

Literary Piracy and the Art of Experimental Narratives

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Abstract

A pirate is a ship-raider who abides by no rules. The pirate roams the tides of the ocean exploring new territories. An experimental writer is a literary pirate who explores new textual territories and toys with literary canons. The literary pirate abides by no generic laws and inscribes rebellion in the pages of his fiction. Classicists even label them as "literary outlaws". In normative piracy, stealing, killing, destroying and ravaging are absolutely allowed. In experimental fiction, plots are either spiral, cyclic or non-existent. Characters are either strange humans or mutant creatures mirroring internal and external struggles with their worlds. Ever since the Second World War, American writers have pledged the oath of piracy and created a fiction that transcends reality. To reflect their apparent antagonism to the laws of the canons, literary genres are often introduced by the prefix "anti" such as anti-detective and anti-romance. To delineate their own code of superiority over tradition, the prefix "meta" becomes attached to historiographic-metaphiction and "post" is added to post-apocalyptic fiction. Science fiction, graphic novels, psychedelic fiction are only a tip of the iceberg when it comes to enumerating how literary piracy eviscerated the laws of time, space, death, religion, morality and consciousness.

Drawing on Jean François Lyotard's contention that postmodernity is "the incredulity towards grand-narratives", this chapter shall examine how the rise of new literary genres in postmodern literature is a form of literary piracy. American Psycho (1991), One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962) and Naked Lunch (1959) are three case studies that epitomize piracy in its many folds. Accordingly, this article shall explore the different generic transgressions from psychedelic, to anti-detective to postmodern gothic experimentations. It will equally explore how literary piracy transgresses the boundaries of reception through tackling controversial themes ranging from madness, to homosexuality to substance abuse. This essay shall culminate on tracing the parallels between actual piracy and its cultural inscription in these novels. Naturally, as actual piracy is criminalized, literary piracy is deemed as scandalous, unacceptable and highly controversial. Whether sailing across the tides of the endless sea or writing the pages of timeless novels, breaking free from the confinement of mould and tradition renders freedom irresistibly outlawed.

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Introduction

Postmodern literature and piracy are two practices that are strikingly similar. Literature and piracy defy conventions whether it is genres or social rules. Pirates are iconoclasts by nature since they defy the rules of the land. Postmodern writers challenge the preset canons of deeply-entrenched literary traditions and obliterate the borders of reality and fiction. Pirates steal while writers parody and borrow. Pirates are incriminated to be feared and chanted. Whereas their postmodern counterparts are celebrated to criticized and banned.

Ironically, both parties deviate from the exemplary orthodox upbringing, leaning towards excessive drinking, overt sexual practices and drug consumption. Naturally, their pages reflect these struggles as part of the flawed human experience. Piracy, then, becomes a subtle metaphor for a literature that toys with generic conventions, explores forbidden territories and celebrates an alternative culture.

Three writers are infamous for remodelling fully grounded narratives into a postmodern tale that promotes failure, degeneration, paranoia and despair over a successful recognition of “the All American success story” as it is engraved in “the Great American Novel”. William Burroughs, Ken Kesey and Bret Easton Ellis have marked their names in history by writing novels that are as controversial as they are daring.

Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* (1959) was declined by American publishers due to its highly pornographic content, and it has undergone an obscenity trial in Boston in 1966 only to be cleared afterwards. *Naked Lunch* is a hallucinatory anti-detective fiction par excellence. It explores the world of a phantasmagoric reality of agent William Lee, who, appointed by the CIA, travels to Annexia to spy on Dr Benway who turns out to be an agent of Islam Incorporated. Benway supplies him with innovative drugs and reveals his secret designs for a world free of sexual deviance. Chased by two Interzone agents, Lee finds himself tried for state treason. Fortunately, he kills the agents and escapes somewhere unknown.

Within the same world of thrilling paranoia and intrigue, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962) is set in an American asylum managed by a very strict nurse. The asylum impeccable order is disrupted by an Ex-convict, Randle Patrick McMurphy, who undertakes to challenge her authority and restore the humanity of the depersonalized patients. The

narrative is carried out by a highly-medicated schizophrenic Indian American.

The Paranoia turns to a premeditated set of murders committed by a successful Wall Street stock broker: Patrick Bateman, who singlehandedly kills, tortures and rapes his victims in the gothic tale of *American Psycho* (1991).

Ellis, Burroughs and Kesey give prominence to psychopaths and delusional murderers over chivalrous and knightly characters. These latter are contemporary literary pirates dubbed as outlaws and rebels without causes. They are simply celebrations of their own violent nature in search of new moulds of expression.

Piracy or Legitimate Experimentation

Mutiny on Form

Literary innovation has never ceased as literature has become more interdisciplinary, sipping from the nectar of history, philosophy, medicine, politics and chemistry. Literature has transformed into a laboratory accommodating different genres ranging from drama to non-fiction.

Probably, the practice of experimentation best reflects the rebellion against deeply-rooted conceptions of what a good piece of fiction should be like. The norm becomes thwarted in the promised discovery of that “new form”. That unknown form has allowed the writer to venture into the realms of the cross-generic and the invention of a “new language” worthy of a new fiction. In this respect, Charles Glicksberg contends:

The experimental novel marks a drastic departure from the type of realistic fiction to which we have been accustomed and which we tend to regard as the established and inviolable norm. The rebellious experimental novel is often the expression of disillusionment with the novel as a literary form. Contemporary culture not only permits but encourages freedom of experimentation in all arts, in the hope of calling forth creative originality. These experiments in the art of fiction affect both form and style, and a bewildering variety of forms and styles make their appearance (1974: 128).

The experimental novel can be a naturalistic social documentation of history like Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*. It can take readers to fantastic realms or allegories such as the *Wild Goose Chase* or penetrate the dream-

like cosmoses while exploring Kafkaesque *Metamorphosis*. This novel can “take the reader places he has never been before” (Kesey 1996: 2), bewilder him beyond belief and lead him to trap doors and enchanted secret forests within the walls of his own city. In the world of the experimental narrative, the unitary wholeness of subjectivity disintegrates as the ego of characters and writers alike multiply.

Perhaps, the chief determiner of this rebellious novel is disintegration. Worlds that are governed by an epistemological unity and an order of logical and causality transform into “a superior reality of the imagination as it fuses past and present and by annihilating time, perceives the only truth that is unattainable by man - the truth projected by timeless memory (Auerbach 2003: 542). Instead of setting genres, experimental fiction is all about setting trends where the laws of taxonomy are completely disregarded.

Different trends have emerged, the lyrical, the surrealist, the new novel and the anti-novel among many others. Their common denominator is that the author is granted freedom “to introduce digressions that are fantastic or grotesque” (Glicksberg 1974: 142). They pertain to the sphere of “new reality” described by Richard Gitman as “[b]eing open-ended, provisional, characterized by suspended judgements, by disbelief in hierarchies, by mistrust of solutions, denouement and competitions, by self-consciousness issuing in tremendous earnestness but also in far ranging mockery” (27).

This radical shift in form clearly announces the cerebral death of the novel, reinstating the spirit of anarchy in adherence to antagonistic discourses that are less likely to be part of the traditional novel. Discourses pertaining to politics, economics, aesthetics, newspaper clips, and illustrations are collages that break the unity of the flow of the narrative.

Alternatively, experimentation becomes synonymous with emergent avant-gardism as to “win new expressive possibilities, for the arts... to bend the existing conventions without breaking them. This is the strenuous and heroic calling of the experimental artist” (Lodge 2002: 170). Hence, writing is piracy in all its forms from sailing across unknown genres to teleporting the reader to unfamiliar territories. Naturally, Burroughs, Ellis and Kesey have defied the conventions of romance, gothic and detective genres, declaring the death of traditional fiction and the birth of the anti-novel.

Naked Lunch: A Spy Tale in a World of Wonders

Pirates often intercept ships, murder the crew and raise their deathly flag. Symmetrically, literary pirates take over traditional forms, bend them, remodel them and produce a mutated genre of their own. This is the case of *Naked Lunch* where William Burroughs parodies the well-established patriotic spy novel. *Naked Lunch* is a hallucinatory narrative whose protagonist happens to be a spy. It is constructed by a series of episodic unrelated chapters that include supernatural elements like giant lizards that are serial assassins or sadistic and lecherous mugwumps. At a first glance, the spy Lee is seen being chased at the train station, then his mission is to infiltrate Benway's laboratory and become his right-hand assistant. He declares, "I am assigned to engage in the services of Doctor Benway for Islam Inc" (Burroughs 1959: 17).

The spy novel has several determiners that "include conflict that is based on a threat or a fear to a country, an agency, or agent. The plot involves "the strategy to end the threat" and usually "involves retrieving or planting information, an object, or a person" (Lee and Bruce 1985). In *Naked Lunch*, there is no conflict or conspiracy against the United States. It is simply a tailing mission that presupposes the observation of Benway's method of operation that consists in "total demoralization. Benway's first act was to abolish concentration camps, mass arrest and, except under certain limited and special circumstances, the use of torture" (Burroughs 1959: 17).

The spy novel is set in exotic lands, foregrounding the elements of mystery. *Naked Lunch* is set in Tangier, Annexia, and the Interzone. However, the Interzone and Annexia seem to be imaginary and contradictory spheres. The Interzone is an ongoing orgy land where everybody engages in murder, rape, and debased sexual practices (1959: 76-80). Annexia is the total opposite where life is a perpetual paperwork preparation. It is a land in which basic rights are denied (17-18).

These lands are not geographically real; they are allegories of supernatural spheres that pertain to another planet rather than exist on earth. As for the spy, he is the furthest from the formulaic hero who holds chivalrous attributes and does everything in his power to preserve the American way of life (Cawelti and Rosenberg 1987: 43). Lee is portrayed killing, sodomizing, raping, and stealing. On occasion, he indulges in drug

consumption and illegal acts (Burroughs 1959: 8). He simply takes part in the different life cycles that exist in the Interzone as well as Annexia. A spy in traditional tales is the epitome of intelligence, resolution and resourcefulness. Lee is rather stripped of his role as he disappears for many chapters, just to resurface at the end in the chase scene.

A loosely knit-plot is the perfect fit for a mock hero. The spy novel that is based on intrigue, sequence and causality transforms into an episodic hallucinatory or rather drug induced narrative laden with anthropological accounts on the history and the types of narcotics.

The tale of Lee does not revolve around allies who are meant to help him in his noble mission. It evolves around mugwumps which are "creatures with no liver", mercenary lizards who feed on mugwump fluids and giant centipedes that crave black human meat (1959: 31). The suspense thriller transforms into a science fiction piece along with aliens, strange creatures and a mad scientist (Benway) leading lives in a giant market place where all commodities are allowed (The Interzone) and a giant prison where the normative act of sitting is liable (Annexia). *Naked Lunch* departs significantly from the idealistic and nationalistic fiction, it is set to tell and depicts a grotesque reality through the consciousness of an intoxicated homosexual spy. The narrative is intentionally built to disintegrate because its core language is dimmed symptomatic of a latent sickness. Accordingly, Burroughs views that:

The word is literally a virus, and that it has not been recognized as such because it has achieved a state of relatively stable symbiosis with its human host. But, the word clearly bears the single identifying feature of a virus: it is an organism with no internal function other than replicate itself (1986: 47).

The word is a virus because it emulates, parodies and reproduces, so why not destroy it? Except, the novel in itself perpetuates a self-destructive discourse submerged in death and madness. When the Interzone epitomizes madness, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* indoctrinates it.

The Bull Goose Loony Mad Kingdom

Pirates are often described as rejects. In Medieval times, the Lepers and the insane were sent on a boat called *Stultifera Navis* or the ship of fools. This ship would roam the sea till these rejects would die of starvation. The Keseyian ship of

fools is “no longer a ship but a hospital” (Foucault 1965: 35). *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is an allegory of McCarthy America in its highest peak of economic boom as it is portrayed by a mental asylum. The major contention rests in the critical consensus that it is a form of a subverted “archetypal romance” (Viktus 1994: 83). Northrop Frye contends that “Romance is the structural core of all fiction: being directly descended from folktale, it brings us closer than any other aspect of literature in the sense of fiction, considered as a whole, as the epic of the creature, man’s vision of his own life as a quest” (1976: 15). Folktales are the worlds of enchantment and of mystery as they project the reader into an exotic territory recounting tales of chivalry and sacrifice. The literary romance is the most flexible of genres since it marks the intersection between the highly factual realistic and the extraordinarily fantastic. In this respect, Gillian Beer affirms that:

The heroic, the pastoral, the exotic, the mysterious, the dream, childhood, and total passionate love. ... The romance gives repetitive form to the particular desire of a community, and especially to those desires, which cannot find controlled expression within society. ... Romance, being absorbed with the ideal, always has an element of prophecy. It remakes the world in the image of desire (1970: 79).

Cuckoo’s Nest is a subversive romance as it thwarts all the previous conceptions of its making. A romance comprises a maiden in distress, a chivalrous hero and a villain with incredible supernatural powers set in an exotic setting. In *Cuckoo’s Nest*, the hero is a street hassle proudly bragging to be a psychopath that he has feigned insanity to escape his being sentenced to hard labour. He sarcastically declares “Another thing: I’m in this place because that’s the way I planned it, pure and simple, because it’s a better place than a work farm. As near as I can tell I’m no loony, or never knew it if I was” (Kesey 1996: 57). McMurphy, the presupposed superman of the novel is not only an ex-convict but also a self-proclaimed psychopath. He adds, “What happened, you see, was I got in a couple of hassles at the work farm, to tell the pure truth, and the court ruled that I’m a psychopath” (1996: 11).

The equation is not complete until the hero rescues the damsel in distress. However, in his case, the damsel is a fully-fledged six-foot Indian American. A deeply troubled “vanishing American, a six-foot-eight sweeping machine, scared of its own shadow” (1996: 60) is the perfect

epitome of a troubled maiden awaiting to be rescued from the dragon. The dragon is none other than the robotic nurse Ratchet who is even thought to “freeze the sun” (45). Here the paradigms of the villain and the maiden in distress are completely overthrown. The Indian who has been thought to be the oldest enemy of the American pioneer like Magua, the Indian Huron chief in Fennimore Cooper’s classic Romance *The Last of Mohicans*, is completely derided and caricaturized in *Cuckoo’s Nest*. The maiden’s description fits nurse Ratchet best masking her devilish side as Chief Bromden notices:

Her face is smooth, calculated, and precision-made, like an expensive baby doll, skin like flesh-colored enamel, blend of white and cream and baby-blue eyes, small nose, and pink little nostrils - everything working together except the color on her lips and fingernails, and the size of her bosom. A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would [have] otherwise been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it (1996: 6).

Kesey overturns the paradigms of gender casting the role of evil to matriarchy where a female character rejects her own femininity, motherly instinct and docility to become the instrument of the combine, forsaking the role of the victim for that of the executioner.

The enchanted forest, the castle and the mysterious sea are discarded for an asylum-like battle field in which McMurphy fights the demonic power of Nurse Ratchet to restore the humanity of persecuted mental patients through gambling, drugs, sex and pranks. The rigid moral law transforms into an ongoing party where these patients are allowed to indulge in a much needed hedonism while breaking away from Nurse Ratchet’s crippling conformity. Ironically, Kesey maintains the tragic element of the romance as the hero sacrifices himself for the common good of the “chronics” and the “acutes”. What is left of the mighty “superman” and the “biggest goose loony”, as he proudly used to refer to himself, is a senseless statute:

The ward door opened, and the black boys wheeled in this Gurney with a chart at the bottom that said in heavy black letters, MCMURPHY, RANDLE P. POST-OPERATIVE. And below this was written in ink, LOBOTOMY. They pushed it into the day room and left it standing against the wall, along next to the Vegetables. We stood at the foot of the Gurney,

reading the chart, then looked up to the other end at the head dented into the pillow, a swirl of red hair over a face (Kesey 1996: 21).

Tragedy may have been preserved, but the fantastic side is maintained in the crazy narrative of chief Bromden for whom everything is a major conspiracy by the combine that seeks to control the universe through robots. The asylum transforms into a zombie colony filled with ongoing monstrosity. Entranced by the blue pill, Chief Bromden describes the rite of the combine ritualistic murders. He declares:

I'd wander for days in the fog, scared I'd never see another thing, then there'd be that door, opening to show me the mattress padding on the other side to stop out the sounds, the men standing in a line like zombies among shiny copper wires and tubes pulsing light, and the bright scrape of arcing electricity. I'd take my place in the line and wait my turn at the table. The table shaped like a cross, with shadows of a thousand murdered men printed on it, silhouette wrists and ankles running under leather straps sweated green with use, a silhouette neck and head running up to a silver band goes across the forehead. And a technician at the controls beside the table looking up from his dials (1996: 103).

Cuckoo's Nest is an anti-romance that invokes the discourse of madness over that of sanity and proclaims an everlasting war on form where all genres mix in a mad world of total dehumanization. This world is further radicalized in *American Psycho* as the ultimate tale of horror.

American Psycho: A tale of Horror

When horror tales are told, they rhyme with savage and blood-thirsty pirates. Pirates are the perfect epitome of gothic tales as they wreak havoc and terror whenever they set anchor. It is no wonder that gothic fiction is fraught with pirate legends, scary creatures and exotic treasure islands.

The Postmodern gothic has not only preserved the horror and the terror, but it has also explored the beastly side of the human being. Patrick Bateman is the human monster Brit Easton Ellis chooses for his urban tale of horror entitled as *American Psycho*. *American Psycho* is not set in a forsaken castle or an enchanted forest, its plot occurs in upper side Manhattan in a luxurious apartment building where celebrities dwell. Naturally, as the word gothic is architecturally relevant as Gothic architecture was prevalent in Western Europe between the 12th and 16th

centuries (Allué 1999: 31). Its major trademark is its darkness and complexity. It is rather significant that Ellis chooses a high-class apartment as the perfect gothic setting. As if Ellis contended that the city in itself was the locus of "darkness, desire, and power" (Allué 1999: 31).

Naturally, the apartment transforms into the monster that feeds Bateman's urges to kill. Simply because he sits there and watches horror movies "*Body Double*" (Ellis 1991: 112) or "*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*" (1991: 153), "*Bloodungry*" (243), or the "*Toolbox Murders*" (278). These movies catalyze these premeditated murders as he visualizes them in slow motion and then executes them with the utmost pleasure. The being haunted motif is omnipresent in the figure of the gothic hero whom everybody sees as the perfect incarnation of "the American Dream".

The gothic hero is supposed to save the victim and vanquish the monster. In this postmodern gothic tale, the monster is the savior whom everybody mistakes as "the boy next door" (Jancovich 2001: 11). Patrick Bateman is a "rich, handsome, good with the ladies and has a good fashion sense" (Allué 1999: 34). Somehow, Bateman is not complete as his internal vacuum transforms into a compelling desire to kill. He utters, "My life is a living hell ...and there are many more people, I, uh want to... want to well I guess murderer" (Ellis 1991: 141). He does not simply stop at wishing; he turns into action as the bold chapter titles of the novel do suggest. The titles themselves emulate real life murders that were announced in the yellow papers as "Confronted by Fagot" (1991: 291) and "Tries to Cook and Eat Girl" (343). He has actually killed the dancer and the homosexual who confessed to him.

The elements of horror and terror can be summarized in sex and murder as they are inspired from pornographic and horror films. In the eighties as monsters, witches, haunted castles and plagued islands cease to make sense, other horrific elements surface. Ellis turns to pornography for the inspiration of "rape, sado-masochistic, killing of women in blue movies" (qtd in Allué 32). Horror exists in society as it is thoroughly documented by tabloids that render homicides, kidnapping and death something taken so lightly.

In one his famous tirades, Price, a junior stock broker and colleague of Bateman, summarizes the frightening content of the daily newspaper saying: "The one issue... in one issue - let's see here...strangled models, babies thrown from tenement rooftops, kids killed in the subway, a

communist rally, Mafia Boss wiped out, Nazis... Baseball players with AIDS, More Mafia Shit, Gridlock, the homeless, various maniacs, fagots" (Ellis 1991: 4). Thus, Ellis draws on Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* assimilating society to a massive orgy of consumption and death. He feeds on the romantic belief that civilization leads to the corruption of the innately-good man and transforms him into a greedy, ambitious and pragmatic beast of the matter. Like Pirates, Ellis is able to twist the conventions of the gothic genre and remodel it within a more plausible framework of horror. Man is his own evil twin.

Say No Evil: Breaching the Taboos

Piracy is about the transgression of norms. The rules of censorship and morality do not apply. Burroughs, Ellis and Kesey have ventured into the territory that remains under the lid of "unspeakable and unacceptable". Relying on the power of allegory the barriers of sexuality, confinement and materialism have been abruptly lifted.

Queer Abomination in American Psycho and Cuckoo's Nest

Naked Lunch, *American Psycho* and *Cuckoo's Nest* deal with the theme of homosexuality at varying intensity. Especially, the issue of homosexuality has been under scrutiny and faced conservative America's echoing rejection. Queers, fagots and fruits are what Kesey, Ellis and Burroughs use to indicate the heightened tension against homosexuals. In *American Psycho*, Bateman radiates a venomous hatred towards these sexual others to the point of killing them. Whenever he utters the word 'fagot', his resentment is conspicuous. He writes:

When I stopped on the corner of Sixteenth Street and made a closer inspection it turned out to be something called a "Gay Pride Parade," which made my stomach turn. Homosexuals proudly marched down Fifth Avenue, pink triangles emblazoned on pastel-colored windbreakers, some even holding hands, most singing "Somewhere" out of key and in unison. I stood in front of Paul Smith and watched with a certain traumatized fascination, my mind reeling with the concept that a human being, a *man*, could feel pride over sodomizing another man, but when I began to receive fey catcalls from aging, overmuscled beachboys with walruslike mustaches in between the lines "*There's a place for us, Somewhere a place for us,*" I sprinted over to Sixth Avenue, decided to be late for them (Ellis 1991: 94).

His disdain for homosexuals is further radicalized by the murder of Luis: a homosexual who has declared his undying love for him which he has met with disgust. His homophobia results in a verbal violence fraught with dangerous threats as he angrily hisses: "Listen, you *want* to die? I'll do it, Luis. I've done it before and I will fucking *gut* you, *rip* your fucking stomach open" (1991: 198). His threats become reality when he savagely and monstrosly strangles him. While describing the scene with the unequal pleasure as the Luis gasps for air, Bateman narrates:

I start to squeeze, tightening my grip, but it's loose enough to let Luis turn around - still in slow motion - so he can stand facing me, one hand over his wool and silk Polo sweater, the other hand reaching up. His eyelids flutter for an instant, then widen, which is exactly what I want. I want to see Luis's face contort and turn purple and I want him to know who it is who is killing him. I want to be the last face, the last *thing that* Luis sees before he dies (107).

Homophobia becomes an obsession for Bateman who feels it is his mission to eliminate all homosexuals simply because they stir an awful feeling within him: an underlying disgust. He incarnates an ideal that is predominant in America at that time which is inherent with the growing number of hate crimes against homosexuals. By believing in his own superiority over everyone who is different, Bateman portrays the anti-sentiment that contradicts American plurality and tolerance. He epitomizes homophobia as a delectable horror story. This horrific reality is symptomatic of a vacuum in the social fabric. Martin Weinreich observes in this context that "it appears that Patrick Bateman murders to discover authentic, something remotely meaningful beyond the images of surfaces and signs" (2004: 72). This crippling void to which Ellis alludes, Kesey clearly explains.

Dale Harding is portrayed the sanest character in *Cuckoo's Nest*. Nonetheless, he is committed by his wife in the Oregon mental Asylum. During the late fifties, two main groups were persecuted by the United States Government: The Queers and the Communists. In his book *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, Alfred Kingsley contends that the spirit of the age has "undermined normative sexuality contributing to the national obsession with homosexuality and placing sexual preferences at the forefront of the public's perception of manhood" (1948: 43). Dale Harding is

also considered as a psychopath although he is a very calm and levelheaded thinker. He is a psychopath simply because he is unable to have a sexual relationship with his wife due to her big breasts that testify nothing but of his impotence regarding her overpowering femininity. His homosexuality has become an object of ridicule in one of the therapeutic group discussions where his problems were not only made public but also subjected him to slander on the behalf of the other ward inmates. He declares when Mack tries to sooth him saying:

I discovered at an early age that I was – shall we be kind and say different? It's a better, more general word than the other one. I indulged in certain practices that our society regards as shameful. And I got sick. It wasn't the practices, I don't think, it was the feeling that the great, deadly, pointing forefinger of society was pointing at me – and the great voice of millions chanting, 'Shame. Shame. Shame.' It's society's way of dealing with someone different (Kesey 1996: 169).

Harding's sexual orientation subjects him to social rejection not only externally but also internally since he was interpellated by the inner voice saying that what he was doing was inappropriate and that made him sick. In his book, *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault argues that sex entails power structures "put into discourse" and that the body becomes its locus inescapable in the construction of masculinity that is not fixed but rather embedded within the social process becoming a part of history (1978: 11). What is common to both novels, homosexuality is met with complete social rejection. Whether it is violence or madness, queers are regarded as an abomination and a taboo that is better left unrevealed. However even sexuality in its normative way can lead to social madness.

Billy Bibbit: A Victim of Matriarchy

Kesey chooses an asylum as reference to America at the peak of its golden age. Billy Bibbit is an "acute" oedipal patient. Billy is a thirty-two-year-old male with the mind of a six-year old boy who is constantly afraid of his own mother (Kesey 1996: 45). Basically, he has never had any sexual intercourse or fallen in love with a woman. He is constantly afraid of getting punished for misbehaving and is terrorized by Nurse Ratchet because she is the dear friend of his mother. Billy's mother does not support, nurture or appears to love her son. She constantly discourages

him from doing anything because he is still young to achieve anything in life. She says: "Sweetheart, you still have scads of time for things like that. Your whole life is ahead of you" (1996: 269). Chief Bromden observes while observing Mrs. Bibbit kissing her son, "I had to admit she didn't look like a mother of any kind" (Kesey 1996: 269). Billy's troubled latent sexual desire for his mother has resulted in his stuttering and his suicidal tendencies. Simply because he believes what he feels for his mother is wrong and that this feeling of shame destroys his self-esteem and makes him suicidal. He screams "You s-s-saw what she c-can do to us! In the m-m-meeting today" (1996: 45) and threatens that he "should just k-k-kill [him]self" (83). McMurphy, being the redeemer of the asylum, introduces him to a prostitute named Candy in order for him to experiment with his sexuality away from his mother. Consequently, Billy regains confidence and is able to utter words without stuttering. However, Nurse Ratchet rebukes him so harshly that he commits suicide after being temporarily healed.

"Billy BillyBilly," she said. "Your mother and I are old friends." "No!" he cried. His voice scraped the white, bare walls of the Seclusion Room. He lifted his chin so he was shouting at the moon of light in the ceiling. "N-n-no! [...] we watched Billy folding into the floor, head going back, knees coming forward. He rubbed his hand up and down that green pant leg. He was shaking his head in panic like a kid that has been promised a whipping just as soon as a willow is cut (287).

Billy Bibbit is a victim of patriarchy. The stereotype where women are oppressed and victimized angels is thwarted as women become "the mad woman in the attic" and the monster that terrorizes males with its sexuality. Robert Forrey confirms "The premise of the novel is that women ensnare, emasculate, and, in some cases, crucify men" (1975: 224). Billy's mother may have resulted in his suicide but Chief Bromden's Mother has caused his dispossession, schizophrenia and his father's subsequent alcoholism.

Chief Bromden: An Invisible Giant

American democracy has two main skeletons in its closet: Indian American genocides and slavery. The mission to ethnically cleanse Native Americans from the American soil has resulted in the quasi extinction of this human race. The Native American association estimates that the American military

has caused the death of ten million Indian American tribes and only a few thousands are housed in reserves (Bancroft 1886: 25).

Kesey explores this shameful past as he sheds light on the Chinook tribe dispossession. Chief Bromden used to be the proud son of the Dales Chinook tribe before he was ridiculed as the famous Chief Broom (Kesey 1996: 8). The Chief represents a lost generation of a stolen legacy and a buried history. The contrasts between an idyllic past where he has enjoyed “the sound of the falls on the Columbia (...), the woop of Charley Bean Belly stabled himself a big chinook (...), the slap of fish in the water, laughing naked kids on the bank, the woman at the rocks (1996: 73) and a dreadful present within the walls of a stranded asylum has led to his schizophrenia. Chief Broom, as the Black male orderlies like to call him, has a pathological fear of everything that surrounds him, believes that everything around him is a conspiracy and chooses to play the dumb and deaf Indian for the past twenty years of his life (1-10). Chief Broom or “the giant sweeping machine” has witnessed how his mother has summoned government officials and convinced them to build a dam in their own homeland. His mother is a white woman from whom he gets the name Bromden. His father who used to be a feared and a respected chief succumbs to alcoholism due to his shame. Under the influence of his wife, his father Tee Ah Millatoona or the pine that stands tallest signed the contract, forsook his land and doomed his people. Chief Bromden has subsequently internalized this feeling of loss and has started to see reality as distorted. His father shrunk, his mother grew bigger and he “start[ed] getting scared of things” (Kesey 1996: 147).

Naturally in the real world, Chief Bromden is an acculturated invisible. The wounding past impedes the process of self-formation and self-recognition of an independent identity construction, resulting in a lost sense of belonging. In this respect, Martha Sotomayor explains:

The self-concept can suffer irreparable damage if the socialization process prevents significant and familiar symbols to be present and reinforced at various levels of experience. The sense of belonging is crucial in the development of self-concept, becomes blurred if one’s language, cultural patterns, and ethnic experiences are reflected and supported, but rather given a negative connotation in the environment (1980: 13).

Society rejects him as a useless pariah and this does nothing but exacerbate his mental illness further. Pained, he declares:

I can see all that, and be hurt by it, the way I was hurt by seeing things in the Army, in the war. The way I was hurt by seeing what happened to Papa and the tribe. I thought I'd got over seeing those things and fretting over them. There's no sense in it. There's nothing to be done (106).

Chief Bromden has paradoxically denied his own past and run from his own present. He has become a senseless, anachronistic unity, accepting abuse for the sake of his own survival. As the novel opens, a scared plea echoes from its pages, "they are out there" (7). An interesting register is used to convey the utmost despair of the six-foot Indian engaged in a state of a pathological fear. He "creeps along the wall quiet as dust in [his] canvas shoes" (8). Yet, they know he is there and can detect his 'fear'. He "ducks back in the mop closet, jerk[s] the door shut after [him] and holds [his] breath" (8). He can sense the black boy coming to get him and smell his own fear. He simply conforms to what he is being labeled as "just old Broom Bromden, the half-breed Indian back there hiding behind his mop and can't talk to call for help" (8). Kesey carefully sketches the daily suffering of a dispossessed ethnic minority in its perpetual struggle to have a decent living. His optimistically devises an ending where Chief Bromden escapes from the asylum and embarks towards a new life. Eventually, He lifts the control panel crashing the window and he "[runs] across the grounds in the direction ... toward the highway" feeling "like [he] was flying. Free" (178). The Chief is able to fight his own dehumanization, Annexia and Interzone dwellers have metamorphosed into monsters in their quest for the plentiful matter of their existence.

The "Mugwump Consumer" in Naked Lunch

Naked Lunch transposes the reader in allegorical worlds that are equally shocking and estranging. The Interzone is a chaotic realm that exists in the psyche of the hallucinating mind of Lee. The Interzone is an obscene place where everything is sold and allowed. The Interzone is the melting pot of aliens, black market salesmen, slave auctioneers, and war lords. It epitomizes "Consumer Land" where everybody indulges in selling and purchasing as a matter of existence where:

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In the city market is the Meet Café. Followers of obsolete, unthinkable trades doodling in Etruscan, addicts of drugs not yet synthesized, pushers of souped-up hermaline, junk reduced to pure habit offering, precarious vegetable serenity, liquids to induce Latah, tithonian longevity serums, black marketeers of World War III, excisors of telepathic sensitivity, osteopaths of the spirit, investigators of infractions denounced by bland paranoid chess players, servers of fragmentary warrants taken down in hebephrenic shorthand charging unspeakable mutilations of the spirit, investigators of fractions denounced by bland paranoid chess players, servers of fragmentary warrants... sellers of organ tanks and relaxing machines, brokers of exquisite dreams and memories tested on the sensitized cells of junk sickness... maladies of the ocean floor and the stratosphere, maladies of the laboratory and atomic war... A place where the unknown past and the emergent future meet in a vibrating soundless hum... laval entities waiting for a Live One (Burroughs 1959: 56).

Man has become a junky for goods. He has become the ultimate consumer even to the point of purchasing diseases, sadness, and horror that lead nowhere but to his demise. Burroughs attacks the growing materialism that has transformed the world into a dehumanized “body without organs” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 351). Man has metamorphosed into a “mugwump”. Mugwumps are creatures with no livers who nourish themselves exclusively on sweets and incline towards tearing each other “to shreds over clients” (Burroughs 1959: 31). Man has lost his essence since he has lost his liver. He has grown addicted to matter “sweets” and blinded by greed to the point of violence and murder. The mugwump consumer is symptomatic of a scatological age in which Man’s carnal instinct takes hold of his essence, restricting his only purpose in life to procreation, and defecation.

Probably, the metaphor of the talking “anus” is best to reflect the hollowness of the contemporary individual whose only words are entirely worthless. Shaffer, the mad colleague of the infamous Dr. Benway concludes that:

The human body is scandalously inefficient: Instead of a mouth and an anus to get out of order. Why not have one all-purpose hole to eat and eliminate? We could seal up the nose and the mouth, fill the stomach, and make an air hole direct into the lungs where it should have been in the first place (Burroughs 1959: 150).

Schaffer's uncanny statement reflects the degree to which human life has become mechanical. Even though he is able to satisfy all the desires of the flesh, he has become enslaved to his animalistic conformity. His addiction to consumerism destroys any sense of individualism that ceases to exist entirely in Annexia. The word Annex is quite significant since it entails a subsidiary degree to humanity. Burroughs portrays semi-humans in a land of unstoppable paper work. Annexia marks striking similarities with the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Oceania. Except, when in Oceania, love and freedom of expression are forbidden. In Annexia, life is a long waiting line for preparing an absolutely useless paperwork where:

Every citizen of Annexia was required to apply for and carry on his person at all times a whole portfolio of documents. Citizens were subject to be stopped in the street at any time; and the Examiner, who might be in plain clothes, in various forms, often in bathing suit or pyjamas, sometimes stark naked except for the badge pinned to his left nipple, after checking each paper, would stamp it. On subsequent inspection the citizen was required to show the properly entered stamps of the last inspection. The Examiner, when he stopped a large group, would only examine and stamp the cards a few. The others were then subject to arrest because their cards were not properly stamped. Arrest meant "provisional detention"; that is, the prisoner would be released if and when his Affidavit of Explanation, properly signed and stamped, was approved by the Assistant Arbiter of Explanations. Since this official hardly came to his office, and the Affidavit of Explanation had to be presented in person, the explainers spent weeks and months waiting around in unheated offices with no chairs and no toilet facilities. (1959: 17)

From being a slave to the flesh in *The Interzone*, Man is forever prisoner of the endless bureaucratic system. Man is still a consumer of a service and not of a product. In this case, the service consumes the lives of the dwellers of Annexia for whom even daylight is a liability. Again, the metaphor of the dark world of excessive consumption echoes the creature of the mugwump who resides in the dim corners of the ceiling (31). The body without organs is a manifestation of a whole culture that is in desperate need for a new spirit.

Pirate Code: A Culture of Rebellion

Pirates have established their own life style; their own folklore and have their own code. They are a group of subcultural others.

Beatniks: Art Pirates

Post-war American society was marked by a spiritual and an artistic vacuum. The country was torn by war, a recovering frail post-Depression economy and the collapse of theological institutions. In this crippling void, a group of intellectuals decide to nurture this void through an alternative way of life based on embracing life. The Beats have noticed how Americans have equated themselves to ultimate consumers along with the nice picket fence and brand-new cars. Over excessive materialism has distanced Americans from every form of artistic expression. As a result, they have opted for a revolutionary life style based on heavy drinking, drug consumption and free sexual practices (Goodman 1960: 184). The founding fathers of the Beats are Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. They have met in New York during the 1940s and have bonded over Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. Allen Ginsberg launched his critically-acclaimed poetic collection named *The Howl* (1956) where he analogizes Americans to "grateful dead" who are deep to their ears in consumption. Kerouac writes on *The Road* (1957) to chronicle his adventure with Neal Cassidy. Using Sal Paradise as a mouth piece, Kerouac tells his unusual journey where he embarks on an adventure with only fifty dollars in his pocket, hitchhiking from New York to Denver. Sal Paradise, the aspiring middle class writer, leaves the comfort of his home and becomes a hobo while seeking an honest man's work. Paradise breaks with his WASP culture and chooses to identify with subaltern groups (Theado 2000: 15-6). Burroughs did the same both in writing and in the flesh. Born the son of a wealthy family, Burroughs leaves home, drops out of Harvard and travels the world on a two-hundred-dollar allowance (Boon 2002: 164). Burroughs has even spent four years in the Peruvian jungle researching for the yagé plant for its telepathic power.

Burroughs, Kerouac, Kenneth, and Ginsberg were all the enemies of complacency and consumerism, devising different metaphors to condemn it. When Kerouac calls it "the serpent" that eats the earth (1991: 148). Ginsberg describes humanity as "a locust like blight on the plane... living

in a kind of addict's dream of affluence comfort, eternal progress" (Snyder 1965: 39). This indictment results in the formation of new bohemian counterculture based on the disengagement from the materialistic society, the reliance on hiring to Far East literature and Buddha consciousness. They have founded the San Francisco West-Coast Bohemian anarchist modernist tradition and the New York Impulse (Johnston 2005: 109). In literature, Kerouac introduces the "spontaneous writing" that echoes the pace of human thinking and its freedom from the norms of punctuation where "the sketching language is undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words, blowing as (per jazz musician) on subject of image" (Boon 2002: 198). Burroughs is famous for the "cut-up" to break free from the mould. Burroughs obliterates the conventions between non-fiction and fiction to further rebel against the conformity of the age. In this respect, Lydenberg notes "the cut-up defy copy right and ownership, transgressing the regulations of boundary and conventions" (1987: 49). Like Pirates they raid ships cargos and reappropriate them as their own. These Beats have not made a significant political difference, but they have affected generations to come like the hippies, punk culture and Generation X (Skerl and Lydenberg 1991: 63). They have perhaps changed the whole face of American literature and history.

The Merry Pranksters: Defying the System

Pirates are known for their experimentation with opiates while crossing the Far East. The Merry Pranksters were no different except they resorted to a customized version of hallucinogenic named as LSD. LSD is the acronym for Lysergic acid diethylamide. It is substance that was first mistaken as uterotonic by the Swiss gynaecologist Albert Huaffman. While drinking the substance, he has had an induced hallucination where he has seen "an interrupted stream of fantastic images of extraordinary plasticity and vividness accompanied by an intense kaleidoscopic play of colors" (Lee and Shlain 1985: 14-15). LSD was then adopted by the CIA as a trial drug for interrogation and Mind control under the name MK ULTRA and BLUEBIRD (1985: 45). Kesey has participated in the psychedelic testing in Menlo Park Veteran Hospital in 1959. His involvement lasted two months ingesting from eight to ten types of drugs such as mescaline, psilocybin and more obscure pharmaceuticals such as IT-290 and Mp-14 (Dodgson 2006: 189). To him, these substances are 'mind blowing'. When asked about their

effects, he answered “[another] world happened... it slowly becomes evident to you that there’s some awful and unique logic going on just as real as, in some ways as your other world” (qtd in Kesey 16). Under the influence of this substance, Kesey was able to deliver his masterpiece *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and earn a good living allowing him to purchase The Perry Lane house. In this place that the famous Merry Pranksters saw the light.

His house on Perry Lane, the bohemian hangout area for Stanford students, became a gravitational force attracting every kind of artist and intellectual. Among them were Larry McMurtry, the young writers Ed McClanahan and Bob Stone, the dancer Chloe Scott, Roy Seburn, Carl Lehmann-Haupt, and Richard Alpert (De Crescenzo 2011: 7).

The Merry Pranksters have attempted to rebel against the predominately lethargic consciousness and explore a newly-induced one. Their experimentation with Acid has been an ironic defiance to the CIA mind control project. They would consume the substance and produce artistic work that counteracts the system. The Merry Pranksters purchased a Harvard international old bus and departed on a cross-country journey just like Sal Paradise in Kerouac’s *On the Road*. Unlike the Beats, who experimented with literature, they decided to make art through living it. Their major difference lies in the fact that:

The Beats and the Pranksters were both countercultural movements. The Beats were trying to change literature and their representation of themselves; the Pranksters were trying to change the masses. The latter brought LSD to public awareness and spoke of its “mind expanding, life-enhancing properties,” birthing the psychedelic revolution and the hippie movement (De Crescenzo 2011: 9).

The Merry Pranksters ideals have inspired the Hippies and the Anti-War militants to change the face of American history and devise a new road map for a freer, more pluralistic and more flexible America. They have advocated “the same rejection of suburban culture, the same disdain for authority and the same enthusiasm for self-expression. There were still also notable moments of friction, particularly on how to achieve the goals of personal liberation and transformation of society” (Lee and Shlain 1985: 146). The Merry Pranksters have parted paths once LSD was criminalized.

Kesey was sentenced to six months and the trial ended after it has sparked a cataclysmic shift in US history (De Crescenzo 2011: 13). Ironically what the fifties and sixties intellectuals have fought so fiercely against has become the way of life Yuppies adopted during the 1980s.

The Yuppies: Empty Shells of Human Beings

Ellis marks his indictment of a Yuppie culture based on excessive materialism and fake ideals of vice and fake luxury. The word Yuppies is an acronym for Urban Young Professionals. Yuppies equate success with material possession believing that individualism is the most important attribute one can possess to achieve success. The hypocritical nature of the Yuppies is reflected in the homicidal maniac *Patrick Bateman*. Patrick Bateman is “the symbol of success in the eighties”. He is the ultimate boy next door who is adored, envied and loved by everybody else. Patrick Bateman’s main quest is to secure a reservation in the best and most expensive restaurant in town. He only wears top quality products and dwells in the best neighbourhood in New York. He works for Wall Street: the locus of capitalism in the America. Bateman embodies the dark side of capitalism by having a double personality: a nice gentleman at day and a psychotic murderer at night. Ellis satirizes the emptiness act of acquiring goods, doping and having excessive sex. Everything becomes commodified to the point that the human life becomes as dispensable as an out of the season clothing. This hollowness is symptomatic of a lost identity where humans become semi-human. Echoing deepening frustration, Patrick Bateman declares:

These are no more barriers to cross. All I have in common with the uncontrollable and the insane, the vicious and the evil, all I have caused and my utter indifference towards it, I have now surpassed. My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact, I want my pain to be inflicted on others (Ellis 1991: 87).

This sadistic nature translates in the alienation of others and the infliction of their suffering to fill a lost void within them. As such, those who can be categorized as others deeply unsettle him and awaken his urges to kill them. The word “other” entails having a different identity. Whether it is immigrant, woman, homosexual or homeless, they are part of a group. Bateman is part of none since he values individualism. So, in order for him

to justify his existence, he has to get rid of the rest. In reality, the yuppies struggle to portray a civilized beckoning community because they suffer from a spiritual and artistic vacuum that cannot be filled with money. Instead, they try to exist in a hyperreality and become holograms. Being their representative, Bateman videotapes talk shows, and spends half of his evenings alone watching rented pornography and horror movies. He only makes sense in the virtual world because in reality he nothing but another commodity. It is simply "humanist monstrosity" that exists in the state of non-existence (Cojocar 2008: 196). *American Psycho* is then a tale of monstrosity par excellence, but the monster is not an alien or a super villain. The real monster is the materialistic system that feeds on the souls of these yuppies and deeply dehumanizes them. They become selfish and harrowing creatures with nothing but the demise and torture of others. The Yuppies can be analogized to blood thirsty pirates who enjoy killing for killing's sake. Ironically, violence, xenophobia and murder become the pillars of a decadent society.

Conclusion

Pirates and postmodern writers are quite similar for being iconoclasts. Pirates want to explore new routes and conquer the ocean. Postmodern writers enjoy breaching the rigid laws of the genre. Pirates raid ships and steal the gold. Postmodern writers borrow, parody, revisit and cut-up preexisting texts and reinvent a new fiction. Pirates have no codes, norms or ethics to preserve. They are free rowdy individuals. Postmodern writers venture into the realms that deeply shock their audience, discarding any notion of censorship or taboo. Themes that range from sexuality to politics to substance abuse to incest and rape are evenly addressed without any filter. Pirates are cultural rebels who self marginalized themselves from the rigid spheres of social damnation and established a lore of their own. Postmodern writers have rebelled against mainstream lethargy, conformity and materialism and called for a pluralistic discourse that promotes equality and authenticity. Ellis's tale of horror, Kesey's hallucinogenic narrative, and Burroughs' eccentric novel has all transgressed the norms of the Great American Novel. Whether it is adapting the classic gothic to the postmodern age, epitomizing the sickness of the American society or taking the reader to realms of depravity and bureaucracy, Ellis, Kesey and

Burroughs have legitimized literary piracy. To them, Piracy is equated with the transformation of the classic and the generic into the fantastic, the supernatural and the gothic. They fiercely attack an obsolete system that stifles creativity and hollows human existence, advocating for a richer, deeper and a more dynamic existence. In this maze of innovation and reproduction, the reader becomes riddled with emergent new forms, daring content and a riveting call for freedom.

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