fact that these women are represented as having a more complex role, as far as power relations are concerned, is overlooked" (2000:56). Blinder's argument draws attention to the fact that Miller portrays himself as being not only financially but also artistically dependent on Tania/Mona/Mara.

the ground shifting from under my feet. [...] I reached for her with two flaming hands but she was more elusive than sand" (*TCP*:199). In contrast to the coherent world he inhabited before the arrival of Tania/Mona/Mara, Miller all of a sudden finds himself in a world that is in constant motion, a world that does not recognize antinomies. Within the context of pre-established patterns of perception, this enigmatic woman becomes a realistic reminder of the inadequacies of the dominant discourse. With her arrival then, both his vision of the world and of language are set in motion. Quite clearly, for Miller this event constitutes a deeply unsettling moment in his life. "[T]he man which I now am was born out of a wound," Miller writes and adds "I was buried alive in a void which was the wound that had been dealt me. *I was the wound itself*" (*TCP*:230).¹⁹³ This wound, which may be interpreted as a disruption of a coherent but inadequate perception of the world, therefore becomes the primal impulse for his artistic creation. Ultimately, it is in this wound, in this zone in-between the polarities established by western culture, that his struggle to make sense of the world is enacted.

In all of these instances his encounter with Tania/Mona/Mara certainly exerts a decisive influence on his artistic creation. But one must also recognize that the inherent loss of coherence is represented as a traumatic experience. Indeed, it contributes to the paradoxical sense of despair and rapture that characterize Miller's novels. "Confusion is a word we have invented for an order which is not understood," Miller reminds us constantly and adds that "if it were understood, [it] must have been dazzling" (*TCP*:176). With regard to his enigmatic wife, it becomes clear that at the center of this process of admitting her difference is the insight that he must learn to renunciate his wish to impose a logic of identity upon her. "I no longer look into the eyes of the woman I hold in my arms but I swim through, head and arms and legs, and I see that behind the sockets of the eyes there is a region unexplored, the world of futurity, and here there is no logic whatever, just the still germination of events" (*TCP*:121). As Tania/Mona/Mara's identity dissolves, Miller recognizes that only in that unexplored region, which no doubt is her sex, he can grasp her essence without imposing any prevailing conceptions of femininity on her.

The wider implications of these claims are clear. Only during sexual intercourse does the Miller persona feel truly liberated from western culture's dualistic conceptions of the world. One of his philosophies of life, therefore, is that "[w]hat holds the world together, as I have learned from bitter experience, is sexual intercourse" (*TCP*:192). The crucial clue, however, is "intercourse," i.e. the coming together of opposites, the ultimate action that gives significance to the realm in-between. Whereas "*fuck*, the real thing, *cunt*, the real thing, seems to contain some unidentified element" (*TCP*:192), sexual intercourse permits Miller to

¹⁹³ Italics in original.

experience the lost union of body and mind, nature and culture, man and woman. From this point of view, the issue of sexuality is not merely used to reinvigorate the primal impulses of the alienated man inhabiting the modern metropolis. It is turned into a symbolical realm in which the healing of opposites, or the acceptance of a world liberated from dualistic discourses, can be expressed. What is more, as a transitory moment, or as that previously quoted "territory [which] nobody was able to lay claim to [...] permanently" (*TCP*:192), sexual intercourse presents a momentary vision of unity. Ultimately, its unifying potential is also the reason why sexual intercourse functions as one of the principal inspirational forces behind Miller's artistic project.

In view of the fact that Miller uses the female-body-as-place to illustrate his slow and painful recovery of his body and his own nature, it is not surprising to discover a striking coincidence between Durrell's back-to-the-womb allegory and Miller's attempts to appropriate the womb, both as a place of a possible union and as a symbol of artistic creation. Miller, the narrator who tries to overcome his sense of alienation is drawn to this irresistible "territory" precisely because it offers a momentary solution to the crisis of modernity. "When I look down into that crack I see an equation sign, the world at balance," Miller contemplates and admits that "[i]nto that crack I would like to penetrate up to the eyes" (*TCN*:249). In his theoretical work, Miller reasserts that this gesture is symptomatic of a particular understanding of femininity: "woman is restored to prime significance—as womb and matrix of life. She is the image of Nature itself, as opposed to the illusory world which man, because of his insufficiency, vainly endeavors to displace" (*WoL*:111).

But as the "matrix of life," the womb affords not only a place to renew the lost union with nature, it obviously also becomes the place of creation. Miller, the artist who tries to achieve a new authentic representation of lived experience, finds in the womb the original moment of creation. At the beginning of *Tropic of Cancer* we thus read: "[w]hen into the womb of time everything is again withdrawn chaos will be restored and chaos is the score upon which reality is written. You, Tania, are my chaos" (*TCN*:10). Like Durrell, Miller uses the womb in its original meaning as a symbolic realm to express a particular vision of artistic creation. As I have suggested in the preceding chapter, the idea of the womb as primordial chaos implies that from this primal gap or opening between two already existing things (to come back to Casey's terms) a new order will emerge. Chaos thus precedes the mastering of original matter that will lead to creation. Reflecting on the "word *creative*," Miller points out that "the whole mystery lies in the realization of the meaning of this word." Namely, that "[e]verything which the brain has labored for a lifetime to assimilate, categorize and synthesize has to be taken apart and reordered" (*TCP*:220).

We have seen that in Durrell this mastering of original matter is related to the fragmentation and eventual chaos arising from the overabundance of new orders. In Miller, however, this original chaos is more tightly connected to the destruction of old orders. In other words, the difference is that for Miller the womb is not simply a place of undifferentiated matter, but also a place of destruction. Or to use Miller's words, the womb is the "the great Janus-faced symbol of death and life" (*WoL*:177). Symbolically speaking then, Miller seems to propose that because in the womb binary oppositions are annihilated it can be used as a tool to illustrate the destruction of normative discourses. This destruction, in turn, transforms the womb into a symbol of the primordial chaos which will give birth to artistic creation. From a similar perspective, Hassan concludes that "[t]he holy orgy is both destruction and renewal" (1967:54). Even though the similarities of Miller and Durrell's use of the womb as a symbol cannot be ignored, we must not minimize the importance of certain divergences either. For it seems to me that Miller's pronounced insistence on destruction ultimately also allows us to elucidate to what extent he proposes a different approach to the healing of the crisis of modernity. Where Durrell's process of healing involves the discovery that a new myth may arise from the chaos of the modern world, Miller's healing presupposes a destabilization of hierarchical systems of representation.¹⁹⁴ Clearly, if his project to "re-enact a lost drama," to continue the "heroic descent to the very bowels of the earth" (*TCN*:185) succeeds in destabilizing representational norms, then Miller's liberation would make room for the non-identical, the 'otherness' within which nature and the body have been imprisoned. Therefore, he suggests that the crisis of modernity can only be addressed by artists who are ready "to be the monster and the pathologist at the same time." That is, only "artists [who] are supremely aware that sleep is an even greater danger than insomnia"— i.e. that stasis is worse than a dynamic production of multiplicity—and therefore, "[i]n order not to fall asleep, in order not to become victims of that insomnia which is called 'living', [...] resort to the drug of putting words together endlessly" (*TCP*:323), may solve the trauma of modernity.

Like Durrell, Miller believes that the alienated city-dweller who suffers from the various consequences of the "machine age," must find a way back to assert the importance of his (or her) body. Accordingly, both authors agree that the only antidote to the *malaise* of

¹⁹⁴ As I have suggested in a preceding chapter on Miller and Durrell's subversion of prevailing literary codes of representation, their approaches differ insofar as Miller never alludes to an impending new language that will solve the crisis of imagination. With regard to their common wish to reclaim the body, a similar difference seems to arise from the fact that Miller does not invoke myth as a solution. Accordingly, also Durrell and Miller's approach to the theme of sex and obscenity are not congruent. Unlike Miller's versatile use of obscenity, Durrell seems to incorporate it primarily in order to dramatize his protagonists' struggle of liberation. The

modern life must be a redefinition of the human being as a natural being. But Durrell's argument bifurcates at this point, because he defines the consequences of this necessity to rethink western culture's dualistic conceptions purely in terms of art. Miller, on the other hand, addresses these issues as concrete problems of his lived experience.¹⁹⁵ As a consequence, Miller stresses the inadequacy of the prevailing patterns of signification to either express or experience an authentic approach to nature and the human body. For Miller the crisis of modernity then, is a matter of destabilizing the hierarchical patterns of dominant discourse. To liberate the body and nature from their stable position as the "other" against which western culture has defined itself, Miller explores that indefinable realm "in-between." As we have seen, the strategies he applies to achieve this goal are based on his production of heterogeneous multiplicities, and his various other attempts to make language stutter.

The actual consequences of this production of a perpetual disequilibrium are that none of Miller's novels offer a precise solution to the crisis of modernity. Instead of the promise of myth, Miller promotes anarchy as a principle of art: "[y]ou are the sieve through which my anarchy strains, resolves itself into words. Behind the word is chaos" (*TCN*:18). Because Miller refuses to propose a solution to the rhetorical and somatic distress of modernity, healing itself takes the form of an endless negotiation of reality by the artist as both "monster and pathologist." During this process, however, the first signs of healing appear as the artist begins to grasp a new logic of difference. This logic of difference, I would like to suggest, is what Miller's notion of "acceptance" is all about. For the very idea that the notion of chaos, as the very origin of creation, involves the production of an emerging new order depends upon the insight that one must learn to accept this incomprehensible order.

"Acceptance," Miller claims throughout his oeuvre, "is the key word. But acceptance is precisely the great stumbling block. It has to be total acceptance and not conformity" (*TA*:48). Part of the difficulty of achieving this total sense of acceptance, is that it must be preceded by a complete dissolution of western culture's dualistic conceptions of the world. To put it very simply, acceptance means the ruin of the ideal. In fact, the foundations of Miller's vision of the world is supported and perhaps even impelled by this idea:

Somehow the realization that nothing was to be hoped for had a salutary effect upon me. For weeks and months, for years, in fact, all my life I had been looking forward to something happening, some intrinsic event that would alter my life, and now suddenly, inspired by the absolute hopelessness of everything, I felt relieved, felt as though a great burden had been lifted from my shoulders. [...] Nothing that had happened to me thus far

diminished importance he accredits to obscenity, might also be the reason why in his later novels Durrell's use of sexual matters are not intended to shock its readers anymore.

¹⁹⁵ At this point it bears repeating that Miller belongs to a tradition of anti-literature. Both his radical denial of literary codes and his insistence on autobiography, the device he himself calls auto-novels, suggest that for him his artistic creation is a kind of life.

had been sufficient to destroy me; nothing had been destroyed except my illusions. I myself was intact. The world was intact. (TCN:103)

Acceptance is simply the process of acknowledging the difference of the nonhuman world without projecting any idealizing or demonizing values on it. As an expression of one's refusal to separate the human being from the nonhuman world, acceptance can be compared to Zen Buddhist and Taoist aspirations to become one with the universe. Or as Miller puts it, "[y]ou live like a happy rock in the midst of the ocean: you are fixed while everything about you is in turbulent motion. You are fixed in a reality which permits the thought that nothing is fixed" (TCP:331).

With regard to the essential question concerning the reappropriation of the human body and its interconnections with the natural world, accepting that "nothing is fixed" implies that a simple reversal of binary oppositions cannot suffice because it perpetuates the rigidity of hierarchical systems of signification. This is what Miller seems to suggest when in *Black Spring* he writes: "I believe, [...], that all the resources of our civilization will prove inadequate to upset the stale, stultifying balance of our world" (BS:199). As the preceding analysis has revealed, an authentic experience of reality in constant flux must therefore focus on a dynamic exploration of the realm in-between rigid oppositions. One acute indication of how this negotiation between the polarities of western culture's dichotomous structures may actually lead to a certain kind of healing of the crisis of modernity is found at the end of *Tropic of Cancer*. As I have suggested in an earlier chapter, here Miller produces an urban pastoral, which permits him to describe the human being in a state that is closer to nature while at the same time it avoids idealizing this nature as a pristine retreat from civilization. Another prominent example of this same process is found in Miller's omnipresent reflections on sexual intercourse. Just as the urban pastoral allows the alienated city-dweller to explore his or her interconnections with nature in a cultural context, so intercourse affords the self-estranged man of modernity a possibility of reaching out for that lost union through an active engagement with the female body-as-place.

5. THE BODY AS PASTORAL SPACE

As Miller and Durrell's texts repeatedly emphasize, the ills of modernity may be solved not by returning to an idyllic idea of nature but by recovering the lived body especially as it is experienced in its sexual interactions with the female body. The female body serves both as a place for overcoming the sense of placelessness tormenting the self-estranged modern man and as a symbolical place for the hope that creation may still arise from the debris of modern culture. Even if Miller and Durrell's visions of creation are not based on the same presumptions, in their attempts to restore the importance of physical experience their imaginations of the female body tend to operate with the same associations of femininity with naturality and animality. Miller and Durrell's alignment with this "long tradition in Western thinking, [...], that has clearly served the purposes of the dominant masculine culture wishing to portray itself as controlling inert matter and docile women" (Westling 1996:10), is surprising because it perpetuates the dichotomous structures they attempt to undermine. The question, therefore, arises whether in their eagerness to undo the nature-culture, body-mind dualisms their masculine quest for authenticity simply replaced the culturally charged notions of nature and body with the supposedly unblemished notion of the female body.

This suspicion may, at first sight, easily be confirmed if we consider the previously analyzed frequency with which women are depicted as mediators with nature. A particularly conspicuous use of this view of women as more corporeal and, therefore, more natural beings can be found in numerous representations of women utilizing animal imagery. True, Miller and Durrell use traditional associations with animality to describe the female sexual body. In *Tropic of Cancer*, for instance, we read "breathing regularly through the gills, sap still oozing from between her legs, a warm feline odor and her hair in my mouth" (TCN:27), and in *The Black Book* Durrell writes, "you are talking suddenly in that pure animal's voice" (BB:104). Nevertheless, in keeping with their efforts to subvert the dualistic substructures underlying western conceptions of the sexual body, we may also observe that both Miller and Durrell attempt to distort the classical device of otherizing women by associating them with animals. Grotesque descriptions, such as "she reminds me of a goose tied to a stake, a goose with a diseased liver, so that the world may have *pâté de foie gras*" (TCN:80), may be interpreted as a deliberate perversion of traditional representations of femininity. An ironic devaluation of this traditional association also sustains Durrell's description of Connie who "sweats like a sentimental seal under the armpits, pants, moans, a little sentimental when the word love arrives [...]. Offer her a beer and she will sit up and bark like a sea lion. You could balance a

glass on her nose" (*BB*:85-6). As a further example demonstrating Miller and Durrell's iconoclastic destruction of representational norms, such crude descriptions of women are part of their subversive strategies which by establishing a disequilibrium attempt to break up existing categories in order to replace the endless repetition of the ideal with new possibilities of variation.

Yet as an element within their subversive strategies, it cannot be denied that a side effect of Durrell's use of woman-as-place, and Miller's perpetual failure to understand "woman," is that man as artistic creator denies woman individualization. Indeed, their refusal to provide any account of women's sense of alienation, or women's sensorial experience indicates that women in their novels seem to be condemned to "take their own bodies to be the object of action and not the originator of acts within that system" (Olkowski 1999:80).

From this perspective, Miller and Durrell's use of woman as a symbolical realm, as a representative of her mysterious sex, as a mediator with the forgotten connection to nature, may also be read as strategies to exclude her from dominant culture. In spite of their deliberately distorted representations of the female body, and their attempts to acknowledge her difference, the question arises whether what is being achieved here is simply to "keep her at a distance: she is always not quite there [...] but no one knows exactly where she is" (Cixous, quoted in Felber 1995:312). The vitalistic reappropriation of the sexual body thus seems to reinforce the dualistic structures even while seeking to make obvious the inadequacy of the way in which nature, body, or woman have been encoded and imprisoned within western notions of identity. Although Durrell and Miller's thematization of the crisis of imagination has made clear that nature is no more a problematic construct than the female body or reality in general, we are coming to a point of contention once we ask how women are supposed to heal their traumatic experiences of the crisis of modernity.

A useful way of getting a better hold of this quandary underlying their contestations of the nature-culture, body-mind dualisms, is to look at this problem from an ecofeminist perspective. When ecofeminists focus on the premise that binary oppositions have "been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals—in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror" that "One" self "who is not dominated" (Haraway 1991:177), they tend to highlight the analogy between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women and ethnic "minorities." Indeed, "[a] revisionary scholarship on race and gender has shown, nature has historically been not only directly exploited but also the sign under which women and nonwhites have been grouped in the process of themselves being exploited even while being relished as exotic" (Buell 1995:21). In focusing on western civilization's subordination of

women to men, and nature to culture, ecofeminist studies have, according to Buell, been a "key influence [...] in directing attention both to gender issues and, more broadly, to all kinds of pathologies of anthropo-normative thinking" (1999:708).

It goes without saying that from an ecofeminist perspective, Miller and Durrell's associations of women with nature and corporeality represent a blatant confirmation of the way in which dominant discourse has traditionally naturalized women and feminized nature. Of course, the preoccupation with the "dualistic classification of reality, with the disjuncts not only being seen as oppositional and exclusive (mind/body, man/woman, human/nature)," (Villanueva 1999:192) but also ordered hierarchically, has been used as a central premise by earlier feminist works, notably by H  l  ne Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Based on such earlier works, ecofeminism should not merely reveal how "women have been devalued and denied cultural participation through their naturalization" (Soper 2000:141), it should also reveal that dualistic structures underlie most dominant modes of discourse. Indeed, as Olkowski points out "[t]he obvious problem with the logic of identity is that whatever group tends to dominate [...] will represent themselves as active human subjects and represent everyone else as 'others.'" The subordination of these "others" is reinforced by a discourse that defines them as "'lacking' in relation to the dominant group" (1999:12). Opposition to masculine hegemony must therefore also pay attention to the ways in which representational norms have set up an order in which "coherence, unity, identity" are "coded as masculine so that the feminine is not another identity but is instead nonidentity" (Michel 1991:171).

The point is that even if Miller and Durrell's nondualistic discourses seems to anticipate what Patrick Murphy has defined as the ecofeminist assumption that "[o]nly by recognizing the existence of the 'other' as a self-existent entity can we begin to comprehend a gender heterarchical continuum in which difference exists without binary opposition and hierarchical valorization" (2000:194), in their attempts to grant value to difference they soon arrive at a threshold they cannot cross. While one may at least give them credit for subverting the binary structures of representational norms, we cannot deny that Miller and Durrell's representations of women are not intended to cast doubt on the hierarchical structures that enable them to designate woman as "other." The problem of Miller and Durrell's accomplishment in overcoming the environmental and epistemological implications of the crisis of modernity is, that while authenticity may briefly be experienced by some of their masculine protagonists, the women in their novels are "women only in relation to the determinations made for them by men" (Olkowski 1999:63). In short, Miller and Durrell do

not question the dualistic substructures which give them the authority to write about nature and women as the "other."¹⁹⁶

If Miller and Durrell's representations of women seem to rely too readily on the indescribable, I would nevertheless suggest that they reflect what feminist theorists carried forward into reflective discourse when maintaining that "within pervasively masculinist, phallogocentric language, women are unrepresentable; they are linguistic absence and opacity" (Olkowski 1999:64). However, where writers like Miller and Durrell may reflect on women as problematic objects of representation and desire, for those that have been marked as "other" the quest for authenticity becomes a painful liberation from male perceptions of their gendered, raced and sexed bodies. Situated in "a subversively exterior relation to the system it supports" (Michel 1991:171), feminine writing finds itself struggling against the male gaze that has constructed their bodies as objects of male desire, while at the same time struggling for the reappropriation of their colonized bodies. Having been subject to western culture's "double-faced process of destruction and sentimentalization" (Mies 1993:152), those that have been marked as "other" will have to abandon the belief that any generalizable concept will suffice to grant them a place within the hierarchical order of the dominant discourse. In this respect, minority and feminist theories have repeatedly insisted that the subversion of dominant systems of signification may be the unique possibility to reclaim their colonized bodies. Within the patriarchal logic of identity, such subversive strategies constitute "the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools that mark the world that marked them as other" (Haraway 1991:175).

But to come back to our point, if modernity constitutes a moment of crisis, in which somatic and rhetorical distress are the symptoms of a civilization that through its denial of the body and nature has produced an agonizing sense of alienation, the question remains where women are supposed to find their place of authenticity. As we have seen, from a Modernist perspective the traditional retreat to nature makes any attempt to stress the interconnection between humans and nature impossible insofar as it is based on rigid representational concepts that in addition to relying on stereotypical images of nature, perpetuates the dichotomous structures of dominant discourse. On the other hand, it is equally clear that unlike the masculine perspective of Miller and Durrell, a feminine quest for authenticity cannot use the female or male body as a pastoral space that allows her to reappropriate her physical existence. Without a notion of nature as an idyllic place of authenticity, and

¹⁹⁶ Put differently, they do not acknowledge what Cixous and Clément have defined as the foundation of phallogocentric culture, namely that "*dans l'Histoire, ce qu'on appelle 'autre' c'est une altérité qui se pose, [...], qui est l'autre dans le rapport hiérarchisé où c'est le même qui règne, nomme, définit, attribue 'son' autre.*" (1975:129).

especially without an alternative concept of body as a place of origin, we may indeed wonder whether for women writers confronting the crisis of modernity a perspective of healing is imaginable. Given the fact that the Modernist struggle to achieve a new authentic representation of reality is based on the assumption that language is at the center of this contest, we may, furthermore, wonder whether a feminine quest for authenticity is reduced to developing subversive strategies that at least would allow women to make visible their nonexistence within phallogocentric systems of signification. Nothing highlights the divergence between a masculine and a feminine approach to the same crisis of modernity more emphatically than a comparison between Miller and Durrell's novels and *Nightwood* (1936), a troubling account of the loss of authenticity, written by their contemporary Djuna Barnes.¹⁹⁷

5.1. Djuna Barnes and the Crisis of Modernity

Djuna Barnes was born only one year after Henry Miller and has for a considerable time exchanged her life in New York for an expatriate existence in Paris where, like Miller, she found an international writing community that nourished her creative work.¹⁹⁸ The use of Paris as a perfect setting for the destabilizing experience of modernity allies Barnes with Miller in more ways than one. But Barnes's fictional evocations of the agonizing experience of modern life and her striving for a new sense of artistic authenticity bear more pessimistic undertones than Miller's. While Miller's quest for meaning is both ecstatic and horrifying, the lack of coherence means pure distress and trauma in Barnes's fiction. The novel's bleak atmosphere is firmly inscribed by "Barnes's characters," who according to Jed Rasula, "collectively animate a single torment, despite their mutual incomprehension" (1999:157). Upon entering the grotesque circus of falsifications of Barnes's *Nightwood*, the reader encounters a radically different degree of alienation from the boisterous exuberance of Miller's accounts of the *malaise* of modern life. The novel's shifting scenery of Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and New York vary only insofar as they document different forms of the same world of decadent entertainment and make-believe. It is in this world of circuses and theatres, and its self-appointed exhibitions of artificiality, that the various characters of *Nightwood* seek

¹⁹⁷ Given Miller and Durrell's well-documented friendship with Anaïs Nin it could be argued that her work, rather than Barnes's, lends itself for such a comparison. My exclusion of Nin is grounded on ecocritical criteria.

¹⁹⁸ Barnes moved to Paris in 1920 where she lived for most of the decade. Miller moved to Paris in 1928 and does not seem to have known her personally. However, under the influence of the same major currents of the late Modernist literary culture, Miller and Barnes's lives and works share more than a common fascination for the French capital. As their correspondence reveals, both Miller and Durrell seem to have been acquainted with Barnes's work. In a letter tentatively dated May 1937, for example, Durrell expresses his admiration for *Nightwood* (MacNiven 1989:78).

relief from their self-estranged forms of life. Against the background of this abundance of artifice and falsifications the various bohemian protagonists come together, trespass on each other's lives, and separate again.

One of its central characters is doctor Matthew O'Connor, a self-confessed liar and gynecologist. As a negotiator between three characters who are all mesmerized by the same enigmatic woman, called Robin Vote, doctor O'Connor is of paramount importance for the narrative development. The first person to be fatefully attracted to Robin Vote is Felix Volkbein. Son of Guido Volkbein, who tried to conceal his Jewish roots by claiming to be descended from Austrian aristocracy, Felix's life is centered around his devotion and "obsession for what he termed 'Old Europe': aristocracy, nobility, royalty" (NW:22). After the breakdown of the marriage between Felix and Robin, we find Nora Flood, an American promoter of circus performers and a hostess of a literary salon, emotionally entangled in a relationship with Robin Vote. After both Felix and Nora fail to contain Robin's urge to explore the nocturnal streets of the modern metropolis, Jenny Petherbridge, another American expatriate living in Paris, tries to take possession of Robin.

In light of the various forms of sexual identification we find thematized in *Nightwood*, much recent criticism of Barnes's fiction has focused on the issue of lesbianism. While a number of feminist critics have proposed that *Nightwood* is a lesbian novel, others have tried to establish a link between the novel's focus on marginalized social groups, such as gay men, lesbians and Jews, to discard the novel's seemingly fascist undertones.¹⁹⁹ Rather than limiting my reading of *Nightwood* to an ecofeminist study of the dichotomous structures that authorize

¹⁹⁹ The numerous feminist revisions of *Nightwood* have brought to light a number of crucial aspects. While questions of lesbianism were undoubtedly central to Djuna Barnes's imagination, I tend to agree with Fleischer who maintains that some of these interpretations are "compromised by political agendas" (1998:406). Where critics such as Shari Benstock address the theme of lesbianism by defining Barnes's work as "sapphic modernism," Jane Marcus uses the term "modernism of marginality" to assert that Barnes's treatment of minorities must be read as an antifascist manifesto. Although Marcus's argument that the novel's "antifascism is apparent only when it triumphs over its own anti-Semitism, when we realize that its characters—Jews, homosexuals, lesbians, transvestites, gypsies, blacks, and circus performers—were all to perish in the Holocaust" (1991:229) is certainly compelling, I would urge a less monolithic and more hybrid approach to the historical experience of fascism. In her study of this complex issue, Erin Carlston addresses the question of fascism's absorption of predominant fears and desires of modernity in a way that I find more convincing than the reading suggested by Marcus. When Carlston points out that fascist Modernists and writers like Barnes, "often articulate surprisingly similar conceptions and reactions to these *maux de siècle*," (1998:5), we might add that Miller and Durrell's texts, too, reveal an engagement with certain fascist themes. (Miller's fascination for Spengler is certainly a case in point). Contrasting Marcus's interpretation, Carlston convincingly demonstrates that "fascism cannot be posed as the absolute Other of politico-cultural thought in the interwar period" (1998:5). Carlston's argument is particularly persuasive on the point that while many Modernist writers incorporate "fascist themes and tropes" it is crucial to emphasize that most of them are "also departing sharply from fascist rhetoric" (1998:189). Far from being a banalization or an apology for fascism, Carlston's analysis reveals the complexity of the subject matter. I think it is accurate to say, therefore, that an analysis based on a rhetorical rather than a political approach promises to reveal the tensions, if not contradictions, at work in the novels discussed in this study. Clearly, the fact that fascist themes (such as the critique of reason, the question of nature and origin) percolate many Modernist texts is of paramount importance—especially from an ecocritical perspective. Nevertheless, limited space does not permit a detailed study of this vast subject.

the exclusion of nonwhites, women and nature, I want to analyze how this dualistic discourse forces Djuna Barnes to develop a different response to the crisis of modernity than the one proposed by her masculine contemporaries. By thus comparing these different responses to the crisis of modernity, I want to discuss one fairly discrete aspect of Djuna Barnes's novel: namely, that her yearning for authenticity does not advocate a reappropriation of the lost connection with nature or the human body as much as it attempts to free women and other groups constituted as "other" from their ideological enslavement. In doing this, I will be particularly interested in analyzing how Barnes's novel subverts the dominant discourse's naturalization of women and nonwhites in order to liberate the female body from its function as place for man. Strategies of contesting for the power to signify and control the place of their own marked bodies in modern culture can be deduced from the way in which Barnes's "narrative shapes itself around a blank space, an absence, that outlines a loss of access to history, to language and to representation in general" (Smith 1999:194).

5.1.1. Alienation in *Nightwood*

Before pointing out what makes Djuna Barnes different from other writers who were her contemporaries, let us begin by examining to what extent her novel responds to a similar anxiety about modernity to the one we have observed in Miller and Durrell's novels. In the novel's first chapter, "Bow Down," we find a concise realization of the trauma of modernity. The symptoms of estrangement and despair that inform this opening chapter are, in fact, paradigmatic of the novel as a whole. As Smith explains, there Barnes presents "an anatomy of loss that provides a pattern for understanding the rest of the novel" (1999:196). Indeed, loss of meaning, loss of history, loss of coherence and loss of identity are at the heart of this curiously distorted genealogy of the Volkbein family. As noted earlier, in a desperate attempt to secure a stable social position, Guido Volkbein, the father of Felix, masks his Jewish ancestry by fabricating an aristocratic Christian identity. The ensuing "chaos [...] of unauthentic selves" (Sharrock 1985:100) is thus initiated by Guido whose "saddest and most futile gesture of all had been his pretence to a Barony" (NW:14).²⁰⁰ The 'futility' of Guido's effacement of his identity becomes the principle predicament of Felix's life. Having lost his father before and his mother immediately after his birth, Felix inherits a second-hand history

²⁰⁰ To come back to the charge of fascism, it is clear that Barnes's decision to use Guido and Felix Volkbein as examples illustrating the problem of authenticity is problematic insofar as "fascism strove to recuperate a notion of authenticity that contrasted with commodified, inauthentic, or 'Jewish' culture" (Carlston 1998:25). Nevertheless, Carlston reminds us that although "[t]he Jew in *Nightwood* is certainly the icon for the predicaments of modernity, [...] he is responsible neither for causing nor for curing them; they are indeed incurable" (1998:80).

transmitted by his aunt. His devotion to this false past and his ludicrous veneration of aristocracy clearly account for Felix's alienated existence.

Unlike Miller and Durrell, Barnes does not dramatize alienation by depicting it against the background of an industrialized environment. Yet by defining alienation as a loss of origin her response to modernity concurs with Miller and Durrell's critique of western civilization. Underlying Barnes's account of the Volkbein family's desperate appropriation of a place in history, is a sense of historical crisis: a feeling that the past cannot be retrieved while the future offers no redemption. Just as the characters in Miller and Durrell's novels take pains to overcome their self-estrangement by trying to reclaim a lost sense of wholeness, so Felix Volkbein is haunted by a desire to maintain a sense of origin. Throughout the novel Felix repeatedly stresses that "[t]o pay homage to our past is the only gesture that also includes the future" (NW:63). Felix's obsession is not simply a veneration of aristocracy, it is a desperate need to establish a historical connection to his origins and to become part of an uninterrupted filiation. However, as the opening of the novel confirms, the very interruption of this connection is at the center of the novel's rhetoric of apocalypticism. That *Nightwood* should begin with an opulent description of Hedvig Volkbein in childbirth—"she named him Felix, thrust him from her, and died" (NW:11-12)—reflects the violence and the ensuing trauma of this disruption. Carlston aptly points out that "this is only one of the incomplete or interrupted lineages in *Nightwood*," and adds that they are "interrupted usually by the absence of mothers, in a world where women [...] struggle to escape their role in reproducing humanity" (1998:52). In other words, we should note at this point already that from the very beginning of the novel Barnes emphasizes her refusal to use woman, or the female body, as a solution to the crisis of modernity.

However, before looking more closely at the difference between Barnes's feminine and Miller and Durrell's masculine response to the crisis of modernity, we should first give some further consideration to the ways in which the notion of history can be linked to the Modernist anxiety about authenticity. As many critics have noted, memory in *Nightwood* "is a source of conflict" (Abraham 1991:262). One sees this, of course, in Guido and Felix Volkbein's historicization of their genealogy, and we will have to ask later on how this need to appropriate a place in history can be linked to their exclusion, as Jews, from the dominant Christian ideology. It seems evident, however, that the lack of authenticity characterizing Felix's devotion to an imaginary past is what the problem of memory in the final analysis is all about. Consider, for instance, the accounts of the actual creation of this false past. What is being emphasized is not simply that Guido claims to be "an Austrian of an old, almost extinct line," but that "to uphold his story" Guido is forced to produce "the most amazing and

inaccurate proofs: a coat of arms [...] and a list of progenitors" (NW:14). Such sentences suggest that Barnes's preoccupation about history and its inherent loss of authenticity is linked to the problem of representation. As Elisabeth Beranger explains, in Barnes's novel everything becomes a representation of a preceding representation with the result that this endless reproduction of representations effaces any authentic contact with primordial reality and originality.²⁰¹

As we have seen, resistance to representation and its degradation into clichés and stereotypes is also at the heart of Durrell and Miller's focus on the problem of authenticity. But in Barnes's novel this issue is more intricately related to questions of identity. Once again, Guido Volkbein's manufactured past exemplifies the artificiality of representation and, on a more general level, the corruption of official historical records. Guido's appropriation of history is described as a collection of signs that authorize his claim to nobility. His fabrication of an aristocratic identity includes the purchase of false family portraits, the adoption of "the sign of the cross" (NW:14), and the creation of a coat of arms representing "a lion, a bear, a ram, a dove, and in their midst a flaming torch." That Guido's existence is founded on the imitation of the iconographic detritus of dominant culture, is stressed when immediately after this sentence we read: "[t]he design was executed under the supervision of Guido who, [...] claimed it as the Volkbein field, though it turned out to be a bit of heraldry long since in decline" (NW:17-18).²⁰² As Beranger points out, even the opening scene portraying Hedvig Volkbein giving birth to her son, "lying upon a canopied bed of a rich spectacular crimson, the valance stamped with the bifurcated wings of the House of Hapsburg, the feather coverlet an envelope of satin on which, in massive and tarnished gold threads, stood the Volkbein arms" (NW:11), is presented as a reading of a picture. The distance that is thus being created, Beranger concludes, signals the "pseudo-reality of the represented object" (my translation 1981:488).

The "life-sized portraits of Guido's claim to father and mother" (NW:18) are a good example of the world of imitations Barnes presents to her readers. While the narrator's reading of these portraits stresses the inaccuracy of the representations—the lady "seemed to be expecting a bird" and the gentleman on horseback "seemed not so much to have mounted the animal, as to be about to descend upon him" (NW:18)—the ensuing remark, "[h]ad anyone cared to look into the matter they would have discovered these canvases to be reproductions

²⁰¹ Beranger insists that in Barnes's problematization of history, "[i]l s'agit de suggérer que tout est représentation d'une représentation préalable, et que ces imitations successives font perdre ses traits distinctifs à l'original dont on a perdu la trace" (1981:469).

²⁰² It is of course interesting to note that both Durrell and Barnes focus on heraldry to express their mimetic concerns.

of two intrepid and ancient actors" (NW:19), widens the gap between reality and representation. This portrayal of Guido's alleged parents, which in fact represents actors who themselves probably imitate fictive people, epitomizes the artificiality of the world that the Volkbein family inhabits. Like the "copies of the Medici shield" (NW:17) hanging over the fireplace, everything we encounter is either designated as a copy or as a reproduction. Even the valet and the cook are chosen because one of them "looked like Louis the Fourteenth and the other [...] resembled Queen Victoria, Victoria in another cheaper material, cut to the poor man's purse" (NW:23).

It thus hardly needs repeating that much of the lack of authenticity derives from such multiplications of copied representations. Given the fact that Guido Volkbein's excessive collection of proofs turns his house into a "fantastic museum" in which we find accumulated "[t]hree massive pianos" and "two rambling desks," as "Hedvig had liked things in twos and threes" (NW:17), we might hazard the claim that this first chapter on the Volkbein family is intended to highlight the lack of authenticity and the patterns of excess underlying the despair of modern life. As we have seen, the notion of multiplicity is of special import for the Modernist response to the crisis of modernity. Recall that according to Rasula the Modernist poetics of excess is registered in trauma. That Barnes's focus on the endless reproduction of images evokes a similar sense of despair is confirmed by the hapless existence of Felix Volkbein, who himself is unaware of the sham existence he leads. Having inherited, to come back to Rasula's terms, the "monstrous excrescence" his father has left behind, Felix is a truly self-estranged figure. The caricature Barnes makes of him clearly shows that due to these circumstances "Felix had become the accumulated and single—the embarrassed" (NW:22). Although he never ceases to stress that his "family is preserved because I have it only from the memory of one single woman, my aunt; therefore it is single, clear and unalterable" (NW:161), the utterance of the "phrase 'time crawling'" is enough to call forth hysterical fits of "uncontrollable laughter." The traumatic origins of this fit is emphasized as the narrator adds: "and though this occurrence troubled him the rest of his life he was never able to explain it to himself" (NW:34-5).

5.1.2. Textual and Bodily Defects: *Nightwood's* Enactment of Crisis

With Barnes, then, we are in a world lacking any distinction between copy and original, reality and representation. In such a world it is illusory to believe in reality, or to be more specific, in the capacity to represent reality. For Barnes—like Miller, Durrell and many other Modernist writers—shows that the lack of authenticity is not only an important aspect

of the *malaise* of modern life, it is also the ultimate quandary of artistic creation. Just as Guido's identity consists of a collection of cultural artifacts, so the text itself copies and assembles "mixed levels of discourse, from the lofty to the low, [...] from medical practice, circus argot, church dogma, and homosexual slang" (Marcus 1991:223). Clearly, both the protagonists' lives and the author's medium have been damaged by the loss of unity. In this sense, it is important to remember that much of the novel's sense of agony and despair is in fact symptomatic of the apocalyptic undertones characterizing a vast majority of Modernist works. Taking my cue from Jed Rasula's previously discussed essay on Modernism, my concern here is with the rhetorical and somatic symptoms arising from Barnes's illustration of the collapsing cultural frames of reference.

It is, of course, especially interesting that one of the novel's principal protagonists is a doctor, whose verbosity is as impenetrable as his medical practice is unlikely to induce any healing. This union of dubious doctor and renowned orator is a striking example of what Rasula has defined as Modernism's traumatic response to the crisis of modernity. Evidence that doctor O'Connor perfectly exemplifies how modernity, as the conclusion of a process during which a sense of wholeness has been replaced by a new inconceivable totality, leads to somatic and rhetorical distress, is not hard to find. For it is through doctor O'Connor that such recurrent themes as dissection, amputation, disease and agony enter the novel. Equally clear is that disease is represented as a misrecognition of a unitary self. Amputees, such as "Mademoiselle Basquette who was damned from the waist down" (NW:45), and O'Connor's tendency to dissect the human body rather than diagnose its diseases, e.g. "[t]here is no pure sorrow. Why? It is bedfellow to lungs, lights, bones, guts and gall!" (NW:39), are thus being juxtaposed to the fatal verdict that there is no "cure, for there is none that takes place all at once in any man" (NW:36).

Furthermore, the doctor's monologues on the omnipresent sense of misery and despair, which culminates in the remark that "[n]o man needs curing of his individual sickness, his universal malady is what he should look to" (NW:52), are throughout the novel linked to the problem of language. One of the most conspicuous examples is O'Connor's statement that "[w]e are full to the gorge with our own names for misery," but "[we] should look well around, doubting everything seen, done, spoken, precisely because we have a word for it, and not its alchemy" (NW:122). Although such passages should suffice to suggest that in Barnes's novel the crisis of modernity is re-enacted through somatic and rhetorical distress, we must not minimize the importance Barnes attaches to the fact that there exists no cure for this "universal malady." It is crucial to note that sentences, such as "[r]age and inaccuracy howl and blow the bone, for, contrary to all opinion, all suffering does *not* purify" (NW:196),

blatantly confirm that the problem of authenticity cannot be healed through formalistic experiments. The same conclusion has led artists like Miller and Durrell to monstrous exhibitions of their own representational limits.

As I suggested earlier, in Miller and Durrell's novels the crisis of imagination, inherent in these writers' display of rhetorical breakdowns, is intricately related to a preoccupation about images. Both Miller and Durrell link their incapacity to create an authentic representation of reality to the overabundance and super-imposition of images which substitute primordial experience and blot out any unmediated contact with reality. A similar wish to exhibit the inaccuracy of images appears in *Nightwood's* enactment of crisis. Just as the cliché in Durrell's novels and the poetics of excess and lexical profusion of Miller was used to express their contestations of representational norms, so Barnes employs a specific technique to demonstrate how her damaged medium prevents her from producing an accurate description of reality.

It is certainly true, as various critics have shown, that one acute indication of Barnes's contestations of literary norms is "[t]he linguistic richness of *Nightwood*—its choked abundance of puns and plays on words" (Marcus 1991:231). Nevertheless, the novel's enactment of rhetorical distress goes much farther than this. Although Leigh Gilmore deplors the fact that in the novel's "critical history" its "narrative experimentalism" has been thoroughly "neglected" (1994:617), one of the best critical accounts still remains Alan Singer's study of the novel's narrative discontinuity. Singer demonstrates how a number of image patterns, "denoted by the recurrent imagery of the horn," or the horse, to name but a few, are "indicative of a practice of narrative digression and supplementation whereby the expressiveness of the image depends on its proliferation of new relational possibilities" (1984:74). Examining the diverse contexts in which the novel's recurrent images occur, Singer shows how each new context neither serves to "explicate a previous context of meaning," nor to "bridge contextual gaps by disclosing a covert similarity" (1984:78).

Singer's exploration of what he calls "Barnes's destabilized or extended trope" (1984:69) needs further clarification. His point can best be made through rapid illustration. All through *Nightwood* there is quite a staggering range of allusions to birds. In our brief analysis of the novel's first chapter we have already encountered the heraldic representation of the Austrian Double Eagle (*NW*:11), and the invisible bird the lady on the portrait seemed to be expecting (*NW*:18). While these two instances imply that one could "expect that the birds in one passage determine the meaning of the birds in another," the ensuing references to birds suggest that the novel's "imagistic continuity" refutes any "causal logic" (Singer 1984:80). Hence, when O'Connor is described as "bathing in the [church's] holy water stoup as if he

were its single and beholden bird" (NW:49), or when we read that "we shall be for the next generation not the massive dung fallen from the dinosaur, but the little speck left of a humming-bird" (NW:218), Barnes unsettles the reader's expectations of imagistic coherence. However, while I agree with Singer's claim that Barnes "insists upon ceaselessly revising perspectives" (1984:67), it is with respect to his conclusion—i.e. that this process leads to an expansion of the image to "new associative possibilities" (1984:76)—that my own reading parts from Singer's. Rather than reducing Barnes's discontinuous images to an illustration of the Modernist fascination for experimentalism, I would argue that they present a contestation of representational norms.²⁰³

As we have seen, Durrell and Miller worked toward a similar result. Where Durrell and Miller prefer ironic destructions of clichés and subversive strategies of multiplicity, Barnes opts for a multiplication of images to enact the problem of signification. That her proliferation and subversion of images also operate with an ironic stance, is illustrated in the following excerpt. As Nora, tormented by grief after Robin has left her, asks O'Connor for his advice, he answers:

'Make birds' nests with your teeth, that would be better,' he said angrily, 'like my English girl friend. The birds liked them so well that they stopped making their own (does that sound like any nest you have made for any bird, and so broken its fate?). In the spring they form a queue by her bedroom window and stand waiting their turn, holding on to their eggs as hard as they can until she gets around to them, strutting up and down on the ledge, the eyes in their feathers a quick shine and sting, whipped with impatience, like a man waiting at a toilet door for someone inside who had decided to read the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. (NW:182-3)

The absurdity of the image, the ironic confirmation of the superiority of this human reproduction of a natural object (i.e. the birds "stopped making their own" nests), the pun on the bird whose fate might have been broken, the disruption designated by the 'broken fate' itself, the anthropomorphic description of birds queuing up by the window, and the comparison to the "man waiting at a toilet door" all illustrate how Barnes's subversive strategy uses images only to manipulate, deform and finally dissolve them.

5.1.3. The Marked Bodies of the 'Other'

Compared to the various Modernist contestations of representational norms, Barnes's demonstration of her incapacity to produce an authentic picture of reality may be interpreted as a further example confirming that the crisis of modernity is indeed tied to rhetorical and somatic distress. From a feminist perspective however, Barnes's contestation of literary norms

²⁰³ Singer seems to confirm what Rasula has denounced as the outcome of most traditional approaches to Modernism's poetics of excess. In chapter 1, it was noted that according to Rasula the failure to take account of

displays a special alertness to patriarchal culture's repressive structures. One way of grasping what is unusual about Barnes, therefore, is to consider the extent to which her concern about representation is linked to phallogocentrism. As a number of feminist readings of *Nightwood* have demonstrated, the numerous fragments from patriarchal culture which Barnes incorporates draw attention to themselves as artificial and reproducible constructions. Facing this ungraspable multiplicity, the reader is incited to reflect on a reality that remains inaccessible to dominant discourse, precisely because it has forced women and other cultural "minorities" into silence. Against the backdrop of the novel's response to western culture's masculine hegemony, a more complicated picture emerges, which ultimately leads us to distinguish between Barnes and her masculine contemporaries.

This concern with dominant culture's power to name and exert control over the "other" is also captured in the novel's first chapter. As Smith comments with reference to Felix Volkbein, "[the] Jew's relation to history become, for Barnes, ways in which to represent how history is constructed, who gets written in and who gets written out" (1999:197). Julie Abraham, likewise, holds that the Volkbein episode "functions as a paradigm of Barnes' understanding of the relation of the powerless to the record of the 'high and mighty'" (1991:255). The evidence provided most frequently to support Barnes's juxtaposition of the record of official history and the obscured histories of those that have been denied cultural authority, are doctor O'Connor's reflections on the contrast between "history" and "legend." However, even if O'Connor's definition of legend as "the stories that do not amount to much [...] that are forgotten in spite of all man remembers [...] merely because they befell him without distinction of office or title" (NW:30) is most revealing, it is surprising to note that most of these critical assessments do not pay attention to Barnes's methods of demonstrating this power to name and represent the "other."

If instead of focusing only on an analysis of who has been excluded, we recognize that the cultural construction of history is linked to the construction of difference—of gender and racial stereotypes—it becomes easier to see how for Barnes the question of the "other" becomes a problem of representation. Take, once again, Guido Volkbein's anxious attempts to conceal his Jewish legacy. As we see him "carrying in a conspicuously clenched fist the exquisite handkerchief of yellow and black linen that cried aloud of the ordinance of 1468 [...] demanding that, with a rope about its neck, Guido's race should run in the Corso for the amusement of the Christian populace" (NW:12), we note that what Guido so "conspicuously" tries to conceal is the sign that Christian culture has imposed on him in order to mark him as

the despair underlying Modernism, has often lead to interpretations in which the novels themselves "seem paradoxically comfortable with the agonies they signify" (1999:143).

"other." This direction of interpretation is reinforced as the narrator, in an ensuing paragraph, asserts that the Jew's "undoing is never profitable until some *goy* has put it back into such shape that it can again be offered as a 'sign'" (NW:24). In all of these instances cultural domination is associated with the power to represent, to impose a sign on the "other."

In contrast to Miller and Durrell's problematization of authenticity, in Barnes's novel the same concern is accentuated insofar as it includes questions concerning self-identification. Donna Haraway summarizes the profounder implications of this phenomenon when she states that "[o]nly those occupying the positions of the dominators are self-identical, unmarked, disembodied, unmediated" (1991:193). As a matter of fact, much of the novel's aggravated sense of alienation derives from the way in which those that have been otherized are forced to re-present their own "disqualification," to use one of Barnes's favorite terms. In this sense, Felix's fascination for the people of the circus can be understood best by placing it in the context of the relation between the dominator's power to represent and the suppressed subject's need to reaffirm this representation. Like Felix's Jewish ancestors, these circus people have acknowledged their dependence on official constructions of difference. Echoing the "ordinance of 1468," they exhibit the signs that have been imposed on them to mark their difference for the entertainment of the dominators. Yet by using the circus as the arena on which western culture enacts its repressive constructions of the "other," Barnes simultaneously indicates the emptiness behind official constructions of difference.

Accordingly, it is only in this world of make-believe that Felix feels safe. "Here," the narrator tells us, Felix "had neither to be capable nor alien. He became for a little while a part of their splendid and reeking falsification" (NW:24-5). "Falsification," here, I take to be the "crisis in referentiality" (Henstra 2000:132) which, when used as a subversive device, serves to protect the suppressed from the dominant by confirming, even highlighting, the official ideas of what constitutes them as "other." This falsification is so efficient that for Felix this world of the circus is cherished precisely because "he could never touch, therefore never know [it]" (NW:26). However, whereas the circus performers are conscious of their mimetic strategies of survival, Felix himself is not aware that his existence was built on a similar adaptation to western culture's systems of signification. Hence, Barnes takes care to indicate that whereas in the circus titles such as "Princess Nadja," or "Principessa Stasera y Stasero," "King Buffo," or "Duchess of Broadback" are only used to "dazzle boys about town, to make their public life (and it was all they had)," in Felix's life their function is "to dazzle his own estrangement" (NW:25). The tragedy of Felix, in short, is his complete ignorance of dominant culture's repressive practices of representation. As Felix inquires about the veracity of Count

Onatorio Altamonte's title, Frau Mann, also known as Duchess of Broadback, exasperatedly answers: "*Herr Gott!* [...] Am I what I say? Are you? Is the doctor?" (NW:43).

Bearing in mind that Barnes's images intend to evoke in the reader a comparable sense of 'dazzling estrangement,' it is important to insist again on the similarities between her subversion of representational norms and her focus on the way in which the circus performers "imitate the process by which subjects are located in society—recognized, gendered, judged, given a name" (Henstra 2000:135). Just as the endless references to images signal the inaccuracy of systems of signification, so the circus's production of falsification tries to make visible how systems of domination imprison the individual into a limited set of signifiers. To emphasize this parallel, Barnes's representation of these performers illustrates how difference is inscribed on their bodies, and how, in turn, their bodies become reproducible images themselves. One example stressing how the body is brought into being by such symbolical impositions is Frau Mann, whose skin seemed to be "the pattern of her costume" and whose "tights was no longer a covering, it was herself" (NW:27-8). While such sentences seem to assert the conformity between Frau Mann's organic body and the cultural markers of her difference, immediately thereafter we find her in her dressing room where "she began removing the paint with the hurried technical felicity of an artist cleaning a palette. She looked at the Baron derisively. '*Wir setzen an dieser Stelle über den Fluss—*' she said." (NW:29). By juxtaposing the public "image" of Frau Mann to its ensuing destruction, Barnes's portrayal of Frau Mann challenges symbolical domination in that it makes visible her confinement to the role of symbolical "other" within the masculine logic of identity.

The best example of Barnes's contestation of dominant culture's "power of symbolic systems to imprint bodies and literally write them into a legible status" (Henstra 2000:135) is the portrait of Nikka, the black circus performer fighting the "bear in the *Cirque de Paris*" (NW:31). As a number of critics confirm, the tattoos covering his body present the same traces of symbolical domination that have marked Frau Mann's body. Indeed, critical consensus views the portrayal of this tattooed body as "a text of Western culture's historical projections and myths about race" (Marcus 1991:225). Unlike Frau Mann, Nikka is presented to us through O'Connor who by giving us a "description of the tattoos traces how the desire of the other is etched painfully across the surface of the body" (Henstra 2000:135). O'Connor's representation is duplicated by Nikka, whose performance for the "circus audience [...] recites all the symbolic designations of which his body is the nexus" (Henstra 2000:135). This multiplication of representational contexts foregrounds the distance between the image of Nikka as "a legible subject" (Henstra 2000:135) and his inconceivable identity. Far from being a simple illustration of dominant culture's construction of the "other," the fragmentary

inscriptions on his body transform him into a monstrous demonstration of discursive failure. For as Kaivola rightly points out, even "if the writing on Nikka's body suggest captivity and containment, it at the same time positions him beyond the bounds of Western culture" (1993:178). Within the western logic of identity, Nikka's true nature must remain unrepresentable precisely because his marked body has been transformed into a "symbolically other to the fictive rational self of universal, and so unmarked, species man, a coherent subject" (Haraway 1991:210).

5.1.4. The Nature-Culture Dualism in *Nightwood*

Although such feminist readings of Barnes's subversion of symbolical domination provide an expanded dimension to the novel's theme of authenticity and representation, they tend to overlook the fact that both Frau Mann and Nikka's "otherness" is accentuated through associations with animality and naturality. From an ecofeminist perspective, it is, of course, particularly interesting to note that Barnes contests this traditional naturalization of women and animalization of nonwhites by applying it to these imitators of master discourses. The naturality of Frau Mann's body, for instance, is indicated through numerous references to wood. She has "the tan bark in her walk," and "the flex of the calf, was as solid, specialized and as polished as oak" (NW:27).²⁰⁴ Also Nikka, the bear-wrestler, reflects the traditional association of the African body with animality. He is described as "crouching all over the arena without a stitch on, except an ill-concealed loin cloth all abulge as if with a deep sea catch" (NW:31). While his posture and nakedness seem to confirm this association, the ironic simile referring to the erotic animalization of the African body calls attention to processes of "symbolic domination in that it articulates a performative procedure ordinarily hidden under myths of universality, nature, origin" (Henstra 2000:136).

That Barnes's focus on the naturalization of women does not indicate, as Fleischer suggests, that in her "cosmology women are privileged with the more primitive existence" (1998:417), but that it constitutes a resistance to the imposition of concepts related to nature on the "other," can best be examined by shifting our attention to some general reflections on the circus. Earlier we noted that the circus world of falsifications allows Barnes to implicitly attack western culture's symbolical domination of the "other." Yet perhaps more crucial than determining how Barnes uses the circus to cast doubt on the naturalization of women and

²⁰⁴ As a matter of fact, throughout the novel women are associated with wood, and we will have to analyze, later on, how this naturalization of woman helps us to interpret the novel's title. That Nora's "weather-beaten grain of her face," should be compared to "that wood in work; the tree coming forward in her" (NW:78), or that Robin's

nonwhites is inquiring why she chose the circus to illustrate western culture's problematic relation to the "other." Considering the fact that in *Nightwood's* circus men are described to be "smelling weaker and the women stronger than their beasts" (NW:25), the answer an ecocritical reading would provide, is that the circus perfectly illustrates the dichotomous structures of western civilization's problematic relation to nature. Barnes's use of the circus has already been adumbrated by a number of critics. In explaining the dualism embodied by the circus, Deborah Parsons follows an argument developed by Paul Bouissac, who "defines the circus as a 'metacultural code' that 'seems to be at the same time both 'inside' and 'outside' culture'" (1998:270). According to Parsons, the circus seems to be reconfirming dualistic oppositions, between humans and animals, civilized and primitive, while at the same time it seems to "rearrange and revalue" such categories (1998:270). Robin Blyn is more convincing on the subversive aspects of the circus when she claims that this "spectacle of the grotesque involves a distancing of the object and a corresponding 'aestheticization' of it." She claims that what is being performed in the circus is "the naming of the frontier and the assurance that the wilderness, the outside, is now territory" (2000:136).

Contrary to Parsons and Blyn, I would argue that Barnes does not use the circus's performance of binary oppositions to merely "name the frontier," or to simply "rearrange" our conceptions of nature. Rather, by drawing attention to our cultural constructions of the natural or the bestial, Barnes attempts to undermine the very dualisms that prop up dominant discourse. The circus allows Barnes to show, for instance, how the exhibition of animals perfectly reflects western culture's Janus-faced subordination and idealization of the animal. Bonnie Scott Kime seems to come to a similar conclusion when she maintains that Barnes's descriptions of animals "suggests that we have always and only had nature as fabricated and deployed by culture, and recorded in the word." By using the circus as a "blurred middle ground between the bestial and the human," Barnes "insists further that nature does not stay conveniently separate or 'other' from culture, and that evolution has not safely or permanently delivered human beings to civilization" (1993:42). Indeed, behind *Nightwood's* numerous allusions to animals lurks a critique of western civilization's problematic relation to the nonhuman world that is directly linked to the nature-culture dualism.

Let me illustrate my point by looking at some of Barnes's reflections on animals. To begin with, it is important to stress that Barnes's representations of animals are intended to expose and challenge western civilization's construction of human supremacy. Barnes's attempts to indicate how the insistence on the disembodied soul and the human reasoning

body emits the odor of the fossil tree resin amber (NW:55), reflects the consistency with which the plant life of wood is used to naturalize women.

capacities have been used to define human nature in contradistinction to animals, range from vague allusions, such as "[t]he trees are better, and grass is better, and animals are all right and the birds in the air are fine. And everything we do is decent when the *mind* begins to forget—the design of life" (NW:151), to explicit attacks on dualistic conceptions of the natural world, as for instance "[s]ome throw the beast on the other side, with the stench of excrement, blood and flowers, [...]! Man makes his history with the one hand and 'holds it up' with the other" (NW:130).²⁰⁵ Furthermore, resistance to western culture's exploitation of animals and its refusal to acknowledge them the status of a sentient being, is at heart of a number of instances describing dying animals on battlefields and in slaughterhouses. Take, for instance, O'Connor's recollections of World War I. Most of them are dispersed with references to dead horses (NW:182), crying cows (NW:40), and remarks such as "the tragedy of the beast can be two legs more awful than man's" (NW:40). Finally, a variety of references to the skin or hide of the animal, insinuate that they have been subject to the same symbolical domination as women and nonwhites. One example illustrating Barnes's preoccupation about the way in which the skin or hide of the animal is used as a blank paper on which western culture inscribes its myths of human supremacy, is O'Connor's remorse to steal a book because it is "bound in calf—for I might steal the mind of Petronius, [...], but never the skin of a calf" (NW:150). Another example stressing the difference of the animal from human constructions of it, is O'Connor's tale about the cow. As he relates how he put his hand on the cow's hide, he says "her hide was running water under my hand." Accentuating the difference between her appearance—i.e. what western culture has projected upon the animal's skin—and her subcutaneous movements, O'Connor asserts: "and I thought, there are directions and speeds that no one has calculated, for believe it or not that cow had gone somewhere very fast that we didn't know of, and yet was still standing there" (NW:41).²⁰⁶

From such descriptions we may discern that animals in *Nightwood* do indeed problematize western culture's constructions of nature. Yet there remains another reason why Barnes's focus on animals deserves critical attention. Consider, for example, the following passage. Here animals are clearly linked to our lost connections to the natural world: "[a]nimals find their way about largely by the keenness of their nose,' said the doctor. 'We have lost ours in order not to be one of them, and what have we in its place? A tension in the spirit which is the contraction of freedom'" (NW:171). In light of what has been said so far,

²⁰⁵ Emphasis added.

²⁰⁶ There are, of course, arresting parallels between the various references to the skin of the circus performers and the skin or hide of animals. In all of these instances Barnes stresses the gap between what is visible and what must remain invisible. As we will see in the next chapter, the same image permits Barnes to render the portrayal of Robin more complex.

this excerpt can be interpreted to mean that this refusal to take into account our own 'human' nature is, according to Barnes, one of the main reasons for the *malaise* of modern life. Although rarely recognized in critical assessments of her work, the human interconnection with the natural world, and the animal in particular, is foundational to the novel's omnipresent sense of alienation. Specifically, I wish to suggest that Barnes's focus on western culture's exclusion of nature, animals, women and nonwhites dramatizes, on the one hand, the discursive failure to create an authentic picture of reality, while, on the other hand, it locates the root cause for this alienation in the dualistic subordination of everything that does not designate the disembodied identity of the European man. Indeed, further references to binary oppositions, such as the novel's complex theme of "the day and the night" and the way they "are related by their division" (NW:118), the oppositions of wood and civilization,²⁰⁷ woman and man, or the body-mind dualism underlying doctor O'Connor's juxtaposition of France to America (NW:123-5), reveal that Barnes shares with Durrell and Miller the belief that western culture's dichotomous conception of the world is integral to the crisis of modernity. After having located and complicated the similarities and divergences between Barnes and her masculine contemporaries, we may now turn to the question raised at the outset of this chapter. Namely, does Barnes's awareness of her own exclusion of the dominant discourse allow her to tackle modern culture's separation from nature by advocating a return to the body as the reminder of "human nature"?

5.1.5. Robin Vote's Body as Pastoral Space

Before answering the question raised above, let me quickly recapitulate the main points of my argument. One of Barnes's methods for showing the effect of symbolical domination is to draw attention to western culture's naturalization and animalization of women and nonwhites. At the same time, however, her diagnosis of the crisis of modernity corresponds very closely to Miller and Durrell's preoccupation about the nature-culture dualism. The core problem, therefore, is that although a reconnection to the nature we have denied would promise an antidote to the *malaise* of modern life, the fact that patriarchal

²⁰⁷ The novel's title, *Nightwood*, has often been interpreted as depicting that area which "has traditionally offered refuge to the displaced and outcast." As a result, Barnes's description of this realm is said to "mark the inversion and disruption of the daylight order" (Benstock 1986:427). From an ecocritical perspective, the title can also be interpreted as reflecting western civilization's distorted relation to nature and the obscured positions of those whose bodies have been marked as "other." That Barnes's use of the wood is a particularly vehement symbol of our problematic relation to nature is revealed by Robert Pogue Harrison's examination of forests. In his study, entitled *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, he maintains that it is western culture's uncanny experience of the forest which "first traumatized the relation between humanity and nature, indeed, that established the relation as a trauma" (1992:2-3).

culture has devalued both nature and women through symbolical affiliation renders any effort to reclaim nature counterproductive to her own liberation from symbolical domination. Trying to recuperate the female body in order to overcome western culture's problematic understanding of the world, therefore, would be to repeat the universalizing discourses of dominant culture. That Barnes resists what Bonnie Scott Kime has called the male modernist "heritage of women characters now famous for their primitive, unconscious, manifestations of nature" (1993:43) is, therefore, hardly surprising. To get to the heart of Barnes's reaction to the Modernist tendency toward locating a new Arcadia within the female body, I now turn to Robin Vote, who is at the center of the novel's battle over ideological images and patriarchal projections.

Almost all critical assessments of Robin Vote begin with a consideration of her extraordinary position in the novel. Unlike other protagonists, she is "absent, distanced from us as readers" (Kaivola 1993:175), "minimally verbal, more spoken about than speaking," (Gilmore 1994:616). Robin is not represented directly, rather she appears "through the impressions of other characters" (Plumb 1993:157). Indeed, on her body we find mapped the anxieties and hopes of the other characters. Readers interested in Barnes's problematization of history figure Robin as a projection screen "promising the possibility that each character can repair the wound left by his or her past" (Plumb 1993:157). Those who read *Nightwood* for its resistance to dominant discourse see in Robin "a trope for memory, myth, remembrance" of a reality that has been destroyed by patriarchal culture (Smith 1999:202). As a mirror of Nora, Felix, and Jenny's defects, she is said to be "a container for the repressed, instinctual, or pre-rational impulses of the other characters" (Carlston 1998:71). Although some critics note that she is "[a]ssociated with animals, plants, music, and inanimate objects" (Carlston 1998:71), the consistency with which these projections upon her body are associated with western culture's ideals and anxieties about nature is overseen.

While others have examined Robin as an embodiment of discursive disfigurement or as "a 'sign' of female difference" (Benstock 1986:258), I would like to suggest that the figure of Robin renders visible Nora and Felix's desire to project their pastoral ideals upon her body. The fact that in Nora and Felix's projections we find encapsulated two predominant landscape metaphors, that is, the "howling, disordered wilderness as opposed to benign and abundant pastoral paradise" (Westling 1996:36), suggests that in Robin we find Barnes's response to the Modernist use of female characters as mediators with nature.²⁰⁸ In keeping with Irigaray's previously discussed thesis about the female body, the following discussion will suggest that

Nora and Felix's desire to use Robin's body-as-place to heal their sense of self-estrangement is central to Barnes's pessimistic response to the crisis of modernity. Attention to Robin's failure or incapacity to be a place for these alienated figures and to her own placelessness can do much to explain the tragedy of their mutual misunderstanding.

Nowhere is the projection of pastoral ideals more apparent than in the introduction of Robin Vote. As Felix and doctor O'Connor step into her room, to arouse Robin from a state of syncope, we enter a picture that, a few sentences later, is likened to "a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau," evoking an image of her "[lying] in a jungle trapped in the drawing room" (NW:56).²⁰⁹ With the "door [...] standing open" as a frame, we see her lying "[o]n a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly oversung by the notes of unseen birds, which seemed to have been forgotten—left without the usual silencing cover, which, [...], are cast over their cages at night by good housewives" (NW:55). The primary issues that emerge from these introductory lines are all linked to the artificiality of the picture that is presented to us. The first issue bears on the construction of Robin as an object exhibited to the male gaze. Echoing the marked bodies of Frau Mann and Nikka, we note, in an ensuing paragraph, the contrast between her "flesh [which] was the texture of plant life," and that realm "beneath it [...] as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface" (NW:55-6). For Benstock "[t]his vulnerability under scrutiny by the human eye becomes a central trope in *Nightwood* and a feature of the narrative method, which operates by indirection, as though the characters were seen at a double remove" (1986:254). Indeed, the fact that the entire description of Robin relies on comparisons—perfectly exemplified by the accumulation of comparative phrases like "making her seem as if" (NW:55)—signals that Robin is re-presented to us through an assemblage of similes. The image of Robin renders visible both the process by which the observer makes a representation of her in order to control her, and the resulting abstraction of "human qualities from the character [...] insinuating that Robin has no palpable presence in the world" (Nimeiri 1993:106).

The second issue is the inaccuracy of cultural constructions of nature, and by implication, the falsity of the construction of Robin as a mediator with nature, or as the narrator suggests, as "a woman who is beast turning human" (NW:59). Consider the passage quoted above from an ecocritical perspective and it becomes clear that the "*potted* plants," "the *cut* flowers," the "*unseen*" and caged birds, and the entrapment of the "drawing room,"

²⁰⁸ In her analysis of these "two conflicting landscape metaphors," Louise Westling adds that "[i]t is no accident that this opposition also corresponds with two radically opposing views of the feminine in European culture, that of the pure virginal or maternal source of life and comfort, and that of the demonic witch" (1996:36).

²⁰⁹ See painting on page iv.

should make us suspicious of the narrator's ensuing affirmation that Robin promises to heal our lost connection to nature. Like a painting by Henri Rousseau (see page iv), the allusion to domesticated specimens of lush plants and exotic animals are used to create an impression of a jungle rather than a realistic reproduction of a tropical landscape. Indeed, what the paintings of Rousseau and the representational context of Robin share is that our cultural perception of nature is based on the recognition of preconceived concepts of the physical world rather than a true perception of it.²¹⁰ Hence, as the narrator concludes that "the set, [was] the property of an unseen *dompteur*, half lord, half promoter, over which one expects to hear the strains of an orchestra wood-wind render a serenade which will popularize wilderness" (NW:56), it becomes increasingly clear that under the scrutiny of the observer Robin's body is transformed into a pastoral space. Instead of representing her as a being closely attuned to the natural world, Barnes presents us a female character who mirrors our cultural ideals and fantasies about nature.

While the ensuing naturalization of Robin—indicated, for example, by the perfume of her body, which is compared to the "quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, [...], overcast with the odour of oil of amber" (NW:55)—surrounds Robin with an earthy atmosphere that stands in dramatic contrast to the novel's lack of natural settings; Barnes simultaneously underlines that Robin is entangled in a process of projection, visual consumption and representation. This is reinforced by the narrator's insistence that Robin is a "woman who presents herself to the spectator as a 'picture' forever arranged." The additional remark that her "movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience" (NW:59), designates the promise of a reconnection to a lost unity as Robin's principal quality. As a result, Felix, reproducing the trajectory of a number of Modernist characters suffering from alienation, is drawn to Robin because he believes that she is the link to his lost origins. This belief, in turn, is so compelling precisely because Robin provides a screen on which he can project his idealized visions of nature. His image of Robin, a conflation of primeval nature and nurturing mother, bespeaks his yearning for a pastoral paradise. Although Felix recognizes that he will never reach beyond the artificial image he has made of her, as "[t]hinking of her, visualizing her, was an extreme act of the will" (NW:65), he is determined to marry her.

That the appropriation of Robin's body-as-place is what Felix's desire is all about, is highlighted by the fact that immediately after this first encounter he confides to O'Connor that "he wished a son who would feel as he felt about the 'great past'" (NW:61).²¹¹ Indeed, his

²¹⁰ The point is that here we have a close linking to Dewey's previously discussed distinction between perception and recognition.

²¹¹ According to Casey, Irigaray's assumption that "there are bodies-as-places," is not only exemplified by the masculine desire to establish a sense of place through her body, but also by "the mother's body as a place for the

"effort to acquaint her with the destiny for which he had chosen her; that she might bear sons who would recognize and honour the past" (NW:69-70), lends a condescending quality to Felix's relation to Robin. As I have suggested earlier, Robin's incapacity to be a place for Felix's sense of self-estrangement, as well as her refusal to be a place in relation to her child, is the reason why their marriage breaks up. Significantly, it is her resistance to consider her womb as a place of creation that initiates the gradual dissolution of their marriage. During her pregnancy, we find Robin caught up in an anxiety that her body is reduced to a place for Felix and her future child while she is condemned to suffer from a sense of placelessness: "[s]trangely aware of some lost land in herself, she took to going out; wandering the countryside; to train travel, to other cities, alone and engrossed" (NW:70). Haunted by a sense of placelessness, we find Robin driven towards vagabondage. Hence, already before Robin gives birth to their son the outcome of this union is doomed. After violently announcing to Felix that she never wanted a child (NW:75), she disappears, only to reappear in the company of Nora Flood.

Before turning to Nora and Robin's first encounter, "brought wordlessly together at a circus with a lioness bowing in recognition" (Allen 1991:60), we should first give some consideration to Barnes's portrayal of Nora Flood. Nora is set up as the American Puritan, whose religious faith legitimized the colonization of the disordered wilderness:

She was known instantly as a Westerner. Looking at her, foreigners remembered stories they had heard of covered wagons; animals going down to drink; children's heads, just as far as the eyes, looking in fright out of small windows, where in the dark another race crouched in ambush; with heavy hems the women becoming large, flattening the fields where they walked; God so ponderous in their minds that they could stamp out the world with him in seven days. (NW:78)

Although Barnes makes explicit the indirection of this portrayal, suggesting that Nora is turned into a projection of myths about the frontier, Nora's Puritanism is important because it shadows forth her response to Robin. The "fright" evoked by the "race *crouched* in ambush," does not only rejoin the preceding performance of Nikka, it also implies that horror and recoil are the principal Puritan responses to the land and its obscured native inhabitants. Moreover, the reference to God points out that such a vision of the natural world relies on Christian ideology to encode and control the menacing wilderness. Unlike Felix's vision of pastoral bliss, the passage cited above imputes to Nora an understanding of nature as a dark and threatening space that must be domesticated.

Accordingly, Nora and Robin's first encounter is not inserted into a lush and exotic setting. Instead, they meet at the circus witnessing a performance of animals that is at once

prenatal child" (1998:323). In this respect, it is crucial to note that an additional example emphasizing that Felix hopes to find in Robin the antidote to his trauma of disrupted lineages, is the symmetry between the description

terrifying and tragic. Significantly, Nora remarks Robin during a moment faintly recalling the formless darkness of the frontier: "she looked at her suddenly because the animals, going around and around the ring, all but climbed over at that point" (NW:83). That the demonic qualities attributed to the scene are the most exemplary markers of difference between Nora and Felix's vision of the world becomes obvious in the following paragraph. There the threatening atmosphere is accentuated as lions, "making the air seem full of withheld strength" (NW:83), enter the circus ring. Upset by a lioness, turning "her furious great head with its yellow eyes afire" to Robin, with an expression "as if a river were falling behind impassable heat, her eyes flow[ing] in tears that never reached the surface" (NW:83), Nora takes Robin's hand and withdraws from this frightening spectacle.

Much has been written about Nora's attraction to Robin. Dianne Chisholm, for instance, maintains that "Robin signals a primeval animism that Nora had not known she was missing and that she tries obsessively to domesticate and possess" (1997:181). Similarly, Deborah Parsons claims that Nora is "fascinated by her 'primitive innocence' and affinity with a performing lioness but soon tries to tame and possess her" (1998:276). More important than the animality or primitivism Nora is supposed to see in Robin, however, is the similarity between Nora's attempts to "tame," "domesticate," and "possess" Robin and the Puritan vision of a formless wilderness that must be encoded and controlled. Jane Marcus, who discusses Nora's endorsement of patriarchal norms, is more attentive to Nora's Puritanism. Taking her cue from the nocturnal conversations between doctor O'Connor and Nora, Marcus asserts that "the rigidity of her American Protestant consciousness, her fear of the body, of drink, promiscuity, and dirt, make her love for Robin destructive, possessive, patriarchal in its insistence on monogamy and control of the beloved" (1991:234). While Marcus is of course correct in stating that "Nora's problem is the body/mind split" (1991:235) arising from her American background, her focus on the patriarchal structures of Nora's relationship with Robin neglects the wider implications of Nora's vision of the world.

Contrary to Marcus, I am arguing that an ecocritical reading of Nora reveals that it is not in her insistence on monogamy that we may detect Nora's confirmation of dominant discourses, but in the religious fervor underlying her attempts to control, or at least understand Robin's "wildness." Nora's endless questioning, by which she tries to overcome the "anonymity" (NW:84) that defines their relationship from its very beginnings, corresponds very closely to Tony Tanner's examination of the "rampant hermeneutic activity" characterizing the Puritan relation to the world (1987:19). Tanner explains that "[f]or the elect

of his mother Hedvig Volkbein lying on a bed in childbirth surrounded by heraldic images, and the representation of Robin, lying on a bed surrounded by 'signs' of nature.

and the saved, the scene of the world was composed entirely of signs and the signs were fixed and interpretable—stabilized, as it were, by God." This insistence on signs is a fundamental feature of the American colonizer's experience of the land. According to Tanner "it was particularly important for the American Puritans that the scene should be a sign and the sign should reveal the intention, and thus the attention, of God who thus, among other things, authorized and legitimated their 'errand into wilderness'" (1987:19). Barnes's wish to underline Nora's belief in the validity of the signs she detects while trying to read the world can be observed throughout the novel. We are told that "[b]y temperament Nora was an early Christian; she believed the word" (NW:79), that "[c]ynicism, laughter, the second husk into which the shucked man crawls, she seemed to know little or nothing about" (NW:81), and most important that "[t]he world and its history were to Nora like a ship in a bottle; she herself was outside and unidentified" (NW:82).

As the novel progresses Nora's Puritan confinement confirms itself in a continual dialogue (often enacted in the presence of O'Connor) with these different ways of reading Robin. Like the "hopelessly over-interpretable world," and the "continuous excess of significance and signification" Tanner describes (1987:19), Nora's desire to understand Robin is crushed by her accumulation of interpretations. As the chasm between Robin and Nora's interpretations of Robin becomes unbridgeable, she ends up "trying to discover not Robin any longer, but traces of Robin" (NW:92). Illustrating the way in which "Puritans were continually searching for signs of grace and damnation in themselves" (Tanner 1987:19), Nora's misery alternates between self-tormenting assertions such as "[t]here's something evil in me, that loves evil and degradation—purity's black backside!" (NW:192), and anxious recognitions such as "I'll never understand her—I'll always be miserable—just like this" (NW:125). Also Matthew O'Connor, whose critique of Nora's Puritanism has been referred to above, confirms that the root cause of Nora's misery is her desire to contain Robin's otherness within a larger pattern of signification. He accuses her of having "dressed the unknowable in the garments of the known" (NW:193), and of having "made her a legend and set before her head the Eternal Light" (NW:179). Finally, he points out the crux of their distorted relationship by asking Nora: "what did [Robin] have? Only your faith in her—then you took that faith away! You should have kept it always, seeing that it was a myth; no myth is safely broken" (NW:199).

To put it very simply, there is no place for Robin's difference within Nora's Puritan world. Yet that Nora should concede such a place is all that Robin desires. "Robin told only a little of her life, but she kept repeating in one way or another her wish for a home, as if she were afraid she would be lost again," says the narrator at the beginning of their relationship (NW:84). Even though Nora does not try to appropriate Robin's body-as-place for exploitative

ends, her Christian legacy and its inherent binary structures links her futile venture to imprison Robin in her preconceived patterns of signification to Felix's unsuccessful marriage. Frustrated by a sense of placelessness, we find Robin once again "[escape] into reckless vagrancy, finding homelessness more dignifying than [...] domesticity" (Chisholm 1997:183). That Nora's domestication is unbearable because it desires to encode and enclose her within the normative structures of Christian ideology, which Nora cannot let go, is confirmed by Nora's conclusion that "'Robin can go anywhere, do anything [...] because she forgets, and I nowhere, because I remember" (NW:215). A further example indicating Robin's resistance to Nora's continual establishment of patterns of signification is centered around the figure of the doll. While Nora sees in the doll a symbol that renders their relationship meaningful, "when a woman gives it to a woman," she tells O'Connor, "it is the life they cannot have, it is their child, sacred and profane" (NW:201), Robin reacts against her imposition of symbolical meaning by violently destroying the doll (NW:209).²¹²

5.1.6. 'The Ruin of Representation': O'Connor's Obscenity and Robin's Iconoclasm

What Nora and Felix's responses to Robin share is their recourse to a fixed system of symbolical or imagistic representation to explain her difference. Robin's failure to reconcile herself with the meanings imposed on her as well as her resulting restlessness suggest that Robin serves as a reminder of the powerlessness of dominant discourse to represent her difference. We have seen that the Miller persona's struggle to come to terms with his enigmatic wife led to a similar questioning of the wider implications of representational norms, such as dominant discourse's "demand for intelligibility, rigidity, and hegemony" (Olkowski 1999:25). Without blurring the real differences between Barnes and Miller, it seems to me that their approaches to the crisis of modernity are based on a similar conviction that the rigidity of dominant systems of representation renders impossible an authentic representation of reality. To elaborate on this suggestion, let us briefly return to Olkowski's study of "the hegemonic reign of representation" (1999:18). Recall that, according to Olkowski, systems of representation rely on the distinctions between "[i]dentity, similarity, analogy and opposition" (1999:186) to establish a fixed and hierarchical (i.e. phallogocentric) norm. "The effect of this dual system of classification," Olkowski alleges, "is to erase

²¹² During her marriage with Felix, we find Robin performing the same "iconoclastic" gesture of revolt. Whereas Felix observes her "standing in the center of the floor holding the child high in her hand as if she were about to dash it down, but eventually she brought it down gently" (NW:74); Nora is forced to watch how "[s]he picked up the doll and hurled it to the floor and put her foot on it, crushing her heel into it" (NW:209).

difference as a concept and as a reality and to subsume all difference under the one, the same, and the necessary" (1999:184-5).

Barnes's attempt to indicate this impossibility to acknowledge the difference of Robin within dominant systems of representation is expressed through doctor O'Connor. The advice he gives both to Nora and Felix is intended to make them aware that the problem resides in their insistence on a world that is fixed and knowable because expressible in representational terms, rather than in Robin. That a homogeneous system of representation can only reproduce the fixed norms of dominant culture and, therefore, must exclude the in-itself of difference is revealed by his reflections on the notion of cleanliness. When O'Connor opposes "cleanliness" as "a form of apprehension," to the assertion that "[d]estiny and history are untidy; we fear memory of that disorder. Robin did not" (*NW*:169-70), we may speculate that "cleanliness" designates the fixed standard of representational norms, while the reference to 'untidiness' and "disorder" designates the difference that only Robin dares to accept.

Significantly, this "disorder" is emphasized by Robin's unfixed and nondualistic status. Most of the descriptions of her stress the impossibility of representing her in dualistic terms. During Felix's first meeting with her, we are told that she embodies "the troubling structure of the born somnambule, who lives in two worlds—meet of child and desperado" (*NW*:56). Elsewhere, her prayers are denounced as "monstrous, because in it there was no margin left for damnation or forgiveness, for praise or for blame" (*NW*:72). O'Connor describes her as a being "outside the 'human type,'" and specifies that she is "a wild thing caught in a woman's skin" (*NW*:206). Even her sexual identification and the numerous allusions to her appearance—e.g. "a tall girl with the body of a boy" (*NW*:71)—insinuate that her difference must remain inaccessible within dualistic systems of representation. Similarly, her indeterminate character is accentuated by numerous references stressing that "she was an enigma," and "non-committal" (*NW*:69). In one of the sole instances granting us access to her thoughts, the narrator points out that during her nocturnal excursions

Robin walked in a formless meditation, [...], directing her steps toward the night life that was a known measure between Nora and the cafés. Her meditations, during this walk, were a part of the pleasure she expected to find when the walk came to an end. It was this exact distance that kept the two ends of her life—Nora and the cafés—from forming a monster with two heads. (*NW*:90)

Far from being a matter of erratic evasiveness, her constant negotiation of the formless realm in-between the two poles that structure her life is seen as the unique context within which she can disengage from dominant systems of signification. Indeed, only in this realm in-between she can live her own difference.

Because O'Connor knows that any attempt to represent Robin can only be based on concepts of sameness and similarity, thereby reducing her to a copy of a copy, he tells Nora

that "there is no direct way. The foetus of symmetry nourishes itself on cross purposes" (NW:141). Viewed in this light, much of Robin's enigmatic quality derives from the assumption that the "other," or in Robin's case "Woman has no single, stable place, but rather is multiple, indefinable, outside or beyond ordered systems of representation of thought" (Michel 1991:170-1). A good example of the "indefinable" status of Robin's difference is O'Connor's remark that Robin had a "sort of fluid blue under her skin, as if the hide of time had been stripped from her, and with it, all transactions with knowledge" (NW:191). If we recall that throughout the novel references to the body's surface are used to illustrate the processes by which people and animals are turned into fixed images, and that the divergence between this surface and the underlying in-itself of difference is highlighted by a fluid quality, we may conclude that fluidity and formlessness are principles of contestation. As we have seen, Miller incorporates a similar concept of fluidity and multiplicity to disorganize and destabilize the rigid binary structures of dominant discourse. Paradoxically then, although Barnes's approach to the question of the "other" and the inauthenticity produced by representational norms is clearly motivated by feminist concerns, Barnes and Miller's subversive practices are based on a similar desire to destabilize the dualistic structures of dominant discourse. Put differently, while Barnes rejects the appropriation of the female-body-as-place to heal the masculine *malaise* of modern life, she concurs with Miller and Durrell's conclusion that only a nondualistic perception of reality may yield a solution to the crisis of modernity.

Of particular interest, in this respect, is the fact that despite having ultimately quite different interests and aims, one finds arresting parallels between Barnes's portrayal of doctor O'Connor and the various subversive practices characterizing the Miller persona's verbal outbursts. That Barnes should use a male protagonist to express her striving after a destabilization of dominant discourse has confused a number of critics. Summarizing critical responses to the figure of Matthew O'Connor, Sarah Henstra states that he is often understood to be exemplifying one of the "parodic figures within works of early-feminist satire of male social authority" (2000:125). Henstra adequately points out the controversial aspects of such readings: "[r]econciling the project of a uniquely female narrative expression with Barnes's deployment of a particularly garrulous *male* speaker requires seeing Matthew as the vilified speaker of master discourses against which feminine discourse must assert itself in the text." She adds that "[a]s the parodic embodiment of masculine authority, Matthew must fail for the feminist text to succeed" (2000:127).

Like Henstra, I tend to see O'Connor as "a *positive* voice of critique in the text" (2000:127), rather than as an embodiment of male privilege. An acute indication of

O'Connor's positive role are his long-winded reflections on western civilization's dualistic understanding of the world. Whereas Robin's portrayal makes visible the inadequacy of representational norms, it is O'Connor who participates in the active destabilization and subversion of dominant discourse. As mentioned above, O'Connor incites Nora and Felix to reflect on the inaccuracy of their preconceived conceptions of Robin. "My voice cracked on the word "difference" (NW:134), O'Connor tells Nora and reminds us that reflections on fluidity and formlessness are transmitted during his ramblings. Validating the non-identical over the mastery of concepts that determine the coherence of identity, he implores Nora and Felix to give up their ideals by insisting that "[a] man is whole only when he takes into account his shadow as well as himself" (NW:171). At the same time, his well-documented portrayal as a cross-dresser can be interpreted to "expose and challenge the social and discursive limits on the construction of the self" (Henstra 2000:126). The often-cited passage of Nora's visit to his room perfectly illustrates that O'Connor, much like Robin, resists representation. As Nora enters O'Connor's room, momentarily taken aback "so incredible was the disorder that met her eyes" (NW:115), binary categories of gender begin to dissolve. The gendered coding of the objects that meet Nora's eyes, such as the "rusty pair of forceps, a broken scalpel, half a dozen odd instruments that she could not place," intermingled with "some twenty perfume bottles, almost empty, pomades, creams, rouges, powder boxes and puffs" (NW:116), as well as the affirmation that this room was "a cross between a *chambre à coucher* and a boxer's training camp" designate the nondualistic universe doctor O'Connor inhabits. The portrayal of "[t]he doctor's head, with its over-large black eyes, its full gun-metal cheeks and chin, [...] framed in the golden semi-circle of a wig" (NW:117) confirms this.

While doctor O'Connor's sexual orientations may be interpreted as an expression of Barnes's personal gender ambivalence, further equally characteristic markers of his nondualistic vision of the world, permit us to establish a more evident parallel between him and the Miller persona. In a comparison of these two figures, O'Connor's aforementioned insistence on the importance of the body and his comparison of Frenchmen with Americans to demonstrate that the latter deny corporeality, are bound to attract our attention (NW:131). Moreover, claims such as "[w]e were created that the earth might be made sensible to the inhuman taste; and love that the body might be so dear that even the earth should roar with it" (NW:122), insinuate that for O'Connor the re-evaluation of the human body promises to reconnect us to the earth. Besides, it is through O'Connor that the back-to-the-womb allegory enters *Nightwood*. Like Durrell and Miller's protagonists, he raves about "searching for a womb to crawl into" (NW:142-3); unlike them, however, he wishes to have been born with

"deep corn curls to my bum, with a womb as big as the king's kettle" (*NW*:132). Further details worth mentioning are O'Connor's definition of himself as a vagabond who "knows everything [...] because he's been everywhere at the wrong time and has now become anonymous" (*NW*:121), as well as numerous allusions to Hinduism.²¹³

The most striking similarity between O'Connor and the Miller persona, however, is his use of obscenity as a subversive strategy. As Dianne Chisholm has remarked with regard to O'Connor's conversations with Nora and Felix, "[h]is primary tactic of demystification is his shocking use of obscenity" (1997:177). Chisholm maintains that Barnes's use of obscenity contrasts D.H. Lawrence's vitalism. "Against Lawrence's phallic optimism," Chisholm writes, "Barnes's eroticism is grotesquely pessimistic: he guides his reader through dionysiac passages [...], whereas she riddles and shocks with excremental speech and unconsumable images" (1997:187). But while I believe that Chisholm's arguments about O'Connor's obscenity as a tactic of destabilization is correct, I tend to see Barnes's use of obscenity as a contestation of representational norms rather than an expression of revolt against Lawrence's "wholesome heterosexuality" (1997:186). Clearly, O'Connor's obscenity does not function as a defense of homosexuality, rather it is applied to disorganize and destabilize idealized and normative conceptions of the world. But even if this use of obscenity as a subversive strategy can be linked to the shock tactics applied by Miller, it is crucial to emphasize that O'Connor's obscene subversions of representational norms have a very limited effect. Felix, though "always troubled by obscenity," does not change his patterns of perception. He merely interprets O'Connor's obscenity as a sign of "melancholy" (*NW*:62). Similarly, Nora seems to be unaffected when O'Connor confronts her with obscene exclamations and "Sadean blasphemy" (Chisholm 1997:193).

Ultimately, his inability to desystematize Felix and Nora leads him to repeated assertions that the world must be accepted as it is, without demonizing or idealizing it. Just as Miller never ceases to stress that only acceptance will make room for difference, so O'Connor ends up telling Nora to "be still, now that you know what the world is about, knowing it's about nothing" (*NW*:177). That a conception of the world premised on acceptance can only become possible once western culture's norms have been violently destroyed, is emphasized by his shocking claim that if he could, he "would instigate Meat-Axe Day, and out of the goodness of my heart I would whack your head off along with a couple of others" (*NW*:184). We have come across similar apocalyptic visions of destruction in Miller's novels and have concluded that in Miller only a destruction of dominant conceptions of the world can lead to a

²¹³ Barnes's references to Hinduism (*NW*:144, 177-8) are less optimistic than Miller's belief in Zen Buddhism or Durrell's belief in Taoism. Or as O'Connor puts it: "[w]e look to the East for a wisdom that we shall not use"

renewal. Barnes seems to propose a similar, though decidedly more pessimistic, solution to the crisis of modernity. As we find O'Connor desperately exclaiming: "[n]ow that you have all heard what you wanted to hear, can't you let me loose now, let me go? I've not only lived my life for nothing, but I've told it for nothing" (NW:233), it becomes increasingly evident that O'Connor's attempts to destabilize normative patterns of perception will not be radical enough. His final remarks: "'Now,' he said, 'the end—mark my words—now *nothing, but wrath and weeping!*'" (NW:233), reconfirms that for Barnes the crisis of modernity is indeed incurable.

That both O'Connor's incapacity to disorganize the fixed representational norms of western culture and, on a more general level, Barnes's bleak vision of the crisis of modernity stand in contrast to Miller's approach to these issues, becomes undeniable as we approach the novel's ending. We have seen that at the end of their novels both Miller and Durrell express a certain hope of rebirth, which is grounded on a vision of the self and the natural world more closely attuned to each other. Where Miller envisions an urban pastoral described in a rich phenomenological style, Durrell's protagonist experiences nature through the female body in a Dionysian state of ecstasy. Similarly, *Nightwood* ends with Robin's return to the natural world with which, throughout the novel, she has been associated. Ostensibly set in a womblike natural realm, we observe Robin's immersion into a sheltering landscape:

Sometimes she slept in the woods; the silence that she had caused by her coming was broken again by insect and bird flowing back over her intrusion, which was forgotten in her fixed stillness, obliterating her as a drop of water is made anonymous by the pond into which it has fallen. (NW:136)

Although her penetration into this gendered landscape suggests that she becomes one with nature, the novel's final scene denies the optimistic connotations of this description.

As the novel's famous final scene so violently exhibits, in Barnes's novel the reconnection with original matter is not based on a vision of chaos as the beginning of a new order. Quite to the contrary, the chaos into which Robin leads us is less encouraging than it is nihilistic. At the beginning of this chapter it was noted that the reason for Barnes's pessimistic outlook may be explained by her feminine perspective. The impossibility to replace traditional pastoral retreats with the female body as an alternative pastoral space suggests that, for women writers of the Modernist era, the crisis of modernity cannot be solved by a return to nature or the body *qua* nature. As we have seen, the traditional naturalization and animalization of women and nonwhites complicates their approach insofar as questions of authenticity involve a painful liberation of their colonized bodies. Given the fact that a reappropriation of the female body as a natural organism would have to be preceded by a

(NW:129).

liberation from symbolical domination, which itself has produced the traditional association of femininity with naturality, it seems evident that from a feminine perspective a simple destruction of representational norms will not suffice to overcome the Modernist preoccupation with the nature-culture divide. However, even if Barnes's destruction of dominant discourse cannot re-evaluate a lost connection to nature, it may at least try to reclaim the colonized female body by creating what Olkowski has called the "ruin of representation."

Let me illustrate my point by looking at the novel's ending. To begin with, it is of paramount importance to stress that, narratively speaking, the last chapter of *Nightwood* departs radically from the rest of the novel. As Carlston has observed "[i]n 'The Possessed' Barnes comes as close to a mimetic style as she ever will, allowing herself only three modest similes and describing the final encounter between Nora, Robin, and the dog in comparatively declarative sentences" (1998:79). Gerstenberger, likewise, points out that "[n]ot only is there no speech in the concluding pages of *Nightwood*, no questions or answers, the characters themselves are removed from the realm of normative narrative expectations of subjective consciousness and cultural being" (1993:39). Yet, even though the last chapter is arranged as a conspicuous endorsement of representational norms—hereby implying that the rhetorical distress at the heart of the text's preceding failures to represent Robin has been healed—we must be careful not to simplify the subject matter. From an analogous point of view, Singer argues that,

[t]he sudden apparent revision to a literal narrative in the final chapter is [...] belied by the metaphoric resonance of its imagery, teasing a fairly conventional metaphoric knowledge in its evocation of already contextualized figures; the literal 'meet' of dog and woman here implies a fuller articulation of the metaphor of the 'beast turning human' and unexpectedly realizes the doctor's earlier prophetic pronouncement upon the fate binding Nora and Robin [...]. (1984:83)²¹⁴

In other words, not only the unexpected inversion of narrative technique, but also the conspicuous reappearance of images should caution the reader.

As Nora "plunge[s] into the jamb of the chapel door" (NW:237), we encounter once again a setting stylized as an image. Standing in front of an altar, decorated with the image of a Madonna, as well as "flowers and toys," we observe Robin in a "pose, startled and broken" (NW:237). In a comparison with previously analyzed representations we note that Barnes's method of indirection resurfaces here in the form of these fixed images. Indeed, the iconographic context of the chapel draws attention to the fact that reality in *Nightwood*, even when it is described in mimetic terms, is at best a simulacrum. The indirection of this representation is accentuated as "Robin and the dog become mirror images of each other"

(Fleischer 1998:426). As a matter of fact, Robin's mimetic imitation of the dog does not only bewilder the reader but also the dog: "[t]he dog quivering in every muscle, sprang back, his lips drawn, his tongue a stiff curving terror in his mouth; moved backward, back, as she came on, whimpering too now" (*NW*:238). Although, the novel's ending has often been interpreted as a confirmation of Robin's "beast/woman embrace" (Blyn 2000:153), I would argue that the opposite is true. The fact that Robin agrees to actively participate in an act of mimetic subjection seems to suggest that the novel's persistent allusions to Robin's closeness to animals is belied by this terrifying spectacle.

As Robin for the first time in the novel becomes "representable" in terms of normative concepts—such as identity, similarity, analogy and opposition—we witness an utterly distorted world of representation. Or as Carlston puts it, "[a]s it approaches mimesis, the text goes down, like Robin, not into semiotic bliss but into animalism and then silence" (1998:79). Instead of an authentic representation of reality the novel's ending confronts us with the ruin of representation. "When images become monstrous," Olkowski reminds us, "then something is happening that cannot be reduced to organic representation" (1999:70). Bearing in mind that Robin's destruction of the doll was interpreted by doctor O'Connor as her "only weapon" left to fight Nora's "fearful eye that would make her a target forever" (*NW*:209), we might go so far as to claim that her monstrous imitation of the dog is motivated by the same iconoclastic desire to liberate herself from symbolical domination. While Miller and Durrell's destruction of systems of representation are linked to a hope of rebirth, Djuna Barnes's attempts to undermine symbolical domination leads us to an apocalyptic confirmation that Robin's difference must either remain inaccessible or become part of a system of signification in which the body of the "other" is turned into a copy of a copy of a copy.

5.2. Harlem and Primitivism

I should like now to demonstrate how far the Modernist endeavor to replace the pastoral tradition with new quests for origin and a more natural way of life has affected another group of people traditionally associated with naturality and animality. For many "white" Modernist writers not the female but the African body provided a perfect screen upon which to project their desires for a more authentic existence. Robert Bone has remarked on the fascination African people exerted on the Modernist imagination. "Here," he points out, "was a primitive, unspoiled people whose natural spontaneity had not been crushed by the

²¹⁴ Singer refers to O'Connor's statement that "Nora will leave that girl some day; but though those two are buried at opposite ends of the earth, one dog will find them both" (*NW*:153).

forces of modern industrialism" (1975:127). Djuna Barnes's portrayal of Nikka, the circus performer, has demonstrated how in dominant discourse both "dark-skinned people and women are inevitably close to animals, associated with matter, body, and ultimately the degradation of undifferentiated merging with nature" (Westling 1996:151). This optical light-dark dualism, in which "white is a marker of civilization and mind" (Westling 1996:150) and black is a marker of nature and body, can be seen to present an accentuated version of the symbolical domination against which Barnes struggled. As Haraway reminds us "[c]olored women are often so closely held by the category *animal* that they can barely function as mediators in texts produced within white culture" (Haraway, quoted in Westling 1996:151).

Many "white" Modernists were attracted to "the traditional romantic conception of blacks as cultural primitives and exotics" (DeJongh 1990:10) precisely because this intensified association with naturality provided a more evocative arena for their attempts to overcome alienation. Indeed, already among the earliest artistic revolts against the *malaise* of modern life, "blacks found, and not always to their pleasure, that they had become for white bohemian and avant-garde artists a symbol of freedom from restraint, a source of energy and sensuality" (Cooley 1987:52). The immense popularity of primitivism during the first decades of the twentieth century attests to the fact that the traditional naturalization and animalization of the African "other" is at the heart of the Modernist fascination for these "exotic" people from communities defined as "black." In Modernism a different view of the nature-culture dualism is called for, and the "primitive" perfectly embodies the unspoiled child of nature. In her study on primitivism, Marianna Torgovnick pursues the thesis that the "primitivist discourse, [is] a discourse fundamental to the Western sense of self and Other." (1990:8). Hence, she goes on to observe that western culture's dualistic conception of the world has used and continues to use the primitive to "[tell] us what we want it to tell us" (1990:9). As a structural other, primitives "exist for us in a cherished series of dichotomies: by turns gentle, in tune with nature, paradisaical, ideal—or violent, in need of control" (1990:3).

It is usually assumed that for Modernists seeking to liberate themselves from false cultural values the primitive promised to lead us to "our untamed selves, our id forces—libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous. Primitives are mystics, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies" (Torgovnick 1990:8). Such comments express a view of Modernism as an era "in which many whites, Freudening themselves from their Puritan inhibitions enviously projected upon blacks the image of the primitive untroubled by the inhibitions of society" (Turner 1987:16). Although it is undeniable that "the idiom 'going primitive' is in fact congruent in many ways to the idiom 'getting physical'" (Torgovnick 1990:228), for the purposes of the ecocritical argument here presented the definition of primitivism needs to be

expanded beyond its use as an expression of sexual liberation. That is why Torgovnick's study is important when she shows that:

[a] fundamental basis of Western interest in the primitive depends on archaic and evolutionist meanings of the word as the 'original' or 'natural' state of things. Within these meanings, explorations or representations of the primitive could be seen as explorations of origins and the marking of patterns that could reveal the truth about human nature." (1990:46)

In this sense, the motivation underlying the Modernist fascination for primitivism seems to be the wish for a return to a "premodern" state of harmony. Like the previously analyzed naturalization of the female body, primitivist descriptions of the "exotic other" seem to exploit the African body as a pastoral space upon which Modernists could project their need of an antithesis to culture that could not be located in nature anymore. This seems to be Torgovnick's conclusion when she proposes that Lukacs's notion of "transcendental homelessness" allows recognition of the Modernist "desires to go home to something simpler, more comfortable, less urban and chafing" (1990:192). As "a form of absolute (though) reversible alienation from the self, from society, and (the source of all other alienations) from 'immanent totality'" (1990:227), transcendental homelessness, suggests that the ultimate force of primitivism resides in its promise to overcome the pathologies of modernity.

From an analogous point of view Buell has argued that "Negritude can be thought of as a pastoral mode because it evokes a traditional, holistic, nonmetropolitan, nature-attuned myth of Africanity in reaction to and critique of a more urbanized 'artificial' European order" (1995:64). It is thus hardly surprising that both Miller and Durrell's novels feature primitivist versions of African women. The most striking example is Durrell's portrayal of Miss Smith, who studies the work of Chaucer at the school where Lawrence Lucifer is employed as a secretary. To emphasize his conscious use of a primitivist stereotype, Durrell establishes a direct link between the sense of alienation and the enthrallment for Miss Smith's exotic aura. "Whenever I become too conscious of [...] this suburban world," Lucifer tells us, he enters the room whose "solitary occupant [is] an inky personality which belongs purely to the world of the image. A negress. Miss Smith" (*BB*:122). This passage mirrors not only a pastoral yearning for the "primitive" as a reminder of our lost origins, it additionally brings to light the literary constructedness of the 'inky personality' of Miss Smith. As evidence of Durrell's ambivalent use of primitivism we can note the importance he places on the impossibility to represent Miss Smith: "[t]ry to make her plausible and you will find yourself mixing her in a stew of images, torn limb from limb from the mythologies of Asia. She is my one connection with the lost worlds" (*BB*:122). However, even if Durrell uses this primitivist portrayal in a radical and subversive way, we cannot deny that Miss Smith merely functions as a symbolical "other." "You may think you are looking at her, looking at the idea of her," Lucifer admits,

"but really, seeking under her cheap European dress, you are looking at her fertility" (*BB*:124).²¹⁵ Similarly, the Negress we find depicted in *Tropic of Cancer* basically operates as an object of desire. Take Miller's portrayal of the "queen of the harem." "You had only to look at her," the narrator insists, "to get an erection. Her eyes seemed to be swimming in sperm" (*TCN*:234).²¹⁶

From these reflections on primitivism the question arises, once again, whether an African American response to the trauma of modernity can accommodate the idea of reappropriating the human body as a valid solution to overcome western culture's denial of nature and its resulting pathologies. Given the fact that within Euro-American literary history the "Africanist other" has been exploited without restraint as a "fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire" (Morrison 1992:38), it would seem that African American writers must first attempt to break out of symbolical domination before they can tackle the problem of modernity. In her study of literary constructions of the "Africanist other," Toni Morrison confirms this when she discredits the rhetoric of "Africanism," or "the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify," as a "disabling virus within literary discourse" (1992:6-7). Especially pertinent for a reading of the African American artist's response to modernity is her statement that as "a black writer, [she is] struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority [and] cultural hegemony" (1992:x). With Morrison's commentary on the dilemma faced by African American writers in mind we may now turn to the Harlem Renaissance.

5.2.1. The Harlem Renaissance and Claude McKay

The artistic movement of the 1920s, known today as the "Harlem Renaissance," is as unique for African American literature as it is for Modernism. As a response to the cultural atmosphere of modernity it rearticulated some Modernist concerns while it also tried to develop a specific "theory of art from the perspective of black Americans" (Turner 1987:10). In order to sort out the conflicting claims about this simultaneous confirmation and vehement

²¹⁵ In spite of Durrell's accommodationist use of Miss Smith's otherness his use of this exotic stereotype clearly constitutes a challenge to dominant versions of primitivism. His resistance to primitivism, as a new form of the pastoral tradition, is confirmed by the fact that not Miss Smith, but Morgan the Welshman is the novel's true primitive. Consider, for instance, Morgan's relation to "[t]he beautiful mutilations and barbarities of Wales, the valleys strung with sores, the religion. And to the seaboard of his world the eternal beating of the Atlantic, the white races. Morgan's inheritance is a queer barbarity" (*BB*:57).

²¹⁶ In Miller's defense we might add that in *Tropic of Capricorn*, Miller incorporates a more subtle portrayal of an African American woman. As a matter of fact, he defends his love affair with her against Kronska's aggressive statements about "the 'nigger wench,' as he called Valeska" (*TCP*:86).

contestation of "white" Modernist preoccupations, we should recall the arguments Houston Baker makes. In *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, he suggests that the hegemonic aesthetic movements of High Modernism should not be confounded with these "earliest attempts by Afro-American artists and intellectuals to define themselves in 'modern' terms" (1987:9). Baker describes the "white" Modernist contestations of civilization as manifestations of "an assumed supremacy of boorishly racist, indisputably sexist, and unbelievably wealthy Anglo-Saxon males," and reminds us that for African Americans "who are assumed [...] to be without art, literature, civilization," the response to the crisis of modernity cannot be the same. To get to the heart of these divergent responses to modernity Baker focuses on the fact that "[w]hat exists on the antecedent side of black modernity is not a line of stodgy, querulous, and resistant premoderns but a universe of enslavement" (1987:101). In sum, the African American experience of modernity is not associated with a traumatic loss of a "premodern" sense of wholeness but with a liberation from subordination.

In the critical assessment of the Harlem Renaissance two great topics emerge. One, of course, is the "effort on the part of black artists to interpret black life on its own terms" (Cooley 1987:53). This desire to develop an African American aesthetic was expected to additionally yield a new affirmation of an ethnic identity. The second topic, therefore, is intricately related with the "idea of re-making racial being and challenging accepted views of the Negro race in the history, culture, and mythology of the West" (DeJongh 1990:215). As Baker points out, "an outpouring of writing, music, and social criticism" (1987:9) formed a counterpoint to the dominant discourse's constructions of the "Africanist other." It is difficult to overestimate the significance of this "declaration of freedom from the white myths" (Cooley 1987:53), yet it is equally important to stress that some of these attempts to reclaim a strong ethnic identity stand in a problematic relation to the aforementioned hegemonic use of primitivism. As Bone has made clear, "[s]ome black authors embraced the new [exotic-primitive] stereotype, others tried to fend it off, or adapt it to their own ends, but all succumbed in one way or another to its seductive power" (1975:125). As a matter of fact, a number of Harlem Renaissance works, express the belief that "[a] return to [...] the authentic values of Africa would insure a repossession of black pride" (Smith 1986:46). Such attempts to reconnect to Africa as a lost place of origin are often "described in idealized, pastoral, or sentimental terms" (McCabe 1997:485). Hence I propose that an ecocritical reading of such texts may throw new light on the complex structures of this African American type of primitivism.

With regard to the theme of primitivism, Claude McKay, is perhaps one of the most controversial figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Born in Jamaica, where he published two

volumes of poetry before he left for the United States in 1912, McKay became a central figure of the Harlem Renaissance, despite his West Indian background.²¹⁷ The fetishization of Harlem as a lush, tropical jungle, as we find it depicted in *Home to Harlem* (1928), or the primitivist elements of *Banjo: A Story without a Plot* (1929), have provoked a vast array of diametrically opposed reactions. Many critics have denounced McKay's exotic descriptions of the lower class African American community as a confirmation of racial stereotypes that would consequently impair the cultural emancipation of African Americans. This point of view is exemplified by W.E.B. DuBois's response. His famous article published in *The Crisis*, called McKay's portrayal of the Harlem subculture "nauseat[ing]" (1928:202). Other critical responses, however, have emphasized that McKay's primitivist discourse evolves around a significant critique of western civilization. From this point of view, *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* glorify the vitality and earthbound self-expression of its picaresque folk heroes in order to criticize the mechanization of western society. Critics representing this group believe that these novels' "racial settings [...] are positive and racially affirming" (Barkesdale 1972:339). While McKay's opposition of African American vitality and western sterility may be compared to the "white" Modernists' endeavors to overcome the crisis of modernity, one must be careful not to simplify this issue. It seems to me that to read McKay's novels as a naïve adaptation of primitivist stereotypes would be to miss their dialectical subtlety. Evaluation of McKay's use of primitivism therefore requires close analysis of the texts' response to the dominant ideology.

Although a detailed summary of *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* may not be pertinent here, a brief look at the novels' general outlines may help us to define the distinctions and similarities between Claude McKay's approach to modernity and the one advocated by mainstream authors such as Miller and Durrell. *Home to Harlem* describes the exotic urban life of Harlem as it is experienced by Jake Brown. Jake's picaresque adventures take us from his desertion from the army during World War I to his social and sensual journeys through Harlem. The setting of *Banjo*, though equally exotic, is located in the harbor of Marseilles. The formless plot, indicated by the novel's subtitle, is "concerned with the adventures of Negro vagabonds on the Marseilles waterfront" (Coleman 1998:140). While some of the previous novel's protagonists reappear, the main character is a picaresque figure called Banjo.

²¹⁷ While some critics claim that McKay has "become synonymous with the Harlem Renaissance and the development of Afro-American literature in the early twentieth century" (McKay 1987:129), others insist that we must "take McKay for what he really was in life: a colonial writer" (Chauhan 1990:69). Although I think it is important to highlight his West Indian background, I do not consider these two approaches to be mutually exclusive.

McKay, who was an expatriate, like all of the writers examined so far, wrote both novels in France. Like Miller and Durrell, McKay was an open admirer of D.H. Lawrence. Some of the values characterizing McKay's portrayal of pan-African subcultures—i.e. the "vitality, the pursuit of pleasure, self-expression, and brotherhood" (Greenberg 1981:248)—indicate a debt to Lawrence. In his autobiography *A Long Way from Home* (1937), McKay defines the various Modernist movements as important to his own development. But although he circumscribes the crisis of modernity as an outcome of "the great machine age, inventions upon inventions bringing a thousand forces and objectives into life. Language is loosening and breaking up" (LW:20), he repeatedly stresses that he did not identify himself with the community of white expatriates. "[T]heir problems were not exactly my problems," he writes and adds that the majority of expatriates "were all-white with problems in white which were rather different from problems in black" (LW:243). Accordingly, he points out that his expatriate existence may have forced him to respond to the same somatic and rhetorical problems of modernity, nevertheless he states: "[c]olor-consciousness was the fundamental of my restlessness" (LW:245). This implies that even if in his critique of "the West's obsession with money and respectability, the increased standardization of man and mechanization of society as well as the cruelty, [...] and racism that thrive beneath the surface of 'enlightened' democracies" (Greenberg 1981:247) we may detect a similar discontent with modernity, we must not minimize the importance of McKay's specifically West Indian or African American concerns.

What is striking for my purposes about McKay's response to modernity is his contestation of pastoralism and the resulting promotion of lived bodily experience as both an antidote to alienation and a basis for a new ethnic identity. Yet what makes McKay different from white Modernists is that—for reasons having to do with the symbolical domination of the "Africanist other"—his quest for a new authenticity in his cultural self-expression is grounded on an adaptation of the primitivist discourse to his own racially affirmative ends. The theme of primitivism in McKay's novels is centered around their picaresque heroes, Jake and Banjo. An analysis of these picaresque protagonists will show that in his attempt to celebrate the vitality of African Americans McKay struggled with the problems emerging from the use of the dominant primitivist discourse. However, McKay was aware of the dangers such an appropriation of the dominant discourse represents; an awareness that becomes obvious in the character of Ray, the Haitian intellectual who plays an important role in both novels. What I am attempting to show is that Ray, the artist figure reflecting McKay's own West Indian background, perfectly mirrors the challenges that a reconfiguration of the dominant primitivist discourse imply. Ray's reflections on his sense of alienation, his attention

to the pastoral tradition, and his views on art emphasize McKay's revisionist treatment of these themes. In order to delineate to what extent McKay tried to achieve a subversive reconfiguration of primitivism, I will first focus on Ray. The second part of this chapter on McKay will be centered on Jake and Banjo. Their immediate physical interaction with their specifically urban environments raise questions of place-experience, and propose a powerful alternative to Ray's search for authenticity.

5.2.2. Pastoralism and Ray's Quest for a New Artistic Expression

McKay introduces Ray in the chapter "The Railroad" of *Home to Harlem*, where he and Jake work in a dining car. In his first conversation with Jake, Ray feels the urge to correct Jake's opinion that "Africa was jungle, and African bush niggers, cannibals. And West Indians were monkey-chasers" (*HH*:134). In other words, from the very beginning we find Ray engaged in an attempt to undermine Jake's biased point of view, which reduces Africa to the archetypal locus of the primitive. Ray seeks to undo this static image of the primitive by presenting glorious accounts of the revolutionary history of Haiti and Africa. Hence Jake "learned that the universal spirit of the French Revolution had reached and lifted up the slaves far away in that remote island; that Black Hayti's independence was more dramatic and picturesque than the United States' independence" (*HH*:131). The purpose of this brief reference to "the universal spirit of the French Revolution" is to disrupt the dualistic structures which have reduced the primitive "other" to a utopian fantasy, hereby denying the histories of nonwestern societies. In terms of the result of Ray's didactic endeavors we read that "Jake felt like one passing through a dream, vivid in rich, varied colors. It was a revelation beautiful in his mind. That brief account of an island of savage black people, who fought for collective liberty and was struggling to create a culture of their own. A romance of his race" (*HH*:134). Closer examination of this and the preceding passage reveals that the language, which summarizes Ray's accounts and Jake's response, is governed by a romantic subtext and thus signals the use of the conventional primitivist mode of representation. Indeed, describing Haiti's history as "more dramatic and picturesque," or a "romance of his race," suggests that Ray's attempts fail to efface the binary structures of primitivism. Jake's response is reduced to a "dream," an intellectual construct "beautiful in his mind" only, rather than an acknowledgement of Haiti's history in its own cultural context. Tracy McCabe's study of the multiple structures of primitivism in *Home to Harlem*, draws attention to Ray's rhetoric. She interprets "Ray's revisionist histories of Africa and Haiti," as an effort to "counter racist perceptions by celebrating the nobility and drama of African and Haitian history," but

emphasizes that "they embody a romantic and idealizing mode of primitivism that seeks to refute previous depictions of blackness as savage" (1997:485).

Ray's ambiguous use of primitivism reinforces the necessity to have a closer look at the various reminiscences of his Caribbean homeland. While having trouble falling asleep, Ray tries to arouse images of Haiti:

He flung himself, across void and water, back home. Home thoughts, if you can make them soft and sweet and misty-beautiful enough, can sometimes snare sleep. There was the quiet, chalky-dusty street and, jutting out over it, the front of the house that he had lived in. The high staircase built on the outside, and pots of begonias, and ferns on the landing....

All the flowering things he loved, red and white and pink hibiscus, mimosas, rhododendrons, a thousand glowing creepers, climbing and spilling their vivid petals everywhere, and bright-buzzing humming-birds and butterflies. All the tropic-warm lilies and roses. Giddy-high erect thatch palms, [...] majestic cotton trees, stately bamboos creating a green grandeur in the heart of space....

Sleep remained cold and distant. (*HH*:152-3)

Ray's reverie of "the green grandeur in the heart of space," is deeply anchored in the pastoral tradition. Yet McKay, like Miller and Durrell, casts doubt on the authenticity of the pastoral idealization of nature. His preoccupation with the artificial nature of the pastoral is accentuated in the commanding remark that "if you can make" these representations "misty-beautiful enough" they will have their intended effect. As a matter of fact, the ensuing images perfectly exemplify the poetic construction of an idealized nature. Beginning his pastoral vision with 'potted begonias and ferns,' Ray's imagination soon gives way to images of lush tropical vegetation that threaten to overgrow the initial memory of the dusty road and the parental home. Eventually, the descriptions culminate in metaphors, such as "majestic cotton trees" and "stately bamboos," which seem to mirror the rhetoric of the pathetic fallacy.

In view of the fact, that this idealization of Haiti does not help Ray to fall asleep, the pastoral apparently fails to offer what it promises. The narrative context suggests that Ray's pastoral construction relies on a dichotomy, which in spite of his initial effort to fling "himself across void and water," he cannot overcome. Accordingly, we may speculate whether Ray, in spite of his conscious endeavor to correct false images of primitive Africa, struggles with the task of elaborating an alternative access to his cultural heritage. The resulting discrepancy offers a promising approach to Ray's sense of alienation. McCabe argues that in stark contrast to his historical accounts of Haiti, "Ray at times imagines Africa and Haiti as 'savage' himself" (1997:489). However, whereas McCabe interprets such passages as, "I don't know what I'll do with my little education. I wonder sometimes if I could get rid of it and go and lose myself in some savage culture in the jungles of Africa. I am a misfit" (*HH*:274), as a "return of the repressed primitivist dream" (1997:490); I propose to analyze it against the background of Ray's preoccupation with pastoralism. In a previous chapter we have noted that for Modernist writers, like Durrell and Miller, the pastoral presents a utopian fantasy, which

self-estranged protagonists tend to reinvigorate whenever they want to counter the repressions of civilization. In like manner, Ray tries to find solace in pastoral descriptions of Haiti and Africa. Nevertheless, he is ultimately aware of the pastoral's artificial nature. His conclusion that he is a "misfit" alludes to his difficulties to adopt the pastoral tradition without restraint.

As a matter of fact, Ray's wish to tackle his sense of alienation with pastoral fantasies, can be observed in several other instances. The transformation of Haiti into a pastoral idyll is elaborated in his remark that one day "he would escape from the clutches of that magnificent monster of civilization and retire behind the natural defenses of his island, where the steam-roller of progress could not reach him" (*HH*:155). Significantly, this oasis of pastoral felicity is juxtaposed with the opening of the chapter that introduces Ray. The setting, which in part produces Ray's sense of alienation, is described as follows: "[o]ver the heart of the vast gray Pennsylvania country the huge black animal snorted and roared, with sounding rods and couplings, pulling a long chain of dull-brown boxes packed with people and things, trailing on the blue-cold air its white masses of breath" (*HH*:123). We have observed similar personified descriptions of trains, which clearly epitomize progress, in Miller and Durrell's attempts to denounce modern civilization's belief in industrial progress. Considering the fact that Ray's pastoral visions are evoked to render life in this train more bearable, McKay's description of the train seems to be tantamount to Leo Marx's "machine in the garden." Recall that Marx has theorized that the sudden intrusion of technology into a natural environment "causes the instantaneous clash of opposed states of mind: a strong urge to believe in the rural myth along with an awareness of industrialization as a counterforce to the myth" (1967:229). As the train serves as a frame of reference for Ray's meditation on his sense of alienation, we may ask ourselves whether this clash between his pastoral dreams and the industrial surrounding raises questions on the futility of Ray's search for wholeness in a preindustrial utopia. A further point worth stressing is that McKay seems to contrast the very animated description of the train, 'snorting and roaring like an animal,' to the formalized and lifeless images of the tropical island.

In keeping with the Modernist critique of pastoralism, McKay's thematization of the pastoral tradition draws attention to its problematic structure. In addition to highlighting the inaccuracy of pastoral representations of Haiti, he seems to imply that pastoral idealizations have little to offer to Ray's search of a re-evaluation of his ethnic identity. The notion of the pastoral's artificiality is especially noteworthy with regard to Ray's drug-induced visions. As the ensuing excerpt shows, it is only under the influence of drugs that Ray's pastoral desires find fulfillment. After his first attempt to regenerate images of his home failed to produce the soporific effects he was looking for, Ray takes drugs. As a result he returns to the same

pastoral setting of Haiti: "[i]mmmediately he was back home again. His father's house was a vast forest full of blooming hibiscus and mimosas and giant evergreen trees." His drug-induced dream, not only conjures up an exotic pastoral landscape, it also turns to erotic imagery as he metamorphoses into a "gay humming-bird, fluttering and darting his long needle beak into the heart of a bell-flower" (*HH*:157). Eventually, his dream becomes openly erotic as he is transformed into a "young shining chief in a marble palace," with "slim, naked negresses dancing for his pleasure" (*HH*:157-8). This sudden turn to erotic imagery which culminates in the conclusion that "[t]aboos and terrors and penalties were transformed into new pagan delights" (*HH*:158) elucidates a further aspect of Ray's sense of alienation: the body-mind dualism. The Modernist awareness that the Cartesian separation of body and mind can be linked to western culture's dualistic conception of nature should be kept in mind as an explanatory background for McKay's portrayal of Ray. For McKay—like Durrell, Miller and Barnes—associates the repression of vital bodily instincts with modern culture's dualistic relation to the natural world.

That Ray is subject to this denial of his body and subsequently wishes to find reassurance in pastoral fantasies becomes explicit when Jake and Ray visit a brothel in Philadelphia. Ray, though surprised by the decency of the "interior," soon feels alienated. Unable to "fall naturally into its rhythm" (*HH*:194) as Jake does, he prefers to indulge in the atmosphere as an external observer rather than a participant. As he turns down a girl's invitation to dance, we find him absorbed in a meditation on her appearance:

Such a striking exotic appearance the rouge gave these brown girls. Rouge that is so cheap in general use had here an uncommon quality. Rare as the red flower of the hibiscus would be in a florist's window on Fifth Avenue. [...] The round face of the first girl, the carnal sympathy of her full, tinted mouth, touched Ray. But something was between them. (*HH*:196)

Ray's incapability to integrate himself naturally into the atmosphere, leads to his abstract contemplations on the distinct "quality" of rouge. Subsequently he fends off the girl's physical reality by seeking refuge in a digression on her makeup. Thus, instead of acknowledging any sexual implications, he compares the "quality" of rouge to the colour of the hibiscus, a flower, which figures prominently in his pastoral memories of Haiti. However, once more the pastoral escape only reaffirms his alienation, as he significantly concludes that, "something was between them."

In several significant ways Ray's self-estrangement and his resulting use of the pastoral can be linked to his western education, which has imposed the ideal of the disembodied mind on his understanding of self. Indeed, Ray calls himself a "slave of the civilized tradition" (*HH*:263) and thus often expresses the wish to be as physically affirmative

as Jake is.²¹⁸ Although in McKay's thematization of the repression of physical instincts we detect the same wish to expose the sterility of western civilization we have observed in most novels discussed thus far, dominant culture's tendency to associate the "Africanist other" with sexual instincts forces McKay to choose a more cautious approach to these issues.²¹⁹ In this sense, Ray is well aware that the dominant primitivist discourse has viewed African Americans not only as being closer to nature, but also as being more physical. In *Banjo* Ray alludes to the problem of African American sexuality, when he claims that only "colored women [...] can understand us as human beings and not as wild over-sexed savages" (*B*:205). Subsequently, Ray never identifies himself with the erotic aspects of his surrounding. Or as McCabe has concluded, "when the primitive presents itself in the flesh, as it were, it turns out Ray wants to be 'touched' only in his imagination" (1997:483).

To reiterate, I have suggested that Ray deliberately tries to rethink primitivist conceptions of Haiti and Africa, which have reduced especially Africa to a cultural artifact.²²⁰ I hope I have shown how his attempt to work against the normative discourse about the myth of primitivism draws attention to the difficulty of working within and against the dominant ideology. Hence his anti-racist intent notwithstanding, Ray ultimately struggles with the temptation of using Haiti and Africa as a powerful concept for acting out pastoral desires which would help him overcome his own self-estrangement. But Ray's conflict is by no means restricted to mirroring the constraints he faces as an African American artist who wishes to reclaim his cultural background; his struggle can in itself be interpreted as a resistance to symbolical domination. After all, the text leaves no doubt that Ray is clearly neither closer to nature, nor an "over-sexed savage." His sense of alienation obviously negates any of these primitivist constructions.

Yet, despite this subversion of primitivist stereotypes, by linking Ray's pastoral discourse with his sense of alienation, McKay reminds us that Ray's quest for a new ethnic identity is bound to fail. In fact Ray's use of the pastoral diminishes his chances of establishing a new authentic form of art which would allow him to create a genuine expression of African American experience. To what extent the pastoral impedes his search for a racially affirming aesthetics is revealed in Ray's meditation on art. To begin with, we learn that "Ray had always dreamed of writing words some day. Weaving words to make

²¹⁸ As pointed out by Suzette Spencer in her essay "Swerving at a Different Angle and Flying in the Face of Tradition: Excavating the Homoerotic Subtext in *Home to Harlem*," the theme of repressed sexuality can also be read in terms of its homosexual subtext.

²¹⁹ In his autobiography *A Long Way from Home*, he refers to this dilemma as "the bugaboo of sex—the African sex, whether he is a poet or a pugilist" (*LW*:88).

²²⁰ There are numerous descriptions of Africa, both in *Home to Harlem* and in *Banjo*, but such tracing is beyond the scope of this study.

romance, ah!" (HH:225). In accordance with previous passages, Ray emphasizes his inclination to adopt the romantic tradition, and by implication its preference for the pastoral. But immediately thereafter doubts arise and we read, "[w]hat would he ever do with the words he acquired? Were they adequate to tell the thoughts he felt, describe the impressions that reached him vividly" (HH:227). McKay converts here the Modernist crisis of imagination into Ray's search for a new aesthetics. The corollary of these reflections on the problem of representation is that pastoral descriptions can only produce a metaphorical and idealized environment. Ray, however, seems to strive for an artistic expression of the lived experience of his environmental existence. As we have already seen in Miller's vitalistic affirmation of sensorial experience, the focus on the individual's place-experience offers a valid alternative to the pastoral tradition. From a similar perspective, McKay seems to promote a phenomenological approach to reality. Hence I suggest that rather than locating his search for authenticity in an elusive pastoral setting, McKay promotes an ethnic identity, which is based on an immediate vital connection to the human and nonhuman environment.

Evidence of this shift of focus from the pastoral idyll to the immediate surrounding presents itself in Ray's final reflections on art. Following the previously quoted thoughts on art, Ray wonders, "[c]ould he ever create Art? Art, around which vague, incomprehensible words and phrases stormed." Ultimately, he expresses relief "that the old dreams were shattered. Nevertheless, he still felt more than ever the utter blinding nakedness and violent coloring of life. But what of it? Could he create out of the fertile reality around him?" (HH:228). As a matter of fact, this necessity to redefine an aesthetic approach to the lived experience of reality is very close to John Dewey's aesthetic theory.²²¹ As I noted earlier, Dewey claims that art must be based on a new approach to authentic experience and expression because the traditional "elevation of the ideal above and beyond immediate sense has operated not only to make it pallid and bloodless, but it has acted like a conspirator with the sensual mind, to impoverish and degrade all things of direct experience" (1981:31). In like

²²¹ Although John Dewey's *Art as Experience* has been referred to throughout this study, it is important to emphasize that McKay's reflections on art are much more attuned to Dewey's thinking than Miller's. Hutchinson explains that Dewey's philosophy of pragmatism "pervaded the intellectual networks that were important to black writers" (1995:5) of the Harlem Renaissance. He signals that even if Dewey's *Art as Experience* (delivered in 1931, published in 1934), appeared in print well after the onset of the Harlem Renaissance, [...] it merely formalizes the ramifications of pragmatism in the realm of aesthetic theory which had been evident all along and which had begun to enunciate in the 1920s" (1995:44). Moreover, Hutchinson points out that "[i]t is fitting that Claude McKay would ask Dewey to write the introduction to his *Selected Poems*" (1995:50). For McKay seems to agree with Dewey's pragmatic theory of art that "experience is not merely a mental phenomenon occurring within a subject; it is the product of an interaction between the self and the world, pertaining to both" (Hutchinson 1995:34). According to Hutchinson it is therefore hardly surprising that "[i]n that introduction, Dewey would single out McKay's ability to evoke the wonder that clings 'to life's commonplaces' as well as his genius at using poetry as a vehicle of protest in which the protest is integral with the aesthetics of experience" (1995:50).

manner, Ray's pastoral vision cannot grasp the "nakedness" of the real. McKay, like Miller, juxtaposes the artificiality of pastoral representations to a new authentic experience of reality which focuses on the perceiver's body and its sensorial interaction with the environment. As we have seen, Ray who in his reflections on art exhibits a rejection of the pastoral idealization, symbolized here as "the old dreams," hopes to develop a form of aesthetic creation, which assimilates a bodily experience of the "fertile" surroundings. The authentic expression of reality, in short, becomes associated with embodied place-experience.

The crucial transition Ray goes through between *Home to Harlem* and his reappearance in *Banjo*, seems to mirror the consequences of his new perception of art. Sentences such as "Ray had undergone a decided change since he had left America. He enjoyed his rôle of a wandering black without patriotic or family ties" (*B*:136), reveal that his pastoral idealization of Haiti does not interfere with his new way of life in Marseilles. Indeed, the notion of vagabondage alludes to a willingness to accept and appreciate the experience of the immediate surrounding. Furthermore, the retrieval of Ray's drug-induced vision of Haiti delineates a significant change of his vision of the world.

Ray's hankering was for scenes of tropical shores sifted through the hectic years. Salty-warm blue bays where black boys dive down deep into the deep waters, where the ship shear in on foamy waves and black youths row out to them in canoes and black pilots bring them in to anchor. [...] Black draymen coming from the hilltops, singing loudly—rakish chants, whipping up the mules bearing loads of brown sugar and of green bunches of bananas, trailing along the winding chalky ways down to the port. [...] But he dreamed instead of Harlem... the fascinating forms of Harlem. The thick, sweaty, syrup-sweet jazzing of Sheba Palace.... Black eyes darting out of curious mauve frames to arrest the alert prowler... little brown legs hurrying along... with undulating hips and voluptuous caressing motion of feminine molds. (*B*:284)

Under the influence of drugs, Ray still feels the urge to return to his Caribbean island. This time, however, it is not portrayed as a preindustrial utopia. Quite to the contrary, whereas in *Home to Harlem*, the already mentioned "natural defenses of his island" still warded off "the steam-roller of progress" (*HH*:155), here we find it deliberately depicted in terms of its integration into the global market. Significantly, progress here is not described as something which is imposed by western civilization. The active engagement of the local population clearly refutes such a primitivist reduction. Even more important, however, is the fact that Ray's mind now finds fulfillment in Harlem rather than in a pastoral depiction of Haiti. With regard to his new aesthetic outlook, the narrative structure calls attention to the wealth of experience Harlem offers. In this sense, the contrast between the realistic description of the Caribbean landscape and the elusive and connotative portrayal of Harlem seems to accentuate the kind of physical apprehension of place that Dewey advocates. Also, the adjectives, "thick, sweaty, syrup-sweet jazzing" seem to present a vision of experiencing Harlem, which is closely connected to the body's senses. This sensorial adaptation to Harlem suggests that

Ray's quest for authenticity has shifted its attention from a pastoral depiction of Haiti, to an active engagement with an urban atmosphere. Earlier we noted how a similar urge to achieve an authentic expression of lived experience motivates Miller's creation of an urban pastoral. For McKay and Miller alike such descriptions of the individual's physical apprehension of urban environments conveys the importance of the human body for the perceptual domain.

Ray's dynamic interaction with his environment is not confined to his dreams of Harlem. As Robert Greenberg explains, in *Banjo* "Ray's monologues and inner thoughts always concern the environment immediately at hand, not a distorted, abstract version of it in Ray's mind" (1981:252). There are numerous references to Ray's altered perception of his immediate surrounding. Descriptions of the port of Marseilles, accordingly, stress his vital response to the environment: "the ships' funnels were vivid little splashes of many colors bunched together, and, close to them in perspective, an aggregate of gray factory chimneys spouted from their black mouths great columns of red-brown smoke into the indigo skies." Such impressionistic descriptions express a sense of a new aesthetic response to place-experience. Moreover, Ray's contemplation of this industrial surrounding, namely that "[h]e was so happily moved. A delicious symphony was playing on the tendrils that linked his inner being to the world without" (*B*:70), signals the end of his pastoral, or alienated, understanding of the earth. But these thoughts not only insinuate a heightened attunement to place-experience, they also disclose a new vitality, and by implication indicate that Ray's self-estrangement has been healed. On that account, Greenberg claims that the dualism of body and mind has "been closed considerably in this novel, so that there is not the sense of an insoluble divergence between intellect and instinct" (1981:252). However, it is important to stress that it is through his contact with Banjo and his vagabond friends that Ray has found a new equilibrium. In the final chapter of *Banjo*, Ray endorses the consequential influence of his new friends. He recognizes that "[h]e had associated too closely with the beach boys not to realize that their loose, instinctive way of living was more deeply related to his own self-preservation than all the principles [...] of the civilized machine." And he stresses that indeed, "[f]rom these boys he could learn how to live" (*B*:322).

5.2.3. Jake and Banjo, or Nomad Space and the Dissolution of Binary Oppositions

After having tried to locate the significant theme of alienation within the paradigm of the major dualisms, which have profoundly altered the human understanding of self and its relation to the environment, I now want to examine the two novels' picaresque heroes Jake and Banjo in the light of these arguments. As Jake and Banjo's bodily apprehensions of their

urban surrounding stand in dramatic contrast to Ray's initial pastoral idealizations, attention must be focused on the representation of Harlem. For it is through the two picaresque heroes' vagabondistical place-experience that McKay ultimately accomplishes a representation of the city which transcends the body-mind dualism, as well as any static representation of the nonhuman environment. McKay's description of Jake and Banjo's immediate, multisensory experience of their environments, instead, points toward Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "nomad space."

Many critics of *Home to Harlem* have commented upon the fact that Harlem is essentially conveyed through the novel's protagonist Jake Brown. Robert Lee claims that "it is Jake as one of Harlem's own, intimate in the ways of its 'rap' and food and drink and entertainment, who gives the novel its momentum." He adds that through the figure of Jake "McKay unfolds a near-impressionistic Harlem, an irresistible black 'city' of the senses" (1988:71). Jake is sharply differentiated from Ray. He was born in Virginia, migrated to the northern cities, participated in World War I and returns thereafter as a deserter. However, as Greenberg observes, "Jake, despite rootlessness, is a whole man" (1981:243). A further aspect governing the critical response to Jake focuses on the episodic accounts of Jake's adventures, which have generally been interpreted as "picaresque journeys" (McCabe 1997:477). For purposes of the argument here presented, the picaresque offers a useful approach to the theoretical implications of Jake's place-experience.²²² The importance of the picaresque mode for Harlem Renaissance writers was adequately expounded by Robert Bone. He explains that the picaresque consists of a journey during which "the picaresque hero moves from a static, hierarchical, traditional society to a series of adventures on the open road" (1975:118). In this sense the picaresque hero, whose ties with his past have been weakened through his heightened mobility, is forced to react spontaneously and improvise in any given circumstance. Therefore, Bone concludes that the "picaresque journey is at bottom a quest for experience" (1975:119). Moreover, he reminds us that the picaresque can be juxtaposed to the pastoral. He argues that whereas the picaresque focuses on experience, and thus can be viewed as a "form [which] is explosive, bursting traditional constraints," the pastoral is "implosive, exploring the conundrums of identity" (1975:122).

One of the characteristic differences between Jake and Ray therefore can be located in their divergent attunement to place-experience. To begin with, Jake does not possess any pastoral reminiscences of his home. Evidence of this lack of an escapist fantasy provides the following passage, which illustrates his memory of his childhood. As Jake faces a life-

²²² In a preceding chapter, we have noted that Miller's vagabondistical sense of place too, may be described as picaresque.

threatening situation, "[h]e thought first of his mother. His sister. The little frame house in Petersburg. The backyard of bleached clothes on the line, the large lilac tree and the little forked lot that yielded red tomatoes" (*HH*:216). Unlike Ray's visions of his tropical island, Jake's memories are confined to a suburban environment. Jake does not idealize his past home. Quite to the contrary, the house with its little backyard leaves a rather sober and delimited impression, compared to his euphoric perception of Harlem as it is, for example, expressed in this description of Seventh Avenue: "[I]ight open coats prevailed and the smooth bare throats of brown girls were a token as charming as the first pussy-willows. Far and high over all, the sky was a grand blue benediction, and beneath it the wonderful air of New York tasted like fine dry champagne" (*HH*:279). Exemplifying Bone's definition of the picaresque, Jake's dynamic interaction with the expansive atmosphere of Seventh Avenue seems to prevail over the static picture of the past. Such passages insinuate that Jake is more alert to direct experience than Ray's contemplative mind is. Viewed against the background of place-experience, his picaresque journeys indicate not only that experience is always emplaced, but that a spontaneous interaction with place is also part of our being. Ultimately, it is Jake's capability to adapt himself to place which characterizes him as a positive figure: "there was something so naturally beautiful about his presence that everybody liked and desired him" (*HH*:103).

Although Jake's sensuous apprehension of Seventh Avenue and his urban childhood can be compared to Miller's vivid descriptions of Paris and his reminiscences of Brooklyn, it is of paramount importance to stress that Jake's relation to the pastoral bears on a more problematic conception of the natural world. Here I am touching on a pivotal question concerning the African American environmental imagination. Namely, what does the pastoral tradition imply for African American authors whose traumatic experience of the southern environment has discouraged any idealization of rural life? What I am attempting to show is that Jake's anti-pastoral perception of the world draws attention to the fact that "[s]lavery changed the nature of nature in African American culture, necessitating a break with the pastoral tradition" (Bennett 2001:205). Yet Jake's lack of pastoral reminiscences of his childhood does not only remind us of the "racialization of pastoral space that excluded African Americans from such supposedly Edenic environs" (Bennett 2001:198). The figure of Jake also reminds us of the "Great Migration" from the rural South to the northern urban areas. Following an argument developed by Amiri Baraka, Hakutani and Butler claim that the direct outcome of this urbanization of African American culture is that "from the Harlem Renaissance onward, black literature has been 'urban shaped,' producing a 'black urban consciousness'" (1995:10). Another critic focusing on the distinctive urban consciousness

which shapes African American literature is Toni Morrison. She compares the importance of the pastoral impulse underlying the "anti-urbanism of white writers" to the urbanism of African American writers; while she emphasizes that in spite of alienating experiences African Americans strive for "acceptance in the city" (1981:36-7).

Therefore, to come back to our point, Jake's anti-pastoral conception of the natural world can neither be compared to Ray's West Indian background, nor to the white Modernist struggle with the pastoral's rigid norms of representation. There are several parallels, however, that link Jake to Lincoln Agrippa Daily, familiarly known as Banjo. In *Banjo* the picaresque mode is intensified, as Banjo is described in the opening chapter as "a great vagabond of lowly life. He was a child of the Cotton Belt, but had wandered all over America. His life was a dream of vagabondage that he was perpetually pursuing and realizing in odd ways" (B:11). Like Jake, Banjo has also severed the ties to his past. After witnessing the lynching of his brother, he leaves the South and joins the Canadian army. His picaresque journeys have taught him to adjust himself to any environment he encounters: "Ise a true-blue traveling-bohn nigger and I know life, and I knows how to take it nacheral" (B:305). Through experience Banjo has developed an attitude toward the environment that makes him and his vagabond friends "adepts at meeting, understanding, and accepting everything" (B:32). Indeed, as Greenberg observes, Banjo "is a product of experience" (1981:248). As a vagabond he is not caught up in any conflicting desires, because "[l]ife for him was just one different thing of a sort following the other" (B:27). However, before looking more closely at Banjo's interaction with his environment, it seems appropriate to shift emphasis to some general reflections on vagabondage. In order to delineate the particular relation to place that vagabondage implies, I will briefly describe some of the main tenets of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of nomadology.

Similar to Robert Bone's analysis of the picaresque, Deleuze and Guattari oppose nomads to the hierarchical system of the "State" which is structured in terms of an opposition between the "interior and exterior" (1987:360). Analogous to Deleuze and Guattari's previously examined attempts to undermine dominant culture's logic of identity, nomad life effaces the dualistic system of the "State." Deleuze and Guattari argue that although the nomad travels from one point to the other, it is the path between the two points, or the "in-between [that] has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own" (1987:380). This view also implies that nomads are determined by a very intense relation to emplacement. On the one hand, nomads "inhabit these places; they remain in them, and they themselves make them grow" (1987:382); but on the other hand they are also made by them. As Casey explains, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of nomad space must be

understood as "deeply localized," in the sense that it "always occurs *as a place—in this place*. But as undelimited, it is a special kind of place. It is a place that is not just *here*, in a pinpointed spot of space, but in a 'nonlimited locality'" (1998:304).²²³ These arguments have profound implications for the concept of emplacement. Casey points out that in nomad space "[n]ot mere multiplicity but radical heterogeneity of place is at play." Moreover, he stresses that "place is not entitative [...] but eventmental, something in process, something unconfined to a thing" (1998:337). Not surprisingly then, Deleuze and Guattari's reflections on nomad art reveal a profoundly altered perception of the environment. They define its aesthetic characteristics as follows: "[f]irst, 'close-range' vision, as distinguished from long-distance vision; second, 'tactile,' or rather 'haptic' space, as distinguished from optical space" (1987:492).²²⁴

I propose that both Bone's theory of the picaresque as a form which is radically grounded on experience, and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of nomad space and its implications for art, help us to cast new light on the vivid descriptions of Harlem and Marseilles. Indeed, they provide us with a reading of McKay's text that goes beyond a concern with primitivism. Consider, for instance, the following excerpt, which depicts one of Jake's first impressions of Harlem: "[o]h, to be in Harlem again after two years away. The deep-dyed color, the thickness, the closeness of it. The noises of Harlem. The sugared laughter. The honey-talk on its streets. And all night long, ragtime and 'blues' playing somewhere,... singing somewhere, dancing somewhere! Burning everywhere in dark-eyed Harlem.... Burning now in Jake's sweet blood..." (*HH*:15). Such passages express a dynamic place-experience. The lack of pictorial representations of Harlem points towards Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the haptic space as opposed to the optical space.²²⁵ For Jake's dynamic interaction with his environment is mediated through his apprehension of sounds and mostly non-visual sensations. Also, the evocative quality of this passage seems to capture the fluidity of the place in process. Hence I would like to suggest that the intrusion of sounds, the "singing somewhere, dancing somewhere," can be read as a manifestation of the undelimited quality of place in nomad space. Place here is truly active and not a static and reified setting. Its participatory dimension is further highlighted by the symptomatic use of ellipses. Traditionally denoting open-endedness, the ellipses in this nomad space hint at the fluid quality of this realm in-between. At the same time as it is confined within the closed

²²³ Italics in original.

²²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari define haptic space as something "which may be as much visual or auditory as tactile" (1987:493).

²²⁵ It also insinuates that for McKay, like all the other authors examined so far, the problem of pictorial representation resides in the artificiality of images.

atmosphere of Harlem, place as it is perceived from Jake's vagabondistical perspective is also expansive and thus is not reduced to a specific point in space.

As we have seen, Banjo even more than Jake exemplifies a vagabondistical approach to place and place-experience. In the opening chapter we read, that "[i]t was Banjo's way to take every new place and every new thing for the first time in a hot crazy-drunk manner." As a result "the first delirious fever days of Marseilles were rehearsing themselves, wheeling round and round in his head" (*B*:13). Banjo's exuberant reaction to Marseilles perfectly mirrors the vagabond's delight in experience as well as his acute sense of emplacement. Analogous to his evocative portrayal of Harlem, McKay creates again a highly dynamic urban atmosphere for Marseilles. Just as Jake's experience of Harlem stresses his physical interaction with his immediate surroundings, so Banjo's perception of Marseilles refutes a static description of the setting:

The quarter of the old port exuded a nauseating odor of mass life congested, confused, moving round and round in a miserable suffocating circle. Yet everything seemed to belong and fit naturally in place. Bistros and love shops and girls and touts and vagabonds and the troops of dogs and cats—all seemed to contribute so essentially to that vague thing called atmosphere." (*B*:18)

Once more we are presented a cityscape which is highly animated. This passage neither pinpoints the port of Marseilles to a strictly delimited localization, nor does it offer any pictorial details of the city. It is a place in motion, or as Casey put it, place here is eventmental rather than entitative. Finally, the "nauseating odor" stresses Banjo's embodied interaction with this environment. Indeed, the heterogeneous list of the elements which actively participate and thus produce this "vague thing called atmosphere," re-emphasizes a vital interrelation between humans and their human as well as nonhuman environment. Like Miller, McKay seems to use both the stylistic figure of the list and the conjunction "and" to create a dynamic, almost fluid environment that stands in dramatic contrast to the rigid pastoral descriptions of Haiti.

It hardly needs repeating at this late stage that McKay's portrayal of Jake and Banjo's vagabondistical experience of place depicts the human body as an organism interacting with the physical world. Suffice it to say that analogous to most phenomenological endeavors to capture a primary experience of the world, McKay's urban settings are not depicted as an abstract space, but as a vital context. Indeed, Banjo and Jake's vagabondistical world view, which celebrates a ubiquitous emplacement, reveals that the acceptance of being physically embodied is of utmost importance in their interaction with their environment. This becomes especially obvious during Jake and Banjo's visits to cabarets and jazz clubs. It is certainly true that McKay's descriptions of these places exploit an exoticism that seems to confirm the stereotypical view of African American vitality. Nevertheless, in the context of this body-

centered, ecocritical reading it is crucial to remember that Jake and Banjo's enjoyment of dance and music are congruent with their sensorial reactions to any environment. Thus the following evocation of Jake's perception of a cabaret works toward the same kind of delineation of a sensorial interaction with his environment: "[i]t was a scene of blazing color. Soft, barbaric, burning, savage, clashing, planless colors—all rioting together in wonderful harmony" (*HH*:320). It seems to me, however, that in comparison with the previously analyzed perceptions of Jake's vagabondistical appreciation of Harlem, his impression of this cabaret is characterized by an accelerated and therefore intensified enumeration of sensorial responses. A further detail emphasizing this heightened awareness of physical embodiment, is the fact that pictorial descriptions are dissolved into an amalgamation of colors. By linking this augmented focus on physicality with a musical surrounding, McKay makes an aesthetic statement, he reminds us that the axiomatic separation of mind and body has generated a disembodied understanding of the self, which disregards any sensorial appreciation of art. Indeed, in *Art as Experience*, Dewey forcefully opposes the understanding of art as something which is confined to the mind, because it "strengthens the conception which isolates the esthetic from those modes of experience in which the body is actively engaged with the things of nature and life" (1981:81). This point reinforces the necessity to avoid simplifying the abundant allusions to jazz and dance. From a Deweyan pragmatic perspective, such passages as "[b]lack skin itching, black flesh warm with the wine of life, the music of life, the love and deep meaning of life. Strong smell of healthy black bodies in a close atmosphere, generating sweat and waves of heat" (*B*:50) point to profounder implications than a mere adoption of primitivist stereotypes. One may argue that the fascination for the cabaret life is instigated by the realization that dance and music are art forms, which acknowledge the importance of physical experience and thus may symbolize a heightened authenticity in their aesthetic creation.

A further corollary of this affirmation of physicality is that neither Jake nor Banjo suffers from the kind of self-estrangement, which tortures Ray in *Home to Harlem*. Jake and Banjo's, and eventually also Ray's, denial of the body-mind dualism, and their consequent lack of sexual repressions, has often been interpreted as an uninhibited glorification of sexual freedom, which animates McKay's attack on western civilization. However, I suggest that both novels in their overall complexity work against primitivist simplifications. Their focus on sensual experience should be viewed in the context of the preceding discussion about an embodied physical interaction with the human and the nonhuman world, which ultimately works against the binary structures of the dominant discourse. In this sense, I agree with George Hutchinson's conclusion that "[i]t is too easy, [...] to lump all interest in the presumed

'sensuality' and 'sexual uninhibitedness' of poor black folks of the South and the Harlem nightlife under the single heading of white folks' sexual and racial neuroses" (1995:110). As the following excerpt shows, the description of Ray's sexuality follows the same pattern of embodied experience that governs Jake and Banjo's place-experience. Note, for example, how the lack of pictorial details accentuates the importance of sensorial responses, while the evocative style stresses the permanent interaction of the organic human body with its human and nonhuman environment: "[p]eace and forgetfulness in the bosom of a brown woman. Warm brown body and restless dark body like a black root growing down in the soft brown earth. Deep dark passion of bodies close to the earth understanding each other. Dark brown bodies of earth, earthy. Dark... brown... rich colors of the nourishing earth" (*B*:283).

I have tried to show that an ecocritical reading helps to cast new light on the problematic notion of primitivism. By contrasting Ray's struggle against the binary structure of pastoralism with a holistic vision of aesthetic creation that integrates embodied experience, I tried to delineate how McKay's use of the primitivist discourse works against the dichotomies of dominant ideology. In a comparison of McKay and a white male Modernist response to modernity three traits stand out. First, although McKay's rejection of the pastoral tradition also draws attention to its artificiality and its dualistic substructures, he emphasizes that from an African American perspective this rejection implies a denunciation of pastoralism as a discourse which allowed "those of European descent [to control] a pastoral landscape that included those of African descent as part of their property" (Bennett 2001:205-6). Second, his focus on western civilization's binary oppositions indicates that for McKay only an effacement of these dualisms will help us to overcome the crisis of modernity. As I have suggested above, one finds arresting parallels between McKay's quest for authenticity and the white Modernist attempts to heal the trauma of modernity. Both seem to advocate that the notion of place-experience offers an evocative field to unfold artistic expression, while at the same time it yields a new understanding of the human body as a natural organism. Ultimately, McKay confirms that a vitalistic affirmation of the human body counteracts the sense of self-estrangement. Third, sex is presented as an intensified form of physical apprehension and therefore offers a new approach to the natural world. Ray's "brown woman" functions, like so many women in Modernist texts, as a mediator with nature. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that both the male and the female body are presented as "[d]ark brown bodies of earth."

McKay's naturalization of the female body notwithstanding, it seems to me that his refusal to use representational norms for his portrayal of the environment and our experience of it, can be read as an attempt to undermine the dualisms which have otherized nature,

nonwhites, women, and the body. Indeed, his handling of literary representation reveals a resistance to dominant discourse's logic of identity. Recall that achieving a logic of difference is particularly problematic for a writer like McKay, since in Olkowski's words, "[m]inorities are recognized as minorities because they deviate from representational norms" (1999:3). Hence Olkowski stresses, that the writer who wishes to challenge this "hegemonic reign of representation" (1999:18), must try to capture the heterogeneity and fluidity of reality, or what Deleuze and Guattari call "the vague, in the etymological sense of 'vagabond'" (1987:367). In this sense, one may argue that Jake and Banjo's nomadic vision of the world challenges the major dualisms of western civilization. Their place-experience has revealed that their dynamic interaction with the immediate surrounding subverts binary hierarchies by acknowledging the multiplicity of place and the human relation to it. But this vagabondist affirmation of heterogeneity is not confined to the individual's interrelation with his or her environment. The pan-African atmosphere, as it emerges in Banjo and Ray's interaction with the seamen in Marseilles, suggests that McKay's ethnic ideal is based on a similar vision. In this context, Greenberg claims that the group of seamen who are loosely gathered around Banjo, are "exemplifying differences of nationality, character, and opinion," and correspondingly are "anything but homogeneous" (1981:250). Nevertheless, within this pan-African frame of reference, an autonomous ethnic identity emerges, which clearly subverts the binary hierarchies of the dominant discourse. Unlike Djuna Barnes's pessimistic response to symbolical domination, McKay's celebration of the vagabond's nondualistic vision of the world yields a new sense of pan-African identity.

CONCLUSION

Claude McKay's celebration of vagabondism reanimates a question we have encountered throughout this study: how are the sense of homelessness, exile and placelessness, which permeates the novels of all the authors discussed in this study, and western culture's problematic relation to the natural world, related? The answer ecocriticism would provide is that the *malaise* of modern life renders visible western civilization's distorted relation to the earth, or the *oikos* in its original meaning of "home." Even though the importance of the lost connection with nature is rediscovered in Modernism, this rediscovery does not offer a simple solution to the crisis of modernity. As these authors' manifestations of their struggle to represent human and nonhuman nature has revealed, overcoming this sense of homelessness is a matter of regaining recognition of the interdependence between humankind and the natural world. Or, to come back to Jean-François Lyotard's definition of ecology as the "discourse of the secluded" (2000:136), to address the human alienation from the natural world means to uncover the hidden place of nature within western culture's dualistic discourses. I hope I have demonstrated the importance of unearthing this "discourse of the secluded" for an interpretation of Miller, Durrell, Barnes and McKay's response to the crisis of modernity.

In this study, I have made the yearning for authenticity central to the discussion of the Modernist rediscovery of the secluded interconnection between humankind and the natural world. Hence, I stated in the introduction to this study that I wanted to examine Miller and Durrell's concern for the lack of authenticity in their living and writing in the light of ecocritical theory. To elaborate on this hypothesis, I have proposed to draw a parallel between an "ecological" (in the widest Lyotardian sense of the word) search for a balanced relation to the nonhuman environment and Miller and Durrell's vitalistic yearnings. The usefulness one has to accredit to ecocriticism when dealing with the Modernist sense of alienation becomes evident when we consider that the nature versus culture dualism seems to be the source of the *malaise* of modern life. Indeed, the analysis of the urban settings we find depicted in Miller and Durrell's novels has revealed that the concept of the metropolis itself embodies the nature-culture divide. That ecocriticism is not a limited field of literary studies, applicable only to "green" genres like nature writing or pastoral poetry, is affirmed by the vast array of urban phenomena this reading has laid bare. We have seen how the modern metropolis is described as an unsound habitat, in considerable detail.

Furthermore, recurrent themes, such as the mourning for a lost sense of unity, the critique of technology and industrial progress, the fear of toxification indicate that the environmental conditions of modernity seemed to have enormous repercussions on the individual's experience of modern life. Indeed, it is in the numerous descriptions of the individual's traumatic experience of such urban environments that Jed Rasula's thesis about the somatic and rhetorical responses to modernity is confirmed. Attention to the various symptoms of somatic and rhetorical distress has proved to be an effective basis for understanding what the crisis of modernity is all about. The pattern that emerges through examining these pathological cityscapes moreover shows that the human body is at the center of the conflict between the urbanite and his or her polluted habitats.

An ecocritical interpretation of the crisis of modernity as an environmental crisis has the further advantage of clarifying how involved Modernist fictions are in a dialogic relationship with the philosophical history of rational humanism. Miller, Durrell, McKay and Barnes share at least two philosophical commitments. One the one hand, we have seen that the *malaise* of modern life is considered with regard to the Cartesian separation of body and mind and, by implication, the promotion of a disembodied consciousness as the essence of the self. On the other hand, these authors' efforts to determine why western civilization's dualistic conceptions of the natural world did not only lead to a problematic understanding of the human body but also to an exploitative relation to the earth, point to the scientific model of nature as a machine. As a number of thinkers have made clear, the machine metaphor constitutes a useful tool for establishing scientific models of uniformity. Both Miller and Durrell show that the subsequent system of scientific abstraction has distorted the perception of the human and nonhuman world. Resistance to this fragmentary vision of the world can, to a certain extent, also be detected in Barnes and McKay's problematization of the limited set of signifiers that the dominant discourse imposes on the world. In sum, both the Cartesian and the scientific abstraction of the world have justified the separation of nature and culture.

These Modernists, aware of the marginalization of nature, the human body, and those that have been otherized through symbolical association with animality and naturality, focus on western civilization's major dualisms to stress the importance of rethinking our conceptions of the natural world. Miller, Durrell, and to a lesser extent Barnes, turn to eastern philosophies as a resource for a nondualistic re-evaluation of the individual's experience of his or her interaction with the earth. Such attempts to become one with the flowing totality of the universe, or to experience what Jung calls a new "*Ganzheitserlebnis*," reveal an effort to stress the human being's interdependence with the natural world—hence its potential both for overcoming fragmentation and re-establishing a lost unity. The striking outcome of these

efforts to replace western culture's rigid dichotomies, however, is that most of these authors choose concepts of fluidity and formlessness to destabilize rigid re-presentations produced by dominant discourse. The "rhizomatic" multiplicities and the fluid realm "in-between" envisioned by Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of binary oppositions has served to underscore the extent to which all of these authors try to rethink dualistic systems of signification. In addition to Miller and Durrell's attempts to depict a nondualistic vision of the world, the recourse to notions of fluidity and formlessness is discernible in Barnes and McKay's conviction that reclaiming their colonized bodies entails a subversion of western culture's major dualisms.

These authors' negative responses to enculturation, and their various efforts to redefine the human relation to the natural world, raised the question whether they propose a return to nature as an alternative to the disturbing complexity of modern life. The effect of this shift in emphasis has allowed us to deduce that Durrell and Miller, but also Barnes and McKay, exhibit an awareness that cultural conceptions of nature are based on a double-faced process of exploitation and idealization. As we have seen, the Modernist (re)turn to nature is motivated by an anti-pastoral stance and in so doing exposes the distance between the physical world and pastoral representations of nature. However, even if the human relation to nature is complicated, the fact that all of these urban novels contain, in one way or another, a critique of pastoralism, reaffirms that in the Modernist response to the crisis of modernity the importance of the natural world is being rediscovered. Indeed, in these authors' accounts of modernity we witness the creation of a new environmental awareness that stands in contrast to preceding attempts to impose meaning on the natural world. To reiterate, we have seen that the conflict between the earth's physical environment and pastoral idealizations of nature is at issue in Durrell's descriptions of Corfu and his denunciation of Englishness. The artificiality of the pastoral tradition is likewise a focus for Miller's re-examination of American ideas about wilderness and McKay's juxtaposition of Haiti and Harlem. McKay's opposition of the picaresque and the pastoral reveals, furthermore, that from an African American perspective the pastoral tradition has become particularly problematic. The most striking case in point is provided by Barnes. Her resistance to the tendency toward using the female body as a new pastoral space deepens and extends the Modernist critique of the pastoral tradition.

Against the background of their refusal to incorporate nature as an ideological screen for acting out urban desires, it has become evident that western culture's epistemological devices cannot yield an authentic approach to primordial nature. The diverse forms of rhetorical despair underlying these authors' attempts to represent the nonhuman world all testify to a common conviction that our distorted relation to the natural world is based on a

crisis of imagination. Since the "true nature" of nature is held to be inaccessible, these writers opt for an indirect solution. By demonstrating their incapability of representing nature through gestures of rhetorical distress, they implicitly restore meaning to natural phenomena that refuse to be reduced to the limited set of signifiers we have invented for them. Even if the problem of mimesis remains unresolved, their attempts to dismantle the images we impose on nature constitutes a challenge to the cultural appropriation of the world. In this respect, Durrell's excessive use of clichés has conveyed that only an ironical stance allows him to highlight the artificiality of our conceptions of nature within the confines of culturally predetermined modes of artistic expression. An equally ironical approach can be found in Barnes's subversion of imagistic coherence. Similarly, the multiplicity envisioned by Miller's use of heterogeneous lists serves to replace simplicity and identity with diversity and variation. Finally, McKay, in line with the Deweyan assumption that our representational norms involve recognition rather than true perception, validates a multisensory approach to lived experience over pictorial representations.

The impossibility of a classical return to nature notwithstanding, McKay's sensorial descriptions of Harlem and Marseilles, or Miller's organic descriptions of Paris, reveal that, rather than idealizing nature, they seek to affirm their bodily apprehension of their immediate urban surroundings. Indeed, the ecocritical emphasis on place-experience has laid bare that the individual's embodied experience of his or her environment yields a new understanding of the physical world while eliciting a renewed interest in embodiment. A general account of the Modernist desire to redefine the specificity of the body occurs in the work of phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty. As we have seen, the equivalent of a phenomenological re-evaluation of the body has been pursued in other domains as well, perhaps most saliently in John Dewey's philosophy. He demonstrates that bodily experience may furthermore lead to a new authenticity in artistic expression.

With regard to Miller, Durrell, and McKay's vitalistic focus on the body as a natural entity, ecocritical assumptions, such as Gernot Böhme's thesis that we can only overcome our estrangement from nature by accepting our own organic body, offers a valuable understanding of the theme of sexuality. From a vitalistic point of view, more than any other physical experience—more than eating or walking—the sexual act generates an authentic contact with one's own nonsocietal nature. In this sense, Miller, Durrell and McKay's descriptions of sexuality imply a wish to reach beyond the nature-culture divide. Having thus found a new way back to humankind's original affinity with nature, the key to authentic experience and artistic expression is henceforth sought in a purely physical dimension. The sense of self-estrangement, in short, is no longer found in an escape to an idyllic idea of nature, but in the

individual's re-evaluation of physical experience. The female body, as we have seen, is pivotal in this regard. The womb, in particular, is transformed into a symbol of creation and a place of renewed authenticity.

I have suggested that Djuna Barnes's provocative portrayal of Robin Vote demonstrates her resistance to this Modernist tendency toward using women as mediators with nature. In this connection, we have observed that what distinguishes Djuna Barnes from masculine writers who were her contemporaries is the pessimism characterizing her response to modernity. Although Barnes seems to concur with other Modernists in the conviction that binary oppositions must be dissolved, her feminine perspective is expressed most evidently by her refusal to heal the crisis of modernity by simply advocating a return to a purely physical realm. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that neither Miller, nor Durrell or McKay, try to replace an idealized notion of nature with another equally Arcadian vision of the female body. What makes this Modernist revision of our relation to the nature and the human body *qua* nature different from preceding recourses to the natural world, is that their questioning of western culture's dualistic structures prevents them from proposing simplistic solutions. Although they agree that only a redefinition of the human being as a natural being can solve the *malaise* of modern life, they believe that neither nature nor the human body can be reclaimed without rethinking dominant systems of signification. One sees this in their various attempts to liberate themselves from representational norms. For Miller, for example, overcoming the crisis of modernity is a matter of putting into disequilibrium the rigid representations produced by dominant discourse. To liberate nature and the body from preconceived patterns of perception Miller refers to diverse concepts—e.g. obscenity, anarchy and acceptance—that allow him to replace simplicity with multiplicity. The attempt to subvert western cultures rigid concepts of the world by capturing this vague realm in-between is explored further in McKay's model of vagabondism and pan-African identity. Also Durrell seeks to overcome western culture's dualistic relation to the body and nature. His search for a lost unity, or a new equilibrium between body and mind, the human and the nonhuman, is motivated by a desire to find a new mythical world view, while it simultaneously rearticulates some of Miller's views on the subject matter.

An ecocritical reading of Miller, Durrell, Barnes and McKay's responses to the crisis of modernity suggests that their use of metropolitan and industrial contexts, as a frame for thinking about western conceptions of nature, calls for recognizing the many ways in which human and nonhuman nature are interconnected. I hope the vast array of themes such a reading unearths has demonstrated the importance of rethinking our approach to Modernism in ecocritical terms. Furthermore, shifting the focal point to the environmental aspects

underlying the trauma of modernity also allows us to grasp more clearly the historical impact of the Modernist problematization of modernity on our current environmental imagination. Indeed, the critique of technology, the rhetoric of apocalypticism, the fear of toxic poisoning, the problematic status of the human body and the question concerning the essence of human nature continue to shape our responses to the current environmental crisis. Finally, although in this study I have attempted to trace, in essence, a vitalistic response to the environmental crisis of modernity, I can imagine alternative responses to the environmental issues implicit in the experience of modernity that would, necessarily, be based on an entirely different selection of texts.

ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS CITED

- ACN* Miller, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*
B McKay, *Banjo*
BB Durrell, *The Black Book*
BS Miller, *Black Spring*
HH McKay, *Home to Harlem*
LW McKay, *A Long Way from Home*
NW Barnes, *Nightwood*
TA Miller, *The Time of the Assassins*
TCN Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*
TCP Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn*
QDC Miller, *Quiet Days in Clichy*
WoL Miller, *The World of Lawrence*

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LEBENS LAUF

Ich, Ann-Catherine Nabholz De Zaiacomo, bin als Schweizer Bürgerin mit Heimatort Zürich im Kanton Zürich, am 18. April 1968 in Basel geboren. Meine Kindheit verbrachte ich zusammen mit meinen Eltern, Kurt Nabholz und Yrsa Nabholz-Renggli, meinem Bruder Christoph und meiner Schwester Mirjam zunächst in Mendrisio (Tessin) und danach in Laufen (Baselland).

Die Grundschule habe ich in Laufen absolviert. Die Matura Typus D habe ich 1988 am Holbeingymnasium Basel gemacht. Im selben Jahr habe ich mein Studium an der Universität Basel begonnen. Nachdem ich mich zunächst für Anglistik als Hauptfach, mit Deutsch und Neuerer allgemeinen Geschichte in den Nebenfächern entschied, habe ich nach 2 Semestern von Deutsch zur Nordistik gewechselt. Dieser Fächerwechsel wurde 1993 durch ein Semester Theaterwissenschaften an der Universität Stockholm bekräftigt. 1996 habe ich mit meiner Lizentiatsarbeit **“Animals in Keri Hulme’s *The Windeater* / *Te Kaihau*: Reflections on Biocentric Egalitarianism“** unter Leitung von Professor Dr. Hartwig Isernhagen, mein Grundstudium an der Universität Basel abgeschlossen.

1997 habe ich mich für ein Nachdiplomstudium (Diplôme d’Etudes Approfondies) an der Universität Orléans (Frankreich) immatrikuliert. Das Diplom dazu habe ich im September 1998 erlangt. Aus diesem Studiengang entstand die Zusammenarbeit der Universitäten Basel und Orléans, die im Rahmen einer „Cotutelle de thèse“ meine Doktorarbeit von 1999-2004 begleitete. Nebst dem franko-schweizerischen Austausch, konnte ich ausserdem von Januar bis Dezember 2001 mit einem vom Nationalfonds unterstützten Forschungsaufenthalt an der University of Oregon, Eugene (USA), meinen Erfahrungshorizont erweitern.

Nach französischem Reglement habe ich meine Doktorarbeit **„The Crisis of Modernity: Culture, Nature and the Modernist Yearning for Authenticity“** einer Jury bestehend aus je einem Referenten und Korreferenten aus beiden Ländern vorgelegt. Die Jury bestand infolgedessen aus den Referenten Prof. Dr. Hartwig Isernhagen (Universität Basel) und Prof. Dr. Thomas Pughe (Universität Orléans) und den Korreferenten Prof. Dr. Werner Brönnimann (Universität St. Gallen) und Prof. Dr. Yves-Charles Grandjeat (Universität Bordeaux III). Mein Doktorexamen im Fach Neuere englische Literaturwissenschaft, habe ich am 6. Juli 2004 in der Anwesenheit der Dekanin Prof. Dr. Annelies Häcki Buhofer, Prof. Dr. Hartwig Isernhagen und Prof. Dr. Thomas Pughe abgelegt.

Zur Zeit des Druckes meiner Dissertation im Juni 2007, wohne ich zusammen mit meinem Ehemann Xavier De Zaiacomo wieder in der Schweiz, wo ich ein Teilzeitpensum als Dozentin für Englisch an der Hochschule für Technik, Zürich besetze.