

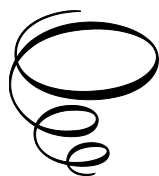
Self-construal in Postcolonial Literature

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INTRODUCTION: SELF-CONSTRUAL – A TRAVELLING CONCEPT

MARIA-ANA TUPAN

A definition of self-construal is itself a construction whose ground and principles have to be stated from the start. Our working hypothesis is that this concept has been exposed along history to the same phenomenal or epistemic determinism as any other cultural signifier. The frame embedding it was the matrix of the whole cultural order, which is more of a function of interfering discourses than a stable formation whose structuring principles and generative source might be precisely identified. The changing view of selfhood one can track while crossing the frontiers of the age of reason, of epistemology, phenomenology, existentialism, pragmatism, deconstruction and virtual reality informed all the chapters in the history of ideas, the spectrum opening with science and ending with the arts. To fully understand someone writing in our days that “The soul is the 5D body that connects to the 3D human self” (Salow 2022), one needs to insert it in the hermeneutic loop of the humanistic heritage.

While promoting invention and discovery, early modernity had, however, cautioned humans against taking too much pride in their fruit. Several Copernican Revolutions, made possible by the new instruments and equipment for research, had proved the unreliability of knowledge acquisition through the senses. Grown over time into a landmark of modern rationalism, seen as architect of a unitary and stable model of the self, René Descartes was actually reviving the ancient *Nous - noesis noeseos* –, the self-observing divine Intellect. Placing the body within brackets, the philosopher located the essence of his self within his mind observing its own operations and constructs : “that the triangle is bounded by three lines only, the sphere by a single superficies [...]”. (Descartes, 2017, web). In the absence of the principle of verifiability, reasoning did not secure cognition. Mental observation was limited to objectless “modes of consciousness,” as he himself names them:

I will now close my eyes, I will stop my ears, I will turn away my senses from their objects, I will even efface from my consciousness all the images of corporeal things; or at least, because this can hardly be accomplished, I will consider them as empty and false; and thus, holding converse only with myself, and closely examining my nature, I will endeavour to obtain by degrees a more intimate and familiar knowledge of myself. I am a thinking (conscious) thing, that is, a being who doubts, affirms, denies, knows a few objects, and is ignorant of many,—[who loves, hates], wills, refuses—who imagines likewise, and perceives; for, as I before remarked, although the things which I perceive or imagine are perhaps nothing at all apart-from me [and in themselves], (Descartes, 1912, p. 95)

Descartes belonged to an age of transition when scientific research coexisted with esoteric concerns. Athanasius Kircher, Jean Batista van Helmont, Robert Fludd, Dimitrie Cantemir, among others, personified this mix of earnest experimentation within nature's compass and spiritual quest. Even Newton, the master figure of classical physics, authored a treatise on alchemy.

By 1798, when Immanuel Kant published his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, British empiricism had documented the mechanism of the mind as grounded in sensory experience to a point where embodied forms of consciousness could no longer be ignored. The encounter with David Hume's associationism tempered the German philosopher's exclusivist investment in "pure reason." What he bracketed was the world out there (the thing in itself), dismissed from consideration as impossible to be known in its infinite potential. Philosophy reforms and narrows down its focus, the mind turning away from metaphysical speculation or empirical observation while engaging in the study of its capacity for understanding, correct judgement, or validity of epistemological constructs.

Whereas former representations of selfhood had absolutized either the mind or the body, in his late Königsberg lectures, published in book form at the end of the luminaries' century, Kant speaks of two selves within the individual, one produced by nature through work on the senses (perceptions and their anarchic associations), and the other which is of the individual's own making:

Physiological knowledge of the human being concerns the investigation of what nature makes of the human being; pragmatic, the investigation of what he as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself. (Kant, 2006, p. 3)

The constructed self emerges at the paradoxical intersection of freedom (the individual chooses to shape his self) and ethics (this self belongs to man, not in his egotistic isolation, but in relation to social others, as “citizen of the world,” being oriented to an otherness).

The passive self has a physical character (“as a sensible or natural being”), while the moral character “is the distinguishing mark of the human being as a rational one, endowed with freedom.” The egoist sees himself as the whole and the only world. In his judgment, aesthetic taste, way of reasoning, the egoist does not look for confirmation from someone else or collective consensus. The egoist breaks the philosopher’s famous categorical imperative at the end of his *Critique of Practical Reason* (“the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me”) concerning the moral law: let me behave in such a way that everybody shall consider it to be the proper conduct. Whereas natural aptitude or natural predisposition, temperament, or sensibility define the natural self (character as a way of sensing), character as a way of thinking does not depend on instinct but on the will to shape one’s self. The moral self may characterize an individual, but, in its ethical orientation, it can also characterize a whole people.

Kant’s anthropology divided the human personality. First of all, it is by definition that man occupies the highest position among the creatures of the earth for two reasons: one of them is the faculty of synthesis which allows the mind to connect past and present experiences and be conscious of remaining the same. The other is the split within consciousness which allows the self to become its own object, to represent itself, which is done through language: “the human being can have the ‘I’ in his representations” (p. 15). The full awareness of self-identity is lacking in small children who refer to themselves in the third person. Feeling oneself precedes thus thinking about the self, manifest in language through the position of the first person pronoun.

Moreover, having different ontogenies, the two selves, natural and moral, are set in opposition to each other. The moral self censures the natural self, it goes against nature, and that is why it is defined in the negative:

Accordingly, it is best to present negatively the principles that relate to character. They are:

- a. Not intentionally to say what is false; consequently, also to speak with caution so that one does not bring upon oneself the disgrace of retraction.

b. Not to dissemble; appearing well disposed in public, but being hostile behind people's backs.

c. Not to break one's (legitimate) promise;¹³ which also includes honoring even the memory of a friendship now broken off, and not abusing later on the former confidence and candor of the other person.

d. Not to enter into an association of taste with evil-minded human beings, and, bearing in mind the *noscitur ex socio* etc.,¹⁴ to limit the association only to business.

e. Not to pay attention to gossip derived from the shallow and malicious judgment of others; for paying attention to it already indicates weakness. Also, to moderate our fear of offending against fashion, which is a fleeting, changeable thing; and, if it has already acquired some importance in its influence, then at least not to extend its command into morality. (Kant, 2006., pp. 193-194)

Kant insists on the distinction between shaping from the outside and self-making: "Education, examples, and teaching" cannot create that paragon of character in the absence of "the inner principle of conduct" (p. 194) – a determination from within, which comes with mature age.

The split self was going to be a favourite motif in the literature of the next century. In Dostoevsky's novel, *The Double. A Petersburg Poem*, the explanation is social frustration. The protagonist grows a double who enjoys the esteem and favours of the upper class company which are denied to him. In *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, R.L. Stevenson speculates on the same motif of the double stranded between social esteem and social acclaim, but not as a case study in abyssmal psychology anymore. Dr. Jekyll is consciously making a scientific experiment meant to allow him to enjoy both high life and low life in the same body. Although the doubling is a matter of choice, the case is not what Kant had designated as the starting point of someone's attempt to become a better man. The wrong choice fires back, the doctor becoming incapable of switching back to his better self. This one is taken hold of for good by his monstrous double whose physical deformity bespeaks nature's rude hand.

A scientific explanation for the existence of a double personality was hypnosis, as in Max Dessoir's *The Double Ego (Das Doppel-Ich)*, 1890). As the patient, in going back to wakeful life, remembers nothing about what he/she has done on command from the hypnotizer, the explanation can only be the existence of a subconscious self. It was also under

hypnosis that certain representations of past experiences which the patient had not been aware of but had left their traces in memory (a hypothesis already launched by Wilhelm Wundt in his 1885 *Essays*) could be retrieved. For this new understanding of personality, Dessoir coined the term the “unconscious”: “die Zusammengesetztheit unserer Persönlichkeit aus zwei mehr oder minder unabhängig von einander operierenden, die man bildlich als Ober- und Unterbewusstsein bezeichnen könnte”¹.

Whereas Dessoir started at the deconstruction of the self as “einheitliches” (unitary) concept, it was Wilhelm Wundt who enhanced its resources by filling the gap between mind and body (Dualismus). The self is embodied, in the sense that it is physiologically generated, but still cognitively disconnected from the world. In his *Essays* (1885), Wundt dismisses the validity of information provided by the senses or its relevance to an external referent. The mind is seen as a laboratory processing perceptions and combining them in synaesthetic representations (combinations of sensations coming from different organs, at different times, sometimes unconsciously recorded in memory, such as hearing and taste in “sweet melodies”) which provide aesthetic pleasure (it was indeed the favourite trope of symbolist poetry). Reality slides under individual representations which sever the physical world from the mind world. The only way of stabilizing the incessant flow of perceptions is fixation in language or some other medium. Wundt’s example is G.E. Lessing’s critical method in his commentary on the Rhodian sculpture of “Laokoon and His Sons,” where the faces of the characters strangled by snakes do not betray the physical agony they endure. Whereas Winckelmann had found fault with the sculpture for lack of verisimilitude, Lessing justifies the artists’ infringement upon the law of nature for the sake of art whose law was beauty.

The real crisis of the unitary self occurs the moment there is no possibility of distinguishing between them. In Sören Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* (1843), the antagonism between the ethical and aesthetical self is internalized in the same individual and seen as a barrier in the attempt to make interiority public through language.

¹ [...] the composition of our personality from two more or less independently of each other's operating halves of consciousness could figuratively be described as upper- and subconscious”. (Max Dessoir, *Das Doppel-Ich*, Leipzig, Ernst Günthers Verlag, 1890, p. 5)

Writing means diving into an abyss of subjectivity, the authentic self getting lost through successive embedding in levels of narrativity which makes his existential essence impossible to be communicated. By writing under pseudonyms and passing himself for editor instead of author, Kierkegaard upheld a poetics of impersonality. The self is sliding under a persona, wearing a rhetorical mask. Hearing and speaking, prefiguring a site of communication, are the medium of the self's estrangement, alienation of its authentic state of mind. Kierkegaard allegorizes this *acte manqué* as the sacrament of confession in church:

A priest who hears confessions is separated by a grillwork from the person making confession; he does not see him, he only hears. As he listens, he gradually forms a picture of the other's outward appearance corresponding to what he hears; thus he finds no contradiction. It is different, however, when one sees and hears simultaneously but sees a grillwork between oneself and the speaker. (Kierkegaard, 1987, p. 3)

Speech awakens images in the listener, but the speaker experiences only the impossibility of articulating and letting his message get through. As he goes on introducing the supposedly found manuscripts, the grillwork becomes a metaphor for the non-transparent printed page.

Instead of offering self-revelation, his writings rely on a codified author-reader relationship which presupposes awareness of the conventions accompanying generic typology (textual self-reflexivity). The author's identity is not existential but inscribed: "The undersigned, Johannes Climacus who has written this work" reads the beginning of "Appendix: For an Understanding with the Reader" from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. An author differs from his existential self and even the latter defies the logic of identity being tensed by inner and insoluble contradictions.

With Kierkegaard, a self-reflexive author enters the site of discourse whose aim, however, is not unveiling himself (as in the example of a benevolent Henry Fielding intruding now and then into the chronodiegesis of *Tom Jones*), but the artificial construction of a conflicted, textual self. His "editorial" introduction to *Either/Or* is an exercise in the deferral of presence. The author disowning his text under the guise of an editor was at that time a common figure of discourse, which, in this particular instance, is laid in the abyss: his character, the aesthetic self named A is in his turn an author disguised as editor, and the motto of the book, *ad se ipsum* (to himself), as well as the title of the chapter attributed to A, the seducer and the aesthete, *Diapsalmata*, are borrowed from the A manuscript. The merging of the author, editor, character, on the writing scene, and of

author-reader at the reception pole turn the text into a semiotic utopia with the author as vertical sign signifying only itself:

The last of A's papers is a narrative titled "The Seducer's Diary." Here we meet new difficulties, inasmuch as A does not declare himself the author but only the editor. This is an old literary device to which I would not have much to object if it did not further complicate my own position, since one author becomes enclosed within the other like the boxes in a Chinese puzzle. (Kierkegaard, 1987, p. 9)

The title itself weaves ambiguity around the concept of textuality. *Diaplasmata* is not a form-giving principle, a teleologically constituted Gestalt, but a leap into sheer indeterminacy. The author says *Diaplasmata* means "formation", adding a description which runs counter the traditional acceptation of the word: "whether one understands with this word the movement that engenders by giving form or the figure that gathers up a mobile multiplicity: configuration in displacement." The deconstruction of the author position in Kierkegaard anticipates by more than a century Roland Barthes's "Death of the Author" (1967).

Multiplicity is an appropriate description of selfhood or personality, Kierkegaard rounding thus up his deconstruction of presence. The author perceives A as a shadow (sending into the future not only a word used by Jung himself but also its semantic content), a projection of his hidden, not fully acknowledged self. The conspirational address to the reader ("It may at times have occurred to you, dear reader") signals the intention of constructing a prototype of the psychic mechanism rather than a personal confession. A synonym for the constructed self, the aesthetic self shaped by will and desire rather than born from the womb of nature is *silhouette*. Don Juan is not interested in erotic consumption but in the play of seduction, his desire assuming the form of a diary, "The Seducer's Diary," the last of A's papers, where seduction is its own end, an art (a Kantian understanding of art). It is attributed to the pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, as one more step taken away from reality. It is this sublimation of the debauchee into erotic aesthete that reconciles the opposites. Of A's conversion to the boring marriage path exhorted by the judgmental (literally Judge) author of the B manuscript, there is no assuring sign. The author himself suggests that the aesthetic and the ethical self, relegated by Immanuel Kant to irreconcilable positions, are mutually constitutive and A and B are denizens of one and the same personality, which renders senseless the query about who came round to the other's view :

In my continual preoccupation with these papers, it dawned on me that they might take on a new aspect if they were regarded as belonging to one person. I know very well all the objections that could be made against this view—that it is unhistorical, and that it is improbable inasmuch as it is unreasonable that one person could be the author of both parts, although the reader could easily be tempted by the pun that when one has said A, one must also say B. (p. 14).

The superimposed selves of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* are similar to Nietzsche's paradoxical prototype in *Ecce Homo*. By the end of his unmasking of Christian morality, Nietzsche's rhetorical question – "Have you understood me? *Dionysus* versus *Christ*" – reads more like "Dionysus as much as Christ".

There seems to be no way out for humanity in the age of the overthrow of all values, of such immersion into error that anti-ideals had become possible.

Irreconcilable oppositions could however be neutralized in an ontology of probability, in a manifold of virtual states. It seems that the word "virtual" with a sense similar to the one it has in quantum physics was first used by Henri Bergson, the philosopher who inspired modernist construals of consciousness. At the same time, we see in him a *forerunner of quantum cognitivism*.

Henri Bergson's focus on memory opened him a path to an epistemic model which today falls within the area of quantum cognitivism. At the time of its emergence, Henri Bergson's philosophy of consciousness represented the third way. On the one hand, he rejected Kantianism on account of its body/mind dualism. Theoretically, he says perception would be possible in the absence of a nervous system and sensuous stimuli, but that would mean replacing a living human being with a phantom. On the other hand, associanism, which was upheld by various representatives of physiological psychology, was seen as the mind's enslavement in the empire of matter. Bergson proceeded to forging his own theory of the mind which worked in a way similar to the apparatus of quantum measurements: matter, objectively existing, emerged as an image under the action of the senses. Similarly to the splinters of a broken hologram, it contains non-localized information about the whole system, not only about the portion measured by the senses. At the same time, the image engendered by the present perception enters a virtual space where the mind does not distinguish between present and previous states of consciousness. The sensory apparatus is thus testing the state of a system,

the image, which becomes entangled with previous imprints similarly to the wave function, progressing through planes of consciousness until it materialises (collapses) as a current perception. The interference of acts of consciousness (*l'emboîtement des faits de conscience les uns dans les autres*) increases mental space where information from the outside is processed in the memory as pure memory, memory image and perception, corresponding roughly to the encyclopedic, procedural and episodic memory whose nervous analysers are examined by cognitive psychology. Bergson's theory of consciousness anticipated cognitivism and the theory of the mind as a quantum system.

The point of departure in Bergson's trajectory of the mind's journey across the world of things is an act of perception whose definition, however, as already noticed (Dolbeault 2012, web) anticipates quantum vocabulary and theory. To understand his originality we'll proceed through comparisons to related trends of thought.

It is true that William James had restricted the individual's perceptions to aspects of the objects which are targeted by the observer's interests. Contrariwise, Bergson establishes a parallelism between mind and world from a holistic point of view. The information extracted from the object, limited as it is on account of our finite sensory apparatus, is less but not different from the nature of the entire system. It is like a broken hologram, where each fragment mirrors the entire image as information is uniformly distributed throughout the zinc plate (a state known as non-localization). Perception as action on bodies is similar to the intervention of the measuring equipment in quantum physics which forces the entangled system of virtual states to collapse (decoherence) into a realised one (Eigenstate).

Cela revient à dire qu'il y a pour les images une simple différence de degré, et non pas de nature, entre être et *être consciemment perçues*. La réalité de la matière consiste dans la totalité de ses éléments et de leurs actions de tout genre. Notre représentation de la matière est la mesure de notre action possible sur les corps²; (Bergson, 1939, p. 22)

The object is caught in a field of energy spreading throughout the universe so that if one knew the position and velocity of each atom, one could

² "This is as much as to say that there is for images merely a difference of degree, and not of kind, between being and being consciously perceived. The reality of matter consists in the totality of its elements and of their actions of every kind. Our representation of matter is the measure of our possible action upon bodies."

calculate its position – anticipating in this way the wave function model whose calculation allows the localization of any particle provided the position and the momentum are known:

Et le mathématicien qui connaîtrait la position des molécules ou atomes d'un organisme humain à un moment donné, ainsi que la position et le mouvement de tous les atomes de l'univers capables de l'influencer, calculerait avec une précision infaillible les actions passées, présentes et futures de la personne à qui cet organisme appartient, comme on prédit un phénomène astronomique.³ (Bergson, 1889, p. 110)

The information accessed through perception is built upon as it adds up to previous prints on memory, not as a distinct state multiplying the number of the previous ones, but fused into patterns which structure our past experience. Bergson's source was probably Helmholtz⁴'s theory of open/closed and isolated systems, but the analogy can be carried into our time:

The extension of the quantum model was required in order to solve the problem of memory overprinting [...] The brilliant solution proposed by Vitiello is a model of modes of the ground on vacuum state. The ontological significance of the proposal lies in the primacy of duality, a new conception of duality sharply distinguished from the classical dualism. Here the duality is that of a system in which brain is opened to external world (process of dissipation) [48] [87]. [...] The brain system is labeled "non-tilde-mode", and the environment is labeled "tilde-mode". The tilde-mode is the time-reversed copy of the non-tilde-mode, i.e. its conjugate image, its "Double". These dual modes are unavoidably coupled, lacking independent existence in the quantum thermofield dynamics of the open brain [...]. Under the usual quantum terms, the two-mode state is "entangled" in the vacuum state, in the sense that it cannot be factorized into two single-mode states, the non-tilde-mode and the tilde-mode [...] The time axis is divided by a singular point, the Now, which divides the past from the future. According to Vitiello, the Now is that point on the time-mirror where the non-tilde-mode and the tilde-mode

³ "And the mathematician who knew the position of the molecules or atoms of a human organism at a given moment, as well as the position and motion of all the atoms in the universe capable of influencing it, could calculate with unfailing certainty the past, present and future actions of the person to whom this organism belongs, just as one predicts an astronomical phenomenon."

⁴ Helmholtz entered the history of the experimental life sciences as the first scientist to make precise measurements of nervous action. In nerve-muscle preparations from the frog, Helmholtz measured a propagation velocity of stimuli between 25 and 43 meters per second. (Eleanor Rosch, "Reclaiming Concepts." *The Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 1999, 6, No. 11-12, pp. 61-77).

join together in the Present [48] [49]. The Now continually renews itself in the dialogic relation of the non-tilde-mode with its Double.(Blanquet, 2015, web)

This collocation of past and present states of consciousness is called *durée*. Previous states of mind and the present one are not added but organised into a pattern, such as that of a musical score “dont les parties, quoique distinctes, se pénètrent par l'effet même de leur solidarité”.⁵ They interfere in an organised space which spatialises time.

Durée resembles a wave function (virtual system of interfering states, which decoheres/ collapses as realised states, as they are distinct both from the original sensory perception and the subject's body) materializing as words (a sublimated reality of mixed subjective/objective nature). It is in language that the profound self can contemplate and address itself.

In the early 1990s Giacomo Rizzolatti, Giuseppe Di Pellegrino, Luciana Fadiga, Leonardo Fogassi and Vittorio Gallese, from the University of Palm, experimenting with monkeys, discovered the existence of “mirror neurons” as part of the motor system of the brain, which were later localized in the inferior frontal cortex and the superior parietal lobe of humans as well. They are active both when performing an action and when watching someone else performing it.

Bergson's profound self (*moi profond*) is swelling up in proportion to the multiplication of entangled states of mind (*l'emboîtement des faits de conscience les uns dans les autres*), the space of pure duration is virtual, including the possibility of choice similar to the quantum forking of the multiverse. It is not a symbolic representation of reality (contrary to the representational theory of the mind), where superimposed states are reduced (collapsed) to a single one upon measurement (the Schrödinger cat experiment), but an open possibility of decoherence.

Il se représentera donc un moi qui, après avoir parcouru une série MO de faits de conscience, arrivé au point O, se voit en présence de deux directions OX et OY également ouvertes. Ces directions deviennent ainsi des choses, de véritables chemins auxquels aboutirait la grande route de la

⁵ “whose parts, although distinct, penetrate each other by the very effect of their solidarity”

conscience, et où il ne tiendrait qu'au moi de s'engager indifféremment.⁶ (Fig. 1-2).



Fig. 1

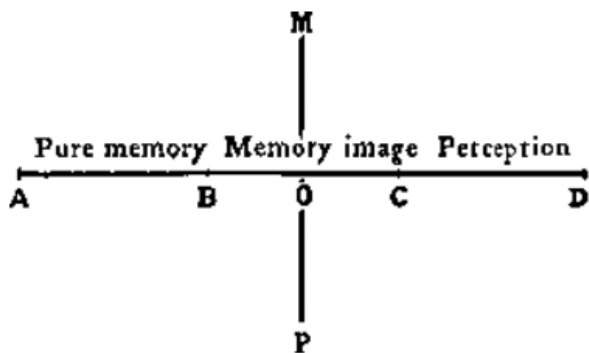


Fig. 2

The splitting I – the reality attuned self and the profound me (self) - bridge the gap between subject and object, between a fictional observer (philosopher Paul) and observed Pierre, the objective pole of the perceptual

⁶ Hence it will picture a self which, after having traversed a series M O of conscious states, when it reaches the point O finds before it two directions O X and O Y, equally open. These directions thus become *things*, real paths into which the highroad of consciousness leads, and it depends only on the self which of them is entered upon.

act of mind. It is not enough for Paul to watch Pierre's movements and acts, he has to experience them himself mentally, Bergson anticipating here the mirror neurons theory. He is trying to imagine how a novelist constructs his characters, the process being that of a specular self doubling up an empirical (in the sense of chronodiegetic) self. Language is the medium of objectification. The author cannot escape the circle of his own consciousness, Marcel (Proust), for instance, being both author and protagonist of *In Search of Lost Time*. By addressing his imaginary double in the second person, Bergson provided a simulation model for the representation of consciousness in the modernist novel. In *Ulysses*, for instance, Stephen, an author figure, uses the same person in an address to a character who is an alter-ego, and to himself, the author of an earlier, quoted, work, *Epiphanies*. In Joyce's allusive manner, the scene is set in the "Boulevard Mich" (Me in German):

My Latin quarter hat. God, we simply must dress the character. I want puce gloves. You were a student, weren't you? Of what in the other devil's name? Paysayenn. P. C. N., you know: *physiques, chimiques et naturelles*. Aha. Eating your groatsworth of *mou en civet*, fleshpots of Egypt, elbowed by belching cabmen. Just say in the most natural tone: when I was in Paris; *boul' Mich*, I used to. Yes, used to carry punched tickets to prove an alibi if they arrested you for murder somewhere. Justice. On the night of the seventeenth of February 1904 the prisoner was seen by two witnesses. Other fellow did it: other me. Hat, tie, overcoat, nose. *Lui, c'est moi*. You seem to have enjoyed yourself. (Joyce 2021, web)

Bergson's description of memory comes close to contemporary cognitivists' classification of memory encoding. His tripartite model - , pure memory, memory-image, and perception (Fig.2), - corresponds to semantic, procedural and episodic memory (Sternberg, 2016, p. 22)..

Perception completed with memory images - something that occurred to us at a particular time or in a particular context. (Martindale 1999, p. 185) – is context-dependent. Bergson's pure memory would correspond to semantic memory (encyclopedic knowledge of the world), while memory-image partakes of both as it fills the empty shell of the abstract frame of a typical script with the concrete image into which it is going to be embodied. In *Ulysses*, for instance, Molly is leafing in retrospect her amorous episodes with plenty of empirical details, Bloom is searching for prototypes (Sindbad, trader) of his canvasser profession, while Stephen's memory is most often a collection of disconnected images sharing however the family resemblance of some general concept (for instance, images of creation as multiplication of the one in Proteus).

Inspired by the model of open systems, engaging in exchange with the environment, provided by Hermann Helmholtz (Second Law of Thermodynamics), Henri Bergson evolved his own theory of the mind as an open system, where exchanges with the environment allow of the fusion of past memories and present perceptions in the NOW – the present moment. Memory is thus a system of entangled acts of mind where time is spatialised.

Perception is an act of mind similar to a quantum measurement, whereby access to matter retrieves information about the whole system, as it is not localized.

The exploration of memory is particularly valuable for the study of the workings of the mind and the way human experience gets encoded. By privileging pure memory (semantic or encyclopedic memory providing knowledge of the world) over what we call today procedural and episodic memory, Bergson proved his intuition about fundamental aspects of the mind, as amnesia, for instance, only causes loss of the latter two. His proleptic contribution to the history of ideas includes intimations of quantum cognitivism.

Informed by science - Bachelard's poetics, for instance, was inspired by the epistemology of the New Physics, perceived as *The New Scientific Spirit* (1934) of the age - modernist character construction used simulation models provided by psychology or by the new discipline of psychoanalysis, intuitionism, pragmatism, archetypal psychology, Gestalt psychology, existentialist philosophy or cultural anthropology. Tenable from the epistemological point of view, these prototypes of selfhood are sites of psychological processes, where the Cartesian modes of consciousness or Kantian transcendental subjectivity have made room for William James's layered self, intrusions from the personal unconscious, archetypes of the collective subconscious, or pragmatic acts of speech placing the self in communion with its world⁷. Intuitionism, phenomenology and hermeneutics

⁷ "Discoursing or talking is the way in which we articulate 'significantly' the intelligibility of Being-in-the-world. Being-with belongs to Being in-the-world, which in every case maintains itself in some definite way of concerned Being-with-one-another. Such Being-with-one-another is discursive as assenting or refusing, as demanding or warning, as pronouncing, consulting, or interceding, as 'making assertions', and as talking in the way of 'giving a talk'. Talking is talk about something.[...] Even a command is given about something ; a wish is about something. And so is intercession. (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Translated

had all contributed to a master narrative of mind-dependent constitution of the object of intentional consciousness and of the self in process. Heidegger was probably the last philosopher of presence (the world is disclosed through language to a subject embedded in it as in a network of connectivity).

The end of the nineteenth century had been marked by demographic crises, a general sense of fatigue caused by rapid changes brought about by urbanization and industrialization, the neurosis or apathy of an age of aesthetic refinement unsustained by ethical values, or unrest within Empires. The modernist artistic bloom breathed a new optimism and vigour into the high culture, enabling it to resist the rise of mass culture and consumerism.

The modernist self found resources to heal past traumas buried in the subconscious. Knowledge was neither universal nor immutable, but it enjoyed temporary validation from historical and embodied forms of subjectivity. Grounded in the phenomenology of perception, the modernist mind re-placed the self within the world. There is healing for traumas harboured in the subconscious and there is intelligibility in the embodied self's contextualised and historicized interpretation of the world:

Understanding is either authentic, arising out of one's own Self as such, or inauthentic. The 'in-' of "inauthentic" does not mean that Dasein cuts itself off from its Self and understands 'only' the world. The world belongs to Being-one's-Self as Being-in-the-world. (Heidegger, 2001, p. 186)

With C.G. Jung, the self moves to the centre of personality, compared, under the influence of Eastern philosophy, to the fullness of the mandala (the Pool of Life) as the exponent of all paths:

During those years, between 1918 and 1920, I began to understand that the goal of psychic development is the self. There is no linear evolution; there is only a circumambulation of the self. (Jung, 2017, web)

At an earlier stage of his career, Jung used the word "individual" for the centre of personality which relates to the collective consciousness as persona, and as anima to the collective unconscious (Fig. 3). The self, as totality of the psyche, incorporating the conscious ego and the

unconscious, was the solution to the liberation of the conflicted ego inherited from the previous century.

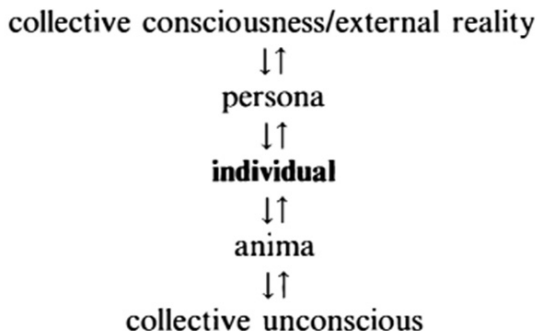


Fig. 3.

The deconstruction of the self as psycho-physical entity, agent in history, author, etc., was a component of the postmodernist onslaught on the myth of presence, on metaphysics and logocentrism. Postmodernist is broadly interchangeable with posthuman. The blame is in general put to the door of postwar technology and consumer society. The self has come to be seen as an inventory of objects which define social status (Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, 1968), or performances characterizing a certain habitus or way of life (Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 1977). The attitudes, choices, type of conduct, unconsciously absorbed/ internalised by the individual from his social milieu and personal status reflect a type of blind determinism which blocks emancipation of the self and the progress of civilization instead of its stale replication. It is enough to compare the levelling down effect of what Gabriel de Tarde (1843-1904) called the law of imitation, which induced the emulation of models of social prestige, to habitus, meaning dispositions of perception and evaluation which reinforce an awareness of status among the privileged and resentment in low life.

The fabrication of pseudo-identities in the social media, the hyperreality of a culture of images are the paraphernalia of the post-truth age. The body bracketed by Descartes is written over by narratives of race, class, or gender – a surrogate identity, most often exposed to discriminations of sorts.

If modernism shaped the human mind, postmodernism constructs narratives of the body or derealizes it, turning it to simulacrum.

Nevertheless, a vindication of the rights of selfhood would have to turn to history rather than to epistemology or technology. A century of demonic politics included in its repressive regime crimes against the self. Torturing the body was not something new but engineering the soul by putting the body on the rack was worthy of the Satanic political mind of a century of world conflagrations and totalitarian regimes. Even when the body was tortured, the target was the self: its shaping as a senseless and obedient slave of the power system, its loss of self-respect, its depersonalization. Contempt of self must have been the effect of telling on people, including family and close friends, denouncing political crimes, well knowing that the victim would not see the daylight again, or experiencing the abjection of self-denunciation, of blaming oneself for imaginary and horrible crimes. *Stalinist Confessions. Messianism and Terror at the Leningrad Communist University* (2009) by Igal Halfin is a well-documented book on the interrogation table scenes of the exertion of psychological and physical terror at the Leningrad University in former Bolshevik Russia at the time of the Great Purges. It reads like exponential Orwellian fiction.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, there is a conversation between the protagonist, Winston, who is unaware of what was going to happen to himself, and Parsons, arrested for thoughtcrime after his own daughter's denunciation and sentenced to death. Winston's commonsensical question, "Are you guilty?," elicits a hallucinating answer from a completely alienated victim of totalitarian brainwashing bio-politics:

Between you and me, old man, I'm glad they got me before it went any further. Do you know what I'm going to say to them when I go up before the tribunal? 'Thank you,' I'm going to say, 'thank you for saving me before it was too late.' (Orwell, 2001, p. 214)

A sample of what might have served as Orwell's simulation model is a letter of a Russian female academic, living in Bolshevik Russia, purged and exiled in Saratov, to a former companion (there was no word for "friend" as there was no supporting reality for this kind of human interaction):

Dear Lenchka! Your telegram renewed my ability to feel not only the power of life within me but (and for the first time!) the joy of life, the joy of knowing that you (never when I thought of any of my other friends did I feel an equally terrible pain) believe me a bit, that you reach out your hand to me as I hover over this abyss. I believe I can, no, I am convinced I can, no, I am burning with the desire to— prove I am able to emerge from the catastrophe that engulfed me with the least possible damage to my moral

and physical strength, that strength so important to our motherland. . . . There is so much work that needs to be done here and so few who can do it. Saratov is a city of universities and research institutes. Thousands of youngsters, young scholarly workers, and teachers are thirsty for solid knowledge. . . . I deeply and sincerely thank the Party for sending me to this province to do that work. By detaching myself from Moscow and drawing closer to the masses, I am useful here—and earn trust and the ability to reenter the Party. . . .(Halfin, 2009, p. 188).

Totalitarian politics of the twentieth century literalized dystopia. The dystopic self descended to the zero degree of fictionality. Quoting a typical victim, “things could not go any further” ...

It is not surprising, therefore, that the new schools of theory which emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century carry names such as Trauma Studies, Studies of the Affect, Healing Studies, Liminality and Memory Studies, Intersectionality Studies, etc. Healing the wounds of near history, the traumatic memories of totalitarianism and the sense of alienation in an age of mass migrations and ethnical displacement fill in the agenda of the international academic discourse. A side effect is the shift from existential anxiety to reconstruction of the ethical self acknowledging what Lévinas calls the “irreducible face of the other.”

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“WHY ME” PARADOX EXPLORED: RUSHDIE’S PSYCHOANALYSIS

ABHIJEET GHOSH

We begin a journey to explore the realities of psychoanalysis and self-construal and investigate the intricate interplay of these concepts in Salman Rushdie's novels *Shame* and *Fury*, as we aim to disentangle the enigmatic paradoxes present in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories as they are applied to the heterogeneous characters within these literary works. By situating Rushdie's encounter with exile and societal biases, we shed light on how these factors shape the self-perception of his characters. Through the tangled dance of repression and expression, the exploration of human sexuality the manifestation of hidden desires, an elaborate narrative unfolds before us. This narrative shall compel readers to ponder upon the complexities that reside within the recesses of our psyche. In Rushdie's novels, the exploration of psychological concepts such as the id, ego, superego, repression, the Oedipus complex the #why me phenomenon is beautifully incorporated into the literary narratives. As the characters struggle with their inner struggles, family dynamics profound existential inquiries, the novels serve as a powerful testament. Rushdie's characters serve as vessels through which Freud's paradoxes are brought to life, offering a unique lens through which to engage with psychoanalytic abstractions in the context of literature. As we explore, the profound intricacies and timeless relevance of Freudian thought come to light, persistently inspiring and testing the boundaries of our comprehension of the intricacies of the human mind. Additionally, this examines often paradoxical reactions of 21st-century literary criticism to these iconic works, through his multifaceted analysis, it also aims to shed light on the intricacies of self-identity and its paradoxical interpretations in contemporary literature and critical discourse.

1. Introduction

The association of psychoanalysis, self-construal and literature has long been a subject of fascination and debate and we undertake a paradoxical

analysis of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories, investigating their relevance and paradoxes when applied to the characters in Salman Rushdie's *Shame* and *Fury*. We also consider the influence of Rushdie's personal experiences, including his exile and the societal prejudices he faced, on the construction of self-identity in his novels. In addition, we look into the catatonic responses of literary critics in the 21st century towards these pieces of literature. We bring attention to the contradictions that arise when trying to decipher intricate stories using modern perspectives. Sigmund Freud, celebrated as the trailblazer of psychoanalysis, established the groundwork for comprehending the ramifications of the human psyche (Niaz; Stanikzai and Sahibzada, 2019, 35–44). His beliefs, while groundbreaking, are not without contradictions and within Freud's theories, concentrate on the relationship between repression and expression, sexuality and unconscious urges (Ghosh, 2023, 1194). Moreover, this study will be contextualized within the setting of Salman Rushdie's *Shame* and *Fury*, which involve narrative threads that cleverly fabricates Freudian concepts into storytelling. To define his psychoanalytic theory, Freud emphasized the process of unconscious repression; this is an act of pushing unwanted ideas and memories out of consciousness (Berlin, 2011, 5–31). More curiously, it is within such repressions that they can find expression. In *Shame*, Salman Rushdie demonstrates that a society on the verge of political upheaval can restrain its citizens' innermost desires to conform to societal expectations only to have these suppressed feelings emerge unpredictably and often catastrophically. Omar Khayyam Shakil's struggle with social pressures vs. sexual urges is portrayed by Rushdie in his novel *Shame*. The psychological conflicts of this character can be assessed through the lens of repression as presented by Freud (Samad, 2016, 314). Omar, pushing his real self, down to conform with societal demands, ends up being expressed through shameful acts that mirror the national collective repressions. This paradox is not only true at the individual level but also on another level of society called "collective shame". Similarly, *Fury* is another of Rushdie's novels that discusses repression versus expression as the main theme; in this case, Malik Solanka fights against the uncontrollable fury within him and Freud's theory of unconscious wishes coming to the surface despite attempts for repression can be seen in Malik's inner conflict (Junejo; Malik and Talaat, 2020, 172–191). Rather than stifling his anger, he simply causes it to become revealed in twisted forms which are destructive. The contradiction here lies in how one inevitably has to speak out even if they choose to consciously repress their thoughts hence making this a Freudian book full of chaos in its storyline.

1.1 Sexuality

Freud's theories on sexuality, particularly the stages of psychosexual development, present another layer of paradox within his work, the Oedipus complex, a central concept in Freudian psychoanalysis, suggests that a child's unconscious desire for the opposite-sex parent is resolved through identification with the same-sex parent. This Freudian topic was deeply unfolded throughout Rushdie's *Shame*, which explored the complexity of sexual desire and familial connections. In *Shame*, Bilquis, who represents the figure of the seductress, steers a complicated network of sexual interactions. Freud's sexual ideas, with their focus on unconscious impulses (Flax, 2004, 47–68) provide a prism through which Bilquis' actions and intentions may be examined. The dichotomy is seen in the characters' cohabitation of suppressed urges and overt sexual displays. As a symbol of unbridled sexuality, Bilquis violates society's standards and symbolises the ambiguities inherent in Freud's theories. The emphasis on the unconscious mind as a store of repressed impulses is central to Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The unconscious, a domain beyond conscious consciousness, is home to ideas and desires that determine human conduct (Fonagy and Allison, 2016, 5–24). The books of Salman Rushdie, notably *Fury*, will examine the latent urges and the contradictory nature of their manifestation. In *Fury*, Malik Solanka is the personification of repressed cravings that transcend societal conventions. Freud's ideas, with their emphasis on the hidden depths of the mind, find echo in Malik's journey. The contradiction occurs when Malik's suppressed latent impulses resurface in weird and unbelievable ways. Rushdie uses the narrative to resolve the complexities of the unconscious mind, showcasing the paradoxical interplay between repression and the unexpected eruption of desires.

1.2 Psychoanalytic Concepts

Psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud have left an impeccable effect on the comprehension of human understanding and the impediment of the human mind. His investigation of the unconscious mind, the reciprocation of the id, ego superego, as well as notions such as quelling and the Oedipus complex (Elliott and Prager, 2016) have affected several areas, including literature. The key to Freud's psychoanalytic principles and their manifestations in Salman Rushdie's novels, *Shame* and *Fury*, with a special mention on the recurring subject of the “#Why Me” notion. Freud conceived the mind as comprised of three components: the id, the ego the

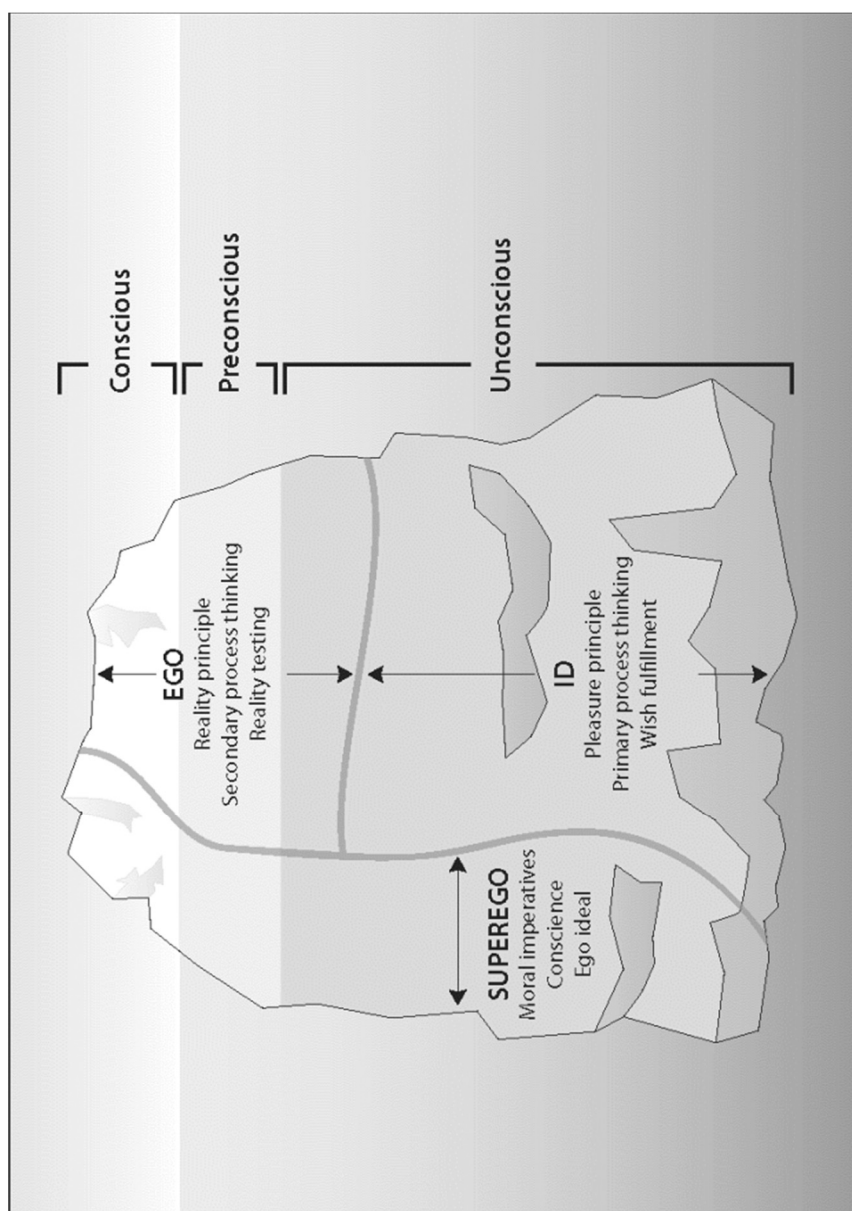


Figure 1. Freud's personality model