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The American University in Cairo  
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Versions of the Alter Ego:**  
**A Study of Joyce, Kushner and Ellis**

A Thesis Submitted to  
The Department of  
English and Comparative Literature

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts

**Sherif El Newehy**

Under the supervision of  
**Dr. William Melaney**

**March 2017**

The American University in Cairo

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### **A Study of Joyce, Kushner and Ellis**

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Has been approved by

Dr. William Melaney  
Thesis Committee Advisor \_\_\_\_\_  
Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Stephen Nimis  
Thesis Committee Reader \_\_\_\_\_  
Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Tahia Abdel Nasser  
Thesis Committee Reader \_\_\_\_\_  
Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dept. Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of HUSS

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date

## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to illustrate the value of reading modern literary fiction through the theme of the alter ego. In this thesis, I demonstrate how the writer explores the various meanings of the alter ego in composing intensely imaginative works of fiction that negotiate the creative process in conscious terms. The thesis is indebted to the psychocriticism of Charles Maurron, which enables the domain of the alter ego to be examined in formal and aesthetic terms. In connecting a given work's themes to the alter ego motif, this thesis evaluates the impact of the writer's psychology on his work and pays scrupulous attention to the stylistic and structural choices that are enacted during various phases of composition. The alter ego-themed literary texts chosen for this thesis are James Joyce's novel, *Ulysses* (with special emphasis on the climactic "Ithaca" episode), Tony Kushner's two-part play, *Angels in America*, and Bret Easton Ellis' novel, *American Psycho*.

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## Introduction:

### Situating the Alter Ego Motif

This thesis attempts to elucidate the analytic effectiveness of psychological criticism when dealing with literary fictions that incorporate an *alter ego* motif in their narratives. The alter ego motif designates the act of an author creating a fictitious character that is modeled on himself/herself. Charles Mauron, in his essay, "Psychocriticism," expounds the connection between the author's personal impulses, desires, anxieties, pains and the creative act of writing fiction. More importantly, Mauron shows how the author's psychology bears a relationship to the life that has found its way into the construction of literature. This thesis deploys his theory of psychocriticism, which enables the critic to explore the interface between the author's life and work on the basis of "influences and biographical events" that are encoded in the text itself (Mauron 55). However, the thesis also uses four psychological concepts—sublimation, transference, Jungian anima, and cognitive dissonance—in a more broadly psychological framework. These concepts were chosen because they are concerned with both the author's personal life (and, by extension, mental state) *and* the aesthetic quality of the literary text. The thesis will demonstrate the aptness of whatever psychological terms pertain to a given text. Moreover, the focus of my writing is on the literary and aesthetic features of this conjunction so that psychological references are presented only sparsely.

According to my way of reading, each of the three texts under consideration is entwined with the psyche of its author. Psyche here refers to the author's anxieties, neuroses, cravings, fetishes, personal sentiments, and so on. Basically, the psyche here is used to designate whatever cognitive or emotional idiosyncrasies characterize the author as related to personal life. I hope to demonstrate how all the vital themes, structural designs and stylistic motifs—what Mauron calls

“the meaning of sentences, linked to the syntactic structure; the ordering of rhythms and sounds; the composition of poetic figures of speech”—are predicated on *and* intertwined with the author *personally* (Mauron 55) In a sense, the thesis moves in the vein of what playwright Tennessee Williams calls “emotionally autobiographical” art, which means that creative work is not connected to *factual* real-life occurrences/experiences but rather “reflects the emotional currents of [the author’s] life” (Williams *Paris Review* No. 5).

To get a sense of the author’s psychology, my research into specific literary works probes materials such as personal memoirs, commentaries, forewords, afterwords, transcribed *and* filmed in-depth interviews, self-appraising essays, and, in the case of one author, an actual diagnosis by a professional therapist. All these materials are chosen to assist in gleaning pertinent information regarding the author’s personal state of mind at the time he was composing a given work of fiction. Such materials will be complemented by other research composed of scholarly essays, critical annotative guidebooks, and official biographies that do not always lend themselves to either psychological criticism or the alter ego motif. Two novels and one play are selected for the thesis. To restate, the prerequisite factor for any chosen work of fiction is that it includes a fictionalized version of its author (alter ego) in the narrative. The thesis aims to elucidate how the writer can use himself as a springboard to compose highly imaginative and fantastical narratives; it contends that the writer uses an introspective writing method that eschews mimesis in favor of vigorous invention.

The first work under review is James Joyce’s modernist novel, *Ulysses*, where the Ithaca section will be adopted as the focus of my analysis. *Ulysses* includes two characters who demonstrate the importance of the alter ego motif to my critical approach, namely, the young Catholic medical student, Stephen Dedalus, *and* the Jewish advertising canvasser, Leopold

Bloom. Both personae represent different aspects of Joyce's character, and hence function as alter egos at different junctures in the writer's life. It should be noted that Stephen Dedalus functioned as the author's alter ego in *Ulysses*'s precursor text, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which was intensely autobiographical in nature. Themes of the novel to be discussed range from the importance of both science and Catholicism (especially consubstantiation) to the life of Stephen Dedalus, the dilemma of infidelity and sexual concerns as they impact the life of Leopold Bloom and the role of music as a structural component in this section of the text. The peculiar significance of the father/son relationship will be taken up in terms of psychological criticism and the problem of the alter ego.

The second chapter is concerned with Tony Kushner's two-part six-hour play, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. Kushner's epic theatre fulfills the alter ego prerequisite by featuring a character, the gay Jewish socialist, Louis Ironson, who represents Kushner. Kushner is a prolific writer of memoirs and self-appraising essays which are often written in a very candid and forthright fashion. In these memoirs, Kushner supplies a tremendous amount of personal (sometimes even unflattering) information. Oftentimes such information includes his idiosyncratic habits as a creative writer. It should be noted that in these memoirs, Kushner often includes psychodynamic references that provide valuable insight into his state of mind at the time he was writing the play. Kushner's extended afterword to his play, *Bright Room Called Day*, contains personal commentary that is pertinent to his play's subtext and will be used accordingly. The play's inclusion of a historical figure, Roy Cohn, into its fictitious narrative will be addressed in terms of character construction. Dramatic themes such as the AIDS epidemic, Judaism, gender permeability, American history, and metafiction/intertextuality will be addressed as well.



The third chapter is concerned with Bret Easton Ellis's controversial postmodernist novel, *American Psycho*. Ellis's novel features a character who functions as an alter ego character—the neurotic dandy, Patrick Bateman, whom Ellis has explicitly (yet only belatedly) stated is based directly on himself. Ellis's interview with the *Paris Review Journal* supplies the research with unique personal information that is not readily available in scholarly articles and will be used extensively. Moreover, *American Psycho* is a literary work where filmed YouTube interviews (given by the author) will be used to supply key information. *American Psycho* is unique because it was originally received negatively upon release—it was condemned as being misogynistic and pornographic—and believed by the author to have been heavily misperceived/misread, and would only belatedly receive critical/scholarly recognition for its literary merit. It should also be noted that Ellis downplayed the alter ego motif upon the book's publication, partly because he was very wary of media backlash, and would only become vocal about it ten years later. *American Psycho's* dramatic themes of brand couture fetishism, criminality/violence, the cross-fertilization between cinema and literature and sexual frustration will be addressed.

The three chosen texts *Ulysses*, *Angels in America*, and *American Psycho* are thematically and stylistically different but deliberately assembled for the specific purpose of casting light on the vitality of the role of the alter ego motif in literature. The alter ego paradigm is effective for a wide variety of literary genres, whether it be a comedic stream-of-consciousness pastiche (*Ulysses*), a political activist play of Brechtian *epic theatre* (*Angels in America*), or a violent work of *transgressive fiction* (*American Psycho*).

## Chapter 1:

### James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Ithaca)

This thesis will only deal with the Ithaca section in *Ulysses*, which assumes a synoptic role, encompassing the motifs, themes, events, and stylistic tropes that operate in the previous sections of the novel. Ithaca can be read as the synecdoche chapter of *Ulysses* insofar as it distills the essence of the narrative in one single section. The novel's final section, Penelope—which presents Molly Bloom's monologue—can be viewed as more of a coda, while the narrative of *Ulysses* culminates in Ithaca. Due to its structural importance to the novel as a whole, I will examine Ithaca in terms of its immense potential as a psychological document. The early focus of my discussion will be on how music and religion perform related roles, which reveal basic aspects of the author's psychology. Reflections on music and religion will yield to a discussion of how the novel encodes the author's social origins. My final thoughts return to the theme of psychology, but this time in view of how the author's own psyche is displayed through the verbal exchanges that occur in Ithaca.

Ithaca is replete with clinical/anatomical descriptions that reflect Joyce's early background as a medical student and aspiring physician. In a letter that Joyce wrote to Claud W. Sykes in spring 1921, Joyce once described Ithaca as “a mathematico-astronomico-physico-mechanico-geometrico-chemico sublimation of Bloom and Stephen” (Parrinder 184). The scientific framework of this section provides Joyce with a crucial device for presenting the movement of characters as a figurative and literal ontogenesis. No doubt this aspect of the novel provides one of many reasons why Joyce is often read as a child of Flaubert, whose family background and early interests also allow us to underscore the use of medical references in the French author's prose fiction. However, what does it mean to refer to “sublimation” in this case?

Surely this question is a psychological one and requires a focus on how the structure of Ithaca, as a question and answer session, provides the reader with insights into the psychology of the author himself.

Ithaca is intensely Catholic in tone and import. When viewed in this way, we need to recall that Joyce began as a Roman Catholic and was trained largely by Jesuit academics. He was a lapsed Roman Catholic at the time of writing *Ulysses*, but his quondam Catholicism should not be separated from his state of mind at the time he was composing the novel. He once wrote in personal correspondence that “though I seem to have been driven out of my country here as a misbeliever I have found no man yet with a faith like mine” (Vanderham 60). Structurally, Ithaca is formatted like a catechism. A reading of it without knowledge of the Jesuit protocol of catechisms will fail to cast light on the ecclesiastical aspects of its verbal design. Joyce draws attention to the catechism format when he writes that Molly Bloom asks about her husband Leopold Bloom’s day through “catechetical interrogation” (*Ulysses* 408).

Joyce’s musical background is also intertwined with Ithaca. The musicality surfaces when one considers how Joyce conspicuously mentions a piano in Bloom’s abode before cataloguing the names of diverse operatic tempos as “ad libitum, forte, pedal, animato, sustained pedal, ritardando, close” (*Ulysses* 391). Catechisms, litanies and canticles are incanted and perhaps exhibit the same recitative feature that applies to Ithaca. Joyce pays attention to cadent language, using sonorous linguistic devices such as alliteration as well as assonance/rhyme. From earlier sections, the reader knows that Leopold’s wife, Molly, is a prima donna who is rehearsing for a revival of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. In making operatic references in the Ithaca section, Joyce reminds the reader that perhaps *Ulysses* is as much a pastiche of *Don Giovanni* as it is a literary pastiche of *The Odyssey*. Vernon Hall highlighted this theory when he stated that

Joyce's characters have their counterparts in Mozart's opera with Hugh E. Blazes representing Don Giovanni, Molly Bloom representing Zerlina, Leopold Bloom representing Masetto (Hall 78).

Musicality is also inherent in the verbal texture of Ithaca, which makes use of sonorous linguistic devices such as alliteration in "truculent troglodyte" (*Ulysses* 404) and "conviviality/connubiality" (*Ulysses* 410) as well as rhyme in "incipient excitation, catechetical interrogation" (*Ulysses* 408) and "with thought of aught he sought though fraught with nought" (*Ulysses* 388). All the alliterative assonance and rhyming consonances impart a dulcet singsong lilt to the chapter's prose. This musicality/recitative quality can be traced back to Joyce's formative years: Vernon Hall notes that Joyce had a precocious interest in music and noted "his interest in particular opera singers, such as John McCormack and John Sullivan" (Hall 78) in addition to Joyce's hometown of Dublin, the setting of *Ulysses*, was "a musical city" (Hall 79). We even know that Joyce in his youth entered musical competitions as an aspiring tenor. Hall even suggests that had Joyce received encouragement, he might have become "a concert tenor rather than a writer" (Hall 78). In conjunction with the catechetical format of the chapter, this might suggest that Joyce intended the Ithaca chapter to be incanted; a theory that is reinforced when one reviews the passage that immediately precedes the start of the section which talks about Stephen Dedalus's operatic aspirations.

James Joyce and his daughter Lucia were patients of famed psychologist, Carl Jung. Jung classified Joyce as an anima-artist/anima-writer. In analytic psychology, the anima designates a feminine cognitive component that is present in all males. At the same time, Jung also espoused the theory that artists are deeply and intensely anima-driven. He even cited Joyce as one of the quintessential examples of anima-artistry and refers to his daughter, Lucia, as his living anima.

Jung theorized that Lucia was her father Joyce's muse calling her his "femme inspiratrice" (Coleman 15). The anima concept which supposes that there is a female component latent within the male psyche evokes an androgynous psychology; thus, according to Joyce's analyst, Jung, Joyce was psychologically androgynous.

We see that androgynous psychology is evoked in one key passage in Ithaca where Joyce writes "epicene comprehension and apprehension" (*Ulysses* 406) when describing Bloom's cerebrations. Another explicitly epicene-themed description is the passage referring to Bloom's "firm full masculine feminine passive active hand" (*Ulysses* 373). The androgynous anima motif is reinforced when it is connected with a description earlier in the novel by Dr. Nixon who, after psychoanalyzing Leopold Bloom, calls him "a finished example of the new womanly man" (*Ulysses* 287). The anima's connection with literary artistry is also reinforced when Dr. Nixon follows this remark by extolling the literary merit of Bloom's writing: "He has written a really beautiful letter, a poem in itself" (*Ulysses* 287).

Joyce's *Ulysses* has a key anima intertext and that is Leopold Masoch's novella, *Venus in Furs*. Masoch's novella is about a man enthralled with a woman-vamp to the point of degradation. We see this pattern occurring with Leopold Bloom. The similarity of the names—Leopold Masoch and Leopold Bloom—and the mention of a "Venus in Furs" (*Ulysses* 277) in the novel reinforce this intertext theory. Masoch's novella is about a man who masochistically immolates himself because of his exorbitant infatuation with his dominatrix. This pattern repeats itself in the Circe episode where Bloom professes his desire to be whipped by demimondaines through "refined birching" (*Ulysses* 277). Joyce later writes of Bloom as being fawning and ingratiating to his dominatrix: paying her "fulsome compliments" and "lauding almost extravagantly her nether extremities" (*Ulysses* 277). Bloom, like the henpecked protagonist in

Masoch's novella, is fawning over a woman and in the Ithaca chapter Joyce calls attention to his fawning nature when he describes him as an "insinuating sycophant" (*Ulysses* 403).

All of this suggests both Joyce's preoccupation with his own anima and that he offers clues enabling the reader to recognize his novel as anima-driven. The power of the anima is revealed in Bloom's exclamation in the Circe episode, "Exuberant female. Enormously I desiderate your domination" (*Ulysses* 302). This remark not only underscores the masochistic intertext but also—since the Circe episode is a hallucination of both Bloom and Dedalus—the reader can see that when Bloom proclaims his desire to be dominated by an "exuberant female" he is speaking in psychodynamic terms. Hence, when Bloom says he desiderates female domination, he is really saying that he wants female domination within the psyche, i.e., anima domination. This allows the reader to see *Ulysses* as an anima-engendered text.

Jung's insights into psychology are also complemented by the social dimension of *Ulysses*, which calls attention to Bloom's subaltern status and thus clarifies why he so often assumes a passive role. Joyce's social background also impacts the sensibility of the novel. If one delves into the biography of Joyce, one can discern how his social origins contributed quite clearly to the anti-elitist tone of the novel. Richard Ellmann explains that Joyce was born into a family in economic decline and grew into adulthood by fraternizing with "waiters, tailors, fruit-sellers, hotel porters, concierges, bank clerks" (Ellmann 24). Ellman contrasts the Joycean milieu to the haut monde of Joyce's contemporary, Marcel Proust, for whom "marquises and marchionesses" were the staple entourages. Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* is an aristocratic-themed novel, whereas *Ulysses* places firmly among the lower-middle class. This is consistent with the overall style of the novel where Joyce composed an epic out of a quotidian setting,

where he mystifies and sees marvels within the mundane, as Ellman suggests Joyce taps into the discovery that “the ordinary is the extraordinary” (Ellman 23).

Bloom in Ithaca is designated as belonging to the “helotic” social stratum (*Ulysses* 403). The hierarchical classification of helot means “a member of a class of serfs in ancient Sparta, intermediate in status between slaves and citizens” (*Merriam-Webster*). Through Joyce’s use of the term, the word connotes being downtrodden and menial-graded. In the same passage, Joyce seems to dwell on themes of penury: “Poverty: Mendicancy: Destitution” (*Ulysses* 403). This passage is capped off with one elaborate sentence, evocative of Bloom as “the aged impotent disfranchised ratesupported moribund lunatic pauper” (*Ulysses* 403). This section is quite consistent in its anti-feudalist tone by speaking disparagingly of venville holders with venville referring to the feudal property rights system. The disparagement is quite clear when contextualized in the passage where Joyce designates venville upholders as “recalcitrant violators of domestic connubiality” (*Ulysses* 397).

Bloom expresses a disdain for private poverty when he mentions that his ultimate lifetime ambition is to relinquish “primogeniture, gavelkind or borough English” inheritances. Joyce in this context evokes an aversion to opulence by emphasizing Bloom’s aversion to “baronial” pomp (*Ulysses* 395). Bloom had applied himself at crucial junctures in this context to battling the mercantile impulses of his community’s “inequality and avarice” (*Ulysses* 386). The only time that Joyce mentions Bloom as having aspirations to affluence is in the context of fantasy, where he would be reincarnated “after incalculable eons of peregrination” as a socialist crusader for the disenfranchised, “a wrecker of justice on malefactors” and eventually upend the feudal status quo by acquiring “financial resources surpassing those of Rothschild or the silver king” (*Ulysses* 404).

Ellmann claims that Joyce's tendency to coalesce the beautiful with the unwholesome is predicated on his Arcadian background. Ellmann claims Joyce seamlessly entwined the scenic and the scabrous: "Joyce lived between the antipodes and above them . . . . The river is lovely and filthy; Dublin is dear and dirty; so are the mind and body" (Ellmann 12). Ellmann's hypothesis acquires validity once we probe into Ithaca, which often reveals Joyce's penchant for scatological themes. Joyce states that water fascinated Bloom due to "the noxiousness of its effluvia in lacustrine marshes" and its "pestilential fens" (*Ulysses* 372). Joyce's penchant for dwelling on the scabrous is also revealed in his long-winded cataloguing of septic organisms as "microbes, germs, bacteria, bacilli, spermatozoa" (*Ulysses* 387).

The bawdy element is also apparent in Joyce's open acknowledgment of Bloom's sexual activity that is described as "the eroticism produced by feminine exhibitionism (rite of Onan)" (*Ulysses* 404). Onan is, of course, a reference to masturbation. The link between Joyce's Arcadian background and this bawdy onanistic theme is accentuated when one considers that the "feminine exhibitionism" that aroused Bloom was by the bucolic maiden, Gerty MacDowell. Another peculiarly scatological description is provided in the scene where Bloom raises a lacerated piece of flesh and then "inhales the odor with satisfaction" (*Ulysses* 395). This scatological trope is present earlier in the novel, when we are informed that Bloom's dietary habits involve eating food that "gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine" (*Ulysses* 20).

The scatological motif in literature was elaborated upon by Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin who referred to it as the *grotesque body*. Bakhtin's *grotesque body* applies very well to the Ithaca episode and perhaps to the entirety of *Ulysses* as well. Bakhtin originally formulated the theory in his studies of Francois Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. *Ulysses* is, in fact, a



Rabelaisian book. Both works are epics and satirical/farcical in tone (novels of bathos, not pathos); they are heavy on wordplay (puns, double-entendres, spoonerisms, portmanteau words, onomatopoeia, esoteric terms) and frequently allude to Greek and Latin mythology; both quote extensively from Christian and Hebraic scriptures. Most importantly, both are risqué and irreverent works that are graphic when it comes to depicting sex, violence and bodily functions. Whether Joyce's novel was influenced by Rabelais' stories is intensely debated within the literary community and the matter remains one of speculation. Joyce claimed that he had never read the Rabelais stories before writing *Ulysses*, yet the novel's final chapter, Penelope, which is composed of an extensive monologue by Bloom's wife, Molly, makes an explicit reference to Rabelais in the words, "some of those books he brings me the works of Master Francois..." before referring to a key scene in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (*Ulysses* 417). Moreover, Bakhtin's assessments of Rabelais's tropes readily apply to the Ithaca episode in Joyce's novel.

Stavroula Constantinou linked Bakhtin's grotesque body to hagiographical literatures or at least to religious-themed texts. While Joyce's *Ulysses* is not hagiography, it is certainly an intensely religious-themed work of fiction. Constantinou's research can be incorporated into the analysis of the bawdy themes of the Ithaca chapter. He suggests that for Bakhtin, the human reproductive and excretive organs (generally considered obscene when depicted explicitly) should not be shunned in literary analysis and rationalizes this by asserting that the grotesque body "is a body in flux" (Constantinou 46). The so-called grotesque body (and its functions) is the means whereby human passions are enacted. It helps us understand how people are brought into the world (childbirth) and pass into the afterlife (putrefaction/atrophy/death). Constantinou reminds us of Bakhtin's maxim that the grotesque body "is dying and as yet unfinished; [it] stands on the threshold of the grave and the crib" (Constantinou 46).

In the Ithaca episode, Bloom and Stephen together go to a pissoir to urinate after a night of extensive drinking. Joyce uses the scene to describe the two men's respective genitalia, "their organs of micturition" (*Ulysses* 389). In this scene, Joyce writes of how the circumcision of a Jewish man like Bloom makes Stephen think of Christ's own circumcision and whether His excised foreskin necessitates sacerdotal worship as a "divine excrescence" (*Ulysses* 389). Joyce dwells on the phallus, which is the organ of male fertility, as "philoprogenitive" (*Ulysses* 182). By doing so, he links the grotesque body with procreation and sustainable life. Joyce's descriptions of private portions of the anatomy to signify life and fecundity (as fitting with Bakhtin's doctrine) represent his movement away from the prudish mores of Victorian literature. As Richard Ellmann suggests, Joyce's Arcadian life experiences may have enabled him to foster a nonchalant earthy attitude to nature and the human body, an attitude that is evinced by his uninhibited prose style.

Nonetheless, the alter ego factor constitutes the pivotal theme in Ithaca, which primarily draws parallels between the two protagonists, Bloom and Dedalus. In reinforcing the theory that Bloom and Dedalus can be viewed next to one another, Joyce begins Ithaca with the phrase, "What parallel courses did Bloom and Stephen follow returning?" (*Ulysses* 377). The placement of the word "parallel" operates as an unambiguous signal for the reader. This prepares us for Bloom vis-à-vis Dedalus poised in a dramatic juxtaposition; Joyce describes the duo as "the duumvirate" (*Ulysses* 368). Bloom represents the Judaic camp and Dedalus represents the Catholic camp. One of the parallels that Joyce draws between the two men is a linguistic kinship related to their respective faiths, where Joyce highlights the phonetic overlaps between Celtic and Hebrew, referring to "the presence of guttural sounds, diacritic aspirations, epenthetic and servile letters in both languages" (*Ulysses* 381).

One key to the kinship between Bloom and Dedalus is their common experience of disenfranchisement. Bloom is often disparaged, maligned, and ostracized because of anti-Semitic prejudice. His situation fits the mold of the Wandering Jew in Christian folklore. This theme is reinforced when one considers that *Ulysses* is ostensibly a novel about Jewish Bloom wandering about in the city of Dublin in one day. It also is reinforced when one considers that according to Christian folklore, the Wandering Jew is a tradesman and Leopold Bloom is, of course, depicted as a Jewish tradesman or “advertisement canvasser” (*Ulysses* 10). The Ithaca episode, of course, makes explicit references to Bloom’s occupation in the scene where he ponders on how modern technology might enhance “the art of advertisement” (*Ulysses* 378). Later on in the episode, he starts envisioning the ideal commercial advertisement as “a poster novelty, with all extraneous accretions excluded, reduced to its simplest and most efficient terms” (*Ulysses* 400). At the same time, Dedalus also shares a persecutory experience: he is ostracized because of his subversive politics clamoring for Irish autonomy and for expressing disenchantment with the Catholic Church.

In truth, Joyce himself experienced disenfranchisement at first hand. He was ostracized by his Hibernian countrymen because of his religious defection and because of his non-marital dalliance with Nora Barnacle who would only later become his wife. He experienced so much cultural backlash and persecution that he became an exile and eventually moved with his family to Paris. It was in Paris that most of *Ulysses* was written. Joyce’s unwillingness to return to Ireland underscores the motif of disenfranchisement that figures strongly in Ithaca. In one scene in Ithaca, Bloom and Dedalus compare their experiences of persecution and expatriation: in terms of “dispersal, persecution, survival and revival” (*Ulysses* 381). Bloom’s marginalization, which certainly refers back to that of Dedalus and presumably Joyce himself, is suggested when

the reader learns of “the isolation of their synagogical and ecclesiastical rites” (*Ulysses* 408). Joyce also describes how Bloom and Dedalus respectively fantasize about emancipation as “the restoration in Chanah David of Zion” and “the possibility of Irish political autonomy” (*Ulysses* 381).

Bloom and Dedalus are fragmented splices of Joyce’s own psyche. His psyche is one of duality. Joyce’s descriptions often emphasize their psychological entwinement: “What, reduced to their simplest reciprocal form, were Bloom's thoughts about Stephen's thoughts about Bloom and about Stephen's thoughts about Bloom's thoughts about Stephen?” (*Ulysses* 377) The syntax is deliberately convoluted to signify the psychological entwinement of Bloom and Dedalus. Psychological entwinement is again evoked in another syntactically convoluted passage: “He thought that he thought that he was a jew whereas he knew that he knew that he knew that he was not” (*Ulysses* 377). Referring to Dedalus and Bloom, Joyce writes: “What two temperaments did they individually represent? The scientific. The artistic” (*Ulysses* 378) This again reinforces the theory that Bloom and Dedalus are aspects of Joyce’s own ego. However, if one probes deeper, one is liable to discover that Joyce doesn’t really make that divisive classification for both Bloom and Stephen. Both characters are simultaneously scientific-minded and artistic-minded. Early in the novel, we learn that Stephen Dedalus was a medical student but we are also made aware of his interest in literature through his fixation on Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Interestingly, Joyce suggests that for Stephen literature and science are not separate, irreconcilable disciplines when he writes: “He proves by algebra that Hamlet... is the ghost of his own father” (*Ulysses* 22). Joyce also indicates Bloom’s literary proclivities when he claims, “Well, I follow a literary occupation, author-journalist” (*Ulysses* 262). Yet also Joyce makes extensive references to Bloom’s clinical acumen and scientific sensibility.

Nonetheless, the alter-ego motif constitutes the crux of *Ithaca*, which is about Joyce's shedding of his skin, creating a new persona and foregoing his previous one. As Richard Ellmann suggests, Joyce's previous persona no longer suited him: Stephen Dedalus, from Joyce's previous autobiographical novel, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, was no longer an effective alter ego because Joyce had outgrown it: Ellmann explains that Dedalus was "Joyce's immature persona; as a mature persona Joyce chose Leopold Bloom" (Ellmann 15). Bloom is older than Stephen but shares so many attributes with him that stem from the same source—Joyce's fragmented ego—so that it was probably convenient for Joyce to portray a father-son relationship to justify their unlikely friendship and psychological connection. This move was enhanced by the author's use of the Homeric paradigm, which enabled him to frame the relationship after that of Odysseus and Telemachus.

Yet once we introduce the psychological motif, a key question arises: Who is the father and who is the son in this relationship? Psychologically speaking, it is Stephen Dedalus who begat Leopold Bloom. Their dynamic fits the Wordsworthian axiom as adapted by Freud—"The child is the father to the man"—because Dedalus is much younger than Bloom. It is also worthwhile to remember that earlier in the novel; Joyce had emphatically nullified Bloom's paternity: "No son of thy loins is by thee" (*Ulysses* 190). All of this complicates the conventional paradigm of Bloom being counterpart to Odysseus and Dedalus being counterpart to Telemachus. It should also be noted in this context that the paternal framework of this relationship is often critically ascribed to that of Jesus Christ and the Heavenly Father. Orthodoxy classifies Jesus Christ as consubstantial with the Heavenly Father, and this doxological notion of consubstantiation is explicitly underscored when Joyce refers to "consubstantiality of the Son with the Father" (*Ulysses* 12). The aforementioned Catholic

analogy (which is yet another evidence of Joyce's Catholic transference) reinforces the notion of both Bloom and Dedalus as consubstantial splices: both have sprung from the same source, which is Joyce's fragmented ego.

And yet, when Bloom and Dedalus finally meet in the second half of the novel, the reader is able to catch a glimpse of the many strands that give stylistic unity to a major literary work. This unity depends on the author himself, who integrates various aspects of his personality into the construction of characters who mirror a complexity that is ultimately returns us to the life situation of the author himself. Ithaca thus serves a climactic function, in the novel as a whole, by enabling Joyce to distill his early interest in science, his Catholic impulses and musical aspirations as well as his intensely Arcadian sensibility into the genesis of a new authorial persona.

## Chapter 2:

### Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*:

Tony Kushner's ensemble play, *Angels in America*, features six male protagonists, one of whom is implicitly autobiographical. Louis is a gay New Yorker, tricenarian, liberal, a Democrat, erudite and angst-ridden about the AIDS epidemic festering in the 1980s. He is also a chastiser of Republican politics, a socialist and Jewish: all of these attributes characterize Kushner himself personally. Kushner himself has written about *Angels in America* in these words: "I think it's my best play because I started writing about my world" (Nielsen 5). While Kushner has never explicitly stated that Louis is his alter ego, I believe that can be legitimately construed in this way, considering the author's belief that creative writing blurs the line between fiction and autobiography and his claim that "the genesis of my politics is no loftier, no less mundane, no more free of family drama than the genesis of my theatrics" (Nielsen 6). Considering that *Angels in America* is an intensely political play—part of the play's subtitle is 'A Gay Fantasia on National Themes'—we recognize that Kushner readily draws on his personal life for his political-themed art.

*Angels in America* is an anti-Reagan play, but its Anti-Reagan sentiment is expressed only through subtext and requires a scrutinized reading to be understood. For the anti-Reagan tone to be elucidated, the reader must delve into Kushner's personal writings and interviews. The play is set in the 1980s and its backdrop the Reagan presidency. While mentioned in the play, Reagan is not attacked rhetorically except in a few lines by Louis. Louis calls the bureaucrats working at the Chief of Justice Department "Reaganite macho heartless asshole lawyers" (*Angels* 29). In the play, Louis also calls Reagan "the American animus" (*Angels* 72) where the word "animus" could mean, "basic attitude or governing spirit" and denote Reagan as an emblem of

the times. But it is interesting (and perhaps psychologically revealing) that the word “animus” also has the connotation of “malice” and “ill-feeling”, thus subliminally communicating Kushner’s disdain of Reagan. Overall, however, the overt references to Reagan in the play are fleeting. Kushner once acerbically summed up the Reagan presidency as “post-modern, cybernetic, microwave, microchip fascism” (*Bright Room Called Day* 173).

Psychocriticism, as theorized by Charles Maurron, allows the critic to review different texts in the author’s oeuvre from the standpoint of an “intertext” that is psychologically constituted. Intertextuality allows is to discover continuity in stylistic and thematic development. Kushner’s *Bright Room Called Day* suggests the underlying continuity in Kushner’s oeuvre and also complements or even completes an analysis of *Angels in America*. Both *Bright Room Called Day* and *Angels in America* feature Jewish protagonists, both are works of Brechtian epic theatre, and, perhaps most importantly, both are vehemently critical of 1980s American arch-conservatism. This demonstrates Mauron’s theory at work about how one text is predicated upon the other and how a progressive analysis can reap insight. In fact, one can go as far as to say that *Bright Room Called Day* is the companion piece to *Angels in America*. As Mauron suggests, one text follows another text, not by accident, and both are “archipelagos whose depths can be explored” (Mauron 55). The focus of this chapter, however, will not be on the unconscious depths that are inherent in Kushner’s work but on the author’s transformation of a unique historical moment into a text that gives evidence of his own psychology.

Overall, in *Angels in America* the overt invectives against Reagan in the play are scant. In the play it is another Republican, cohort and associate of Ronald Reagan, who takes center-stage: this is lawyer, Republican politician and former Joseph McCarthy protégé, Roy Cohn. Cohn is dramatized in the play as a very antagonizing, manipulative and bigoted politician who is in the



process of getting disbarred for previous unethical dealings while languishing from an AIDS virus (Cohn, a highly complex figure, was both an active homophobe and a closet homosexual). Cohn in the play can be perceived as the representative of right-wing politics in general: in one scene Martin Heller, Cohn's associate, describes Roy Cohn as "the Saint of the Right" (*Angels* 77). Another scene that demonstrates the play's tendency for portraying Cohn as a poster boy for the Right, Cohn declaims that "if you want to look at the heart of modern conservatism, you look at me" (*Angels* 248).

The play evokes some intensely resentful vibes with regards to the ailing Roy Cohn. In one scene, Louis is indignant upon discovering that his paramour, Joe, works for Cohn. Louis is further taunted by the character Belize, who tells him, "I don't know whether Mr. Cohn penetrated more than his spiritual sphincter all I'm saying you better hope there is no GOP germ Louis, cause if there is: you got it" (*Angels* 232). GOP (abbreviation for Grand Old Party) is a sobriquet for the Republican Party and it is interesting that the character would say "GOP germ" giving the Republican Party a virulent connotation.

In one of his many diatribes in the play, Republican "Saint of the Right" Cohn espouses his splenetic philosophy on politics, describing it as "gastric juices churning . . . this is enzymes and acids . . . this is intestinal is what this is . . . bowel-movement and blood-red meat, this stinks, this is politics!" (*Angels* 81) all intoned with eviscerating relish. The play (not so subtly) connects the draconian persona of Cohn to the party of which he is a constituent. One character in the play calls Cohn "cloven-hoofed" (*Angels* 196) which operates as Mephistophelean imagery. This imagery of Cohn, who again was a real-life cohort of Reagan, can be directly tied to Kushner's previous description (in another play) of Reagan himself. In *Bright Room Called Day* Kushner wrote: "Reagan is afflicted in his right hand with a disease of the manual ligaments

called Dupuytren's contracture which causes the hands to shrivel, gradually assuming a claw-like appearance" (*Bright Room Called Day* 106). Both similes have overtly satanic connotations. By Kushner's own admission (as he remarks in the play's afterword), *Bright Room's* devilish references to Reagan might be legitimately construed as a sophomoric allegorical device however they do confer both a figurative and literal Mephistophelean tinge to what he (Kushner) perceives to be Right-wing callousness. All this comes back to Kushner's *Angels in America*; the play can be plausibly recognized as the author's aesthetic sublimation of his anti-GOP rage.

Moreover, Kushner's unique Judaic sensibility also has a profound impact on the play. Of the five protagonists in *Angels in America*, two are Jewish, Louis Ironson and Roy Cohn. Although an ensemble dramatic piece, Kushner himself says "Louis carries the biggest burden of the play" (Sherman 80). Moreover, it is plausible that Kushner represents Cohn in his play as a prototype of the self-loathing Jew. Cohn makes consistent anti-Semitic remarks throughout the play. In one scene where he brags about coercing a Jewish supreme court judge, Cohn exclaims, "I made sure that timid Yid nebbish on the bench made his duty to America, to history" (*Angels* 121). He also disparages the personal appearance of Jewish playwright Lillian Hellman saying "Even a Jew should worry with a punim like that!" (*Angels* 193) and says at one point that "the one thing about the American Negro is that he never went communist, loser Jews did but not blacks" (*Angels* 164). In another scene, it is only after Belize (who had been provoked) calls Cohn "Kike!" (*Angels* 196) that Cohn indulges him and allows him to filch the anti-AIDS drug AZT from Cohn's private armamentarium.

Also tied directly to Kushner's Jewishness is the portrayal of Roy Cohn as a seething homophobe--Cohn taunts Belize calling him, "butterfingered spook faggot nurse" (*Angels* 166). This rather brusque portrayal of Cohn is connected to Kushner's personal opinion regarding

Jewish homophobia, as clarified: “I’m very critical of Jews because I am one and . . . Jewish homophobia makes me angrier than Goyishe homophobia . . . good God after what we’ve been through for the last six hundred years and before . . . surely suffering should teach you compassion” (Sherman 81). In real life, Roy Cohn was an active participant of the homophobic persecution of 1950s America. Cohn, being a key (and the most prominent) member of Joseph McCarthy’s brain trust, was one of those who orchestrated McCarthy’s lavender scare, an operation contemporaneous with McCarthy’s Red scare and that resembled it although far more clandestine and directed against homosexuals rather than communists. In the play, Cohn speaks of his unqualified allegiance to McCarthy and describes his loyalty to him as outright filial. Cohn’s filial devotion (which savors of sycophancy) as well as his homophobia can be contextualized with the historical McCarthy’s invective against the homosexual community.

In the play, Louis calls Cohn “the polestar of human evil . . . he’s not human even” (*Angels* 232). Louis is indignant upon discovering that his lover, Joe Pitt, works for Cohn. He then proceeds to confront Joe Pitt by quoting factual American history when Joseph Welch addressed Joseph McCarthy, Roy Cohn’s boss, saying “Have you no decency sir! At long last have you no decency!” (*Angels* 246) before impassionedly saying to Joe Pitt, whom he accuses of being a bedfellow of Cohn, “lips that touch those lips will never touch mine!” (*Angels* 246). One can plausibly construe that the play’s description of Cohn as “the polestar of human evil” is partly Kushner himself vicariously venting his own personal rage at Cohn through his fictive surrogate, Louis. In the spirit of this sort of characterization, the portrayal of Cohn throughout the play is rooted in Jewish iconography. In one scene, Cohn vigorously dials his office phone, talking to many clients/associates simultaneously while his apprentice, Joe Pitt, sits pensively watching Roy’s gesticulations and ravings. Kushner’s stage-directions are very revealing: not

only does Kushner stress the flamboyant demeanor of Cohn but he describes his body language as being carnal when he sensuously handles the receiver and responds to the incoming calls with “virtuosity and love” (*Angels* 11).

Cohn’s very opening line is especially revealing: “I wish I was an octopus” (*Angels* 11). As Jonathan Freedman suggests, this octopus reference conjures the legacy of anti-Semitic stereotypes that features Jews in grotesque caricatures and as possessing “long clammy fingers that reach out to clutch or caress” (Freedman 95). The octopus imagery, as possessing tentacles to enmesh its victims, strikes a libidinous note, according to Freedman. Freedman calls the octopus “hyperphallic” (because of its tentacles) and his observation has validity considering how paintings sometimes depict the sea creature in a sexually suggestive fashion (Freedman 95). When Cohn exclaims the octopus, what he evokes is this predatory lecherous image of him ensnaring and cajoling the young idealistic Mormon, Joe Pitt. This motif can be readily found in George du Maurier’s novel, *Trilby*, which features the Jewish character, Svengali, also preying on the young impressionable gentile girl, Trilby, who appears in a nightmare sequence as a spider. Whether it be an octopus’ tentacles or a spider’s pedipalps, the gist of the imagery is the same: a polyped creature who entangles.

Kushner’s personal memoirs provide us with key information on how his play was structured. In his memoir, Kushner writes of his first homosexual experience and how it ties in with his Jewishness. He spoke of a nightmare (something that traditionally lends itself to psychoanalysis) where a hallucinatory apparition of his “paternal grandfather” (Kushner 49) occurs in his bedroom and looks condemningly at both Kushner and his lover. The grandfather who appears utters an anathema—“You’re going to die”—which, according to Kushner, is in stark contrast to his grandfather’s typically benign demeanor (Kushner 49). Kushner states that at

the time of the nightmare, the grandfather was in fact sickly, which renders the nightmare's final words even more ominous: "There's something wrong in your bones" (Kushner 49).

There is a triad of themes in this nightmare that pertain directly to *Angels in America*. The homosexuality theme is self-evident, but what is also revealing is that the nightmare includes both the pestilential and the Judaic themes of the play. Kushner refers to the apparition of his sick grandfather as "cancer-ridden Jeremiah", thus making a connection between disease and Judaism (Kushner 49). Kushner goes on to explain how that "nocturnal drama" manifested itself repeatedly for him later on, oftentimes in "broad daylight" (Kushner 50). This fantasy becomes more frequent for Kushner after AIDS emerged in America. Kushner's own description of the first nightmare experience is intensely suggestive of psychodynamics: he described the ending of the visitation as the grandfather retreating back into "the Cave of the Psyche" (Kushner 49). The "cancer-ridden Jeremiah" aspect of Kushner's nightmare pertains directly to his play's interchange between Judaic and AIDS motifs.

Despite the play's "richly multicultural spectrum of ethnic identities and religions" at its core, *Angels in America* is fundamentally a Jewish play. Whatever its egalitarian aspirations, the play partakes of the "Jewish sensibility" (Sherman 79). According to researcher Sherman, Kushner himself "claims to have been taken by surprise when he discovered the degree to which the work is permeated by Judaism" (Sherman 80). All this can be traced back to Kushner's personal experiences of trying to reconcile his Jewish faith with his homosexuality and his personal experiences of anti-Semitism and homophobia. Arguably the play's central character is Prior Walter, who is the chosen prophet upon whom the titular angel descends. Now, Prior is a Christian character, a self-described "WASP" (Kushner 33). Yet even so, Kushner endows his prophetic role with a stark Hebraic quality. In his stage-directions for the scene where Prior is in

Heaven to speak with the angels, Kushner writes that he should be garbed after the fashion of Moses with specific reference to Cecil B. DeMille's religious epic, *The Ten Commandments*. Sherman also suggests the assembly of angels that await Prior are representative of a "Kafkaesque bureaucracy" (Sherman 6).

Delving into Kushner's memoirs, the reader can link the structure of *Angels in America* to a preference for baroque style over the tendency towards minimalism that more strongly emerges in the contemporary stage. In his memoirs, Kushner professes great love for lasagna and states that it was his favorite childhood dish. He also claims that this is something that resurfaces in his adult years as an author: according to Kushner, baking lasagna is his personal "paradigm for writing a play" (Kushner 61). He also describes *Angels* as a copious meal "like a fatted calf" to "feast on" (Kushner 63). Kushner compares the density of lasagna to his creative fiction emphasizing their dual "pomposity" and "overreach" (Kushner 61). By applying Kushner's idiosyncratic analogy we can see how *Angels in America* is structured like a lasagna play: its sprawling six hour length narrative has to do with Kushner's maxim of a good play being "overstuffed" like good lasagna. The transference element factors again in Kushner's longstanding dislike of what he considers the antithesis of lasagna--the matzo. The matzo is the bread that is consumed during the Jewish ceremony of Passover and is of rancid/brittle quality.

Whereas lasagna represents for Kushner baroque aesthetics, the matzo represents for him postmodern minimalism in contemporary theatre that had been ushered in by Samuel Beckett, whom Kushner calls "that matzo of a playwright" (Kushner 68). Kushner spoke emphatically of his distaste regarding the matzo, emphasizing its "anhedonic" (Kushner 68) quality. By way of analogy, he extends his grievance to what he personally feels is the bland literary quality of postmodernism. There is something reactionary in Kushner opting for "lasagna" baroque theatre

in lieu of “matzo” minimalist theatre, yet because of his individual sensibility, Kushner designed *Angels in America* as the hefty work of Brechtian epic theatre (Kushner 69).

The pivotal scene of the Angel visiting Prior Walter in the play is also intimately connected with Kushner’s transference and Jewishness. In his memoirs, Kushner speaks of his seventh birthday as being a watershed moment in his development. For his birthday cake, Kushner’s mother had decorated with sparklers she had saved from the Fourth of July celebration. Kushner’s description strongly suggests that for him the dazzling spectacle of sparklers atop the cake had an “indelible” imprint on his consciousness (Kushner 3). Kushner elaborates by saying that the fiery spectacle “completed a circuit of identification” for him: incandescence became intertwined with democratic themes “of Independence, of Freedom” (Kushner 3). The dazzle motif manifests in the play in the Angel visitation scene where she barges into Prior’s bedroom, accompanied by polychromatic blaze so that “the bedroom is saturated with colored light...rich, brilliant, warm gold; then, hot, bilious green . . .” (*Angels* 131). It is difficult not to read this passage in terms of Freud’s Oedipal psychology.

Ken Nielsen outlined how profoundly indebted *Angels* is to Walter Benjamin’s critical essay, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”. Nielsen demonstrates how the pivotal scene of Prior Walter’s encounter with the Angel is predicated upon Benjamin’s critical analysis of the Paul Klee painting, “Angelus Novus”. The turbulent altercation between Prior and the Angel in Kushner’s play parallels Benjamin’s description in the painting, which also evokes violence and frenzy in an altercation between a mortal and angel figure “. . . has gotten caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them” (Nielsen 50). This altercation motif reverberates in Kushner’s play; the character Prior actually wrestles with the Angel. Nielsen also demonstrates how the theme of *Angels* is connected with Benjamin’s essay by highlighting

Benjamin's saying, "This storm is what we call progress" (Nielsen 50). The association of progress with altercation also reveals a thematic in Kushner's play. It is only after the tumultuous wrestling with the Angel that Prior Walter is revitalized and is able to endure his disease with fortitude. The play's epilogue speaks to the audience of moving ahead despite adversity, proclaiming, "The Great Work Begins" (*Angels* 284).

Wrestling with the angel is the pivotal semiotic device of Kushner's play. The imagery is not only inspired by Klee's painting but even more explicitly the play refers to Alexandre Louis Leloir's painting, *Jacob Wrestles with the Angel*. The reference to Leloir's painting can be tied to Kushner's Jewish-homosexual paradigm. In the scene where the painting is referenced, Mormon Joe Pitt gives us the first insight into his latent homosexuality. Pitt's monologue accentuates the homoerotic quality of the painting, emphasizing the girth of Jacob and the pristine splendor of the masculine Angel. Kushner, who was closeted, coped with his homosexuality (in pre-gay liberation America) by linking it with Jewishness. Even in liberal New York—which is considerably less homophobic than 'bible belt' America—Kushner felt the danger of threadbare tolerance and linked it to Holocaust-era Europeans who didn't endorse Nazism but who readily sacrificed their Jewish acquaintances to preserve their own selves. Kushner embraced the social dynamic of being relegated to obscurity as a homosexual in 1970s/1980s America, i.e. as the member of a shunned minority. Kushner spoke of the importance "of identifying (himself) as other" (Sherman 82). If one looks into the scene of Joe Pitt's monologue, the homosexual motif is intimately tied with the Jewish one. Thus, Pitt, a Mormon, references Jacob, the Hebraic patriarch, as his object of fascination.

It seems that the Jewish motifs seep through whenever Kushner starts evoking themes of homosexuality. This is connected to what is perhaps the most vital theme of Kushner's drama:



personal identity. All the characters in the play experience a profound sense of ambiguity and disorientation with regards to who they are. Prior grapples with the fact that he is HIV-positive and whether he is a prophet or is succumbing to madness, while Louis is shocked and distraught by his own behavior of abandoning his diseased lover. Louis is also reticent about his homosexuality, especially in front of his conservative family, Joe Pitt doesn't know whether he is homosexual or bisexual, and whether he can or should continue life as a practicing Mormon. Joe's wife, the valium-addicted Harper Pitt, is sexually frustrated, experiences hallucinations about Antarctica, knows her husband is a closeted homosexual and wants to leave him but at the same time feels helplessly attached to and dependent on him. Joe's mother, Hannah Pitt, is ambivalent about her affections to her son and wonders whether her cold upbringing of him is the cause of his adult marital problems. She also seems to harbor ambivalent feelings about her Mormon religion when she mentions that she doesn't subscribe to the law of chastity tenet of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, which denounces homosexuals. Hannah's distancing herself from her own faith is highlighted when Prior humorously tells her, "I wish you would be more true to your demographic profile. Life is confusing enough" (*Angels* 240).

It is redundant to highlight that Kushner's homosexuality affected the themes of the play whose subtitle is *A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. However, this thesis addresses the stylistic devices/tropes adopted by Kushner in constructing the play and how they pertain personally to Kushner's homosexuality. Transvestitism, known colloquially as drag and/or camp, is a staple within the homosexual community, and *Angels in America* makes intensive use of homosexual transvestitism as a literary device. The play uses the drag/transvestitism element to call attention to itself as a work of metafiction. In his self-appraising essay "On Pretentiousness", Kushner describes his own writing style in this way: "[It is Camp, it is Drag, perhaps this is why

it's most resplendently at home in the theatre" (Kushner 67). Kushner then proceeds to associate metafiction with Camp/Drag; Kushner writes of his Camp/Drag-influenced verbal style that "if it's done well, performs the salutary parody of carving out, in the face of the theorilessness and bewilderment of our age, metanarratives" (Kushner 67)

We see the "metanarratives" that Kushner personally extols materialize in this play. In the first act of the play, Prior dreams that he is dressed in drag: the fantasy takes place in a baroquely upholstered room whose décor is patterned after the mise-en-scène of Jean Cocteau's film, *La Belle et La Bête*. Cocteau's homosexuality accentuates the gay-metanarrative motif. More crucially, in this fantasy, Prior Walter is dressed in drag like the fictional character, Norman Desmond, from the 1950s Hollywood film, *Sunset Boulevard*. The character, Norma Desmond, happens to be an iconic figure in the gay community: her make-up, coiffure and 1950s wardrobes are appropriated by gay male transvestites. In this scene, Prior quotes with diva-like hauteur Desmond's classic line, "I'm ready for my close-up, Mr. DeMille." Prior then segues into a monologue lamenting his HIV status while still sustaining a haughty tone: "One wants to move through life with elegance and grace, blossoming infrequently but with exquisite taste, like a zebra orchid. One wants . . . But one so seldom gets what one wants . . . one dies at thirty, robbed of decades of majesty" (*Angels* 43).

The "metanarrative" reference is quite apt because one can see thematic linkage between the plight of AIDS-infected Prior Walter and *Sunset Boulevard's* Norma Desmond. In the play, Prior becomes more emaciated and mentally unhinged, because of the toll that the disease takes, while in the film, Norma Desmond also becomes unhinged and wasted as a silent-screen star who lost favor with the public upon the advent of the talkies. Norma is now losing her good looks, earns a precarious livelihood and is being slowly relegated to anonymity. In both cases,

the troubles of both characters (Prior's loss of health, Norma's fading career) plunge them into a state of mental disequilibrium. As a part of his allusive metafictional tropes, Kushner also makes conspicuous references to plays by gay author, Tennessee Williams. In Act 2 of the play, Belize, who is a former drag queen, visits bed-ridden Prior and greets him by saying, "Stella for star!" (*Angels* 72) which is appropriated from Tennessee Williams' play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. At the end of the same scene, Prior Walter makes a reciprocal metafictional reference by saying, "You're just a Christian Martyr" (*Angels* 74), which is another appropriated line from yet another Williams play, *The Glass Menagerie*.

In the very last act of the play, Kushner performs another referential act with regards to a Williams play: Prior Walter says, "I've always depended on the kindness of strangers" (*Angels* 276), which is again appropriated from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. A comparison can be made between the psychological disequilibrium of Blanche Dubois in Williams' play and that of Prior Walter since both of them are gradually becoming unhinged and start hearing voices. But one can go even further. The metafictional trope adopted by Kushner allows us to compare his play to Williams's entire oeuvre. For example, W. Douglas Powers draws an elaborate comparison between the gravelly, bombastic, archconservative Big Daddy in Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Roy Cohn in Kushner's *Angels in America*.

Interrelated with the play's cross-dressing motif is its theme of gender permeability. The protean gender-dynamic of *Angels in America* can also be directly linked to transference and to Kushner's formative years. According to Kushner researcher, Ken Nielsen, Kushner was an angst-ridden adolescent who changed upon seeing his mother, a professional actress, perform on stage. Nielsen suggests that his mother's performance had a signal effect on Kushner by making him realize the transformative power of theatrical performances—"its potential for disguise and

transformation, could offer a free space in which to become something else” (Nielsen 7). According to Nielsen, the transformative aspect of drama intrigued a repressed Kushner and opened up for him a liberating venue of “not having to be oneself” (Nielsen 7). We see Kushner’s personal penchant for mutability in his play’s intensely protean quality where the actors often cross-dress and shift personae.

Moreover, in his memoirs, Kushner strongly suggests having an anima psychology. He writes: “I for instance can be ever so butch . . . but talk about sex and the queen in me buds and flowers” (Kushner 16). The queen inside him that Kushner describes can be construed as his anima. This becomes more reinforced when Kushner suggests that this anima has a mesmeric effect on him: “Come sit by her. In the air are the soft sibilants and susurrations, the whispered syllables and invitations, the words that wend serpentine towards perdition or redemption” (Kushner 16). The power that Kushner attributes to the anima taps directly into the play’s epicene quality. *Angels in America* features an intensely androgynous casting system stipulated by its author, Kushner. In the stage directions of the play, Kushner stipulates that the male rabbi character in the first act’s prologue should be performed by the actress who plays Hannah. The same androgynous casting technique is applied to the character of Henry, Roy’s doctor, who is to be played by the same woman actor (*Angels* 3).

Another blatantly epicene motif in the play is Kushner’s description of the female Angel character as being “Hermaphroditically equipped as with a bouquet of phalli” (*Angels* 180). Prior Walter, although homosexual, becomes tumescent every time he hears or becomes near to the female Angel character. When he tells the Angel that her voice and propinquity arouse him she tells him sternly that “the stiffening of your penis is of no consequence” (*Angels* 164) before they (Prior and the Angel) have sex together. The very act of copulation between homosexual

Prior Walter and the female Angel has an inherently pansexual aspect which underscores the play's epicene motif.

The play's epicene motif is also intertwined with the theme of democracy. Belize's monologue with a sedated Roy Cohn describes a vision of Heaven: "A gray high sky full of ravens. Prophet birds. Piles of trash, but lapidary like rubies and obsidian. And everyone in Balenciaga gowns with red corsages, and big dance palaces full of music and lights and racial impurity and gender confusion. And all the deities are Creole, mulatto, brown as the mouths of rivers. Race, taste and history finally overcome" (*Angels* 214).

The democratic motif factors in the monologue because it exalts racial diversity as "racial impurity." The description of Heaven as a racial farrago is even more clear-cut with the description of the heavenly deities as being racially mixed: "Creole" (of mixed European and black descent) and "mulatto" (of mixed white and black ancestry). Close on the egalitarian motif's heels is the play's epicene motif: "gender confusion" is described in the monologue as being one of the salient attributes of heaven. The monologue also describes "everyone in Balenciaga gowns" in heaven. Balenciaga is a Spanish fashion house specializing in haute couture for women. When the play mentions "everyone" wearing Balenciaga gowns this includes men as well. This again reveals the play's epicene sensibility in how it readily eschews binary representations of gender by nullifying conventional gender-based partitioning of clothes.

The final triumph of the epicene sensibility occurs when one considers that the play equates androgyny with the paradisaic: the play's vision of Heaven includes epicene permeability and "gender confusion" (*Angels* 223) among its most salient features. By amalgamating all these motifs, we can see how *Angels in America* is quintessentially a democratic, Judaic, homosexual/epicene work of literature. All of these traits permeate the work and direct its

dramatic pathos, just as they undoubtedly express the personal pathos and creative propensities of its author, Tony Kushner.

### Chapter 3:

#### Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*

Bret Easton Ellis's novel, *American Psycho*, is narrated in the first-person by the central character Patrick Bateman. Ellis has stated that the fictional protagonist is based directly on himself. Ellis further explains that this is his consistent authorial style: "Every one of my books is an exercise in voice and character . . . featuring a male narrator who is always the same age I am at the time, of the pain I'm dealing with in my life" (Ellis *Paris Review* No. 216). Bateman, like his author Ellis, is an upper-class Manhattanite living in 1980s America. Demographically speaking, both author and character are members of Generation X and, by the author's own admission, both were leading lives underpinned by consumerist values (Ellis *Paris Review* No. 216). This chapter is intended to cast light on how Ellis' emotional state at the time of writing the novel is encoded in its plot and aesthetic choices.

*American Psycho* sprang from its author's precarious mental state during his early twenties. Ellis has acknowledged that just before writing *American Psycho*, he had been chronically depressed due to the poor reception of his earlier novel, *Rules of Attraction*, which also features Patrick Bateman as a minor character. This failure seems to have exacerbated an already growing sense of alienation from mainstream culture. Certainly, *American Psycho*'s caustic humor comes from the author's perception of a philistine streak in Ellis' culture. We notice this motif encoded in the novel. In one of the novel's early sections, one character mocks another for thinking that the Western film *High Noon* was "a film about marijuana farmers!" (*American Psycho* 12). In another scene, Bateman expresses his exasperation at a tabloid piece regarding the dubious reportage of a hobgoblin-like flying monster (part-rodent/part-pigeon) sighted in Manhattan. Bateman expresses dread over the article, not because he believes what it

claims but because “someone out there has wasted the energy and time to think this up: to fake a photograph and send the photograph in to the Post, then for the Post to decide to run the story” The inanity of this piece of populist journalism is what piques Bateman as he broods over how it will be “discussed over hundreds of thousands of lunches in the city this afternoon” (*American Psycho* 63).

Both the inanity and dissonance of 1980s culture are profiled in the novel. In the first chapter, the mass media as it functioned during this period is shown to be especially discordant. One of Bateman’s colleagues takes out his copy of the *New York Post* and exclaims, “In one issue . . .” and then immediately repeats these words as if to emphasize the incongruence of topics “*in in one issue*—let’s see here . . . . strangled models, babies thrown from tenement rooftops, kids killed in the subway . . . baseball players with AIDS . . . the cancellation of a soap opera . . .” (*American Psycho* 4). The inclusion of such hard-hitting devastation mentioned alongside something as frivolous as a soap-opera cancellation might plausibly produce cognitive dissonance. This passage actually reflects the jarring dissonance of the 1980s zeitgeist that the novel assembles: the emergence of Reaganomics that exalted elitist (yuppie) enterprises as exemplified by Donald Trump, Ivan Boesky, Michael Milken, T. Boone Pickens, the spiraling of the AIDS epidemic, the family massacre of *Fatal Vision*, the exuberance of pop music, the rise of mainstream pornography, the popularity of etiquette pundit Judith Martin, Miss Manners, court trials of mass-murders Ted Bundy and Ed Gein, the Challenger disaster and the pomp of fashion-houses.

The most patent sign of Ellis’s sense of cognitive dissonance is his depiction of the fictional tabloid television series, *The Patty Winters Show*, which is mentioned in almost every



chapter. In depicting the show, Ellis uses satire/hyperbole to underscore dissonance: he mentions that episodes would be concerned with matters ranging from the horrors of infanticide (*American Psycho* 75) to the fading of matinee idols in public consciousness (*American Psycho* 123). Ellis's cynical descriptions really pinpoint the jarring quality of the tabloid media. Bateman mentions one episode where the program featured neo-Nazi skinheads, but instead of tackling the controversial topic with apt solemnity, the segment quickly degenerates into burlesque: "One of the Nazis, in a rare display of humor, even juggled grapefruits" (*American Psycho* 84). Also connected with cognitive dissonance is the frequency with which the fictitious tabloid program is mentioned in the novel. That very frequency reflects the actual airwave frequency of such programs at the time Ellis was writing his novel. During that period, tabloid programs (Merv Griffin, Oprah Winfrey, Phil Donahue, Geraldo Rivera) were not only broadcast on multiple channels but were also ubiquitous through syndication; Ellis was plausibly bombarded by them.

In a filmed interview, Ellis articulated his disgruntlement with what he perceives to be his society's loss of a tactile sensibility. As Ellis laments "[W]e don't live in this tactile sensuous culture where we feel things; everything is digitized . . . including our love lives" (Ellis YouTube). Ellis's dissatisfaction might render the carnage in *American Psycho* more understandable to us. The bodily violence in the novel that assumes the form of dismemberment/cannibalism/necrophilia can be construed as an expression of the author's own impulse to use violence metaphorically as a sublimation of his own urges. The novel's violence is also a means to break through the barrier of intangibility by literally and figuratively searing through human flesh. This very fleshly aspect of Ellis's gore is reflective of the overall physicality of *American Psycho*, which in turn accounts for the carnality of the novel. It is no coincidence that Bateman states that his favorite film is Brian De Palma's *Body Double*. He

states that he has rented this film thirty-nine times, which suggests an abiding obsession (*American Psycho* 38). The word “body” is part of the film’s title, underscoring the physicality motif. Moreover, De Palma’s film possesses further kinship with Ellis’ novel since both works deal with pornography.

Throughout the novel, pornography seems to be part and parcel of Bateman’s pathology. In one sequence, Bateman describes being mortified at the prospect of accidentally taping over a pornographic title. This prospect so unhinges him that a psychopharmacology pill fails to restore his sense of equilibrium: “A Xanax fails to ward off panic. Saks intensifies it” (*American Psycho* 95). In De Palma’s *Body Double*, the subplot revolves around the pornography industry. Both *Body Double* and *American Psycho* are erotically charged to evoke an aura of decadence. Ellis seems to be writing about a certain lurid ambience as he explains that “sex in the 80s . . . was frightening, laced with danger, impersonal, something to be bought, negotiated” (Ellis *Paris Review* No. 216). Ellis seems to be disconcerted with the proliferation of commercialized sex. Richard Corliss explains that Ellis’s novel can be situated in a social moment when “the Eighties demise of sex-movies houses, and the slump in readers of *Playboy* and *Penthouse* were traceable to the advent of video pornography” (Corliss 54).

Ellis’s angst seems predicated on this phenomenon of commercialized sex “to be bought and negotiated” (Ellis *Paris Review* No. 216). This commoditization of sex is also intertwined with the portrayal of Bateman as a prolific patron of prostitutes, who constitute the majority of his victims. The second *Body Double* connection has to do with the novel’s violence: De Palma’s film revolves around an elaborate gruesome murder sequence involving a woman being drilled to death. The graphic nature of the scene again underscores physicality of Ellis’s novel. The components of carnality and violence in the novel often become intertwined, specifically in Ellis’

description of *Body Double*. Bateman explicitly expresses a masturbatory thrill that he derives from watching the murder-sequence depicted in De Palma's film (*American Psycho* 38). By doing so, Ellis directly links sexuality and violence, a link which reinforces the "tactile" sensibility that Ellis seems to be emphasizing in his commentaries. In the filmed interview, Ellis attributed his approach to depicting violence to the artwork of Andy Warhol.

By making references to the Warhol imagery, Ellis enables the critic to form a more plausible link between his own work and that of Francis Bacon, another image-maker who was obsessed with physicality. Ellis himself acknowledged that he deliberately adopted a "baroque" approach in depicting the novel's murder sequences (Ellis *Paris Review* No. 216). The term baroque has an explicit painterly connotation and fits in neatly with the Bacon analogy. Ellis' prose and Bacon's macabre imagery have a thematic kinship: they similarly emphasize the fleshly aspect of the human form. In describing one of his violence-laden triptychs, Bacon proclaimed: "We are meat. We are potential carcasses" (Deleuze 17). We find this Bacon axiom reverberating in Ellis's prose when Bateman eviscerates a human victim and claims that "it does sporadically penetrate how unacceptable some of what I'm doing actually is, I just remind myself that this thing, this meat, is nothing . . . ." (*American Psycho* 184).

The contemporary philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, asserted that for Bacon "Meat is not dead flesh; it retains all the sufferings . . . . It manifests such convulsive pain and vulnerability . . . ." (Deleuze 40). This direct association between human flesh and "convulsive pain" finds its counterpart in another passage by Bateman: "I have all the characteristics of a human being: blood, flesh, skin, hair; but not a single, clear, identifiable emotion, except for greed and disgust" (*American Psycho* 74). Deleuze also proclaims that the visceral potency of Bacon's artwork depends on the technique of juxtaposition, where his imagery is "poised somewhere between the

sordid and the exalted, the shocking and the comforting” (Deleuze 28). The same juxtaposition can be found in *American Psycho*, where the prose describes abattoir-like carnage alongside references to haute couture. For instance, in one context, Bateman speaks of “a serrated blade in the pocket of my Valentino jacket” and deliberates whether he would slash his male co-worker, McDermott—“maybe slice his face open, sever his spine” (*American Psycho* 30). The novel subsequently refers to fashion pomp as exhibited by “diamond studs from Trianon, patent-leather and grosgrain pumps by Ferragamo” (*American Psycho* 31). Based on the Bacon analogy, we can extend the analysis to appreciate *American Psycho* as an intensely visual novel. In the filmed interview, Ellis described his authorial aesthetic as “the neutral gaze within the face of horror” (Ellis YouTube) which has an explicitly visual connotation.

*American Psycho*’s visual motif, however, is even more filmic than painterly. According to Ellis’s interview, *American Psycho* is fundamentally intertwined with a 1980s Paul Schrader film, *American Gigolo*. Once we investigate the novel further, we see how Ellis’s claim acquires validity. Besides being similarly titled and using the common plot elements of prostitution, crime, the upper-class social stratum, sadomasochism and antiheroes as protagonists, the two works share a thematic concern for brand-fetishism. The titular character in *American Gigolo* is a brand-fetishist with a fixation upon the clothes-line of Giorgio Armani in particular. This haberdashery obsession is also the pivotal motif of *American Psycho*. Ellis himself described his novel as being fundamentally about “the dandification of the American male” (Ellis *Rolling Stone*).

The “dandification” aspect taps into the novel’s portrayal of a foppish male protagonist whose infatuation with brands lapses into pathology. We see an obsessive streak in Bateman who speaks extensive monologues on designer brands and pays intensive attention to sartorial

nuances whenever he meets another character. While the protagonist in *American Gigolo* is a Giorgio Armani devotee, Patrick Bateman is obsessed with virtually every major fashion brand in the 1980s—Ralph Lauren, Zegna, Behar, Fratelli Rossetti, Jean-Paul Gautier, and so on. The novel’s motif of brand-fetishism taps into what Ellis described as “the *Gentleman’s Quarterly*” lifestyle of both himself and his alter ego (Ellis *Paris Review* No. 216). Ellis explains how Bateman’s brand-fetishism relates to his own personal state of mind at the time he was composing the novel: “The more he acquires, the emptier he feels. On a certain level, I was that man, too.” (Ellis *Paris Review* No. 216).

Continuing the theme of *American Psycho* as a cinematic novel, we see the protagonist cultivating a special attitude towards film that compares to that of his author/creator. We see one whole chapter devoted entirely to cataloguing Bateman’s newly acquired film equipment—“high-performance cassette deck, the DX-5000 from NEC, which combines digital special effects with excellent hi-fi, and a connected four-head VHS-HQ unit . . . .” (*American Psycho* 163). The novel’s prose style is explicitly cinematic, using film jargon to describe Bateman’s gaze. In one remarkable description of Bateman bumping into another character, Ellis writes “Like a smash cut from a horror movie a jump zoom . . . Luis Caruthers appears” (*American Psycho* 156). *American Psycho*’s rootedness from *American Gigolo* is what spurred Ellis to compose a “movie-bred” novel (Corliss 56).

The reliving of childhood memories also provides insight into the book’s violence. By his own admission, the book’s carnage may have stemmed from Ellis’s recollections of violent literature that he had read at a young age: “When I wrote those violent scenes I was thinking about a lot of things—the EC comics of my youth . . . .” (Ellis *Paris Review* No. 216). The first chapter in *American Psycho* includes a rodent. Ellis asserted that this detail was based on a scene

in the writings of the Marquis de Sade whom he read long before he wrote the novel. The memory of this scene occurred to him spontaneously and he immediately incorporated it in his story: “I just upped it to whatever it would be in 1989” (Ellis *Rolling Stone*).

On a psychological level, Ellis was also deeply influenced by Vincent Bugliosi’s narrative of the Manson family murders as presented in his written account, *Helter Skelter*. Ellis read this account at the precocious age of ten. He elaborates on the effect that the reportage had on him: “[T]he descriptions in that book of what actually happened during those two nights of mayhem were terrifying. They didn’t just kill Sharon Tate—they carved out her fetus” (Ellis *Paris Review* No. 216). The Sharon Tate murder in particular seems etched into Ellis’s novel, given that most of Bateman’s murder victims are women. The “nights of mayhem” aspect of the account is also pertinent to Ellis’s novel: Bateman’s homicidal rampages occur predominantly at night. Moreover, Ellis did emphasize how *Helter Skelter*’s grisly documentary detail impacted his outlook: “It was part of the scary narrative of L.A. that I grew up with” (Ellis *Paris Review* No. 216). Ellis suggests that the aftermath of the massacre “has influenced my fiction . . .” (Ellis *Paris Review* No. 216). Not surprisingly, the leader of the murderous Manson cult, Charles Manson, is mentioned in the novel (*American Psycho* 51).

Once we acknowledge Ellis’s statement that Bateman is his alter ego, many other themes acquire coherence for the reader. As a portrayal of a serial killer, *American Psycho* is not a novel keen on verisimilitude. The premise of an affluent dandy who is also a serial killer does not match most of what we know about American serial killers in general, nor does it seem to reflect the time when the novel was written. Charles Manson, Ed Gein, the Hillside Stranglers, Son of Sam, and John Gacy—all of whom are mentioned in the novel—were drifters, menial job occupants, blue-collar dropouts in stark contrast to the privileged white-collar Harvard-educated

status of Patrick Bateman. Bateman's demographic profile does not even resemble that of the American serial killers who are also handsome and chic like Ted Bundy and Robert Chambers. Chambers is mentioned explicitly in the novel as being someone Bateman admires. In real-life, Chambers was nicknamed by the press as the preppie killer and in the novel Bateman is described as "pure prep perfection" (*American Psycho* 27). However, Chambers came from an impoverished working-class background, thus nullifying any substantial kinship between himself and patrician-bred, Harvard-educated Bateman. All of this reinforces one theory: the portrayal of Bateman is not based or inspired by any actual mass-murderer but is the construction of Ellis himself.

Another factor which shows how the novel departs from realism is in the portrayal of Bateman as literary-minded. It might be construed as implausible that Bateman, if little more than an intensely materialistic, business-minded Wall Street stockbroker, would occasionally demonstrate a fondness for modern literary classics: "I read long passages aloud from *Doctor Zhivago* and *A Farewell to Arms* (my favorite Hemingway)" (*American Psycho* 150). Yet this factor is rendered more credible once we recognize Patrick Bateman as the fictive surrogate of his litterateur author, rather than as a character who was modelled after a living person. Once we go back to Ellis's self-analysis on how the novel developed from his consumerist anxiety, we can also discern motifs more lucidly. It would be a mistake to perceive *American Psycho* as a horror fable about killing. Ellis's own summation of the novel is that it is a study of "the dandification of the American male" and of brand-fetishism and the dehumanizing "existential chasm" that follows (*American Psycho* 112).

Brand-fetishism is explicitly connected with Bateman's use of language. Bateman's narration is often written in prose that is highly depersonalized and catalogue-like. For instance,

in one case he claims, “I pick up a Foltene European Supplement and Shampoo for thinning hair which contains complex carbohydrates that penetrate the hair shafts for improved strength and shine” (*American Psycho* 16). Ellis also refers to the “overkill” effect, which in literary terms would be classified as hyperbole. He often uses hyperbolic descriptions to emphasize the “psychopathic” element of his novel: “I’m on the verge of tears by the time we arrive at Pastels since I’m positive we won’t get seated but the table is good, and relief that is almost tidal in scope washes over me in an awesome wave” (*American Psycho* 22). The anxiety Bateman describes is disproportionate to not being able to procure a table at a restaurant for what is essentially an informal social gathering. The hyperbolic description foreshadows Bateman’s impending disintegration.

The question remains of the novel’s violence. This, too, can be explained by further probing the novel’s author. It would be a mistake to perceive *American Psycho* as an allegory of run-away capitalism culminating in bloodlust. Ellis himself stated that his novel is not a critical work, that he “didn’t set out to create this sweeping indictment of yuppie culture” and that “it came from a much more personal place” (Ellis *Rolling Stones*). One can suggest that *American Psycho* is a violent novel because it stems from its author’s emotional duress “pain” (Ellis, *Paris Review*). Ellis’s self-appraisal designates *American Psycho* as a work of artistic catharsis. His cathartic style links with the use of sublimation since the author sublimated his chronic free-floating-rage into a work of transgressive fiction. Ellis’s claim acquires validity when we discern how angst is evoked by his alter ego: “My pain is constant and sharp,” Bateman narrates (*American Psycho* 201). Some of the descriptions in the novel verge on misanthropy: “I want my pain to be inflicted on others. I want no one to escape” (*American Psycho* 201). All of these descriptions are evocative of the protagonist’s and author’s state of mind.



From the very beginning of the novel, Ellis supplies the reader with cues of a subterranean literary impulse that is dredged up from the unconscious. The novel's opening sentence is: "Abandon all hope ye who enter here . . . ." (*American Psycho* 3). These words are appropriated from Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*. We might believe that the ominous opening refers to the nether realm, but once appropriated to *American Psycho*, it also refers to the realm of Bateman's and Ellis's anxiety-laden subconscious, which the reader is invited to enter. This metaphor is reinforced when we examine the foreword of the novel, which includes a long passage from Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground*. It is interesting that Ellis would choose a passage from Dostoevsky's novella to introduce his novel. The word "Underground" in Dostoyevsky's novella's title does not refer to a physical underground but metaphorically to the unconscious in the human psyche. All of this is intimately connected to the precarious mental state that Ellis was experiencing at the time of writing the novel. In short, Ellis's personal malaise is explicitly channeled into his creative fiction. As Bateman mordantly narrates, "[T]his was civilization as I saw it, colossal and jagged . . . ." (*American Psycho* 200).

## Conclusion:

### Author, Text and Alter Ego

The goal of this thesis has been to elucidate how three different texts that include an alter ego motif—the alter ego motif being the common denominator—that can be linked directly and fundamentally to the psychological/personal state of the author. This argument is antithetical to what is proscribed by the New Criticism as the biographical fallacy. Briefly put, the New Criticism generally deters from probing into the author's personal profile as a source of insight into the literary work. It tends to advocate the divorce between author and text. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that this theory is profoundly misguided when dealing with literatures that include an alter ego motif. The thesis is also very oriented towards modernist and twentieth-century canonical literature that does incorporate an alter ego motif (Marcel Proust, Henry Miller, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Truman Capote, Philip Roth, etc). The prevalence of literary alter egos in modernism and postmodernism, which bespeaks a new understanding of selfhood, is urgently relevant to this paper's argument.

This thesis is also engaged with authors who are very vocal about their own works and their creative processes. Tony Kushner's personal memoirs, afterwords, and commentaries offer unique insights and information that were not taken up in any of the scholarly/critical articles that contributed to the thesis. Kushner's memoirs frame his writing as a craft rather than just as a theoretical discourse. Ellis also provides commentary about his creative processes that clarify the aesthetic decisions he made and help the critic discern the intricacies of his novel's design. Kushner and Ellis are artists who like to talk about their technique: they are quite outspoken, gregarious and willing to articulate the esoteric elements in their writing craft. This thesis suggests that various materials—like the author's work-in-progress drafts, memoirs, self-

appraising, essays and the like—provide indispensable information to the investigative researcher and should not be readily dismissed as irrelevant to criticism.

This research also goes against the grain of the critical view that literature featuring a salient alter ego is merely self-indulgent as art. There is a critical concern that artists who are too self-reflective and ruminative produce ineffective art either because it is simply not creative or it is little more than a maudlin confession. Authors such as Truman Capote were wary of such a pattern. Capote expressed dissatisfaction with his debut novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, because of the personal elements he had infused in it. However, this thesis paints another picture. Despite being personal narratives, the three selected literary texts show a profound leap of the imagination in which biographical material is transformed into creative fiction. The imaginative and fantastical elements that permeate the text often obscure the autobiographical elements.

For example, *Ulysses* deals with Greek and Latin mythology, Shakespearean allusions, astrology, theology, epidemiology, ecology and transmigration of souls (metempsychosis). Even the mundane aspects of the Dublin locale are often treated with a mystical and stylized quality that shows a penchant for expressionism. In *Angels in America*, despite being Kushner's most personal play, there are fantastical themes of divine prophecy, ghosts, angels, a visitation to Heaven, visions of Antarctica, elixir potions (Bethesda Fountain references), talking mannequins, and so forth. This conveys the counterintuitive aspect of the alter ego motif in this thesis: when the writer is intensely self-reflective and incorporates himself into his work, the fictitious aspect of his work is immeasurably intensified. Kushner describes *Angels in America* as the first play where he “started writing about [his] world” (Nielsen 5). And yet, the play is intensely fantastical to the extent that it overwhelms any trace of realism. What ‘world’ is Kushner talking about? He is not referring to a physical or tangible reality but rather to a

psychological reality that he experienced and then dramatically transformed into creative fiction. The same is true for *American Psycho*, which can be read as an intensely hyperbolic and expressionistic novel.

This discussion is also indirectly related to cinema to the degree that the alter ego motif is a longstanding tradition in movies. In film criticism, auteurs are directors who not only direct their films but also write their own scripts. Such filmmakers can be considered cinematic authors. More often than not, such filmmakers include an alter ego motif in their key signature films. A large number of auteurs have made extensive use of the alter ego motif: Federico Fellini, Martin Scorsese, Woody Allen, Bob Fosse, Luchino Visconti and David Lynch are among them. What is suggested in this thesis is that the alter ego motif constitutes a vital factor in creative writing, whether writing occurs in print, on the stage or screen. Moreover, this thesis presumes the possibility of an interface, and perhaps even a permeability, between literary fiction and cinema. Joyce was an aficionado of cinema, which was still at its nascent stages when *Ulysses* was composed. It should be noted as well that Joyce established the very first film house in Ireland, the Volta cinema. Kushner and Ellis have written for both media and navigate seamlessly between them, while their texts frequently allude to films.

The thesis has also tapped into an area of research that might be of considerable use to modern criticism. Kushner and Ellis are both living authors and they supplied this thesis with immensely insightful commentary. Their personal commentaries offered information that was not only lucid and constructive but was not taken into account in the available articles written by established critics. Moreover, some of these articles, though instructive and erudite, were often derivative and included sociological and/or anthropological information that was not explored in the hands-on style of the creative writers. Perhaps the most singular aspect of the commentaries

given by the creative writers is how they explicate the aesthetic choices that were enacted in their respective texts. Both Kushner and Ellis were able to articulate complex stylistic impulses that might remain exasperatingly vague or impenetrable to a non-creative writer.

For these reasons, the distinguishing mark of the analyses offered by both Kushner and Ellis is that they prioritize artistry. The fact that the creative writer can provide potent critical analysis is of course not new to criticism. Oscar Wilde expounded on the matter quite strongly in his essay, "The Critic as Artist" in which criticism itself is identified with autobiography. No doubt the attentive reader of Kushner's *Angels in America* can appreciate Wilde's effort to break down the schematic division between creative writing and literary criticism. Part of this play's identity as a work of Brechtian epic theatre is that it also operates as a work of criticism. Kushner deliberately designed the play as a direct critique against William Hoffman's play, *As Is*, which he intensely disliked. Kushner's play fulfills the Brechtian criterion of *dialectical theatre* so that *Angels in America* is not only a work of creative writing but is also a work of criticism. This special case most strongly indicates why the creative author should have a more vital place in literary analyses.

In conclusion, the three authors whose works have been examined in this thesis provide insight into the creative process that foregrounds a changing self that is presented in different guises, depending on the changing situations of the writers themselves. What has been important in my analyses are not the life stories or historical circumstances that inspire each author, even when biography or history perform a role in providing literature with its theme. Instead, the thesis has focused on how the author constructs a persona that varies what he projects as his own self but should not be confused with the living self that changes in time. Basic psychological motifs have been identified to argue that the author elaborates on that projection according to his

own creative needs, although not in a manner that would allow us to determine, once and for all, exactly how the author derived the character from life experience. The result has been a study of three literary works that enable us to better discern how the creative writer gives us a understanding of how characters are constructed out of the of the writer's own life, as either a shadow of the self or as a reminder of problems and issues that assume a new shape and form in the literary mind.

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