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HEAR THE VOICE OF THE ARTIST: POSTMODERNISM AS A FAUSTIAN BARGAIN [*]

Abstract

The view put forward in this paper is simple and radical. I propose that postmodern literature does not exist. The term 'postmodern' may be employed meaningfully to describe the massive material and political changes that marked the end of the millennium, the mood – from resigned acceptance to euphoric celebration – that accompanies them, and a range of theories giving both sophisticated academic support. The effectiveness of these theories depends on what Umberto Eco called a *cogito interruptus*: the imposition upon the reader of the kind of reasoning that 'rests on … the modes of denied rationality.' But such deliberate interruptions of intellectual and ethical understanding, fashionably prescribed as a criterion of what constitutes not only postmodern theory but also 'postmodern art', are, in fact, contrary to the purpose of art, which still is what it was for Conrad: 'to make you *see* ... that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.' There have been hints lately that postmodernism has reached an impasse and that it is time we looked for a way beyond it. My position, as developed in the rest of the paper, is different in so far as it assumes that while the contemporary artist cannot help being implicated in the postmodern condition, his art is 'always already' on its way beyond it. In support of this view I offer a reading of Mark Ravenhill's play *Faust* (*Faust Is Dead*).

Кључне речи: Postmodernism, politics, theory, literature, *Faust*

> I would much sooner subject Derrida to the criteria of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, than Dostoevsky and Tolstoy to Derrida's criteria.
>
> J. M. Coetzee

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I have always been more willing to dwell on what artists have to say about criticism and theory than what critics have to say about art. Thus I find the brief, punning remark by Heiner Muller (1984, 137) – besides Coetzee's laconic comment, probably the most summary treatment postmodernism has received so far – more rewarding on close examination than many pages of postmodern discourse on literature. Asked for his opinion about what might constitute the truly postmodern drama and theater, he replied: 'The only postmodernist I know of was August Stram, who was a modernist and worked in a post-office.' Underlying this joking dismissal we find a number of implied convictions about the meaning not only of modernism and postmodernism, but of art in general: Postmodern art, Muller is saying, is inconceivable; it is a contradiction in terms. The artist can never be anything else but a modernist, or else he stops being an artist. Had Muller bothered to theorize these assumptions, they would amount, I believe, to a contemporary re-statement of the kind of endemic romanticism which is defined by a belief in the type of genuine individual and the highly independent, imaginative, questing mind, through which romanticism persists and is perpetuated in modernism. Viewed from this perspective, postmodernism, in so far as it means an obliteration of this kind of the creative self, its dispersal, to use the current idiom, into a plurality of subject positions inscribed within language, is the negation of art.

Of course, the term 'postmodern' has its uses. It is employed meaningfully to describe the massive material and political changes – all contributing to the triumph of a neo-conservative global society – that marked the end of the millennium. It is valid, too, when applied to a mood or a state of mind accompanying or generated by these changes – ranging from resigned acceptance to euphoric celebration – which pervades popular media culture and is endorsed and promoted, whether intentionally or not, by major postmodern theorists. The effectiveness of their theories, as some of them cheerfully testify, depends on the kind of discourse that tries to persuade without the notion of a traditional argument[1]. This, in fact, involves what Eco (1987, 231), speaking of McLuhan's ecstatic welcome of the media culture, called a *cogito interruptus*: the imposition upon the reader, carried out in the most insidiously illegitimate way imaginable, of the kind of reasoning that 'rests on the equivocation of a *cogito* that is denied, arguing in the modes of denied rationality'. But it is perhaps not necessary to subject these theories to a logical deconstruction, such as Eco so brilliantly and wittily performs, in order to examine their validity. For much of what is confusing in post-

[1] See Madan Sarup (1993, 154). Sarup writes: 'Lyotard supported Marxism but he now sees it as one of the grand narratives he is against. He writes about the force of language beyond truth and wants to develop a theory of philosophical fiction – a discourse that tries to persuade without the traditional notion of "argument"'.

modern discourse can be understood if one approaches it from a pragmatic angle: if one asks not how postmodern thinkers arrived at their antihumanist propositions but why these views became so rapidly and so immensely popular. Asking the Grail question – 'Whom do you serve with this?' – may in fact show the term postmodern to be hardly more than an accurate description of the intellectual and moral compromise by which the postmodernism's leading proponents have hyper-adjusted themselves to postmodernity; and their theories, on closer inspection, to be a sophisticated example of hypocritically correct political thinking. The perspective was first suggested to me by Nietzsche, and once again proved fruitful as I read *Chomsky on MisEducation*. The Introduction, by Donaldo Macedo and Chapter 2: 'Democracy and Education' deserve special attention.

In the Introduction Macedo describes the strategies employed by the dominant sector in the US since the sixties in order to contain the general democratic participation of masses of people in questioning their government's criminal involvement in the Vietnam War. One of them was the Trilateral Commission which dropped all pretensions about schools as democratic sites, charged with the teaching of democratic values, and declared them instead as institutions responsible for the indoctrination of the young. The colonial model of education perfected for this purpose aims to prevent the development of the kind of thinking that enables one to read the world critically and to understand reasons and linkages between the facts: the priorities of education are reduced to the pragmatic requirements of the market, whereby students are trained to become 'compliant workers, spectorial consumers, and passive citizens.' (Macedo 2000, 4)

Whereas the ruling class makes no apologies for the undemocratic role of schools, Macedo continues, to maintain capitalism's cultural hegemony it has been necessary to create a cultural middle management composed of teachers, professionals and experts, who are expected, through a reward system, to propagate the myth that schools are democratic sites where democratic values are learned. Among the various means these cultural commissars resorted to in order to achieve their mission, one of the most insidious was to place the responsibility for 'the social catastrophe of the sixties' precisely on those who sought to avoid it by a democratization of institutions, and a change in relations of power: 'Thus it became necessary to frontally attack the experiments in democracy that questioned the unethical and sometimes criminal behavior of the governments and squarely put the blame on the great society programs not only for financial losses but also for the drop in high school test scores, drug problems and a generation of children and youths with no fathers, no faith and no dreams other than the lure of the streets.' (Macedo 2000, 2)

Macedo's comments are confined mostly to the situation in grade schools in the US, but can also clarify the point I want to make about the postmodern theories currently promoted in leading American and Euro-

pean universities. It is not an irrelevant coincidence, for example, that in the late sixties and seventies the major teaching posts in the US universities, hitherto held by teachers and philosophers of German origin, some of them originating from the Frankfurt School, people like Marcuse, Adorno or Fromm, whose common standpoint in criticizing the consumer society was that of traditional humanist values, began to be taken over by a new set of postmodern thinkers, mostly French, whose anti-humanist orientation soon became the order of the day. This replacement, I believe, was part of the campaign Macedo speaks of: the newly installed teachers were promptly assimilated into the 'bought priesthood'; their ideas, whether they intended it or not, contributing to a common endeavor, namely, to prevent independent critical thought while appearing to defend it. Thus, for instance, Fukuyama's jubilant proclamation of Good News – the end of history which has reached its supreme goal in the globally achieved liberal democracy and the capitalist free market – depends on a cynical distortion of the meaning of democracy and a consequent falsification of historical facts, as Derrida pointed out in his reply to Fukuyama. But there is a group of postmodern thinkers, including, besides Lyotard, Baudrillard and Foucault, Derrida himself, whose views are less accessible to critical analysis than Fukuyama's rather obvious hypocrisy. For one thing, they are highly ambiguous, combining quite incongruously their radical critique of ideology with the acquiescence in, or even fascination with, various manifestations of its ubiquitous power. This hardly gives us reason to be optimistic about the possibility of resistance and transformation, for, as a recent critic of postmodernism (Haber 1994, 101) reasonably asks, 'if ... individuals are wholly constituted by the power/knowledge regime Foucault describes, how can discipline be resisted in the first place?'[2] (How, one might add, could the sixties have happened in the first

[2] This, by the way, is one of the very few valid insights the book provides. Haber's critique of postmodernism soon turns into a demand for a kind of ultra postmodernism. Thus Lyotard's attempt to transcend the relativism of his position by an appeal to Kant's categorical imperative as a ground for 'the justice of multiplicity' is, according to her, a betrayal of his initial, more desirable, 'pagan', 'Nietzschean' concept of the 'multiplicity of justices', paganism being a name for 'a situation in which one judges without criteria.' (Haber 1994, 32 -33). This should be compared with the contrary, and much more cogent argument to be found in *Culture First! Promoting Standards in the New Media Age* (Dyson and Homolka 1966). In the Preface, postmodernism is criticized precisely from the standpoint of Kant's criteria, without which the 'development and exercise of moral intelligence', and 'reflective judgments that intellectual inquiry should enable us to make' are impossible. It is through the abandonment of these criteria and the 'fascination with and celebration of free-floating media images, the openness and lack of objective content of "texts" and power of the "reader" to define and create textual meanings' that postmodernism has provided professional groups, from advertisers and marketing specialists to media studies lecturers, with an ideology that justifies their roles and serves their interests.

place?) The difficulty of finding the possibility of a revolutionary vocabulary is not a problem that haunts only Foucault, the comment goes on, but also many other proponents of post-structural politics. Yet – and this is *cogito interruptus* at its most insidious – their target seems to be precisely those traditional thinkers who did posses the kind of revolutionary vocabulary that they themselves lack. The strategy Macado unmasks – that of blaming the cultural catastrophe of the sixties on what only could have prevented it – is also employed by postmodern cultural critics: they justify their anti-humanism by seeking not only to instill the view that the liberal humanist tradition has proved definitely wrong in its emancipatory hopes, but, in fact, to blame it for the failure of these hopes.

Quite a different picture emerges in Chomsky's essay 'Democracy and Education': it is not the conventional one, the author warns, 'but it does have one merit, at least – namely, the merit of accuracy.'(Chomsky 2000, 38) Chomsky identifies the humanist tradition with the independent Left, which grew out of the Enlightenment and included progressive thinkers, from the grossly misunderstood Adam Smith, and his contemporary J. S. Mill to Dewey and Russell, together with the leading elements of the Marxist mainstream, mostly anti-Bolshevik, and, of course, the popular libertarian and labor movements long preceding Marx. He reminds us that the values common to them all were formulated in reaction against what Adam Smith called 'the inherent vile maxim of masters of mankind: all for ourselves, and nothing for other people', the guiding principle of capitalism which 'nowadays we are taught to admire and revere'. In contrast to this vile maxim Smith stressed sympathy, the goal of perfect equality and the basic human right to creative work. Chomsky (2000, 42) recalls that the founders of classical liberalism, people like Wilhelm von Humboldt, also 'regarded creative work freely undertaken in association with others as the core value of a human life.' In support of the humanist conception of education, he quotes Russell and Dewey, in whose views we readily recognize the orientation shared by teachers and critics such as Leavis and Trilling, Fromm and Marcuse. Russell claimed that the goal of education is 'to give a sense of value of things other than domination, to encourage a combination of citizenship with liberty and individual creativeness, which means that we regard a child as a gardener regards a young tree, as something with a certain intrinsic nature, which will develop into an admirable form, given proper soil and air and light'. (qtd. in Chomsky 2000, 38) Together with Russell, Dewey considered these ideas revolutionary: if implemented, they would bring about a more just and free society in which 'the ultimate aim of production is not the production of goods, but the production of free human beings associated with one another in terms of equality'. (qtd. in Chomsky 2000, 37)

To the tradition delineated by Chomsky one should add Isiah Berlin and the names of nineteenth century thinkers Bernard Bosanquet and T. H. Green, evoked by Quentin Skinner, Regius Professor of Modern

History at the University of Cambridge, in the Isiah Berlin Memorial Lecture delivered to The British Academy in December, 2001[3]. Professor Skinner used the occasion to raise serious doubts about the validity of contemporary political theory, and its power to define a program for liberation. He spoke about two traditional concepts of liberty. The first, negative liberty, is identified with absence of interference; it is freedom from external constraint. This negative definition must also include, but no longer does, a concept of freedom as independence, the knowledge that is, that the exercise of our rights will not depend on the goodwill of others. This is significant. But what is of even greater interest in the present context is that in contrast to this juristic concept of negative liberty as freedom *from* interference or *from* dependence, a fuller or positive understanding of the term as freedom *for* self-realization has traditionally been recognized. Professor Skinner quotes Isiah Berlin who suggested that for all those who wished to give a positive content to the idea of liberty, 'the freedom of human agents consists in their having managed most fully to become themselves'. One of them was a nineteenth century thinker T. H. Green, who wrote that 'real freedom consists in the whole man having found his object', it is 'the end state in which man has realized his ideal of himself'. This argument can be carried a step further, says Skinner, if we recognize that what underlies theories of positive liberty is the belief that human nature has an essence, and that we are free if and only if we succeed in realizing that essence in our lives. Now Skinner deplores the fact that contemporary political theory, especially in Britain and the USA, has quite neglected the positive view of liberty. Only the first definition of freedom as absence of interference has been preserved as orthodox. But detached from the sense of freedom as being identical with whatever is the true inherent goal of man, liberty, Professor Skinner insists, may and has become a name for what is actually servitude. To talk of liberty then, as our politicians and engineers of the new world order do, is to speak the language of tyranny. This, I think, extends to an enormous majority of postmodern theories. They are exactly what Roland Barthes – but the early, critical, Barthes – said bourgeois mythology was: 'a prohibition for man against inventing himself.'

To help ensure a counter-revolution, while appearing to serve progressive goals, postmodern cultural analysts employ all sorts of confusing and highly illegitimate argumentative procedures to persuade us that the views upheld by thinkers quoted and praised by Chomsky or Quentin Skinner are essentially reactionary, in unacknowledged yet deep agreement with coercive regimes: for example, the humanist idea of the free, creative individual is deliberately conflated with the economic notion of the acquisitive, aggressive ego or with the bourgeois private man, and

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[3] Published under the title 'A Third Concept of Liberty' (Skinner 2002, 16-18)

then accused of contributing to the triumph of the capitalist principle of 'mastery over a world of slaves', which, incidentally, the Nobel-prize winning economist James Buchanan frankly endorsed as the 'genuine aspiration of every person in an ideal situation.' (qtd. in Chomsky 2000, 39) As postmodern thinkers proceed to suggest ways of resistance to cultural enslavement, ironies increase and become quite mind boggling. Thus the remedy does not lie, as people like Macedo or Chomsky, who still believe in humanist education, claim, in the 'teaching of the truth' i.e. in the development of the kind of knowledge that would ensure a 'global comprehension of the facts and their *reason d'etre'* (Macedo 2000, 9); nor in the 'pedagogy of hope' demanding from educators 'to discover what historically is possible in the sense of contributing to the transformation of the world...'. (Macedo 2000, 13) For have not Lyotard and company taught us that truth is epistemologically and morally indistinguishable from falsehood? That to read, whether words or the world, with a view of arriving at a coherent moral interpretation, is to perpetuate the sin of teleological thinking which is a form of mastery? That all total explanations are totalitarian, all global projects coercive, and that the history made intelligible by the great systems of narrative knowledge is, fortunately, a thing of the past, its end coinciding, again fortunately, with the death of man as knower. That homogeneity, unity or universality can be politically coercive and do accompany the regimes of terror is true – there is no better evidence than the eradication of differences by the current capitalist recolonisation of the world. But, when as a counter-strategy to the terror of the political logic of the same, the postmodern theorists prescribe a universal multiplicity – of language games, of free interpretations, of subject positions, none of which stake a claim to superior truth or justice – they end up as champions of a compulsory epistemological and ethical relativism which prevents political clarity and thus one of the few remaining strategies of self-defense against the power of dominant culture.[4]

Another is art. Here, as elsewhere, what in reality is a terrorist act is disguised as a rescue operation: postmodernism has invaded literary debate carrying the banner of democracy and promising to free us from the hegemony of the cultural elite. But far from being democratically in-

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[4]That postmodern theory is politically suspect, representing a threat to the transformation it claims to seek, has been recognized within the context of postcolonial studies. In 'Foucault On Power: A Theory For Women?' Nancy Hartsock writes: 'Somehow it seems highly suspicious that it is at the precise moment when so many groups have been engaged in "nationalisms" which involve redefinitions of the marginalized Others that suspicions emerge about the nature of the subject, about possibilities for a general theory which can describe he world, about historical "progress". Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic?' (qtd. in Haber 1994, 107)

spired, the demolition of difference between 'high' culture and pop is, in fact, calculated to ensure that whatever was potentially revolutionary in the canon is reduced to a clever ideological manipulation and repudiated. Combined with the universally accepted axiom about the destruction of the self, the assault on the canon is aimed ultimately against that high authority of the artist in his quarrel with culture, on which, according to critics like Trilling (1967, 90-91), or Marcuse, the culture's accurate knowledge of the self, and hence the possibility of effective transformation, depend.[5] If in the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment the target is rational coherence and intellectual comprehensiveness, in the current campaign against Romanticism and Modernism it has been necessary to discredit the aspiration both to formal unity and spiritual wholeness: the belief, crucial to artists from Shakespeare and Blake to Conrad and Lawrence, that emotions participate in cognitive processes and ethical decisions; that valid perceptions and responses to the world are those that involve our sensibilities, and that truth is accessible only when we 'see feelingly'. It seems that the degree of the vilification of this principle is what makes the contemporary author publishable. We read, again and again, that the romantic ambition to recover the repressed emotions is their greatest blunder, or fraud, since authentic feelings or desires are a pre-Freudian illusion and/or a bourgeois lie.[6] Or if they do exist, as an-

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[5] Only briefly touched upon by Trilling, this problem is discussed at length in the chapter 'Art and Revolution' of Marcuse's *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972). Marcuse's criticism of what in the seventies was called a cultural revolution and what we have since learnt to call postmodernism begins by questioning whether the efforts to break with bourgeois art are 'really steps on the road to liberation', or whether, in view of the strong antibourgeois elements in the literature since the XIX century, they may not be 'falling in line with the capitalist redefinition of culture', with the adjustment of culture to the requirements of contemporary capitalism. If, to the proponents of cultural revolution, 'it is precisely this "inner truth" [of "bourgeois" literature], this depth, and harmony of the aesthetic imagery, which ... appears as mentally and physically intolerable, false, as part of the commodity culture, as an obstacle to liberation', then we may assume that the cultural revolution aims 'far beyond bourgeois culture, that it is directed against... art as such, literature as literature.' Against its contradictory, and essentially counterrevolutionary, tendencies – on the one hand, to give word, image and tone to the feelings of 'the masses' (which are no longer revolutionary) and, on the other, to elaborate anti-art, or anti-forms which are constituted by the mere atomization and fragmentation of traditional form – stand those, Marcuse claims, which, while radically revamping the bourgeois tradition, preserve its progressive qualities.

[6] Thus Raman Selden (1989, 3-6) explains his preference for contemporary antihumanist, anti-Romantic theories by implying that in privileging emotions and ascribing to them the power to heal the split subject, the Romantics somehow supported the Imperialist view of culture. This, and similar pronouncements, derive from the uncritical acceptance, and additional reduction *ad absurdum*, of the Lacanian unconscious: no longer a repository of the *o*ther, i.e., of the real, the biological, it is thoroughly invaded by the *O*ther, i.e. by the symbolic, the cultural Law of the Father; de-

other line of attack concedes, then poetry evokes them only to arm us for 'the battle with that enormity.'(Paglia 1993, 19) 'Poetry', says Camille Paglia (1993, 18), currently one of the brightest academic stars in the US, 'is a connecting link between body and mind. Every idea in poetry is grounded in emotion. Every word is a palpitation of the body'. But if 'poetry mirrors the stormy uncontrollability of emotion, where nature works its will', it does so – when it has not succumbed to romantic and modernist decadence – only to inspire 'horror and disgust', which are 'the reason's proper response to nature' and enclose us more firmly within the glorious world of technological artifacts. 'Art is shutting in order to shut out.'(Paglia 1993, 29)

In one way or another, we are being persuaded that art's proper function is not to include and coordinate but to exclude and disconnect. It is no wonder then if 'that pure and random play of signifiers that we call postmodernism' should be recommended, by a postmodern Marxist (Jameson 1991, 96), as the best anti-dote to the modernist aesthetics of formal unity or expressive totality. Frye's suggestion (1976, 117) that 'the arts, including literature, might just conceivably be ... possible techniques for meditation, ways of cultivating, focusing, and ordering one's mental processes, on a basis of a symbol rather than concept' is just one among the junk heap of discarded notions. The desirable effect is that of TV and video, forms *par excellence* of postmodern art: 'a sign flow which *resists meaning*, whose fundamental logic is the exclusion of the emergence of themes'(Jameson 1991, 96) and which, therefore, will be bad or flawed whenever an interpretation proves possible.

This brings us back to what I believe is the point of Muller's joke, namely, that postmodern art is a contradiction in terms: that what is currently promoted as postmodern art is either not art or it is not postmodern. For such deliberate interruptions of the processes of knowing, and of feeling, such a trivializing reduction of knowledge and experience to a meaningless kinetics of intellectual and aesthetic games and the resulting blurring of moral vision, fashionably prescribed as a criterion of what constitutes 'postmodern art', is, in fact, contrary to the purpose of art, which still is what it was for Conrad (1984, xii-xiii): 'to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions ... and ... make you feel,... above all, make you *see* ...that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.'

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sire, far from being a spontaneous urge *for* the other, is the desire *of* the Other; and the effect of psychoanalysis is to reconcile the subject to the fact that his identity is a matter of accepting his radical self-expropriation, of realizing that he does not belong to himself: 'Life does not want to heal... What, moreover is the significance of healing if not the realization, by the subject, of a speech which comes from elsewhere, and by which he is traversed?'(Qtd. in Felman 1994, 89)

Many contemporary artists would subscribe to this view. Unlike Muller, or Coetzee, they do not stop at casual jokes at postmodernism's expense or simply let their art speak for itself. For, intimidated by the formidable obfuscation of post-modern interpretation, most readers, and especially students of literature, have forgotten what Bruno Bettelheim (Betteheim and Rosenfeld 1993) called 'the art of the obvious'.[7] This arrest of critical thought that the exposure to postmodern ideas brings about was certainly one of the reasons why Edward Bond has found it necessary to write, in addition to his plays, books of essays, where he identifies postmodernism as a manifestation of the death drive of our civilization. 'Western democracy', he writes in *The Hidden Plot*, 'has become a secret Culture of Death', and postmodernism is its final phase:

> Postmodernism is a turning point not yet an end. It is as if human life were a last dream flickering in the minds of the dead. Soon they will fall asleep for ever. For a while we can still hear the echo of human language; it is not spoken in our courts, legislatures, factories, and seldom in our schools and thea-

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[7] An experience of one of my students at The Edinburgh Summer School of English in 2001 may serve as an illustration of how postmodern theory cuts us off from the perception of the obvious. My student was attending a postgraduate seminar on the modern novel. He read a paper on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and scandalized practically all of his young colleges by saying that the story was, among other things, about western imperialism. What he had assumed everybody would agree on, what was obvious to him, became, unexpectedly a matter of fierce contention: they denounced his reading as a misreading; or rather, as so simplistic, so naive, so unsophisticated that as to be no reading at all. It took him considerable time and effort to compel his listeners to remember the relevant parts of the story and concede, though reluctantly, that yes, there may be some such theme, but anyhow, imperialism belongs safely to the past, hence it is no longer part of the work's (post)modern meaning. The meaning, presumably, consisted in its being a sum of formal devices, whose purpose was to subvert referentiality, forestall closure and precipitate the reader into abysmal indeterminacy of unresolvable aporias. Now I cannot help remembering that for Kenneth Burke the purpose of any literary formal device was to be a strategy for survival. Whatever devices Conrad used, they were employed to initiate an urgent examination of the possibilities and conditions of survival, moral, above all, and ultimately physical, in a world driven by greed to its apocalyptic end. Francis Copola understood that much, at least. The students in Edinburgh did not. One should stop and think of it: one hundred years after Conrad wrote his story, his exposure of the hidden motives and devastating effect of the colonial civilizing mission, as we are entering the new millennium and history continues in the same direction, the power states of the civilized west showing no intention of renouncing their imperialist tradition except for wrapping it up in new excuses, at the moment when it is more urgent than ever to see clearly through these deceptions and establish connections, students of literature and of culture are being trained in what I can only call interpretative blindness. They have assimilated the postmodern techniques of *cogito interruptus* successfully enough to confuse a thorough, comprehensive, responsible reading of the word and the world with the sin of interpretative closure – and then to confuse this confusion, this intellectual and moral frivolity, with sophistication.

> ters. But we still hear its echo on the walls of prisons, madhouses, children's playgrounds, the derelict ghettoes of our cities... Our task is to teach the dead to listen. (Bond 2000, 8-9)

If postmodernism is 'a state every species must enter before it becomes extinct', to survive, he insists, we must be radical, we must not compromise. It is not the creator's, the writer's, job to compromise: that is the job of manufacturers. When manufacturers compromise they change our dreams; when creators do not compromise they change reality. Bond's refusal to compromise is evident in the very manner he says what he says. He does not even make the concession of entering any frontal theoretical polemic with postmodern thinkers, because it would involve speaking their language, which corrupts our imagination. But the utterly personal, and highly resonant words and images that he uses to evoke the problems and difficulties of being human build up a philosophy that is an indirect refutation of the whole of postmodern anti-humanist orthodoxy: of its axioms about the death of man; about the totalitarian nature of comprehensive explanations; of the notion that teleological thinking is a delusion of the past. He takes it for granted, for example, that there is such a thing as human nature and that demand for justice is its imaginative birthright, part of its radical innocence; that human nature does not feel at home in this world and that a child's cry is a rebellion against the world's injustice; that the purpose of schools is to stifle the child's anger and its imagination, and adjust it to social madness; and that drama – art – is a struggle to regain one's sanity and recreate our humanity: that is, to reimagine the world in terms of values that the alchemy of the capitalist economy turns into dross. Drama – if it is not corrupted, and most contemporary drama is – reminds us that being human involves asking questions – questions that cannot be answered yet must be answered. Not 'what' questions, the answers to which are mechanistic and fragmentary and warranted by the objective order of things, but 'why' questions, which are holistic: asking about one thing, one has to ask about all things; the answers must be total and they emerge from imagination or utopian dreams. 'There could be no stories of human beings without Utopia,' he says, no drama whose theme is not justice. (Bond 2000, 4)

Even within the academic establishment there have been hints lately that postmodernism has reached an impasse and that it is time we looked for a way beyond it. One such hint, surpassingly enough, comes from Francis Fukuyama[8]. Another, earlier and more radical hint than

[8] Francis Fukuyama, who in 1992 has announced the End of History, has been worried recently about the future of human nature. Human nature, he warns in his latest book *The Posthuman Future* (reviewed by Appleyard 2002) is threatened with extinction by experiments in biotechnology. At present millions of schoolchildren in America are 'cured' from 'attention deficiency disorder' by Ritalin, while cases of depres-

Fukuyama's, is to be found at the end of *Postmodernism for Beginners*, where the authors remind us that shortly before his death, Foucault called for a re-thinking of Enlightenment, observe that Europe is haunted by two specters, that of Marx and of romanticism, and conclude, in the last paradoxical sentence, that 'the only cure for postmodernism is the incurable illness of romanticism'. My own position is different in so far as I assume that while the contemporary artist cannot help being implicated in postmodern condition, his art is 'always already' on its way beyond it. I propose to test this view by reading Mark Ravenhill's play *Faust (Faust is Dead)* in the light of Coetzee's comment quoted above: to see, that is, what the result may be when some of the major postmodern ideas are reinterpreted by art.

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sion are treated with Prosac. The former, Fukuyama observes correctly, medicalizes an invented illness – schoolboys are not programmed to sit still in classrooms; the latter promotes the most prized of contemporary attributes, self-esteem, without one having to do anything worthwhile. He points to a disconcerting sexual symmetry between Prozac and Ritalin: women with low self esteem take Prozac to give them a serotonin high – the alpha male feeling; young boys are given Ritalin to make them more passive and compliant, more feminine. One can anticipate a future, says Fukuyama, when the two sexes will merge into that androgynous median personality, self-satisfied and socially compliant, which is the current politically correct outcome in American society. Prozac and Ritalin are only one of the ways in which biotechnology may flatten our conception of humanity. This must not happen, says Fukuyama – and here he sounds very much like Professor Skinner – or else all talk about liberation, equality, freedom, will be merely a politically correct form of words. To be meaningful, equality requires a substructure of the metaphysic of human nature, what he calls 'the essential factor X: it cannot be reduced to the possession of moral choice or reason, or language, or emotions, or consciousness, or any other quality, that has been put forth as a ground for human dignity. It is all those qualities coming together in a human whole'. To protect its sanctity, Fukuyama calls for the immediate establishment of institutions with real enforcement powers to regulate biotechnology.
At the beginning of the paper I referred to Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* as an example of *cogito interruptus*. This new publication is not quite free from it either; Fukuyama still displays that superb postmodern capacity to overlook the obvious: that children should not feel at home in America and must be controlled by chemicals does not at all undermine his thesis that western liberal democracy is Paradise regained where history may safely abolish itself; nor does he wonder what the inherent logic of this best of all worlds might be if it is capable of generating such a monstrous future. But despite the contradictions, the book *is* good news. Or perhaps, even because of the contradictions: it is encouraging to hear a man who did so much to make postmodernism the doctrine of the capitalists suddenly stand up against the chief premises of both: against anti-humanism and technocracy. We need clarity of vision, and even if the doors of perception are only partially cleansed, it is a step towards it.

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Gay, HIV positive, but fending off the fatal end by combo therapy, still on anti-epilepsy pills, and by his own admission 'just as confused by advertising as anyone', Ravenhill must have personally experienced what postmodern theory calls the destruction of the subject, multiple sexualities, or simulacrum. His art is an attempt to understand that experience. An explorer of hyperreality, he begins by checking whether the directions inscribed on its entrance really lead to the promised land or rather deeper into hell. The answer suggested by his plays, particularly *Faust*, is quite unequivocal. Its hero, Alain, is a composite character, reminiscent of Fukuyama, Foucault, Baudrillard: we glimpse him first in a TV chat show – Madonna's presence and comments contributing to the postmodern mixing of styles – being introduced to the American public as a famous French philosopher, and the author of two widely acclaimed books, one on sexuality, the other entitled *The End of History and the Death of Man*. In the next scene we find out that he is gay, too. To Pete, a seemingly cool, but disoriented and deeply troubled adolescent whom he meets by chance and eventually rapes, he confides the reason why he has left his university teaching post in France and come to 'to live a little' in the West Coast of America. In Europe, where obsolete humanist traditions still persist 'we are ghosts, trapped in a museum, with the lights out and the last visitor long gone.' For him and for so many children of the twentieth century, he goes on as Pete videos him, America is the only true home: it is in America, where the 'death of man' can most authentically be experienced, that paradoxically 'we really believe that we are alive, that we are living in our own century'. If, at this point, Alain may sound like one of Eco's Parusiacs, Ravenhill certainly does not belong in this category: the end of history, if it has come to an end, is no Good News. The Faustian situation established by the title indicates clearly that if America is the symbolic realm of postmodern man's posthumous life, then he is condemned to live it in hell. As the play unfolds, as Pete accompanies Alain across America on an educational journey involving forced sex, drugs, a suicide of another boy, the Internet-obsessed Donny, and Alain's own decision to end his life, this hell becomes synonymous with a world drained of feelings.

There are no new feelings, Eliot said once speaking of the poet's task. The business of the poet is not to find new feelings, but to combine existing ones into new wholes, within which a truly significant emotion might emerge. Slightly modified, this notion would serve to describe Ravenhill's (and other contemporary artists') strategy in the face of postmodern indifference, which is to search, from play to play, for new images, new, ever more disturbing ways of juxtaposing them, in order to demonstrate the *absence* or perversion of feelings and locate responsibility. Reading Ravenhill's plays in this key, rather than as sums of formal

devices, enables us to resist the *cogito interruptus* imposed by current interpretations of the 'anti-social' behavior of the young. For a neo-conservative thinker, such as Daniel Bell, for example, the unnerving mixture of brutality and hedonistic escapism that constitute the lives of Ravenhill's characters would be attributed to the unwholesome effect of modernism. According to Bell, Madan Sarup informs us,

> modernist culture has infected the values of everyday life. Because of the forces of modernism, the principle of unlimited self-realization, the demand for authentic self-experience and the subjectivism of hyperstimulated sensitivity have come to be dominant. This unleashes hedonistic motives irreconcilable with the discipline of professional life in society. In his view, hedonism, the lack of social identification, the lack of obedience, narcissism, the withdrawal from status and achievement competition is the result not of successful capitalist modernization of economy but of cultural modernism.(Sarup 1993, 144)

Quite contrary to this hopelessly muddled interpretation, Ravenhill's plays trace modern sickness not to a desire for self-realization, but to its prevention, and place the responsibility on the capitalist ideal of 'mastery over the world of slaves'. Thus in *Shopping and Fucking* he relates the crippled lives of a group of young drifters, reduced to drugs, masochistic fantasies and prostitution, to the inversion which according to early Marx precipitated the fall of western man – the one demanding that the exchange of love for love should be substituted by the exchange of money for money. Not quite completed yet, the process requires a joint enterprise of all ideological state apparatuses, from television, school, church, to those responsible for the mental health and protection of the young. Thus, on leaving a mental hospital where he was treated for drug addiction, Mark is warned that emotional dependencies are just as, or even more, addictive, that craving personal attachment is his greatest weakness, and that he should avoid it at all costs. He tries at first to follow this advice and carefully confines his relationship with the fourteen-year-old Gary to a strictly financial transaction. Gary has been raped, ever since he was nine, by his stepfather, but his single appeal for help was met by the social worker's matter-of-fact question: 'Does he use a condom?' Mark's final attempt to save him comes too late: his explanation that 'the world has offered us no practical definition of love' and that Gary yearns to be owned because he has never been loved, cannot prevent the fatal climax of Gary's masochistic fantasies in a morbid ritual of enslavement and rape.

Gary's voluntary death is also part of a bargain whereby the process of his reluctant killers' conversion from faith (however residual) in feelings (however perverted) to money-worship is finally accomplished. The sum Gary paid them for his murder had been meant to ransom their own lives from Brian, a TV editor and lover of soap operas (his favorite a grossly distorted version of *Hamlet*), a sadistic drug pusher and an au-

thoritarian father masquerading as his son's savior. He allows them, however, to keep the three thousand pounds they owe him as a reward for having learnt the crucial lesson: that money is civilization and civilization money. The change of faith is sealed as Brian forces upon them the veneration of the new, the only authentic, *Bible*, the one whose first words are 'Get. The money. First.' The getting may be cruel, he explains – it may necessitate the suffering of countless children such as Gary – but their deaths will be redeemed by the happiness of the generations to come, particularly of his own boy. To drive this point home he has already shown them a video of his son playing the cello – a poignant image of prelapsarian purity and beauty, at which he wept uncontrollably but then abruptly switched it off to show them another tape, of two of his men drilling out an eye of a wretch who has proved unteachable with a Black and Decker. This gruesome exercise was undertaken and recorded as an admonition to all those who fail to understand that the flow of cash, kept up by any means, including drug dealing, is the only way to a future paradise – a world where impure chemicals will finally be replaced by a more innocent anesthetic of television and shopping. He concludes his tragicomic capitalist gospel with a horribly sentimental conflation of his own criminal enterprise with the kind of work Irena embraces at the end of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*: 'We must work. What we've got to do is make the money. For them... We won't see it, of course – that purity. But they will. Just as long as we keep on making the money... For that is the future, isn't it? Shopping. Television'.

The use of the Chorus, at crucial points in *Faust*, serves a similar purpose. It is the disembodied collective voice narrating the process of systematic emotional starvation to which American youths are exposed from the moment they enter school, until they are taught to repress their natural needs and feed on surrogates. The earliest memory the Chorus conjures up is of a seven year old insomniac, who whimpers night after night at the world being such a bad place, but eventually learns to cry so mother, worried crazy that teachers are doing evil things to him, will not hear him ever again. At a later stage the voice is of a teenage delinquent, who smashes the window of a store and gets himself a VCR, the latest model, and to his mother's exasperated cry that had he listened to God, he would have gone to the food store, replies that there is no point in having food in the house when you have nothing to watch while eating it. Next it speaks of the Minister of a local church deciding to install a terminal and modem right there in the church so the young people can spread the word way into the future. When the mothers protest, seeing that they are losing their kids to the Net, he reminds them of the Lord's mysterious ways, which may seem to be taking their children away, but are in fact working for a brighter world, and appeals to them to raise funds for more terminals. For a moment, preceding the critical episode of Donny's suicide, the

Chorus speaks in his voice, recalling his childhood attachment to a slushie-machine in a store where his mother worked night shifts and he consoled himself gulping cherry slush until his mouth, and teeth and tongue were red. The machine was suddenly removed, and deprived of that compensation, Donny developed symptoms of 'pathological' aggression, first against the teachers at school, (the doctors typically overlooking the obvious and blaming his anger on some toxic substance in the cherry slush[9]), and then against the only object still in his control: his

[9] Bettelheim's argument in *The Art of the Obvious* is highly relevant to this episode. In the chapter entitled 'The Laziness of the Heart', Bettelheim (1993, 104-145) accuses modern child psychiatry research projects of assuming that the emotional disturbance of children under observation is due to all sorts of biological factors and chemical imbalances, and disregarding the obvious contribution of the unnatural and inhuman social environment, including the research environment itself, which would elicit abnormal reactions in even perfectly healthy individuals. Instead of enabling empathy, which is the obvious first step in the treatment of autism, the conditions of the research are deliberately designed to reproduce and re-enforce the autistic situation. The refusal to relate to the disturbed child, according to Bettelheim, is not justified by the ideals of scientific objectivity, as it is usually claimed, but is due to the laziness of the heart.
Another illuminating comment is to be found, once again, in *Chomsky on MisEducation*. Among the sources of information used to document his devastating report on the life conditions of children in America are the results of a UNICEF study called *Child Neglect in Rich Societies*. The author, Sylvia Ann Hewlett, points out that in European and other less developed countries, the standards of child-rearing, initially higher than in America, have further risen in the last fifteen years. By contrast, and despite much talk of traditional and family values, 'the anti-child spirit is loose in the US and Great Britain'. The effect on children of the economic, emotional and moral deterioration of the family background in these countries, due to what is euphemistically called 'the ideological preference for a free market' (which in reality affects only the wages of the poor, while the rich still enjoy a high level of public subsidy and state protection) and 'flexibility in the labor markets' (which simply means 'you had better work extra hours, without knowing whether you have a job tomorrow, or else') is that of 'silent genocide': a sharply increased reliance on television for the supervision of what are called 'latchkey children', kids who are alone, is a factor in rising child alcoholism and drug use and in criminal violence against children by children and other obvious effects in health, education, the ability to participate in a democratic society, even survival. Hewlett's book, published in 1999, has not been reviewed yet; instead, in the book review sections devoted to this topics, eminent magazines feature publications whose authors, full of somber forebodings about the fall of IQ's, the decline of SAT scores and so on, attribute these alarming symptoms to bad genes. (Well, if not the art of modernism, what else could have caused this decadence, but nature.) 'Somehow', Chomsky's bitterly ironic comment runs, 'people are getting bad genes, and then there are various speculations about why this is. For example, maybe it's because black mothers don't nurture their children, and the reason is maybe they evolved in Africa, where the climate was hostile. So those are maybe the reasons, and this is really serious, hardheaded science, and a democratic society will ignore all this at its peril, the reviewers say. Well disciplined commissars know well enough to steer

body, on whose surface he now cuts red patterns of bloody razor marks, hoping that one day Jesus will explain why he does that to himself. Finally the Chorus modulates into the voice of an adult, who is still looking about for signs that the world is getting better, as mother promised it would, but finding none, discovers that he does not feel a thing about it. And like Donny, who remembers the facts but has been conditioned to forget their meaning, he too wonders who made him that way.

It is this lack of comprehension that dooms the desperate attempts of Pete and Donny to reverse the process described by the Chorus and recover the reality of experience. The reference to Faust supplies additional irony: Faust is in hell because he has sold his soul. Pete is ready to sell his in order to buy his way out of the postmodern simulacrum. He hates his father, a software magnate, and a self-appointed Messiah, who has just worked out an answer to the millennium. His solution, quite in line with the postmodern recommendation of disconnected multiplicity as a cure against over-determination, is chaos. Like one of Jim Morrison's Lords, who use art to confuse us[10], he has put on a disc a hundred of the world's most famous masterpieces, which, instead of purging and focusing perception – in Pete's already muddled understanding it would mean 'mooding out the wrong mood down on you' – have been programmed to keep perceptions as blurred and chaotic as possible. Pete is on the run from his father, but has taken the trouble to steal the disc first and is now going to offer it back for a sum so vast, it will buy him 'so many totally real experiences.' Again, when he first makes a pass at Alain, mistaking him for the Artists and Repertoire agent, he intends it as a bargain on behalf of his rock idol, Stevie, whose lyrics ('Got a killer in my VCR/ Killer in my Rom/ Killer on the cable news/Killer in the floss I use...') and the way he sings them 'like he really totally means it, which is like, totally marketable' bring back the memory of the sixties', of 'Kurt's spirit ... yeah... teen spirit' – and of the anger which no longer seems possible. The moment the misunderstanding is cleared up, Pete withdraws, with an apology, as it were, for not quite fitting into the theory of multiple sexualities: he is 'cool' about the 'whole guys thing', but it just happens that he himself is not that way. Yet, seduced by the aura of authority in

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away from the obvious factors, the ones rooted in very plain and clear social policy'. An eloquent illustration of this policy is the following: when Hewlett wrote her book, 146 countries had ratified the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, and one had not: the US. (See Chomsky 2000, 48-52)

[10] In Morrison's collection of poetry *The Lords: Notes on Vision* (1969) we read:

The Lords appease us with images. They give us books, concerts, galleries, shows, cinemas.

Specially the cinemas. Through art they confuse us and blind us to our environment. Art adorns our prison walls, keeps us silent and diverted, and indifferent.

Alain's voice, Pete agrees to his conditions, hoping through this transaction to earn the spiritual illumination that, beneath his coolness, he secretly yearns for. Just like his father, however, and like the God-on-line Minister, the postmodern philosopher turns out to be a false prophet too. Far from helping Pete learn what his real desires are, the teacher violates what natural integrity his disciple still has left. The act is carried out under the aegis of Foucault, Baudrillard, and all those philosophers who claim to be Nietzsche's spiritual heirs.

As Raymond Tallis reminds us in his article 'Truth About Lies' (2001, 3), the denial of objective truth brought Foucault much fame and uncritical admiration. He did not, however, always behave as if he actually believed it – nobody could – but when he did, the consequences, for his disciples and lovers, were brutal. Dismissing the talk of a strange new disease as a mere effusion of words coming from anti-sexual forces of authority, he went on searching for 'new truths' in sadomasochistic sexual adventures at Berkley, where he was a visiting professor. Even later, when he must have known that he was infected, he did not 'communicate the death-or-life-dealing truth to his partners', and the resulting death toll, given that Foucault was wealthy enough to buy anything he wanted, can only be surmised.[11] Alain does not infect Pete with quite the same disease, but the analogy, though not complete, is nevertheless striking. The

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[11] Tallis's text is valuable for more than one reason. A witty and mercilessly dismissive review of Jeremy Campbell's *The Liar's Tale*, it invites incredulous laughter at the preposterous lengths one is prepared to go to defend postmodernism. To do so Jeremy Campbell first confuses human failure with success, which is typical, but then resorts to evolutionary biology for an alibi, which in view of postmodern hostility to nature is very untypical. *The Liar's Tale* rests on the argument that truth has been overrated and falsehood has had unfair treatment in the press. The author welcomes postmodern skepticism, notably Foucault's denial of the truth of objective truths, and then invents a whole tradition of thinkers who allegedly attacked the privileging of truth over falsehood: from the postmodern patron saint, Nietzsche, all the way back to Parmenides. But he does not stop there: after Ockham, Plato and Parmenides, even orchids which look like insects have their fifteen minutes. Thus nature is enlisted in the cause of lying. Since survival is all, lying is not an artificial, deviant or dispensable feature of life. On the contrary, 'deceitfulness is a kind of ethics, small lies serving nature's larger truth.' He instances orchids, that mimic the look of female insects and so invite pollination by males, cuckoos and butterflies and concludes: 'Where simpler species disguise themselves with borrowed plumage, we obfuscate with words, plant doubt in minds we are able to read.' The consequences of the denial of truth, Raymond Tallis writes, are rarely so immediate, attributable and brutal as they were in Foucault's case. This may explain, in his opinion, why those who attacked truth were treated with such respect and rewarded so handsomely in the twentieth century, when a 2,500-year-old tradition of (often insincere) denial or relativizing of truth climaxed in an orgy of tenured skepticism. If this is so, all the more reason to persist in giving art a chance to reveal the less visible connections and attribute the crimes of the twentieth century to those truly responsible for them.

reference to Baudrillard is also unmistakable. Baudrillard suggested that the only form of self-defense against the flood of media images is to regard them as detached from any reality, as mere signifiers without signifieds, surfaces emptied of meaning. (Fiske 1989, 180) But, of course, if a deliberate refusal of meaning can give any protection, it is the protection of blindness or indifference. The strategy Baudrillard recommends is precisely the one used to create what Robert Brustein called 'dumbocracy in America', and thus 'manufacture consent' to what would outrage a person unprotected in this way. It is also used by Alain to gain Pete's consent to his own abuse. As he masturbates Pete, Alain instructs him to conquer his spontaneous revulsion by viewing the whole affair through his camcorder, as an unreal TV spectacle. And it works – Pete does not feel a thing. As a practical introduction to the nihilistic sermon of hedonism and cruelty that he later preaches to Pete, the episode also reveals the degree to which Nietzsche's philosophy had to be falsified before it could be enlisted for a postmodern cause[12]. To Nietzsche (1988, 336-337), nihilism was an *intermediary* period, 'before there is yet strength to reverse values' and 'create the world as it ought to be'; his will to power was the

[12] Despite his occasional overstatements, which his anti-humanist interpreters like to read out of context, the core of Nietzsche's philosophy and ethics, like Fromm's non-selective and far more intelligent reading demonstrates, was fundamentally humanistic. As his dictum – Good is what makes me grow – testifies, Nietzsche sought for criteria that would rescue morality from Christian ascetic authoritarianism and bourgeois respectability. (See Fromm 1949, 123-126.) The true significance of Nietzsche's philosophy in the context of the nineteenth-century seismic intellectual and moral shifts emerges with exceptional clarity in what I believe is the most comprehensive, intelligent and inspired interpretation of Romanticism and Modernism. In the section on Emerson and Nietzsche in Ljiljana Bogoeva-Sedlar's *Options of the Modern: Emerson, Melville, Stevens* (1993, 60) we read: '"Henceforth be masterless" could not have remained the only slogan guiding man toward a more satisfactory future. Rejection of old masters, the negative definition of the self, had to be re-worked into a positive credo, into an affirmation of those values for the sake of which the radical transformation of the past was undertaken. The old masters were gone, but man could not survive without a source of moral authority, a system of values with which to master into meaning both himself and the world. ...And even Nietzsche, the most violent destroyer of old tablets, sings his invocation of the Unknown God... The Satanic "Non serviam" was thus often merely a proclamation of the readiness to serve someone else, namely the power that moved the New Self discovered within the confines of the Old'. Her Afterword ends with a reminder that postmodern appropriation of Nietzsche involves a reversal of the values he most passionately held to: 'A confusion must be avoided and a distinction made: saying yes to the whole creative output of nature is not the same thing as saying yes to everything being produced in culture. Especially the culture of postmodernism. Ultimately, it is a question of responsibility. Nietzsche, whom Paglia quotes repeatedly, was the fiercest and most uncompromising critic of *culture*. Yet we find "Even the love of *life* is still possible..." recorded in his last published documents.'(Bogoeva-Sedlar 1993, 247)

will to a spontaneously productive life, experienced as joy rather than any hedonistic pleasure; and the unequivocal purpose of cruelty was to overthrow whatever inhibits, from within or without, this joyful self-overcoming and self-creation. This *creative* cruelty mutated into Derrida's unspecified 'monstrosity,'[13] to become, in Alain's 'free interpretation', a pretext for an act of ultimate destruction: rape.

Alain's sermon of cruelty leads to another tragedy. His prescription that 'we must be cruel to others *and* to ourselves' is translated by Pete and Donny into a final attempt to revive their numbed sensations through self-inflicted wounds. The pain they feel as they cut themselves is the one remaining proof that they are still alive and the images of their lacerated bodies on their home page are transmuted into codes through which they communicate this message to the world. Yet seeing that the medium is obstructing his message, enclosing him in the spectral world of the virtual, Donny decides to prove that it is all 'for the real': he accepts Pete's challenge to meet him in the flesh, posts a message on his home page that 'he has had enough of it all just being pictures', and that he is on his way to a motel room where he intends to 'go for his jugular'. The reality of this last act of rebellion soon, however, dissolves into another spectacle. Donny's suicide, committed in Pete's and Alain's presence, but also

[13] Derrida's allegedly Nietzschean affirmation of free play in his 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences' is defined in purely negative terms and thus exemplifies the negative concept of freedom that may become, as Quentin Skinner warns, a disguised tyranny: it is 'an affirmation of a world of signs, *without* fault, *without* truth, and *without* origin'; it is a *repudiation* of the 'humanist ethic' of 'self-presence', a *rejection* of the romantic 'saddened, nostalgic, guilty' interpretation of man and history; it is a liberation *from* 'remorse'. What this freedom is *for* is not specified; instead its imminent coming is merely welcomed in the rhapsodic anticipation, at the end the essay, 'of the birth... of some as yet unnamable ...formless, mute, infant and terrifying form of monstrosity'. In his essay 'The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation,' Derrida is more explicit: here cruelty is identified with life – the non-verbal instinctual energy released when the author, text and aesthetic illusion of theatrical representation have all been smashed up. Yet, it is highly instructive to return once again to Marcuse (1972, 111-112) and compare his repudiation with Derrida's celebration of Artaud (incidentally, the only artist that he has singled out for praise). In abolishing the distancing aesthetic form, or 'the secondary alienation' of art, Marcuse claims, and moving into the streets instead, the theater of cruelty appeals to the masses as masses, and not individuals; there, a 'constant sonorization' insisted on by Artaud – and praised by Derrida – is addressed to the audience 'long since become familiar with the violent noises and cries, which are the daily equipment of the mass media, sports, highways, places of recreation'. There, violent physical images fail to shock 'minds and bodies which live in peaceful coexistence (and even profiting from) genocide, torture and poison... They do not break the oppressive familiarity with destruction: they reproduce it.' Unlike Artaud's, Ravenhill's cruel images, surrounded by what I would call the controlling cognitive context, the critical perspective of the author's text, do shock.

viewed on the net by hundreds of subscribers, is immediately turned into the subject of every talk show and into a song Stevie performs unplugged and is now showing three times an hour on MTV. This epilogue is one of the most shocking among the play's demonstrations of how 'the potentially libertarian subcultures of the young are co-opted and their revolt transmuted into marketable commodity'. (Marcuse 1972, 84)

Yet Donny's defiant gesture is not quite devoid of reality, at least not for Pete and Alain, and death as liberation, as an exit out of the virtual, remains one of the two options defined at the end of *Faust.* Pete rejects it. Horrified at the brutal immediacy of Donny's blood-smeared dead body and blaming it solely on Alain's doctrine of cruelty, he shoots him and returns to his father and the hopeless prospect of electronically controlled chaos. Alain, however, follows Donny's example: seriously wounded, he refuses medical help, and dies. Weariness, disappointment, desire for escape, guilt – whatever brought him to this decision – it is the final, decisive indication of his moral ascent beyond his real life prototypes. The first hint is the despair audible in whatever he says and shadowing both his hedonism and his cruelty. Another lurks in the two elusive parables that seem to obsess him. While they seem to add a deeper, more disquieting resonance to the theme of the loss of feeling and the fragmentation of the self, they may also be read as evidence of his capacity for self-searching and remorse.

One tells of a Japanese businessman and a Dutch woman having lunch at a restaurant. The woman admits to being a poet and reads the businessman a love poem that he has inspired her to write; he shoots her, chops her up, and eats her, declaring all the while his undying love for her. Even in this minimalist form, the story is reminiscent of the great modernists', Ibsen's, for example, exposure of the west's inadequate knowledge of the self and the disorienting teleology deriving from it. Peer Gynt discovers at the end of his life-long pursuit of worldly success that he is 'defective goods', and that the only place he has ever been complete and whole is in Solveg's love. The successful Japanese businessman encounters his own estranged soul embodied in a love poem about himself – his cannibalism being an accurate measure of his hunger to re-possess it. The other parable – about a man who makes love to a beautiful woman, tells her that the part of her he finds most attractive are her eyes, and a few days later receives a gift from her, a shoe-box containing her two eyeballs – makes shockingly explicit the symbolic dismemberment implied in the fetishism of body parts. But these examples are also disguised confessions on Alain's part. The important questions he insists they give rise to – 'Who was cruel, the Dutch woman or the Japanese man?' and 'Who was the seducer and who was the seduced?'; the subdued hostility in Pete's response: 'I'm not so good at the whole metaphor thing'; and finally Alain's own answer that it was the woman who was cruel, because

she understood the use of metaphor, and the man understood nothing – all combine to project Alain's sense of responsibility for the effect his own metaphors have produced.

That the absence of any ascertainable metaphysical truth or transcendental absolute makes all knowledge metaphorical is not an original, postmodern discovery, nor does it matter much. What does matter is the awareness that the choice of metaphor is a moral commitment: for metaphors are interpretations and interpretations have power to shape conduct and thus generate their own confirmation. Speaking of the conflict of interpretations concerning human nature, Zygmunt Bauman (1995, 257) observed that we 'would never know for sure whether people as such are good or evil... But it does matter whether we believe them to be basically good or evil, and consequently how we treat them', for 'the image we hold of each other and of all of us together has the uncanny ability to self-corroborate.' To paraphrase Bauman, we may not ultimately know what the self is and what it may become, but to speak of the postmodern crisis of identity as 'the death of man' and 'the end of history' is to immobilize the creative energies that might take us beyond it.

These energies, according to Ravenhill, are love and anger. Blocked or perverted in *Shopping and Fucking* and *Faust,* they are, if only tentatively and partially, released in *Some Explicit Polaroids*, Ravenhill's version of *Look Back in Anger*. A socialist and an anarchist just out of prison, Nick agrees to subdue his still unflagging desire to smash up things only to satisfy the even more urgent need to take care of somebody: it is under this condition that he is allowed to win back his wife, who has renounced her youthful belief in great narratives of liberation, and convinced herself that playing the small game, according to the rules of that greater prison-house, Thatcherite England, is a sign of adulthood. Yet she soon discovers that what binds her to Nick is the memory of his anger, and promises to turn him into what he used to be.

If Ravenhill's hope of a breakthrough involves a return to romantic individualism, it is because any genuine alternative to postmodernism must begin with a breach of its prohibition against nostalgia. To search for absolute novelty is to perpetuate the discontinuity and fragmentation on which postmodernism, or any other theories whose concealed purpose is mind control, thrive. Looking back in anger may in fact reveal that postmodernism is not as new as it is made to appear: that beneath its permissiveness and hedonism it belongs to a tradition of repressive ethics whose proponents, from the great medieval defenders of the Church to ideologues of state power, imposed a concept of 'salvation' that required the destruction of the soul. Between this authoritarian ethics and the humanist upholding of the productive self, crucial to the romantic tradition in art from Blake to the great modernists, there is, as Fromm repeatedly warned, not much else to choose from. Ravenhill has rediscovered and

attached himself to the latter, at the most inauspicious of historical moments, when postmodernism, seemingly on the wane, in fact persists in the way we crave novelty: new excitement, new distraction, new language games. But if we desire a true alternative to postmodernism, and not merely the old Faustian bargain in a new guise, we had better listen to the voice of the artist.

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ГЛАС УМЕТНИКА: ПОСТМОДЕРНИЗАМ КАО ФАУСТОВСКА НАГОДБА

Резиме

Позиција коју заступам у овом тексту једноставна је и радикална: постмодерна књижевност не постоји. Постмодернизам је валидан назив за економске и политичке промене које су обележиле крај претходног века, опште стање духа – од равнодушности до клицања – које их је пратило, као и спектар нових али сродних теоријских дискурса, утемељених на поступку *cogito interruptus*-а, који су обома пружили софистицирану академску подршку. Међутим, такви намерни прекиди процеса мишљења и етичког вредновања који се прописују као критеријуми не само постмодерне теорије већ и уметности, у суштини су страни уметничкој сврси, која је и даље оно што је била за Конрада: „да омогући увид... у истину... коју смо заборавили да затражимо." Иако неизбежно импликован у постмодерном друштву, уметник (конрадовски одређен) никада му без остатка не припада, увек је у чину отпора, искорака, превазилажења. У прилог овом ставу, а да би се демонстрирала судбина неких од кључних поставки постмодерне теорије када се подвргну уметничкој реинтерпретацији, у другом делу рада анализира се драма Марка Рејвенхила *Фауст* (*Фауст је мртав*).

Кључне речи: Постмодернизам, политика, теорија, књижевност, Фауст