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The Search for Authenticity in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*

Nino Kiguradze

Introduction:

Authenticity is the notion that a thing or a being is unique and original; it's the opposite of imitation. In my thesis, I explore how the idea of authenticity and authentic experience is presented as a problem or impossibility in Tom McCarthy's novel *Remainder*. I focus on the idea of authenticity and motivations behind the main protagonist's actions from the perspective of theories that I think have influenced the text. Two of Freud's essays and the medical category of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are helpful in terms of providing a basic understanding of the role that trauma plays in the psychology of trauma victims. In the first section of the thesis, I demonstrate how *Remainder*'s protagonist exhibits many of the classical symptoms of PTSD, and I point out some of Freud's ideas as an influence on the text. In the last section, I present my own interpretation of what I think the novel has to say about the idea of authenticity, which seems to be an unattainable and absurd quest. Despite this, what is interesting is the existence of the desire to pursue it, and a sense of yearning for an unadulterated experience, and then subsequent failure. Furthermore, there is an obsession with having an authentic experience in *Remainder* for the unnamed protagonist, and he goes to great lengths in order to try and satisfy his obsessive quest.

The idea of originality and authenticity seems to have been seized ironically by global corporations, promoting it as a sort of commodity that can be purchased, making *Remainder* a relevant and an interesting contemporary novel. Corporate attempts to appeal to as many consumers as possible, while selling the idea of authenticity as a contradiction, is also present in McCarthy's work. For example, in McCarthy's latest

novel, *Satin Island*, the main character U 's corporate boss understands this phenomenon as he explains to U the ways in which Starbucks is now disguised as a local business in Seattle, in order to avoid being inauthentic. He says, "Starbucks' management, their strategists understand that no one actually wants to buy coffee from Starbucks; they do it for convenience heads hung low with shame. People crave authenticity, locality and... origin – everything that Starbucks as a global chain represent the polar opposite of"(52). For the main character of *Remainder*, being unique and original also relates to the way he is able to navigate his way through the material space he inhabits, and his relationship with matter. The protagonist has physical, somatic responses to situations and outside stimuli, especially when he feels authentic.

The quest for authenticity is further complicated by the presence of violence as almost a primordial force that if nothing else, can jolt one into an awareness or reality. I explore the significance of violence in relation to authenticity and some of the ethical problems that have to do with violence in the novel. I also compare Wallace Stevens' poems to the experience of the protagonist, which in a similar way, question the discrepancy between imagination and reality. I am especially interested in how both of the authors' works are grounded in materialistic sensibility, while their responses to the material reality are different.

Last, the idea of authenticity and its pursuit is not limited to just corporate culture; in addition, it's older than postmodern Theory and the contemporary period. While authenticity of the self is not the only preoccupation in the novel, it raises many problems about such a self, while offering no clear answers or solutions. Why authenticity?

Perhaps this quote from McCarthy's *Satin Island* can provide some insight "People need foundation myths, some imprint of year zero, a bolt that secures the scaffolding that in turn holds fast the entire architecture of reality, of time: memory-chambers and oblivion cellars, walls between eras, hallways that sweep us on towards the end days and the coming whatever-it-is" (1). In order for something to be authentic, it also has to be original, and foundation myths represent the ultimate attempt to locate the original: the origin of how everything came into being.

PTSD, Freud and the Traumatized Literary Characters

Remainder's unnamed protagonist is essentially a traumatized subject. Trauma plays an important part in his actions, reactions, motivations and pursuit of authenticity through the purposefully staged re-enactments. The sole purpose of re-enactments is not to explore traumatized psyche and suffering experienced by those who have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Before the official diagnosis of PTSD came about, Freud also discussed traumatic neurosis and how the traumatized person goes back to the source of trauma through repetition compulsions. It would be an oversimplification to attribute all the actions of a fictional protagonist to diagnosis of PTSD, in a very literal, clinical sense. However, both the diagnostic criteria of PTSD and Freud's psychoanalytical work are helpful ways to make sense of the déjà vu, repetitions, and re-enactments in the novel. Neither should the interpretation of what happens in the novel be limited to only psychoanalytical understanding of pain, trauma and drives that Freud discusses in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and his other works. Still, both the extensive research done in PTSD and Freud's essay provide a useful framework for understanding

and interpreting protagonist's psychological state and changes in his personality and identity due to trauma. The trauma that the protagonist experiences at the beginning of the novel is very literal, but it's also meant to be understood metaphorically. In a very literal sense, the trauma has many of the "classical" symptoms described by PTSD that came about in the latter part of 20th century. But its significance lies beyond being literally hit by a falling object from the sky. The protagonist's obsessions are never pathologized, nor can the book be considered a disability novel. One way to understand it then is to see it as a metaphor for coming into conscious existence. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud gives a hypothesis of living organisms that differs from the traditional understanding of living organisms as necessarily developmental and striving towards progress. Proposing that living organisms can be "conservative" Freud describes organisms that are regressive in nature, or they want to stay as they are. Freud makes a note of this occurrence in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* "(...) in remarkable contrast to the supposition that the whole life of instinct serves the end of bringing about death" (48). If his hypothesis is true, it would mean that survival is not the main driving force behind life but rather there are some other instincts involved as well. Freud says, "If then all organic instincts are conservative, historically acquired, and are directed towards regression, towards of something earlier, we are obliged to place all the results of organic development to the credit of external, disturbing and distracting influences" (47). External reality seems to be in conflict with the instinctual drives of the living organisms. Navigating through external "disturbing" influences become the reason the organism goes on living as well as a source of internal conflict. Similarly, the protagonist in *Remainder* is struggling with external reality, which in the novel is represented by the

presence of material that keeps getting in the way of things in one way or another. These obstacles are paradoxically what keep the organism going. Arguably, the organism dies once the obstacles are overcome.

Going back to Freud's idea about conservative nature of living organisms and their strivings to return to some unknown, previous, pre-existing state Freud states:

It must rather be an ancient starting point, which the living being left long ago, and to which it harks back again by all the circuitous pathos of development. If we may assume as an experience admitting of no exception that everything living dies from causes within itself, and returns to the ignorance, we can only say '*the goal of all life is death*', and, casting back, '*The inanimate was there before the animate*'. (47)

The mysterious object that hits the protagonist in the head is arguably what brings him into a conscious existence. He can't remember anything before the accident, and when he is able to recall his past it doesn't offer him any insight about himself. Neither does his past before the traumatic event provide any explanation of why he is so taken by repetition. He keeps re-enacting and repeating the same scenarios over; his repetitive re-enactments are not progressive but instinctual. They are also irrational and do not serve a purpose of attaining self-knowledge. In that sense, the re-enactments and the character formation that is presented is anti *bildung*. Therefore, the model it follows is closer to the life of a "conservative" organism that Freud discusses in his essay. Re-enactments repeated to perfection leads to a sense of control and instinctual satisfaction, but not to personal development or a sense of self-knowledge grounded in reflection. There is a

quest for authenticity in the re-enactment but no lesson to be learned from the experience. Or if there is something to be learned from it, the protagonist never consciously attains it.

There are other examples of characters in literature that appear to have PTSD. The protagonist of *Remainder* seems to be suffering from PTSD much like other fictional literary characters from the 20th century modernist fiction. Nick Adams, from Hemingway's short stories has lost interest in the everyday life after returning from the war. Septimus Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is another example of a character suffering from "classical" symptoms of PTSD or shell shock, as it was known before. He is struggling to continue living a normal life after returning from the war. Unable to deal with the memories from the war, he tragically ends his life by jumping from a window. Traumatized subjects are not limited to fictional, literary representations. Trauma theory developed in response to direct and indirect witnessing of the extremely horrific events of 20th century like the Holocaust, world wars, Vietnam War and the often-violent postcolonial struggle. Much of the literature that emerged after WWII are personal, non-fictional memoirs and accounts of extremely traumatic events, like Primo Levi's books and a whole host of Holocaust literature. It's important to make a distinction between the kinds of real traumatic narratives and accounts that trauma theory focuses on from fictional theoretical trauma of literature. In the case of literary modernism, often the literary works were in direct response to what was happening culturally and socially during the time.

Are mental anguish and human suffering limited to traumatic experiences? In order to understand more about literature's exploration of human suffering, it is useful to explore Freud's essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, in which he gives insight into the

psyche of a melancholic person. In the essay, Freud is trying to get at the depth of what causes psychological distress and sadness experienced by the melancholic person. Unlike PTSD, melancholia is not necessarily a direct response to a traumatic event or events that are completely outside of normal human experiences. Melancholia in some sense is even more difficult to explain because in most cases, the reasons behind it are not easily identifiable. Yet it is a state of mind experienced by many people and it can be a cause of serious anguish. In sum, it seems that the difficult question Freud is trying to deal with in the essay is to understand what is at the root of human mental suffering. The unpleasant symptoms of melancholia share many similarities with pathological grief and PTSD. Freud describes some characteristics and symptoms of melancholia in *Mourning and Melancholia*, “The painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment”(244). Someone like Hamlet could be described as melancholic due to unfortunate life circumstances, which are beyond his control and cause him great psychological distress. In case of Hamlet, who is a melancholic literary figure, the reasons why he is feeling melancholic are clear. According to Freud, there are multiple factors and instincts that govern human behavior and influence inner psychological condition. The difficulty is in understanding the reasons behind those instincts and drives which are not fully clear. For example, for a melancholic there is loss of a loved object that causes distress but to identify that loss seems beyond the capability of the conscious mind. Freud says,

The self-tormenting in melancholia, which is without doubt enjoyable, signifies, just like the corresponding phenomenon in obsessional neurosis, a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned round upon the subject's own self in the ways we have been discussing. (251)

There is a masochistic aspect to melancholia much like the traumatized subject's impulse to replay the original trauma. Furthermore, for Freud the melancholic and those suffering from obsessive neurosis do to traumata share another important factor: it's the rage against the outside world turned inwards that causes the suffering. For Freud, the flashbacks or repetitions that causes great pain for the traumatized person represents an unexplainable mystery. He seems to be suggesting that the masochistic suffering from repetition of the trauma is a source of not just pain, but pleasure as well. This speculation seems insensitive to the victims of trauma. However, it tries to answer difficult questions about memory, and why human psyche returns to a source of pain, even if in most cases the return is involuntary. Freud describes how external world can also become a source of great pain:

The analysis of melancholia now show that the ego can kill itself only if owing to the return of the object-cathexis, it can treat itself as an object--if it is able to direct against itself the hostility which relates to an object and which represents the ego's original reaction to the objects in the external world. (252)

This quote seems to suggest that inner experience is directly dependent on the external world, since it has the ability to turn the hostility for the objects outside of itself towards the self.

In order to do a more literal analysis of the trauma, it's useful to shift focus from Freud to a more recent research into PTSD. By having a main character that has PTSD, it also serves as an effective literary technique to explore the loss of interest and a sense of detachment he experiences. As mentioned before, melancholia shares many of the symptoms of PTSD. *Remainder* seems to be bridging the gap between the two by presenting trauma as both literal and metaphorical. Research in PTSD has been able to provide more insight about the profound ways in which trauma alters the psychology of traumatized people. It is connected to authenticity because trauma can impact one's sense of identity, especially the way traumatized past seems to dominate and spoil the present moment. Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Alexander C. McFarlane in the first chapter of their book, *The Black Hole of Trauma* describe the changes in the person due to a traumatic event:

(...) traumatic experiences can alter people's psychological, biological, and social equilibrium to such a degree that the memory of one particular event comes to taint all other experiences, spoiling appreciation of the present. The tyranny of the past interferes with the ability to pay attention to both new and familiar situations. (488)

This quote is useful for interpreting the novel because in a literal sense, it describes what happens to the protagonist of *Remainder*. The traumatic experience, which he cannot name, has altered him in significant ways. It has changed the way his memory functions and the event has a strong hold on his consciousness. The opening narrative of the novel starts with the protagonist trying to describe the accident, he says, "About the accident itself I can say very little. Almost nothing. It involved something falling from the sky.

Technology. Parts, bits. That's it, really: all I can divulge. Not much I know "(1). Van Der Kolk and McFarlane explain the importance of giving PTSD diagnoses its name (or more general point to be drawn from this quote, for the purposes of the novel is that by naming experiences, it solidifies that what is being described actually happened): They state, "In important ways, an experience does not really exist until it can be named and placed into larger categories" (488). While Van Der Kolk and McFarlane are talking about the significance of naming the disorder, it should be noted that the protagonist is not able to name what happened. It doesn't mean it didn't happen but it points out the ambiguity of the accident and his inability to place it into his personal narrative. The protagonist of the novel says, "It's not that I'm being shy. It just that – well, for one, I don't even remember the event. It's a blank: a white slate, a black hole. I have vague images, half-impressions: of being, or having been – or, more precisely, being *about* to be – hit; blue light; railings; lights of colours..." (1). Trauma is directly tied to the person's inability to integrate the memory as a regular experience. The inability to integrate traumatic memories causes great deal of suffering for the victims of trauma. Essentially, memory becomes one of the most important aspects of how one deals with trauma, since it's the persistence of the un-integrated memory that starts to alter the psychology of the traumatized person. Van Der Kolk and McFarlane point out how the symptoms of hyperarousal and avoidance develop in response to the un-integrated traumatic experience:

However, with the passage of time, some people are unable to integrate the awful experience and start developing the specific patterns of avoidance and hyperarousal that are associated with PTSD.... They start organizing their lives

around the trauma. Thus, it is the persistence of intrusive and distressing recollections, and not the direct experience of the traumatic event itself, that actually drives the biological and psychological dimensions of PTSD. (489)

The protagonist in *Remainder* experiences what could be described as a state of hyperarousal and in addition, he avoids certain situations since the accident. Here is another attempt to talk about the accident by the protagonist, he says “as the no-space of complete oblivion stretched and contracted itself into gritty shapes and scenes in my unconscious head...” (4). Once again he is not able to put into words what happened and the use of the word oblivion suggests a lack of comprehension. When the protagonist is told that he cannot talk about the accident he responds by saying “‘I’ve already forgotten,’ I said. ‘I never had any memory of it in the first place.’ ”(6). Van der Kolk and McFarlane describe how PTSD affects memory function:

Because people with PTSD have a fundamental impairment in the capacity to integrate traumatic experiences with other life events, their traumatic memories are often not coherent stories; they tend to consist of intense emotions or somatosensory impressions, which occur when the victims are aroused or exposed to trauma. (492)

The resulting inability to formulate a coherent narrative in memory characterizes the protagonist and further establishes trauma theory as a point of reference for McCarthy’s novel. The language the protagonist uses to talk about the accident points out the incoherency of his experience, which is similar to what Van Der Kolk and McFarlane describe. Throughout the novel, he also experiences what could be described as psychosomatic responses to situations. What triggers the psychosomatic experiences for

him are not entirely clear, but there is a strong suggestion that it is the consequence from the trauma. Therefore what this demonstrates is that the lasting effects of trauma are not just psychological, but biological as well. Besides psychological and memory problems, he experiences re-occurring unpleasant physical symptoms of nausea, dizziness and mysterious tingling (sometimes the tingling is pleasant). Since the trauma, he feels physically distressed when he is not able to fully comprehend a situation. He says, “I remember feeling dizzy. Things I don’t understand make me feel dizzy” (6). Because he couldn’t understand what happened during the traumatic event, whenever he doesn’t fully perceive a situation since the trauma, it re-triggers the traumatic memory. For example, after the trauma trivial matters make him feel dizzy “A trivial distinction you might say, but the uncertainty still made me dizzy. I placed my hand against my living-room wall”(6). It’s not the trivialness of the situation that makes him feel dizzy, but uncertainty of what is happening that triggers the memories of trauma. Traumatic memories work in somewhat puzzling ways as Van Der Kolk and McFarlane point out: “Many people experience sensory elements of the trauma without being able to make sense out of what they are feeling or seeing” (489). What exactly triggers trauma memory is not always clear but in some cases the triggers are perceivable. Van Der Kolk and McFarlane state: “Triggers for intrusive traumatic memories may become increasingly more subtle and generalized; what should be irrelevant stimuli may become reminders of the trauma”(493). Here is another example of how uncertainty makes the protagonist feel physically ill: “More than that; my failure to get a grip on the space we were traversing had made me nauseous. I’d even thrown up in the ambulance”(15). The uncertainty of trauma also leads in the traumatized victim a desire to gain mastery or control over the

situation. Being a victim often means a sense of loss of control during the traumatic event. Both Freud and Van Der Kolk/McFarlane talk about the victim's attempt to gain mastery over the situation and the role repetition plays in their efforts to regain control:

Freud thought that the aim of such repetition is to gain mastery, but clinical experience shows that this rarely happens; instead repetition causes further suffering for the victims and for the people around them. In their reenactment of the trauma, an individual may play the role of either victimizer or victim.

Reenactment of victimization is a major cause of violence in society. (494)

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the loss of control causes the victims a desire to be in control, and subsequently it leads to repetition of the trauma in order for them to regain a sense of control. But as Van Der Kolk and McFarlane point out the regaining of control rarely happens during the repetitions.

Another major symptoms of PTSD is a loss of interest in things that one used to previously enjoy. There is a sense of detachment from reality and withdrawal from the banality of everyday life in people with PTSD. The protagonist is a good example of someone with an altered consciousness due to his trauma. He says, "I didn't feel like going back to work. I didn't feel like doing anything. I wasn't doing anything...

Sometimes I watched TV, but not much; even that seemed too proactive... Mostly I just set in my flat, doing nothing"(5). This quotation indicates that he has lost interest in activities and instead he wants to remain passive. Another example (there are numerous examples in the novel) of him losing interest in things is when he talks about the dent in his car "I'd meant to get it fixed, but since coming out of the hospital it has seemed irrelevant. Like most other things, so the bodywork behind its left rear wheel had stayed

dented and crinkled ”(9). He no longer cares about things he used to care about before the accident. Thus, human identity is not fixed, but changeable in response to extreme external stimuli. Van der Kolk and McFarlane point out how trauma changes the human psyche, including how previously important and relevant information are no longer interesting to the victims: “They have alterations in their psychological defense mechanisms and in personal identity. This changes what new information is selected as relevant”(491). Is the protagonist literally experiencing what Van Der Kolk and McFarlane describe as posttraumatic decline? The authors give an account of the condition “ (...) a gradual withdrawal and detachment from everyday activities...’post traumatic decline” (495). He fits the model of someone going through a “gradual withdrawal;” he substitutes his disinterest in everyday life by obsessively re-enacting events in order to regain control. Van Der Kolk and McFarlane point out the numerous changes that take process in the traumatized individuals over time:

In those individuals, the traumatic event, which started out as a social and interpersonal process, comes to have secondary biological consequences that are hard to reverse once they become entrenched... These biological (mal)adaptations ultimately form the underpinnings of the remaining PTSD symptoms: problems with arousal, attention, and stimulus discrimination, and a host of psychological elaborations and defenses. (491)

What one can gather from these articles is that trauma alters people in profound ways. Trauma has not just psychological, but physical consequences as well. The text of *Remainder* takes the medical research done in PTSD into consideration while focusing on a character whose life revolved around a traumatic incident. Because of this reason, the

model of PTSD is useful to make sense of what the main character is going through. His initial déjà vu of a building brings up questions about human consciousness and its connection to desires. Is it the building supposed to represent a sort of nostalgic longing, a return to a place he cannot quite know? There is a sense of wanting to reinstate and re-create a sensory experience that is associated with the pleasant memories of the past. Since nostalgia is only possible in retrospect, it's a desire for something that cannot be fulfilled because the moment has already passed. The déjà vu he has in the bathroom, triggers a vague familiarity that comes from a previous experience; he says about the déjà vu, "I'd been in a space like this before, a place just like this, looking at the crack, a crack that had jutted and meandered in the same way as the one beside the mirror" (65). Later on in the novel, when he has re-created the building and he is re-enacting scenes from his déjà vu, he says about the re-enactment: "This wasn't right –wasn't how I remembered it: my memory of passing it deftly, letting the shirt brush the woodwork lightly, almost imperceptibly, like a matador's cape tickling a bull's horn "(141). Sensory experience triggers nostalgic feelings, but, *pace* Freud, the sense-experience is closely related to the horn of a rushing bull. Déjà vu in the novel evokes a sense of nostalgia to return to somewhere to a nostalgic place that is beyond the access and realms of human consciousness, and the essential trigger is a flirtation with violent death. Thus these ideas are connected to Freud, because he often tries to get at the root of some of the most difficult and mysterious side of human psychology. Freud is a complicated thinker and the hypothesis he presents about the regressive or "conservative" nature of living organisms in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* resonates in *Remainder*.

Novel of Ideas

Tom McCarthy's novel is a philosophical novel that explores difficult existential questions. While the novel is pursuing several philosophical and physiological themes simultaneously, one of the main themes in the novel is quest for authenticity. More specifically, the novel is interested in the possibility of an identity and experience that is original and authentic. It's not only concerned with the idea of the "authentic self" and what that might mean, but it also questions if such a self and experience is a possibility. In a sense, *Remainder* can be categorized in the genre of "novel of ideas" or philosophical fiction. Nicholas Dames' article *The Theory Generation* discusses the impact of Theory on the new generation of contemporary writers. He compares the Theory generation writers to 19th century Russian realists, who also incorporated philosophical ideas of 19th century in their novels in response to "backwardness of novelistic narration"(Dames). In Dames' argument, "theory generation" writers similarly make theory part of their fiction, Dames refers to such novels as "peculiar novels of ideas." Dames says,

This is the odd space these Theory Generation novels inhabit, making them peculiar novels of ideas. Their writers have read enough Theory at a young enough age to be in continued thrall to its power; they do justice to the disorienting shock those texts once had, and perhaps still have. Yet they are old enough to ironize (tenderly or bitterly) that power (Dames).

He refers to characters on whom theory has made an undeniable impact as "theory-trained characters of the novels"(Dames). The main protagonist in *Remainder* is living out Theory in his quest for authenticity but without consciously being aware of its

impact. In this case, there is no self-reflexive ironic reference to Theory, which is a common characteristic of many of the “theory trained characters”(Dames). Dames continues to says “Theory, it turns out, might be most interesting not when it changes the form of fiction, but when it becomes an uneasy part of fiction’s content”(Dames). Perhaps this “uneasy presence” is what makes this and other similar novels complicated. Dames give a list of writers in whose work the influence of theory is the easiest to identify, McCarthy being one of them:

For decades it’s been easy to trace the impact of Theory on the novel, but largely in the novel’s more experimental or formally innovative reaches; for instance, among the Theoretically sanctioned practitioners of the *nouveau roman* (Robbe-Grillet, Sollers, Sarraute), or the Anglo-Americans who, after the late ’70s, seemed intent on adding the torque of Theory to their own narrative twists (from DeLillo to late Pynchon, Winterson, Foster Wallace, Tom McCarthy, et alia) (Dames).

The above quotation from Dames is helpful to place *Remainder* in relation to other writers who are working in a similar mode. *Remainder*, seems to be postmodern in the way it challenges the popular notion that the self is original and self-expressive. *Remainder* also suggests that, while consciousness is connected to certain pursuits and desires, the mind can’t have a full grasp on the objects of its own desires. The question that follows then is--are all efforts futile, including literary fiction and art itself? Or is all human effort an aiming at something that doesn’t have a target. While *Remainder* could not be categorized as metafiction, the main protagonist’s effort to re-enact events could be compared to an artist trying to recreate life, an artistic attempt at mimesis. After all,

Remainder is a novel and if nothing else, all literary fiction is an attempt at accomplishing something. Does literary fiction accomplish what it sets out to do, or is it just a failed attempt? In other words, for example, does a novel like *Remainder* demonstrate that there is no authenticity? There is an element of paradoxical and absurdist nature of existence present in the novel. During a talk Tom McCarthy gave titled *A Movable Void: Tom McCarthy on Alex Trocchi*, he talked about why he thinks Trocchi is an important writer and the kinds of literary conventions he challenges in his writing. The following is McCarthy's opinion on Trocchi's novel *Cain's Book*: "This paradox is what gives *Cain's Book* its final, brilliant ending, in which Trocchi first recognizes the inadequacy of art and literature in actually 'accomplishing' anything, muttering dismissively 'such concepts I sometimes read about, but they have nothing in intimacy with what I am doing, exposing, obscuring'"(McCarthy). In the same way that McCarthy describes Trocchi's novel, his work also recognizes a similar inadequacy. This recognition is not done through a self-reflexive character like in *Cain's Book*, but instead through the repetitious re-enactments staged by the main protagonist.

It's interesting to note that in an interview Tom McCarthy said that his works reject sentimental humanism (McCarthy). In many ways, this rejection of the "sentimental humanism" is what the novel does and what makes this, and other novels like it, interesting. It succeeds in rejecting the sentimentality of humanism but not without leaving serious ethical questions and concerns. By refusing to rely mainly on interiority, feelings and the inner experience as the guide behind human interaction, the environment and the material world become as important as emotions and sentiments (in that sense the novel is Kafkaesque as McCarthy has pointed out himself). By Kafkaesque in this case

meaning that the environment acts in spite of the individual and furthermore, that it's not necessarily the individual acting upon the environment, but the individual attempting to navigate their way through it. In an interview McCarthy said this about Kafka: "That's what I love about Kafka: he completely undoes humanist psychology by making psychic space indivisible from the whole architecture of communication and containment that forms –to adapt to your own terms –its ecosystem." (McCarthy). What he seems to be saying is that unlike in humanist psychology that focuses on self-realization and agency, the subjectivity of the self in Kafka is interrupted and complicated by the complex structure of the ecosystem. The protagonist's, as well as other characters' relationship with matter become as telling as their inner psyche. The main protagonist, in his quest for authenticity, seems to be attempting to transcend the autonomy of the self by merging with the environment and matter. Matter is the only tangible reality, and it is indifferent to (or at least outside of) strictly inner rationalizations of the mind or subjective experience. Also, matter is bounded to the laws of physics, and as much as the protagonist is hoping for a miracle at one point in the novel that will counteract the laws of physics, it doesn't happen, "physics won't allow it" (McCarthy). Inner experience has little control over matter or outside stimuli, but it's still subjected to its interpretation. In that sense, the inner and the outer are intertwined by a complicated relationship with one another. In the novel, there is an attempt to blur the lines between the inner and the outer by trying to draw attention to the complexity of the relationship between them, without presenting it simply as a binary oppositions. In order to better understand, it is useful to look at a quote by Paul Sheehan from his essay *Images Must Travel Further: Bataille and Blanchot Read Beckett*, of what Bataille and Blanchot, two complicated thinkers whose

work has influenced McCarthy's writing, thought of inner experience. Sheehan summarizes some of the problems of thinking of inner experience as only coming from the inside, without acknowledging its complicated relationship with the outside:

For both Bataille and Blanchot, inner experience is somewhat misleadingly named, given that it is neither 'inner' nor 'experience.' Everyday lived experience works to construct selfhood, hence its problematic associations with the metaphysical coordinates of presence, immediacy and pre-reflective truth. Inner experience, by contrast is neither interior nor subjective, but the experience of its relation to an incommensurable outside. This puts it at odds with the tradition of self-formation known as *Bildung*, where experience teaches and instructs, and launches a teleology whose end-point is knowledge. Inner experience, then, is an experience laid bare, free of ties, even of an origin, of any confession whatever.

(118)

Not just for Bataille and Blanchot, but the *Bildung* self-formation is also put into question by Freud's hypothesis about the nature of living organisms in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, as noted above. There is no self without its "relation to an incommensurable outside" (118) for Bataille and Blanchot and I think *Remainder* is a novel that acknowledges and speaks to this idea of their rejection of the "traditional" understanding of inner experience. The protagonist in the novel struggles with matter, at first being irritated by its presence, and then eventually accepting it towards the end of the novel. The protagonist says, "He had to learn too: matter's what makes us alive--the bitty flow, the scar tissue, signature of the world's very first disaster and promissory note guaranteeing its last"(304). If there is any progression in the protagonist's character, this

arguably is the only time, when he accepts matter as an unavoidable and integral part of existence. Dames asks in his article, “Does Theory threaten to break apart the norms of the realist world, or do we just need to wait for these characters to outgrow their reading?” (Dames). Does the main protagonist’s “acceptance” of matter mean he has outgrown his theory reading? It’s hard to say since there is no conscious self-reflection about Theory on the character’s part. And if he has outgrown his reading (at least when it comes to matter) it might be a little too late for the protagonist, as he has already done some irreparable damage.

Identity and its Connection to Originality

What constitutes “identity” is difficult to define. Notions about how we are to understand human identity have changed throughout history, and much of what we know is contested. In his article *Repetition and Difference in Beckett’s Work*, Nursel Icoz defines identity in the words of the postmodern thinker Gilles Deleuze:

Repetition always repeats originality, yet repetition is always different from its original, to however small a degree. For Gilles Deleuze identities are defined by differences because we are able to conceive of identity only as difference from something else, but the effect of perceiving difference is always to resist the form or an original identity. Beckett, who has dedicated himself to discovering what is meant by being and identity, is naturally preoccupied with repetition.

(282)

Deluze's definition of identity is connected to the idea of the original. The above quotation highlights two important points: one is that repetition always repeats originality, yet it is always different from the original in some way. The other is that the difference from something else is what constitutes an identity. Repetition marked by difference is always attempting to reinstate the original. Thus, repetition is an important part of identity, but the question that follows is what is the original that it is trying to repeat? In other words, is there an original of anything that can be traced? Originality is an important part of identity. In his book *Simulation and Simulacra*, Jean Baudrillard makes the argument that there is no original to imitate: "Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or relative: a hyperreal" (1). Simulation then has no original, which it can imitate, it's an imitation of an imitation; in other words it's inauthentic. But even if Baudrillard makes a claim that there is no original to imitate, he is still engaging with the idea of the original. Its absence is as telling as the attempt to locate it. This is what Baudrillard says about the real in *Simulation and Simulacra*: "The impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real is of the same order as the impossibility of staging an illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible." (19). If there is no longer any real, then there is neither the original, and if there is no original there can't be any authenticity according to Baudrillard.

Icoz's discussion of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is useful because he focuses on the theme of repetition in the play. As in *Remainder*, one of the questions in *Waiting for*

Godot is what is it that the repetition is supposed to reveal to us about identity and existence? Here he is discussing the actions of the characters from *Waiting for Godot*:

And they reconstruct the events of their previous meeting. When they do so, they open up the gap between the original and its repetition. This reconstruction is a result of the anxiety concerning the changeability or personality.

Continuity of personality is an illusion. The present itself is the repetition of the past self with a difference, hence, the wish of the tramps to prove that they are the same as they were yesterday and will be the same as they are today. (282)

I would question if their reconstruction has to do with anxiety due to changeability, but what is important to draw from this quote is that there is no fixed identity; the self is always in the process of changing. What one gets is the instability of the self, which cannot produce a stable identity. In order to understand more about preoccupation with the question of originality, it is useful to look at the chapter *Art and Origin: Bataille and Blanchot's return to Lascaux* from the book "Framing French Culture" in which Poiana discusses Bataille and Blanchot's mutual interest in "discourse of origin in relation to art" (Poiana).

Both writers consider origin in terms of the anxiety-filled questioning surrounding the ontological and historical aporias that have plagued Western thought, including those that appear under the banner of Modern and the Postmodern; Both ask: What kind of discourse presides over the disconcerting doubling of reality performed by the artist? For Bataille, origin is bound up with the ritual significance of eroticism and death as the underpin of all forms of

artistic endeavor; Blanchot, for his part, focuses on the existential void that takes up residence at the centre of all poetry and art. (275)

Both Bataille and Blanchot are concerned with the questions of doubling of reality and the origin of the need for doubling. As this quotation points out, they have different ideas of about what the original is. These questions over identity, originality, and doubling of reality are all part of Theory and its presence as the “uneasy” of the book’s content (Dames).

The Significance of Violence

The presence of violence in the novel is disturbing. Furthermore, it has a clear connection to authenticity. Generally speaking literature has a significant relationship with violence going all the way back to Greek tragedy. There seems to be a cathartic quality to violence in *Remainder* that takes place at the end, in the way that it produces a strong response in everyone witnessing it. This is what McCarthy said speaking about violence and its connection to literature “it seems to me that it has always been at the core of literary experience in some form or another. This goes all the way back to the Greeks, for whom space is usually grounded in primal acts of violence” (McCarthy). Why is the protagonist who is generally emotionally detached feeling ecstatic and elated when the re-enactment of a bank robbery turns violent? It’s precisely when the re-enactment becomes violent that he feels they have accomplished what he has set out to do all along. His re-enactment at that moment reaches a kind of a climax or its “full potential.” I already mentioned how Bataille saw the return to the origin tied to the presence of violence in primordial rituals. Pina, points this out in a chapter from the book *Framing French Culture*: “For Bataille, then, the return to the origin of the foundation of the ‘all

too human', requires that we renew our union with the erotic and destructive energies that civilized societies had quashed (277)." Mysterious accident at the beginning of the novel is what sets everything in motion, and it comes full circle at the end of the novel. Here is how the main character describes the moment the re-enactment turns violent:

This re-enactment was unstoppable. Even I couldn't have stopped it. Not that I wanted to. Something miraculous was happening. I looked at Two and Five lying on the floor. They seemed now less like acrobats than sculptures. The bag that had slipped from Five's hand and the gun that now lay beside Two looked to me like wedges of surplus matter stripped away to reveal them. Something else was being revealed too, something that had been there all along, present but hidden, now emerging, everywhere. It was palpable: I could sense this new emergence in the very air. The others could sense it too. (293)

Violence, if nothing else has the ability to evoke strong emotional response. Imitation and performance are suspended at the moment when a violent act takes place. The protagonist has a strong reaction to it, and so do the other re-enactors. What is especially disturbing is the lack of emotional empathy from the protagonist for the victims. From a moralistic perspective, his lack of concern for the victims at the end is chilling and raises a questions—how does he see other people? His description of the person he has killed in terms of materiality, lacking an emotional response is troubling. After he shoots and kills a person he goes over to look, he says "I poked at his exposed flesh with my finger. It was a lot like Four's flesh: it had that same sponge-like texture, soft and firm at the same time"(300). He aestheticizes the materiality of the dead person and sees death as something beautiful; with a chilling detachment. What seems to be missing is a point of

view that sees people as more than just their materiality. It should be noted this re-enactment is even more complicated by the fact that the protagonist decided to re-enact a bank heist at a real bank. Here is another description of how the protagonist feels when the bank robbery re-enactment turns violent:

The tingling really burst its banks now; it flowed outwards from my spine's base and flowed all around my body. Once more I was weightless; once gain the moment spread its edges out, became a still, clear pool swallowing everything else up in its contentedness. I let my head fall back; my arms started rising outwards from my side, the palms of my hands turning upwards. I felt I was being elevated, that my body had become unbearably light and unbearably dense at the same time. The intensity augmented until all my senses were going off at once. (293)

He's reached some kind of ecstasy or what could be compared to a religious fervor. Even the way he has his palms are turned upwards is supposed to evoke a religious ritual or worship. In short, violence and the double mirroring of the re-enactment makes him feel alive in all kinds of ways. Is he so devoted to the idea of authenticity that he doesn't care about the sacrifice it takes to feel authentic? In a sense he has become like a power hungry politician, ready to obsessively pursue the object of his desire without caring about the sacrifice. In Zadie Smith's essay, *Two Paths For The Novel*, she says that one of the authenticity dreams of the avant-garde is to become a criminal (Smith). But this is not always the case. For example, the characters in Chuck Palahniuk's book *Fight Club* are not what could be described avant-garde; they are regular men trying to reclaim masculinity through the means of violence. Smith explains the purpose of violence as the

protagonist's attempt to place himself "outside of meaning." She explains, "In this Re-enactor has a true avant-garde spirit; he wants to become the thing beyond the pale, the inconvenient remainder impossible to contain within the social economy of meaning. But no: it is still not quite enough. The only truly authentic *invisible* remainder, the only way of truly placing yourself outside meaning, is through death" (Smith). Smith would seem to argue that the desire for originality, the doomed efforts to recapture an authentic first moment, the triumph over obstacles, and the organism's drive toward stasis must all converge, finally, in death. From the point of view of the later Freud, the ultimate goal of every organism is a return to perfect stasis, which can only mean its own extinction, the point at which its strenuous survival efforts can finally end.

In *Simulation and Simulacra*, Baudrillard speculates what would happen if one were to organize a fake holdup and how the apparatus would respond to it.

For example: it would be interesting to see whether the repressive apparatus would not react more violently to a simulated holdup than to a real holdup.

Because the latter does nothing but disturb the order of things, the right to property, whereas the former attacks the reality principle itself. Simulation is infinitely more dangerous because it always leaves open to supposition that, above and beyond its object, law and order themselves might be nothing but simulation (20).

The bank robbery in *Remainder* is a good example of postmodern theory being put into practice, because that is precisely what the main characters do in the novel. The moment when he pretends to be a homeless person begging for change produces the same

effect as the bank robbery because they are both simulations, they both point to “the impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real...” (20).

Essentially *Remainder* is a novel full of postmodern sensibilities that has come out of the “theory trained generation” as Nicholas Dames calls it. Another postmodern element in the novel is the narrative voice and the impossibility of the narrator telling the story after it has happened. At the end of the novel, he’s hijacked an airplane that is bound to run out of fuel. How is he able to retell the story in past tense? It is the self-referential quality of the book that draws attention to itself as a text of fiction, and in turn points out its limitations as a novel.

Materialism and Imagination in Tom McCarthy and Wallace Stevens

In this part of the paper, I would like to shift focus on the novel and focus on how McCarthy presents the above discussed ideas and concerns. I will discuss what the text has to say about the ways in which his character is able to experience the world through matter and the main influences that are behind people’s personas. At the beginning of the novel, we get to have a look at his inner state (something that the novel refuses to do as it progresses and the protagonist actions starts to become more “bizarre”) and experience. We learn that the protagonist was involved in an accident, which he cannot remember and leaves him mentally traumatized and physically disabled. All he can recall from the trauma is that something hit him in the head. He has to stay in a hospital and go through the process of physical rehabilitation. Since he cannot recall the actual trauma, he is unable to talk about it in a clear, precise way. On the first page, the protagonist is trying to describe what has happened but he is clearly struggling. He says, “But who’s to say that these are genuine memories? Who’s to say my traumatized mind didn’t just make

them up, or pull them out from somewhere else, some other slow, and stick them there to plug the gap – the crater- that the accident had blown? Minds are versatile and wily things. Real chancers” (1). From the opening of the novel, the protagonist is already questioning the idea of genuine memories and how the mind works. Memory is an important part of human identity and closely related to one’s interpretation of selfhood, his quote suggests that memory is susceptible to change and adaptable to new situations. Thus he is pointing out the ambivalence of memory when he says minds are “versatile.” What is already being set up on the first page is a theme that runs through the entire book. If minds cannot be trusted as a source of truth, then what can be said of human identity? Since the protagonist is unable to recall his past, and he is suffering from a brain injury and is experiencing all kinds of psychosomatic symptoms in consequence, he is often left feeling uncomfortable and confused. Living itself for him becomes a traumatic experience. The unnamed trauma is a well-thought-out narrative device that allows McCarthy to explore the theme of authenticity and detachment from the protagonist’s experience. One of the ways in which the accident can be interpreted, is to see it as a metaphor for being alive in the age when mass media and technology are at its height. One could draw a parallel between being unable to talk about the traumatic experience and not having the language to talk about existence in the world changed by these powerful agencies. Because of the accident he receives a large settlement, which he uses to hire people to re-enact events. The corporation makes him sign a contract that says he can’t talk about the accident in any public form or he will lose the money “you can’t discuss the accident in any public area or in any recordable format. To all intents and purposes, you must forget it ever happened” (7). He responds by saying that has already

forgotten about the accident to which his lawyer answers, “What they mean is that you must accept that in law, it ceases to be actionable” (7). If he can’t prove legally that the accident ever took place, it means the corporal apparatus can reconstruct reality through erasure, according to their own interests. The large settlement he receives after the accident shows how corporations can use money in order to control and silence people. Thus, they are concerned about their reputation and image. Their wealth and influence make corporations powerful agencies.

The protagonist is very self-conscious and self aware at the beginning of the novel. He has an especially heightened consciousness of his physical movements because he has to re-learn how to do things, a re-education that requires him to put in extraordinary mental effort in every action. The hyper self aware state amplified by the traumatic accident makes him question every movement: “I’ve learnt to do things slowly since the accident, understanding every move, each part of what I’m doing”(6). He emphasizes the point again by saying “Everything was like this. Everything, each movement: I had to learn them all. I had to understand how they work first, break them down into each constituent part, then execute them”(23). Self-awareness of his movements becomes an important and necessary part of exploring identity. His “rehabilitation process” also reveals the influences that govern behavior at the beginning of 21st century (when the novel is supposedly taking place). During the rehabilitation process, he becomes frustrated by the discrepancy that exists between the imagined and the real. In that sense, one can draw several important connections between the modernist poet Wallace Stevens’ and *Remainder* in terms of thematic similarities.

Stevens similarly explored these ideas in some of his best-known poems, many of which are concerned with how culture has an influence on the imagination. He points out the external influences on the imagination and doesn't see imagination as just internal or totally separated from the outside. Stevens' preoccupation with imagination and exploration of matter is where the two writers really converge. This convergence also suggests a continuity between Stevens' variety of Modernism and the postmodern work of Tom McCarthy.

I will analyze some of Stevens' most famous poems in terms of how they deal with the difficult relationship between the imagined and the real and compare it to the protagonist's experience in the novel. I will also compare how Stevens' poems pay close attention to material and contrast it with the presence of matter in *Remainder*. For both authors matter and the "material world" are essential parts of existence that shape one's interaction with the world and the environment. The common understanding of imagination seems to be that it is an innate faculty, but how much of that is also shaped and manipulated by culture? To go back to question of art, imagination is an important part of any creative process; especially when it comes to poetry and literary fiction. More generally speaking, the exploration of discrepancy between the imagination and the real that is present in Stevens' poetry seems to be part of the larger human experience. First poem I would like to look at closely is Wallace Stevens' "Sunday Morning."

"Sunday Morning" deals with the idea of imagined set against the real, amongst other things. The poem is about a female protagonist who, as the poem progresses, goes on to renounce Christian idea of heaven in favor of what can be described as more tangible, material reality grounded in nature and Pagan like sensibility. In that sense she

is similar to the protagonist of *Remainder* for whom matter, if nothing else, has tangible presence. As the protagonist of *Remainder* says in memorable lines in the novel, “everything must leave some kind of mark” (10) and, again, “I’d probably passed it at some point over the last few years already – which meant that it would be recorded somewhere in my memory. Everything must leave some kind of mark” (99). It should be pointed out that in this case, he is not talking about mark in terms of physical matter but a mark from the external world branded in the consciousness. This idea that nothing “ever goes away” (McCarthy, 10) that some remnant of experience is always imprinted in the consciousness seems to be a re-occurring theme in McCarthy’s work.

Not only nothing ever goes away but technological advancements now have made it possible to literally store all the “marks” in a form of data. This quotation from *Satin Island* touches on the same idea of “everything must leave some kind of mark” (10):

There’s hardly an instant of our lives that isn’t documented. Walk down the stretch of street and you’re being filmed by three cameras at once--and even if you aren’t, the phone you carry in your pocket pinpoints and logs your location at each give moment. Each website that you visit, every click-through, every keystroke is arched: even if you’re hit *delete*, *wipe*, *empty trash*, it’s still lodged somewhere, in some fold or enclave, some occluded avenue of circuitry. Nothing ever goes way. (133)

Besides a mark on the consciousness, there is physical mark that seems to live its trace everywhere in the novel. There are many instances in the novel when the protagonist is talking about physical matter leaving all kinds of marks and mess behind. “I have, right to this day, a photographically clear memory of standing on the concourse looking at my

stained sleeve, at the grease – this messy, irksome matter that had no respect for million, didn't know its place: My undoing: matter “ (17). He has a complicated relationship with matter; during the reenactments that he stages matter is one thing he has no control over, which for him, disrupts the authenticity that he is trying to achieve through the reenactments. In Stevens' poem, material is presented as something graspable, set in opposition to an idea of an imagined Christian heaven. The protagonist of *Remainder*, unlike the persona from the poem is actually yearning for a metaphysical experience. At one point in the novel he is hoping for a miracle where matter can disappear. But in case of Steven's poem, she favors materialistic world to Christian metaphysics (or maybe she just doesn't believe in metaphysics). *Remainder's* protagonist thinks that the fluid that was put into his windscreen washer has vaporized into the sky but is thoroughly disappointed when it bursts out from the dashboard. “This miracle, this triumph over matter, seemed to have occurred, then turned out not to have done at all--to have failed utterly, spectacularly, its watery debris crashing down to earth, turning the scene of a triumphant launch into the scene of a disaster, a catastrophe” (174). He wants to be a witness to a transcendental experience, but for him matter gets in the way. When he reenacts a scene of a man being shot by two gangsters, he contemplates a world where people are trapped and unable to escape the pending doom. “Then when he realized, as his brain pieces it together and came up with a plan of escape, then changed it he found out that physics wouldn't let him carry out the plan: it tripped him up. Matter again: the world became a fridge door, a broken lighter” (194). There is something fatalistic about the role the environment and space plays in the impending doom of the man and his entrapment by it. Smith notes the presence of space as something other than neutral: “It

forces us to recognize space as a non-neutral thing--unlike Realism, which ignores the specificities of space”(Smith).

To return to the poem, the title of the poem “Sunday Morning” points to the time and day when most churches hold services. But the fact that the protagonist would be contemplating going to church on a Sunday morning is not made certain from the title of the poem, though it may be hinted or intuited. The eight-stanza poem, written in blank verse, opens with a description of a morning that from the beginning calls attention to material objects like chair, and consumable food items such as coffee and oranges. It leaves the reader with an image of a world grounded in the material reality “Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair, And the green freedom of a cockatoo/ Upon a rug mingle to dissipate” (66). *Remainder*'s protagonist reminds us of material reality all throughout the novel, like when he is describing going up the excavator “as my hand slipped over the handrail the black grease got onto my sleeve and stained it”(17). Another example is when he is describing how a secretary accidentally spilled coffee on his pants “But diverting it just made the stream fun faster, and I ended up getting it on my trousers and my fingers too. It was sticky and black, like tar”(50). When he goes out to eat dinner, he once again points out the material reality and messiness of matter: “the tablecloth was white; the wine stained it deep red” (59). Towards the end of the novel, his relationship with matter seems to be evolving as he no longer finds it annoying, but he still notices how matter leaves trace: “The black patch was still there next to them: the big, dark, semi-solid growth of engine oil and tar. I stopped finding it annoying and started wondering what had made it: something must have happened there, some event, to have left this mark”(278). Furthermore, when he thinks of certain people, he thinks of them in

terms of being surrounded by material and objects, almost as an extension of their personalities. When he is thinking of a secretary from the law firm he says “I could see in my mind the desk she sat behind, the leather seats that faced it, the glass coffee table” (10). Or when he first meets Naz, one of the characters in the novel he says, “As he spoke his name then my name and then asked how he could help me, he sounded confident, efficient. I couldn’t quite picture his office, but I saw his desktop clearly: it was white and very tidy” (83). Once again, he thinks of the person in terms of the material that surrounded him: “I pictured his office: the polished mahogany table, paneled walls and corniced ceiling, the portraits of frail and wealthy men” (101).

In the poem, the specific items that are listed work together to set up the space where the poem is taking place, a sort of a poetic *mis-en-scene*. The use of the word “cockatoo,” recalls something that is found in nature, and serves to join different elements from the ecosystem in order to create a particular mood. The poems end the line with an interesting choice of word “dissipate,” to point out the messiness of materiality much like McCarthy’s spilled coffee and wine, and other numerous residue. After descriptions of external reality, next lines turns from external to internal as the reader get a glimpse, now for the first time, in the protagonist’s inner mind “She feels the dark Encroachment of that old catastrophe/As a calm darkness among water-lights” (67). While the reader is not sure exactly what catastrophe the speaker of the poem is alluding to, the feeling that is evoked is of anxiety the protagonist feels over some idea that is “bigger” than her. From the first stanza, it starts to unfold that the protagonist is experiencing uneasiness that is connected to an ancient idea involving some kind of sacrifice and death. By the end of the poem, the reader is aware that what is unfolding is a

contemplation of spiritual and religious ideas. As the poem shifts inside the mind of the protagonist, the first stanza ends with the following lines “Over the seas, to silent Palestine/
Dominion of the blood and sepulcher.” (67). The last lines of the first stanza are describing images that are clearly speaking of death. In the poem, Christian ideas and its connection to the past are being described as “silent” and “calm” but ultimately it is the kind of silence that leaves the protagonist feeling troubled. The stanza that follows is a contemplation of the Christian idea of an “afterlife” and what it might mean for the protagonist: “Why should she give her bounty to the dead?/ What is divinity if it can come/Only in silent shadows and in dreams?” (67). These lines question Christianity’s concern and emphasis on death and afterlife, while overlooking things to be enjoyed in the present world. The question “why should she give her bounty to the dead” seems to be pointing to some of the problematic aspects of Christianity, such as too much focus and preoccupation with death and afterlife. “What is divinity if it can come/Only in silent shadows and in dreams?” She is questioning the idea of the divine, which is not revealed by the physical act of seeing, and only exists as an abstraction, therefore (or in this case in silent shadows and dreams) divinity becomes something that can be imagined but not seen. Hence divinity can only reveal itself in “shadows and dreams” and its not to be found in the materiality of the world. “Shall she not find in comforts of the sun/ In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else in any balm or beauty of the earth,/Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?(67).” Unlike the protagonist of *Remainder*, in “Sunday Morning” the speaker of the poem does not seem to be bothered by matter as the thing that gets in the way of experience. At the end, even *Remainder*’s protagonist ends up accepting matter but he spends most of the novel irritated by its presence. When he’s

with his friend Catherine, he says he prefers her absence. “Catherine had already begun to annoy me. I prefer her absence, her specter (39).” He prefers the imagined idealized version to the real. Whereas the woman in the poem prefers real experiences to the imagined, which points out their different relationship to imagination and matter.

The poem is concerned with philosophical questions about human need for meaning “beyond death” and this world. It is one of the reasons why she seems to be contemplating Christian ideas about afterlife and death (even if she ends up rejecting it). She is thinking of an idea or a belief that will offer an explanation for death. However, the poem also wants to point out that there are many things presently in this world that are “comforting” and beautiful. What is being implied is that perhaps humanity, which is represented by the protagonist, does not need to search for abstract ideals but instead focus on what the worldly experience. Like the sun, which serves a purpose and can be seen (proof that it exists) and is accessible by senses such as sight, where for one to understand any idea of a God or divinity one has to turn to use of imagination and theological teachings. Thus, sensory experience becomes more important than spiritual metaphysics. The poem goes on to expand on this idea further by asking a question that is rooted in Pagan ideas and understanding of the world, nature and divinity. Paganism seems to interpret the world in terms of being pantheistic and anthropomorphic, and therefore more flexible in comparison to Christian worldview that sees divinity as supreme, monolithic and therefore as more of an oppressing governing power. In Paganism, divinity exists in nature, and within self and not just an abstraction compared to Christianity view. Paganism, in the case of this poem becomes a way to experience the world “raw” compared to Christian view that is adulterated with worries of an afterlife.

In that sense, the poem seems to be making an argument for a sensibility and consciousness that puts emphasis on the surrounding and aesthetic experience that recognizes material beauty. “And shall the earth / Seem all of paradise what we shall know?”(67). These lines are from the middle of the poem in which once again, the protagonist favors the known external, materialistic world because of its self-revealing nature. Material is graspable and therefore it stands in opposition to the immaterial for Stevens, similarly to *Remainder*. The protagonist is asking why wait for an ideal when there is so much to be cherished that can be found on earth? Like sensory experience of materiality, illustrated by the words “...Fruit and green wings”(67). The stanza ends with the following lines “The sky will be much friendlier then that now, /A part of labor and a part of pain, /And next in glory to enduring love, /Not this dividing and indifferent blue”(67). Once again by focusing on what is, one is able to take in experiences that are grounded in reality instead of the “imagined.” Projection of ideals seems to create divisions and indifference in the poem, where as if one takes things “as they are” (like the blue sky) it leaves more room for an aesthetic experience that can be enjoyed in the moment. What is present in Stevens’ “Sunday Morning,” is the idea that pain, love and beauty are both indispensable part of human experience. Consequently, to view and experience these seemingly opposing forces as a part of a whole, is to find an appreciation for them that is missing in the world view that sets up binary oppositions between concepts. It’s similar to the part in *Remainder* when the protagonist sees matter as no longer irritating but an inevitable part of existing, unlike his comparatively idealistic friend Naz, who wants the world to be perfect, and in consequence ends up completely shutting down and becoming literally unresponsive. The protagonist in

Stevens' poem is making an argument against preconceived notions or cultural and religious movements that hinder the unmediated aesthetic experience of materiality.

The specifics of this materiality are indicated in the following stanza, when she goes on to describe her contentment with things that are to be found in nature such as birds. She talks about a world that is not haunted by "prophecy" that seems to be a reference to Christianity and its concern with prophetic revelation. As she starts to contemplate paradise, she wonders what a place like paradise, that is never changed by the powerful presence of death might be like. "Death is the mother of beauty" is a line that is repeated twice in the poem. Death in the poem becomes "mother of beauty" because it plays an important role in what is seen as beauty of the life cycle of living organisms and nature. Thus death is not something to fear, but instead a part of a mystical nature: "Death is the mother of beauty, mystical, /Within whose burning bosom we devise/Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly." Death waits for all, and it is necessary part of existence that springs from the same source as life. In the 6th stanza men are chanting to nature, suggesting a return to a more primordial unity with nature that seems to be a celebration of nature and its offerings. In the last stanza, the speaker of the poem refers to the grave of Christ as just a grave, stripping it of its mystical significance and goes on to describe nature as enough mystery in itself, worthy of the same attention without the religious influence. The poem ends with "...pigeons make/Ambiguous undulations as they sink,/Downward to darkness, on extended wings (70)." The last line of the poem is contemplating an ending that is ambiguous in meaning and lacking clear explanation, simply referred to as "downward darkness." We

can be certain only that there are no gods in the vicinity: the wings belong not to angels but to pigeons, those most grimy of birds.

Wallace Stevens poems “Disillusionment of Ten O’clock” shares thematic similarities with “Sunday Morning,” but it is considerably less convoluted (it is also much shorter in length). It’s about a haunted house that is characteristic of what one would expect a “haunted house” to be like, until we get to the ending of the poem and the idea of a haunted house is subverted in an unexpected way. The title in itself that includes word “disillusionment” and 10 o’clock suggests disappointment in a certain time of the day, in this case 10 o’clock. The poem, in many ways is about imagination that is capable of going beyond the banalities of everyday life. It opens with the following lines “The houses are haunted/By white night-gowns./None are green/Or purple with green rings,/Or Yellow with blue rings. None of them are strange, with socks of lace and beaded centuries”(66). These lines point out that one has to use imagination to think of a haunted house, and most would imagine a white night gown not purple, or green or yellow as he goes on to describe. He is defining banality by opposing it with something (in this case colorful gowns) that is not banal, which brings up an important point about imagination and cultural influences. A haunted house, something that only exists as a myth is also influenced by cultural ideas about what a ghost or a haunted place should look like. Next it follows “People are not going/To dream of baboons and periwinkles/Only, here and there, an old sailor/Drunk and asleep in his boots/Catches tigers in red weather”(66). Therefore, society and the collective have an influence not only people’s thoughts but their dreams as well, which prevents one from actively engaging with their imagination. In the last two lines, the poem shows

that conventions can be subverted by an imagination that is capable of thinking beyond culturally conditioned ideas. Hence the image of an old sailor, drunk and asleep having dreams that are not part of the “mainstream” sensibility. The figure of a sailor, in some way represents an imagination in poetry that is capable of thinking beyond set conventions. In McCarthy the theme of the imagined versus real (especially imagined as the ideal version of the real) is present throughout the book. For example, in *Remainder* when he has to practice picking up a carrot, first in his imagination and later using a real carrot he says “But then you take a carrot-....gnarled, dirty and irregular in ways your imaginary carrot never was, and they stick it in your hand—and you know, you just know as soon as you see the bastard thing that it’s not going to work” (20). The novel questions the idea of preconceived notions in the imagination that often do not translate to reality. Another example from *Remainder* is when he is talking about his friend and romantic interest Catherine: “We sat beside each other, but her profile wasn’t quite as sexy as I’d made it by the field and the parked Fiesta in my fantasy. She had a couple of spots on her cheek”(29). His thoughts show how the imagined is different from the real, which leaves him feeling disappointed. Imagination, then, in some cases leads to unrealistic expectation and ultimately to disappointment, and points out the influence of preconceived ideas about what things should be and not how they are. But in Wallace Stevens’ “Sunday Morning,” it’s the sensory experience found in the real world that is seen as something worthwhile itself.

The poem “The Snow Man” starts with “One must have a mind of winter/To regard the frost and the boughs/Of the pine-trees crusted with snow” (9). According to these lines, imagination or the “mind of winter” makes it possible to recall things from

previous experiences and to think of ideas that have presence in culture, such as thoughts associated with winter time. At first the poem describes winter in somewhat “typical” terms such as pine-trees covered in snow that evoke the materiality of winter. Then the poem starts to project certain feelings about winter “...and not to think/Of any misery in the sound of the wind/In the sound of a few leaves” (8). Usually when thinking of a snowman, one thinks about a figure that is associated with either childhood, play time and children. Because the line about misery comes as a surprise, the reader’s thoughts are also re-directed to feel what the narrator of the poem might be feeling. The poem ends with “For the listeners, who listens in the snow/And, nothing himself, beholds/Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.” (10) The idea of nothing at the end is interesting (just as darkness is interesting in “Sunday Moring) one way to read it is to think of an experience that doesn’t require the engagement of imagination or projection of feelings into something (snowman, winter and so on). Could one actually observe anything without a previously held opinion and experiences that are so essential to interpreting the world? “The Snowman,” then becomes not just a sculpture children build and play with in winter, but an object that leads to serious contemplation about how human emotions and projection work in order to create meaning.

In “Of Modern Poetry” Stevens writes about the act of writing poetry. This poem in many ways is more self-reflexive and self-referential than the above-discussed poems. The poem seems to be questioning what is it that produces the act of writing poems and tries to position poetry writing in its historical context. It describes poetry as a living thing that needs to be experienced “It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place/It has to face the men of the time and to meet/The women of the time.” Therefore, poetry

becomes a medium of expression that is conscious of the times and at the same time, it has to come from the mind as an act of imagination, “Containing the mind, below which it cannot descend/Beyond it has no will to rise.” The poet is ultimately expressing his mind through poetry and contemplating the very act while doing so. In that sense, this poem presents a shift to postmodernity that recognizes the limits of the subjective experience through its self-referential qualities.

Last poem that I want to discuss is “The Emperor of Ice-Cream,” a poem that has absurdist elements in the way it juxtaposes words and ideas that would traditionally not be associated with each other, such as emperor and ice cream. Absurdist sensibility is also present in *Remainder*. When the protagonist is looking for a building in order to reconstruct his *deja vu*, he also wants to have black cats running on a red roof and an elderly woman frying liver. There is no logical connection between these things, therefore, they serve to highlight the absurdist nature of existence: “I needed that building for two things only: red tiles on roofs and black cats walking over this”(86). In this following sentence, he describes his vision of the elderly woman frying liver with attention to the sensual aspect of the event: “The smell of liver cooking in a pan had been wafting to me from the flow below-the sound too, the spit and sizzle”(65). What this shows is that life does not follow a coherent narrative, and not everything people desire can be explained in relational terms. An additional absurdist line is the novel is when the protagonists say: “I’ll start the liver and the cats. We’ll take it from there” (139). It sounds like a line from a modernist poet like William Carlos Williams, who likewise juxtaposed random things and images together in order to point out the absurdist nature of existence; its randomness mirrors the incoherency of life. The line in

the poem “The Only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream” places ice cream, a perishable food item and places it with a word like emperor that suggests power and permanence. Soon we learn through careful observation of the words that what the protagonist is describing is actually a funeral. Preparations are being made for a funeral that includes boys bringing flowers “... and let the boys/Bring flowers in last month’s newspaper./Let be finale of seem./The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream”(64). The poem ends with the lines “If her horny feet protrude, they come/To show how cold she is, and dumb. Let the lamp affix its beam. The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream”(64). Feet in this case signal death through the use of the words “how cold she is” followed by “let the lamp affix its beam,” suggesting that the lamp and light are there to prepare the end that is signified by death. The poem finishes with “the only emperor is the emperor of ice ream”(64) a conclusion that points out that there are no great emperors, instead everything passes and nothing has the power to last. And lastly, its playful language and reference to ice cream seems to be suggesting that human beings should not take things too seriously.

In the end, Stevens is a modernist, from pre-Theory generation and if Theory generation has produced “novel of ideas,” by engaging with Theory, Stevens is likewise a “poet of ideas” who explores complex philosophical subjects in his poetry.

Identity as a Performance

As the novel progresses further, and the reader is more aware of the questions and struggles of the protagonist, performance takes on an important role in the novel.

In the text, references to media, to the way in which it shapes ones interaction with the world, to its subtle demand that one put on a performance for others, suggest that media

now form the basic layer of being. The protagonist thinks of himself and others, in many ways, in reference to images and movies, as when he says “My memory had come back to me in moving images... like a film run in installments, a soap opera, one five-year episode each week or so” (23). Even when talking about memory, he has to rely on images from television and film in order to give an idea of what he is experiencing. Here, is another description of his behavior that once again references media, “I realized that I was jerking back and forth like paused video images do on low-quality machines. It must have looked strange. I felt self-conscious. Embarrassed” (14). When he realizes he is being watched, he feels the need to put on a performance, he says: “It was a performance for the two men watching me, to make my movements come across as more authentic” (14). Now, he begins to question the idea of authenticity and his quest to experience it. He is aware he is performing, but he wants his performance to come across as “original” which seems to be a self-contradictory idea (or at least a problematic understanding of authenticity). Then, the protagonist goes to the movies with his friends and watches *Mean Streets*. He observes:

The other thing that struck me as we watched the film was how perfect De Niro was. Every move he made, each gesture was perfect, seamless. Whether it was lighting up a cigarette or opening a fridge door or just walking down the street: he seemed to execute the action perfectly, to live it, to merge with it until he was it and it was him and there was nothing in between. (23)

He is commenting on De Niro’s performance in the film, and he seems to be greatly impressed by De Niro’s “perfect execution” of his actions. It should be noted that even

though it is a role in the film, he sees it as “authentic,” because for him authenticity is a role well played.

In a sense, for the main character, the idea of authenticity is more complicated outside of a film set because of the huge influence films and media have on people and their behavior. Actors like De Niro are clearly aware that their role is for a movie, and they are consciously acting for the cameras. Their actions are a clear simulacra. In general, the actors’ role in a film is less complicated than a person performing a role in real life. In every day life, people are still performing, but with less awareness and without the presence of cameras. His friend Greg says “‘But the character is a loser.’ (...) ‘And he messed everything up for all the other characters’” (23). The protagonist does not care about these questions, or the consequences of De Niro’s character’s actions, because he, unlike his friend, is obsessed with authenticity. Because he is interested in the form of action rather than their content, moral choices of the actor are not what concern him, but only the idea that the actor seems authentic. For example, when his friend once again tries to point out that De Niro’s perfect performance is possible only because of the controlled environment in which films are made, the protagonist, once again does not seem to care. For him, the appearance of authenticity and actual authenticity are not very different, rather, what matters, is that something only appears to be authentic. It is in these passages about the media that the novel makes its most convincing and devastating attack on the possibility of authenticity, originality, and pre-postmodern ideas about Being.

We see more examples of people performing and being “inauthentic” when the protagonist goes to a coffee shop, and starts people watching, which remind him of

advertisements. “I could tell in their gestures and their movements they acted out the role of the ad’s characters: the way they turned around and walked in one direction... how they threw their heads back.... See? Just like me: completely second hand” (54). Here, he is describing people imitating an advertisement, or at least he thinks of their behavior in terms of an ad he has already seen somewhere. Once again, the novel points out how much influence the media (in this case advertisement) has on people’s behavior and identity. Everything people do is second hand because their actions are an imitation of an imitation, a replica of already existing behavior. Nevertheless, if the protagonist is after the idea of authenticity, the novel seems to be raising serious doubts whether it exists. Smith points out in her essay, “(...) a perverse acknowledgement of limitation. One does not seek the secret, authentic heart of things. One believes.... That the world is what it is, and, moreover, that all our relations with it are necessarily inauthentic” (Smith). This is interesting, because as Smith’s essay also points out *Remainder* is an acknowledgement of limitations of the self. This idea of the self as limited could be applied to understand what prevents identity from being “fully authentic.” One does not seek “authentic heart of things” but that is exactly what the protagonist is trying to attempt, but is failing. And, even if he is aware that he is failing, he is able to experience momentary satisfaction and feeling of realness through the re-enactments, which get more and more elaborate and bizarre towards the end of the novel.

In the first half of the novel, he decides to use all of his settlement money to hire people and stage re-enactments. One could argue that the first part of the novel is concerned with setting up many of the philosophical problems (detachment, influence of media), while the other half of the novel is more concerned with experience of the

external world “first hand,” and the connection of violence to authenticity. The novel carefully works through the entire logic of this thesis.

The more the novel progresses, the less access the reader has into the interiority of the protagonist. Last two thirds of the novel, the reader is left to interpret and make sense of what is happening by the character’s actions. Re-enactments become an important part of the novel as the protagonist is repetitively and obsessively staging them, in order to experience authenticity. Thus, repetition is a crucial concept in the text, and in some cases, it points out that identity is reinforced through repetitious actions. If one does the same thing over and over again (to the point of exhaustion), perhaps one can begin to “own the role” insofar as one experiences realness, even if for a brief moment. On one hand, repetition becomes a way for allowing a person to reinforce his or her identity, while on the other hand, it also highlights the absurdity of an identity and life that is rehearsed and based on what has already been said and done.

At first, the protagonist gets the idea of doing a re-enactment while attending a party where he has a *déjà vu*. In his *déjà vu*, he sees a crack in the wall that reminds him of a residential building where people perform mundane tasks in their everyday life. After this happens, he says, “Right then I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my money. I wanted to reconstruct that space and enter it so that I could feel real again. I wanted to; I had to; I would. Nothing else mattered” (67). Unlike before, he is now sure of what he wants to do with his settlement money, so he hires people from a corporation called Time Control. He orders them to reconstruct the building from his *déjà-vu*, and pays people to be tenants of the building and assigns them different roles to play. Once the re-enactments start, he stages them many times over (sometimes more

than a hundred), until he is able to experience a tingling that makes him feel real. Through repetitive re-enactments, he is capable of feeling something, even if only temporarily. His reproductions are possible because of his facilitator Naz, who never questions the protagonist's motives behind his strange actions. Smith says in her essay "In place of the please of the rick adjective we have an imagined world in which logistical details and logical consequences are pursued with care and precision" (Smith). Naz and other people who work for Time Control, vacantly execute all of the protagonist's crazy ideas with "care and precision" and main focus on logistics rather than the substance and meaning of what they are doing. He starts out with the *déjà vu* enactments and eventually starts re-enacting real life events of violence, and at the very end, a bank robbery. At the end, he is so obsessed with the idea of feeling something through re-enactments; he becomes completely desensitized from the violence.

Paradoxically, this violence is what makes him feel real, and is the only thing arguably, that accomplishes the purpose of his re-enactments—feeling authentic. It is tempting to read the final movement of this novel as a theory of terrorism. The protagonist can experience the world through matter, but he is unable to form meaningful emotional connections with people around him. The repetitive re-enactments often involve slowing down of time, and then re-doing things, which points out the banality of everyday life. In fact, how much of our lives is actually a repetition and a rehearsal of what we are anticipating, have already experienced, or said and done? McCarthy's novel exhausts the idea of life as a repetition and the world as mimetic, by repeating the same things over again, and by blurring the line between who is exactly copying whom. Is the media a representation of society or is society

mimicking the media? Is it vice-versa or both? Repetitions merge what is authentic and inauthentic, in a way that becomes hard to separate and distinguish.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Tom McCarthy's novel, *Remainder*, deals with difficult questions about the possibility of having an authentic experience and the existence of a unique identity. It points out that such identity if not entirely impossible, is very unlikely. Further, the novel shows that people are too pre-conditioned, culture has too much influence, and the original cannot be located. The quest for authenticity is hindered by situations and behaviors where things become a replica of something unoriginal. Authenticity is more complicated by the presence of mass media and television, and that further blurs the lines between the imitation and the real. The main character gets his settlement from a corporation, and similarly it's another corporation, Time Control, that is the facilitator of the re-enactments that are supposed to make him feel authentic. Ironically, it's the powerful corporations that make the quest for authenticity possible. So then, even when pursued obsessively, authenticity, in contemporary world seems to come with many troubling notions, particularly the argument that authenticity has become a corporate commodity and that the final lunge for real being can only take form as an act of terror leading to the organism's demise.

Moreover, this paper demonstrates a remarkable development beyond the affirmative materialism that is found in a Modernist poet such as Wallace

Stevens. Instead of a debate in which pagan material pleasures win out over metaphysical abstractions, the novel *Remainder* posits material reality as less of an affirmative goal than as a paradoxical mix of stubborn obstacles that nonetheless give the organism a reason for struggling, thinking, and generally carrying on. The novel deeply explores how trauma, re-enactments and repetitions all play a role in exploration of authenticity and the instability of human identity. If violence and death are the only transcendental experiences in the novel, then silence and self-annihilation are the ultimate goal. As a meditation on ontology and being, the novel is bleak. *Remainder* is grounded in materialistic sensibility, by comparing the novel to Wallace Stevens' poems, where the material world and sensory experience are the subject of philosophical inquiry and triumph over metaphysics. Finally, it seems that the novel as a genre has expanded its possibilities by making room for critical engagement with Theory as Nicholas Dames has pointed out. Contemporary novels like *Remainder* are not just responding to social and humanist needs, but they are aware of their position in history as subjects of intellectual contemplation. Where this leaves the novel now is not entirely clear. It is apparent that novelists such as McCarthy and Zadie Smith have huge ambitions. They are coming to terms with a whole, emerging literature of trauma theory, media studies, terrorism, and post-Heideggerian philosophy. In the process they are demonstrating that these issues are best handled not in the traditional fields of psychology, cinema studies, or philosophy; instead, they can be articulated best in the novel reconceived to fit a strange, new world.

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