

PERSEPHONE'S PARADOX: THE AUTHOR'S JOURNEY INTO THE UNDERWORLD

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Abstract

In the most fundamental of Freud's discoveries, it has been argued, there exists a large part of the psyche which is not under the direct conscious control of the individual. In referring to this as 'the unconscious', Freud generated a paradox: how can we know of the existence of the unknowable?(Fowler: 1981: 193). This unknowable unconscious underpins the fugal narrative in its many variations. Varied perhaps, but structural similarities also unite narratives such as these. 'Underworld narratives' rely on a fugal descent into the underworld, including the underworld of the unconscious, which forms the structure of these narratives in terms of both their ongoing framework and signified content. The underworld into which the protagonist descends may be of a personal, social or cultural nature, or any combination of these. This paper examines two novels which emphatically represent this type of narrative structure. Most saliently, Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, first published in 1911, and also Susanna Moore's contemporary novel, *In the Cut* (1995), which offers a similar theme of fatality and surrender. Both of these novels have as their main character an author whose self-repression leads to a fugal, self-destructive projection of their desire onto a 'perfect' object for the narrator's unconscious purposes. This paper is based on research for my recently completed PhD thesis, 'The Writer's Fugue: authorship, subjectivity and the self', which applies the multivalent concept of 'fugue' to the creative writing process. As Deleuze argued in his work on Proust, a work of art is analogous to a machine, because it is essentially productive of certain truths (Deleuze 2000: 146). Mann's and Moore's murderous fugal narratives explore analogous truths about the psychological state of writing and 'being' a writer, both of which involve a necessary level of repression which can be represented analogously as a form of 'death'.

Keywords: Fugue authorship Persephone narrative underworld return

UNDERWORLD NARRATIVES

A descent into the underworld is an archetypal metaphorical device which has been used (unconsciously or consciously) to structure creative narratives since the dawn of story-telling in mythology around the world. In the Western literary tradition, from the modernist era since Freud, this journey has often assumed a dialectical psychological cast, represented as a fugal descent into the individual protagonist's unconscious mind. 'Underworld narratives' therefore represent both a cultural journey to the origins of narrative structure in myth, and an individual psychological descent into the archetypal unconscious mind. Aristotle suggested one function of art is catharsis. To what extent does a journey into the underworld perform a cathartic function of renewal for reader and author?

With this question in mind, I shall examine two novels which use as a central structuring device an author's fugal descent into an underworld of their own psyche, Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1911) and Susanna Moore's contemporary novel, *In the Cut* (1995). My

methodology is drawn from my doctoral research into the creative process which I call 'fugal' employing the metaphor of 'fugue' from the polyphonic, contrapuntal Baroque musical fugue and psychology's loss of awareness of self-identity. The transformative creative process of writing may be intentional but its intentionality is fugal, in part irrational and unconscious, propelled by deeply unknown yet basic drives embedded and acted out in social and cultural contexts. Underworld narratives structurally and thematically reflect these processes. Both these novels have as their main character an author whose self-repression leads to a fugal, self-destructive projection of their desire onto a highly unsuitable or, according to its compensatory nature, a *perfect* object for the protagonist's unconscious purposes. In Mann's novel the object of desire is a beautiful young boy, Tadzio; in Moore's, a sadistic street-wise New York City detective.

Mann's *Aschenbach* falls deeply and fatally into a fixated love for a thirteen-year old Polish boy, a guest with his family at the hotel in Venice where *Aschenbach* is also staying. Edward Said (1991) suggests that Mann's Professor *Aschenbach* represents the dominant (masculinist) values of the classically educated, ruling elite of imperialist Western high culture, in the first decade of the 20th century. Mann's novel therefore critiques these values as they were very specifically shaped by the social and cultural nationalistic context of pre-First World War Germany. The young boy who (secretly and enigmatically) entrances this esteemed professor is of a somewhat feminine cast and has a propensity for flirtatious glances, or so it seems to *Aschenbach*'s intrusively besotted gaze. Mesmerised from first sight, *Aschenbach* feverishly perceives the boy as erotically provocative at every chance encounter. Tadzio modestly lowers his eyes, then looks directly at the author/protagonist. He walks backwards from the lift in which he has travelled with *Aschenbach*, so that his admirer can better see him. He turns his profile to *Aschenbach*'s view and for the older man this is a fetching gesture. On the other hand, Moore's *Frannie*, a writer and university teacher in contemporary New York City, becomes fatally attracted to Malloy, a macho inner city detective with delicate hands, 'faggot's hands', and a mysterious tattoo of the three of clubs on his inside wrist, following him into his tough-talking underworld of edgy combative brutal sex, violence and murder. *Frannie* can also be read in relation to her author's, unconscious or conscious, critique of the conflicted moral core of contemporary American imperialist values, as *Frannie* is, significantly, an American diplomat's daughter.

In each novel the object of desire literally becomes the protagonist's nemesis, indirectly yet inevitably leading them to their death; forbidden desire for the Other doubling as retribution. On a deeply subliminal, semiotic, level these narratives represent and reflect a certain 'truth' of their author's writing. As Deleuze argued in his work on Proust, a work of art is analogous to a machine, because it is constitutively productive of certain truths. (Deleuze 2000: 146). Like Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, these short novels also constitute 'machines' which generate their own meanings, their own truths. Mann's and Moore's murderous fugal narratives explore analogous hypotheses about the psychological state of writing and 'being' a writer, both of which involve a necessary level of repression which can be represented analogously as a form of 'death'.

NARRATIVE SUBLIMATION

Sublimation, or repression, of the sensual, material world acts as a driving modality for writers. To adapt a Lacanian (1973) model in which the 'unconscious is structured like a language' the process of writing involves the un/conscious transformation of experience, including the instincts, passions, longings and desire, from the 'semiotic pre-conscious' as

Kristeva (1982) phrased this, through the semiotic realm of language into the conceptual medium of writing. In order to make this metaphorical journey to-and-from the semiotic underworld, in order to write, an individual writer must be able to exercise the sustained self-discipline required to transpose their desires into writing, which therefore becomes a process of creative displacement (or repositioning). I would argue that the process of writing is therefore contradictory and paradoxical, willed by desire yet driven by a 'fugal' intentionality that is at least partly irrational and unconscious. This paradox is differently observed by both Lacan (1973) and Kristeva (1982) in their psychoanalytic arguments about the unconscious and the 'impossible' proposition of writing (for discussion on writing and the psychoanalytic lost 'objet a' see Roudiez's 'Translator's Note' to Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1982)). In observing this kind of repression, Freud developed his views of sublimation, claiming that all culture is created as a result of the sublimation of basic instincts (primarily sex and violence) into cultural forms and projects. Many dark beasts may lurk amongst the flagellating Erinyes of the Underworld.

Derrida (1996) believed that writing is a form of individuation, a 'becoming' in which language is transfigured into writing. This process necessarily involves a metaphorical inward journey and immersion in the semiotic 'underworld' of language. But if, as Deleuze says, novels constitute machines which generate their own structural meanings, and, as Freud says, the process of writing itself is a form of sublimation, could it then be the case that 'Underworld narratives' depicting a descent into the nether regions of the psyche stand as cultural metaphors both for themselves and the creative fugal journey of writing in which they have been created? And if so, can this journey into the underworld become dangerous for the author and perhaps also the reader? In relation to the fictional authors-as-characters who are the hypothetical textual projections of the real authors Mann and Moore, this paradox is doubled in a classic labyrinthine modernist maneuver in which art - artfully - reflects 'reality' and vice versa (that is, the author's narrators are themselves authors).

In his essay, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through", Freud (2003) examines psychoanalytic treatment and the nature of repression in a patient's sickness. Like Freud's patient who 'has been content up to then to bemoan his illness, to despise its significance, whilst for the rest applying the same repressive behavior, the same head-in-the-sand strategy, to the manifestations of his illness' (Freud 2003:38), both Mann's and Moore's protagonists are doomed because they are fugally 'stuck' in a stage of illness which binds them to their own destruction. Freud argues that a subject must acknowledge the signs of her or his sickness to be able to gain the conscious motivation to free themselves from obsessional neuroses and move on. They must 'find the courage to focus on the manifestations no longer regard the illness as something contemptible, but rather as a worthy opponent, a part of his very being that exists for good reasons, and from which he must extract something of value for his subsequent life' (Freud 2003:38). Mann's and Moore's protagonists do not even recognize their illness as such, let alone see any 'good reasons' for self-transformation and survival. Their heads remain in the sand, they do not appreciate the conditions under which their phobias function and their obsessional impulses are driven by Thanatos as much as Eros. Each has a death wish in the guise of love and fugally they do not want to read the signs of their desire-death.

DEATH IN VENICE

In *Death in Venice* these impulses are played out in the complex relationship between aesthetics and morals which characterized German Romanticism in pre-Nazi Germany. In her

essay 'Syberberg's Hitler', Susan Sontag argued that Mann saw 'Nazism as the grotesque fulfillment - and betrayal - of German Romanticism.' (Sontag 1972:150). And certainly *Death in Venice* can be read as a vehicle for Mann's criticism of certain aspects of German Romanticism during the rise of fascism in early twentieth century Germany. The novel's protagonist, Aschenbach, a writer who has made a highly respectable and successful career extolling the almost mythic virtues of a certain type of romanticized male hero, epitomizing 'intellectual and virginal manliness' is later seduced by the beautiful, blonde, manly 'Aryan' ideal. Aschenbach also undergoes a moral crisis, which leads to his demise: a struggle between the Dionysian and Apollonian binaries of freedom and discipline. The critic E.L. Marson (1979) has interpreted *Death in Venice* in terms of Aschenbach's overriding 'lack of self-knowledge' which is the driving motivation of his 'strange adventure'. Ironically, of course, it is Aschenbach's disciplined self-denial and sublimation to an aesthetic ideal which leads to his Freudian repression, and fugal breakdown.

But Marson's critique of Professor Aschenbach is based on a limited assumption. Mann's focus on beauty and youth, and the desire of Aschenbach to possess it, his claim that the Professor's lack of self-knowledge caused his metaphorical fall, has another deeper textual resonance reflecting the Deleuzian machinic. The novel achieves another level of meaning which does more than critique the hyper-rational values of Aschenbach's ultimately unsustainable, implosive self-discipline. This meaning is denoted in Mann's interrogation of masculinity and homoerotic desire, notions of self-sacrifice and purity. In Aschenbach's fugal state he remains chaste and doesn't fully lose his dignity - regardless of the humiliation of his external, sexualised self. His ascetic worship of beauty may result in death but it also reaches a tormented poetic grace. Furthermore, the purity of Aschenbach's ideal - the beautiful boy - also remains unsullied, an 'impossible' perfection. Thus Mann does not so much escape, as reflect, the demonic aestheticism of the social and cultural values he is critiquing.

The structure of *Death in Venice* allows these themes to be played out fugally. The narrative takes the form of a perfectly structured allegorical novella, written with a compelling dream-like intensity, which juxtaposes the inevitable inner decay and self-destruction of a middle-aged German author's psyche with the external world of a Venice illuminated by the, albeit dying, light of youth and beauty. Aschenbach is a highly regarded and successful novelist who has been honoured on his fiftieth birthday with the title "von" by a German prince, for his book on Frederick the Great. He has made his reputation writing books applauding 'the new type of hero', young men who are passive, beautiful and pallidly languid, exemplifying qualities of 'aristocratic self-command that is eaten out from within' and 'the heroism born of weakness ... And after all what kind could be truer to the spirit of the times?' (16).

But Aschenbach's success has been at the expense of repressing, as a youth, his own individualistic artistic 'voice' in pursuit of the fame and honor which writing this kind of heroic nationalistic novel will bring. The disciplined life which follows ironically hides the emptiness of a dutiful, asexual life largely un-lived. Mann's irony symbolically comments on the idealized male German character Aschenbach creates from a sense of nationalistic duty, personal ambition and vanity, which ultimately, fugally, turns inward, literally embodying and becoming itself as 'forbidden' homoerotic desire which destroys him. There is therefore a deep masochistic driver in this desire which is an internalized response to the sadistic disciplinary social and aesthetic values Aschenbach obeys without question. The reader may ask to what extent Mann's representation of Aschenbach reflected his own experiences; Said (1991) reminds us such questions of social and cultural embedding are what make narratives such as these invaluable social and cultural records of their historical times.

Aschenbach's fugue begins with his walk one May afternoon to try to settle his thoughts before his evening's work. He passes a stonemason's yard in which tombstones are made and engraved. The symbolism is not lost on Aschenbach who is overtaken by a strange sensation. He makes eye contact with a stranger, a young traveler with a backpack on his back. At the sight of him, Aschenbach:

... felt the most surprising consciousness of a widening of inward barriers, a kind of vaulting unrest, a youthfully ardent thirst for distant scenes - a feeling so lively and so new, or at least so long ago outgrown and forgot, that he stood there rooted to the spot, his eyes on the ground. (*Death in Venice*: 9)

In creating such a scene, Mann introduces the first signs of a fateful dualism, the graveyard and youth. Aschenbach is overtaken by an attraction to all the things he has lost: youth, beauty, sexuality, life. He is seized by a desire for new opportunities. A homoerotic undertone also pervades the scene: his attraction to youth and beauty literally manifests in the form of a youth, and it is youth he will continue to fatally pursue. For much of his life, the reader is informed; Aschenbach, preoccupied with the obligations of his literary work, has 'regarded travel a necessary evil'. Now, surprisingly, he is irresistibly charmed by its prospects.

Desire projected itself visually: his fancy, not quite yet lulled since morning, imaged the marvels and terrors of the manifold earth. He saw. He beheld a landscape, a tropical marshland, beneath a reeking sky, steaming, monstrous, rank - a kind of primeval wilderness-world of islands, morasses, and alluvial channels. Hairy palm-trunks rose near and far out of lush brakes of fern, out of bottoms of crass vegetation, fat, swollen, thick with incredible bloom ...

Among the knotted joints of a bamboo thicket the eyes of a crouching tiger gleamed - and he felt his heart throb with terror, yet with a longing inexplicable. (*Death in Venice*: 9-10)

Nature, then, provides a fecund metaphor for Aschenbach's own repressed physical desires. The visual image of the tiger in the swamp recalls a child's nursery books, the paradoxical fear of and desire for danger. These inner signs of repression manifest themselves in vegetative and animal form, becoming within the narrator a fugal undermining of his repressed and dutiful persona, bringing with them what Freud (2003) would call an 'integrated' conscious change in perception, a change coming from the unconscious which is, at last, registered and acknowledged consciously.

He is faced with a deeply fugal imperative. He must follow what he most desires and fears. He heads for Venice, the archetypal Romantic symbol of European aesthetic ruin, the sinking city of decay and dreams, 'the fallen queen of the seas' (*Death in Venice*: 20). For Aschenbach, Venice signifies a longed for impossible Arcadia. What Aschenbach doesn't know is that Venice is gripped by a plague. The air is torpid and rank and death pervades its canals.

Aschenbach's failure to notice what's happening around him removes any chance of escape. On a subliminal level, death is his desire, so he closes down any 'rational' response to health threats. Instead he actively invites infection in two 'charged crossings' (to use Derrida's (1996) evocative phrase) which reprise the mythological motif and metaphor of Persephone's 'food of the dead', symbolising his descent into her Underworld. One sultry afternoon, as he feverishly follows Tadzio and his family, Aschenbach buys strawberries from a street vendor to slake his thirst. Marston (1979) suggests these represent the kisses he'd rather have. They are a possibly choleric substitute. Later Aschenbach sips from 'a glass of pomegranate juice

and soda-water sparkling ruby-red before him' (*Death in Venice*: 66), gazing at Tadzio whilst ostensibly watching a musical performance. Edward Said suggests that the cholera or 'Asiatic plague' in *Death in Venice*, which 'disturbs the Apollonian and very European, calm of Gustav von Aschenbach', represents 'the crisis of modernism as it encounters for the first time a resurgent challenge from the Other' (Said 1991: 52). On this interpretation, the Asiatic plague represents the imperialistic Western sado-masochistic fascination with the Other, the intermingled fear and desire of the coloniser for the colonised. And certainly the plague becomes a metaphor for Aschenbach's inner state, his psychological fall, as he obsessively and symbolically pursues 'his' vanishing elusive youth.

Tadzio's deadly beauty is amplified by his Polish foreignness, the unknown fugal music of his 'Otherness'.

Aschenbach understood not a word he said; it might be the sheerest commonplace, in his ear it became mingled harmonies. Thus the lad's foreign birth raised his speech to music. (*Death in Venice*: 49)

It is foreignness, both apprehended and unknown to him, representing a soporific state in which language is half-heard, half-understood, erotic and dangerous. What Aschenbach unconsciously craves is a Dionysian counterpoint to the disciplined rigour of his Apollonian life. He dreams of orgiastic rituals, the kind of orgies held by Persephone fertility cults in Ancient Greece. But, chaste to the end, the only breakthrough he makes is in the feverish solitude of his own mind in the form of imagined Platonic dialogue. Aschenbach's imaginary hallucinatory dialogue with Phaedrus serves as an indictment of a life in pursuit of hypocritical 'knowledge' and authoritative reason. In Venice, in delirium, he realises that Beauty is the only truth he can follow. Fever offers a truth of the senses and passions, the symbolic realm of the senses and the spirit, which exists beyond the significations of reason and 'knowledge' alone.

Mann understood this desire, describing Aschenbach as a 'poet-spokesman' representing, 'all those who labour at the edge of exhaustion; of the over-burdened, of those who are already worn out but still hold themselves upright; of all our modern moralizers of accomplishment, with stunted growth and scanty resources, who yet contrive by skilful husbanding and prodigious spasms of will to produce, at least for a while, the effects of greatness' (*Death in Venice*: 16). What happens in *Death in Venice* is, in one sense, Aschenbach's come-uppance, or poetic justice, the fugal breakthrough of an artist who turned his back on his true calling, who mocked art yet made it, who saw 'honour' in the wrong places.

IN THE CUT

Susanna Moore's novel, *In the Cut* echoes *Death in Venice* in that, although not explicitly criticizing the limitations of knowledge, it murders those who live too narrowly within its prescriptions. There are striking similarities between Moore's protagonist, a self-determined writer and academic, Frannie, and Mann's Aschenbach. Both introspective characters have led lives of scholarly solitude, living alone for a long period. Aschenbach's wife died long ago, Frannie is a divorcee. Both writers, by definition, conceptualize and intellectualize the worlds which they write about. At the same time on a deeper level, they secretly, sub-consciously eroticize, fetishize and become fatally drawn into the dark underbelly of that 'Other' world. Whereas Aschenbach writes about young manly Aryan heroes, Frannie is writing an academic treatise on New York street slang, the edgy argot of an aggressive male-dominated subculture far from her own privileged, isolated background as an American diplomat's daughter. Further fugal parallels can also be drawn between the two works. Moore writes in the first person and Mann in the third, but in Mann's narrative the third person voice

is trained on the main protagonist, to give an introspective point-of-view depiction of Aschenbach's experiences and states of mind. Both narratives explore the dangers, the hypnotic inevitability of repressed erotic desires surfacing and being acted out in an almost ritualistic abnegation of self.

Frannie, a divorcee in her mid-thirties teaches creative writing at a university in New York City where she lives alone. At the start of the novel, echoing Aschenbach, she too displays an anxiety about becoming too pedagogical, too caught up in a rule-governed linguistic dead-end of empty knowledge. She is trying to teach her creative writing class the meaning of irony, and she bewails the difficulties she experiences to herself, to the reader:

I am beginning to sound like one of the spinster ladies who used to take an interest in me in boarding school.. (*In the Cut*: 4)

Frannie has repressed erotic desires, for a type of street wise 'bit of rough', her intellectual and social opposite. Like Aschenbach, she is not conscious of these desires until a certain series of horrific events allow them to surface. Her fugue begins when she breaks with protocol and goes for a drink in an underworld 'cop bar', The Red Turtle, at the invitation of her amorous student Cornelius Webb who propositions her with promises he can help with her book project, 'Tell you shit. Secret words and all' (*In the Cut*: 26). In a backroom, whilst searching for the bathroom, she accidentally witnesses a woman giving a man oral sex. Then there is a gruesome murder in her neighbourhood, of the woman she's just seen. She meets the investigating detectives only to discover the man she'd witnessed in the act of fellatio. But, fugally she can't quite remember who he is, confusing the two detectives. To Frannie, in her increasingly fugal state, memory is as unreliable as a dream. The detectives show her gruesome images of the 'disarticulated' female murder victim. Paradoxically yet irresistibly she is drawn into a sado-masochistic affair with Detective Malloy even though ambiguity surrounds his involvement in the murder. Fugally, as if sleep-walking, she enters an underworld of eroticism and dangerous sexual risk taking.

Describing herself as a 'word castuist', Frannie admits that 'I do possess a certain rigidity; a certain prudishness. I hate it in myself' (54). Yet consistent with her repression she focuses on the verbal wordplay of the tough street-wise macho speakers, fascinated by their limber lexicon for sex, women and violence, a far more aggressive and dangerous life-vocabulary than that afforded by her own linguistic background studying Middle English grammar. Like a fetishist, she confides, 'The words themselves - in their wit, exuberance, mistakenness and violence - are thrilling to me' (54).

Frannie is seduced by street language and its 'handsome' tough-talkers. She might like to be like them yet she herself is often almost ridiculously polite in their company belying a social gulf that renders her dangerously vulnerable, almost childlike and naive in their brutal world - which she has deliberately, riskily, put herself into. For instance, when she meets Malloy at the precinct he greets her:

"How you doing?" he asked. "How's everything?"

"Fine, thank you," I said, turning my bracelet on my wrist. I felt shy, and it made me uncomfortable.

"You always say that," he said.

"That's what I'm supposed to say. I could say, Yo, yo, what's up with that. But then I'd sound like an asshole. Not that people who say yo, yo are assholes. Just people who try to talk like someone else."

"Yeah," he said, smiling, looking at me as if I were nuts. (*In the Cut*: 108)

Frannie neurotically analyses everything she sees and hears in terms of superficial linguistic signs rather than deeper semiotic meanings – which proves to be her downfall. She obsesses over the signs of the words she wants to learn, but what they signify she doesn't seem to (want to) understand. The street slang of gangs and subcultures is tricky, ever-changing and deceptive, reliant on subtext and subtleties, shades of meaning only insiders know. Like a well-brought-up Alice in Wonderland, Frannie wanders through a dreamworld of violence and darkness, sexually obsessed by a corrupt lying murderous detective. She doesn't see herself positioned within that danger on the streets. Yet she does acknowledge her death wish. 'I don't believe in destiny, although I am sometimes tempted by the freedom implied by inevitability; at least in the *Appointment in Samarra* sense. Unfortunately, it is not Death who is waiting to take my soul at Houston and Broadway, but the cross-town bus I did not see coming' (55). She continues presciently yet unconsciously in relation to her fugal state: '...I tend to the view that most behaviour is neither accidental nor haphazard' (*In the Cut*: 55).

It was Freud who said there is no such thing as an accident and, as she unconsciously knows and desires, it is no 'accident' that Frannie proceeds fugally inevitably to her own narrative closure. She meets Detective Malloy several times in bars with his sinister partner who has been taken off the streets for his violence against women. She unconsciously 'chooses' to see him only as good looking, sharply dressed, 'Mr Puerto Rica', probably an excellent dancer (*In the Cut*: 22). The detectives talk about women as if they were dead meat. Talking of a murder victim of domestic violence Rodriguez (who had tried to kill his own wife) responds:

Rodriguez nodded. "She must not of known when to shut up."

I wondered if Rodriguez thought of himself as aspic.

Rodriguez looked away from the girl and said, "You know, all you really need is two tits, a hole and a heartbeat."

Malloy said mildly, "You don't really need the tits."

Rodriguez said, "You don't even need the heartbeat." (*In the Cut*: 51)

As if she hasn't heard what they said, Frannie chooses to ignore the malice, hatred and contempt (as well as the taunting lack of respect for her) underlying the murderous words. Instead in a perversely blithe process of linguistic and psychological dissociation she switches into an intellectual rumination on feminism, gender, concepts of romance and cultural difference, then continues to flirt. This demonstrates her fatally misguided misinterpretation of what constitutes a 'cool' attitude which she projects onto Rodriguez, with 'his great impersonal beauty' (50). She continually misreads the signs and fugally doesn't see the very real danger all around her. She doesn't remember what she deeply knows about the closely bonded detective/so Floating in her mind like a dream is the knowledge that might save her. Instead she flirtatiously confides her self-willed weakness to the two men: 'my eyes aren't too good....someday I'm going to get into the wrong car' (22), as if invoking her narrative fate when she does indeed do just that.

Blinded by desire and self-denial, she is dazzled by the confident corrupt arrogance of the armed men who dominate the underworld of the inner city streets. "We're detectives," Malloy tells her with a smile. "We can do anything we want" (45). When Malloy tells her casually that "Cops go through girlfriends like they go through veal cutlets", again murderously associating women with dead meat, Frannie's only response is ludicrously flippant: 'wondering idly if he was the type who needed to talk about it after, maybe on the phone a couple of days later' (45).

Like Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*, Frannie is caught in the prefiguring of her own Death. Driven by dark desire, she cannot escape its pull. Both characters leave the safety of their normal routine existence, a *fugal* wrench sets them on their narrative journey. Like Aschenbach, Frannie meets her nemesis, and is overcome. As if drawn to her own death she cannot stay away from Detective Molloy and his shady partner in a 'secret club', only to discover, in a chilling twist at the novel's conclusion that he was the murderer, she the next victim.

Thus *In the Cut* ends in much the same way as *Death in Venice*, with a death. Moore executes her victim with powerful linguistic symbolism. The monologue which has been running through Frannie's mind, which has *been* the narrative, ends thus:

I know the poem.
She knows the poem. (*In the Cut*: 180)

The tense change into the third-person indicates that 'I' no longer exists. 'I' is dead. Frannie can no longer speak for herself. She can only be spoken of in the third person. As Frannie herself observes self reflexively, with gruesome irony in her last moments, her last lines, 'There is an essay on the language of the dying. The dying sometimes speak of themselves in the third person. I was not speaking that way' (180). Intellectualising, she is blind still to the real meaning of the situation, her own impending 'disarticulation'. This shift in tense renders the text performative in that it demonstrates what it tells. As with Mann's novella, Moore's ending has a powerful impact on the reader who has been closely bound to the narrative first person voice of Frannie, a voice which speaks directly and personally to the readers.

In Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, it is the death of Proust, the author, which ultimately closes the narrative. In the Underworld narratives of *Death in Venice* and *In the Cut*, it is the death of the protagonists, both of them authors, which end the story. These novels seem constructed on the premise that the death of the protagonist, the death of the narrator, is also the death of the author. Yet each metaphorically represents the fugal seduction and 'death' of the writer in the act of writing. Each is a metaphor for the fugal journey into the underworld from which, like Persephone, the author does return. For the reader and the author the structure of these underworld narratives represents and allows a socially acceptable exploration of dark aspects of the psyche followed by a cathartic release, which recalls Persephone's mythological rite of rebirth. Both the readers' and authors' journey into the underworld ends with narrative closure. For the author, killing off flawed characters after exploring destructive and dangerous aspects of their psyches, represents an ambiguous psychological act of renewal which invites further consideration into their narratives' social and cultural embedding. Transformed, authors may be recreated in the next text they write. But is this skin-shedding renewal, denial, resolution, Freudian repetition or something radically Other? To what extent do the narratives authors write critique or merely reflect their societies and eras underlying themes? Are Achenbach and Frannie individually responsible for their repression and retribution, or are they helpless pawns with no free will in the machinic, metropolitan, capitalist Western societies they live in? Above all, do Underworld narratives such as these perform a necessary social function. Can the moral of such stories - the need to find an integrated self-balance - help readers and authors negotiate the pitfalls of modern life? From mythology to (post) modernity, their enduring power says yes.

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