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A WORLD OF LOST THINGS:
THE CANADIAN BAROQUE TRADITION IN ITS MODERNIST CONTEXT

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by

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Graduate Program in Comparative Literature

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

In this thesis I consider what T.S. Eliot has called a "peculiar affinity" between the twentieth century and the seventeenth. I do so first by establishing what may be called a baroque sensibility and then analyzing the ways in which this sensibility is present in modernist texts by Luigi Pirandello, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, T.S. Eliot, and Carlo Emilio Gadda. Using theoretical writing by Walter Benjamin and Georg Lukács, I develop the idea of a baroque sensibility, which is characterized by the separation of immanence and transcendence, by way of a consideration of allegory and melancholia. After a comparative discussion of the ways in which the above writers adopt and adapt a baroque sensibility in their work, I turn to a similar tradition in Canadian literature and argue that Canadian modernists, like A.J.M. Smith and Leonard Cohen, can be seen as participating in this tradition of reconsidering the baroque.

Keywords: Modernism, Baroque, Neo-baroque, Allegory, Melancholia, Canadian Literature, Benjamin, Lukács, Agamben, Pirandello, Hofmannsthal, Eliot, Gadda, Smith, Cohen

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Introduction:

A World of Lost Things

Throughout the twentieth century, critics have alluded to the similarities in the "emotional attitude[s] toward the world" (Wellek 105) in the literature of twentieth-century modernism and the literature of the seventeenth-century baroque. Initially, these similarities in the "spiritual constitution" (Benjamin, *Origin* 55) of both periods were noted by figures such as T.S. Eliot and Walter Benjamin. Since these first indications of an affinity between modernism and the baroque, the comparison of the two periods has become increasingly popular and in recent years, it has even constituted the theorization of a neo-baroque by critics like Severo Sarduy, Omar Calabrese, and Angela Ndalianis. While the topic of the neo-baroque deserves much attention, here, I will be focusing on the first comparisons made between the twentieth century and the baroque, those of a common sensibility found in both. If we consider the baroque to be ushered in by a rupture in a stable worldview that creates what I call the baroque sensibility, the modernists texts discussed here refer to a similar rupture that marks and reconstitutes the subject's orientation to its material world.

In the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin refers to this rupture as an emptying out of the transcendental immanence of the world's material objects. In other words, while in times of a stable world order, like that found in the Middle Ages, the material objects of the world seemed to constitute their own meaning, the baroque is marked by the fact that the objects of the world appear merely immanent. The rupture that ushers in the baroque sensibility is the separation of transcendence from immanence.

After this separation, objects appear robbed of the fullness that allowed them to proclaim their position in the world. A world of merely immanent objects is a world in which no natural order seems to present itself and the subject, confronted with an emptied material world, is forced to take on the responsibility of ordering it. Of course, in a world in which the transcendent significance of objects has receded, the order that the subject places upon the world can only be a tentative and insecure one. For Benjamin, this is the position of the baroque allegorist. Importantly, it is not only the responsibility of putting an emptied world in order that marks the baroque sensibility, but also the longing for the full immanence of the material world that seems to be forever lost. Thus, the position of the baroque man of melancholia arises from the baroque allegorist. In "The Ideology of Modernism," Georg Lukács argues that, in his work on baroque allegory, Benjamin's real topic is modernism. I argue that the modernist, pensive subject of which Lukács writes in his essay is a modern iteration of the baroque, melancholic allegorist. The world of lost things is the world in which transcendence and immanence have been separated and in which, the subject, still longing for a harmony that seems to have forever receded from it, nonetheless attempts to order its merely immanent objects.

The first chapter of my thesis, "A Curse on Copernicus: Modernist Affinities with the Baroque," surveys the ways in which the term baroque has been used in the twentieth century and elaborates upon what I have called the baroque sensibility. It then looks at four modernist writers – Luigi Pirandello, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, T.S. Eliot, and Carlo Emilio Gadda – and the ways in which they exhibit a similar sensibility to that of the baroque. This comparative chapter establishes a set of characteristics which modernism shares with the baroque. In my discussion of Luigi Pirandello's *Il fu Mattia Pascal* and

L'umorismo, I outline the gravity of a cosmological revolution – that of Copernicus – and the instability that it introduces into the world. Hofmannsthal's "The Letter of Lord Chandos," is set in the seventeenth century and illustrates the psychological rupture that characterizes the baroque sensibility. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" presents an indecisive subject, like Chandos, that exhibits the characteristics of a baroque orientation toward the world. In a world in which objects are merely immanent and void of a natural hierarchic structure, action, for Prufrock, becomes impossible. Finally, in my discussion of Gadda's novel, *La cognizione del dolore*, I introduce the concept of melancholia that for Benjamin is the reaction of the great men of the baroque to their emptied world.

The first chapter of my thesis establishes a tradition of looking back to the baroque in modernism and of exhibiting a baroque sensibility in the way the material world is thought of and represented in modernist texts. The following two chapters suggest a similar tradition in twentieth-century Canadian literature that has, as of yet, remained on the peripheries of its scholarship. An affinity with the seventeenth-century baroque is important to the consideration of Canadian literature, because it also inserts Canadian literature in a similar tradition in international modernism. From this perspective, Canadian modernists can be understood as having participated in a subtle, yet important, aspect of modernism beyond Canada's borders.

In the second chapter, "What do they say? Or seem to?: A.J.M. Smith's Allegorical Landscapes," I argue that Smith's landscape poems portray a baroque orientation to the world. These landscapes are ones in which the natural and hierarchic order of the world cannot be found and, as a consequence, the subject can find no comfort

in them. For Smith, the adoption of a baroque sensibility in his representations of the Canadian landscape also functions to assert his position against the typically romantic representations of nature in Canadian poetry. In this chapter, I read Smith's identification with the English Metaphysicals and the modernists and his portrayal of a closed and flattened nature as evidence of his allegorical relationship with the material world. This alignment with allegory is also a way of renouncing Romanticism and its favouring of the symbol.

In the third chapter, "Lost in the Particulars: The Melancholia of Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*," I position *I* as a melancholic subject that, like the melancholic subject of the baroque, desires a union with the divine, but not the way that would lead to it. *I*'s melancholia is a result of the mere immanence of the world that surrounds him. Like the modernist subjects discussed in the first chapter, *I* becomes lost in the possibilities of the particulars and is barred from direct knowledge of the universal. In these modernist and Canadian works we can begin to understand the affinity that exists between seventeenth and twentieth century sensibilities. Attempting to orient themselves in a world of merely immanent objects and longing for a harmony that no longer seems possible, these writers adopt a baroque sensibility in their representations of a world of lost things.

Chapter One:

"A Curse on Copernicus": Modernist Affinities with the Baroque

I. Some Peculiar Affinity: The Twentieth Century's Relationship with the Baroque

Beginning in January 1926, T.S. Eliot delivered a series of lectures for Cambridge, Trinity College's Clark Lectures called, "On the Metaphysical Poetry of the Seventeenth Century with Special Reference to Donne, Crashaw and Cowley." Eliot began these lectures by speaking about the popularity of metaphysical poetry at that time, due in part to his own earlier essay, "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), and Herbert J.C. Grierson's anthology, *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* (1921). According to Eliot:

> We have seen in the present century and increasingly within the last few years, an awakening of interest in this seventeenth-century poetry. However this arose, it undoubtedly contains besides pure literary appreciation, a consciousness or a belief that this poetry and this age have some peculiar affinity with our own poetry and our own age, a belief that our own mentality and feelings are better expressed by the seventeenth century than by the nineteenth or even the eighteenth. (43)

He goes on to say, "there are not wanting voices to declare that the present age is a metaphysical age" (43). This sentiment, noting a "peculiar affinity" that suggests the poetry of the seventeenth century can act as a model of expression for the poetry of the twentieth, can also be found in Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, written the year before in 1925. Benjamin, comparing German Expressionism with the *Trauerspiel* of the seventeenth century, notes, "the present age reflects certain aspects of

the spiritual constitution of the baroque, even down to the details of its artistic practice" (55). At the end of the twentieth century, Robert S. Dombroski, writing on the baroque aspects of Carlo Emilio Gadda's writings, claims that "if Gadda is 'baroque,' he is not so on account of a love for artifice and ornament, but because the world itself is baroque, for a writer, the task is to represent the reality of its baroqueness" (3-4). In these quotations from Eliot, Benjamin, and Dombroski metaphysical poetry and the baroque appear as both literary styles, or modes of expression, and "spiritual constitution[s]" found in the seventeenth century that motivate and inform the twentieth century's renewed interest in them. Thus, for these twentieth century writers, the return to the seventeenth century reflects both a stylistic appeal and a shared perspective of relationship with the object world. This thesis examines precisely this "peculiar affinity" between the twentieth century and the seventeenth and places two Canadian writers – A.J.M. Smith and Leonard Cohen – within a group of European writers, including Eliot, Benjamin, and Gadda, that look back to the seventeenth century as they consider and write in the twentieth.

However, an inconsistency of terminology already exists in these quotations. Eliot refers to the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, while Benjamin and Dombroski describe a connection with the baroque. Although it has not been popular to consider English writing in the seventeenth century baroque, I believe that the term can be usefully applied to English literature and is therefore a relevant term under which Eliot's metaphysical poets can be contained. First, however, let us consider this "chameleonlike adjective" (Warnke 1), baroque, in some detail. Popularized and contested throughout the twentieth century as a term that may be applied to European

literature, a stable definition of the baroque has eluded its theorists to points of frustration that culminate in statements such as Gregg Lambert's declaration in the introduction to *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture* (2004) that "it has no other mode of existence than expression" (7), Benjamin's claim in a letter to Gershom Scholem that "[it] is quite characteristic of baroque style that anyone who stops thinking rigorously while studying it immediately slips into a hysterical imitation of it" (*Correspondence* 247), and René Wellek's advice that "we have to realize that [the baroque] has the meanings that its users have decided to give it" (90). Today, the baroque is associated with many aspects of artistic history, including the historical baroque of the seventeenth century, an ornamental style, Latin American post-colonial literature, postmodernism, and popular culture. It is in part due to this diffusion of use and inconsistency of definition that Lambert compares the term baroque with the term postmodern (2). Furthermore, while late twentieth century iterations of baroque art are often marked by the prefix 'neo,' this demarcation alone hardly qualifies or explains the conceptions of the baroque to which it is attached.

In "The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship," Wellek compiles and analyzes the history and uses of the term in literary criticism throughout the twentieth century. Wellek notes that, although Heinrich Wölfflin's *Renaissance and Baroque* (1888) applies the term baroque to literature, this literary use of the term only became conventional after 1914 (73). In reference to Eliot's and Grierson's writings on the metaphysical poets, Wellek clarifies that the term baroque was probably not available to them at the time of their work, since the use of the adjective in discussions of English literature came "much later than the revival in Donne and the metaphysicals" (85). Since

these early applications of the baroque in the literary sphere, the term has been consistently contested, as its critics attempt to define it as either a period of literary and cultural history or a style that recurs periodically throughout history. Wellek notes that the important first step in defining the baroque is to make the "distinction between those who use the baroque as a term for a recurrent phenomenon in all history and those who use it as a term for a specific phenomenon in the historical process, fixed in time and place" (91). Wellek also recommends the adoption of the term in the discussion of English literature of the seventeenth century, although he anticipates the difficulty in such a change in terminology because "[t]he term 'metaphysical' is too well established (though admittedly misleading), and today too honorific to be felt in any serious need of replacement" (89). This still appears to be the case, although it is more widely understood that the Metaphysicals participate in the larger cultural movement known as the baroque. Additionally, Wellek considers the existence of a baroque spirit – what Benjamin calls the "spiritual constitution of the baroque" – which could unite the distinct iterations of the baroque throughout Europe and also explain the recurring interest in it over time. He claims that when considering the various ways of defining the baroque, "[m]uch better chances of success attend the attempts at defining baroque in more general terms of a philosophy or a world view or even merely an emotional attitude toward the world" (105). The emotional attitude that Wellek associates with the baroque is one of "conflict between the individual and the insecure world" (108). Thus, Wellek's version of the baroque is defined by its spiritual constitution, the subject's confrontation with a world in which the stability of the previous worldview has been lost. Although Wellek warns against the exaggeration of the term to the point in which it may be used to speak

of any work of art from any period, his definition does not limit the baroque to the specific moment of the seventeenth century.

The definition of the baroque as a style that repeats rather than a strictly defined historical period was popularized by Eugenio d'Oros. Lambert explains that d'Oros' definition of the baroque is of "a category of the spirit that has been ripped from any historical narrative and is made to stand on its own" (41). Similarly, Lambert takes up this position as he defines the baroque as a historically repeating phenomenon (9). Yet, for Lambert, the baroque – whether viewed as an historical period, a repeatable style, or an "emotional attitude toward the world" – is always bound up in ideas of modernity and thus, the baroque is a "radical abolition, inversion and reversal of the past that prepares for the arrival of the 'new'" (68). The baroque, then, is a sign of a rupture between an established order – in the case of the historical baroque, the Renaissance – and what follows that order's dissolution. Similarly, for Jorge Luis Borges, the baroque indicates a period of decadence or exhaustion of artistic devices: "the baroque is the final stage in all art, when art flaunts and squanders its resources" (4). In *Versions of Baroque: European Literature in the Seventeenth Century*, Frank J. Warnke also emphasizes an attitude of decadence as characteristically baroque. Warnke writes of the baroque, "the sense of something ending, and ending forever is inescapable. And the styles of the age [the historical baroque] – experimental, extravagant, capable of a wider range of response than the style of the Renaissance – expressed that sense of conclusion with an eloquence mournful, exhilarated, or both" (215). This mournful exhilaration is expressed in baroque melancholia, which will be discussed later in this chapter and again in reference to Leonard Cohen.

Perhaps it was the signaling of the end of one artistic moment by squandering the resources of the artistic past that first led to the baroque's historical definition as a low-brow style, which becomes important for critics of the neo-baroque. Lambert explains that "at the basis of the Baroque itself there has always been the specific tension with its definition as a degradation of Renaissance and classical ideals of beauty and, at the same time, with the infusion of popular and more local expressions of taste" (128). Wölfflin notes the staying power of the definition of the baroque as a degradation of the Renaissance outside the sphere of artistic or literary criticism; as early as 1888, he claims, "[a]s an art-historical term *baroque* has lost its suggestion of the ridiculous, but in general use it still carries a suggestion of repugnance and abnormality" (23). Despite Wölfflin's claim that within the realm of art criticism, the term baroque can be recognized as a style without the negative associations of the low-brow and the ridiculous, in *Storia dell'età barocca in Italia* (1929), Benedetto Croce polemically separates the notion of the baroque from any serious consideration of art. Croce claims, "quel che è veramente arte non è mai barocco, e quel che è barocco non è arte" (463) ["that which is truly art is never baroque and that which is baroque is not art"]. Croce's position obviously limits the seriousness with which the baroque may be considered and dismisses any discussion of baroque art as fundamentally misunderstanding both terms. Fortunately, Croce's disapproval of the term's application to art has not remained prevalent and while the definition of the baroque is still often contested, its use is not.

In recent years, the term baroque has regained popularity as the prefix "neo" has been attached to it to signal a reworking of the baroque in the twentieth century. Neo-baroque refers most often to Latin American literature; for example, in his essay "The

Baroque and the Neobaroque," Severo Sarduy, perhaps its best-known theorist, recommends the restriction of the neo-baroque to Latin American literature (116). Critics of the Latin American neo-baroque argue that, due to the colonizing history of Latin America, its culture has always been, to some extent, baroque. Lambert elaborates on this point:

> *Barocco*, [...] describes the process of displacement, as the movement in which Europe is caught up in a general transmigration initiated by the discovery of the new world (i.e. the 'Big Bang')[1], and the process of assimilation as the confrontation and creative disfigurement by which European culture is grafted onto the American, like the piling of surfaces in the baroque structure. (121)

In this sense, the baroque is an amalgamation of styles and influences that both demonstrate the history of the site and culture which they express and are applicable to the Post-Colonial considerations of Latin American literature. From this perspective, Lambert defines Sarduy's *Barocco*, as "an amalgamation of styles and tastes that have been imported from various other geographical and cultural regions (Africa, India, Europe, North America) and a kind of co-existence of different styles (modern, pre-modern, surrealist, neoclassical, primitive)" (128). This mixture of styles and tastes, of high and low-brow, contributes to the conflation of the terms neo-baroque and postmodern.

In "The Baroque and the Neobaroque," Sarduy states his awareness of the mixture that occurs in Latin American neo-baroque and identifies the absence of one unified and

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[1] Sarduy uses the metaphor of the "Big Bang" to explain the origin and constitution of the baroque. In contrast to the stability and uniformity of the "Solid State," the "Big Bang" signals the Cuban-American culture "which is created from an explosion and then fusion of different traditions and origins" (Lambert 120). The cosmological frame of reference of Sarduy's metaphor seems apt in reference to a term which applies to art shortly after the Copernican Revolution. The importance of Copernicus for the baroque and its twentieth century reconsiderations will be addressed in detail later in this chapter.

permanent style as a defining element of the baroque in general. Sarduy writes, "[f]rom its birth, the baroque was destined for ambiguity" (115). Although Sarduy believes that the term neo-baroque is most relevantly applied to elements of Latin American culture, recent critics have used the term to describe diverse parts of twentieth-century culture from a variety of geographical locations. For example, in *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (2004), Angela Ndalianis uses the term neo-baroque to discuss Hollywood cinema with examples such as *Jurassic Park* and *The Evil Dead*. In this case, the baroque is once again associated with the low-brow. Similarly, Omar Calabrese's *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* (1992) evaluates contemporary popular cultural through a discussion of the neo-baroque. Calabrese uses the neo-baroque to designate the repetition of certain cultural phenomena of the historical baroque in the twentieth century. In these final two examples, the neo-baroque is associated both with low-brow cultural productions and with a mixture of styles and influences, like the Latin American neo-baroque, but, produced in diverse geographical locations. In these more recent uses, the baroque is not only transhistorical, but also transnational.

Warnke identifies the spiritual aspect, or what Wellek calls the "emotional attitude toward the world," of the baroque. For Warnke, as for Benjamin, what defines the spirit of the baroque is that the dissolution of the harmony between appearance and reality is met by a spirit that, while acknowledging this break, still longs for the harmony and order that has been lost. Warnke writes:

> For the artists of the Baroque period this relationship between appearance and reality has broken down. The old symbolic cast of mind, with its assumption of an ordered and hierarchical cosmos, remains operative until well into the second half of the seventeenth century, but an irritable doubt as to the precise relationship between the seen and unseen worlds informs the Baroque, in both its typical works and its masterpieces. A thirst for the

> single reality behind the disparate appearances of experience is characteristic. (22)

Here, Warnke identifies the rupture of the historical baroque. The baroque marks a new manner of perceiving the world, one in which the order of the world and the relations between its elements have been put in conflict. The conflict that defines the emotional attitude toward the world is, for Wellek, as mentioned above, the "conflict between the individual and the insecure world." As Warnke explains, in the baroque, a fully immanent relationship between the object, or the signifier, and its meaning, or the signified, no longer remains. Nonetheless, the desire for that immanence persists. The subject longs for a full and intimate immanence in which immanence and transcendence are still connected and through which meaning inheres. This desire for the true meaning or the underlying order of the world in a time when that order no longer proclaims itself leads the poet to search for meaning among the fragments of formerly complete signs, or, in Warnke's Neo-Platonic terms, "[t]he compulsive search for the One enmeshes the poet in the complexities of the Many" (23). The poet is caught in a search for an example of the One that can be found in the Many, for an ordering principle that may structure the world. It is from this perspective that allegory asserts itself as the appropriate mode of representation in the baroque and later again for early twentieth-century, modernist writers.

The baroque may be defined by a shift in perspective toward the world that is marked by the dissolution of the seamlessness between immanence and transcendence and the heightened desire for that harmony to still exist. Thus, the synthesis between the visible, material world and the invisible, immaterial world is brought into question. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin returns to the seventeenth century as he attempts to reconsider the *Trauerspiele* by way of rehabilitating allegory, which he

claims had been devalued in the previous century due to the prevalent Kantian or Neo-Kantian understandings of the artwork. For Benjamin, a type of allegory peculiar to the baroque arises to define the style of the *Trauerspiel* of which he writes. This allegory, distinct from Medieval allegories and the Romantic symbol, exhibits the conflicts of the baroque spirit, as defined above; within it the conflict between the multivalent world of particulars and the quest for what may synthesize them is played out. In this way, allegory asserts itself as the exemplary literary device of the baroque.

Benjamin's definition of allegory, in contrast to the definition of the symbol, will be discussed in further detail in the second chapter. Here, allegory may be regarded as distinct from the symbol, which exists in a moment of fullness and synthesis: "[t]he measure of time for the experience of the symbol is the mystical instant in which the symbol assumes the meaning into its hidden and, if one may say so, wooded interior" (Benjamin 165). In other words, the symbol contains both the image and its meaning in one cohesive and synthesized whole. In contrast to the momentary fullness of the symbol, allegory is associated with "the contemplative calm with which it immerses itself into the depths which separate visual being from meaning" (Benjamin 165). While the symbol exhibits the seamlessness between immanence and transcendence, in allegory the visual is merely immanent. The allegorical signifier does not partake in the self-sufficiency of the symbolic sign. Instead, the contemplative calm of allegory marks the necessary disjuncture between the "visual being," signifier, and the "meaning," signified. In allegory, what would unite the signifier with its signified is not contained within the sign, but must be searched out. Thus, allegory must always be accompanied by contemplation as the interpreter searches for the "meaning" of the "visual being."

Although he does not specifically refer to allegory, Sarduy's descriptions of baroque artifice in "The Baroque and the Neobaroque" are related to the discrepancy between the signifier and the signified in Benjamin's discussion of the type of allegory particular to the baroque. Before considering different examples of the manifestation of this disjuncture in baroque literature, Sarduy notes that baroque artifice is defined precisely by an "exaggerated distance," or an "[a]perature, a gap between the namer and the named, and the appearance of another namer" (118). Sarduy goes on to identify metonymy and proliferation as two examples of the "exaggerated distance" between the namer and the named. In the absence of a fully immanent sign, metonymy emphasizes the disconnect between signifier and signified by consistently piling up signifiers. Sarduy explains:

> Another mechanism of the artificialization of the baroque is that which consists of obliterating the significant of a given signified but not replacing it by another, however distant this might be from the first, but rather by a chain of significants which progresses metonymically and which finally circumscribes the absent significant, tracing an orbit all around it, an orbit through the reading of which – which we could call a *radial reading* – we can infer it. (118)

The result of the radial reading of metonymy is proliferation, which "indicates the mark of the absent significant, that which the reading, without naming it, refers to in each of its tacks around, the expelled, that which flaunts the scar of exile" (Sarduy 120). In Sarduy's definitions of metonymy and proliferation, the absence of the signified in the signifier is emphasized. Here, as in allegory, a lack presents itself as the defining feature. In his book, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning*, Max Pensky points to the piling up of signifiers as characteristic of the "allegorical intention." Pensky explains that the "allegorical intention insists upon filling up the space between these two

poses (otherwise expressed as 'image' and 'meaning') with a profusion of objects, to fill up the void, to produce allegorical objects capable of bearing significance" (118). Here, the connection between Sarduy and Benjamin, as interpreted by Pensky, is quite clear; both point not only to the incongruity between signifier and signified, but also to the effort made to dissolve that incongruity which results in the piling up of signifiers.

The fracture in the synthesis of immanence and transcendence is a defining feature of the baroque. In "La polemica sul Barocco" ["The Polemic on the Baroque"], Giovanni Getto refers to the uncertainty of the world to the subject perceiving it, in contrast to the middle ages or the Renaissance. Getto argues that the "unica certezza" ["only certainty"] of baroque civilization

> è nella coscienza dell'incertezza di tutte le cose, dell'instabilità del reale, delle ingannevoli parvenze, della relatività dei rapporti fra le cose. (182)
>
> [is in the awareness of the uncertainty of things, of the instability of the real, of the deceptiveness of appearances, of the relativity of relations between things.]

Here, like Benjamin and Sarduy, Getto emphasizes the distrust of appearances in the historical baroque. Furthermore, the relationships between objects are no longer clear, as appearances deceive, the order between things cannot be definitively proclaimed, but becomes relative and tentative. This absence of unified and knowable relations between things, and the underlying order that determines those relations, gives agency to the observer to act as an interpreter and to create an order, if only tentatively. Benjamin explains that when transcendence is separated from immanence, "[a]ny person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else" (*Drama* 175) in the allegories of the baroque. Accordingly, Benjamin notes that the task of the baroque writer thus becomes "one of arranging" (179). As the writer represents a world in which the

underlying order and the relations between things are no longer apparent, he becomes the establisher of order; but he is unable to forget that this order is imposed and temporary.

If we recall that writers like Borges and critics like Warnke associate the baroque with a moment of decadence, it should not come as too much of a surprise that Benjamin claims that allegory "established itself most permanently where transitoriness and eternity confronted each other most closely" (224). Allegory, as the literary device most appropriately associated with the baroque, like the subject's "emotional attitude toward the world" in the baroque, faces a similar conflict between a stable and unified sign and one which is constituted by a lack. Consequently, this disjunction between "visual appearance" and "meaning" creates a transitory rather than eternal meaning. Here, Benjamin's choice of words recalls Charles Baudelaire's definition of modern art in his essay, "The Painter of Modern Life." There, Baudelaire states, "[m]odernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable" (403). In Baudelaire's terms, baroque allegory could be said to be caught between the transient modern and the immovable eternal. This places allegory in a position not unlike the baroque's position between established and unstable world orders, which leads Lambert to define the baroque by way of its relationship with or signaling of a type of modernity. By extension, both the baroque and allegory have a particular relationship with the concept of modern art.

In *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*, Christine Buci-Glucksmann makes explicit the connections between Benjamin's development of a theory of allegory in the baroque, Baudelaire, and modern art. Buci-Glucksmann identifies allegory as the feature that unifies the three time periods for Benjamin, claiming Benjamin traces out "an

archeology of modernity at its crucial turning-points: the seventeenth century baroque, the nineteenth century of Baudelaire (and not Balzac), [and] the literary avant-garde of the twentieth century" (46). Allegory asserts itself at each of these junctures, so that it becomes "the principle of an aesthetic modernity" (Buci-Glucksmann 46). In "The Ideology of Modernism," Georg Lukács also links Benjamin's notions of allegory with the characteristics of modernism. For Lukács, a defining feature of modern literature is man's negation of his traditionally social character, *zoon politikon*, to become "by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings" (1128). Here, Lukács presents man as fragmented, isolated, and unable to connect the experiences of his life or to arrange them in a meaningful order. Thus, man, as represented in modernist literature, is disconnected from the surrounding world, ultimately interiorized, and unable to participate in a historical continuum. Modernist portrayals of the *condition humaine*[2] demonstrate the "lack of hierarchic structure" (Lukács 1135) that could unify and interpret experience. This lack of hierarchic structure also acts upon the individual's self-understanding and contemplation, because "[if] reality cannot be understood (or no effort is made to understand it), then the individual's subjectivity – alone in the universe, reflecting only itself – takes on an equally incomprehensible and horrific character" (1137). For Lukács, allegory is the appropriate

[2] Lukács' discussion of both modern allegory and the ideology of modernism is informed by his position that the ideology of modernism, as expressed in modernist literature, is an expression of the author's "intention": "[a]nd it is the writer's attempt to reproduce the view of the world which constitutes his 'intention' and is the formative principle underlying the style of a given piece of writing" (1128). It must be clarified, however, that with this comment, Lukács does not mean conscious intention of the author, but the expression of a worldview that is realized through the literature, whether consciously intentional or not. For Lukács, modernist literature expresses the *condition humaine* of a fragmented individual in a fragmented world. In other words, the realized intention of modernist literature is the expression of a solitary individual in an unstable world.

mode of expression for such a fragmented individual in what is perceived as a fragmented world. "Allegory," according to Lukács, "is that aesthetic genre which lends itself *par excellence* to a description of man's alienation from objective reality" (1138). Allegory is in such a position in relation to the modern, solitary subject because within it there remains a "tension between immanence and transcendence" (Benjamin 66); the meaning of the world is not inherent in allegory, but, as mentioned above, must be searched out. Thus, until the search is completed and the allegory is resolved, each detail of the world appears only as a fragment, merely immanent and void of a hierarchical structure. Transcendence in modernism, on the other hand, is defined negatively by Lukács as the absence of immanence, "the negation of any meaning immanent in the world or the life of man" (1138). Here, Lukács refers to the separation of transcendence from immanence that creates the perception of a world that is merely immanent. As the subject comes face to face with an unstable object world and realizes its task as its interpreter, it becomes an allegorist, albeit a hesitating, isolated, and contemplative one.

The baroque can be understood as an "emotional attitude toward the world" that first arises in the seventeenth century as the subject attempts, as Wellek points out, to understand itself in a new, unstable world and to make sense of a world of fractured and incomplete signs. The unstable world is one in which appearances are misleading and anything seems to be capable of meaning anything else. This "emotional attitude" or worldview, however, repeats; thus, critics like Benjamin and Buci-Glucksmann are able to draw parallels between the baroque of the seventeenth century, Baudelaire's nineteenth century, and the avant-garde literature of twentieth century modernism. Allegory asserts itself in these moments; its characteristic division between signifier and signified is

appropriately relevant to the fragmented subject in its unstable world. Lukács explicitly draws the connection between allegory, as developed by Benjamin with reference to the baroque, and modernism. Accordingly, Lukács explains the peculiar affinity modernist writers – like Eliot, Benjamin, and Gadda – find between twentieth-century writers and the writers of the seventeenth century. Here, then, the baroque will be considered a literary style which first arose in the seventeenth century and which is defined by a characteristic disjunction between immanence and transcendence. Furthermore, I will consider how the "spiritual constitution of the baroque," the subject's interaction with a world that is merely immanent and its attempt to organize that world in a meaningful way, recurs in the twentieth century as modernist writers attempt to interpret and represent a similar world.

In the remainder of this chapter, let us turn to some examples of this resurgence of the baroque in Luigi Pirandello, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, T.S. Eliot, and Carlo Emilio Gadda. These writers share a characteristically baroque awareness of and anxiety about the absence of a transcendent immanence in the material world and in them allegory asserts itself, as Lukács claims, as the aesthetic genre *par excellence* for expressing this conflict between material appearance and transcendent significance. As I have noted, the baroque has been considered in diverse ways over the last century. Here, rather than concentrate on a history of the term and its use, I would like to focus on a baroque sensibility that can be found in modernist writers. Lukács' pensive, modern subject is a subject of such a sensibility. This particular example of a modern subject is like the baroque, melancholic subject. Both are confronted in their insecurity with an unstable world and both exhibit longing for a moment of fullness and harmony that seems no

longer accessible. Through Pirandello, Hofmannsthal, Eliot, and Gadda, we can begin to trace how certain authors hark back to a rupture that is associated with the baroque in their treatment of their own moment and how a baroque sensibility becomes a defining feature of their work.

II. A Hole Torn in a Paper Sky: Pirandello and the Disruption of the Universe

Pirandello is an example of a modernist writer who shares an "emotional attitude toward the world" with the baroque. In both his novel, *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, and his essay on humour, *L'umorismo*, Pirandello writes with the understanding of the world as a dismantled, fragmented place, a world previously conceived of as finite that can no longer conceal its infinity and incertitude. Pirandello links this infinity and incertitude to the break between a Ptolemaic understanding of the world and a Copernican one. While the Copernican Revolution occurred before the historic baroque, Pirandello, like A.J.M. Smith[3], attributes the rupture that creates the baroque sensibility to Copernicus' ushering in of an infinite universe. For Pirandello, in both the novel and essay mentioned here, Copernicus, the Polish scientist who discovered that the earth moved around the sun and dissolved the Ptolemaic vision of the world, becomes an emblem of the change in worldview from a closed and finite world before the period of the historical baroque to

[3] As I will discuss in the second chapter, Smith argues that the cosmological shift of the Copernican Revolution becomes a theme of seventeenth century English literature. Smith makes special reference to Donne's "First Anniversary" to argue this point. The Post-Copernican cosmos is also a topic of Book Eight of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In that book, Raphael suggests that the Ptolemaic view of the universe is developed from a human and earthly perspective, while more recent cosmological discoveries like those of Copernicus reflect the structure of the universe from the perspective of the angels.

the infinitely particular world of the baroque and what follows it. This infinite world becomes a world of mere particulars, in which the subject is confronted with the instability of immanence separated from transcendence. As Mattia Pascal writes his memoir, he tells Don Eligio that his motto is "*Maledetto sia Copernico!*" (Pirandello 8) ["*A curse on Copernicus!*" (Weaver 4)]. When questioned by Don Eligio as to how Copernicus came to deserve this curse, Mattia answers that Copernicus, with his discovery, has robbed humanity of its ability to assert itself and its place of privilege in the universe:

> Copernico, Copernico, don Eligio mio, ha rovinato l'umanità, irrimediabilmente. Ormai noi tutti ci siamo a poco a poco adattati alla nuova concezione dell'infinita nostra piccolezza" (Pirandello 10)
>
> [Copernicus, my dear Don Eligio, Copernicus has ruined humanity forever. We have all gradually become used to the new idea of our infinite smallness. (Weaver 5)]

Mattia explains that before Copernicus discovered that the earth moved around the sun, it was as if the earth were stable, because people did not know that it was at the mercy of the sun. Therefore, it is only with the knowledge of the earth's necessary movement around the sun that the earth actually compromised its privileged position in the cosmos. This knowledge has necessarily compromised the position of humans in the universe; forced to recognize the vast universe that does not fit with the organizational structure the humans had believed to be true, humans are accordingly forced to recognize their smallness in relation to a universe that has become infinite and inexplicable. Here, Pirandello emphasizes the significance of a cosmological revolution and sets up Copernicus as someone who interrupts a stable world and begins to usher in the instability that defines the baroque sensibility.

An intertext for Pirandello is Giacomo Leopardi's dialogue, "Il Copernico." Leopardi calls attention to the new sensibility that is a result of the Copernican Revolution. Copernicus is charged with the responsibility of dismantling the synthetic way of thinking in the Ptolemaic universe. Here, the harmony of the Ptolemaic universe can be associated with the synthetic unity of the Romantic perception of the world. Leopardi, a post-Romantic, introduces Copernicus as a disruptor of the synthetic, Ptolemaic worldview and, by extension, the catalyst for an analytic way of thinking. In this way, Leopardi elaborates the significance of the cosmological revolution. In Leopardi's dialogue, it is quite true that before Copernicus announced the earth's movement around the sun, the sun moved around the earth. The Sun is personified into a character that one-day realizes that the earth needs it and thus it no longer needs to be a subject in a court ruled by the earth. The Sun refers to the infinite smallness of the humans – "poca quanità di creaturine invisibli, lontane da me i milioni delle miglia" (Leopardi 418) ["a few invisible little creatures, millions of miles away (Cecchetti 419)] – who will be made to feel their size in relation to the universe when the Sun claims its position at the centre of the world. Copernicus, chosen by the Last Hour to convince the earth to begin moving around the sun, however, reminds the Sun of what will be at risk of being lost with the establishment of a new order:

> La Terra insino a oggi ha tenuto la prima sede del mondo, che è a dire il mezzo; e (come voi sapete) stando ella immobile, e senza altro affare che guardarsi all'intorno, tutti gli altri globi dell'universo [...]. E così, dimostrando tutte le cose di essere occupate in servizio suo, pareva che l'universo fosse a somiglianza di una corte; nella quale la Terra sedesse come in un trono; e gli altri globi dintorno, in modo di cortigiani di guardie, di servitori, attendesssero chi ad un ministero e chi a un altro. Sicchè, in effetto, la Terra si è creduta sempre di essere imperatrice del mondo. (Leopardi 432)

> [Up to now the earth has held first place in the universe, that is to say, the center; and, as you know, she has been sitting motionless without anything else to do but look around at all the other globes of the universe [...]. And, thus, everything proved to be at her services, and the universe looked like a court where the earth sat as if on a throne, and the other globes all around her, like courtiers, guards, and lackeys, tending to one job or another. As a result, the earth has always believed herself to be the empress of the universe. (Cecchetti 433)]

Here, Copernicus describes a vision of the world order that will be dissolved by his discovery. The earth, believing to be the centre of the universe, considers herself to be the empress of the cosmos and, importantly, is thus stable and unmoving. The unmoving character of the earth in the Ptolemaic structure of the universe presented here is key to understanding the disruption of the Copernican Revolution for the baroque and for modernist writers, like Pirandello. The order of the Ptolemaic universe leant security to the earth and the people on it; not only was the earth at the centre of the universe, it was the principle around which the cosmos was ordered. The dissolution of the vision of the Ptolemaic universe meant the dissolution of that security; when the earth's position was compromised, a finite order was transformed by the infinite and its old stability was inevitably left behind.

Copernicus also notes the understanding humans have of a similar position at the centre of the universe, because they live on earth:

> ciascheduno di noi, se ben fosse uno vestito di cenci e che non avesse un catuccio di pan duro da rodere, si è tenuto per certo di essere uno imperatore; [...] un imperatore dell'universo; un imperatore del sole, dei pianeti, di tutte le stele visibili e non visibili; e causa finale delle stele, dei pianeti, di vostra signoria illustrissima, e di tutte le cose. (Leopardi 432)
>
> [Each one of us, even if dressed in rags and with no more than a piece of hard bread to gnaw on, thinks of himself as an emperor; [...] an emperor of the universe, an emperor of the sun, of the planets, of all the stars, visible and invisible, and the ultimate cause of the stars, of the planets, of you illustrious Excellency, and of all things. (Cecchetti 433)]

Here, humans are not yet threatened by the knowledge of their smallness in relation to the vast universe; instead, even the most insignificant and powerless human, dressed in rags with only stale bread to eat, believes himself to be the emperor of the universe. As Copernicus notes, the threat of the change in the organization of the universe has significant consequences for both the personified earth and the humans that live on it; both will be left in their rags, robbed of any notions of their importance in the universe. Accordingly, Copernicus warns the Sun that the change

> sconvolgerà i gradi delle dignità delle cose, e l'ordine degli enti; scambierà i fini delle creature; e per tanto farà un grandissimo rivolgimento anche nella metafisica, anzi in tutto quello che tocca alla parte speculativa del sapere. E ne risulterà che gli uomini, se pur sapranno o vorranno discorrere sanamente, si troveranno essere tutt'altra roba da quello che sono stati fin qui, o che si hanno immaginato di essere. (Leopardi 434)
>
> [will upset all the steps on the ladder of the dignity of things and the order of beings; it will switch the purposes of creatures; and therefore it will cause an extremely great revolution in metaphysics as well – in fact, in everything that touches the speculative side of knowledge. And as a result, if men can or want to reason well, they'll discover that they are something completely different from what they have been until now or from what they have imagined themselves to be. (Cecchetti 435)]

Here, Copernicus outlines a grand reversal in the perception of the universe. Rather than humans perceiving themselves as emperors of the universe, they will become aware of their infinite smallness in a universe that is no longer organized around them by a logic with which they are familiar. On earth, even the order and meaning of things will be called into question, as what was once held to be the true is shown to be a misperception; all knowledge will be called into question. Here, the disjunction between the "visual appearance" and the "meaning" in the baroque should be noted. A reorganization of the universe includes a reorganization of the things on earth and, thus, in the absence of a

new and definitive underlying logic, a breakdown of the unified and self-sufficient sign occurs. This disruption, as explained by Leopardi, marks the importance of Copernicus for the baroque sensibility. Men, as Copernicus notes, will be shaken by the change in the structure of the universe as it makes them call into question their own place in it. Furthermore, the shift in the organization of the universe will not simply replace one closed system with another, but will blast open a finite vision of the universe with one that seems to hold an infinite number of worlds, thus making each world a relative world rather than a complete universe. Copernicus, endlessly aware of the consequences of such a change, asks what will happen to the human race when it realizes that it is not only no longer in the first position of one world, but its world is also no longer the only one:

> E qui vi starò a dire del povero genere umano, divenuto poco più che nulla già innanzi, in rispettto a questo mondo solo; a che si ridurrà egli quando scoppieranno fuori tante migliaiai di altri mondi, in maniera che non ci sarà una minutissima stelluzza della via lattea, che non abbia il suo. (Leopardi 438)
>
> [And at this point I won't tell you any more about the poor human race – which has already become almost nothing in relation to this present world. What will it become when so many thousands of other worlds burst forth so that the minutest star in the Milky Way won't be without one of her own? (Cecchetti 439)]

Here, Copernicus points out that once the Ptolemaic vision of the universe is dissolved, humans will not only be unable to consider themselves emperors of the universe, but that they will be further reduced as they realize that thousands of other worlds now exist. Thus, the position of power and greatness that the humans believe they hold is only relative, as the universe divides into thousands of worlds, each with its own organization, humans shrink and lose their previously held notions of importance. Here lies Copernicus' devastating blow to synthetic thinking.

Pirandello returns to the problem of the infinitely expanding universe and the infinitely shrinking human race in his essay on humour. In *L'umorismo*, Pirandello emphasizes the humourist's reflection and, by extension, analytic reason. With the striking image of a diabolical imp, Pirandello defines the humourist's reflection as that which dismantles the perceived, if untrue, vision of a whole:

> Tutte le finizioni dell'anima, tutte le creazioni del sentimento vedremo esser material dell'umorismo, vedremo cioè la riflessione diventar come un demonietto che smonta il congegno d'ogni imagine, d'ogni fantasma messo su dal sentimento; smontarlo per veder com'è fatto; scaricarne la molla, e tutto il congegno striderne, convulso. (Pirandello 146-147)
>
> [We shall see that all fictions of the spirit, all the creations of feeling are the basic material of humour; that is, we shall see that reflection becomes something resembling a diabolical imp that takes apart the mechanism of each image, of each phantasm produced by emotions; it takes it apart in order to see how it is made; it releases the mainspring, and the whole mechanism squeaks convulsively. (Illiano 124-125)]

Pirandello, who also notes that most works considered to be humour also give the impression of disorganization, here defines reflection as that which takes apart the image to see what motivates it, but this undoing cannot reinstate the whole. The parts of the dismantled whole are no longer hidden and thus, the squeak cannot be ignored. Similarly, allegory is that which attempts to reassemble the whole from the parts that are now visible. Later in the same essay, Pirandello returns to Copernicus – specifically as he is represented by Leopardi – who, according to Pirandello, did not so much dismantle the universe, but the notion humans had of it:

> Uno dei piú grandi umoristi, senza saperlo, fu Copernico, che smontò non propriamente la macchina dell'universo, ma l'orgogliosa imagine che ce n'eravamo fatta. (Pirandello 164)
>
> [One of the greatest humorists, though himself unaware of it, was Copernicus who, properly speaking, disassembled not the machine of the

> universe but the haughty image we had formed of it for ourselves. (Illiano 141-142)]

Copernicus is a humorist for Pirandello, because he dismantles the perspective of the machine of the universe to show what it really is. After Copernicus, the squeak of the mechanism cannot be ignored. Rather than replace a finite perspective of the world with a new finite perspective, Copernicus, the humorist, breaks the whole into parts. Thus, as in allegory, the whole is no longer unified, but in pieces. The squeak of the convulsing machine is the awareness of the parts that, while part of something that used to be whole, can no longer be gathered together to form that whole; the humorist, in this case Copernicus, makes the invisible parts visible. The "infernal mechanism" (142) of Galileo's telescope, another typically baroque topic, similarly expands the universe, while reducing man in size and importance:

> Mentre l'occhio guarda di sotto, dalla lente piú piccola, e vede grande ciò che la natura provvidenzialmente aveva voluto farci veder piccolo, l'anima nostra, che fa? salta a guardar di sopra, dalla lente piú grande, e il telescopio allora diventa un terribile strumento, che subissa la terra l'uomo e tutte le nostre glorie e grandezze. (Pirandello 164)
>
> [While our eye looks from below through the smaller lens, and sees as big all that nature providentially wanted for us to see small, what does our soul do? It jumps up to look from above through the larger lens, and as a consequence the telescope becomes a terrible instrument, which sinks the earth and man and all our glories and greatness. (Illiano 142)]

Here, Pirandello draws attention to the double nature of the telescope; it simultaneously makes what once looked small in its distance, as large as it is and in a grand reversal, makes man appear small in relation to the universe. The telescope, then, acts like the diabolical imp, revealing the particulars of the machine so that man can no longer convince himself of his privileged position as an emperor of the universe. Now, the general, the structure of the universe as a finite whole, is broken and exposed in its

particulars, making man not the emperor but, as Leopardi's Sun states, an invisible little creature.

The reversals discussed in Leopardi's "Il Copernico" and Pirandello's *L'umorismo*, also appear in Pirandello's novel, *Il fu Mattia Pascal*. Mattia Pascal's Post-Copernican world is one of contingency in which the definitive structure of the universe has been disassembled so that the world has become a squeaking and convulsing machine. The image of the finite world that becomes infinite appears in the novel when Signor Paleari asks Mattia, known to him as Adriano Meis, what would happen if during a marionette production of Sophocles' *Electra*, Orestes, the moment before he murders his mother and Aegisthus in vengeance, notices a hole in the paper sky of the set. Signor Paleari answers his own question by explaining that Orestes would become distracted by this hole, this break in the finite world, and would then become the contemplative Hamlet:

> Oreste sentirebbe ancora gl'impulsi della vendetta, vorrebbe seguirli con smaniosa passione, ma gli occhi, sul punto, gli andrebbero lí, a quello strappo, donde ora ogni sorta di mali influssi penetrebbero nella scena, e si sentirebbe cader le braccia. Oreste, insomma, diventerebbe Amleto. Tutta la differenza, signor Meis, fra la tragedia antica e la moderna consiste in ciò, creda pure: in un buco nel cielo di carta. (Pirandello 164-165)
>
> [Orestes would still feel his desire for vengeance, he would still want passionately to achieve it, but his eyes, at that point, would go straight to that hole, from which every kind of evil influence would then crowd the stage, and Orestes would feel suddenly helpless. In other words, Orestes would become Hamlet. There's the whole difference between ancient tragedy and modern, Signor Meis – believe me – a hole torn in a paper sky. (Weaver 145-146)]

Orestes becomes Hamlet because he is distracted. The Copernican hole in the paper sky reveals two similarly devastating characteristics of the world: first, the organizing structure thought to be stable and true is not and second, the structure, the limits of the

fixed world, were only paper. It is not only that the structure of the world has come undone, but that it was always at risk of being undone and yet, for centuries, people lived ignorantly believing in the eternal stability of the sky. Copernicus becomes the figure that rips the hole in the paper sky and transforms Orestes into Hamlet.

Hamlet, with his contemplative and melancholic character, becomes a prototype, appropriately baroque, of the isolated and pensive subject of modernist literature that Lukács describes in "The Ideology of Modernism." Distracted in a world where anything can mean anything else and the fixed structure of the cosmos has disintegrated, the pensive Hamlet hesitates before acting. Mattia Pascal is also a Hamlet figure. Marked by a wandering eye, evidence of his distraction, and transformed by a trip to the casino, only possible in a world of variables, Mattia Pascal is an example of the isolated and alienated subject of modernist literature. If the diabolical imp of reflection dissembles the machine to reveal its parts and thereby eliminates the possibility of reassembling the whole, the modernist subject of which Lukács writes, cannot dissociate itself from the particulars revealed by reflection. Here, the modernist subject is related back to its baroque prototype and yet another relation between the baroque and modernism is revealed. Allegory, again, arises as the literary device that expresses the position of this subject, because allegory asserts itself in moments in which the whole has been reduced to its particulars. If reflection dismantles a whole, allegory, given only its parts, attempts to reassemble it; however, as previously discussed, the reorganization of the whole will always be tentative and this provisional order will always betray its imperfection with a convulsive squeak. Pirandello, in *Il fu Mattia Pascal* and *L'umorismo*, by way of the Leopardian intertext, draws a connection between the alienated and isolated modernist

subject, obsessively distracted by the hole in the paper sky, and the baroque. Copernicus becomes the figure who initiates the rupture between the old and the new when he tears apart the cosmos and eliminates the possibility of a stable whole. Consequently, Orestes becomes Hamlet and Mattia Pascal, as a pensive subject, his modernist iteration.

III. Visions, Revisions, Indecisions: The Chandos Letter and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

In "The Letter of Lord Chandos," written and published in 1902, Hugo von Hofmannsthal also returns to the seventeenth century to present a world in crisis. Lord Chandos, responding to a letter written to him by Francis Bacon, attempts to describe his crisis of language in a world in which immanence and transcendence have been separated. Chandos recalls his previous confidence in the interconnectedness of things, the connectedness of history, and his own participation in the universal harmony of the world. Chandos also remembers his plan to write a book that would connect all elements of the world and that he once "conceived the whole of existence as one great unit" (Hofmannsthal 132). This project was to be called *Nosce te ipsum*, to reflect his faith in his own position in the universal harmony of the world. He explains:

> everywhere I was at the centre of it, never suspecting mere appearance: at other times I divined that all was allegory and that each creature was a key to all the others; and I felt myself the one capable of seizing each by the handle and unlocking as many of the others as were ready to yield. This explains the title which I had intended to give to this encyclopedic book. (Hofmannsthal 132-133)

Here, Chandos reflects on a time of totality, before a hole was torn in what was revealed to be a paper sky. At this moment in the past, Chandos still felt himself to be, in the

language of Leopardi, an emperor of the universe. As an emperor of the universe, Chandos could confidently and comprehensively interpret the world. He does not suspect that anything could be "mere appearance," because at this moment there is not a separation between material appearance and transcendent significance. Language, here, is still intact. Not only did Chandos have faith in the interconnectedness of things, but he also had faith in language's ability to express those connections; thus, he could plan to write a book that would reveal the key to the interconnectedness of things and proclaim the fullness of the world. At this moment, his allegory is not of the baroque; instead, it is an allegory of revelation like that of Dante's *Paradiso.* Furthermore, to write this comprehensive book was also to know himself and thus to implicate himself in the interconnectedness of things. The inability of Chandos to write this book, however, suggests that not only has his confidence in the interconnectedness of the world and language's ability to express that interconnectedness deteriorated, but also that he no longer knows himself.

Chandos' crisis of language and self is the product of looking backwards through the telescope. Gradually, Chandos loses his ability to comprehend the universal harmony of the world and the key to the allegory of it slowly recedes from him. The structure of the world is no longer explicable and clear; thus, while Chandos could once "unlock" the structure of the allegory to understand its logic, he is now bound to guess at what the key may be. Chandos writes to Bacon of this allegorical shift: "To me the mysteries of faith have been condensed into a lofty allegory which arches itself over the fields of my life like a radiant rainbow, ever remote, ever prepared to recede should it occur to me to rush toward it and wrap myself into the folds of its mantle" (Hofmannsthal 133). Here, the

allegory of revelation escapes Chandos. He explains that the underlying logic of the world, which he had once thought he grasped, has receded from him. Now, like a brilliant rainbow, it teases him from afar, warning him that he will never be able to grasp it with such confidence again. At this point, Chandos has entered a Post-Copernican world, in which he can no longer confidently claim his position as emperor of the universe. In this new position, immanence and transcendence have been separated; the meaning of things in the world is no longer fully immanent, but recedes, like the untouchable rainbow. This disruption of the harmony of the world results in a crisis of language, as Chandos confesses, "I have lost completely the ability to think or to speak of anything coherently" (Hofmannsthal 133). Rather than comprehending the universal immediately, Chandos is confronted with its parts. Like the humorist who, through reflection, dismantles the whole to make its parts apparent, Chandos sees the dismantled world and reflects upon it:

> My mind compelled me to view all things occurring in such conversations from an uncanny closeness. As once, through a magnifying glass, I had seen a piece of skin on my little finger look like a field full of holes and furrows, so I now perceived human beings and their actions. I no longer succeeded in comprehending them with the simplifying eye of habit. For me everything disintegrated into parts, those parts again into parts; no longer would anything let itself be encompassed by one idea. (Hofmannsthal 134)

In this rich statement, Chandos sees close up and in its particularity what from a distance appears unified. His own body, when examined closely, becomes strange; the skin of his finger is transformed into a field. As Chandos loses his ability to write *Nosce te ipsum*, he becomes a stranger to himself; here, even his body becomes foreign and unknown. Furthermore, other people become strange to him. Just as he no longer knows himself, he no longer understands those around him. What was once a unifying eye that could connect the world is now a simplifying eye. Once immanence has been separated from

transcendence, the ability to unify all the particulars under a stable idea appears as a simplification. This is not to say that the world has lost its meaning for Chandos. On the contrary, "everything [...] has a meaning" (Hofmannsthal 138), but this meaning is no longer inherent and can no longer be expressed in a language which Chandos knows. Chandos admits to Bacon that the language in which he could not only write, but also think, is not a language with which he is familiar. He explains it is "a language none of whose words is known to me, a language in which inanimate things speak to me and wherein I may one day have to justify myself before an unknown judge" (Hofmannsthal 141). This language is one which could reunite immanence and transcendence and reunify the world; however, this is also the language of the receding rainbow, its structure is unknown and out of reach for Chandos.

If we recall that for Lukács the subject of modernist literature is alienated from itself and the world that surrounds it, Chandos appears as the modernist subject *par excellence*. Lukács describes the development of this modernist subject in a world that can no longer be fully and confidently interpreted. It bears repeating that Lukács claims that "[if] reality cannot be understood [...], then the individual's subjectivity – alone in the universe, reflecting only itself – takes on an equally incomprehensible and horrific character" (1137). Chandos suffers from this *condition humaine*, as the world becomes something that he cannot interpret and as language loses its ability to express the interconnectedness of things, Chandos becomes alienated from himself. Thus, he writes to Bacon as a stranger, rather than a friend and claims, "Hardly do I know whether I am still the same person to whom your precious letter is addressed" (Hofmannsthal 129). Left alone in a world, which he can no longer interpret, a stranger to himself and to

others, Chandos, like Hamlet becomes a pensive subject. Now, distracted by the particularity of everything and unable to unify the parts into the whole, Chandos is left to reflect upon the fragments. Thus, a grand reversal occurs and what is conventionally accepted as higher up in the hierarchy of the universe is supplanted by what is conventionally thought of as lower. Chandos describes his strange state, "[in] these moments an insignificant creature – a dog, a rat, a beetle, a crippled appletree, a lane winding over the hill, a moss-covered stone, mean more to me than the most beautiful abandoned mistress of the happiest night" (Hofmannsthal 137-138). The hierarchy of things has been dissolved so that a single and banal thing, notably inhuman, a dog or a stone, can produce an overwhelming, but particular, sensation. It is also worth noting that the objects that seem to please Chandos the most – for example, the dog and the stone – are conventional symbols of melancholia and thus suggest that Chandos, in his isolation, occupies a specifically melancholic position. This melancholic position is also related to the baroque sensibility and to the twentieth century reconsiderations of it that are discussed here. Baroque melancholia will be considered in this chapter with reference to Gadda and again in the third chapter with reference to Leonard Cohen.

"The Letter of Lord Chandos," shares many of the characteristics that were considered as defining features of the baroque. Not only does Hofmannsthal set his fictional letter in the seventeenth century and address it to the famous essayist, Francis Bacon, he also develops parallels between the twentieth century in which he is writing and the seventeenth century to which he is referring. In "The Letter of Lord Chandos," the reader is faced with an alienated subject in an unstable world. The hierarchical structure of this world and the interconnectedness of things within it have been lost to

Lord Chandos; instead, he is faced with parts that break again and again into more parts. Importantly, the letter is addressed to Francis Bacon, who was a promoter of the inductive method of reasoning. It is by way of inductive reason that Chandos loses his confidence in the interconnectedness of things. Chandos had been used to jumping from the particular to the universal quickly, but, forced to look at the objects of the world closely through Bacon's inductive reasoning, Chandos loses his ability to quickly find connections in the world. As the interconnectedness of things and the logic of that interconnectedness recede, the peculiar allegory of the baroque, which Benjamin elaborates upon in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, asserts itself once more. Immanence is separated from transcendence and from the particular one must search for the general.

T.S. Eliot's interest in the seventeenth century, as established in his Cambridge lectures and essays on the Metaphysical poets, is well known. Eliot's poetry, however, picks up on some of the themes of the baroque as they have been discussed here. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Eliot presents another character, like Lord Chandos and Mattia Pascal, who seems to have lost his ability to connect the particulars of the world and who has thus become a modernist subject like those of which Lukács writes. A defining feature of this subject of modernist literature is an emphasis on abstract potentiality, the infinite "possibilities in a man's mind" (Lukács 1129), over concrete potentiality, the interaction "between the individual's subjectivity and objective reality" (Lukács 1130). In other words, as man's nature is redefined in modernist literature from a social nature to an isolated and interiorized one, abstract potentiality, with its infinite possibilities makes action – the relation between the subject and the objective world –

impossible. Thus, the modern subject, like Hamlet, distracted by the hole that leaks the infinite into a closed system, is caught up in possibilities and unable to act. The ideology of modernism, with its emphasis on abstract potentiality, conflates abstract and concrete potentiality so that the subject's interaction with the objective world is one of isolation. The subject is capable of doing everything, but in its immersion in abstract potentiality does nothing. Lukács explains: "[if] the 'human condition' – man as a solitary being, incapable of meaningful relationships – is identified with reality itself, the distinction between abstract and concrete potentiality becomes null and void. The categories tend to merge" (1130). This merging of abstract and concrete potentialities is also related to a disintegration of reality and, as a consequence, "[m]an is reduced to a sequence of unrelated experiential fragments; he is as inexplicable to others as to himself" (Lukács 1131). As discussed above, this is the condition of Lord Chandos. As Chandos loses his assurance of the outside world and his mind concentrates on the infinite possibilities of the universe, he also loses his ability to know both himself and others. Lukács relates the disintegration of the outside world and the subject's fragmented relation to that world directly to allegory, specifically to the allegory of the baroque according to Benjamin. Thus, as mentioned above, "[a]llegory is that aesthetic genre which lends itself *par excellence* to a description of man's alienation from objective reality" (Lukács 1138). Furthermore, as Benjamin notes, in this disintegrated world, hierarchies and orders are reversed so that anything may mean anything else and thus, "the profane world is both elevated and devalued" (Benjamin 175). This is precisely the crisis of Lord Chandos; as the material world becomes merely immanent and he becomes responsible for creating its order, a rock is elevated while the mistress of the night is devalued.

"The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock," picks up on themes established in Lukács and Benjamin, and elaborated in "The Letter of Lord Chandos." Prufrock is a modern, pensive subject to which the world has disintegrated into fragments and for which action has become impossible. Prufrock describes the experience of the pensive subject that is reduced to experiential fragments and that is a stranger both to itself and to the people it encounters:

> There will be time, there will be time
> To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
> There will be time to murder and create,
> And time for all the works and days of hands
> That lift and drop a question on your plate;
> Time for you and time for me,
> And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
> And for a hundred visions and revisions,
> Before the taking of a toast and tea. (Eliot 26-34)

The preparation of a face to meet faces suggests a fragmented and inconsistent subject. Here, the subject is reduced to merely a face that has the potential to change from moment to moment. There is no impression that meaningful and lasting relationships can be forged in this world; instead, it seems that relationships in this world are merely appearances. The subject is inexplicable to itself and to the faces that it meets. Moreover, Eliot does not describe a single individual who occupies the position of a fragmented and changing subject. By describing a face that meets other faces, Eliot suggests that everyone is in the same position and that this changing appearance is, as Lukács claims, a *condition humaine*. This quotation ends with an example of abstract potentiality that becomes the subject's way of interacting with the world and an example of the profane world being both elevated and devalued. Prufrock recedes into his mind as he considers his indecisions; he seems incapable of action because each vision is subsequently revised.

Here, Prufrock becomes an example of the modernist subject of which Lukács writes; caught up in the infinite possibilities, the revisions of visions, Prufrock can hardly become a man of action. Moreover, the last line of this passage deflates the gravity of Prufrock's indecision; he is only deciding to have toast and tea. This seemingly banal activity is elevated by the thought and attention Prufrock gives it.

Prufrock repeats his indecision when he wonders about his position in the universe:

> Do I dare
> Disturb the universe?
> In a minute there is time
> For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse. (Eliot 45-48)

Here, contrary to Prufrock's indecision over toast, the question whether or not to disturb the universe is a question seemingly worthy of hesitation. This question and its hesitation assume that Prufrock is in a position that he could disturb the universe. This would be a position that again recalls Leopardi's "Il Copernico" and man's belief that he is the emperor of the universe. This privileged position is, however, again deflated later in Eliot's poem when Prufrock uses the same language when considering if he should eat a peach: "Do I dare eat a peach?" (122). With equivalent gravity given to the question of whether or not to eat a peach, the question of disturbing the universe seems ridiculous. In Prufrock's world, the hierarchy has been dismantled so that all actions are equally grand and impossible. If Hamlet has been considered a model for the distracted and pensive subject of modernist literature, Prufrock does him one better, claiming "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be" (Eliot 111). This line should not be read as a denial of the similarities between Hamlet and Prufrock, but a suggestion that Prufrock is a type of extreme Hamlet; he is not *even* Hamlet. In other words, even Hamlet has more of an

ability to act and to change the world than does Prufrock. Prufrock is an example of the modernist, pensive subject who is disconnected from himself and from other people. He is incapable of action and, in a world in which the hierarchies have been dissolved, Prufrock, like Chandos, elevates the banal and devalues what seems fantastic.

IV. An Allegorical Coin: Melancholia in Carlo Emilio Gadda

Until now, I have primarily discussed the ways in which the characteristics of the allegory of the baroque are taken up in modernist writers like Pirandello, Hofmannsthal, and Eliot. Related to the discussion of allegory in the baroque *Trauerspiel* and a defining feature of the baroque sensibility is the concept of melancholia. Writing on Baudelaire in "Central Park," Benjamin describes a coin he imagines to have been given to the French poet: "On its face it showed the figure of Death; on its reverse, Melancholia sunk into brooding meditation. This was the coin of allegory" (162). It would seem, then, that allegory is comprised of death and melancholia and that a defining characteristic of melancholia is meditation. Of course, allegory is always involved in contemplation, as the attempt to find a signified that is not contained within the signifier relies on contemplation. Furthermore, Pensky argues that while it is possible to imagine melancholia without allegory, "allegory arises from melancholia" (117). In other words, allegory is the work of a melancholic mind that searches to find a way to unify the fragments of the world. The image of Baudelaire's allegorical coin – which links death, melancholia, and meditation with allegory – is relevant to a discussion of the resurgence of allegory in modernism. Here, I will discuss the relationship between melancholia,

allegory, and the seventeenth and twentieth centuries with particular reference to Carlo Emilio Gadda's novel, *La cognizione del dolore* [*Acquaintance with Grief*].

First, let us return to the quotation from Dombroski at the beginning of this chapter. Dombroski claims that if Gadda may be called baroque, it is only because the same can be said of the world around him and that his writing represents the baroque quality of reality. The baroque quality of Gadda's world is not unlike the relationship between the subject and the object world that has been discussed in Pirandello, Hofmannsthal, and Eliot above; the subject of Gadda's writings comes face to face with a reality in which objects have become merely immanent and therefore the order and the meaning of the world is no longer clear. It is the merely immanent world that is at the heart of Gonzalo's melancholia in Gadda's novel. Like Chandos and Prufrock, Gonzalo is unable to determine a hierarchy in the object world and it is "for him the source of confusion. [...] the subject has difficulty focusing on the object; it cannot establish the correct distance from which to view the object; it is unable to establish a criterion of relevance" (Dombroski 14). Like the modernist subject of which Lukács writes, here Dombroski notes the dissolution of the object world and the multiplicity of positions that the subject is forced to consider. Furthermore, as in the allegories of the baroque, there is an absence of hierarchy in Gonzalo's position in Gadda's novel. Gonzalo, in the position of the interpreter of the object world is unable to formulate and secure a hierarchy and thus, he lacks a "criterion of relevance" that would help him exist socially in that world.

Gadda shares with his protagonist a discomfort in a world that seems insecure and devoid of immanent meaning. Reflecting on Gadda's diary of World War I, "Giornale di guerra e di prigionia" in the collection of Gadda's writing, *Opere di Carlo Emilio Gadda*,

Dombroski writes, "[t]he world is unstable, and largely unbearable, because it does not conform to the ideal – hence the subject's alienation" (22). The anger expressed in Gadda's diary certainly points to an autobiographical connection with Gonzalo, who is irreconcilably angry at the world around him. In his *Giornale*, Gadda expresses his frustration with the disorder of his fellow soldiers and the chaos of the world that surrounds him:

> Quand'è che i miei luridi compratrioti di tutte le classi, di tutti ceti, impareranno a tener ordinato il proprio tavolino di lavoro? A non ammonticchiarvi le carte d'ufficio insieme alle lettere della mantenuta, insieme al cestino della merenda, insieme al ritratto della propria nipotina, insieme al giornale, insieme all'ultimo romanzo, all'orario delle ferrovie, alle ricevute del calzolaio, alla carta per pulirsi il culo, al cappello sgocciolante, alle forbici delle unghie, al portafoglio privato, al calendario fantasia? (574)
>
> [When will my filthy compatriots from every class and social group learn to keep their work table in order? When will they learn not to pile up official papers together with letters from their mistresses, together with picnic baskets, together with photographs of their nieces, newspapers, latest novels, train schedules, shoe repair receipts, paper with which they wipe their asses, rain soaked caps, fingernail clippers, wallets, pin-up calendars? (Dombroski 24)]

Here, the hierarchy of the object world is surely lost; all order is void in a pile that does not distinguish between toilet paper and official war documents. This world, in which the most base toilet paper and the most noble war papers can be mixed up together is a world in which a natural order has been lost. Gadda's horror and frustration at this intermixing motivates his anger, an anger which reappears in Gonzalo.

In this world of misplaced objects, Gonzalo suffers from melancholia. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud distinguishes between the two concepts, noting that mourning entails the loss of an object that is replaced with another object, while melancholia entails the identification of the ego with the object that is assumed to be lost.

In melancholia, Freud explains, "the free libido was not displaced onto another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object" (586). In melancholia, the loss of the object is displaced onto the ego so that the ego becomes like an object and, therefore, at risk of being lost. The disintegration of Gonzalo in his melancholia is a result of this object loss that is identified with the ego itself. Dombroski also notes the affect melancholia has upon Gonzalo, "[a]ffected by melancholia, the protagonist's mind wanders in pursuit of things he perceives as lost, that belong to the Other, and that, although real, have no meaning" (76). In other words, Gonzalo, perceiving the world as full of lost objects that he cannot possess, suffers from melancholia.

Gonzalo's melancholia is evident in his "brooding meditation" and withdrawal from the world into isolation. Battastina, explaining Gonzalo's behaviour to the doctor, notes his isolation, "[a] furia di viver solo... sprangato in camera, a leggere... a fantasticare..." (95) ["[l]iving alone like that... barred into his room... reading... daydreaming..." (Weaver 57)]. Gonzalo cuts himself off from the world, which always succeeds in disappointing him and withdraws into his own world of meditation. Gonzalo's melancholic state is diagnosed by the doctor as "una nuova crisi di sfiducia nella vita" (107) ["a new seizure of lack of faith in life" (Weaver 69)]. Gonzalo's disappointment in the object world and his subsequent recession into isolation recall Benjamin's description of the melancholiac in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama.* Using Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia* as an example of the baroque's melancholic character, Benjamin writes that in the engraving:

> the utensils of active life are lying around unused on the floor, as objects of contemplation. This engraving anticipates the baroque in many respects. In it the knowledge of the introvert and the investigations of the scholar are merged as intimately as in the men of the baroque. The Renaissance explores the universe; the baroque explores libraries. Its meditations are devoted to books. (140)

In Dürer's engraving, the winged finger is bound to earth as the objects of the world lose their use value and become points of contemplation. In this quotation, Benjamin draws a parallel between this figure of contemplation and the baroque. In a world that is no longer fully immanent, the baroque figure recedes into a melancholic contemplation of its objects. While the figures of the Renaissance were free to explore the skies, the figures of the baroque stay close to the earth, inquiring for knowledge of its objects. Like Dürer's figure of melancholia, Gonzalo studies the world through its objects; he isolates himself with his books and is constantly disappointed by the failure of the world to live up to the ideal for which he had hoped. This melancholic position, associated with the baroque, is also the position of the modernist subject; the object world loses its immanent meaning for the subject and it, like Prufrock, is forced to consider all the possibilities of the world. This position of brooding meditation in an unstable world is the position of the melancholic and of Gonzalo. Moreover, Gonzalo's melancholic state is the *condition humaine* of the modernist subject. Like Mattia Pascal, Lord Chandos, and J. Alfred Prufrock, Gonzalo recedes into himself and becomes an isolated and pensive subject. Gonzalo does not act, except in moments of uncontrollable rage caused by his disappointment in a world that appears lost, disparate, and without meaning. This is the position of the modernist subject who, sharing a spiritual constitution with the men of the baroque, recedes into melancholia.

This chapter has aimed to provide a survey of the use of the term baroque in the twentieth century and then to argue that a specific baroque sensibility can be found in some of the twentieth century's most prominent modernists. Besides marking a specific moment in European artistic history, the term baroque also refers to a sensibility that can be found again in modernism. Critics and theorists including Benjamin and Wellek have acknowledged this sensibility and its importance for writers in the early twentieth century. Confronted with a disrupted world and remembering a former harmony that no longer seems possible, the writers of the twentieth century discussed here adopt a baroque sensibility in response to the separation of immanence from transcendence. Eliot's claim that the seventeenth century better expressed the spiritual constitution of the twentieth than the eighteenth or the nineteenth acknowledges the similarities in the sensibilities of the baroque and the twentieth century. For these modernists, the baroque appears as a moment of rupture in which a similar worldview to that of the twentieth century can be found. Thus, the "peculiar affinity" that Eliot identifies between the seventeenth century and the twentieth is an affinity in the subject's relation to the world in response to its longing for a transcendent immanence that is no longer evident. In the next two chapters, I turn my attention to a similar affinity in Canadian modernism with the examples of A.J.M. Smith and Leonard Cohen. The relationship that Smith and Cohen have with their object world suggests that they too share a baroque sensibility and, moreover, that the roots of Canadian modernism can be found deep within this "peculiar affinity" European modernists felt for the baroque.

Chapter Two:

"What do they say? Or seem to?": A.J.M. Smith's Allegorical Landscapes

"To the metaphysical poet, indeed, nature possesses a philosophic unity. But it is a unity which, like that of the scientist and that of the mystic, is not one with the unity of common sense" (A.J.M. Smith, "A Note on Metaphysical Poetry" 61).

"Such a mind searches for another realm, or, at least, an inherent order in the chaotic world of things" (Compton 95).

I. A Metaphysical Mind

In a letter written to Desmond Pacey in 1957, A.J.M. Smith, an "initiator" of modernism in Canada,[4] claims that his poetry has always been a combination of "Metaphysical poetry and pure poetry" (Pacey 203). Smith defines pure poetry in "A Rejected Preface to *New Provinces*" (1936) as "objective, impersonal, and in a sense timeless and absolute" (172). With his short statement to Pacey, Smith condenses his greatest literary influences, the metaphysical poetry of the seventeenth century and the harder, more concrete verse, he found in modernists such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. For Smith, as for other modernists, these two strains of poetry are not mutually exclusive, but in fact work together to create the modernist poetry in which he placed the highest

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[4] In the introduction to *The Complete Poems of A.J.M. Smith*, Brian Trehearne notes that Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski "locate Smith pointedly among the 'initiators' [...] who *called for* a Canadian modernist poetry rather than practicing it themselves" (xxvi). While Dudek's and Gnarowski's accusation that Smith does not write modernist verse should be disputed, his commitment to importing characteristics of international modernism through his own poetry and through his anthology selections and critical reviews make Smith an integral part of the development of modernism in Canada and confirm his position as an initiator of the movement.

value. In the introduction to *The Complete Poems of A.J.M. Smith*, Brian Trehearne, Smith's most recent and comprehensive critic, notes that in his criticism, Smith began to use the word "metaphysical" as an indicator of a modernist aesthetic, "almost [...] as a synonym for modernist style generally" (xxviii). Furthermore, in *A.J.M. Smith: Canadian Metaphysical*, Anne Compton explains that for Smith, metaphysical poetry is necessary in the development of modernist poetry: "Smith described modernism as a two-stage development; first came the shifts in subject-matter and diction, and then came the deeper psychological shift. Smith placed the 'turning back' to the Metaphysicals in the bridge position between the two stages" (67).[5] Here, we can think of the bridge that leads to a psychological shift as an adoption of the baroque sensibility that was discussed in the first chapter. For Smith, the two types of poetry he acknowledges in his letter to Pacey are complementary in that the modernists find in the English Metaphysicals characteristics of the poetry they hope to write. Smith's claim that his poetry belongs to both the metaphysical and the pure strains of poetry summarizes his position towards poetry in general and the traditions into which he aimed to insert his own work. This chapter will examine Smith's participation in the modernist admiration of the Metaphysicals and the ways in which Walter Benjamin's notion of baroque allegory can be used to understand Smith's nature poetry and his stance against Romanticism.

Smith's interest in the poetics of both the Metaphysicals and the modernists began in the 1920s while he was studying at McGill University. Trehearne notes that it was T.S. Eliot and his essay, "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), that sparked Smith's interest in the English Metaphysicals. Trehearne argues that it is unlikely that Smith's metaphysical

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[5] Here, Compton is summarizing Smith's argument in his essay, "Contemporary Poetry" (1926), published in *The McGill Fortnightly Review*.

interests were at first the result of Eliot's poetry, because Smith's first allusions to the Metaphysicals in poems such as "When Thought of Her" (1923) and "To His Coy Mistress" (1923) appear before the first allusions to Eliot's "metaphysical" poetry in 1925[6] (xxxix). Smith left McGill to pursue a PhD at the University of Edinburgh under the supervision of Herbert J.C. Grierson, whose annotated anthologies, *Poems of John Donne* (1912) and *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* (1921), also contributed to the revival of the English Metaphysicals in the twentieth century. In 1931, Smith completed his dissertation, entitled *Studies in the Metaphysical Poets of the Anglican Church in the Seventeenth Century.* His interest in the seventeenth century, which his doctoral thesis makes explicit, has been well documented by his best critics, including Anne Compton in her book-length study, *A.J.M. Smith: Canadian Metaphysical*, and Brian Trehearne in his "Introduction" to *The Complete Poems of A.J.M. Smith.* Compton notes Smith's conscious participation in the metaphysical trend amongst the modernists, claiming "[his] decision to study the Metaphysicals did not arise in a vacuum; absorbed in the excitement of modernism, Smith caught the modernist's enthusiasm for the Metaphysicals" (77).

While the metaphysical trend among modernist poets may have been the catalyst for Smith's admiration of the English Metaphysicals, his extensive study of their work and his prolonged interest in them throughout his career is a result of more than a belated participation in a trend. Compton argues that "Smith is metaphysical not because he achieves what any one of [the Metaphysicals] achieved, but because he is linked to

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[6] Trehearne cites "Nightfall [I]" and "The Woman in the Samovar," both published in 1925, as the first examples of poems which allude explicitly to Eliot's "'metaphysical' verse" ("Introduction" xxxix).

several, and because, at a deeper level, he is concerned with the timeless problems that concerned them" (84-85). Smith shares with the Metaphysicals a desire to bring disparate objects together and to find the principle of order that can be drawn out by placing such dissimilar objects in relation with one another. Writing on John Donne in "The Metaphysical Poets," Eliot notes, "when a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary [...] in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes" (219). On the level of poetic devices, the metaphysical conceit demonstrates the poet's amalgamation of disparate images and concepts into new wholes. Samuel Johnson calls the metaphysical conceit "a combination of dissimilar images" (qtd. Compton 87), but these dissimilar images are, according to James Smith, "plausible, satisfying, natural" (qtd. Compton 83) and bring an idea to illumination. Smith is drawn to this ability of the Metaphysicals to connect distinct and disparate images and to bring them into unison through thought. In his dissertation, Smith explains the metaphysical drive to find similarity in the dissimilar. Using Donne as his example, Smith writes:

> The great apostle of common sense and correctness saw such poetry as a *discordia concors*, a combination of dissimilar images, the revelation of hidden resemblances in things apparently unlike. The metaphysical poet submits his world to the dissector's knife, he reduces substance to its elements, and these to their atomies. To seek original correspondence, to collect and assemble strangely related ideas, to make a minute examination of the inner similarity of things: this, according to Johnson, is the purpose of the metaphysical poet. (*Studies* 2-3)

Furthermore, according to Smith, this emphasis on connecting the disconnected requires the reader to "think first and feel afterwards" (*Studies* 20). Frank Warnke describes the metaphysical conceit as the poetic device "which implies that all sensuous appearance is illusion and that the transcendent experience can be evoked only in intellectual terms"

(28). Smith's affinity with the Metaphysicals is a result of a shared intellectualization of images and the desire for new wholes to be rendered through the use of the intellect. Borrowing from Wallace Stevens, Leon Edel describes this desire as Smith's "rage for order" (201). Through an examination of Benjamin's discussion of the allegory of the baroque in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, this chapter will further explore this rage for order, which could be rephrased as an allegorical impulse. Furthermore, it is through this allegorical impulse that we can see evidence of Smith's baroque sensibility.

II. A Rage for Order: *"'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;/All just supply, and all relation"* (Donne, *An Anatomy of the World:* "The First Anniversary" 213-214).

The concern with finding unity and meaning between and through disparate images, found in both the poetry of the Metaphysicals and Smith, is an allegorical concern. In his lectures on John Donne for Cambridge Trinity College's Clark Lecture Series in 1926, Eliot identifies the allegorical impulse in Donne and defines allegory as "a mode of expression of a mind passionately eager to find order and significance in the world" (*Varieties* 98). If, as discussed in the previous chapter, Eliot identifies something particularly modernist in the Metaphysical poets, so too does Benjamin's examination of the turn to allegory in the *Trauerspiel* of the seventeenth century betray an implicit interest in modernism. Here, it bears repeating that in "The Ideology of Modernism," Georg Lukács finds a theory of modernist art in Benjamin's discussion of allegory in his book on baroque drama. Lukács writes that Benjamin "uses the Baroque drama to

criticize modernism, imputing the characteristics of the latter to the former. In so doing, Benjamin became the first critic to attempt a philosophical analysis of the aesthetic paradox underlying modernist art" (1139). Lukács reads in Benjamin's discussion of the baroque use of allegory, a theory of modernist art which for Lukács is marked by man's alienation and isolation and as a result, "[m]an is reduced to a sequence of unrelated experiential fragments; he is as inexplicable to others as to himself" (1131). Allegory, then, is implicated in modernist literature because, as Lukács claims, it "is that aesthetic genre which lends itself *par excellence* to a description of man's alienation from objective reality" (1138).

Benjamin, drawing upon quotations from Friedrich Creuzer and Goethe, defines allegory by way of comparison to the romantic symbol in an attempt to rehabilitate the *Trauerspiel* and suggesting that allegory needs to be rescued. Benjamin attempts to accomplish this redemption of allegory by suggesting that it needs to be freed from its conceptions in Romanticism, which tend to favour the symbol over allegory. For Creuzer, allegory "signifies merely a general concept, or an idea which is different from itself"; while, in the symbol there is "momentary totality" (qtd. Benjamin 164-165). Goethe's well-known definitions of allegory and the symbol present allegory as a process of seeking and symbol as a way of seeing:

> There is a great difference between a poet's seeking the particular from the general and his seeing the general in the particular. The former gives rise to allegory, where the particular serves only as an instance or example of the general; the latter, however is the true nature of poetry: the expression of the particular without any thought of, or reference to, the general. Whoever grasps the particular in all its vitality also grasps the general, without being aware of it, or only becoming aware of it at a late stage. (qtd. Benjamin 161)

In his essay, "The Allegorical Caesura: Actuality and History of Allegory," Rainer Nägele elaborates upon the differences between allegory and the symbol in Goethe's definition:

> The poet who does not search for but 'sees the general in the particular' claims for himself the fullness of an immediately accessible presence. In the contrast between 'searching for' (*suchen*) and 'seeing' (*schauen*), the allegorician appears as a being with a lack and allegory appears as a form that is excluded from the fullness of meaning. It must look for meaning, and in searching for it, it constantly defers meaning. (89)

Allegory is that mode of representation that is born from a lack, from a "dissatisfaction with the literal appearance" (Nägele 82). Both Creuzer and Goethe point to the disjunction, what Nägele calls both a temporal and spatial "abyss that opens up between the signifier and the signified" (83), in allegory. While the symbol would unite the particular and the general, allegory is defined by the discontinuity between the two.

As discussed in some detail in the first chapter, the break between "visual appearance" and "meaning" that characterizes allegory is also a defining feature of the baroque sensibility. Paul de Man explains that the symbol, like the synecdoche, "is always part of the totality that it represents" (191), while allegory refers "to a meaning that it does not itself constitute" (189). In other words, while the symbol would contain the referent, allegory is reduced to being a conveyor or mediator between signifier and signified through which meaning is deferred rather than contained. In his clarification of the differences between allegory and the symbol, Nägele explains that, while the symbol, according to Goethe, "transforms appearance into an idea" (qtd. 88) by way of synthetic reason, allegory, again according to Goethe, "transforms appearance into a concept" (qtd. 88) by way of analytic reason. Thus, while the symbol has a synthetic and seemingly immediate relationship with its image, allegory is once more restricted to a mode of

searching and deferral. With the association between analytic reason and allegory, the position of the allegorist becomes like that of the curious boy who is the model for analytic reason. The boy, "admiring the butterfly [and] trying to solve the enigma [...] cuts up the butterfly and thus destroys the beauty" (Nägele 90). The allegorist is in a similar position of dissection as he attempts to understand the whole through its parts. Again, with this association with analytic reason, the disparity between signifier and signified arises to define allegory, as signifier and signified cannot be united in it. It is precisely in this disjunction between material appearance and transcendent significance that the fulfillment of allegory is put at risk, for what happens if in the poet's search for the particular in the general, the concept that would unite the two is lost? Moreover, what if the concept that would guide the poet in his search, was never known? In a world in which immanence has been separated from transcendence, the poet finds himself in a position of insecurity. In Smith's case, the response is to adopt a baroque sensibility and relationship with the object world.

The mode of allegory peculiar to the baroque is the allegory in which the concept that would order the world has been lost. As a result, the model of allegory becomes one in which "[a]ny person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else" (Benjamin 175). The consequence of anything meaning "absolutely anything else" is that nothing can ever be said to be itself and, as a consequence, things may only be placed in tentative configurations. Related to the outcome of anything having the ability to mean anything else is Benjamin's statement that "[t]he baroque knows no eschatology; and for that very reason it possesses no mechanism by which all earthly things are gathered in together and exalted before being consigned to their end" (66). In the allegory of the

baroque, and in modernism, the mechanism that gathers and orders is not *the* mechanism of the moment of Revelation, but a provisional and tentative mechanism. Benjamin later elaborates that the baroque, in its transition to a secular age, "sees the hierarchical strain of the middle ages assume authority in a world which was denied access to a beyond" (79). The denial of direct access to a beyond results in attempts to order the world that can only culminate in the attempt; unlike the allegories of the Middle Ages in which the universe may be put in an order through relations from earthly object to divine being, the allegories of the baroque cannot transcend "the seal of the all-too-earthly" (Benjamin 180). The transcendence of objects within the allegory of the baroque does not "come from within" (Benjamin 180); any attempt to order the world can only produce an image of an ordered world or an image of transcendence, but cannot culminate in the thing – the ordered world or transcendence – itself. Furthermore, as each object can mean anything else and that meaning can only ever be tentative, objects appear as ruins, rather than united wholes that constitute their own meaning. In other words, as a result of the separation of immanence and transcendence, material objects appear merely immanent and unable to constitute their own meaning. In allegory, things can only gain meaning by being put in configuration and through that configuration, redeemed; however, in the allegory of the baroque, because the hierarchical strain of the Middle Ages no longer holds, the hierarchy can only amount to what is constituted by the agency of the interpreter.

In *Studies in the Metaphysical Poets of the Anglican Church in the Seventeenth Century*, Smith attributes the shift between the unity of the Middle Ages and the more multivalent world of the seventeenth century to the scientific discoveries – including

Copernicus' discovery that it is the earth that moves around the sun, rather than the sun that moves around the earth – that put the former world view into question. Smith explains that while "Dante could give poetic form to the consistent world-view of St. Thomas Aquinas [...] by the time Donne wrote, this had been strangely disrupted" (*Studies* 15), which meant the Metaphysicals, "unlike Lucretius and Dante, were unable to express a unified philosophical system" (*Studies* 14). Smith later elaborates that Galileo's telescope and Copernicus's discoveries resulted in the earth losing its privileged position at the centre of the universe as "the constant fixed point of reference, around which all stars hovered in humble ministration" (*Studies* 16). Donne refers to the shift in worldview in *An Anatomy of the World*, "The First Anniversary," where he recounts what has been lost at the hand of the new discoveries. In *From Renaissance to Baroque*, Louis L. Martz explains that Donne's *Anniversaries*, in a baroque fashion, "dramatize what it is to live in a world that seems to be dying in the throes of some mysterious renewal" (51). As Donne attempts to come to terms with the changing world around him, he is conflicted between the excitement of the new perspective of the world and mourning the loss of the old, ordered world. Thus, Donne attempts to order the world that surrounds him in his poetry. Sona Raiziss explains Donne's conflicted position, claiming, "[l]ike his age, he was a divided man. His nature welcomed the enormous changes, and his curiosity hungered for new satisfactions. Yet he was profoundly disturbed and felt a great need for order. That order, so difficult to achieve in the turmoil of physical actuality, he sought to formulate in the metaphysical relationships of his art" (63). In "The First Anniversary," Donne's longing for order after its perceived loss is evident:

> And new philosophy calls all in doubt,
> The element of fire is quite put out;

> The sun is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit
> Can well direct him where to look for it.
> And freely men confess that this world's spent,
> When in the planets, and the firmament
> They seek so many new; they see that this
> Is crumbled out again to his atomies.
> 'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;
> All just supply, and all relation:
> Prince, subject, father, son, are things forgot. (205-215)

When these ten lines of Donne's poem are contrasted with St. Francis of Assisi's thirteenth century prayer, "Cantico di frate sole," ["Canticle of Brother Sun"] the break in worldviews is clear. If Donne expresses an anxiety about the "new philosophy" in the seventeenth century, it is because the coherent order of the world that is apparent in "Cantico di frate sole" is at risk of being lost. Below I have included "Cantico di frate sole" to demonstrate the world order that Donne sees jeopardized in his "First Anniversary."

> Altissimu, omnipotente, bon Signore,
> tue so' le laude, la Gloria e l'honore et onne benedictione.
>
> Ad te solo, Altissimo, se konfano,
> et nullu homo ène dignu te mentovare.
>
> Laudato sie, mi'Signore, cum tucte le tue creature,
> spetialmente messor lo frate sole,
> lo qual'è iorno, et allumini noi per lui.
> et ellu è bellu e radiante cum grande splendore:
> de te, Altissimo, porta significatione.
>
> Laudato si', mi'Signore, per sora luna e le stele:
> in celu l'ài formate clarite et pretiose et belle.
>
> Laudato si', mi'Signore, per frate vento
> et per aere et nubilo et sereno et onne tempo,
> per lo quale a le tue creature dài sustentamento.
>
> Laudato si', mi'Signore, per sor'aqua,
> la quale è multo utile et humile et pretiosa et casta.

Laudato si', mi'Signore, per frate focu
per lo quale ennallumini la nocte:
ed ello è bello et iocundo et robustoso et forte.

Laudato si', mi'Signore, per sora nostra matre terra,
la quale ne sustenta et governa,
et produce diversi fructi con coloriti flori et herba.

Laudato si', mi'Signore, per quelli ke perdonano per lo tuo amore
et sostengo infirmitate et tribulatione.

Beati quelli ke 'l sosterrano in pace,
ka da te, Altissimo, sirano incoronati.

Laudato si', mi'Signore, per sora nostra morte corporale,
da la quale nullu homo vivente pò skappare:
guai a cquelli ke morrano ne le peccata morali;
beati quelli ke troverà ne le tue sanctissime voluntati,
ka la morte secunda no 'l farrà male.

Laudate e benedicete mi'Signore et rengratiate
e serviateli cum grande humilitate.

[Most High Almighty Good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessings!
To you alone, Most High, do they belong,
And no man is worthy to mention you.

Be praised, my Lord, with all your creatures,
Especially Sir Brother Sun,
By whom you give us the light of day!
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor
Of you, Most High, he is a symbol!

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Moon and the stars!
In the sky you formed them bright and lovely and fair.

Be praised, my Lord, for Brother Wind
And for the air and cloudy and clear and all weather,
By which you give sustenance your creatures!

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Water,
Who is very useful and humble and lovely and chaste!

Be praised, my Lord, for our sister Mother Earth,
Who sustains and governs us,

And produces fruits with colorful flowers and leaves!

Be praised, my Lord, for those who forgive for love of you
And endure infirmities and tribulations.
Blessed are those who shall endure them in peace,
For by you, Most High, they will be crowned!

Be praised, my Lord, for our sister Bodily Death,
From whom no living man can escape!
Woe to those who shall die in mortal sin!
Blessed are those whom she will find in your most holy will,
For the second death will not harm them.

Praise and bless my Lord and thank him
And serve him with great humility! (Brown 496)]

In St. Francis' prayer, God structures the universe and through God, each element is given its significance and its relation to the others. Here, a natural order exists so that the objects in the poem do not need to be placed in a tentative configuration to be given meaning; instead, the poem demonstrates the synthesis of an ordered, hierarchical world in which each element has meaning and a relation to the others. Furthermore, what seems to be the lowest item in the hierarchy can be made high, because it can be redeemed by God, the structuring principle. The raising up of the low is clear from the last three stanzas of the poem in which St. Francis thanks God for the possibility of redemption. Significantly, the sun, the "symbol" of God, is the first to be mentioned after God in this thirteenth century poem and is the element which is lost to Donne in the seventeenth century. With Copernicus' discovery that the earth moves around the sun, the order of the universe and the possibility of the unified worldview of the Middle Ages that could see a cohesive symbol of God in the sun is lost. In the seventeenth century, as Donne's poem demonstrates, the "universe has become a multi-verse. Its essence, unity, has been fractured into innumberable atoms" (Smith, *Studies* 16). The cohesive structure of the

universe found in "Cantico di frate sole," in "The First Anniversary" has been reduced to chaos and disconnected pieces. The logic of organization that is God in St. Francis' prayer is absent in Donne's representation; thus, human relations on earth become chaotic as well, as prince and father and son no longer maintain their hierarchical structure. In Donne's poem, the established hierarchical synthesis of "Cantico di frate sole" has been reduced to a tentative configuration of disparate elements.

Eliot also recognizes the distinction between the worldview of the Middle Ages and that of the seventeenth century. Comparing Dante with Donne, Eliot explains, "[t]he interest of Dante lies in the idea or the feeling to be conveyed; the image always makes this idea or feeling more intelligible. In Donne, the interest is dispersed [...] It is an harmony of dissonances" (*Varieties* 120). Eliot's explanation of Donne's conceit emphasizes the difference between medieval allegory, in which meaning and order are found in God, and baroque allegory, in which the emphasis is on the attempt to put things in an order, albeit an order that will not maintain but will be disassembled and reassembled the next time. Furthermore, Donne's conceit becomes "an harmony of dissonances"; a group of images that do not naturally fit together but that are brought into, temporary, harmony in the mind of the poet. Eliot elaborates on the distinction between Dante and Donne, claiming that Donne "is a mind of the *trecento* in disorder; capable of experiencing and setting down many super-sensuous feelings, only these feelings are of a mind in chaos, not of a mind in order" (*Varieties* 120). It is not that Donne is incapable of feelings comparable to Dante's or that he lacks a desire for order or transcendence, but that the way is not clear to him. In this quotation, Eliot seems to be diagnosing Donne with melancholia and thus characterizes Donne as a man of baroque

sensibility. I will return to the topic of melancholia in the last chapter. The desire for order and unity remains in the seventeenth century, but the logic of the interconnectedness of things, even the possibility of that logic, seems lost. As twentieth century writers, including Smith, reconsider the baroque, they find in the absence of a unified philosophical system and in the minds of the *trecento* in disorder, a literature with which they have an affinity.

III. A Modernist Position

The modernist interest in the Metaphysicals has been attributed to a desire in the modernists to distance themselves from Romanticism. Compton argues that "[t]he twentieth century, in its striking rejection of romanticism, eagerly swung toward the Metaphysicals" (78). This is certainly true in the case of Smith. Smith's stance against Romanticism, particularly the Canadian manifestations of Romanticism found in his predecessors's representations of the Canadian landscape, is well documented in his critical writings and anthologies.[7] Smith's landscape poems demonstrate both his allegorical impulse and his position contra Romanticism. He takes the landscape as his subject most explicitly in his imagistic poems that are found in section two of his book, *Poems, New and Collected.* Taken as a whole, this section contains ten poems, which range from descriptions of specific places to descriptions of nature that can only be found in the mind. From this section, this chapter will consider the poems "Birches at

[7] Two examples of Smith's criticism of the Romantic representation of the Canadian landscape, in "A Rejected Preface to *New Provinces*" and his "Introduction" to *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, will be discussed later in this chapter.

Drummond Point" (1967), "The Lonely Land" (1926-29), and "The Creek" (1928). These poems, taken from opposite ends of his poetic career, demonstrate Smith's movement from a romantic communion with and rejuvenation through nature to a modernist presentation of a landscape, which, at best, is indifferent to its human counterparts. Furthermore, they exhibit both Smith's allegorical impulse to find order and meaning in the landscape and the impossibility of that order becoming either manifest or permanent.

In "The Rhetoric of Temporality," Paul de Man explains nature's appeal to the romantic subject. Not unlike the symbol, nature presents a unity to the Romantic that he cannot find in himself. De Man explains that "this unity can be hidden from the subject, who then has to look outside, in nature, for the configuration of its existence" (194). The subject searches for the stability that it lacks in nature so that it may use it in its quest for "refuge against the impact of time"; however, de Man notes the impossibility of finding in nature a cure for the passing of time, as the subject "bears no resemblance" to it (de Man 206). For de Man, it is in these instances of failed identification with nature that the allegorical mode presents itself most readily. Benjamin makes a similar connection between allegory and nature when he writes, "[i]t is by virtue of a strange combination of nature and history that the allegorical mode of expression is born" (167). Furthermore, Benjamin states that "[h]istory merges into the setting" (92) so that nature is no longer the idealized and eternally complete nature in which the romantic subject believes to find protection from the impact of time, but nature itself is subject to history and thus also to the ravages of time. Benjamin once again contrasts the allegorical merging of history and nature with the symbolic view of nature to clarify the position of allegory. He writes, "[w]hereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is

fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape" (Benjamin 166). Rather than finding in nature a humanized image of redemption, however fleeting, the allegorical mode reveals a landscape emptied of any possibilities of redemption or human presence and confronts the observer with the promise of his demise. The subject is denied its desire to find stability in nature and escape from its own promise of death through nature as nature itself is revealed as incomplete and changing. Rather than provide an image of redemption through which the subject can find comfort, in allegory, nature is indifferent to mankind and its insecurities.

In "Rejected Preface to *New Provinces*," Smith comments on two characteristics of the poetry of his predecessors: "[t]he bulk of Canadian verse is romantic in conception and conventional in form. Its two great themes are nature and love – nature humanized, endowed with feeling, and made sentimental; love idealized, sanctified, and inflated" (170). Smith returns to the topic of nature in Canadian poetry when he introduces the Confederation Poets in *The Book of Canadian Poetry* in 1943. There, he contrasts a typically Wordsworthian version of nature found in the work of the Confederation poets with a modernist understanding of nature's inability to provide a vision of union and a source of redemption. He writes:

> The older masters sought a spiritual nourishment in the beauty of their natural surroundings. For them, the challenge of environment strengthened both the moral virtues and aesthetic sensibilities and led ultimately to a powerful communion with the Divine Spirit, more or less pantheistically conceived. The poets of today, inheritors of what I.A. Richards has called the 'neutralisation of nature,' have turned away from all of this. They have sought in man's own mental and social world for a subject matter they can no longer find in the beauty of nature – a beauty that seems either deceptive or irrelevant. (40-41)

Here, Smith's interpretation is comparable to Benjamin's understanding of nature in allegory. Nature does not provide spiritual nourishment or redemption as Benjamin claims it does in the symbol. Instead, nature is not to be trusted to provide an image of continual unity in which the subject may project itself, but appears, like the *facies hippocratica* in Benjamin's explanation of allegory, as a barren and indifferent landscape. In "The Rejected Preface," his introduction to the Confederation Poets in *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, and in his nature poetry, Smith aligns himself with a modernist and allegorical consideration of nature as he attempts to adapt modernist aesthetics to the Canadian landscape (Bentley 27) and to show romantic readings of nature as idealizations.

IV. Correspondences

At this point, a detailed discussion of Smith's poetry will illustrate how Smith's position against the romantic idealization of nature appears in his poetry through the use of baroque allegory. "Birches at Drummond Point: Lake Memphremagog," written late in Smith's career but still participating in his modernist opposition to a romanticized landscape, provides a clear example of his lack of faith in the ability of nature to provide spiritual nourishment.

> Leaning over the lake
> slim white birches
> curved by the south-west wind
> offer a silent rebuke
> or seem to
>
> When the sun glints
> on their leaves

dark green or light green
they seem to be flashing
a message

When a breeze
makes them rustle

I listen:

What do they say?
or seem to?

Here, Smith's representation of nature and his position in relation to it hinge on the word "seem." Smith attempts to see nature through the eyes of a Romantic; however, with the repetition of the word "seem", appearing for the first time at the end of the first stanza, any message that could be extracted from the scene, any redemption that could be found in the blown birches, is undercut. If the reader is led to believe that the birches can communicate an intelligible message with the first "seem," the last "seem" casts her back to the first and makes her aware of her misguided faith in the landscape. In this poem, Smith takes on the voice of a romantic poet, who would find spiritual nourishment in the image of the birches, only to show that position as faulty.

In his essay, "Not of Things Only, but of Thought: Notes on A.J.M. Smith's Imagistic Poems," D.M.R. Bentley identifies a Wordsworthian character in the poem's attempts to find a message in nature, noting that the poet's failure to read the message in the birches "is as though Wordsworth were to have depicted the leech-gatherer as a practitioner of semaphor" (37). At this point, I would like to elaborate upon the poem's Wordsworthian intertext. In the first book of *The Prelude*, an autobiographical poem about the growth of the poet's mind, Wordsworth successfully finds in nature the message and the guidance for which he is looking. *The Prelude* begins with a scene quite

the opposite of the images of the blown birches in Smith's poem. The young Wordsworth finds a "blessing in this gentle breeze" (1) in the first line of his poem. Not only is this a breeze that Wordsworth can interpret, it reaches out and touches him on the cheek and is "half-conscious of the joy he brings" (3). Here, nature and the poet are in communion with each other; furthermore, the breeze is personified with the third person subject pronoun, "he". This breeze is given additional significance when it becomes a messenger from God:

> For I, methought, while the sweet breath of heaven
> Was blowing on my body, felt, within,
> A correspondent breeze, that gently moved
> With quickening virtue. (Wordsworth 33-36)

The breeze communicates with Wordsworth and rejuvenates him, restoring his life with "quickening virtue." Wordsworth's faith in the communicative faculty of nature is so strong, it does not matter which aspect of nature he chooses as his guide, even following "a wandering cloud/ [he] cannot miss [his] way" (16-17). In *The Prelude*, there is no allegorical searching for meaning; rather, in the fashion of the symbol, nature gives itself up to the poet for interpretation and happily guides him into maturity. In Wordsworth's poem, the poet subject finds in nature all of the elements Smith identifies in the nature poetry of the Confederation poets; nature strengthens the poet morally and aesthetically, and, through the "correspondent breeze," the young Wordsworth is brought into communion with the Divine. This intertext further clarifies Smith's poetic position, particularly in its opposition to the romantic characteristics he identifies in the Confederation poets.

The desire for communication with nature that is evident in "Birches at Drummond Point" and the quest of the Metaphysicals to "seek original correspondence"

(Smith, *Studies* 2-3) in what appears discordant recall Charles Baudelaire's sonnet, "Correspondances." That Smith's poem appears to take the French Symbolist's as an intertext should not come as a surprise, because, as Compton points out, Eliot found in the French Symbolists a poetry similar to that of the English Metaphysicals and believed that they "created a climate of receptivity in the twentieth century for the Metaphysicals" (Compton 79). Eliot, like Benjamin, draws a plumb line from the seventeenth century baroque to Baudelaire and then to the twentieth-century modernists. Thus, the apparent intertext between "Birches at Drummond Point" and "Correspondances" suggests not only a similarity in topic, but also another example in which Eliot's influence on Smith is evident. Furthermore, from a genealogical perspective of allegory, specifically modernist allegory, *Fleurs du mal*, the collection from which "Correspondances" is taken, has an important role, as it is with it that "[t]he history of modern allegory begins to bloom [in] the middle of the nineteenth century" (Nägele 82). Baudelaire's poem is as follows:

> La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
> Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles
> L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
> Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.
>
> Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
> Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
> Vaste comme une nuit et comme la clarté,
> Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.
>
> Il est des parfums frais comme de chairs d'enfants,
> Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
> —Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,
>
> Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
> Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
> Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.
>
> [Nature is a temple whose living colonnades
> Breathe forth a mystic speech in fitful sighs;

Man wanders among symbols in those glades
Where all things watch him with familiar eyes.

Like dwindling echoes gathered far away
Into a deep and thronging unison
Huge as the night or as the light of day,
All scents and sounds and colors meet as one.

Perfumes there are as sweet as the oboe's sound,
Green as the prairies, fresh as a child's caress,
-- And there are others, rich, corrupt, profound.

And of an infinite pervasiveness,
Like myrrh, or musk, or amber, that excite
The ecstasies of sense, the soul's delight. (Crosby 29)]

In "Correspondances," nature has a synaesthetic unity that is not immediately obvious to man. While man walks through a forest of symbols, nature watches him with knowing eyes, giving the impression that nature knows man better than he knows it. As the poem progresses, the correspondences in nature, perfumes "sweet like oboes" (Baudelaire 10), are discovered by the poet and expand into an ecstasy of the mind and the senses. The title of the poem suggests not only a relationship between the objects in nature and the relationship between the senses that results in synaesthesia, but also that there is a communion, or communication, present in nature and eventually between man and nature. In his essay, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," Paul de Man notes that the title of Baudelaire's poem connotes "response, the dialogical exchange that takes place in mutual proximity to a shared entity called nature" (128). In Baudelaire's poem, the senses become attuned to the relationships that exist between them and through them between objects in the world. In the world of correspondences, nothing stands alone and isolated; everything is interconnected. In Michael W. Jenning's notes to Benjamin's essay, "Central Park," Jenning's observes that the idea for Baudelaire's poem had been

influenced by the Swedish mystic, Emmanuel Swedenborg, "who envisioned a universal language in which everything outward and visible in nature was a symbol pointing to an inward spiritual cause" (264). "Correspondances," then, is an example of the unity and order of nature; the correspondence between the visible and invisible is evident and full. However, in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin points out the incongruity between the vision of harmony found in "Correspondances" and other poems in the *Fleurs du mal*, which better serve as examples of modern allegory. "Correspondances," claims Benjamin, belongs to a cycle of poems at the beginning of the *Fleurs du mal*, which are "devoted to something irretrievably lost" (181), the interconnectedness of all things. Furthermore, Benjamin notes that "[o]nly by appropriating these elements [of correspondence] was Baudelaire to fathom the full meaning of the breakdown which he, a modern man, was witnessing" (181). Already in Baudelaire, the possibility of Wordsworth's harmonious and redemptive nature begins to falter; yet, "Correspondances" presents an image, although receding, of a communicative and communicable nature.

Smith's poem, in contrast to *The Prelude* and "Correspondances," demonstrates the poet's desire to correspond with the landscape he looks out upon and the impossibility of that desire's fulfillment. Bentley claims that "Birches at Drummond Point" suggests that, no matter how attractive the idea of a communicative nature, "to conceive of a message emanating from the birches is a delusion" (37). Bentley continues to say that the poem "indicates a crystallized skepticism regarding the Romantic epistemological assumptions" (37). The word "seem", however, suggests that Smith's position is not one of mere mocking condemnation of the romantic idealization of nature. Although "seem"

casts doubt on the possibility of a message, it does not guarantee that a message does not exist. Here, the observer seeks out the message in the birches, but it cannot be corroborated – in fact, any possible messages are absent from the poem. Any message found in the birches could only amount to a guess on the part of the observer; it cannot be confirmed in the landscape. This poem presents an observer who, attempting to 'see' in the symbolic sense, is instead required to 'seek,' in the allegorical sense, for what the birches may communicate. This allegorical searching is disappointing, as the observer can only guess at what the birches mean. Contrary to the two previous poems by Wordsworth and Baudelaire, "Birches at Drummond Point" presents two correspondents, the birches and the poet observing them, without correspondence; the message is lost in the south-west wind.

V. Resonating Dissonance

Three different versions of "The Lonely Land" were published between 1926 and 1929 before Smith's revisions were complete.[8] The revisions to the poem reveal a conscious effort to shift from a romantic consideration of nature to one more aligned with the modernist aesthetic. The first version, "The Lonely Land: Group of Seven," published in *The McGill Fortnightly Review* is as follows:

> Cedar and jagged fir uplift
> Accusing barbs against the grey
> And cloud-piled sky;
> And in the bay
> Blown spume and windrift

[8] In his entry, "A.J.M. Smith," in *Ten Canadian Poets*, Desmond Pacey has collected all three published versions of the poem with some interpretive comments.

And thin, bitter spray
Snap at the whirling sky;
And the pine trees lean one way.

Hark to the wild duck's cry
And the lapping of water on stones
Pushing some monstrous plaint against the sky
While a tree creaks and groans
When the wind sweeps high.

It is good to come to this land
Of desolate splendour and grey grief,
And on a loud, stony strand
Find for a tired heart relief
In a wild duck's cry,
In grey rock, black pine, shrill wind
And cloud-piled sky.

In this version of the poem, the human is comforted by nature as the tired heart finds consolation in the landscape. Nature is personified: the fir trees accuse the sky, the duck's cry and the water push a complaint to the sky, the trees groan. Although the images of nature are hardly those of lush superabundance and harmony, the emphasis in this version of the poem is on finding the human elements of nature and on what the human receives from the land. The line, "[i]t is good to come to this land" (14) further suggests that nature has a moral structure, so that the tired heart finds the right sort of relief amongst the hard images of the North. This line, with its reference to a moral structure of nature, seems to align Smith more with the view of nature held by the Confederation Poets – who, it bears repeating, believed "the challenge of environment strengthened both moral virtues and aesthetic sensibilities" (Smith, *Canadian Poetry* 40-41) – and less with the allegorical and modernist position he assumes more regularly in his later poetry.

The final version of "The Lonely Land," however, offers a sharp contrast to its earliest version as any allusions to a romantic view of nature are eliminated:

Cedar and jagged fir
uplift sharp barbs
against the gray
and cloud-piled sky;
and in the bay
blown spume and windrift
and thin, bitter spray
snap
at the whirling sky;
and the pine trees
lean one way.

A wild duck calls
to her mate,
and the ragged
and passionate tones
stagger and fall,
and recover,
and stagger and fall,
on these stones –
are lost
in the lapping of water
on smooth, flat stones.

This is a beauty
of dissonance,
this resonance
of stony strand,
this smoky cry
curled over a black pine
like a broken
and wind-battered branch
when the wind
bends the tops of the pines
and curdles the sky
from the north.

This is the beauty
of strength
broken by strength
and still strong.

Further indication of Smith's debt to Eliot is his use of objective correlatives in this final version. Eliot developed his theory of the objective correlative in "Hamlet and his Problems" where he claims:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (100)

Although Eliot's objective correlative has an emotional affect, it does not use overly sentimental language to induce that affect. Smith turns to the objective correlative as a way of reducing the romanticized content of the previous version of the poem. This turn to the objective correlative also facilitates the immediately obvious visual differences between the two poems. The final version drops the subtitle of "Group of Seven"[9] and shortens its lines to create a concentrated and visual effect in each line. For example, the "snap" in stanza one is given both an onomatopoeic and a visual emphasis as it voices the snap of the spray and snaps the line above it off. In the first two stanzas, Smith subscribes to imagist aesthetic principles and so concretizes the images, making "accusing barbs" "sharp barbs". Between the change in the visual appearance of the poem and concretizing of the images, Smith achieves what Bentley calls "a fitting congruency of matter and manner" (40). If the first half of the poem has been revised to fit more with an imagist aesthetic, the second half has been added to abstract and interpret the scene described in the first two stanzas.

Bentley further explains that in these last two stanzas, Smith "order[s] and humanize[s] the chaotic and inhuman reality" (42) of the harsh Canadian landscape.

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[9] An intertext for this poem is Tom Thompson's *The Jack Pine*, from which Smith seems to have derived the image of a lonely pine bent by the cruel wind.

Bentley also notes the way in which the publishing history of the poem in Smith's collections – *Collected Poems*, *Poems, New and Collected*, and *The Classic Shade* – emphasizes the split between the imagist presentation of the scene in the first two stanzas and the metaphysical searching for its meaning in the last two, as it is conventionally published with "the first, more objective section on the left-hand page and the second, more abstract section on the right" (40). This presentation of an objectively represented scene followed by its abstraction and interpretation evokes Benjamin's statement that "[i]deas are to objects as constellations are to stars" (*Drama* 34). Ideas organize and give meaning to objects. In the absence of an organizing structure like the one found in the Middle Ages, thought is called upon to interpret, structure, and endow the world with meaning. Later, Benjamin draws a parallel relationship between allegories and ruins: "Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (178). The separation of the two parts of "The Lonely Land" demonstrates Smith's allegorical mind at work. Following the aesthetic principles of Imagism, he presents an image as "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (qtd. Preminger 574), yet he cannot rest there; his deep affinity with the Metaphysicals drives him to interpret that image. The landscape, as it is represented in the first two stanzas of the poem, appears as a ruin, in that it is an image represented in an instant of time and outside of an interpretive structure. Furthermore, this ruin must be abstracted and interpreted in the following two stanzas. The images become ruins of symbols as they do not constitute their own meaning and, rather than appearing full and complete in the symbolic sense, appear lacking and in need of interpretation in the allegorical sense. As Smith claims in his "Note on Metaphysical Poetry," "[t]o the Metaphysical poet, indeed, nature possesses

a philosophic unity. But it is a unity which, like that of the scientist and that of the mystic, is not one with the unity of common sense" (61). Here, Smith strives to find the philosophic unity in nature, that is evident to Wordsworth in *The Prelude* and to Baudelaire in "Correspondances." Nature in Smith's poem, however, does not offer itself up to the poet in the way it does to Wordsworth, instead, the poet is left to extract meaning from a scene in which the hierarchical strain no longer attains.

If in "Birches at Drummond Point" Smith searches for a message from the birches, in the final version of "The Lonely Land" he finds it. However, this is not to say that Smith has negated his position against the romantic idealization of the landscape. The heart finds no relief in the final version of the poem, in fact, the heart has been completely removed from it. Furthermore, the duck's cry that in the first poem rises in a plaint against the sky, here calls out for its mate and another message is lost, this time on the rocks. Smith's representation of a nature which robs the message from the duck's mate and from which the heart has been removed would suggest that, as Benjamin claims, nature is neither complete nor perfect, but contains within itself the structure for its own demise. From this point of view, one may find an unexpected similarity between "The Lonely Land" and Al Purdy's poem "The Country North of Belleville," where on the "lean land" (21):

> Old fences drift vaguely among the trees
> a pile of moss-covered stones
> gathered for some ghost purpose
> has lost meaning under the meaningless sky. (40-43)

Purdy, like Smith, seems to take *The Prelude* as an intertext to his poem; just as Wordsworth leaves the city, "escaped/ From the vast City" (6-7), to find rejuvenation in the country, the country north of Belleville is "a little north of where the cities are" (66).

Unlike *The Prelude*, however, Purdy's poem offers no such rejuvenation to the subject. Instead, the country, like Smith's lonely land, appears to lack a hierarchical structure. The country is one of "defeat" (47, 69), one to which the subject may return, but one in which the full immanence of its objects has been lost. Purdy's poem has an air of nostalgia for a moment in time when their meaning could be said for certain, as the poet looks at a land of ruins, of moss-covered stones, which may have once exhibited a meaning that is now lost to the poet. In *The Last Canadian Poet*, Sam Solecki explains that in Purdy's poem, the farmer, like the poet, attempts to establish an order on a land, which, like Smith's lonely land, is indifferent to the presence of humans. Solecki writes:

> The farmer's immemorial struggle to impose his order ('meaning under the meaningless sky') is projected against a permanent background that indifferently provides stones to be moved by 'back-breaking' labour or an ineffable beauty that appears whether anyone is looking or not. And in the end it slowly and again indifferently effaces or buries or disguises all traces or 'lines' of human presence. (149)

Just as Smith attempts to order and interpret the land in the last two stanzas of "The Lonely Land," Purdy's farmer attempts to order the land on which he works; yet, both lands are indifferent to these efforts. They do not appear as interpretable and full as in the nature of *The Prelude* or even "Correspondances," but as indifferent and fragmented lands that have lost their interpretable meanings. Like the tentative order that is established by the agency of the interpreter in allegory, the cultivation of the land in "The Country North of Belleville" and the poet's effort to represent that land "achieve a temporary and provisional order that in Purdy's view of the universe – 'the meaningless sky' – is the best humanity can do" (Solecki 150). "The Country North of Belleville" and "The Lonely Land" link Purdy and Smith, perhaps unexpectedly, through an allegorical

attempt to order a land, notably a geographically similar land, that does not offer up its own hierarchic structure.

The final version of "The Lonely Land" also emphasizes the piling up of a nature that, like the nature in "The Country North of Belleville," seems to have "lost meaning under the meaningless sky." More than a quarter of the lines in the final version of "The Lonely Land" begin with the word "and," suggesting not a natural unity in the scene, but a collection of fragmented images put into relation with each other through the conjunction. In other words, the image of the scene itself does not constitute a unified whole as each image seems to be merely added paratactically to the one that preceded it. Each image then, is a fragment of what might have been a whole, a ruin of an image that could constitute its own meaning. Due to the absence of a structuring logic in the baroque, Benjamin notes that it is characteristic of its literature "to pile up fragments ceaselessly" (*Drama* 178). "And" appears in instances of anaphora, the repetition of a word at the beginning of lines. Derived from Greek, anaphora literally means, "a carrying up or back" (Preminger 73), thus with each 'and' in the poem, the scene is compounded as a new fragment is piled on to the fragments that preceded it. This piling up of parts is emphasized by the fact that the repetition of conjunctions in poetry, polysyndeton, literally means "many tied together" and produces the effect of images appearing "much compounded" (Preminger 968). The repetition of "and," gives the impression that the scene is created in the absence of a logic of interconnectedness; here, "and" stands in for that logic and creates the relationships between the objects in the scene. Polysyndeton creates a paratactic logic of tying that suggests that things merely follow rather than follow a plan. As in the allegories of the baroque, the paratactic structure of "The Lonely

Land" is without a natural and hierarchical structural logic; instead, "and" suggests that each image can be merely added so that the land at any moment is neither complete nor unified. That "and" is the most important word in the poem is emphasized by its first occurrence in the title, in the word "Land." The reader is then presented with a world of "and," a land built from addition, a collection of fragments in the absence of a unifying logic. In "The Lonely Land," hierarchies are either distant or imposed, thus creating the image of a flattened land and in that respect, it would seem that this poem and its notions of order "know no eschatology."

"And", like pronouns and other "indicators" (Benveniste 218), is a word which has a primarily grammatical, if not lexical, significance. "And," because it has no referent, does not have a principle of order contained within it; instead, it creates an order for things which do have referents. In his essay, "The Nature of Pronouns," Emile Benveniste explains the concept of the "indicator" in relation to pronouns, such as "I" and "you". Benveniste notes that pronouns "cannot be defined except in terms of 'locution'" which results in their having "no value except in the instance in which [they are] produced" (218). Similarly, "and" derives its meaning from the words and clauses which it connects; its significance exists only in the context in which it is used. In "The Metaphoric and the Metonymic Poles," Roman Jakobson identifies two semantic lines: the metaphoric, which relies on similarity and substitution, and the metonymic, which relies on a relationship of contiguity (1267). Jakobson's metaphoric pole is closely related to romantic poetry and he notes "[t]he primacy of the metaphoric process in the literary schools of Romanticism and Symbolism" (1267). Romantic poetry can be associated with the metaphoric pole because the romantic symbol relies on the process of

similarity and substitution that defines it. For example, when Wordsworth describes the "correspondent breeze" with which he can communicate, the breeze becomes a symbol of "the sweet breath of heaven" (33) through the similarity between breeze and breath. Consequently, the "correspondent breeze" may come to replace "the sweet breath of heaven" while maintaining the full significance of the line for which it comes to stand.

In contrast, metonymy follows "the path of contiguous relations" and functions by way of digression (1268). Metonymy progresses by way of an and-device in which objects or images are placed in contiguous relation to each other. Smith's consistent use of "and" to link the images in his poem and his replacement of personification and moral implications with objective correlatives in the final version of "The Lonely Land" associate his poem with the metonymic rather than the metaphoric pole. "And" has a contiguous relationship with the things that it connects, particularly in Smith's poem. "And" connects those things which are beside one another through their proximity to each other, but not through a relation of logical necessity. Derived from the Latin, *contiguus*, meaning, touching, contiguous refers to things which share a border (*OED*). In Smith's poem, "and" becomes the border which brings the distinct images of the poem into relation with each other. The piling up of fragments in "The Lonely Land" through the repetition of "and" emphasizes the contiguous relationship between those fragments and creates an image of a world of contingency, like that of the baroque, without a logic of interconnectedness to create a symbolic picture of a unified whole. In "The Lonely Land" the poet attempts to interpret a compounded scene of contiguous elements. If the world can be thought of in terms of poetic devices, the world of Smith's poetry is defined by asyndeton, by disconnected parts, which I will expand upon below in my analysis of

"The Creek." If, when Smith attempts to represent that world, to write it down in a sentence, he relies on polysyndeton, as in "The Lonely Land," "and" becomes the principle of order, albeit one that is imposed by the poet and does not create the image of a naturally hierarchical and synthesized world.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the beauty that Smith finds in the lonely land is a beauty of resonating dissonance. Rather than finding a perpetual harmony and union, he finds a dissonance that sounds again in the hard images of the poem. All that can be brought together are the things that do not produce harmony and with the rhyming word, resonance, appearing on the next line (25), it is further suggested that this disharmony will continue. Smith does not find the temporal stability in nature that he lacks; the duck's cry falls and is lost, communion and unity are denied. Recall that Eliot, contrasting Donne with Dante, claimed that Donne's poetry creates "an harmony of dissonances," a temporary order amongst things that do not naturally appear to be related. Smith arrives at a similar harmony of dissonances through his abstraction of meaning from the scene in "The Lonely Land". His allegorical mind searches for meaning in the scene, but this meaning can only be extracted by bringing unharmonious images together. Unlike the redemptive and unified nature in Wordsworth and the Confederation Poets, "The Lonely Land" presents a nature from which only an unresolved beauty can be extracted.

Smith studies nature in its contingency again in "The Creek" (1928). Once more, Smith uses "indicators" to draw relationships in nature, but in this poem he does not offer any abstract interpretation of the scene:

> Stones
> still wet with cold black earth,

roots, whips of roots
and wisps of straw,
green soaked crushed leaves
mudsoiled where hoof has touched them,
twisted grass
and hairs of herbs
that lip the ledge of the stream's edge:

these

then foamfroth, waterweed,
and windblown bits of straw
that rise, subside, float wide,
come round again, subside,
a little changed
and stranger, nearer
nothing:

these

Here, the images are not brought into relation to each other through "and"; rather, following a reading of "The Lonely Land," "The Creek" presents the logic of the asyndeton, the absence of conjunctions from the Greek literally meaning "untied together" (*OED*). Asyndeton creates the effect of a "disconnected" (Preminger, "Asyndeton" 105) scene, in this case the scene of a world that is untied. "And" appears in this poem only four times in eighteen lines, while it is repeated thirteen times (fifteen if "land" and "strand" are included) in the thirty-eight lines of "The Lonely Land." The impression, however, is the same. Images in nature seem to be placed into relation without a natural organizing logic. This is made evident by the repetition of the indicator, "these." Like "and," "these" only acquires a meaning when it is put into use; its definition is one of contiguity. Here, "these" is placed after the objects to which it refers and is therefore changed from a demonstrative adjective, a word which would describe the

position[10] of the objects that come after it, to a demonstrative pronoun, which, while maintaining its positional information comes to fully stand in for the objects to which it refers. "These" suggests the relative proximity of the observer to the scene that is described. In this pronominal position, "these" is asked to contain the image of the scene that comes before it within it; in other words, "these" is given the responsibility of holding the images together. Of course, "these," like "and" only acquires significance when it is used and thus cannot imbue the objects it replaces with meaning. "These," then, takes on an ekphrastic significance in "The Creek," because it may describe the world, but it cannot, as a pronoun must, replace that which it describes.

The instances of "these" in "The Creek" deflate the significance of the images to which they relate. Here, as in the perpetually sounding disharmony of "The Lonely Land," a unified significance cannot be derived from the scene. The first "these" suggests that it will act like the demonstrative adjective "this" (23, 35) in the second half of "The Lonely Land" to "[compel] and [advance] the consolidation of the details accumulated earlier into a single vision that is amenable to abstraction and analysis" (Bentley 43), but what follows is a repetition of the first image with the insertion of time. Time is inserted in the poem with the adverb "then." "Then" functions like "and" as its signals "and next," what may be added to the scene with the insertion of time. The second and final occurrence of "these", like the final occurrence of the word "seem" in "Birches at Drummond Point" works to deflate any hope of interpretation of the scene. The second stanza introduces the deflation by representing the image as "stranger, nearer / nothing."

[10] By position here I mean the relative closeness to the subject of the objects to which "these" refers. In contrast, "that" or "those" are used to denote a distance between the subject and the object(s) to which they refer.

With the absence of any attempt to abstract and interpret the images and the empty white page that follows the second "these", the nothing becomes quite literal, as the image disappears and the reader is left with nothing after the final "these." This deflation and disappearance implies that these fragments of nature, brought into contiguous relation, are without a logic of interconnectedness or significance.

Smith's allegorical attempts to find order and significance in nature and the impossibility of extracting that order and significance in his landscape poems illustrate his interest in the seventeenth century. Smith's affinity with the seventeenth century extends past an intellectual, and at times imitative, interest in the English Metaphysicals to an affinity with the baroque mode of allegory that Benjamin elaborates in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama.* Smith shares a desire to find within a fragmented world an order that would put all of its objects into relation with the English Metaphysicals and the authors of the *Trauerspiel.* In "Birches at Drummond Point," Smith demonstrates the fallacy of a communicative and symbolic nature. As he attempts to appropriate a romantic view of nature, which would allow him to correspond with the landscape and understand the messages that seem to flash among the birches, the romantic and symbolic view of nature fails; instead, Smith is left to guess at what the significance of the landscape "seems" to be. Similarly, in "The Lonely Land," Smith attempts to bring the compounded and fragmented images of the landscape into a relationship through abstraction and to find within them a "philosophic unity." Again, the harmony between subject and nature presented in *The Prelude* is impossible for Smith. Confronted with a nature that does not offer itself up as complete, Smith's task is an allegorical searching for significance and relation in a land of contingency. In "The Creek," nature is again

disconnected. The synthesis of this final poem, if there is any, is represented only by the word "these," but the possibility of that interpretation is negated as the final "these" drops off into the empty page before the significance of the images can be abstracted. Smith presents an allegorical view of nature; however, this is not the allegorical view of the Middle Ages, but of the baroque, in which the desire for order and significance still exists, but the logic that would connect the material objects of the world and put them in relation no longer seems possible, let alone obvious.

Chapter Three:

Lost in the Particulars: The Melancholia of Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*

In the ecstatic ascension of the Scala Paradisi *of John Climachus, the seventh step is thus occupied by the 'grief that makes joy,' defined as 'a sadness of the soul and an affliction of the heart that seeks always for that which it is ardently thirsty; and, as long as it is deprived of it, anxiously follows it and goes after it with howls and laments.'* (Agamben, *Stanzas* 7)

I. *Else how shall I keep that thing I have not seen?*: A.J.M. Smith's "The Cry"

Like "The Lonely Land" and his other imagistic poems, discussed in the previous chapter, A.J.M. Smith's religious poem, "The Cry," presents a landscape emptied of significance. "The Cry" is a description of the journey of the magi, during which a cold and impersonal nature is found, rather than a recreation of the Garden of Eden or the "temperate valley" found in Eliot's "Journey of the Magi," a source for the poem.[11] Smith's poem, instead, describes a harsh land on which the birth of Christ has not caused a transformation; nature is not lush and plentiful and does not suggest a redeemed world:

> We have come a long way riding. Is it this
> Granite overgrown on no sweetsmelling vale
> Only to gain? No more? O look how pale
> His heart is, blue his lips ... Ah, this it is
> -- White for his ruthless love, see, Maryblue
> For his heart's lips' cloudless song – that shall prevail:
> So have the Fathers writ; this is no tale
> Of worldly flies stuck in a kiss's glue.
>
> A tired boy, at midnight probing a sore,

[11] In his essay, "Impersonality, Imitation, and Influence: T.S. Eliot and A.J.M. Smith," Brian Trehearne notes that although Eliot's "Journey of the Magi" is certainly an intertext for Smith's poem, the significant difference in the representations of the landscapes point to a divergence between the poets and mark Smith's turn away from Eliot's influence (206).

Sobs, lifting the word from a touched lung.
Where are the flashing limbs? They bloom no more.
Only the thin dust stiffens the pricking tongue.
He cries out *Jesus shew me thy grass thy green*
Else how shall I keep this thing I have not seen!

The first three lines of the poem express the speaker's disappointment in what the landscape has to offer, no sweetsmelling vale, but hard and impermeable rock. This is not a view of nature that would renew or replenish the soul, but one that in its hardness is indifferent to the humans that move upon it. After the description of the landscape, the speaker moves to a description of a young boy, drained by his faith and resembling the grey granite of the landscape. In the second stanza of the poem, the boy tries to hold onto his faith as he realizes that, again, he will not find signs of the divine in nature where the "flashing limbs" "bloom no more." As Brian Trehearne suggests, the thin dust that stiffens the tongue is another sign that they have been denied direct access to the beyond. Trehearne argues that this image of dust is an allusion to the moment in *Paradise Lost* when the fallen angels are cast down to hell where their attempts to quench their thirst are denied and fruit turns to dust and ashes on their serpent tongues (*Complete Poems* 563). This allusion further suggests the denial of access to the divine and the emptiness of the fallen world.

Confronted with this image of nature, hardly the paradise for which he had hoped, the boy cries out for Jesus to show him paradise before he completely loses faith. As the boy looks out onto a landscape in which he cannot see God, he begs Jesus to make his presence known. Here, the boy's desire to see paradise is clear, but his disappointment in the way in which he must come to that paradise, in fact his doubt that his journey will end there, communicates the dissatisfaction and the despair of the melancholic subject, who,

according to Giorgio Agamben, lacks not the thought of the divine or the desire to encounter it, but the path he must take to get there. Agamben explains that *acedia*, the medieval religious concept in which contemporary notions of melancholia find their roots, is "*the perversion of a will that wants the object, but not the way that leads to it*" (6). In Smith's poem we find an example of a development of a melancholic relationship with the world. Anne Compton explains that Smith's poem, representing the melancholiac's journey to Christ, shows it as "long, hard, and painful" and "draws attention to anguish as a component of faith" (123). The boy, although desiring what he hopes will be his eventual destination, literally rejects the path as he walks upon a nature devoid of signs of the divine. This boy's cry is one of melancholic despair.

II. *Hiro-Koué*: The Noise of True Emotion

How can we begin to understand this melancholic relation to the world that seems to be the outcome of the subject's inability to witness the presence of God? Moreover, of what importance is melancholia to an experimental novel in which the protagonists search for ways to "[f]uck a saint" (Cohen 13)? A concept that has been consistently redefined since antiquity and the writings of Aristotle, melancholia has become a complicated and seemingly paradoxical concept. In their study of the history and development of the concept of melancholia, *Saturn and Melancholy*, Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl refer to a Danish *fin-de-siècle* novel by J.P. Jacobsen, *Frau Marie Grubbe*, to demonstrate the presence of both joy and despair, indeed the "grief that makes joy," in the melancholiac. It is worth noting that this novel,

published in 1925, sets its action in the seventeenth century and takes as its topic the "pleasure-seeking satiety actually attributed to Baroque times" (Klibansky 240). It is thus another example of the relevancy of the baroque for modernist writers. Furthermore, its topic of melancholia suggests that the concept of melancholia, in particular how twentieth century writers take it up, is also closely tied to the understanding of the baroque. The authors of *Saturn and Melancholy* quote from a dialogue in *Frau Marie Grubbe* in which two characters discuss the seemingly contradictory temperament of the melancholiac. As to why people who think only of "joys and worldly pleasures" can be called melancholic, the answer is given:

> Because all earthly joy is so fleeting and transitory, so false and incomplete... Do you still ask why they are called melancholics, when all delight, as soon as possessed, changes its aspect and turns to disgust... when all beauty is a beauty that vanishes, all luck a luck that changes? (qtd. Kilbansky 240)

Here, Jacobsen draws attention to the relationship the melancholic subject has with its object world. For Jacobsen, the position of the melancholiac is one in which the subject is acutely aware of the impossibility of a joy that persists, that is stable. Yet, the melancholic subject's search for this joy, its desire to possess it, is unrelenting to the point that the despair in the absence of joy becomes pleasurable. Regardless of the melancholiac's grief, his quest is essentially joyful.

In Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* the unnamed narrator[12] of Book One, "The History of Them All," explains the etymology of the word Iroquois in terms that are applicable to a discussion of the dialectical characteristics of melancholia. *I* explains that

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[12] Here, I will follow the convention of the criticism of *Beautiful Losers* and will henceforth refer to the unnamed scholar as *I*.

the French changed the name of the Hodenosaunee[13] to Iroquois, because of a specific development in the Hodensosaunee speech:

> They had developed a new dimension to conversation. They ended every speech with the word *hiro*, which means: like I said. [...] To *hiro* they added the word *koué*, a cry of joy or distress, according to whether it was sung or howled. Thus they essayed to pierce the mysterious curtain which hangs between all talking men: at the end of every utterance a man stepped back, so to speak, and attempted to interpret his words to the listener, attempted to subvert the beguiling intellect with the noise of true emotion. (Cohen 8)

The unique *hiro-koué* of the Hodenosaunee can serve as a verbal example of melancholia. Particularly with the example of the *koué*, we find the "noise of true emotion" that seems to point to melancholia in this passage. If the word *koué* has a lexical signifcance, *I* omits it from his history. It seems that *koué* functions only to indicate the emotional position of the subject that utters it; it functions only to compliment the "like I said" of the *hiro* with an emotional relation to what has been spoken. *Koué* may be either a cry of joy or distress; it indicates both ecstasy and despair and, as I will argue in this chapter, it is the sound of the melancholic subject who desires joy but in its absence finds itself in despair, albeit a despair that becomes pleasurable. For, what if one could not determine if the *koué* was sung or howled? What if it were a howl that turned into a song? The cry of the melancholiac is the indistinct *koué*, in which both joy and distress can be heard. Melancholia is the sound of the *koué* in the response to the lost object. I would like to argue that *Beautiful Losers* is, itself, an extended *hiro-koué* and, moreover, one that we can read from a specifically melancholic point of view. As *I* and F. attempt to make sense of the universe and to see under Catherine Tekakwitha's blanket, to "[f]uck a saint," the novel oscillates between ecstatic song and desperate howl. Thus, *I*'s request that

[13] *I* defines Houdenosaunee as "People of the Long House" (Cohen 8).

Catherine "speak to [him] in *Hiro-Koué*" (Cohen 8) aligns the mode of speech with the language of the sacred. Furthermore, in the *hiro-koué*'s function in piercing a mysterious curtain, this sacred speech also holds within it the potential to lift Catherine's blanket and to aid in *I*'s quest to fuck a saint.

Additionally, it is perhaps in the convergence of song and howl in the *koué* that we can also explain the early reviews of the novel that seem to focus on either the joy or the distress, rather than addressing the combination of the two as one of the topics of the novel. Thus, critics have seem confused by a novel that presents a contradiction of playful pornography, postmodern irony and the search for the sacred, for divine communication, and the sincere despair of an old scholar who finds himself alone in a world he no longer understands. The conglomeration of all of these elements has led critics to call *Beautiful Losers* both "gorgeous" (Ondaatje 45) and an "orgy of filth" (qtd. Stacey 213). Instead of considering the novel in terms of the morality of its representations or in terms of its aesthetic accomplishments, particularly in reference to the Canadian literary tradition, I would like to explore the melancholic tone of the novel and specifically to present *I* as someone who fails to meditate successfully and who is thus bound to the position of the melancholiac. Although critics of *Beautiful Losers* have considered the prominent theme of desire in the novel from a variety of theoretical positions[14] and although some, like Linda Hutcheon, have briefly mentioned the Jesuit and baroque allusions in the novel, for the most part critics have overlooked or avoided

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[14] Here, I am referring specifically to Robert David Stacey's essay, "Pornographic Sublime: *Beautiful Losers* and Narrative Excess," Paul Nonnekes essay, "Beyond Mommy and the Machinery: Leonard Cohen's Vision of Male Desire in *Beautiful Losers*," and Nicole Markotic's essay, "The Telephone Dance and Mechanical Ecstasy in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*."

the topic of melancholia, which could unite these two thematic strains. In this chapter I would like to begin to fill what I perceive to be a notable gap in Cohen scholarship by using the concept of melancholia to discuss both the baroque sensibility that is present in the novel and the emphasis on unsatisfied desire. We are, of course, considering a novel that warns us of the paradox of melancholia in its title, *Beautiful Losers*, a title that alludes to the position of the characters as "losers," to the beauty in losing, to the idea that – as Jacobsen suggests in *Frau Marie Grubbe* – beauty always points to loss, and finally a title that suggests a beauty which is lost and which cannot be accessed. The position of the melancholiac, however, as we will see with the discussion of *acedia* in Giorgio Agamben's *Stanzas* and other theories of melancholia, need not be considered without its own ecstasy. Thus, at the end of both *I*'s and F.'s extended monologues, we arrive at "An Epilogue in the Third Person" in which the melancholic subjects are lost in their ecstasy and in which, perhaps, beauty is sacrificed for the sake of the sublime.

III. Theories of Melancholia: Freud, Agamben, Benjamin

Before a detailed discussion of Cohen's novel, it will be beneficial to discuss some theories of melancholia that have been popular in the twentieth century and to determine how they are informed by one another and by the rich history of the notion of melancholia. Perhaps the most obvious place to begin a discussion of melancholia in the twentieth century would be Freud's essay, "Mourning and Melancholia." In this essay, Freud makes a clear distinction between the two terms. For Freud, mourning is "a reaction to the real loss of a loved object" (587) which is then replaced by another loved

object and results in the displacement of the libido onto that new object. On the other hand, while melancholia is, like mourning, a result of a lost object, it results in the "*identification* of the ego with the abandoned object" (586). This identification of the ego with the object that it perceives as lost results in the blurring of the line between the subject and the object world. Furthermore, for Freud this identification indicates how the "ego can kill itself" (588) by identifying with an object that has been *a priori* lost. Thus, while mourning seems to end with the displacement of loss onto a new object, melancholia threatens the ego with its own annihilation. This threat can be, nonetheless, pleasurable, as Freud notes:

> If the love for the object – a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up – takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering. (588)

As Freud explains in this quotation, the melancholiac displaces the love for the lost object onto itself, but in this move from object to ego identification, the love turns into a sadistic pleasure and the melancholiac derives a pleasure from its own suffering. Melancholia, then, is, like the *koué*, not only joy or despair but the possibility of both, the tension that arises when suffering brings pleasure. In *Stanzas: Words and Phantasm in Western Culture*, Agamben comments on the ego identification of Freud's melancholiac and relates it to the tradition of defining melancholic temperament:

> we rediscover in the Freudian analysis of the mechanism of melancholia – translated naturally into the language of the libido – two elements that appeared traditionally in the patristic descriptions of *acedia* and in the phenomenology of the black-biled temperment, and whose persistence in the Freudian text testifies to the extraordinary stability over time of the melancholy constellation: the withdrawal from the object and the withdrawal into itself of the contemplative tendency. (19)

Agamben is interested in the history of melancholia and its development from the medieval Christian notion of *acedia*, which is commonly referred to as sloth. Here, Agamben notes the similarities between the traditional notions of *acedia* and Freud's definition of melancholia. Given these similarities, Agamben finds that the traditional characteristics of the melancholiac, the belief that an object has been lost and the withdrawal into isolated contemplation, are stable in Freud's analysis.

Agamben begins his book with a discussion of *acedia* (sloth) in the Middle Ages. In the Middle Ages, *acedia* had distinct features called *filiae acediae* (daughters of sloth), which included malice, resentment, the small soul, desperation, torpor, and, of particular importance to a discussion of *Beautiful Losers* and contemporary theories of melancholia, *evagatio mentis* (wandering of the mind). Agamben defines the last of the *filiae acediae* as "the flight of the will before itself and the restless hastening from fantasy to fantasy" (5). A wandering mind that cannot concentrate upon its task and instead flies from fantasy to fantasy is an accurate description of both *I*'s distracted history in the first part of *Beautiful Losers* and F.'s eventual recognition of the failure of systems[15] and his chaos inducing advice to *I*. Importantly, Agamben notes that for the doctors of the church, sloth "was not placed under the rubric of laziness but under that of anguished sadness and desperation" (5). Furthermore, it is also important to understand that the sin of sloth was not simply laziness, or lack of action, but was instead a state of mind in relation to the world that prevented the slothful from acting in the prescribed manner, thus the slothful desires the destination but not the path. Agamben emphasizes that the slothful was not the

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[15] In her canonical essay, "Caveat Lector: The Early Postmodernism of Leonard Cohen" in *The Canadian Postmodern*, Linda Hutcheon notes that although F. "loves machines and preaches system" he "admits to failure in the end" (32), thus calling the value of systems into question.

one who had turned his back on faith or who did not have the desire to come close to God, but the one who, aware of the magnitude of his desire for union with the divine, undergoes a "frightening withdrawal (*recessus*) when faced with the task implied by the place of man before God" (5-6). Thus, the slothful cannot forget his desire for this union but, also, cannot proceed on the path toward that desire. Agamben connects this medieval interpretation of sloth with the contemporary, psychological interpretations of melancholia:

> If, in theological terms, what the slothful lacks is not salvation, but the way that leads to it, in psychological terms the *recessus* of the slothful does not betray an eclipse of desire but, rather, the becoming unobtainable of its object: *it is the perversion of a will that wants the object, but not the way that leads to it, and which simultaneously desires and bars the path to his/her own desire.* (6)

Here, Agamben equates the position of the slothful to that of the melancholiac. The melancholiac's inability to fulfill his desire is a result of his desiring an object but being unable to move in the right direction toward it; thus, his desire is necessarily unfulfilled.

In contrast to the state of the *evagatio mentis* of the subject that suffers from *acedia* is a related position of thoughtfulness – which I will call a position of meditation in distinction from the melancholic contemplation – that of the Jesuit partaking in St. Ignatious of Loyola's spiritual exercises. *The Spiritual Exercises* is something of a manual of instructions for union with God through meditation on the material world and the rightful ordering of it. Essential to the possibility of a successful meditation is the belief, not unlike the melancholiac's, that the material objects of the world have a relation to God. George E. Ganss explains, "Ignatius habitually viewed all things as proceeding from God, and then becoming a means by which humans could make their way toward happiness by praising or glorifying God here and hereafter" (1-2). Material objects are in

this sense not only earthly signs of the presence of God, but also tools in the ordering of one's earthly life toward God. In contrast to the *evagatio mentis*, the meditating subject can stop its thoughts and its will from straying from the path toward the divine. The meditating subject shares with the contemplating, melancholic subject the desire for a relationship with the divine, a belief in the enigmatic relationship between the divine and the objects of the world, and the secluded and isolated position of a subject pursuing thoughts of the divine. The meditating subject, however, is successful; it finds what it is looking for, while the melancholic subject is stuck and cannot move past the contemplation of objects. While for the meditating subject the contemplation of the material world is a step in the process of turning itself to God, contemplation of the material world for the melancholic subject becomes the defining feature of its character.

Like the modernist subject of which Lukács writes in "The Ideology of Modernism," the melancholiac digresses into a world of abstract potentiality in which thought paralyzes action. Seclusion and isolation are recommended for the meditating subject, because in isolation the subject does not divide its attention, enjoys "a freer use of [its] natural faculties for seeking diligently what [it] so ardently desire[s]," and because

> the more we keep ourselves alone and secluded, the more fit do we make ourselves to approach and attain to our Creator and Lord; and the more we unite ourselves to him in this way, the more do we dispose ourselves to receive graces and gifts from his divine and supreme goodness. (Ignatius 29)

On the other hand, isolation for the melancholiac further signals its despair. As we can see from Ignatius' instructions, the meditating subject is not truly alone, but merely apart from the human world and preparing itself for the company of God. This move into seclusion from the human world is in actuality a step toward communion with the divine.

The melancholiac's *via negativa*, his move away from God that simultaneously reaffirms his desire for God, is defined by God's absence, thus the melancholiac is secluded and without the comfort of preparing himself for God's appearance. While the meditating subject prepares itself to feel God's presence, the melancholiac only feels the loneliness of his absence. Furthermore, the first instructions of the detailed meditating process inform the subject to learn to use objects in the world in meditation. The first prelude is the composition of place:

> When a contemplation or meditation is about something that can be gazed on, for example, a contemplation of Christ our Lord, who is visible, the composition will be to see in imagination the physical place where that which I want to contemplate is taking place. By physical place I mean, for instance, a temple or a mountain where Jesus Christ or our Lady happens to be, in accordance with the topic I desire to contemplate. (Ignatius 40)

Here, Ignatius instructs the meditating subject to imagine the physical elements of the place and to use them in the meditation. If we return to Smith's poem, "The Cry," we find a similar imagining of a scene, of a physical place, except that in Smith's poem, the movement beyond the physical is barred. In so much as Smith presents a melancholic relationship with the material world, we are given a description not of the ecstasy that can be derived by way of thinking of the divine through meditation on the landscape, but of the melancholic subject being prevented from moving beyond the physical landscape. While the meditating subject can use physical objects in the world to turn to God and can order the world toward the divine, the melancholic subject, on its *via negativa*, is always barred from its desire and is thus an example of a failed meditating subject. Consequently, the melancholic subject is bound to the contemplation of the material world.

Agamben notes that the melancholic position has also been associated with lust and Eros, since Aristotle argued that black bile, of which the melancholic is sufficiently full,[16] causes the melancholiac to have an erotic disposition (16). Similarly, in the Renaissance, Ficino connects melancholia with a propensity of falling in love in his *De amore*. Agamben explains that for Ficino, "the determined contemplative inclination of the melancholic pushes him or her fatally toward amorous passion" (17). Melancholia, thus, participates in a tradition of lust and love that is the product of its unfulfilled desire. Moreover, if melancholia can be further defined as a turn to inward contemplation, it would seem that erotic thoughts threaten the melancholiac's thought. Agamben explains that it is the confusion of desire and contemplation, of physical relationship and thought directed to the divine, that produces the erotic characteristic of the melancholiac:

> The erotic intention that unleashes the melancholic disorder presents itself as that which would possess and touch what ought merely to be the object of contemplation, and the tragic insanity of the saturine temperament thus finds its roots in the intimate contradiction of a gesture that would embrace the unattainable. (Agamben 17-18)

The melancholiac's desire to embrace what should only be an object of contemplation demonstrates its confusion between contemplation and action and the fact that the slothful lacks, not the desire for union with the divine, but the way to it. Any reader familiar with *Beautiful Losers* will immediately see within this quotation a description of *I*, who, rather than writing his history of Catherine Tekakwitha and thus keeping her in the spectrum of contemplation, desires to see underneath her blanket and thus Catherine

[16] The etymology of the word melancholia makes the connection between black bile and melancholy obvious, because, of course, melancholia comes into Old English from Old French through the Latin use of the Greek, *melankholia*, which can be broken into *melan*, meaning black, and *khole*, meaning bile (*OED* 887).

becomes an object which *I* desires to possess and touch. The "tragic insanity" of *I*'s desire to "embrace the unattainable" will be discussed in further detail below.

As the melancholic subject withdraws into itself and flees from the object of its desire, although still longing to touch what should only be thought of, it creates the impression of a gap in that desire. Agamben explains, however, that the melancholiac's flight from the object of its desire is, nonetheless, a movement toward that object. Because the melancholiac's flight is motivated by the object of desire, the melancholiac is never free of that object and, as a consequence, the further it attempts to move away from the object, the more tightly bound to it the melancholiac becomes. Agamben explains that "since its desire remains fixed in that which has rendered itself inaccessible, *acedia* is not only a flight from, but also a flight toward, which communicates with its object in the form of negation and lack" and that "every gesture that it completes in its flight is a testimonial to the endurance of the link that binds it to its object" (7). Here, we can think of the last words of *Beautiful Losers*: "Welcome to you, darling and friend, who miss me forever in your trip to the end" (Cohen 255). This greeting offers at once a welcome, a sign that the characters have reached their apotheosis, and a claim that the characters have missed the mark, have not truly achieved ecstasy. If the characters are both welcomed and told that they have missed their union with the divine, it is through a type of *via negativa* that the missing can also be a welcoming, so that each miss more tightly binds the characters to their seemingly inaccessible desire.

If the desire of the melancholiac is to order and find meaning in the object world through contemplation of it, we can clearly find a relation between the position of the melancholiac and that of the allegorist in Benjamin's terms. It bears repeating that in

Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning, Max Pensky explicitly relates the position of the allegorist to that of the melancholiac, stating, "allegory arises from melancholia" (117). The characteristic contemplation of the melancholiac is essential to the function of allegory. Benjamin explains that in the baroque, melancholia became a characteristic of great men, perhaps in reaction to the "empty world" (*Drama* 139) that surrounded them. Here, "empty world" means a world that is void of immanent meaning, as discussed in the previous chapter with reference to A.J.M. Smith. In Smith's poem, "The Cry," briefly discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the world too has become empty. The natural landscape through which the magi and the boy must travel is void of immanent meaning and thus, the boy begs for Jesus to show him the world not empty, but full, so that he will not lose his faith. The absence of the green grass of a redeemed world pushes the boy into a position of melancholia; he does not lose his faith in Jesus, but if the world is to be meaningful, it will be full of the meaning that he himself endows upon it. Furthermore, this position of endowing meaning in a world in which immanence and transcendence have been separated is the position of the allegorist.

Benjamin, like Freud, makes a distinction between mourning and melancholia. He explains that "[m]ourning is the state of mind in which feeling revives the empty world in the form of a mask, and derives an enigmatic satisfaction in contemplating it" (139). In contrast to the satisfaction that can be found in the position of mourning that Benjamin will later attribute to a loyalty to the world of things, melancholia occupies a position of betrayal:

> Melancholy betrays the world for the sake of knowledge. But in its tenacious self-absorption it embraces dead objects in its contemplation, in

> order to redeem them. [...] The persistence which is expressed in the intention of mourning is born of its loyalty to the world of things. (Benjamin 157)

Here, mourning can be associated with the successful meditation that St. Ignatius promotes in his *Spiritual Exercises*, while melancholia is its opposite; the melancholic subject is the dark other of the successful meditating subject who may order the world and find satisfaction in it. Melancholia betrays the world for the potential of knowledge; the melancholiac is faithful to the possibility of ideas. This betrayal of the world and faith in the possibility of knowledge, will bind the melancholiac to contemplation. Pensky comments on this passage from Benjamin and explains that the melancholiac

> plunges even deeper into fragments of an empty world in order to produce a profusion of objects for its own contemplation. The loyalty to the world of things has, for the melancholic, 'strings attached': loyalty extends only so far as the strings themselves are transformed from their sheer facticity into melancholy objects, capable of emanating – or receiving – meaning. (105-106)

The potential of an object to emanate meaning is absent if it is in a melancholic relation to its interpreter; instead, once an object falls under the gaze of melancholia its potential for significance is reduced to that which it "acquires from the allegorist" (Benjamin 184). In other words, the fragments of the world do not emanate meaning to the melancholiac, but, to the extent that the melancholiac finds meaning in the world, he becomes an allegorist, assigning significance to what he contemplates, all the while aware that the object to which he assigns meaning is "dead" (Benjamin 183) and without immanent significance.

For Benjamin, as for Agamben and Klibanskly, Panofsky, and Saxl, Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I* provides a useful visual aid for thinking about melancholia. Although Dürer is a Renaissance artist, his work, particularly in this engraving,

anticipates the perspective of the baroque melancholic subject. Benjamin's interest in the engraving lies in its transformation of useful and quotidian objects into objects of contemplation:

> The concept of the pathological state, in which the most simple object appears to be a symbol of some enigmatic wisdom because it lacks any natural, creative relationship to us, was set in an incomparably productive context. It accords with this that in the proximity of Albrecht Dürer's figure, *Melencolia*, the utensils of active life are lying around unused on the floor, as objects of contemplation. This engraving anticipates the baroque in many respects. In it the knowledge of the introvert and the investigations of the scholar have merged as intimately as in the men of the baroque. (140)

In the image of Dürer's *Melencolia I*, Benjamin finds the characteristics that, for him, are formative in the definition of the baroque man. Like the daughter of sloth, *evagatio mentis*, Dürer's grounded angel is one whose wandering mind binds it to its objects and that transforms tools into objects of contemplation. Klibansky notes that in his engraving, Dürer transforms Geometria's workshop "from a cosmos of clearly arranged and purposefully employed tools" to one of disarray and haphazard order (317). Importantly, it is the absence of an immanent meaning that emanates from these tools that is integral to their transformation into objects of contemplation and the transformation of an ordered cosmos into one of haphazard logic. In that respect, these objects open the way to allegory. The fact that they lack an immanent and self-sufficient meaning endows them with significance for the melancholiac as he attempts to decipher their meaning and put them in relation to other objects. This transformation, however, also binds the melancholiac to these objects in his contemplation of them. They are, in the words of Pensky, "pieces in a puzzle of redemption" (106), but the image that will be created by

assembling all of the pieces is not known and moreover, can only be a tentative picture structured by the allegorist.

Similar to Benjamin's interpretation of *Melencolia I* as anticipating the baroque melancholic subject who searches for "enigmatic wisdom" in the strewn tools, Agamben finds that in Dürer's engraving the melancholiac empties objects of meaning so that they can become objects of contemplation that will, hopefully, provide it with a glimpse of the eternal and the inaccessible:

> The compass, the sphere, the millstone, the hammer, the scales, and the straightedge, which the melancholic project has emptied of their habitual meaning and transformed into images of its own mourning, have no other significance than the space that they weave during the epiphany of the unattainable. [...] these objects have captured forever a gleam of that which can be possessed only with the provision that it be lost forever. (Agamben 26)

As the melancholiac focuses on these objects, emptied of their immanent meaning, he searches for an allegorical and transcendent significance within them; however, because the melancholiac cannot possess the object of his desire, this transcendent significance will always evade him. Although the fulfillment of these objects is impossible for the melancholiac, the absence of transcendent significance does further bind him to his desire and thus, perpetually reignites that desire. Pensky explains that the melancholic disposition is a result of the absence of immanent meaning or the disappearance of God in the material world, so that the desire of the melancholic subject to seek out the transcendent significance of these objects is in actuality a desire to find within the objects the presence of God. Pensky writes, "[t]he intensity and the persistence of the melancholy mind is always described within the negative space of the absent deity. This underlies the dialectical nearness of intense mournfulness and absolute bliss, or of despair and utopian

anticipation" (107). The absence of God thus initiates the melancholiac's search for transcendent significance in the object that he contemplates; the melancholic position is, then, at once the desperate sensation of seeking the absent divine and the joy of the anticipation of finding the divine at the end of the search. The continuous evasion of fulfillment, however, binds the melancholiac to the earthly object that he contemplates. Benjamin explains that "all the wisdom of the melancholic is subject to the nether world; it is secured by immersion in the life of creaturely things, and it hears nothing of the voice of revelation. Everything saturnine points down into the depths of the earth" (152). If the melancholiac wishes to understand the "enigmatic wisdom" of its objects, to find within them their transcendent significance, he remains bound to the earth on which the objects are found. On the same note, if the melancholiac cannot seem to move past the material objects of the everyday, it is due only to his faith in the glimmer of redemption which he may see in them, even if that glimmer only functions to secure its loss.

For Benjamin, this melancholic disposition anticipates and describes the character of the great men of the baroque, who are confronted with an emptied world which they must assign with meaning. Likewise the subject of modernist literature, according to Lukács, has a similarly melancholic disposition. Like the melancholic subject, who cannot act because he is bound to his internal contemplation of an "emptied world," the modernist subject, in its state of "throwness-into-being" (Lukács 1128)[17] is barred by thought from becoming a subject of action. The modernist subject can be considered a

[17] In his reference to Heidegger, Lukács explains that man's "throwness-into-being" "implies, not merely that man is constitutionally unable to establish relationships with things or persons outside himself; but also that it is impossible to determine theoretically the origin and goal of human existence" (1128-1129). Man in this conception is ahistorical and bound to his own experiences; he is without a hierarchic or externally defined understanding of the universe.

later iteration of the melancholic man of the baroque. If we recall that for Freud melancholia creates the opportunity for the ego to kill itself and that for Lukács the modernist subject is precisely that one which cannot interact with the world that surrounds it, we can find a connection between melancholia and the disposition of the modernist subject. Writing on modern melancholia in the work of Benjamin, Pensky notes that "[it] is as if each fragment of the allegorical rubble, turning into a puzzle piece, also transformed, horrorfyingly, into a fractured mirror, an image of the subject itself" (170). Here, the melancholic subject, identifying with objects that are void of immanent meaning and which it must contemplate in order to find a glimmer of "enigmatic wisdom," finds itself reflected back to itself in these fragments and slips further into its melancholic state. If melancholia can be said to describe the disposition of the baroque man, as Benjamin suggests, it can also be said to be a characteristic of the subject in modernist literature, that, as discussed in the previous two chapters, is isolated, internal, and bound to abstract potentiality. Furthermore, we should keep in mind that the medieval notion of sloth, which is closely related to contemporary theories of melancholia, is a disposition of the distracted mind; thus, the distracted mind that cannot act is not unlike the modernist subject that, bound to abstract potentiality, finds it difficult to interact with the world.

IV. A Glimmering of a Fake Universal Comprehension: Melancholia in *Beautiful Losers*

IV.i Weeping for a Lost Garden: *I*'s Melancholic Disposition

Cohen's *I* seems to occupy a melancholic position that is the result of his failed meditation. Unlike the meditating subjects that successfully follow the instructions of St. Ignatius, the melancholic *I* cannot achieve union with the divine. The old scholar displays melancholic characteristics, most obviously his contemplative disposition, his isolation, and his desire to be loved in the way that he chooses. *Beautiful Losers* begins with a series of questions that situates the narrator in a position of insecurity and distraction. Moreover, it is clear from the first page of the novel that *I*, like the melancholiac, is isolated and alone with his books. He tells Catherine that he is "an old scholar" with a "dusty mind full of the junk of maybe five thousand books" (Cohen 3). *I* presents himself from the beginning as a man for whom contemplation and study have maintained a prominent position in his life and, consequently, for whom action has always been more difficult. *I*, living alone in his empty apartment and reflecting on the lives of his wife Edith, his friend F., and the long dead Iroquois saint,[18] Catherine Tekakwitha, is the very image of the man of inaction and contemplation.

I's inaction is made physical by his chronic constipation. Michael Ondaatje calls *I*'s constipation a "physical parallel of his mental state" (47). From this point of view, *I*'s constipation is a physical manifestation of his psychical stasis; *I* cannot move forward, he merely questions the past and reconsiders his options, holding within him all that he cannot let go. Indeed, *I*'s constipation itself becomes a topic of contemplation as he considers whether he is "going to be able to shit or not" (Cohen 7). Here, it is important to note that constipation is a physical symptom of melancholia (Agamben 11), so that *I*'s

[18] Although Catherine Tekawitha is not beatified, she occupies the position of the saint in the text, as it is clear that she is the saint which *I* desires to "fuck."

constipation functions metaphorically to indicate that he is unable to let go of the past and to be filled again anew and literally to clinically indicate his melancholia.[19] I will return to *I*'s constipation when I discuss his desire for union with the divine that he perceives as physically impossible because of his backed up system; because he cannot empty himself, he believes he cannot be filled.

Another immediate indication that *I* is a melancholic subject is his longing to be loved, but only in the way that he desires. Here we should recall that Agamben explains that although the slothful desire communion with the divine, they do not desire the path that will lead them there. Similarly, *I* begins his "History of Them All" by asking Catherine if he can "love [her] in [his] own way" (Cohen 3) and later confesses his desire that Edith "love [him] in [*his*] way" (Cohen 26). The parallel structure in these statements is also one of the many indications that Catherine and Edith are related characters and foreshadows their merging into the Isis figure that appears in the third book, "*Beautiful Losers*: An Epilogue in the Third Person." *I*'s desire to be the master of the love that he receives from Catherine and from Edith further associates him with the melancholic disposition; he does not wish to be the object of love or to learn from or be changed by either Catherine's or Edith's love, but to feel it in the way he desires it and to come to that love by the path that he chooses.

Additionally, *I* is attributed with melancholic characteristics by F. in his letter in the second book. F. alludes to *I*'s melancholic state in his letter when he reminds *I* that

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[19] Because of the historical association between constipation and melancholia and the other indications of *I*'s melancholic temperment, I argue that *I*'s constipation is a symptom of melancholia rather than a symptom of his discomfort with his homosexual relationship with F. as Andrew Lesk argues in his article, "Leonard Cohen's Traffic in Alterity in *Beautiful Losers*."

"[w]ith every handshake you wept for a lost garden" (Cohen 182). Here, F. identifies the essential loss responsible for *I*'s melancholic disposition: the loss of the harmony of the Garden of Eden. Moreover, this loss and *I*'s obsession over it bar *I* from interacting with men in the world, as each handshake, the signal of an initiation in a new relationship, only serves to remind him of the essential loss of mankind. The loss of the Garden of Eden also refers the reader back to the loss of the transcendent immanence in which the Iroquois lived in their Edenic world. I will discuss this loss further in the next section. In his letter, F. also tells his old friend to "[s]ay good-by to constipation and loneliness" (Cohen 196). Here, F. promises to free *I* from his melancholic symptoms, to save him from the life of lonely contemplation into which he has receded consistently after the deaths of Edith and F. F.'s promise comes after he implores *I* to read the history of Catherine with "that part of your mind which you delegate to watching out for blackflies and mosquitoes" (Cohen 196). In other words, F. will free *I* from melancholia by providing him with the information that he longs for, but only on the condition that *I* does not concentrate completely on the story. In order to be free from melancholia, *I* must stop thinking too deeply, must "stop bravely at the surface" (Cohen 4) and not be overcome by his thoughts. Furthermore, F. asks *I* whether his commitment to contemplation, his obsession with the past that prevents him from acting in the present, has provided him with a revelation. F.'s question to *I*, "[h]as loneliness led you into ecstasy" (Cohen 161), points to his awareness of the ecstatic characteristics of melancholia. F.'s plan to bring chaos into *I*'s life so that he may have a revelation has included keeping *I* in an ecstasy-inducing loneliness from which only F., with his history of Edith and Catherine, can bring him into full revelation. In these passages, F. seems aware of *I*'s melancholic state

and the *via negativa* of melancholia that may, through despair, bring joy. *I*'s position as an old scholar who is obsessed with his books, defined by his contemplative rather than active life, constipated, and desires to dictate and control the way Catherine and Edith love him, together with F.'s seeming awareness of the connections between ecstasy and despair and contemplation and constipation, are some of the ways that the novel makes explicit reference to *I*'s melancholic disposition. From here, let us turn to some of the ways in which *I*'s melancholia is portrayed more subtly.

IV.ii The Knowledge of the Introvert and the Investigations of the Scholar: *I*'s *evagatio mentis*

I's melancholia pushes him into a Prufrock-like distraction; he becomes a subject who does not act but thinks and for which the world has lost its hierarchic structure. Thus, seemingly banal daily activities take on the utmost importance. This skewed structure of the universe, in which Prufrock may ask if he dares eat a peach in the same language as he asks if he dare disturb the universe, nonetheless suggests that actions carry with them meaning. Therefore, even the most ordinary action can have bearing on the universe and so must be considered with the highest degree of gravity. Prufrock's absorption in abstract potentiality that creates his indecisive and inactive relationship with the world that surrounds him is similar to *I*'s melancholic state. During *I*'s manic questioning of the world in the first pages of Cohen's novel, he displays similar traits to Prufrock. Like Prufrock, who linguistically equates eating a peach and disturbing the universe, *I* manically asks, while thinking of mass produced religious trinkets of

Catherine: "What makes the mountainside of maple turn red? Peace, you manufacturers of religious trinkets! You handle sacred material! Catherine Tekakwitha, do you see how I get carried away? How I want the world to be mystical and good? Are the stars tiny, after all? Who will put us to sleep? Should I save my fingernails? Is matter holy?" (Cohen 6). *I*'s manic and distracted questioning of the world around him that moves quickly from thought to thought, at times without clear connection, becomes part of the recognizable style of the first book of *Beautiful Losers* and, structurally, marks the difference between *I* and F., as F.'s letter is much more organized and didactic in its structure and development. Here, however, we find one of many examples of *I*'s distracted, melancholic mind. Unlike the Jesuit meditating subject, *I* cannot order the world around him and thus, he follows the absurd question of whether he should save his fingernails with the question of the holiness of matter. However, as in Prufrock's question of the peach, the following question of disturbing the universe lends gravity to the previous, seemingly absurd indecision. In this case, if matter is holy, perhaps *I* should save his fingernails. At the very least, he should not flush holy matter down an otherwise empty toilet. Furthermore, if matter itself is essentially holy, the mass produced trinkets of Catherine must carry within them something sacred. This question of the holiness of matter is essential to *I*'s – and the melancholiac's – relationship with the world, for it is the belief that the material objects of the world may provide a glimmer of the "enigmatic wisdom" of the absent deity that produces the desire to order the world, the desire to know the secret that the object may expose. It is also worth noting that *I* questions the stars in this passage. This questioning of the cosmos, and its repetition throughout the

novel, further implicates *Beautiful Losers* in a baroque literary tradition in the way we have seen in Pirandello's novel *Il fu Mattia Pascal* and Leopardi's *Il Copernico.*

On the same page as *I*'s questioning of the essential holiness of matter is a question posed by F. that also creates a similarity between the anarchist separatist and Prufrock. F., however, does not ask if he dare disturb the universe, but asks, "Who am I to refuse the universe?" (Cohen 6). *I* remembers F. muttering this rhetorical question to him after recalling F.'s desire to have sex with a saint, thus linking the two thoughts and implying that to have sex with a saint – the narrative quest of the novel – is to gain the universe. Here, F. does not wonder at his ability to disturb the universe but, through a rhetorical question, implies that by having sex with a saint he may gain the universe and, as a result, may understand its "enigmatic wisdom" and be free from his melancholic contemplation of it. F., the anarchist man of action and the foil of a character like Prufrock, is frustrated by this endless contemplation and wants desperately to know the secrets of the universe.

If the reader is frustrated by the absence of the history that *I* is to be writing in the first book, *I*'s distracted mind is at fault. As in the quotation above, *I* moves quickly from the historical facts of Catherine Tekakwitha's story to the subjective memories and emotions that are awakened during his writing of it. So, for example, he moves from the simple, factual statement that "[t]he French gave the Iroquois their name" (Cohen 7)[20] to an appropriately critical statement of the moral implications of naming a people, to a

[20] For a discussion of the function of naming in Cohen's novel, please see Frank Davey's article "*Beautiful Losers*: Leonard Cohen's Postcolonial Novel" and Bernd Engler's and Kurt Müller's chapter, "Historical Alterity and the Revenge of Names in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*" in their collection, *Historiographic Metafiction in Modern American and Canadian Literature.*

discussion of his constipation – "[w]ill my bowels churn? Has the old machine turned the food brown?" (Cohen 7) – to a description of his wife's awful death. This distracted narrative, which has frustrated some of the novel's early readers, is a testament to the *evagatio mentis* of the melancholiac. Like the distracted subject of modernist literature who has lost itself in abstract potentiality, *I*'s melancholia binds him to his own history and the contemplation of his own relation to the world. He cannot provide a focused and detailed account of Catherine because he is far too emotionally caught up in her story. Furthermore, he has, in melancholic fashion, undergone an ego identification with the lost object, here the dead Iroquois saint by whom he longs to be loved. *I* is aware of his contemplative and obsessive position that bars him from interacting with the world. He asks:

> I don't want to think too much about what F. said. Why must I? [...] Why must I be lashed to the past by the words of a dead man? Why must I reproduce these conversations so painstakingly, letting not one lost comma alter the beat of our voices? I want to talk to men in taverns and buses and remember nothing. And you, Catherine Tekakwitha, burning in your stall of time, does it please you that I strip myself so cruelly? I fear you smell of the Plague. The long house where you crouch day after day smells of the Plague. Why is my research so hard? Why can't I memorize baseball statistics like the Prime Minister? (Cohen 35)

In this quotation, *I* admits his obsessive contemplation of the words of his friend F., who acts as his spiritual guide and mentor throughout the novel. In this passage, however, *I* makes clear his desire to free himself of this melancholic disposition so that he could interact with the world and talk to men in bars and buses. *I*'s conversations, though, are always with the dead; he transcribes obsessively from his memory the conversations he had with F. during which F. tried to show him the path to revelation and he asks Catherine to listen as he recounts them for her. Furthermore, *I*'s relation to history is one

of suffering; an emotional old scholar, he feels the pain of the Iroquois' losses during colonization. He has a synaesthetic relationship to the histories that he writes so that he smells the Plague, which he can only access through the dusty old books of the library. Unlike the Prime Minister, a man of action, *I* cannot memorize the cold and trivial histories of baseball, but is emotionally attached to and despairing for the histories over which he obsesses. History for *I* is not a hobby; instead, in his desire to reproduce and interact with what has been lost, he exists in a state of melancholia.

IV.iii A Needle that Sews the World Together: *I*'s Allegorical Desire

I's melancholic disposition produces within him an allegorical desire to order the world and to understand the "enigmatic wisdom" of its material objects. The image of the conversion of the Iroquois by the Jesuits provides an example of a fully immanent and harmonious world that is lost after the Iroquois conversion. In their attempt to convert the Iroquois, the Jesuits insist that the natives remove their fingers from their ears and thus disrupt the Telephone Dance. But, once the Iroquois remove their fingers the world of transcendent immanence is lost:

> As those waxy digits were withdrawn a wall of silence was thrown up between the forest and the hearth, and the old people gathered at the priest's hem shivered with a new kind of loneliness. They could not hear the raspberries breaking into domes, they could not smell the numberless pine needles combing out the wind, they could not remember the last moment of a trout as it lived between a flat white pebble on the streaked bed of a stream and the fast shadow of a bear claw. Like children who listen in vain to the sea in plastic sea shells they sat bewildered. (Cohen 86)

Here, the Iroquois conversion marks a disruption of an immanence of plentitude, in which immanence and transcendence are bound together. Before the conversion, nature held, for the Iroquois, a natural unity, in which the Iroquois could witness its workings during the moment in which a raspberry becomes the perfect size for eating and the last second before the trout is struck by the bear. Once the Iroquois are converted, however, "a wall of silence" robs them of their fully immanent relationship with the natural world. They are no longer part of the natural world, but outside of it and bewildered by its workings. The immanence of the material world becomes separated from transcendence so that the objects of the world become merely immanent. At the moment of conversion, the moment when the Telephone Dance ends, the relationship the Iroquois have with the world changes from a symbolic relationship to an allegorical relationship. No longer can the Iroquois "see," in the symbolic sense, the logic of the world; they are bound to an allegorical relationship that will require them to "seek" or to abstract a guiding principle of organization that would make their world meaningful. Thus, at the moment of conversion and the loss of the symbolic relationship with the world, the Iroquois feel "a new kind of loneliness," one in which the unity of the world can no longer be witnessed but must be sought out.

F. and Edith also participate in the Telephone Dance, from which *I* is barred due to his allegorical rather than symbolic relationship with the world. F. and Edith do the Telephone Dance together in the basement of the System Theatre while *I* is in the bathroom. During the dance, F. and Edith "became telephones" (Cohen 33), transcending the distance between each other and connecting themselves, albeit through an electronic metaphor, to the Iroquois before conversion. Importantly, F. tells *I* during his recollection

of the Telephone Dance that *I* could not participate in the dance because he "lost [himself] in particulars" (Cohen 29). While F. is explicitly referring to *I*'s erotic preoccupations here, the underlying erotic tension of the Telephone Dance is not comparable to *I*'s erotic tendencies. In fact, in his recollection of the Telephone Dance to *I*, F. attempts to teach *I* that his concentration on the details has barred him from understanding the underlying harmony that is possible in erotic relationships. These relationships need not be, as F. is determined to emphasize, conventional sexual relationships; eroticism here is not merely sexual, as is made clear by the Iroquois Telephone Dance, but a path to a vision of the inconnectedness of the world and a key that unlocks a world of full immanence. F., aware of *I*'s allegorical rather than symbolic relationship with the world, thus makes *I* beg for the details of his Telephone Dance with Edith, explaining to him, "that's the only way you value [the information]. When it falls on you from out of the trees you think it's rotten fruit" (Cohen 33). Again, F. alludes to *I*'s obsessive melancholic disposition. *I* is uncomfortable in a world in which he does not have to search for meaning; he does not trust it. Thus, *I* searches, begs, and fights for the details of the world all the while unsure of their significance. *I*, like Dürer's grounded angel, loses himself in the particulars of the world and is unable to fuse the world of immanence with its transcendent other side. *I* is again figured as a failed meditating subject, who, although he desires the outcome of the Telephone Dance, cannot allow himself to participate in it.

In his article, "Beyond Mommy and the Machinery," Paul Nonnekes identifies the essential element of the Telephone Dance which is responsible for *I*'s position outside the dance. Nonnekes, evoking the Iroquois myth of Ostarach, explains that in the Telephone

Dance, "the connection between the fingers is made by the absence between the ears" (7). In other words, the Telephone Dance is only possible in those who have given up contemplation. *I* is thus too intellectual and contemplative to participate. The participants of the Telephone Dance, who seem to see a world of transcendent immanence and the interconnectedness of things around them, like the Romantics who view the world symbolically, have a synthetic relationship with the world. In contrast, *I*, in his perpetual contemplation and melancholic state, has an allegorical relationship with the world that relies on analytic, rather than synthetic, reason.

Despite F.'s seeming authority on the world and the way to a sensation of the divine unity of all things and his participation in a Telephone Dance with Edith, his Telephone Dance is disrupted and thus, F. does not have full access to the "enigmatic wisdom" of the world. The image of a needle, with which the particularities of the world may be sewn together and thus reunited, repeats throughout the novel. If we imagine that in *I*'s world, Pirandello's diabolical imp of reflection has already dismantled the machine of the universe and exposed it in its parts, the image of the needle and thread is an image of hopeful redemption. *I*, and even F., desires to reunite the world that has been exposed in its particularity, to "[f]uck a saint" and thus "to see the acropolis like the Indians did who never even had one" (Cohen 13). To be able to see the acropolis like the Iroquois, is to have an fully immanent relationship with the world in which material objects proclaim their position in the order of things without the need for historical interpretation. *I* first refers to the needle he imagines he has in the first book:

> Out, out along the narrow highway sails my mind, driven by curiosity, luminous with acceptance, far and out, like a feathered hook whipped deep into the light above the stream by a magnificent cast. Somewhere, out of my reach, my control, the hook unbends into a spear, the spear shears

> itself into a needle, and the needle sews the world together. [...] it goes through everything like a relentless bloodstream, and the tunnel is filled with a comforting message, a beautiful knowledge of unity. (Cohen 17-18)

Here, *I*'s mind becomes the needle that sews the world together. *I*'s needle is one that attempts to sew together the hole that is ripped in the paper sky; his desire is to de-melancholize Hamlet so that he can once again act like Orestes. This is not a synthetic and symbolic relationship with the world, but an allegorical one in which harmony is created by the mind through analytic reasoning. Nonetheless, *I* admits his desire to find the unity in the world that is otherwise unclear to him. He desires the fully immanent relationship the Iroquois had with the world before their conversion and the building up of a wall between their interpreting minds and the natural world around them. *I* is comforted by the potential harmony of the world that frees him from the despair of his melancholia. This is, nonetheless, an allegorical relationship with the world. *I* does not simply see a unified world, but must sew a disparate world together in an attempt to recreate the harmony in which the Iroquois participated before their conversion. F.'s advice to *I* in these moments of desire to sew the world back together to "connect nothing" (Cohen 17) is a result of F.'s doubt in the potential for the world to be reunited, based on his own experience.

For F. has also imagined himself holding a powerful needle with which he may connect the disparate particulars of the world, but F. understands this work as the work of Dr. Frankenstein and for him, the results are not the "beautiful knowledge of unity" but the creation of monsters:

> all I had in the wrecked world was a needle and thread [...] All I heard was pain, all I saw was mutilation. My needle going so madly, sometimes I found I'd run the thread right through my own flesh and I was joined to one of my own grotesque creations – I'd rip us apart – and then I heard my

> own voice howling with the others, and I knew that I was also truly part of the disaster. But I realized that I was not the only one on my knees sewing frantically. There were others like me, making the same monstrous mistakes, driven by the same impure urgency, stitching themselves into the ruined heap. (Cohen 183)

Here, F. is aware that, in a world of mere immanence, any connections he makes, any harmony he feels he perceives in the world will always be of his own creation. Thus, he makes "monstrous mistakes" in his attempt to put the world in order. This is a painful job and it is, as Pensky notes, from the position of melancholia that the allegorist is born. In these quotations, with the repeated image of a needle and the desire to sew the world together, we find an allegorical desire in both *I* and F. F., however, is aware of the perpetual failure of his needlework, while *I* still remains hopeful for the reconstruction of the beautiful harmony of the universe. Thus, F. advises *I* to connect nothing and to understand that the relationships in the world are built on contingency, like Smith's lonely land. Annoyed with *I*'s naïve desire, F. shouts, "[p]lace things side by side on your arborite table, if you must, but connect nothing" (Cohen 18). F. warns *I* against making connections because he knows that these connections will only be tentative; they will not reinstitute a state of transcendent immanence in the world, but will only be an attempt to cover up the tears in the "wrecked world." In other words, the needle and thread will not silence the convulsive squeak of the dismantled machine.

IV.iv *I*'s Desire for Communion with the Divine

I, in his state of melancholia, feels not the presence but the absence of God. This absence, as Agamben suggests, nonetheless further binds *I* to his desire for communion

with the divine. In his desperate questioning of the world around him, *I* often betrays his longing for the presence of God. As I have suggested above, *I*'s constipation is a physical symptom of melancholia that metaphorically signals his desire for God to enter his soul and the impossibility of that entrance. It is as if *I*'s body, filled with waste, cannot make room for the presence of God. *I*'s constipation then becomes a testament to his isolation and his melancholia. He begs:

> Please make me empty, if I'm empty then I can receive, if I can receive it means it comes from somewhere outside of me, if it comes from outside of me I'm not alone! [...] Is there an outside? I am the sealed, dead, impervious museum of my appetite. This is the brutal solitude of constipation, this is the way the world is lost. One is ready to stake everything on a river, a nude bath before Catherine Tekakwitha, and no promises. (Cohen 40-41)

I's constipation reveals his loneliness. He is locked within himself and begs to be moved from the outside. Like the melancholiac who desires the destination but not the route, *I* wants to be emptied from the outside, to have God come to him rather than going himself to God. Moreover, with the allusion to Eliot's "The Hollow Men," *I* sets himself up not as a hollow man, but a man whose waste has made him incapable of significant relationships. Here, like in the last stanza of Eliot's poem, the world is lost with a whimper, but this whimper is *I*'s melancholic despair, the howling *kouè* of an isolated old scholar. The *kouè* becomes a melancholic whimper of constipation. *I* alludes to his melancholic position when he asks, "Why me? – the great complaint of the constipated. Why doesn't the world work for me?" (Cohen 39). This is also the question of the melancholiac. Why may other men interact with the world when I am bound to a lonely contemplation of it? Why may the Prime Minister collect baseball statistics and make

decisions when I am bound to an emotional study of the horrors of history? Thus, *I* later asks, "Why is my work so lonely?" (Cohen 47)

I's desire to be made empty so that he may be entered from the outside, an explicitly homoerotic image, and his imploration to God, "O God, please terrify me" (Cohen 47), recall John Donne's "Holy Sonnet 14." Like *I*, in this sonnet Donne asks to be moved by God, to physically feel his presence:

> Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you
> As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
> That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
> Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
> I, like an usurped town, to another due,
> Labor to admit you, but O, to no end;
> Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
> But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
> Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
> But am betrothed unto your enemy.
> Divorce me, untie or break that knot again;
> Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
> Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

Like Cohen, Donne creates a seductively erotic metaphor to describe his desire to feel the presence of God. Furthermore, like *I*, the speaker of Donne's "Holy Sonnet 14" desires for God to make his presence felt, physically. *I*'s plea for God to "terrify [him]" recalls Donne's request for God to "[b]atter [his] heart." Donne's desire to be touched by God and *I*'s desire to "[f]uck a saint" suggest melancholia as they testify to Donne's and *I*'s desire to touch – or be touched by – what should only be the object of contemplation. Both Donne's poem and *I*'s extended monologue in the first book are evidence of an absence of God in the world, a separation of immanence from transcendence. If God's presence were immanently felt in the world, neither Donne nor *I* would need to implore God to move them, to make his presence felt. Yet, this desire to feel the presence of God

confirms that *I*'s melancholia is indeed related to the medieval notion of *acedia*. *I* yearns for a specific lost object; he desires to feel the presence of God in the world. That he has turned his back on the prescribed and conventional path toward God does not negate his desire; instead, as Agamben suggests, every step that *I* seems to take away from God is a step that reaffirms his desire for God. Thus, his longing to "[f]uck a saint" is not pornographic filth, but the expression of the desire to witness the presence of the divine in the material world.

IV.v Somebody Said Lift that Veil: To Embrace the Unattainable[21]

Throughout Cohen's novel, the image of a veil – occasionally figured as a wall, screen, or blanket – is repeated. This veil is intimately connected to *I*'s desire to understand the underlying harmony of the world and to feel the presence of God. In the novel, the first veil – in the history the novel gives though not the first veil to appear in the novel – is not one that is lifted, but one that bars the Iroquois from their state of transcendent immanence; it is the wall of silence that shoots up in the moment that they remove their fingers from their ears and are converted by the Jesuits. The narrative quest of the novel then becomes the quest to break through that wall and to understand the organization of the world again. Although the Iroquois seemed to have had a symbolic

[21] In her discussion of the epigraph of *Beautiful Losers* – "*Somebody said lift that bale*" – in "Canadian Cryptic: The Sacred, the Profane, and the Translatable," Sylvia Söderlind explains that "[in] [M]odern Greek, the letter *B* is pronounced *V*; read 'in Greek' the word 'bale' would be pronounced 'veil'" (96). Thus, the novel's first veil is in its epigraph, which is also a reference to Ray Charles, appropriately the image that the nameless vagrant of the third book will assume as he is projected across the night sky. After his stay in Hydra in the early sixties, Cohen could very well have been aware of the difference in the Greek pronunciation and could be making such a play in his epigraph.

relationship with the world around them, the relationship to the world after the wall of silence has gone up, must be one of allegory. *I*, then becomes the twentieth century iteration of the Iroquois after their conversion and assumes the position of a melancholic allegorist in his quest to understand the universe. As *I* contemplates why F. has recommended that he "[f]uck a saint" of all people, he realizes that the saint is the one who can balance the world and who holds the key to the allegory of the it. *I* describes the characteristics of the saint: "[s]omething in him so loves the world that he gives himself to the laws of gravity and chance. [...] His house is dangerous and finite, but he is at home in the world. He can love the shapes of human beings [...]. It is good to have among us such men, such balancing monsters of love" (Cohen 99). Importantly, the saint is the one who is comfortable in the world and who does not, like F., perceive it as "wrecked." The saint can balance the material world in a way that *I* cannot. The saint does not lose himself in the particulars, but understands the underlying logic of those particulars so that he can see the world as unified.

In his historical analysis of the translations of Catherine Tekakwitha's name, *I* notes two translations and his own interpretation of them. Catherine's name is translated by the Jesuits as "[s]he who puts things in order" and "[l]ike someone who proceeds in shadows, her arms held before her" (Cohen 45). The first of these translations implies the ordering of the world in order to achieve a transcendent knowledge of its significance. In this sense, Catherine's name implies that she is like a Jesuit, meditating on the physical world all the while working toward communion with the divine. The second translation of her name suggests that the material world holds not objects of full significance, but shadows of such full objects. Catherine, then, walks in the mode of the sleepwalker, with

her arms stretched out in front of her, allowing her minimal contact with these shadows. *I* combines these translations in his definition: "[s]he who, advancing, arranges shadows neatly" (Cohen 45). Here, Catherine moves forward, ordering the world, but this is still a world of shadows. Catherine cannot fill out the shadows, but she is able to understand their underlying logic and thus she may arrange them. Catherine is, of course, the saint that *I* desires to fuck. It is her understanding of the shadows of the world, her ability to advance amongst shadows, as well as her connection to the divine that *I* wishes to feel. Moreover, as a melancholiac, *I* desires to touch what he should only think about; thus, he desires to lift another veil, to "get under [her] blanket" (Cohen 103).

While the sexual implications of *I*'s desire to "get under" Catherine's blanket are obvious, *I* is also referring to what he will come to know if he does. *I* explains that apocalyptic has a similar sexual implication:

> The word apocalyptic has interesting origins. It comes from the Greek *apokalupsis*, which means revelation. This derives from the Greek *apokaluptein*, meaning uncover or disclose. *Apo* is a Greek prefix meaning from, derived from. *Kaluptein* means to cover. This is a cognate with *kalube* which is cabin, and *kalumma* which means woman's veil. Therefore apocalyptic describes that which is revealed when the woman's veil is lifted. (Cohen 102-103)

Here, *I* explains his desire in terms of revelation. When *I* finally crawls underneath Catherine's blanket, the veil will be lifted and he will have access to her understanding of the world. The vagabond that is created through a merging of *I* and F. in the third book, participates in an apocalyptic moment, when he goes down on the goddess Isis, who is a merging of both Edith and Catherine. This is the moment of initiation for *I*, when *I* will prepare himself for transcendence and will be able to escape the screen of the System Theatre. Thus, soon after he "dissolve[s] from the inside out" and is projected across the

Montreal sky as a movie of Ray Charles. Here, *I* has escaped the cinema's screen and has gained access to the sky. If the novel ended here, I would argue that it suggests an escape from *I*'s melancholic state and that he achieves what he has desired; his melancholia dissolves and he has a revelation that allows him to understand the order of the universe. However, the ending of the novel suggests that this moment of ecstasy could not be maintained and that *I*, unlike the saint who achieves "a remote human possibility" (Cohen 99), is bound to his melancholic state that combines ecstasy with despair and continues upon its *via negativa*. Like F.'s Telephone Dance, the ecstasy of the vagrant is disrupted and does not last. The people that gather on the street to witness the miracle transformation quickly lose interest; relieved, someone says, "[t]hank God it's only a movie" (Cohen 254). The miracle projection of the movie across the sky changes nothing and, as the last words of the novel suggest, this moment of ecstasy does not so much hit as miss its mark. The last passage of the novel suggests that *I*, like the reader – and here we cannot ignore the allusion to Baudelaire's "To the Reader"[22] – exists in an allegorical world. "Welcome to you, darling and friend, who miss me forever in your trip to the end" (Cohen 255) does not suggest the fulfillment of *I*'s desire, but, in an allegorical fashion, it suggests the desire to know the underlying logic of the world and the perpetual barring of that desire's fulfillment. The characters of *Beautiful Losers* are bound to their

[22] Linda Hutcheon notes that Cohen's allusion to Baudelaire is devoid of the antagonism in the French poem: "[t]he intertext is pretty obvious, but there is none of the hostility of 'Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère' – Baudelaire's famous Prologue to his *Fleurs du mal*; nor is there any of the aggression of Eliot's modernist recalling of it in *The Waste Land*" (42). For Hutcheon, the absence of hostility in Cohen's allusion is characteristic of what she calls his postmodern metafiction through which the author "wants to lure readers into the act of meaning-making, to tantalize us with our own expectations – if only then to ironically thwart them" (42). Rather than read this joyful evasion as a feature of Cohen's postmodernism, I interpret it, as I have made clear above, as characteristic of the melancholic nature of the text.

melancholia as they attempt to understand a world in which transcendence has been separated from immanence. The vagrant's momentary ecstasy is then, like *I*'s feelings of harmony when he attempts to sew together the world, just a "glimmering of a fake universal comprehension" (Cohen 17). This final veil, here the cinema's screen, when lifted does not reveal the underlying logic of the world, but confirms the failure to know that logic. This universal comprehension is fake, and, as the title of the novel suggests, its beauty is one of loss.

The characters of Cohen's experimental novel participate in an allegorical relationship with the world in which they live. *I*, in his melancholia, desires to have a revelation, to pierce the wall of silence that is created when the Iroquois are converted and thus to gain access to the underlying logic of the world. He desires to achieve, like the saint he wants to fuck, "a remote human possibility." It is in his quest for the fulfillment of the world and the revelation of its harmony that *I* experiences the "grief that makes joy" of his own melancholia. This is not to say that *I* finds the key to the allegory of the world and thus escapes his state of melancholia, but that, like the melancholiac throughout history, *I* finds pleasure in his own pain. This melancholic pain that brings pleasure can be thought of in terms of both Benjamin's man of the baroque and Lukács' subject of modernist literature. *I* shares with both of these types a disappointment in the object world that surrounds him and the desire to find within it a glimmer of "enigmatic wisdom." This desire binds *I* to himself and his own contemplation of the world in which he lives. He is not a man of action, but like both the slothful man and the man consumed in abstract potentiality, he is a man of inaction, of thought and distraction. *I*'s distracted thought and melancholic despair, nonetheless, lead

him to a kind of ecstasy, but this is not the ecstasy which he has desired. *I*'s ecstasy does not restore an immanence of plentitude in the world, but further confirms its absence, just as the reader is reminded at the end of the novel that she has not fulfilled the quest. As *I*'s *kouè*, his noise of true emotion, becomes a howl that turns into a song, indeterminate if it is a cry of distress or joy, the reader is reminded of the melancholia of an old scholar alone in his misery and desiring an object, a lost garden perhaps, that although in its beauty may be glimpsed, will always be lost.

Conclusion:

A Canadian Baroque Tradition

In this thesis I have attempted to outline the adoption of a baroque sensibility by modernist writers in the twentieth century. Moreover, I have argued that this recurrence of a baroque sensibility has also occurred in Canadian modernism. Here, I have used the examples of A.J.M. Smith, an initiator of modernism in Canada, and Leonard Cohen, for some the first Canadian postmodern writer, in part to show that this baroque sensibility appears at both the beginning and end of modernism in Canada. The examples of Smith and Cohen, however, are not the only ones to be found in Canadian literary canon and the affinity with the baroque does not end with modernism in this country. If, in the early twentieth century, Canadian writers found themselves looking to the seventeenth century for a model of expression and spiritual constitution, this alignment has persisted throughout the century. But, this tradition in Canadian literature, if alluded to, has yet to be explicitly elaborated upon. This thesis is only a modest first step in the consideration of a baroque tradition in Canadian literature. Such a project would not be a reshuffling of the Canadian canon, but the consideration of a previously unacknowledged tradition in Canadian literature. I would like to conclude by mentioning some of the Canadian writers who were not considered in this thesis, but who contribute to the baroque tradition in Canadian literature.

In terms of modernist poets, many of Smith's colleagues at McGill shared with him a deep interest in the English Metaphysicals. Perhaps Smith's best-known counterpart, F.R. Scott, combines Metaphysical and imagistic techniques in his non-

satirical poetry in a way that suggests the tension between "immanence and transcendence" (Benjamin, *Drama* 55) that is characteristic of the baroque sensibility. Similarly, Leo Kennedy's volume of poetry, *The Shrouding*, also owes a great deal to his interest in the affinity between the Metaphysicals and the modernists. Kennedy openly acknowledges this in his essay "Direction for Canadian Poets," where he writes that *The Shrouding*, "reverts by way of Smith and Eliot to something of the matter of the metaphysicians" (17). In this quotation, Kennedy interestingly explains that modernists specifically constitute his interest in the seventeenth century. Smith, Scott, and Kennedy make up a group of early modernists that begin to establish the baroque tradition in Canadian poetry.

Furthermore, although I have not included any female writers in this thesis, women have participated in the baroque tradition in Canadian literature throughout the century. For example, in *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, edited by Smith and published in 1943, Margaret Avison's poetry appears in the section for "cosmopolitan" poets, where it is described as "metaphysical poetry, passionate, intellectual, and essentially religious" (426). Avison initiates a tradition of women writers with affinities with the baroque and can be seen as a bridge between the metaphysical poetry of the modernists in the early twentieth century and continuation of a baroque tradition in women writers in its second half. These women writers include canonical figures like Margaret Atwood and lesser-known writers, like Diane Schoemperlen. Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye* is also invested in what may be more appropriately called a neo-baroque poetic. The novel is the story of an artist who paints in a neo-baroque style reminiscent of Francis Bacon. Marta Dvorak argues that the novel is also neo-baroque in form, claiming "[i]n a neo-baroque fashion,

the writer generates sense by producing a sens/ation in readers [...] by touching their sens/ibility" (304). Moreover, with the protagonist's vision of the Virgin Mary that saves her as a child, Atwood's novel introduces Mary as a character in the Canadian baroque tradition.

Mary reappears in Schoemperlen's novel, *Our Lady of the Lost and Found*, when she takes a break from her position as the mother of God and visits a writer in a small town. Schoemperlen's novel is particularly relevant for the characteristics of the baroque tradition that have been discussed in this thesis. The novel begins with a chapter entitled "Signs" that portrays the material world as one in which signs exist, but cannot be read. Thus, although in retrospect the writer can understand how the material objects of her life were pointing to the arrival of Mary, she cannot read the signs at the moment of their occurrence. Furthermore, like *I*, the protagonist questions the essential holiness of matter after Mary makes a joke about the holiness of Evian water (Schoemperlen 193). Schoemperlen also takes the disconnect between material appearance and transcendent significance of the objects of the world, particularly mass-produced objects, as a theme in her collection of short stories, *Forms of Devotion*. The story, "Innocent Objects," takes this disconnect as a specific theme. Helen, the story's protagonist, collects objects that have no real relation to her life, such as a photo album full of pictures of people she does not know. The impossibility of the objects functioning in a revelatory way is referred to in a footnote describing the photo album, in which Schoemperlen writes, "[e]very eye, every elbow, every dish, every drawer, each and every innocent subject and object waits to spill out its secrets like pearls. Helen is still waiting to receive them" (66). In this quotation we once again see the impossibility of objects to reveal their transcendent

significance and, in Helen's patience, we see the longing for the reconstitution of a fully immanent world.

These are only a few of the writers who may be said to participate in a Canadian baroque tradition. The consideration of this tradition in Canadian literature would further open Canada's literary history to comparison with other literary traditions in Europe and in the United States. As we can see with the recurrence of baroque themes in contemporary writers like Schoemperlen, the world remains one of lost things in representations that are no longer modernist. Furthermore, even in the work of late twentieth century writers, this emptied world is one to which the subject often orients itself by adopting and adapting a baroque sensibility.

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