Robert Rawdon Wilson

"The Hydra's Tale"

Imagining Disgust

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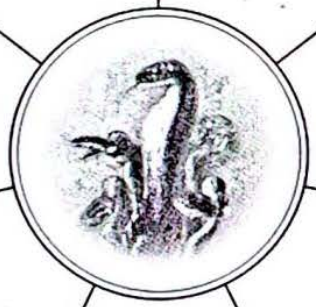
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Its Venom

Feeling Abject

The most unhappy man I ever knew was a brilliant student of philosophy. When I first met him, we were both in a tavern near the University. He was alone at the bar, but a mutual friend introduced us and we ended up spending a late evening talking through an endless series of ancient difficulties. He smoked constantly, a habit that even then I found repulsive, but it seemed so much a part of his character that I barely noticed. Sometime before midnight, I was astounded to see him take a lit cigarette and grind it out against the back of his left hand. As I got to know him better, I learned that he had scars from cigarette burns up and down both arms. The inside of his mouth was often cut from broken glass. He would bite the rim off a beer glass and hold the jagged shards in his mouth as blood pooled behind his tightly squeezed lips. Then he might spit it out on the floor, blood and glass together. He said, and I believed him, that he really wanted to swallow the glass and that he did, against bodily habit and disposition, sometimes succeed. I never knew another man so sad.

It didn't take me long to understand that he felt a deep uncertainty and a lack of confidence about many things, including existence and himself. Today, it would probably be easier to smoke out the root of the problem: abuse, sexual trauma and perhaps a failed repression of tormenting memories. At that time, although I certainly knew that many people had been sexually abused in their childhood, I assumed that everyone could bear up

and carry on. My new friend didn't bear up well at all. Something gnawed at him savagely. Several times I tried to discover the reasons for his self-hurtful behaviour, always approaching the issue indirectly. ("Tell me about growing up in Texas?" "What was your worst experience?" etc.) On two or three occasions, I asked him directly to change his behaviour simply as a matter of hygiene and self-preservation. He always said that he would, but then I would have to watch as he stubbed out cigarettes on his skin. He was like an alcoholic who promises to quit but never can, because his craving overpowers him. Addicted to suffering and pain, my friend clung to his personal regime of punishment and retribution.

I lived alone at that time. I had a rather dingy room a few blocks from the university in an old building that was known affectionately to students as "Firstein's Flophouse." It was both cheap and convenient, a magnet for students in the humanities. One morning, shortly before five, I woke up to the sound of faint knocking at my door. It was my new friend, stinking in a wretchedly unwashed condition, reeking of stale beer and bleeding from the corners of his mouth. He was curled up on the floor against the door, weeping and whimpering faintly like a man who has been tortured to the point of near death. I brought him into my room and made him some instant coffee on a hotplate. I tried to persuade him to shower, but he wouldn't take his clothes off. I did manage to talk him into rinsing his mouth out with an antiseptic wash. The problem that always seemed to drive him to self-punishment was, he had tried to make me believe, a terrible sense that he was unloved. There would usually be a girl in the background, someone I would never meet, who had just dumped him. "I'm worthless," he would sob between philosophical disquisitions, his beer slopping over as he would gesticulate with his glass in hand. What he usually said was, "I ain't worth shit." By the time he showed up at my door that morning, I had understood that his difficulties with girls masked some other, far deeper problem. It was that submerged region of darkness that I would sometimes try to reach with my ineffectual questions.

After he had rinsed his mouth and spat out the last threads of blood, I suggested that we go for a walk. We walked down 57th Street, under the Illinois Central viaduct and out to the shores of Lake Michigan. It was still very early in the morning, no later than six-thirty, but the traffic was already heavy along the lake. There was a small peninsula, a tiny thumb of land sticking out into the lake where I often walked when I was writing term papers. I steered us out to the end of the point so that we could contemplate the cityscape stretching north towards the Loop and Navy Pier. We sat

on a large rock almost against the edge of the water. Suddenly, he leaned his head into my shoulder, sobbing. I felt tense, but I let him keep his head pressed against me. I did not put my arm around him, but I did pat his nearest shoulder encouragingly. This was a moment of confession.

I was never certain what had brought on the weeping, slobbering self-revelation. Probably the need to tell someone had been building up within him. Today he would be seeing a therapist, but I never heard the least suggestion that he was receiving psychological counselling of any kind. On the two or three occasions that we talked about such matters, he had expressed the philosopher's scorn for Freud and psychoanalysis. He was a man, terribly hurt by something in his past, who had no resources other than his own. That morning by the lake, he abruptly welled over because I had acted like a friend. I had looked after him on more than one occasion, and that morning I had actually welcomed him in an almost brotherly manner.

He had been sexually abused. From the age of eight or so, his father had anally sodomized him on a regular basis. I might have guessed that he had been abused, but the knowledge that it had been his father struck me like a blow to the head. Through his sobs, he told me that he had never been able to escape his father and that his mother, although she must have known what was happening, did nothing to help. What was worse was that his father had often given him to an uncle for sex. He had been like a rent boy that his father had kept in the house for casual sex. No one ever offered to help or ever tried to advise him. His terrible fate was never discussed or even mentioned in his home. Now, grown into adulthood, he had left his family behind, escaped the dark pit that was Texas, as he said, and established that he was, or could be, a brilliant student in a difficult subject. He believed that he would never be happy until he went back to Texas and murdered his father. He was in the fork of a decision: he could ease his memory by killing his father or he could go on to earn a PhD in philosophy. Later, I realized that a third option was the most likely. He would continue on his self-tormenting course until, nothing resolved, no solutions ever found, he killed himself or went mad. Today if I were to meet him again, I expect that he would be living on the street in Chicago or San Francisco. He would be truly cast out.

After that spring, I never saw my friend again. A few years later, he learned my address and wrote to me in Australia wanting to know this or that, but saying nothing about his bad memories, his self-loathing, the confession at the lake or his wish to kill his father. I wrote back, but I never heard from him after that. He was the first man I had ever known who

admitted to having been sexually abused. I had known women who kept dark secrets about their childhoods and who would intimate that terrible things that had been done to them. They would never say explicitly what had happened, but I could tell, from hints or coded allusions, that they had experienced horrors. My friend was the first man who had spoken about his abuse, and even the terse tale that he told had been slow in coming, obviously very hard for him to articulate. He was, I believe, the first person I ever met who was deeply, and perhaps irremediably, abject.

All the contemporary clichés about sexual abuse come into play when I try to recall him. He had been abused, his natural trust in his parents had been violated, he had been traumatized, he had been transformed into an object. He possessed a long string of painful memories that, it seems, he had been unable to repress. And these memories made him feel worthless, unloved and unlovable, cast off from both his family and society. All these haunting memories, and all the intensely negative affects that surrounded them, circled around one fact and one body part. His anus had been raped, but raped not merely in the narrow contemporary sense of exacting non-consensual sex from another person: he had been raped in the older sense of having been carried off, of having been kidnapped. His anus had been subjected to violent, undesired sexual intromission, but it had also been kidnapped, alienated from his sense of his own personhood. Unlike the phallus, a highly social bodily appendage, the anus, Guy Hocquenghem observes, is "essentially private."[1] Social formation, centring around toilet training, hides the anus from public scrutiny, denies its pleasure-giving possibilities and concentrates it upon its excremental function. Although much happens during intimacy that is never made public, including several varieties of anal sexuality, the anus is not usually a topic for public discussion. It does seem to be, in western cultures at least, an "essentially private" bodily part. Of all the many cyber(body)parts that you might imagine, a colostomy bag would be, I suspect, the least acceptable and the most difficult to endure. My friend had been stripped of this privacy, which no doubt, in a classic double bind, he had also been taught to preserve. Having been anally raped many times over a number of years had exposed his hidden anus to a terrible public knowledge, but it had also, paradoxically, transformed him into a boy whose anus was the most important thing about him. He had become morbidly conscious of his anus, both that it was a potential area for sexual pleasure (which could be commanded against his will) and that it had been taken away from him, made public in an extremely painful way.[2] He was experiencing, I know now, deep and

corrosive abjection. The world opened before him, like a Beckett novel, in narrow vistas of existential bleakness.

Against the figure of the abject person, you have to set all those whom you have met who seem to experience no self-consciousness at all. Rather than having their self-consciousness stink in their minds like a rotting corpse, they seem hardly aware of their own existence (other than as a self-satisfied pleasure). They do not feel self-disgust, certainly not abjection, and they do not mind acting in disgusting ways. Like so many other aspects of the study of disgust, the problem of consciousness occupies an unmistakable highpoint. An abject person, such as my friend in Chicago, experiences an intense, overwhelming self-consciousness. You could say that an abject person lives in a fictional world, given over entirely to modes of victimization and punishment, in which he or she acts as a participant-observer. His opposite, the unself-conscious person who easily performs private acts publicly, inhabits no fictional worlds at all, except (like the Sports Bore, for instance) those which are wholly objective and contain only other people. In order to put the abject person into perspective, consider someone who so lacks self-consciousness that normally disgusting acts would be as ordinary as breathing or swallowing.

In early 1999, riding the bus to the seaside resort of Lorne on Australia's south coast, a beautiful young man sat in front of me. He was one of those splendid human beings, male or female, who can only be described as gorgeous. His magnificent Celtic face, high forehead, curving eyebrows, sharply defined cheeks and green eyes (rarities, a Spanish proverb asserts, like dukes and kings) held my attention. He also stank, badly. He was in his early twenties and probably, from his looks (trimmed but tousled hair, a rugby shirt), coming from school, most likely Deakin University in Geelong. His stench might have indicated that he had just left a gym or come from an Australian Rules game hurriedly without showering, or it might have suggested that he had just been having sex with someone. His rancid stench might just have included whiffs of dried sperm and vaginal juices. However, it struck me as more like the stale body odour of a person who seldom washes than that of someone coming unshowered from vigorous activity.

Stench is relative to the environment in which you smell it. My friend in Chicago often stank, and the morning he crawled up to my door his stench from drink and self-neglect had been appalling; but he was always aware that his body was repulsive in the noses of others. Stench was a part of his self-image. In a third-world country, I would hardly have noticed human

body odour since everyone, normally unwashed, would have one. In Australia, where cleanliness and all the other modalities of modern hygiene are easily available, a stale, acrid stench most likely reveals a decision to go unclean. There are many reasons why a person might choose to stink. A loathing of water might be one; an active punk ideology another. The young man's decision to stink publicly might have shown an escape from family repression or just a personal choice to reject all repression, at whatever level, insofar as it can be seen to be as embodied in social mores. It would then be an instance of an individual seeking what Isaiah Berlin called "negative liberty," the freedom to act as one wishes, independent of restraint or hindrance. Having perceived himself as repressed, as constrained by a parental sense of hygiene or a generalized social sense of deportment, a young man might assert his liberty by choosing to stink. It might even have been a deliberate act of transgression, negative liberty subordinated to an active program of anti-repressive self-transformation. At the time, I doubted that hypothesis.

After a few minutes, the young man, who could not have known that I was observing him from behind, dipped his head under the high-collar of his rugby shirt and sniffed his left armpit. He did this more than once before I left the bus at Lorne, leaving him to carry on, now unobserved, to Apollo Bay. A man travelling on a bus in Bolivia between two small towns would probably not bother to sniff his armpits. All armpits would be much the same, ill-smelling but imperceptibly so. If a man riding a rural bus in Bolivia were to sniff himself, it would only be out of concern for what the gringo riding next to him might think. Observing the young man smelling his own bodily stench, I had to conclude that something more than negative liberty was in play. It seemed such an unstudied action, as innocent as a dog licking his genitals, that I had to suppose either a perversion, a compulsive physical expression of narcissism or an almost total lack of personal awareness of his body in space. Surrounded by other people, he acted oblivious of social norms. He was so absorbed in his own body, in his private narcissism made public, that he could not imagine that another person might observe him and note his behaviour. (Or care much if they did, I would guess.) Many people are fundamentally unaware of their physical scatter, their expulsive detritus, the many varied matters of their encroachment upon others, but some few are even unaware of their own persons in collective space. Their stenches, although lovingly sniffed, are unmeasured and unregarded.

One thing was certain: he was not, at least on the only evidence I had, what Australians call an "ocker." Ockers are performative; they act in calculatedly disgusting ways precisely in order to offend. They are like actors in an individual shock theatre, playing to small, unwilling audiences. An ocker's behaviour resembles the public actions of punk in unmistakable ways. It is an acting-out of the observer's dread and anxiety. It seeks to evoke disgust in order to demonstrate the paltriness of the observer's resistance: "This is what you dread; see what it shows you about yourself." Once, many years ago in Cowes, on Philip Island in Australia, I observed two young men in their late twenties, both dressed in suits and wearing ties, order spaghetti Bolognaise. When the spaghetti arrived, they ate it with their hands. Both hands. In fistfuls and by the strand. They may always have eaten in this manner, but it struck me as likely that they were responding to my presence in the restaurant. An obviously middle-class foreigner, studiously reading a book while eating my dinner, I was the right target for ocker behaviour. I did find the spectacle faintly loathsome, but I didn't flee, call loudly for my bill or evince any outward signs of disgust. The young men had targeted my conventional inhibitions about eating and table manners, but had not quite succeeded. The aimed-for spot had not been as tender as they had supposed.

The self-sniffer on the bus was not, then, really an ocker. He was too drawn up in himself, too absorbed and oblivious, and entirely non-performative. Nor was he what Australians refer to as a "dag."[3] He reminded me rather sharply of an experience I had in Argentina while staying in Mar del Plata, the largest seaside resort in the country. I was sitting on the terrace of a restaurant on the beach near the casino when a young woman came up to my table begging for money. She had an attractive face and a strong upper body, but her legs were crippled. She supported herself on canes, the kind that fit over the wrist and act like crutches. I had no change at that moment so I waved her away, but I decided that I would look for her after I had paid my bill to give her some small coins. When I stood up from the table eventually, I did look for her. I saw her about thirty feet away leaning back against a wall. She was picking her nose in an utterly unself-conscious way and leisurely eating her snot. I did not give her any money.

People act against conventions, making themselves disgusting. This may happen merely because they have crossed borders, geographical or social, and are ignorant of different mores or unaware how shocking their own familiar habits may seem. (Australians often seem to find strange accents in English disgusting: my own flat or intrusive *R* sounds, for example. You can

observe a person's eyes bug, his nose crinkle and his lips pucker, rather as if he had unwittingly sucked upon a rotten prune, even as you speak to him.) It may also happen because, like punks or other nihilists (such as ockers), they want to act out their rejection of normal values. This usually follows an indirect course. People act disgustingly because they wish to force upon a shocked audience either the repressed urges of that audience or else their own judgement upon its values. In such moments, disgusting behaviour effects a grotesque transformation of hypocritically under-articulated values into something like their true character. Yet it is also possible for people to act disgustingly, within their own cultures, in purely unconscious ways. The young woman in Mar del Plata and the young man on the bus in Australia were not trying to shock or even disturb me, or anyone, but only enjoying their bodies, or their bodily effluvia. Such unconscious behaviour can arise from ignorance (the simple-minded may eat their own feces, for example), narcissism or the cultivated exercise of negative liberty. It might even be deliberately transgressive in the de Sadean sense. I concluded that the young Argentinian woman was ignorant; the Australian man, narcissistic. My friend in Chicago had been abject, neither ignorant nor narcissistic, but, indeed, their mordant opposite.

The human body is multiplexly split. I do not mean only that it has appendages or even that it creates the appearance of bilateral symmetry (until it has been split open), but rather that in consciousness, as an object of thought or as the subject of one or another conceptual system, the human body is experienced as a battleground, an area of conflicting themes.[4] You can imagine this battleground in many ways. In a straightforward manner, it could be envisioned with the body reproduced as an image framed by words and arrows that identify parts and their functions. In a surrealist fabrication, the body opens like a cabinet to reveal the products and tools it employs in consumption. Phantasmagorically, the body morphs through a series of variations to show itself at different stages (or in different fantasies) of composition or decomposition. It can be imagined as actually split, like Italo Calvino's Cloven Viscount, or symbolically so, the shadow-side of consciousness darkening the face or else filling it with uneasy dreams. In Barbara Kruger's 1989 silk-screen photo of a woman's face, a line divides the face vertically along the bridge of the nose. On the left side, she stares ahead (intent, perhaps a bit grim), but on the right, a negative image, the intentness has been smoothed over in a softening gloom that is outside of the face itself. The right eye becomes a piercing flash of light or a mysterious hole bored deep into the skull. The image is

bordered in red and has a message written in three parts, white letters on red background, that reads, top to bottom, "Your body is a battleground."[5]

The apprehension of the body as split, divided or in fragments not only can be imagined in different ways but has very different consequences both for understanding and for practical action. Marking the body in a highly visible manner, a tattoo must be interpreted (or "read") to make sense of it. It is a more complex marking than either scarification or piercing since it both conveys more significance than these other modes of bodily mutilation and reveals a more intricate intention. The design must be chosen, out of possibilities nearly as wide as those of all visual art (the tattooist's "flash" only hints at what can be done), and it must be inscribed slowly, often in phases. Thus, as I have already argued, tattoos are privileged as bodily markings, both more complex and more ineradicable than piercings.[6] Moreover, all tattoos create one dominant effect: they mark the body into separate places, transforming it into areas or zones. The potential significance of each zone is important, but the act of division, splitting the body into discrete areas, precedes that significance and is usually perceived first.[7] The differentiated areas inscribed by visible markings on the body point towards a possible *Spaltung* in the person's sense of identity, a division that may be written upon the psyche as well as upon the body. In this sense, the perception of a tattoo upon another person may evoke the issues of "spoiled identity" that Goffman discusses. One aspect of a multiplex intention may be to exhibit to the world an inner awareness of fragmentation and personal disintegration. Perceived in that way, a tattoo, like the jailhouse inscriptions on Max Cady's back in *Cape Fear*, flags a dangerous psychic state, a potential for violence. A person who sees himself as split and has taken deliberate and unmistakable steps to register this for the world might wish to impose an analogous fragmentation upon others. A human corpse, as Kristeva notes, is the ultimate instance of the abject: it is also a rather final act of division, of splitting one thing from another. Death, Norbert Elias writes, is "a problem of the living."[8]

In this chapter, I want to examine the most personal of all disgust-worlds: the private world of self-disgust or self-loathing. Ugly fictional worlds play out in which the self-loathing person may imagine him/herself in a variety of punishing or humiliating scenarios. My friend in Chicago once told me that he often dreamed he had died and his body was being cut apart by an anatomy class at the medical school. These dreams were, he thought, signs that he could still be "good for something," still able to possess worth. An ugly personal world of self-loathing reflects a bodily split

that is intensely, perhaps unbearably, intimate, a split in which "good" and "bad" parts are isolated from each other. However, I want most to distinguish the inner sense of feeling oneself another object among many disgusting objects, a single point in a general field of disgust, from, in contrast, the inner sense of feeling oneself abject, cast apart and away. Throughout this book, I have emphasized the diverse array of both objects and acts that have been, or might be called, disgusting. I have stressed over and over again what seems to be an irreducible aspect of experiencing disgust: that it can be relearned, either effectively suppressed or else displaced entirely onto some new object. Up until this point, I have largely concentrated on the ways in which individuals experience disgust within a socio-cultural context. Disgust seems to be, and in the history of literature must be imagined as, an individual problem within some larger setting. Some people experience disgust more quickly, and some more forcefully, than others. Some people give occasion for disgust in others, and are themselves the cause of disgust, quite readily. A scum rocker, such as G.G. Allin, probably strikes most people as disgusting (he certainly wanted to strike you that way); but among his fans, and generally among punk audiences, who anticipated, perhaps yearned for, his violence and taboo-breaking, he seemed wonderful, glorious even.

In most of what I have said so far, I have pursued a model of a person who stands behind a boundary that marks certain objects or acts as disgusting or who, knowingly or unknowingly, crosses over such a boundary. Of course, taken only as a problem in representation, disgust will dominate, simply as a matter of course, exceptional fictions in which the world is pervasively a disgust-world and the characters who inhabit it live according to its terms: Beckett's characters, for instance, do not cross boundaries because such demarcations exist only for the reader or not at all. Their worlds are uniformly bleak, consistently without either joy or transcendence. David Lynch's character Henry in *Eraserhead* does not cross boundaries since, in his world, there are none. His dreams, his relationship, his food, his child, each aspect of his life, is, rather like the world of Beckett's *The Unnamable*, consistently grim and desolate.[9] The entire world, including Henry himself (who, after all, stabs his "child" to death), might be seen as disgusting, but within that world there are no divisions, no boundaries. It is more common for fictional worlds to contain internal boundaries that split it into distinct zones of disgusting and non-disgusting acts. Brigadier Pudding in *Gravity's Rainbow*, for instance, crosses a well-marked and highly illuminated boundary when he eats Katje's

excrement, but he may not know what he is doing or be fully conscious of its significance. Pynchon is silent on this point, but he does let his readers know that Brigadier Pudding has been conditioned by past experience and manipulated by experimental psychologists. In Sartre's *Nausea*, Roquentin exists behind a self-constructed boundary that radically separates him from Bouville and all its commercial fussiness, but he has constructed it for himself out of the material of his personal alienation. Roquentin knows clearly that the world he experiences as disgusting is so because of who, and how, he has become. J.G. Ballard's *Crash* depicts techno-copulation, the intimate association of machines and sexual pleasure, as transgressive, but it is also a fictional world in which nearly everyone desires this transgression. The consciousness of boundaries exists entirely in the way the narrator (who is known as "Ballard") recognizes the potential destructiveness, as well as the excitement, of techno-sex.

I have treated disgust as, by and large, a question of boundaries, always an edge experience: that, but not this; them, but not us; you, but not me. Of course, this treatment may seem like the classical perspective on human cultural interaction, rather old hat, a discarded or repudiated "depth" model.[10] Still, even if it seems to make more sense to think of people as printed circuits, or as nodes or relays within a larger system of communication, as mere reflecting surfaces or as unconsciously structured by a symbolic system (an "ideology") that is class or gender based, it does usually seem *as if* one stood along the edge of boundaries, witnessing culturally sanctioned disgusting objects and acts across that edge, and either rejected or desired whatever stands on the other side. And certainly the history of western literature and film has accepted the depth model, the model of the individual as a conscious member of, yet distinct from, the culture in which he or she exists. Shakespeare's Leontes experiences disgust at the thought of Hermione's adultery with his best friend, but he does not appear to think of this as a communal system of information exchange. It is very personal, "deep" in the old sense, as it is for Hamlet when, contemplating Yorick's skull, he, too, experiences disgust. Hamlet feels his gorge rise when he considers the lipless skull, where once lips had hung that he had kissed, "I know not how oft," and his imagination runs immediately, in a characteristic manner, to historical, metaphysical, cosmic and comic speculations. Quite unmistakably, he seems to take Yorick's skull personally.

What happens when disgust moves inside and you begin to think of yourself as disgusting, as cast aside from the sane, integrated world of health and symbolic order? What happens when you begin to think of

yourself as abject? The experience may be uncertain: both a hateful degradation and a potentially transcendent moment; a way down that leads to a way up. Often in modern literature the experience of degradation, of having entered the domain of the disgusting or of having become oneself disgusting (a "heap of rubbish," in Bataille's phrase), proves to be a liberating moment. Self-knowledge comes from testing yourself in extreme experiences, from discovering the limit cases that strip away the Apollonian carapace, the body armour of cultural rules that may seem to protect you but perhaps only hides or obscures your true self. Beckett's characters, for example, exist outside Apollonian encrustations, with neither the protection nor the hope that these bring, while Patrick White's characters often live secret lives, managing an Apollonian persona like a carnival domino. One of the most popular cult films of the 1970s, Phillipe de Broca's 1967 *King of Hearts*, tells the story of a soldier in World War One, a member of a Scottish regiment, who abandons the war in order to cast his lot with the inmates of an insane asylum.[11] The Great War was so futile, so degrading, so profoundly disgusting in so many ways that *only* Apollonian prohibitions made it possible. Men had to believe that it was proper, and even sweet, to die for their countries in mud and filth. When they stopped seeing the world that way, then an insane asylum would appear sane.

For many novelists, the moment of abjection has also seemed to be the moment of self-revelation. Patrick White, for example, returns over and over again to the moment of transcendence when the experience of disgust leads to knowledge, or the intimate sense of abjection opens a path to self-realization. In White's *Voss*, Willie Pringle, newly returned from studying art in Paris (it is the middle of the nineteenth century) and fascinated by the "grey of mediocrity, the blue of frustration," remarks to a group of astonished nineteenth-century Sydneysiders that the "blowfly on its bed of offal is but a variation of the rainbow."[12] There must be ways of seeing, whether painterly or punk, that allow the eye to peer beyond all social boundaries, even into the nominally disgusting and, more profoundly disturbing, the abject. Other of White's novels, such as *The Vivisector* and *The Twyborn Affair*, explore the persistent human problem of self-disgust and abjection. The main character in *The Twyborn Affair*, Eddie (but also Eudoxia and Eadith), experiences himself as a woman in a man's body. He can live successfully as a woman, but he never loses the anguished sense of his imperfection. He finds himself to be disgusting, and he has a keen eye for whatever seems disgusting in the world about him. Living as a young woman in France just prior to the Great War, he is almost happy, but futureless, if not hopeless;

living as a man in Australia after the war, he is raped, humiliated and degraded; living again as a woman in London just before the beginning of World War Two, he protects himself as a rule-conscious madame of an elegant brothel. Protected, he is nonetheless empty, still seeing himself as hopeless, unfulfilled, abject. Killed in a German bombing raid, he is left "little more than a white smile in a skin as rough and red as a brick."[13] Eddie is typical of the many limit-case characters that White creates, torn between worlds, existing behind boundaries while pretending to be on the other side. In limit-cases, you may discover yourself, or at least the Dionysian shadow-image of yourself, but never within the Apollonian constraints of, in Bataille's words, a "negative morality" that matches the "servile need of a constraint."[14] As a cultural boundary, disgust can constitute either a threat or a protection (a servile constraint that you may need); but it can also take shape as a moment of self-transcendence. Consider *Hamlet* once more.

Hamlet's self-appraisal after he has seen the Player King weep for a fiction he has seen performed, a contrast in registering affect that Hamlet calls "monstrous," reveals a negative and biting judgement. For a prince to call himself a "rogue and peasant slave" must show a negative self-accounting, a fall or shortcoming from an ideal standard. He calls himself an "ass" and compares himself to a "drab" or a "stallion" who, "like a whore must unpack my heart with words."[15] It probably would not be necessary for a reader/viewer to understand Hamlet's words as registering actual self-disgust, though self-disgust would be appropriate to the world of *Hamlet* in which so much is disgusting, deeply and inescapably loathsome. Hamlet's words may only establish a number of relevant analogies. Still, some readers of the play express considerable confidence in stating baldly that Hamlet feels self-disgust. In his recent study of character in Shakespeare, Imtiaz Habib writes that Hamlet "seethes with repulsion and disgust."[16] Camille Paglia also reads Hamlet as a character experiencing self-disgust. Hamlet, she writes, "as all sons of mothers, is bloated with 'this too too solid flesh'." She sees his first soliloquy moving with a "hidden chthonian logic" from

> suicidal self-disgust to thoughts of the world as 'an unweeded garden,' overgrown by 'things rank and gross in nature,' and ends in lurid visualization of his mother's sex life amid rumpled 'incestuous sheets,' sweaty soiled rags, both swaddling and shroud, mother nature's bindings of birth and death.[17]

The play, she adds, is "filled with bad smells." Although Paglia would seem to support my argument, I do not actually think that it is necessary to read Hamlet as experiencing self-disgust. Even the self-accusatory words in the soliloquy in the second act need not be taken as a self-analysis of disgust and loathing. However, I do think that one must understand Hamlet at this point, and indeed until the end of Act IV, Scene iv, when he reflects upon the significance of Fortinbras' projected invasion of Poland, as having introjected some aspects of the fictional world that he inhabits.

What critics sometimes call "images," or even "image patterns," are also fictional objects within a fictional world upon which the characters, the native inhabitants of that world, draw. Let us suppose that Hamlet feels only shame, an affect on the road to, but not quite fully arrived at, the point when a person might see himself as disgusting. The case of Hamlet shows what powerful fictional effects, both narrative and dramatic, can be gained when a character turns inwards and experiences itself negatively. It also shows the interrelationship between character and world in much fiction. The character's mind draws on the world it inhabits for its shape and self-definition. That mind reflects its own world, not the extra-textual lifeworld of the author or, if it does, it does so only at a sharply oblique angle. To cite another canonical example, Gulliver's ultimate misanthropy, preferring horses to humans, his stable to his house, may or may not indicate Jonathan Swift's personal misanthropy. However, it certainly does appear as the conclusion, the final mental state in a sequence of such states, to Gulliver's experiences of the human self diminished, its pretensions and ideals made ridiculous, among the Lilliputians; of the human body magnified, all its blemishes made large, among the Brobdingnagians; of the human mind parodied, its weakest proclivities manifested systematically, among the Laputians and Lagodians; and of the human person itself made vile, reduced to excrement-throwing, shamelessness and greed among the Yahoos.[18] His experience within his own world has taught Gulliver his misanthropy and has led him to feel physical disgust in the presence of other human persons, including his own family.

The body falls into its own matter and into disgust. Its degeneration and disintegration begin early and continue late (as a rotting corpse, as ashes). No consideration of the "lived body" should fail to take into account the experience of an actual body's disintegration. There are two ways to put the problem of disintegration into perspective. First, there are human bodies that have not quite achieved "normal" development. Although lacking the specific evocative power it once possessed when sideshows toured

throughout North America, *freak* is still a word to reckon with. Even in the loose contemporary sense of a person who behaves in ways that are outside the bounds of ordinary conduct, a moral rather than a physical significance, a freak is someone whose disintegration has preceded development. The failure of the body is measured against some communal standard, real or imagined; that postulates an image of a human person's full, normal development. Second, there are bodies that have reached development, perhaps even helped to promote the flowering of a personal ego-ideal, but then failed in particular functions. In this second case, once-sound body parts have to be replaced. Disintegration is piecemeal, but nonetheless painful, an active source of self-disgust.

Both conditions exemplify the processes that I discussed in Chapter 4, metamorphosis and decomposition. While losing a body part and acquiring a prosthetic substitute in its place is a clear instance of decomposition, having an undeveloped or deformed physical condition may not seem like a case of metamorphosis since, by definition, a freak would be someone whose development has stopped or deviated at an early stage from the fetus' normal developmental sequence, not undergone change. However, this common-sense view underlooks the capacity of imagination to create scenarios that reinvent the world. The traditional lore of freaks, in sideshows and permanent collections such as P.T. Barnum's "American Museum," always held out two distinct possibilities: you might, but for God's grace, have looked this way yourself; you may still, luck or providence dealing you dark cards, look this way. There is something archetypal about freaks, pointing to large questions about human nature, identity, social roles and destiny. They prompt imaginary worlds and complex scenarios. In any event, it is the archetypal that Leslie Fiedler explores in his *Freaks*. The true freak, Fiedler observes,

> stirs both supernatural terror and natural sympathy, since, unlike the fabulous monsters, he is one of us, the human child of human parents, however altered by forces we do not quite understand into something mythic and mysterious, as no mere cripple ever is.

The freak challenges conventional boundaries "between male and female, sexed and sexless, animal and human, large and small, self and other, and consequently between reality and illusion, experience and fantasy, fact and myth."[19] The mental theatre in which disgust scenarios play out will be

open to the possibility of mutation. You may imagine a world in which you might have been, or one in which you may still be, a freak. You may mutate, find yourself transformed by accident or disease or even by punishment. In all these situations, it will be possible to imagine a metamorphosis as a process that still unfolds. Metamorphosis is a process that is always with us, even when it seems not to be.

Tod Browning's 1932 film *Freaks*, censored and banned (in the United Kingdom) for years, brilliantly captures the equivocal two-sidedness of freaks: at once like and unlike those who pay to see them; at once sympathetic and disturbing. Browning's direction is masterful. Working together in a small tenting circus, the freaks are shown to form a tightly knit community. (By definition, as indicated in the inter-title commentary at the beginning of the film, freaks are outside of a community, viewed by the "norms" as monsters.) Within the film, the normal circus performers, such as Cleopatra, the beautiful but immoral aerialist, and Hercules, the strong man, constantly express their disgust for the freaks but are clearly themselves not members of a community. They are, like all bigots, at once exploitative and hypocritical. Hence the physical disgust they pretend to register at the freaks is offset by the moral disgust the audience is asked to feel about them. The first indication of disgust within the film occurs in the initial framing incident when a woman turns away, screaming, from a pit in which there is something frightening. The barker hedges the pit's contents in mystery. Then a cut-away shows Cleopatra on a trapeze. In the film's conclusion, Cleopatra becomes the most disgusting of all the freaks, or at least the only one who evokes an actual scream. The camera reveals what had been hidden at first: it is Cleopatra metamorphosed, reduced to a torso, squeaking unintelligibly in a bird-like chatter, and apparently covered with feathers.[20] It is as vivid an instance of metamorphosis, if surgical rather than divine, as those in Ovid.[21]

Fiedler observes that the "finale is so atrocious and contrived that it risks breaking the illusion completely."[22] It is also very powerful. After all, Cleopatra has become, by surgical intervention, a mutant. Yet if you wanted a single image, out of all the vast archive of literary representation, for either an unwilled metamorphosis or an abject person, you could hardly do better than the image of the beautiful and haughty Cleopatra transformed into a Chicken Woman. The film demonstrates the point that the existence of in-the-world freaks makes the disturbing impact of metamorphosis troublingly real. You can always imagine a fictional world in which undergoing metamorphosis, even becoming a freak, is held out as one of your lifeworld's unfolding possibilities.

Decomposition occurs in many ways, including death by torture (which I discussed in Chapter 4). However, the failure of a specific body part, because personal and so continuously an object of consciousness, focusses the body's fall into disgust in an especially acute form. A replacement body part is known as a prosthesis. What do prostheses tell you about the disintegration of the body or of its splitting and fragmenting condition? When they fail, the body's parts, (ordinarily so silent within the illusion of their "whole") scream their presence. When they are replaced, they grumble unnervingly in a new tongue. In having a prosthesis, I experience a split consciousness. When I put on my glasses or my contact lenses, I can see more clearly. I also correct a defect in my vision. At some point in the future, it may be possible to have prosthetic eyes. Contact lenses and glasses will seem primitive then; no longer commonplace, they will be difficult to find even for a person who can remember their use. I may wear a "visor," like commander La Forge in *Star Trek—The Next Generation*, or else possess a cybernetic eyeball. For the moment, I will imagine my prosthetic eyeball to be fully functional, unlike the one that Pynchon imagines in his parable of plastic surgery and bodily metamorphosis, *V.*

> As the distance between them gradually diminished Mondaugen saw that her left eye was artificial: she, noticing his curiosity, obligingly removed the eye and held it out to him in the hollow of her hand. A bubble blown translucent, its "white" would show up when in the socket as a half-lit sea green. A fine network of nearly microscopic fractures covered its surface. Inside were the delicately-wrought wheels, springs, ratchets of a watch, wound by a gold key which Fraülein Meroving wore on a slender chain round her neck. Darker green and flecks of gold had been fused into twelve vaguely zodiacal shapes, placed annular on the surface of the bubble to represent the iris and also the face of the watch.[23]

Pynchon's myth-inscribed eyeball is important to this discussion, but at this early point I want to imagine a future prosthetic eyeball that actually functions, enabling me to see. Still, even with ordinary in-the-world glasses, my consciousness is modified. It is not merely that I can see better, but also that an aspect of my being has been put behind me, if never out of mind. Nearly every human body part, other than the brain and the nervous system, can be replaced prosthetically. (However, in the case of the eyes and

the testicles, the prostheses are only cosmetic. Undoubtedly, this situation will change.) Even on the threshold of a full-scale Cyber Age, the multiplicity of the human body seems astounding. Stephen Hawking is a good example of that multiplicity. Because he uses a voice prosthesis, his vocal presence would be electronic whether you were standing next to him or on Mars. His voice in China or Australia, on Mars or in a space station, would remain what it is. You could never be certain where his edges were. Multiplicity is another way of not being sure where people's edges are, where their identity begins and ends.[24] My prostheses elevate me to a higher plane of fulfillment, or a more ideal conception of myself, but they also remind me of how I have slipped from the plane that I have previously occupied. They attribute to me a multiplicity that I had not planned. They blur edges even while refining capacity.

Your body seems always to be dissolving, failing in one way or another, needing supplements. You feed it vitamins and healthy food and, as one part after another begins to fail, you discuss with various doctors the possibilities of replacement. For instance, the knee that I injured at seventeen in a motorcycle accident has been replaced by one made from hard acrylic and held to the bone by a titanium stud. I will someday have other parts replaced with either artificial parts or with transplanted body parts from someone else (but which someday may be grown in incubator animals, such as pigs). If my kidneys begin to fail, I can make use of a collective prosthetic kidney, called a dialysis machine, that I will share with other people in a similar condition. When my penis begins to dysfunction, if it does (and common male experience assures me that, most predictably, it will sadly do just that), my personal physician will refer me to a urologist who will recommend a penile implant which will actually improve my normal performance by making me permanently virile.

Always a "phantasmatic" body part, my penis will have been modified towards enhanced performance.[25] The implant may simply extend my penis so that it will never be entirely flaccid, always sufficiently turgid for action, or it may involve a small hydraulic mechanism that will permit me to pump my penis into tumescence simply by squeezing a tiny plastic reservoir that the urologist will have tucked away within my scrotum, like a third testicle. The bio-mechanical expansions of my natural potential may so please me that I might return to the urologist and ask for a cosmetic phalloplasty in order to have my penis sculpted into a more attractive shape. Once I have had that operation, my penis will have been lengthened (by cutting the suspensory ligaments that join it to the pubic bone) and thickened (by the

liposuction of fat from my buttocks or abdomen) and I will seem, to my own mind at least, irresistibly bionic. (A person might also undergo neovaginoplasty, for cosmetic or transsexual purposes. I do not know if such a procedure would be experienced as bionic.[26]) If I do not like these possibilities (a permanently semi-erect penis will be conspicuous, especially when swimming, and the hydraulic mechanism may break, probably will in fact, leaving me with a piece of ruined machinery in my scrotum, a tiny replica of an abandoned industrial site), then the doctor can prescribe injections of prostaglandin, Phentolamine, papaverine or some other chemical or hormonal fluid.[27] I will then prick a syringe into the corpora cavernosa (left or right, depending upon the hand I use) and inject myself. This will leave me with a magnificent erection that will last for two or three hours, or (I would hope) long after ejaculation. It may also leave me with an embarrassing case of priapism, but, always optimistic in these matters, I will hope not. It may even be that something as apparently simple as Viagra will do the trick. Viagra acts like a chemical prothesis just as surely as does prostaglandin. The simplicity of its delivery (swallowing) masks its genuine prosthetic nature. In all of these instances, I will have been improved. In each, I will also have been diminished. Each prosthetic modification also marks the distance I will have travelled from my original physical condition.[28] Even as I approach a new ideal, bionic standard, I will be slipping below the natural bodily standard that I inherited and watched develop during its social formation.

The human body interacts with machines in many ways. Many of these ways are obvious, but none are ever simple. Some kind of system will always be presupposed. The simplest machine floats on the surface of numerous hidden systems, networks of connections and conceptual overlap. A machine that no longer functions or that has either lost or never had a purpose will seem, as Heidegger expresses it, "conspicuous." It will become equipment that is in "un-readiness-to-hand."[29] I draw from Heidegger's proposition the corollary that machines are only seen "fully" when, no longer in use, they cannot be seen fully. It may well be the case that machines are so omnipresent in the western technological environment that they are also invisible in the sense that they seldom attract attention, becoming visible, as David Porush argues, "only when resurrected by fear" or by metaphor in the abrupt shock of defamiliarization.[30] However, this seems far less important than the invisibility of their hidden systems. While they are still functioning, the extended systems that make machines possible are largely out of sight, too complex to be seen easily. Still func-

tioning, a machine is a node, an expression of unseen rhizomes; no longer functioning, it becomes conspicuous, a thing in the world that can be seen but not understood. The most obvious example would be the use of tools. Philosophical optimists like to observe that human beings are toolmakers (rather than, say, predators or destroyers): "Toolmaking man learned," one such optimist writes, opening a proposition after which any fact from human history might follow.[31] There have been many tools and there will be many more, not all of which have suggested reasons for joyous hope. The strongest form of the toolmaking argument would hold that the human mind can constitute an interface with everything in the cosmos, including all physical laws, to create tools. In *that* proposition, there is neither woe nor wonder, only fascination.

Imagine a human ancestor picking up a stone with which to crack a shell or a nut, or using a twig to winkle out marrow from an already-gnawed bone. Another one, perhaps gimpy from combat with a mastodon, has discovered he could use a fallen branch to improve his walking. The branch actually performs much the same work as my prosthetic knee, supporting rather than replacing. Both ancient tools are elementary prosthetic devices: they enhance the body, increasing its force and range, but both are possible only because underlying systems of bio-mechanics, activated by cultural objectives, bring them into use. Today, resting in a glass case in a museum, both ancient devices would be conspicuous, surrounded by their sheer visibility and uprooted from their original cultural domains, with only the museum's documentation to provide a partial, but highly artificial, re-enrooting. You may see small chip marks in the stone, for example, and the documentation will explain that these show that a piece of hard stone, perhaps flint, had been used to rough-hew it. The documentation will scarcely reanimate the system of discovery, trade and craftsmanship that once obtained and fully shaped the smashing-stone. All tools, as all machines, slip into conspicuous meaninglessness once they have been severed from their operating systems. What documentation could fully make sense of or re-embed the "mountain of leather prostheses and wooden limbs" that you can see on display at Auschwitz?[32]

The modes of body-machine interaction are supplementary. Of course, a machine may kill you or cause you devastating injury. So far as machines are concerned, the world offers a million ways to die. Every technology carries its dark twin or, hidden within its total implicature, a death-system capable of destroying you. Science-fiction returns obsessively to scenarios in which computers break their programmatic limitations and attempt to

seize control, or androids go wrong and claim their independence or seek, as the "replicants" do in Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner*, extended and enhanced "life." In a favourite narrative motif of *Star Trek—The Next Generation*, hyper-complex machines (such as starships) evolve life. Evolved from a machine but no longer merely a machine, the new life form may be exploratory and curious (exhibiting, as in *Star Trek*, what human beings suppose to be prime human attributes) or malign as is the car in Stephen King's *Christine*. Even my glasses, products of a benign technology in common use, might shatter in an accident and create a glass shard that could drive into my brain, making optometry wholly irrelevant. Any consideration of prostheses has to take into account their potential failure and even the conditions under which they might go wrong or turn against their users. An awareness of machines always includes, as Porush observes, a dimension of fear. There is also an element of potential disappointment, fear's most intimate radical: the prosthesis may not work, may work inadequately or may entail unwanted consequences. However, I am primarily interested in prosthetic consciousness as a reflexive awareness of supplementation. What happens within the mind once an exotic mechanical part, reflecting an unseen technological system entirely alien to all your previous bodily processes, has been joined (whether integrated or merely appended) to your body?

The argument begins with two distinctions. First, all machines are both hard and soft. There will always be a system of instructions, of operating commands, such as a program. Hardware and software invite themselves as metaphors: "at one level or another one always needs both in any machine."[33] This may seem obvious, but it is so only because a tool uprooted from context, an *ur*-tool, such as the smashing-stone in the display case, conspicuously has no system, no accessible software. The difference between a functioning and non-functioning tool is precisely the presence or absence of operating commands, its system or culturally understood rhizomes. It is also within the operating system that problems arise, the "undecidables and double binds" that often make machines appear to be schizophrenic.[34] Those science-fiction scenarios that emphasize the turning or going "wrong" of machines, from simple to hyper-complex, play upon the potential schizophrenia, the sudden undecidables and abrupt double-binds, within the hidden operating system, the software.

Second, a prosthesis is not an android. An android, existing in the contemporary world only in the crude prototypical form of drone robots even though written deeply into our cultural mythology, is a self-contained artificial life-form. A prosthesis is a part, a supplement to a human body, and not, however complexly integrated, self-contained. (It would be an interesting problem for a science-fiction writer whether an android *could have* a prosthesis since each replacement part, even if it enhanced previous levels of task accomplishment, would be fully consolidated within the android's cyberbody.[35]) As I have used the term, a prosthesis is an artificial body part that supplements or replaces a genetic body part, but a part that implies, and to some degree continues to function under, an operating system different from the body's organic processes. Hence a prosthesis marks an intersection between two systems, two underlying networks of rhizomes, technological and organic.

Any cyber(body)part may degrade in either of its two intersecting systems. A prosthesis may fail either as a replacement for a diseased body part or as a machine. Either of the two intersecting systems may fail either through further disease and death, or through mechanical degradation. In both cases, the hopeful fantasies of replacement will have been destroyed. You may experience horror as you observe the manifestations of failure, additional disgusting evidence of the human body's disintegration and deliquescent collapse. You may also experience terror as you contemplate the abrupt dysfunction of your special cyber(body)part, its weakness with respect to random glitches or simple wearing out. Horror and terror, as I argued in Chapter 6, seem to move from the world towards the mind, slowly abrading or suddenly bursting upon consciousness, and both may be enclosed within the mind, working against personal identity.



There are many kinds of imaginative disgust scenarios, but abjection—a private world that extends self-disgust—is in many ways the most corrosive. Because the consciousness of being abject may be ambiguous, at once a loathed and a desired state, it could be potentially fructifying, a source of creative transcendence. That is, it could amount to a consciousness of a border experience, a path that opens beyond ordinary human routine in much the way that Bataille and others have described transgression. "The

experience of abjection arises from an indistinction between self and other," Juliana De Nooy writes, "a blurring of the limits between inside and outside."[36] Because it does blur boundaries, and does arise from an "indistinction" which is felt even if it is not easily made clear, abjection calls all manner of ideas about identity and place into question.

My friend in Chicago must have felt as if he had been blurred. His entire existence had become a painful smudge, the past so powerful in the present, intentions running at such cross-purposes; but above all, he had lost his sense of himself as distinct and whole. Although I have been employing the example of prosthetics, or cyber(body)parts, which spark consciousness to remember the body's unmodified state even when they are most successful and corrode the conscious sense of well-being and wholeness when they fail, I actually want to make a larger point. All bodily failures, including the alienation of mythological parts in rape, can inspire self-disgust. Abjection can follow, nose to arse, as inevitably as the monster in art-horror slowly emerges from its own spoor. My friend had lost his exclusive proprietorship of his own anus, which his father and uncle had raped. As a consequence, he had been hurled downwards into unhappiness, self-destruction and abjection. If, at an early age, he had lost his anus through surgical intervention and had been given a prosthetic anus (a colostomy bag, say), he might have been able to face existence much differently. Fewer of the mythological associations encompassing his anus would have been evoked. Consider the following fable.

> On Zwffzwss, a distant planet, the inhabitants are perfectly spherical. Their bodies are uniformly filled with a stable gaseous substance. They need do nothing to replenish this substance, since their bodies simply ingest energy from the atmosphere, and they feel no necessity to excrete. Indeed, their bodies have no openings for either ingestion or excretion. Their anecdotal history indicates that their ancestors may once have had appendages, but this is uncertain. Now they think things. They have evolved capacities, telepathy and telekinesis, for instance, to act at distances. They can roll and hover, but mostly they communicate thoughts. If they desire something, they cause it to move towards them. They can even think things into existence. Their lives are comfortable, full and rounded.

One day their powerful sensors tell them that spacecraft filled with human beings are approaching. The knowledge that human beings possess appendages, limbs used for fetching and carrying, voices to communicate thought, fascinates them, filling them with confused mixtures of horror and desire. They hover softly above the ground quivering with anticipation. How do these appendages work, they wonder. Are they a kind of magic? A wise inhabitant explains the concepts of levers and soundwaves. The cognitive networks of Zwffzwss flutter with excitement. Can these beings actually carry objects back and forth? Can they make things? Do they really hear and listen to each other? Does this mean that they are not limited to thinking? That they don't have to think things into existence? The mind of Zwffzwss trembles. Human beings do not have to think.

Conquest is easy when the inhabitants desire it. Zwffzwss falls to human force. Colonies are established. The inhabitants are employed to supply low-cost telecommunications. They make cost-efficient tools for construction. They are cheap to keep alive since they synthesize nutriments from the atmosphere. They are wonderfully clean since they never excrete. Human life flourishes, but at the expense of the original inhabitants. They have been transformed into machines, servo-mechanisms. They are not allowed to hover or roll freely. They have become abject slaves on their own planet. And then one day someone wonders: What if we thought them out of existence? Or thought them home again? Or caused their spacecraft to disintegrate? And then they would be our slaves. (But Zwffzwss had never needed slaves before.) The networks, softly whispering to escape human surveillance, consider the possibilities. Suppose it doesn't work? Suppose they come back, even more hostile? What will we do without them? Who will organize us and give us purpose? Small murmurs in the collective thinking keep saying, Let us try. Let us try. And the suggestion becomes louder. It is now a serious meditation. It becomes a plea. An argument. A command. Let us try.

Could the inhabitants of Zwffzwss experience abjection? They have neither orifices nor parts. They do not eat and they do not excrete. So far as you can tell from the fable, they would have no bodily effluvia at all. They cannot be penetrated, though they can be kidnapped and colonized. Can they be made abject? Could they even feel self-disgust? The answer is found in the common factor linking the loss of body parts (whether are not they are eventually supplemented) and the alienation of body parts. Both conditions involve losing control over your own parts and both act upon consciousness as a burning brand upon flesh. You can never forget what you have lost, nor ever successfully re-imagine yourself as unshrunken. The inhabitants of Zwffzwss have lost their proprietorship over themselves. They have been colonized.[37] Victims of racism, gender or sexual-orientation discrimination can all be transformed into, if indeed they have not been born into, human abjects. The governing discourse of their places in the world will have made them indistinct, their identity blurred. And thus the inhabitants of Zwffzwss may feel abjection in the sense that their identity has been compromised and blurred. Colonization works against the spirit as sexual violation does against the body. My friend who had been raped as a child, and who had lost the exclusive control over his anus even while having his sense of self-being reduced to it, experienced a corrosive self-disgust. He saw himself as one among the world's many disgusting things. However, he also saw himself in an even more degraded condition. When he wept in my arms, he must have seen himself as being abject. That is, he imagined himself cast out, thrown away by his society and transformed into human waste, like excrement or a corpse. He had always to negotiate his life with the lucid apprehension of himself as worthless but still human. The abject, because it is transgressive and disruptive, always "out of place" but always self-consciously so, can break the conceptual constraints, the symbolic or Apollonian laws that constitute it. The truly abject person will be so far outside normal cultural boundaries that he or she may actually appear transcendent, saintly or hermetic. My friend did often strike me as a man possessing a high-order understanding, even an inhuman kind of knowledge, and as someone standing numinously to the side of the world's on-goingness. On the other hand, self-disgust passively inhabits a place within those symbolic and Apollonian boundaries: a pre-determined, submissive and regulated place. It is possible to feel both conditions at once (which, I am convinced, my friend did), although the relation between the two concepts is clearly intransitive. You may experience self-disgust without abjection, but the reverse condition seems wholly impossible.

The contrasting condition to self-disgust helps to focus and clarify the concept. I have already introduced the young man who likes to make his private stench public and the young woman who likes to eat her own snot. These are instances of human self-exposure, occasions for the disgust of others, but not instances of an existence that is felt as disgusting or abject. The element of self-consciousness is entirely lacking. Now consider self-disgust's opposite and antitype. Think of how disgusting, yet how very unself-conscious, mass behaviour can be. At the opposite extreme from self-disgust there is the experience of crowds, of people who lose their self-awareness entirely, swallowed within collective behaviour.

A crowd can be very frightening and it is, when seen exclusively from the outside, potentially disgusting. Indeed, any kind of mass behaviour, when seen from the outside, is likely to seem disgusting. Human identity will have dissolved into a collective form of action. Warfare seems like the paradigm case: individuals having abandoned their normal morality, having become swallowed and digested into a collective identity, will perform all acts of killing and mutilation. Nearly any memoir of warfare, from Thucydides to Paul Fussell, will record the perception of individual decay, of slipping and oozing into collective mass actions. Nation states, tribes, gangs, armies, warring factions, hooligans, bureaucracies all may seem, if you are not yourself among the collective, both disgusting and frightening. Nationalism, which sometimes seems like such a charismatic word, describes what almost everyone in a postcolonial age takes for granted: the right of a "nation" (either a group of ethnically similar people or a political entity composed of several such "peoples") to self-determination and self-defence. Yet the other face of nationalism is violence, the assumption of a right to violate and subjugate others, and the unquestioning participation in triumphant group actions. In the extreme case, people swallowed up in a collective action may participate in genocide against those outside of their collective consciousness. Michael Ignatieff writes that nationalism is "centrally concerned to define the conditions under which force or violence is justified, in a people's defence, when their right of self-determination is threatened or denied."[38] Nationalistic violence, such as ethnic cleansing, mob chanting and military massacres, even of a fairly humdrum kind, even seen from outside on TV as the mere simulacrum of violence, frequently appalls. The disgust you feel over the images of a massacre, the burnt and mutilated bodies, splayed in undignified positions or huddled helplessly against implacable violence, may inspire both physical and moral disgust. Television news reports often warn that the "following report contains

scenes that may be disturbing to some viewers." The disturbance TV producers have in mind is disgust, not fear. However, the disgust that you feel, both physical and moral, for the image of a massacre touches more than the wretched victims. It also reaches outwards towards the indications of the mass collective behind the grossly disturbing action.

The responsible mass collective itself also prompts disgust: the sense that they are, in some genuine way, "mindless," collective automata acting like dehumanized machines.[39] Its members have lost or given up their individual identity for a collective one, and in the process they may seem to have undergone deliquescence, to have slid towards muck. Even very minor instances of crowd behaviour, a mob of sports fans (a vast distance from war or tribal hatred) celebrating after a victory, will strike the outsider as disturbing, potentially violent, a single dangerous entity moving in collective mindlessness. Not only will the members of a crowd have given up their individual identities, swept away in the mass contamination of de-individuating, but also they may acquire a powerful sense of unity, even cohesiveness. A crowd may feel itself drawn tightly together because of a common exuberance, as the fans or supporters do in sporting crowds, or else a common purpose, or the illusion of one, as in religious crowds. Salman Rushdie brilliantly captures the intensity, and singleness of purpose, in a mass religious movement when he has Gibreel Farishta, the mad actor in *The Satanic Verses*, observe from the air the steady march of a crowd into the firing machine guns of a tyrant's palace guard.[40] A crowd's cohesiveness may take on the further intensity of feeling persecuted, of being attacked by everyone who is not a member or does not share its singleness. Persecution increases intensity and reinforces the unitary sense of collective purpose.[41]

A crowd represents the opposite of personal self-disgust. It is unreflective and, once in motion, unhesitant, relentless, implacable. Self-disgust, whatever else, is intensely reflective and a cause of hesitancy. Whether on TV or in actual life, seeing a crowd move, often as purposefully as mindlessly, can be a disturbing experience. It is so chiefly because of the sense that everyone, each participant in the mass action, has given up his or her identity and with it all moral agency. Elias Canetti, whose *Crowds and Power* undertakes a probing analysis of crowd behaviour with a particular interest in how religions employ mass human action, writes that any crowd manifests four characteristics: first, it always wants to grow; second, within the crowd there is equality; third, it loves density; fourth, it needs a direction. It continues to exist, Canetti adds, only so long as it has an unachieved goal. Only that endpoint keeps it from disintegration.[42] In Canetti's analysis, the crowd's

swallowing, homogenizing, thickening movement towards someone or some place makes it what it is: the antithesis of individual caution, responsibility and empathy. This is what is meant when someone says that crowd behaviour is "irrational." All disgusting behaviour can be bracketed between extreme poles: on the one hand, self-disgust, the inward gnawing of personal loathing, the actual crystallization of self into agonizing consciousness; on the other, dissolution of self, the absorption of personal identity into a larger, collective identity as a de-individuating crowd or mob action.

Bill Buford describes crowd behaviour in intimate detail in *Among the Thugs*, his study of English football hooligans. He travelled with Manchester United supporters, even into violent overseas excursions, and participated in some of their riots. He compares the exhilaration of being in a crowd to crossing a boundary which makes possible an incineration of self-consciousness, of obliterating "our sense of the personal, of individuality, of being an individual in any way."[43] It is, he says (with an echo of Bataille), like religious or sexual ecstasy, or like the experience of drugs. "Nothingness is what you find there." And, he continues, writing out of personal memories, "Violence is one of the most intensely lived experiences and, for those capable of giving themselves over to it, is one of the most intense pleasures."[44] Later, describing English hooligan violence in Sardinia, during which he was severely beaten by Italian police, he claims that he was "appalled" by the violence and the way the English crowd carelessly hurt innocent by-standers.[45] By his own account, however, he must have stepped momentarily outside the crowd in order to feel this: being "appalled" is not a judgement one can make while within the dense, impacted territory of crowd behaviour.

If a crowd can be characterized as "irrational" or even as "mindless," then self-disgust must be described as among the most intensely mindful, certainly the most conscious, of all human experiences. The nagging awareness of a prosthesis, especially when it has failed, or fails to do what you had hoped it would, aches like a suppurating boil. The brooding contemplation of a stolen or alienated body part may stab like broken glass in the gut. Furthermore, in the abject state, the boundaries of the actual world become etched within the mind, a network of acid-incised edges, conduits flowing with poison. A crowd may seem abject, but no member of a crowd could ever think himself or herself, while still within the crowd, abject.



I have made this brief trip into the theory of crowds in order to focus more clearly my main topic in this chapter: self-disgust and abjection. Human beings experience disgust within a socio-cultural context. Yet disgust seems to be, and in the history of literature must be imagined as, an individual problem. To be abject is an acutely individual problem. (Although it is possible to imagine abject groups in the sense that they are outsiders, despised or even persecuted, who register their collective identity as abject. However, unless the deviant group feel themselves to be abject and experience themselves as ambiguously double-sided, they will not be abject in the way that individuals, dwelling within their consciousness, feel themselves to be.) The distinction between self-disgust and abjection cannot be made in any very simple and straightforward manner. It must be seen as rather like that between the convexity and the concavity of a curved line. Each depends upon the other and each, except in thought, is inseparable from the other. Self-disgust is a possible, though certainly undesirable, state of mind in which you may think of yourself as an object, among others, of revulsion and loathing in the world. To experience self-disgust, disgust itself must be already a constitutive element in the world's make-up, clinging like a rancid ooze to its raw shapes. At such moments, you might even make the classic disgust face, about yourself. On the other hand, abjection invokes a personal experience of disgust in which you will be unable to admit that what has been called disgusting is actually merely that. The sense of touching the abject, or of being yourself abject, is never fully categorical and definitive. Further paths open from the experience of abjection. The abject is "what of the body falls away from it while remaining irreducible to the subject/object and inside/outside oppositions. The abject necessarily partakes of both polarized terms but cannot be clearly identified with either."[46]

In the contemporary use of the term, "abject" often seems to describe a permanent condition. Writers seem to assume that being abject is a state into which you are born, like race, ethnicity, sexual preference or gender, and which you can hardly abandon or transform. This ontological conservatism arises in part from Kristeva's insistence that the menses, and expelled menstrual blood, constitute one of the primary categories of the abject. The human mourning, deeply, violently and corrosively, for objects once intimate parts of the self that have been lost (or, more accurately, lost through

expulsion), and have "always already been lost," runs through most aspects of existence.[47] In her *Shattered Subjects*, Suzette Henke adopts this position throughout. Discussing New Zealand writer Janet Frame, Henke notes Frame's difficulties as an adolescent and young woman with menstrual hygiene (destroying the signs of "female corporality by symbolically burying them [sanitary pads] in the cemetery") and specifically adopting Kristeva's "theoretical association" between the menses and abjection.[48] It must serve certain cultural and gender analyses to insist upon the permanence of abjection (you would then be abject in much the same way that you are a certain race, ethnicity or gender), but it seems like a weak position to hold. I have consistently argued that disgust is metamorphic, subject to transformation and displacement. Abjection, although a radically vitriolic form of disgust, also changes and undergoes conceptual shift. It is possible, I think, to feel abject in one respect but not in all; it is also possible to experience abjection only for a time, perhaps even a short one. My friend in Chicago felt himself to be abject because of what had been done to him as a child, but he was not abject in all respects. He was a brilliant student of philosophy, capable of both wit and slashing analysis, and he may well have gone on to star in his profession. Even if he did not, I cannot imagine him without his intelligence, wit and steadiness of conceptual focus.

There is a powerful, exemplary episode of self-disgust evolving into abjection in Doris Lessing's novel *The Golden Notebook*. The episode describes the novel's central character, Anna Wulf, falling steeply into an abyss of abject self-loathing and negative self-accounting.[49] The experience of disgust, self-disgust and abjectness is central to the novel; it is one pivot upon which the narrative turns.[50] It leads into a fictional world in which characters draw back from certain experiences, from each other and even from themselves. That fictional world demands that every reader imagine everywhere the averted face or the hand thrust between experience and perception. In the world of *The Golden Notebook*, characters are disturbed by what they see and by how they see themselves. They register disgust at the world's chaos and transgressions, turning away from or trying not to see the evidence of fragmentation, decay and deliquescence. Even nature is experienced in terms of inordinateness, incontinence and chaos:

> As soon as we turned off the main road on to the sand track we had to walk slowly and carefully, because this morning after the heavy rain there was a festival of insects. Everything seemed to riot and crawl. Over the low grasses a million white

> butterflies with greenish white wings hovered and lurched. They were all white, but of different sizes. That morning a single species had hatched or sprung or crawled from their chrysalises, and were celebrating their freedom. And on the grass itself, and all over the road were a certain species of brightly-coloured grasshopper, in couples. There were millions of them too.[51]

In *The Golden Notebook* many things are, like the tree root that Roquentin experiences in Sartre's *Nausea*, excessive: eluding (or even breaking) conceptual categories, overflowing. Anna Wulf's character development begins in the perception of universal fragmentation in which everything is "cracking up," moves through different reflections upon the dissolving, unstable condition of western civilization and reaches a climatic point in which she sees herself as, spider-like, slipping from normal human categories into becoming an object of self-disgust. Her eventual climb back into normalcy ascends from self-disgust to self-acceptance. Anna experiences unmistakable abjection, but she does so only as a temporary, or conditional, state. Throughout, the novel is concerned with problems of fragmentation and disintegration. Structurally, it is broken up and intercut in many different ways, both formal and substantive. The notebooks, for example, are formal divisions, breaking up narrative movement and forcing a continuous reconsideration, but they also introduce variants of the action, setting up difficult contrasts between what happens in the "Free Women" sections and what is said to have happened in the notebooks. (Does Tommy marry an activist student from Oxford? Does he attempt suicide? In what/which reading is he blind?) "Free Women," depending upon how you read the novel, is either a frame, a traditional narrative convention for containing the main action which takes place in the notebooks, or it is the product of the notebooks, made possible by them (though markedly boiled down and variously transformed) and explicitly activated by the "Golden Notebook" itself. Throughout, and in any possible reading, self-disgust is not only a recurring theme but also an incremental force within the novel.

Anna has had a difficult time in maintaining a positive sense of herself. Many experiences, particularly with men, have undercut her and have given her a repertory of negative images to play against herself. She sees the world as endlessly subdivided and fragmented. She also sees herself as fragmentary, playing multiple self-conscious roles. After all, she is a woman of her times and so she, inevitably it might seem, embodies chaos and disorder.

She dreams of fragmentation, of disintegration and chaos. A malicious figure of spite, "something anarchistic and uncontrollable, something destructive," troubles her dreams.[52] This malicious figure, usually perceived as an old man or even as a dancing old man, often appears to be present in the actual in-the-world people whom she meets. Sometimes she even perceives it in herself. Her notebooks, which continuously reflect both her inability and her ability to write, record episode after episode in which she must play one role or another: a woman, mother, friend, lover, analysand in Jungian therapy, communist, Old Red and writer (herself a postcolonial ex-colonial) who has written of colonial racism and love across both race and class boundaries and who, although she can privately transform her personal experience into fiction, cannot commit herself to public expression. The men in her life have exercised a fundamentally abrasive influence. At worst, they have been controlling, indifferent, negative, undermining and degrading; at best, ataraxic. She remembers how one lover had described his wife:

> I remembered Nelson telling me how sometimes he looked at his wife's body and hated it for its femaleness; he hated it because of the hair in the armpits and around the crotch. Sometimes, he said, he saw his wife as a sort of spider, all clutching arms and legs around a hairy central devouring mouth. I sat on my bed and I looked at my thin white arms, and at my breasts. My wet sticky centre seemed disgusting, and when I saw my breasts all I could think of was how they were when they were full of milk, and instead of this being pleasurable, it was revolting. This feeling of being alien to my own body caused my head to swim, until I anchored myself, clutching out for something, to the thought that what I was experiencing was not *my* thought at all.[53]

The spider is not Anna's own thought. It is borrowed from the discourse of men. At the nethermost point in a process of mental disintegration, Anna thinks of herself as existing in a "fug of stale self-disgust." It is as if she herself had become an object in the world or even a place, since "fug" is a spatial as well as an olfactory term. With its connotations of both stench and stuffiness, a closed room suffused by noisome stinks, "fug" might take us back to the accounts of the Great War that emphasize, in nauseating detail, the stinks of the trenches, the wasteland of decay, putrefaction and

death. A "mephitic stench," perhaps, but one that is located within the self, a personal and intensely private world of fetor and rot. The usual angle of perception in registering disgust has been radically shifted. Only Anna can experience her own disgust. From outside, she might appear distracted, split and divided in her lifeworld (keeping different notebooks, subdividing and cancelling them, writing in different handwritings, pinning newspaper clippings on the walls, feeling herself fragmented into distinct roles, and so forth), but she would not seem disgusting. She has done nothing disgusting, nor said anything that another person could judge to be disgusting. Her disgust is her intense personal experience of herself.

In the "Free Women" sections of the novel (the third-person novella in five discontinuous sections that may be read as intercut by the self-conscious and reflexive notebooks or as arising out of the notebooks, as a final distillation of their experience), Anna decides to evict two gay roomers in her flat, Ivor and Ronnie. Ivor is a paying tenant, a young man who has lived with Anna for quite a long time, but Ronnie, his lover, has moved in without asking Anna's permission and pays no rent at all. He lives in Anna's flat only because she is too sympathetic to ask him to leave. Things now seem out of hand, and she has decided to ask both young men to move out. In the scene that prepares this decision, the word *disgust* recurs several times. She finds Ronnie in the bathroom using her facial lotion and carries on a conversation with him in which he attempts to talk to her as if he were another woman. (Her disgust for him is repeatedly registered.) A few minutes later, returning from seeing that her daughter is comfortably in bed, she passes the room that Ivor and Ronnie share, the door purposefully left open so that she can hear them act out a misogynistic routine.

> Anna took her bath and went upstairs to see if Janet was settled for the night. The door into the young men's room stood open. Anna was surprised, knowing that they knew she came upstairs at this time every night to see Janet. Then she realized it was open on purpose. She heard: "Fat buttocky cows..." That was Ivor's voice, and he added an obscene noise. Then Ronnie's voice: "Sagging sweaty breasts ..." And he made the sound of vomiting.[54]

Ivor's and Ronnie's little routine, another fictional world in miniature (rather like the conditional shame-world that the Ghost creates for Hamlet), reflects deep disgust towards women. Mocking women in extreme

physical images, making physically manifest the categories in which they would place her, their mode is evidently Menippean. The language is grotesque, bodily and degrading. Ronnie's mocking sounds of vomiting must be taken, like facework, as comic superscriptions that inscribe second-order semiotic significance. They encode the sense of ultimate rejection.

Anna seems threatened from many angles, not least from the men in her life. As Henke observes of Janet Frame, gender is "a cultural performance that she is unable to master."[55] Misogynistic images expressing male disgust with the female body pervade *The Golden Notebook*. The men in Lessing's novel might all have learned about female sexuality more or less as Joe Christmas does in Faulkner's *Light in August*. Even the images that Anna employs to record herself to herself have been taken from the language of men. She invents a world the materials of which she has found in what men, both lovers and strangers, have said. In the passage in which she thinks of herself as a spider, Anna is living within a fictional world she has created for herself out of misogynistic and anti-female motifs embedded in her culture. Within *The Golden Notebook*, these motifs find reinforcement in the fragmentary, splintered male perception of female anatomical difference in which menstruation, seen only as bloodstain or stench, stands for the whole reproductive system. In this alternative world of introjected male perceptions and judgements, the image of a spider is still overdetermined, as it always seems to be, but here it has been narrowed to signify simply femaleness. Now the spider represents only the degraded, and disgusting, male perception of the female body.

In this perspective, female anatomical difference may be, to cite Paglia once more, only a "mucoid swamp" constituted by "fishy female jellies, the dead weight of Medusan paralysis."[56] It is a world that frightens men; or, at least, both Lessing and Paglia seem to agree that men find it frightening. (Cronenberg's *The Brood* graphically captures the presumed male repugnance when confronted with the female reproductive system and its mysterious fecundity.) Grosz puts the issue of male fears, or male aversions, into its cultural context:

> Can it be that in the West, in our time, the female body has been constructed not only as a lack or absence but with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment—not a cracked or porous vessel, like a leaking ship, but a

> formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order? ... My hypothesis is that women's corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage.[57]

This female world of viscosity and seepage is, Paglia remarks, alluding to Sartre, "Dionysus' swamp, the fleshy muck of the generative matrix." And there, she adds, "Apollo's solar torch is put out."[58] Even if it were nothing else, disgust would be an Apollonian response to the Dionysian. If, as I have claimed more than once in this book, disgust marks the way to the Dionysian, as one path to follow, it is only a trick of perspective. Disgust may seem to be the condition of the Dionysian, but it is so only from the outside.[59]

Anna experiences herself as abject. As the term is currently used, *abject* points to a related, but different, experience than mere self-disgust: it is at once more narrow and more profound. In an older and precursive sense, abject meant only "cast off" or "cast down" or even simply "downcast" (in the sense of feeling unworthy because one has been excluded, left out, or not permitted to belong). The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces it back to the fifteenth century where Lydgate employs it. Shakespeare uses *abject* as an adjective at least ten times, as a noun a single time and once, in *Titus Andronicus*, as an adverb. In *Richard III*, Gloucester observes to his brother Clarence, soon to be drowned in a cask of wine, that "We are the Queen's abjects, and must obey."[60] That is the single use as a noun. As an adjective, abject has several interesting uses. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Ulysses exclaims to the sulking, ill-tempered Achilles, "Nature, what things there are / Most abject in regard, and dear in use."[61] In *2 Henry VI*, Shakespeare uses it twice, once to mean, very precisely and unmistakably, unworthy, cast down if not downcast, when Suffolk exclaims, "O that I were a god, to shoot forth thunder / Upon these paltry, servile, abject drudges!"[62] It is an old word in the English language, and an older word in other languages, but in recent usage, abject has taken on a very precise meaning. Kristeva defines abject as a highly conceptual term that marks the condition of subjectivity and language, but also marks the edges of an abyss that threatens always to suck the subject into its disintegrating power. Kristeva's analysis of the abject has given it explicit significance for the present moment, and it is that sense that, as do both Henke and Grosz, I have borne in mind throughout this book. There is a creative dimension in abjection that Shakespeare did not recognize. Kristeva locates the "birth of narcissism" in the consciousness of being abject, or of having wilfully crossed a boundary into a domain that has been marked as abject. It is clear that the transgressive model I discussed in

Chapter 2 is much in play in Kristeva's analysis. Desiring the abject breaks down that Apollonian order which always seems to promise more than it can deliver. Creativity bursts from the Dionysian, the opening to which may be the "birth of narcissism" or, at least, the moment after the birth.

Lessing does not use the words *abject* and *abjection* in the Kristevan sense, of course, since in 1962, when she wrote *The Golden Notebook*, and even in 1971, when she wrote her famous preface, abjection still meant what it had for Shakespeare, cast down or simply downcast, lacking both social status and the freedom to act independently. Thus, it may seem that I am proposing an aggressively retrospective reading. And, to be sure, that is precisely what I am doing. *The Golden Notebook* concerns, in part, the struggle to overcome the "fug of stale self-disgust," the mental projection-room in which experience is recast in the introjected terms of male misogyny. However, there is a path for Anna to follow that will lead out of the fug, out of her negative self-accounting. As so often seems the case, the way upward begins in the way down. At the lowest depths, a person may discover the upwards way. Because there is a way up in *The Golden Notebook*, away from the introjected private world of self-disgust and loathing, it makes sense to reconsider Anna Wulf's predicament in terms of the concept of abjection. Lessing's novel shows the twisted braid, the Möbius strip, of the human body with elegant clarity.

What constitutes the Kristevan abject? How does it differ from the Shakespearean? In the first place, the abject is no longer merely that which has been cast aside or cast down. When Richard III, punning on the normal sense of "subject," remarks that he and his brother Clarence are "the Queen's abjects," he seems to mean only that they are outside of her good grace, excluded from her good intentions. In Kristeva's understanding of the term, the abject follows the paths of bodily expulsion. In its most primitive sense, the abject is dirt "out of place," dirt that has been expelled from the body but still calls back to the body as to a lost home. Grosz, observes that, for Kristeva, what is excluded "can never be fully obliterated but hovers at the borders of our existence, threatening the apparently settled unity of the subject with disruption and possible dissolution."[63] Of course, many functions of the body produce abject materials: tears, sweat, sperm and smegma, for example, or dandruff, nail parings and toe jam; but for Kristeva the primary, constitutive expulsions are excrement and menstrual blood. "Neither tears nor sperm," Kristeva writes,

> although they belong to the borders of the body, have any polluting value ... Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death. Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within female identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference.[64]

Excrement and menstrual blood are, according to Kristeva, the most massively sanctioned of the body's outpourings. Considering them, you can begin to see what, in any given place or time, the actual Apollonian order demands. If you think of all the cultural constraints upon both excretion and menstruation, you can begin to grasp what Kristeva has in mind. (You may also see how wrongheaded William Ian Miller is in supposing that the anus is "democratic" while the mouth, encoded by countless taboos governing ingestion, is mythological.) Imagine a person who feels free to have bowel movements on the public streets or a woman who ignores hygiene during menstruation and allows herself to bleed freely. What would happen to them? You may also see how uncertainly the boundary stands between them, active sources of expelled matter, and yourself. The abject, Grosz writes, attests to "the impossibility of clear borders, lines of demarcation or divisions between the proper and the improper, the clean and the unclean, order and disorder," all the partitions that the symbolic, or Apollonian, order forces upon its subjects.[65] If the abject matter is a corpse, the "ultimate" abjectness or (in Stephen King's phrase) "the really big casino," it is possible to observe both the complex psychological system of repulsion, of turning away from the corpse or of moving it quickly out of sight (and smell) and also the socio-cultural systems for keeping it in memory, as the object of religious ceremony and meditation, or as the matter for political, historical and cultural apotheosis.[66]

The abject is *atopic* in that it has no proper place: once outside the body, it marks the boundaries of the self. *That* is not me, you learn to say, but yet it still seems to be yourself. When experimental psychologists attempt to elevate human (or mammalian) feces into the universal object, they have a point. Despite the shady essentialism, or questionable biologism, of the project, feces does force its double-sidedness upon many, if not all, people.[67]

Neither smegma nor toe jam create quite the same compound affects: desire-loathing or longing-revulsion. The force of the abject lies in its double-edgedness. As always in questions of disgust, the abject seems a problem in boundaries, but ones that possess two clear and unmistakable sides. The expelled may seem to be beyond a boundary and to have become a not-me, but it is also within the boundary as a still-me. The expelled, the rejected not-me, continues to call; it is a *me* that still proclaims itself and can exert its fascination. You may often experience "an attack of itchy squeamishness" when you desire to touch what repels you.[68] In one sense, Kristeva's understanding of the abject recalls Freud's observations on excrement and the process of toilet training. What is abject is a part of the human person, but a part that must be denied and finally abandoned as a source of sexual pleasure. But as repressed content, excrement can return, in highly displaced forms, to disturb your peace of mind. (Neuroses, as Freud thinks, are the price you pay for civilization.) Everything that is thrust—or flushed—away returns. It will only have been sent on its *a*way.

In another, and even more important, sense, Kristeva's understanding of the abject points towards a dialectic between the self and repressive powers far more sweeping and rigorous than even the parental restrictions that guide toilet training and promote the development of the superego. These powers, whether you call them symbolic or Apollonian, reside in language and enforce control, discipline and law. You may feel called by what has been expelled, what has been named as abject. Thus the relation between the self and abject is dialectical. The experience is at once degrading and potentially creative. This is what Bataille means when he writes about the importance of living one's life without measure, without limitation. Bataille finds the possibility of transcendence even in the spectacle of human torture (which, no doubt, is always an example of "deep disgust"), and the more horrible the death, the more degrading the torture, the more closely Bataille seems to have interrogated the victim's eyes. The abject constitutes a double-edged experience, an ambiguous fusion of degradation and creativity. Writing the abject, writing about what the Apollonian order has designated as perverse, will be an ambiguous experience. Yet it will discover the capacity to "soften" the superego, to reveal what must normally be repressed. Subject and object "push each other away, collapse, and start again—inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject." Great modern literature "unfolds over that terrain ...."[69] Put another way, literature begins with the first thrust across the Apollonian boundaries.[70]

For Anna Wulf, the way upwards begins soon after when she invents another fictional world and another man, Saul Green. (Saul emerges out of the narrative materials that all her experiences with men throughout her life have given her, and disappears into a scanty trace, summed up in writerly abbreviation as "Milt," in the final "Free Women" section.) Saul allows Anna to explore her potential for re-integration.[71] He is an American who is in London, as were so many other Americans at that time in history, in order to avoid the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee and the pervading McCarthyite spirit of the times. Like Anna, he experiences alienation, fragmentation and an incapacity to commit himself to public authorship. He seems uncertain, even disoriented, easily hurt, skittish and afraid, and he cannot "sleep alone." The intense relationship that develops, full of mutual antagonism and mutual dependence, allows Anna to discover within herself a capacity for re-integration. Saul becomes the introjected mental projectionist in her imagination who shows her episodes from her life, small fragments of her actual lifeworld's experience. In the world that she inhabits with Saul she is able to discover how to bring pieces together into an individuated whole. In this reading, Saul and Anna are "crazy, lunatic, mad—what you will." They "'break down' into each other, into other people, break through the false patterns they have made of their pasts, the patterns and formulas they have made to shore up themselves and each other."[72] They recognize each other in themselves, and each gives to the other both the theme and a first sentence for a novel.[73] The inner "Golden Notebook" actually seems to be written by both of them, the boundaries between them dissolved, their identities interpenetrated. In this reading both Anna and Saul, because of, and through, their relationship, manage to overcome personal anxiety and alienation, succeed in achieving a significant measure of individuation and learn how to express themselves publicly once more. The world's disgust, which is always both vast and pervasive, is put into the perspective of writerly distance. Self-disgust disappears along with fragmentation.

On the surface it seems that Anna's process of disintegration follows the Sartre-Douglas model, her identity dissolving and sinking, but Lessing suggests a more complex understanding. Disgust breeds within the mind's powers to imagine worlds and invent stories. What happens with Anna Wulf indicates what must happen often as disgust undergoes abrupt metamorphoses. The imagination accepts disgust motifs as bits, discrete pieces to work from, and creates worlds, perhaps very partial and incomplete, in which it can watch, as a secret observer or as an active participant, negative

anger, is impersonal." It is the disease of "women in our time."[75] It is the final time that she and Michael will copulate. As she prepares for the day, making breakfast for Michael, sending Janet off to school, dressing for her voluntary job at the Communist party press, she discovers, with a bit of a shock, that her menstrual period has begun. She begins to feel irritable because, she writes, the feelings of tiredness and irritability accompany her periods. That is, irritability seems to be a habit, a regular mental response to her body, but not necessarily a causal effect. She asks herself if she should even keep an entry in her notebook for this day (which will become, after all, one of the most important days in her life) and then decides that "the instinctive feelings of shame and modesty" are dishonest, not emotions for a writer. And so the blue notebook continues:

> I stuff my vagina with the tampon of cotton wool, and am already on my way downstairs, when I remember I've forgotten to take a supply of tampons with me. I am late. I roll tampons into my handbag, concealing them under a handkerchief, feeling more and more irritable.[76]

Once again, the dance between disgust and shame takes place. A slow choreography unfolds before the mind's eye. Just before going out the door, Anna waters her plants. "The leaves sparkle with water. The dark earth smells of damp growth." I infer that the image of the dark earth smelling of "damp growth" is not an iconic accident. The creative force of the plants contrasts vividly with the sterility of Anna's self-image at this moment. Taking a phrase from Angela Carter, one might suspect that there is "a subtext of fertility" in play.[77] The shame Anna feels about her period—which she notes she should not feel, not as a writer, but clearly does feel since she seeks to hide her tampons—reflects her awareness of the world about her and of the world's possible reactions. Throughout the day, working in an office with two men, she worries obsessively about her body, about her stench, about detectable evidence of her menstrual period. She washes herself with what might seem a nearly neurotic compulsiveness.[78] At the office she argues against publishing a book that has been submitted for publication: a flat, tame, optimistic piece of Communist hack writing. "It all comes out of myth," Anna writes. This, I think, constitutes one of the important themes in *The Golden Notebook* as a whole: so much in human life comes out of, and retreats back into, myth of one kind or another. The entry in the blue notebook for this day has concerned myths of several kinds, not least one aspect

of a painfully complex myth about the female body that may exist in the discourse of men, but certainly must also reflect, if not entirely arise from, a symbolic, deeply Apollonian, dimension in culture. In contrast to the workings of that dark myth, Lessing offers the image of sparkling light and damp growth.

Sartre speaks of the imagination and the association of different images each with its correlative affects. He stops just short of describing (and Douglas entirely ignores) the powers of the human imagination to create worlds out of small bits of evidence. Imaginative worlds arise upon shards and fragments. From a single worm-bitten apple, you might easily build a world crowded with disgusting motifs: a disgust-world characterized by mucoid objects and loathsome acts. In fiction, a sparse array of deictics and descriptive phrases may provide a mechanism for the imagination to build worlds far thicker, more solid and more richly characterized than the thin narrative indices themselves. Seeing something disgusting in the actual world, a spider tattoo or excrement, prompts the imagination to envision deliquescence, a vast, interior galaxy of dissolving, muck-inhabited private fictional worlds. It calls into question all assumptions about identity, the Other and the Self. Once Anna Wulf has absorbed, or introjected, enough images of women from the standard male imaginary, she begins to lose control over her own identity. The chaos that she so easily finds in the world about her restates the chaos within her. Disgust is such a powerful affect because, as its fellowship with horror suggests, it invokes worlds in which it would be appalling, though necessary, to live.



The perception of disgust drives wedges through consciousness, splitting it into diverse spheres. This consciousness, as I have argued, can be split in many ways. However, the lines of rupture seem to follow most readily those body parts that have acquired, within a particular culture, definite mythic associations. Consider the eyes. The eyes, like the genitalia, are one of those encrusted body parts that are massively inscribed by citations, tentacularly mythological. The eye is connected to the powers of gods to see, to keep an eye on humankind, to overlook, to be omniscient. Apollo is an "eye-god," but so are they all to one degree or another. Mythological stories "always lie at the foundation of something."[79] The prosthetic eye in Pynchon's *V.*

cannot see, but it evokes the mythological spectrum associated with sight: the colours of sky and sea, the passage of time, the zodiac's symbolic categories. In myths both space and time precede human sight and consciousness. The vision of sky and days comes later than the things themselves. Even my glasses, though highly desirable in providing me with the corrected vision for which I yearn, invade my consciousness at a key point: my symbol-making capacity.

Consider the genitalia. If my prosthesis is to be a penile implant, then the invasion of my consciousness will be even more devastating. More than eyes even, the human genitalia, male and female, are entwined with myth. They are excitingly phantasmatic.[80] What happens to Semele, tricked by Hera, consumed by the force of Zeus' flame-hooded phallus, that "bolt which none can escape," pricks out the geography of human fate.[81] Hierogamy, Calasso writes, was how the gods chose to communicate at the beginnings of human time: "an invasion, of body and mind, which were thus impregnated with the superabundance of the divine."[82] Western mythology and lore are crowded with stories of how genitalia destroy and save, burn, bite and soothe, become weapons or havens. In myths, the gods are often more androgynous than their human playthings; for example, after Semele's death, Zeus rescues the embryo of Dionysus from her charred embers and sews him into a prosthetic womb that he opens within his thigh "till the months for which his mother should have carried him were fulfilled."[83] The human penis plays such a large and varied role in myth, legend and fiction that it makes sense, following Lacan, to distinguish the bit of bodily flesh and gristle, the penis itself, from the mythological phallus which is both "the idealization and the symbolization of anatomy."[84] The mythological phallus, huge but versatile, has always been the yardstick by which mortal men have measured their own potential: "Having a prominent penis is one of the primary characteristics that defines human males."[85] Hence long before the development of phalloplasty as a set of surgical procedures, men have tried to enhance the performance of the penis, edging it towards ideal phallushood. Pearls or steel balls, among other items, can be placed beneath the skin to increase friction or rings may be used to elongate the scrotum. More commonly, rings can be used to pierce the penis and scrotum in a variety of ways for either adornment or performance (or, longingly, for both).[86] Women can wear labial or clitoral rings, but nothing in female body piercings seems quite to correspond to such legendary male practices as the "Prince Albert," a Victorian "dressing ring" pierced through the urethra at the base of the penis' head, which is used by men (in the Prince's own

manner) to secure the penis, either left or right, when wearing "crotch-binding trousers" and to keep the foreskin (if any) "sweet-smelling."[87] All of these practices are prosthetic in that they seek to supplement and enhance the penis. It might seem that they reshape the penis into a cyber(body)part only to satisfy yearning, but they are also, as are all prostheses, mnemo-technics.[88] The vast mythological entanglements that enmesh the penis make it inescapable: the penis cleaves the mind between the desire for enhancement and the disgust at slippage. An implant will represent both enhancement and dysfunction.

The penis is only a synecdoche for the male body as a whole. The mythological web entangles the whole body and each of its parts, even the most hidden.[89] As myth, the body interpellates consciousness clamorously. When I contemplate my glasses or my artificial knee, or imagine the possibilities of a future penile implant, I experience a sharp split in my consciousness. I may enjoy my enhanced capacity to see and walk or I may yearn for, in tumescent daydreams, a godlike phallicity, but I cannot escape remembering myself as I once was (or should have been) in historical time. I may then feel disgust, even sharp twinges of shame, at my bodily modifications as well as for my personal deficiencies, my indeterminate fall from a now-lost ego ideal. In extreme cases, as when my university friend would contemplate what had been done to him, or how he had lost control over his anus, consciousness may consider itself abject.

Consciousness, it seems, cannot be fully commanded. It recognizes the body's failures (its slippages and blurrings) and may recognize the new condition as diminished (even though enhanced), disgusting, even abject. Like Stephen Hawking's prosthetic voice, the very multiplicity of my cyber-enhanced body blurs the edges of my being, deleting the intuition of integrity which I still remember and for which I may also yearn. My prostheses constitute a nexus, harmonized by my mind's proactive interface, of distinct systems. I will become a cyborg, if only an absurd and inadequate one, when I bring together both a cyber system (a widely diffused structure of technological rhizomes) and a bodily system (a narrowly concentrated process of physiological capacities, memories and mythology), forcing them to cohabit within my consciousness. *That* consciousness, at once encompassing and split, will hold the diverse systems together, like howling winds from hostile poles.

Even the spherical inhabitants of Zwffzwss, in my parable, experience self-disgust. Judged against the physically more efficient human bio-mechanism, they see themselves as inept and clumsy, confined within their power to

think. Although they never excrete, and hence are never confronted with bodily wastes that they must both reject and admire, the Zwffzwssians may experience abjection. They can see how far they have fallen and how their bodies are mocked and humiliated. They have become both servo-mechanisms and freaks within a society reconstituted by their human masters. It is as if they themselves were waste products, large and absurd turds in the human scale of things. Their fate suggests that the abrading experience of feeling yourself abject, lying always so close to the heart, may have less to do with the double-sided link between consciousness and waste products, such as feces or menstrual blood (or even smegma and toe jam), than with the awareness of self-loss and diminishment. In that sense, Anna Wulf, imagining herself trapped in a spider-world of alien values, seems to exemplify the basic dilemma of Zwffzwss: to think yourself in terms of hostile values, whether race- or gender-based, is to accept an invitation into a fictional world, unfriendly to your own being and utterly hostile to all generous imaginings, the construction materials of which have been provided by an invading force. In true colonial spirit, you will be required to do the building yourself.

Tightly bound to disgust in all cases, shame has a particularly ineradicable hold upon self-disgust and abjection. The dance of shame occurs most implacably within those hostile fictional worlds, such as the conditional world that the Ghost creates for Hamlet, that are created out of your perceived (or claimed) faults and shortcomings. Anna Wulf is most within the grip of mythological forces when she most feels shame. These mythological pressures, expressed from within a male imaginary, characterized by negative images and gender-hostile jokes, lend Anna her abject self-image.[90] Happily, she regains a positive view of herself, but while the alien image rules her imagination, shame acts as an enforcer.

My friend in Chicago was less happy. His negative self-image, heavily reinforced by shame, seemed to constitute a permanent condition. He would always be, even if he managed to live into old age, a boy whose anus had been raped. In his mind's eye, he would remain, through all the vicissitudes of his future life, a boy whose anus had been alienated by the person who should most have kept it safe. He would always be a boy reduced to his anus but who had also lost control over it, and hence himself. Both Anna and my friend exemplify the Kristevan concept of abjection. Both experience themselves with self-disgust, seeing themselves as items within a disgusting world, and both move from that unpleasant self-image to the even more corrosive sense of themselves as degraded beyond help, filled with shame, needing

punishment. (Depression and the overwhelming sense of chaos for Anna; cigarette burns and broken glass for my friend.) Lessing's novel conveys a hopeful message in that it shows abjection as a temporary, and curable, condition. In-the-world existence, like the normal theory of the abject, may occasionally carry a more brutal comment: once you have lost control over a part of your body, all the more so if it is phantasmatic and mythologically encrusted, you may never fully climb back up from the abyss of abjection. The gnawing monster within may have found a home and, unhappily, remain your life-long companion. Yet, if the theory of the abject has predictive value, you may be able to transmute the devastating sense of abjection into art, like gold out of sludge. That positive thought lies at the core of the Kristevan theory of the abject: modern literature in particular has repeatedly, in the work of many different writers, traversed the territory of the abject.[91] Perhaps I should think of my old friend in Chicago as having transformed his painful experience into art. If I were to meet him on the streets in Chicago or San Francisco today, he might pull from his coat pocket a notebook, filled with stories and poems as corruscating as they (surely) would be corrosive. ⚜

1 Hocquenghem, p. 96. Sublimation, Hocquenghem adds, is "exercised on the anus as on no other organ ... anality is the very movement of sublimation itself."

2 William Ian Miller discusses the human anus at several places in his study of disgust. He thinks that while a "multitude of taboos" encompass the mouth and "rank" the substances that enter the mouth, the anus, as an "endpoint in the reductive digestive process," is significantly more democratic. I suspect that a little reflection would show that the anus is massively over-determined with multiple taboos regulating the places, methods and conditions of excretion as well as the possibilities for sexual excitement. Like the eye or, indeed, the phallus, it is a mythological part. On the other hand, Miller strikes me as spot on when he argues that the "female anus may not bear the surcharge of significance the male one does." Women, he adds, "expect a certain amount of penetration as coming with the territory of femaleness." During anal intercourse, the male is feminized, but "penetrating a woman's [anus] does more than brutally drive home her penetrability as a woman; it shows rather that she is penetrable as a man ... Her anus is an anus being used as if she were a he being used as a she" (pp. 99–101).

3 "Dags" are the feces-encrusted strands of wool around a sheep's anus that must be cut away during shearing. A person who is a dag typically dresses down and tries to make himself appear much rougher and more lower-class than he or she actually is. The boy on the bus was not a dag because, however badly he stank and poor his manners, he dressed well.

4 *Theme*, it will be objected, is the wrong term in this context. It makes the body seem too much like a literary text, not enough like a cultural text. But theme is the word I have used throughout this book to indicate the concepts that writing (or other art) signifies and which run, paracursively, through a text. It has become commonplace in the scholarly discourse of the humanities to use the term "inscription" with reference to the coded messages that the body bears in, from and through culture like habits, or coded memories, burnt into the flesh. The usage, with its attractive suggestions of writing *into* or cutting through the surface (revivifying the concept of a stylus as an instrument for writing), derives, at least in part, from Derrida's use of the term in *Of Grammatology* to account for the origins of the concept of space. As a concept, space begins from the possibility of multiple inscriptions upon the same site. Elizabeth Grosz enhances the "problematic of inscription" by her allusion to Kafka's tale, "The Penal Colony," in which the juridical machine inscribes the name of the crime upon the convict's body. The body may be considered as a "surface of erotogenic intensity," but it must also be seen as a surface of punishment, pain and all manner of cultural sanctions (*Volatile Bodies*, p. 138). "All the effects of depth and interiority," Grosz writes, "can be explained in terms of the inscriptions and transformations of the subject's corporeal surface" (p. vii). However, though provocative, this formulation seems more like one metaphor (the inscribed body) displacing another metaphor (consciousness), or one analogy forced to do the work of another. Even modes of freedom, of escape through transgression, such as tattooing, scarification and branding, are messages

"written" upon the body only in consciousness, as deliberate acts of awareness. Taken a step or two further, the notion of inscription leads to the concept of body "technologies" and, finally, the body as a cyborg. The cover to the Allen & Unwin edition of *Volatile Bodies* shows a nude female body, the upper half of which, beginning at the pubic region, metamorphoses into a semi-opaque plastic mannikin. In feminist analyses of the body as inscripted surface, the female body is always already a cyborg. Despite reservations, I have used "inscription" to indicate cultural messages, themes that appear and reappear in human life as functions of how the body has been constructed through the inevitable processes of socio-cultural formation.

5 "Your body is a battleground" is reproduced in Ewing (p. 337; the Annie Sprinkle photo is on p. 336). Reading *The Body* constitutes both a delightful corrective and a source of corroborative evidence for highly theoretical (and often rigid) discussions of the body, such as Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* or even Grosz's more flexible *Volatile Bodies*. Looking at human bodies complements the conceptual systems that are required for thinking about them. I learned a great deal about the nature of tattoos from seeing the man in Melbourne with the spider tattooed into the corner of his right eye.

6 People who have tattoos like to point out that piercings can be obliterated. Once you cease to wear a ring or pin, new skin begins to close the hole. Even scars will fade and can be hidden by cosmetics or surgery. A tattoo resists surgical eradication: even laser surgery leaves a scar-like discolouration. Thus a tattoo is said to show a permanent sense of commitment, even a more profound sense of personal worth and purpose.

7 Some tattoos are so startling that the problem of interpretation may actually precede the recognition that the body has been marked, divided and split into fragments. The two men with spiders tattooed in the corners of their right eyes whom I mentioned earlier were so shocking to see that the question of meaning was immediate and quite brutal. Only later was it possible to discuss the re-cognition that these men had split their faces, the most public of "public skin," into zones, arachnida/human, or art/nature. A few years ago I had an unforgettable experience of first seeing a tattoo as a recognizable zone of difference. I had gone to a South American restaurant with a friend from Morocco. As we were being served, the waitress bent over the table and her blouse fell open. Quite inadvertently, I saw that she had something blue tattooed upon her right breast. Of course, I was interested, but I found myself in the predicament that, far from being able to ask *what* she had tattooed on her breast, I could not even admit that I had glanced (however unplanned or accidentally) into her open blouse. I explained this situation to Aicha and she asked the waitress very directly to show us the tattoo. The waitress then undid her blouse further and revealed a long, blue dragon, the head of which was hidden within the cup of her bra while the tail stretched upwards towards her neck. She then explained that she had chosen the tattoo to commemorate her twenty-fifth birthday. She had spent four months deciding upon an image. I asked her why the dragon was in blue only. She replied that her research had informed her that other colours would fade more quickly and she wanted her tattoo to remain as fresh as her memory of her birthday. This encounter showed me how seriously a person may choose a tattoo (not everyone who has a tattoo is, or has been, a drunken seaman at the end of a pier) and with what intelligent consideration. It also showed that a viewer may easily see the tattoo as a division of the body, a zone of purposeful differ-

ence, prior to entering into the problem of interpretation. Such personal tattoos reveal a numinous attraction similar to that of the sacred: they both mark the body *off* and they mark the body *as* (an inviolate and distinct zone).

8 Elias, *The Loneliness of The Dying*, p. 3. It is the living who worry about disposing of the corpse, what to do with it, what ceremonies (if any) to award it, how to demonstrate grief. Elias writes about the embarrassment that a corpse causes family and friends and the inevitable "screening off," putting both dying and death out of sight, that occurs (p. 23). In modern western culture, there is always a great deal of what Elias calls "hygienic suppression" (p. 30). What he calls the "process of decay," often long, seldom pretty, inspires many strategies of aversion and repression. Generational cruelty alone (in his phrase) insures that the dying, unavoidably more a problem for the living than for themselves, enter into the field of the disgusting (pp. 71–73). The dying approach the condition of the abject and, once dead, have become abject.

9 Beckett's fictional worlds are bleak and (from the outside) swarming with disgusting objects. However, there are seldom even hints of internal boundaries: the world as a whole is disgusting or, from within, neutral and indifferent: "Labyrinthine torment that can't be grasped, or limited, or felt, or suffered, no, not even suffered, I suffer all wrong too, even that I do all wrong too, like an old turkey-hen dying on her feet, her back covered with chickens and the rats spying on her" (*Three Novels*, p. 314). I have not discussed Beckett's fiction extensively in this book, but his presence looms over any study of the representation of disgust.

10 Jameson, p. 12.

11 It is probably appropriate that a book dealing with the theory of disgust should return so often to "cult" films. Typical Hollywood shlock always assumes Apollonian boundaries, even if it shows them being transgressed, and hence the real presence of disgust. Films such as *Eraserhead* and *King of Hearts* do not make such naïve assumptions and hence played, in the 1970s and '80s, to large audiences of young people who had been influenced by punk values. No one who had listened to the Sex Pistols in 1977 (the year in which *Eraserhead* was made) would fail to see that Henry's world, stripped of Apollonian carapace, is the *real* world. De Broca's *King of Hearts* sees the Great War very much as Paul Fussell sees it: stench, death, unforgivable waste. *King of Hearts* holds the record for consecutive performances at a single theatre in the United States. It showed, twice a night, for six and a half years at the Central Square Cinema 1 in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Samuels, *Midnight Movies*, p. 200).

12 *Voss*, p. 447.

13 *The Twyborn Affair*, p. 429.

14 "Letter to René Char," p. 36.

15 *Hamlet* 2.2.585; *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 1159.

16 Habib, p. 113.

17 *Sexual Personae*, pp. 93–94.

18 "The horrors in Swift's writing are not the men and women who have bowels and fart but those who can work out how long a two year old baby carcass would feed a family, or who, like Judge Whitshed, bent on sending a printer to jail, sought a guilty verdict by sending a jury back nine times, and who turned up to the court in a coach bearing a personal motto declaring how much he cherished liberty and patriotism in the abstract. The horror and the disgust are always directed at those who exempt themselves from the discourse of the body, for it is the body which is the sign both of our commonality, a shared eschatology, the same universal origin and destination" (Probyn, p. 41).

19 Fiedler, *Freaks,* p. 24. The mystique of the freak has not disappeared simply because the travelling sideshow is now uncommon in most parts of North America. Extreme punk styles amount to temporary transformation into a freak (sometimes term of affection in punk circles since "freak" can be used to describe the person's appearance, not his or her actuality, in a straight, non-punk world). To "freak out," whether because of drugs or emotional stress, is not necessarily a bad thing, certainly not a condition to be despised. The Jim Rose Circus, which I discussed in Chapter 1, calls itself a "sideshow" to signify its marginal social position and to call attention to the status of certain acts. (As I said earlier, it is an excellent circus, with classical acts, masquerading as a marginal, disgusting experience. It is, like gothic rock and grunge, a complex performance that stimulates the disgusting behaviour of true punk.) When I saw the Jim Rose Circus, one member of the troupe was known as "Mr. Enigma." He was heavily clothed through most of the performance, but eventually revealed himself as massively tattooed in abstract, blue patterns (which might have been bodypaint). He turned out to be a sword-swallower and glass-eater. In some performances (including that on the commercial tape), he eats bugs and maggots. In effect, Mr. Enigma is a geek, a voluntary or self-fashioned freak. His freak-status is registered from the very moment that the performance begins. (For a photo of Mr. Enigma swallowing a sword, see Swerdlow, p. 11.) In his final chapter, Fiedler examines the image of the mutant in western culture to show the ways in which desire enters into the ambivalent image of the freak. The mutant illustrates how a person might become a freak in the endpoint of metamorphosis. Reading Fiedler together with Robert Bogdan, providing both recognition (Bogdan) and re-cognition (Fiedler), makes available a very thorough survey of the social problem, now more historical than contemporary, of freaks.

20 Browning employed genuine freaks, each with a career independently of the film, and this was, no doubt, one reason that the film evoked such averse reactions. Browning's performers include several pinheads, such as Koo-Koo the "Bird Girl" Randian the "human torso" (also known as "The Caterpillar Man"), the Hilton Sisters (Siamese twins joined at the hips who each accept offers of marriage during the film, thus introducing an erotic note), a legless man, played by Johnny Eck, who walks on his hands, and an armless woman, played by Frances O'Connor, and a hermaphroditic boy-girl, Joseph-Josephine. Many of these freaks are mentioned in Mannix. This is a weak book, but one with many photos (for photos, see also Drimmer). Bogdan's study, though rich in photos has only a few photos of the freaks who star in Browning's film, but these include a delightful poster of the Hilton Sisters dating from the 1920s. There are four photographs of the Hilton Sisters in Ewing (pp. 262-63). Both Mannix and Drimmer

adopt righteous, patronizing attitudes (the latter's title indicates the tone). Browning's much-reviled film does much more to register the humanity of the quite genuine freaks who performed for him. Fiedler discusses Browning at several points (pp. 288–98). Fiedler remarks that his book "represents a belated tribute to that great director [Browning] and his truly astonishing film" (p. 18).

21 Browning's film emphasizes the humanity, and the genuine community, of the circus freaks set against the "freakish" behaviour of the "norms." The freaks follow what the film calls "the code of the freaks." This is said dramatically in the film to indicate the impending act of revenge. However, it does have an important thematic import: normal people act freakishly; freaks act lovingly and well. The possibility of feeling disgust over the freaks is transmuted by their gentle and mutually respectful behaviour. The pinheads are especially childlike and loveable. The film's plot revolves around the beautiful Cleopatra marrying the circus' midget for his money and then trying to poison him slowly (all the while making love to the strong man). The freaks learn about this and decide to punish Cleopatra. She is chased through the circus grounds and under wagons while a storm rages. (Browning was a master of horror conventions and had, in 1931, directed the original *Dracula* with Bela Lugosi.) The freaks, each overcoming his or her handicap to join the chase (Randian slithers through the mud with a knife clenched in his mouth), close in upon the deviant aerialist and execute an appropriate punishment. In the film's final scene, the audience learns what had been hidden from sight in the opening scene: Cleopatra has been transformed into a speechless, gabbling Chicken Woman. The dramatic irony involved in having the immoral Cleopatra transformed into an obviously disgusting "freak" has struck some viewers as undercutting the film's main theme that there is no natural connection between physical appearance and moral character.

22 Fiedler, *Freaks*, p. 295. Fiedler remarks that audiences sometimes laugh at Browning's ending, but sometimes scream. It is deeply disturbing, in the extremity of the freaks' sense of justice, and unresolvably ambiguous. More than most films it must be seen in order to be "seen." Browning's ending has inspired variants in horror writing. Ray Bradbury's "The Jar" explores similar territory in transforming an Evil Woman into an embryo-like object (still possessing the woman's eyes) in a jar.

23 Pynchon, *V.*, p. 237.

24 Synthetic voices have become ever-more commonplace. Hawking's stands out because he uses it in such a complete manner, answering questions and expounding difficult abstractions. *What* it replaces can never be out of mind. One of the most striking instances of a prosthetic voice can be found in Gerard Corbiau's 1995 film, *Farinelli*. Corbiau's film is based upon the life of the famous eighteenth-century castrato, Carlo Broschi ("Farinelli" was his stage-name). To recreate the (unknown) tone of a castrato's voice, Corbiau had the voice digitally processed from the actual voices of a countertenor (Derek Lee Ragin) and a coloratura (Ewa Godlewska). Presumably, Stephen Hawking's rather shrill American accent could be replaced by a similar digital fusion if he thought it worth the trouble.

25 "Phantasmatic" is Judith Butler's term (*Bodies That Matter*, pp. 88-9). The penis is "phantasmatic" because it bears a vast weight of mythological associations. Using William Ian Miller's more direct term, you could simply say that it is, like the mouth (but unlike, in Miller's view, the anus), mythological. So much has been said about the penis in myth and legend, so much has been expected of it (in myth, in legend, in ordinary life) that it can hardly be reduced to mere nature, to a wrinkled fleshy appendage with a bio-hydraulic pumping mechanism to effect tumescence. It exists in a zone created by the intersection of memory and anticipation. Hence the distinction between penis and phallus, like that between nature and culture (or between history and legend), seems important. Writing of the opposition between phallus and castration (the male/female polarity in, she claims, Freud's view), Elizabeth Grosz remarks that there is no natural body to return to, no pure sexual difference one could gain access if only the distortions and deformations of patriarchy could be removed or transformed. The phallus "binarizes the differences between sexes, dividing up a sexual-corporeal continuum into two mutually exclusive categories which in fact belie the multiplicity of bodies and body types" (*Volatile Bodies*, p. 58). If the penis is as phantasmatic as Butler argues (and it probably is), the hardships that it effects fall upon men as well as upon women. (It is hard, indeed, to live up to a standard set by Zeus.) My argument is that all prostheses have a double impact upon consciousness, as well as upon the body, in that they both enhance performance but remain mere machines designed to supplement failing performance (of eye, or knee, or penis), reminders of a personal Fall. This is especially the case when the cyber(body)part replaces, or supplements, a phantasmatic part such as the penis.

26 A "neovagina" is also possible, both in transsexual surgery and in reconstructive plastic surgery after disease or mutilation, but neovaginoplasty does not involve the use of prostheses as does neophalloplasty. (In some cases, it appears that a mould is used as an aid in constructing the vaginal cavity. However, it would be removed in a postoperative procedure. This may, or may not, constitute a prosthesis.) Since stenosis is a possible complication in neovaginoplasty, it may eventually call for a prosthetic solution (see Martine-Mora et al.; Eldh; and van Noort). I write as a male, and the split consciousness that I invoke in this chapter is a personalized (but hardly universalized) male consciousness. I would not wish even to suppose how the possession of a neovagina might play out in a female consciousness. Nonetheless, there is evidence to indicate that many women, possessing healthy and fully functional genitalia, do seek to have their vaginas modified and surgically enhanced. See Debra Ollivier's on "Designer Vaginas."

27 Govier et al.

28 A large body of material exists concerning penile implants. Medical journals publish dozens of articles each year on reconstructive phalloplasty in which the surgeon builds a "neophallus" to replace a penis that has been lost because of accident, gunshot wound or disease. The same surgical techniques are used to construct a neophallus where, in the case of transsexuals, it had never existed. Much less is written with respect to cosmetic phalloplasty. For articles on penile implants see Irwin Goldstein et al. and Levine et al (see also Francesco Montrosi et al.). Considerable information, as well as a discussion of problems inherent in implant therapy, can be found in Findlay.

29 Heidegger, p. 103 .

30 Porush, p. 8.

31 Halacy, Jr., p. 25.

32 Lawrence Douglas, p. 13.

33 Plotinsky, p. 297.

34 Plotinsky, p. 298. Both science-fiction and art-horror employ the motif of a machine that develops its own identity and consciousness and then begins to take over. A hyper-complex machine, such as the starship *Enterprise*, may decide to run itself, or else a computer, such as HAL in Kubrick's *2001*, may attempt to take over (having developed a consciousness that reveals to itself its own superior intelligence but inferior role as a server). In art-horror, Stephen King's *Christine*, in which a car comes to life, stands out. (King had experimented with this theme ten years earlier in his 1973 short story "Trucks" in which interstate rigs acquire an evil life.)

35 As I suggested in Chapter 4, I think that James Cameron's *Terminator* films actually pose this metafictional problem. Although the Terminator is called a "cyborg," it is actually an android with prosthetic organic skin and flesh. Hence the Terminator inverts the paradigm I have been discussing in this chapter: an android with an organic prosthesis may experience itself as diminished, less than a machine. A memorably loathsome variant occurs in Gregory Benford's *Great Sky River*. Benford's narrative is set far into the future on an interstellar human colony in which the Mechs, a hyper-advanced machine civilization that has displaced human, grow body parts to act as prostheses. Disembodied parts, legs, hearts or other parts, are sustained in a battery by an organic gruel-like substance to produce more efficient "motors." This is an image that has now spread through science-fiction films. The Borg in the *Star Trek* TV series or the failed versions of the Riply clone in *Alien Resurrection* come strikingly to mind.

36 De Nooy, p. 183.

37 They have been colonized but not (at the time of telling this story) subjected to genocide. Victims of genocide, especially if they are living within an ongoing genocidal project, must experience abjection. You could hardly be more cast out, or discarded, by your society than when it tries to kill you. Firchow points out that the sense that genocide is the worst of all possible crimes reflects a very modern sensibility. It has not always been so. There has been a great deal of loose talk about genocide. Inadvertent and non-purposeful deaths, even if they are in considerable numbers, probably should not be classified as genocide (Firchow, pp. 148-52).

38 Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging*, p. 6. Ignatieff identifies himself as a "civic nationalist," someone who believes in multinational states which provide homes for different nations, with a definite fear of ethnic nationalism (p. 249). Ignatieff probes the ambiguities of nationalism, and of being a "nation," with great intelligence. He would probably agree with English novelist Penelope Lively that for "a nation, it is a great historical convenience to have edges" (p. 134). However, even the clearest, most precisely demarcated edges (such as the United States possesses, say) will not keep a nation, once it is moving in a collective action against its minorities or against an alien "enemy," from appearing disgusting from the outside.

39 De-individuation is another common science-fiction and horror theme. Both Don Siegel's 1956 film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and Philip Kaufman's 1978 re-make memorably explore this territory. Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* suggests a classic example, on the borders between horror and science-fiction, in which de-individuation functions as a gender-specific manipulation (the male characters methodically de-individuate the female). Disgust arises only upon the consideration of the slippage, the fall from a human ideal of individual personhood. Human beings will seem disgusting when they slip into a trans-entity existence such as that which the women in Levin's novel share once they have been given a reprogrammed femininity that excludes personal identity.

40 Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, pp. 212–15. Rushdie has in mind the unswerving ferocity of the Iranian mobs, under the religious leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini, that marched against the Shah's army in 1978. As Gibreel flies over the land of Desh, observing the insurrection, he carries the Imam, a simulacrum of Khomeini, on his back.

41 Klinkenborg draws attention to the sense of being persecuted among anti-abortion protesters at a Milwaukee clinic. "There is a community, a bond, in opposition. Persecution is election, even when it is self-persecution, a martyrdom in the parking lot" (p. 43). Rushdie attributes a sense of persecution, which is largely "self-persecution," to the Imam and his followers.

42 Canetti, p. 29.

43 Buford, p. 193. I cite Buford's fascinating book in absence of any intimate experience of my own. I have on three occasions observed riots or (at least) mass actions in which the participants appeared to be de-individuated. On one of these occasions, in Nicaragua, which was perhaps more like a large rumble than a riot, I stood as far to one side, though unable to escape, as I could move while the young men involved threatened each other with multiple rich variations upon the Spanish verb *matar* (kill). On another occasion, during a major sporting event in Vancouver, I was so interested in the police use of dogs that I foolishly got too close (trying to overhear the whispered commands) and abruptly found myself grabbed in a police armlock. I spent a grim night in the Vancouver jail. However, I have never actually participated in a riot and, thus, I have never experienced, at first hand, de-individuation of that kind. Buford's vivid first-hand account of participation may stand in for my own lack.

44 Buford, p. 205.

45 Buford, p. 299.

46 Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 192. Writing of her "Möbius strip model," Grosz observes that it has "the advantage of showing that there can be a relation between two 'things'—mind and body—which presumes neither their identity nor their radical disjunction, a model which shows that while there are disparate 'things' being related, they have the capacity to twist one into the other" (pp. 209–10). The abject is the primary, and exemplary, fact subsumed by the Möbius strip. Discussing Kristeva's analysis of the abject, de Nooy observes that the "abject, explored in *Powers of Horror*, is a form of otherness that never quite constitutes a definable Other. It never accedes to the status of object, in that—although heterogeneous—it can never be completely expelled from the subject.

It disrupts the neat organization into inside and outside, self and other, as an inaccessible otherness within" (pp. 24–25 n. 27). There seems to be no simple (non-Möbius) way to think about the abject.

47 Kristeva, p. 15. I have never felt certain that I understand the reasons for insisting upon the menses as a fundamental category of the abject. Pre- and post-menstrual women should not experience abjection. Neither should women who, either through ignorance or education, do not feel shame over the public inconvenience of menstruation. In Chapter 3, I discussed the results of one survey showing that menstrual blood actually ranked low, among both male and female respondents, as a source of disgust. Blood suggests its own Möbius strip, at once life-giving and a life poisoning, a complete pharmacy of positive and negative powers (see Camporesi, esp. pp. 101–21). Muscio, taking a robustly positive view of menstruation, describes the flowering in the United States of menarche parties (pp. 32–33). Of course, Kristeva and her followers, such as Henke, may have ideological reasons for their cock-eyed insistence.

48 Henke, *Shattered Subjects*, p. 86. In her earlier study of the idea of desire in the writings of James Joyce, Henke had explicitly adopted Kristeva's analysis of the female condition as a heuristic tool. In that book, she was more concerned with Kristeva's theory of "semiosis," the fluid proto-language beneath linguistic articulation, the "mysterious and polymorphous iterations of a woman's psyche" (*James Joyce*, p. 127). The common marker in both Kristeva's and Henke's analysis of female psychology is fluidity, or flow. The female proto-language (the pre-male inarticulation of semiosis) and the abjection of menstrual blood are both, private and public, manifestations of flow.

49 In the more than thirty years since it was written, *The Golden Notebook* has become a key text for many different scholarly interests. It has been seen as a glass held up to the shifting tides of modern European history: the collapse of empires and the rise of distinct postcolonial voices; the disillusionment with the Communist party after 1956; the critique of American political values particularly as manifested in the House Un-American Activities Committee whose many victims helped to create one of "the classic, already archetypal stories of our time" (p. 490); the rise of popular culture and entertainment as a dominating force throughout western civilization; the evolution of postmodernism as both a register of cultural phenomena (the novel's interest in both popular and marginal culture) and as a repertory of narrative conventions (the novel's overtly metafictional strategies). Above all, *The Golden Notebook* has been seen as focussing a brilliant light upon the condition of women "in our time" and as providing both an analysis of this condition and range of possible solutions. I do not wish to deny the validity of any of these interests. *The Golden Notebook* is, rightly I think, a textual lens for the study of the political background to recent British fiction, the emergence of a self-reflexive postcolonial discourse, and the evolution of postmodernism (it was published in 1962, the same year as Nabokov's *Pale Fire*). Along the way, the novel examines a wide spectrum of political issues, such as the developing hegemony of American anti-communist ideology and its impact upon European thinking. Most importantly perhaps, *The Golden Notebook* records the conceptual structure of an unfolding feminism both as an historical movement and as a continuing area for discussion. What I want to argue in this chapter is that the novel also helps to focus the concepts of disgust and abjection. This is not, as I shall show, a minor excrescence

of a complex narrative that derives its significance from other, more transcendental if not more fundamental, preoccupations. Disgust plays a central role in the novel just as it does in the western society that the novel reflects. I also want to argue that grasping the role of disgust in the novel helps to see the other issues (for which it is famous) even more clearly.

50 The word *disgust* is used twenty-six times in the novel. *Self-disgust* is used seven times; *disgusted*, six times; *disgusting*, three times. In addition, words such as *repulsion*, *revulsion*, *loathing*, *self-abasement* and *abject* are used frequently.

51 Lessing, p. 368. Massified and swarming insects are not the exclusive property of horror films.

52 Lessing, p. 419. A similar (if not identical) figure ("some malicious creature, sarcastic and 'rational'" who appears in "various guises with different traits") haunts the dreams and waking hallucinations of Nicholai Vsevolodovich Stavrogin in Dostoevsky's *Devils* (p. 455). It is the figure of nihilism but also the embodiment of self-disgust and despair. It is also a familiar figure, in "various guises," throughout modern European literature. Compare the character of the malign (but highly intelligent) dwarf in Pär Lagerkvist's *The Dwarf*. Viewers of David Lynch's films will recall how often dancing dwarfs figure in his work, especially the "hieratic dwarf" in the aborted TV series *Twin Peaks* (Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing*, p. 148).

53 Lessing, p. 532.

54 Lessing, p. 358. Although feminists seem to think that menstrual blood lies at the core of male misogyny, other factors may play equal, or more important, roles. Myth, fable, anecdote and tale, all suggest that men fear female fecundity (for which the Hydra is the outstanding image) and softness. Male jokes about the normal absence of female muscle-tone ("gravity lends definition to the female body") tell at least as clear a story as do those about menstruation. Lingis, drawing upon the fiction of Marguerite Duras, sees this thorny issue very sharply. Certain female nudity (that of a "temple maiden," say) is "obscene": it "invites strangulation, rape, ill usage, insults, shouts of hatred, the unleashing of deadly and unmitigated passions ... [men may] "feel a vertiginous attraction for the muck and stench of the disordered organs and suppurating orifices that her soft forms and delicate skin hold so weakly. Voluptuousness plunges all that is infantile, feral, violent in oneself into another, seeking all that is frenzied, predatory, bloodthirsty in the other" (p. 147). Wills cites Albert the Great in the thirteenth century for the proposition that the "woman contains more liquid than the man, and it is a property of liquid to take things up easily and to hold them poorly" (p. 109).

55 Henke, *Shattered Subjects*, p. 95.

56 Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, p. 94.

57 Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 203. Grosz' diction, especially her use of "viscosity," suggests that she, like Paglia, is thinking of Sartre. However, it also displays an obvious congruence with Henke (and Kristeva) in insisting upon female fluidity, and/or wetness, as the distinctive gender-marker. Reading Lynda Goldstein's essay, "Raging in Tongues: Confession and Performance Art," on the expression of rage in female performance art, I was struck by the description of Karen Finley's act: [Finley] "works

into a screaming rage. Stripping off her dress in a nonerotic fashion, she tosses stuffed animals and raw, coloured Easter eggs into a large, clear garbage bag, repeatedly smashing it on the floor until the gooey yolks coast everything inside. Pulling the yellow-slimed stuffed animals from the bag, she uses them to sponge the eggs over her body." This gesture, charged with archetypal as well as cultural significance, is said to create an "interplay" between battering and subjection.

58 Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, p. 93. Although Paglia seems to support Henke and Grosz, her discourse is several degrees more flamboyant than theirs. Her philosophical guide is Sartre (and the world of imagination and fiction), not Kristeva. There are no references to Kristeva in *Sexual Personae*.

59 Paglia does not mean the same thing by "Dionysian" as Bataille does. She seeks a radical polarity in framing Dionysus as Apollo's "antagonist and rival." Dionysus represents "obliteration" of seeing (whereas Apollo is an "eye-god"), the dark underside of human experience (*Sexual Personae*, p. 88). For Bataille, the Dionysian is transgressive, life lived excessively and against Apollonian constraints, but it does not exclude either intelligence or intellectual expression. It is, rather, an active, exploratory mode. It is the source of human creativity (whereas Paglia associates creativity with Apollo, with order and light). Bataille and Paglia would seem to agree that, whatever its ends, the Dionysian inhabits a fluid, dissolving world that mocks both constraints and categories.

60 Shakespeare, *Richard III*, 1.1.106; *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 714.

61 Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, 3.3.127–28; *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 472. *Abject* appears only in the *Folio* text.

62 Shakespeare, *2 Henry VI*, 4.1.104–05; *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 654.

63 Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p. 71.

64 Kristeva, p. 71.

65 Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p. 73.

66 King's phrase crisply sums up the role of death in horror fiction and points unmistakably to the role that necrophilia plays in contemporary American culture (*Kingdom of Fear*, p. 97).

67 Grosz distinguishes neatly between essentialism and biologism as the "postulation of a fixed essence" and the "postulation of a biological universality" (*Volatile Bodies*, p. 212 n. 15). Many psychologists would probably wish to deny that they sought a biological universality, but their conclusions, as I argued previously, exhibit their desire.

68 Self, p. 18.

69 Kristeva, p. 18.

70 Although feces, menstrual blood and corpse rot are the central examples of the abject, there are many other candidates (Miller, as I noted previously, suggests hair). In fact, any boundary that is involved in, or constitutes an aspect of, your human individuality might seem to function both as a marker of the abject and as a first step towards

creativity. De Nooy lucidly discusses the role of the abject in defining femininity. You are defined by, but also against, your mother. "No longer one with the child but not yet separate," she writes, " the mother is 'abjected': halfway between same and other, unnamable, she seems repulsive, something to be expelled like excrement, like unwanted food" (p. 45).

71 I am taking a shortcut here. Saul may be either a "real" character (i.e., an inhabitant of the same fictional world that Anna Wulf inhabits) or he may be a creation of Anna's imagination (and hence an inhabitant of an embedded world), a projection of her animus. Many of Lessing's critics have taken the further step of identifying Saul with one of Lessing's in-the-world lovers, Clancy Sigal. Lessing, Pierpont writes, calls her character Saul Green, but he is "identifiable as the American writer Clancy Sigal, 'already pretty ill when he arrived in London', according to Lessing's memoir" (Pierpont, p. 242). I am not arguing the point, and both of the opposing interpretive positions can certainly be argued; rather, I am merely assuming that Saul Green is a creation, a fictional embodiment of Anna's archetypal animus, that will lead her, in the section called "The Golden Notebook," to individuation. Even though Lessing herself describes Saul as if he were a real character, and the inner "Golden Notebook" as if it had been written by both of them, I find my "fictional" reading consistent with Lessing's Jungianism in the novel. "In the inner Golden Notebook, which is written by both of them," Lessing writes, "you can no longer distinguish between what is Saul and what is Anna, and between them an the other people in the book" (p. 8). There is considerable internal evidence that Saul is best understood as a projection of Anna's animus. For one thing, Anna seems to know about him, or at least how he writes, before she meets him. In section 19 of the Yellow Notebook, she writes a pastiche called "The Romantic Tough School of Writing" in which Saul's style and emotional affiliations are already made plain. (Compare his unlikely "American" stance of standing, "his thumbs hitched through his belt, fingers loose, but pointing as it were to his genitals" [p. 484], the "mensch-pose" [p. 487], or Anna's insight that Saul's strongest emotions are reserved for his "group of buddies" [p. 542].) In the numbered sections of the final entry in the Blue Notebook, the passage in which Anna notes that she sees Saul clearly, "the slum kid, member of a gang of slum kids, lifting something from a shop counter, or running from the police," is also a number 19. Clue or snare? Finally, Saul's fictionality (within the fictional world that Anna inhabits) supports a Kristevean reading of Anna's feelings as abjection (since that is a potentially creative experience), but if he is read as "real," then Anna's "fug of stale disgust" is simply self-loathing, negative and deadend. (For a recent analysis, interesting if trendy, of fragmentation in *The Golden Notebook* which accepts Saul's "reality," while arguing that "Anna-the-editor" elides the distinction, see Hayles, pp. 236–64). In order to see the Jungian reading in a deeper perspective, compare Theodora Goodman's creation of "Holstius," out of a similar need for male companionship in the third section of Patrick White's *The Aunt's Story*.

72 Lessing, "Preface," p. 7.

73 Saul gives Anna the first sentence of the "Free Women" novella. Anna gives Saul a first sentence, "On a dry hillside in Algeria, a soldier watched the moonlight glinting on his rifle," that simply could not have led to a novel, certainly not one that "did rather well"

(pp. 556–57). It is pastiche, very much a part of the final section from the Yellow Notebook, and defies all that Anna represents as a writer: write out of your own experience, write what you know.

74 Lessing, p. 299.

75 Lessing, p. 298.

76 Lessing, p. 303.

77 Carter, p. 39.

78 Pierpont seems to find Anna's response to the on-set of her period excessive. She "does more frantic blood-washing than Lady Macbeth" (Pierpont, p. 240). I would hardly dare comment on this judgement as referring to an actual-world situation. However, Lessing has written the episode of Anna's menstrual period as a symbolic exploration of a typical, or representative, experience.

79 Calasso, p. 175. Thought of another way (Northrop Frye's way), myths are the boilerplate of the imagination, a culturally-inscribed imaginary. They function in the building of fictional worlds as a high-order fund of stereotypes and thematic allusions.

80 I do not think that the penis is more mythological (or phantasmatic) than the vagina, though it is probably the case, things being as they are, that more has been written about it. When I was four and watched my mother cut a peach open, feeling strong aversion at the sight, it may be that the open concavity where the pit had been, so pink and shaggy, may have reminded me of an open vagina. Of course, I had only seen one vagina at that point in my life, my playmate's, and it been neither open nor shaggy. So that account of my instantaneous disgust has to appeal to such difficult mental phenomena as archetypes and collective memory. Once I begin to entertain that hypothesis, I can move on to ask whether the slit-open peach had reminded me of a *vagina dentata*. I could not have had such a concept, but, according to the hypothesis, I might have had the archetype hidden within some intellectual node, waiting actualization.

81 Ovid, p. 82.

82 Calasso, p. 291.

83 Ovid, p. 82.

84 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 75.

85 Mindich, p. 72. Cosmetic phalloplasty lays claim to many success tales (measured by the mythological yardstick), but it also seems to have had many failures (p. 74). Reconstructive phalloplasty, having smaller objectives but more distance to cover, seems to have good success rates (see J. Joris Hage et al.). The possibilities for disappointment in attempting to enhance the penis are, evidently, great. Even the dangers and potential failures of penile prostheses, which are strictly corrective within the natural limitations of an individual penis, are considerable (see Findlay). It is easy to suppose that a man who seeks to have his penis enhanced has been thinking mythologically. He will have been building private fictional worlds in which, mythologically enhanced, he brilliantly flares, thrusting across the heavens like an elongated flash of lightening.

86 See Malloy. Adam Parfrey observes that postmodern "penises seem positively naked without ornate tattoos, and a stud, ring or chain piercing the glans and the urethra" (*Apocalypse Culture*, p. 98).

87 Malloy, p. 25. I write this as a male, open to contradiction. There is a vaginal piercing known as the Princess Albertina. Whether this imitates, precedes or is entirely independent of the male Prince Albert, I do not know. Anne Greenblatt describes the Princess Albertina as another "relatively new and experimental piercing, this piercing passes through the back wall of the urethra. In the piercing documented by *Piercing World* magazine, a captive bead ring was used." Greenblatt's enthusiasm for labial and clitoral piercings, always identifying an appropriate piece of jewellery for each local piercing, suggests that I may be wrong in claiming a greater mythic, or phantasmatic, aura for the penis than for the vagina. Anne Greenblatt, *rec.arts.bodyart* (1995).

88 I cannot say whether a tampon is a prosthetic. Clearly, it both enhances the vagina, making it more socially flexible, and acts as a mnemotechnic. In the entry in the blue notebook that I discussed above, Anna Wulf experiences her vagina during menstruation as mythological.

89 The mythological dimension of all body parts, including both cyberparts and transplants, can be seen clearly in the contemporary ethical debates concerning commercial transplants. While transplants from the bodies of those who have died in accidents (and signed the appropriate release forms before dying or, if children, have had relatives give permission) are a triumph of medical science, the commercial traffic in body parts is ethically suspect and, in many places, illegal. A forty-nine-year-old real-estate agent from British Columbia named Robert Kinnee exemplifies the problem. His kidneys failed in 1992 and he had been on dialysis while waiting for transplant kidneys. If someone had died, even in a grisly accident, whose kidneys could have been transplanted into Kinnee's body, it would have been a normal medical procedure. However, Kinnee grew tired of waiting and, taking matters into his own hand, travelled to Madras, India, where he *bought* a kidney from a seventeen-year-old construction worker. The young man is said to have received about two thousand dollars for giving up one kidney. Buying organs for transplantation has become relatively commonplace. (A great deal of business is done in China with the organs of executed criminals.) This example of aggressive self-preservation, or of successful market capitalism, causes furious ethical debate. The director of the British Columbia Transplant Society, Bill Barrable, was quoted as finding the act "deplorable." The British Columbia Minister of Health, Paul Ramsey, said that the practice was "unethical." Kinnee's act, Ramsey said, "sent a chill up my spine" (McInnes). While the temptation might be to call Kinnee an ethical monster, or else Ramsey a hypocrite, a more detached view would be only to note the confusion in this contemporary debate. The potential ferocity of the argument, one side or the other, for the commercialization of human body parts turns largely upon the mythological encrustations of the body. Two other current debates, whether to use animals, such as pigs, as incubators to grow organs for human use and whether to employ stem cells (or even to do research on the problem) from fetuses to grow new organs, arouse intense anger and dismay. In both cases, heated reference is made to the mythological status of the human body. It is, we are told, sacred. Even its most secret

parts are sacrosanct, inviolable to casual, or monetary, invasion. However, many of the people who make these arguments happily support the death penalty (or would, in Canada, if only the politicians would bring it back). One person's Apollonian order turns out to be another's disgusting experience of a perverse geometry.

90 Mythology does not show up only in fables and tales. Jokes are a fundamental vehicle for mythology. And they are also, as Freud observes, a form of rape. For a recent analysis of male jokes designed to degrade, and to exercise dominance over, women, see Murphy.

91 The failure to consider the workings of disgust (and abjection) in modern literature constitutes the single most glaring weakness in Miller's occasionally brilliant study of disgust. I found this absence to be a frustrating and infuriating shortcoming. Robertson observes that when he told a colleague in Sydney that Miller had written a study of disgust that ignored the twentieth century, his colleague replied that "such an endeavor would be like writing a study of mass destruction but dismissing everything that has occurred since *The Charge of The Light Brigade*" (Robertson, p. 223 n. 10).

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