

**Iris as an Evil Narcissist: Moral Dimension
Surrounding the Construction of Truth in
Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin***

Sofia Min-Innala
University of Tampere
School of Modern Languages and Translation Studies
English Philology
Pro Gradu Thesis
December 2007

Tampereen yliopisto

Englantilainen filologia/kieli- ja käännöstieteiden laitos

SOFIA, MIN-INNALA: Iris as an Evil Narcissist: Moral Dimension Surrounding the Construction of Truth in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*

Pro-gradu tutkielma 108 sivua

Joulukuu 2007

 My thesis addresses problems of moral evil in Atwood's novel, *The Blind Assassin* and thus aims to show how banal aspects of narcissistic desires can contribute to the creation and development of moral evil. By tracing evidence of small moral evil in the book, I attempt to provide the grounds for regarding the narrator Iris as evil. My focus is thus on the way the narrator depicts other people in her memoir including herself and on the manner she shapes her memoir, which give rise to a number of morally relevant questions concerning her moral thinking and attitude.

As regards the theories I have employed in my analysis, Kant's moral theory concerning the way moral issues are ignored by the demands of self-love is the main tool for understanding the novel in terms of moral evil. In this context, different kinds of self-deception often assist Iris to divert her attention from her moral duties. Some main features of the theory of narcissism are also referred to in connection with Iris's past and present psychological state. Some aspects of self-narratives are also applied to the veracity of Iris's argument that she is offering 'truth.'

In Chapter 3, my purpose is to examine Iris's narcissistic attempt to create a favourable self-image. First of all, I look at Iris's attempt to show her virtuous side as a daughter, who sacrifices herself to help her father, but point to her failure to be a dutiful daughter owing to her adoption of self-deception regarding a moral issue surrounding her father's death. With regard to her relationships with her sister-in-law Winifred and her husband Richard, I attempt to show how Iris victimizes herself and endeavours to make them look evil while paying attention to Iris's narcissistic injuries caused by them and her lack of recognition of her own deceitful behaviour. More importantly, I look closely at the ambivalent way Iris describes her sister Laura and deals with the latter's suffering and death, which reveals her old envy and hate towards Laura. Her avoidance of necessary moral deliberation, and worse, her morally opportunistic attitude allow her to adopt various self-deceptive strategies to protect her self-image.

In Chapter 4, I attempt to see a bigger picture by taking a close at Iris's manoeuvres as an author. I examine how, disguised as a fictional character, Iris unconsciously creates an 'other' her, in the romance subtext in the embedded novel. More significantly, Iris's attempt to lead the reader to conceive of her memoir as a tragedy and its moral implications are discussed in terms of her narrative control and manipulation. Here, the concepts of tragedy and truth are used to turn the reader's attention away from her moral responsibility for the questionable choices she made in the past. In connection with this, how the different layers of narratives can serve the purpose of supporting Iris's self-representation as a victim of circumstance is also briefly discussed. Iris's real reason to grasp a pen is also considered in the light of Iris's inner thoughts, which reveal her unconscious desire. Although Atwood seems to keep authorial distance from the narrator's narcissistic attempt to defend herself, the force of her structural design in a way appears to affirm Iris's delusional reconciliation with her sister and her false catharsis.

Keywords: (moral) evil, self-love(narcissism), self-deception, truth

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Theories of evil and narcissism	10
2.1 Evil	11
2.2 Narcissism	21
3. Iris as an evil narcissist	33
3.1 Iris as a virtuous daughter and sister	34
3.2 Winifred and Richard as evil enemies	37
3.3 Haunting Laura	50
3.3.1 Odd Laura	53
3.3.2 Envidable Laura	54
3.3.3 Hateful Laura	57
3.3.4 Creating blind spots – Iris’s self-deception and self-defence	60
4. Iris’s manoeuvre as an author and memoirist	70
4.1 “Other me” in <i>The Blind Assassin</i>	70
4.2 Traumas and tragedy	78
4.3 “Remember me”	93
5. Conclusion	100
6. Bibliography	104

1. Introduction

Margaret Atwood is a renowned Canadian author with a number of critically acclaimed books such as *Surfacing*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Alias Grace*, to name only a few among many. She produced another book, *The Blind Assassin* right before the new millennium, which has created much discussion regarding its narrative structure as well as its contents. In addition to its various themes ranging from culture, history and power to memory, truth and the very act of writing, certain elements of ancient myths, fairy tales and gothic novels whose connotations are often linked to gender and class issues give the book rich layers of interpretive possibilities. As regards its structure, at first glance, the book looks like a collage of disparate things, but on closer inspection, the way events are presented through different narrative levels actually shows that it is carefully and coherently organized with the technique of *mise en abyme*¹ whose effect amounts to the blurring of the contrast between fact and fiction.

Apart from its apparently complex 'postmodern' structure, compared with *Surfacing* or *The Handmaid's Tale* whose endings leave some interpretive options open, the ending of *The Blind Assassin* is quite close to the tradition of realist texts in which "closure amounts to *disclosure*".² Which is to say that an enigma, which has activated the narrative, is resolved in one way or another at the end of the novel. Atwood's interest in language is visible in the novel, but the problem of language and its experimental exploration are found especially in her earlier work, *Surfacing*. On the other hand, Sarah R Morrison (2000) points out Atwood's frequent use of the "romance plot," which originates from medieval romances in which "tales of chivalry and amorous adventure" are

¹Mise-en-abyme refers to an "internal duplication of a literary work or part of a work" and its 'Chinese box' (mirroring) effect often indicates an "endless succession of internal reduplications." Literary works with the effect of mise-en-abyme often suggest that different narrative layers in them share some important elements.
<<http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1056-miseenabyme.html>>.

² Sally Robinson, "The "Anti-Logos Weapon": Multiplicity in Women's Texts", in *Contemporary Literature* (Spring, 1988), Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 105-124, p. 113.

unfolded.³ In these stories, male heroes often rescue female heroines in distress or in danger. In modern romances, this ‘rescue’ part in medieval romances is adapted in various forms. The conventional plotline in a modern romance involves a heroine encountering a “potential paramour”, with whom she develops a passionate relationship. But there are often “social, psychological, economic or interpersonal” obstacles they have to overcome before finally confirming love for each other.⁴ For instance, Atwood’s *Handmaid* finds herself absorbed in a romantic fantasy in which she imagines the male hero – he could be the Commander or Nick – being in love with her and coming to rescue her, but its conventional ending is denied, which Morrison interprets as a story about women’s attachment to the fantasy itself – how they are trapped by it – rather than as a love story per se.⁵ What critics find disturbing in her romance plot, though, is that Atwood’s *Handmaid* can be linked to “countless heroines of “The Innocent Persecuted Heroine genre” in which “glamorised victimization and subordination” are an essential feature and the heroine’s rescue is ultimately realized through love.⁶ *The Blind Assassin* also includes a romance plot with ‘innocent victim’ aspects, which, at first sight, seems like a love story, but turns out to be something different.

Another characteristic in many of Atwood’s novels is her preference for first-person narrators. Naturally these first-person narrators draw the reader closer to their stories. The fact that they tell their stories from ‘particular’ points of view does not necessarily create moral problems. It is when they attempt to ‘deceive’ the reader for dubious purposes that they are subject to moral scrutiny. The protagonist in *The Blind Assassin* is in fact a devious narrator whose narration gives rise to a number of ethical questions.

³ Literary Terms Menu <<http://lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/resources/shakespeare/Literary.Terms.2.html#Romance>>.

⁴ Literary Terms and Definitions <http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_R.html>.

⁵ Sarah R. Morrison, “Mothering Desire: The Romance Plot in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and Susan Fromberg Schaeffer’s *The Madness of a Seduced Woman*”, in *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* (Autumn, 2000), Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 315-336, pp. 317-318.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 321.

In discussing ‘evil’ in literature, Sholom J. Kahn (1953) holds that the value of books should be measured in a framework of good and evil in life. If we take his view of literature at face value, the capacity of literature for encompassing all areas of life seems to be reduced to a matter of good and evil. It should be noted however that he is fully aware of the complexities of the phenomenon of good and evil. It is not moralistic aspects in a book, but possible moral implications in any book that are worth examining.⁷ When seen in this light, *The Blind Assassin* is an interesting piece of literary work regarding moral aspects. It is true that we live in a liberal modern world in which the term ‘moral’ is not popular and even avoided, but it cannot be denied that moral issues are present, to a greater or lesser degree, in one’s life. Indeed, as Snare remarks, ethics is actually closely related to a “deep-rooted” part of everyday practice and routines, that is, “the making of moral judgements and the thinking of moral thoughts,” but our liberal and “permissive” cultural atmosphere finds overt moral judgements so “intrusive” and “judgemental” that we “go to great lengths to make our moral judgements seem like something else.”⁸ Indeed, the meaning of moral judgements turns out to be something that the protagonist does not invest her thoughts and energy into. Another relevant point made by Amelie Rorty in relation to everyday moral practices is also worth mentioning here because they are something we employ without giving much thought:

After all, the morality of everyday life is largely conveyed in prohibitions. Negative commands can be given children as guidelines for conduct without deep metaphysical or psychological elaboration. “Thou shalt not murder, steal, bear false witness...” are more focused, clearer than “Love thy neighbor” or even “Be just.”⁹

As I shall show in my analysis, positive commands such as “Love your sister,” “Be good to your sister” turn out to be more difficult for the narrator to respond to.

⁷ Sholom J Kahn, “The Problem of Evil in Literature”, in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (1953), Vol. 12, No. 1, Special Issue on Symbolism and Creative Imagination, pp. 98-110, p. 98.

⁸ Francis Snare, *The Nature of Moral Thinking* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1-2.

⁹ Amelie Rorty (ed.), *The Many Faces of Evil: Historical Perspectives* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. xi-xii.

From the perspective that self-love is all too familiar and human, W.H. Auden's words are also pertinent to throwing light on my starting point in examining evil in *The Blind Assassin*: "evil is unspectacular...and shares our bed and eats at our table."¹⁰ The book thus tells about a 'small' evil, which, owing to its banal, trivial side, easily goes unnoticed, but which nevertheless has potential for turning into a horrible evil in certain circumstances. Hannah Arendt's remark, "the movement towards wrongdoing can be subtle, unnoticed, banal"¹¹ is also useful in figuring out signs of the movement towards evil in the book. Since it seems that no one has yet discussed the novel in detail in terms of moral evil, it would be meaningful and interesting to examine and rethink 'not-so-visible' evil in the novel. Before elaborating on my thesis topics, I shall briefly present a plot summary of the novel.

It begins with the narrator Iris Griffen Chase's recollection of her sister Laura's suicide, which was then – about four decades ago – reported as an accident. Expectedly, the narrator eventually offers her answer to the mystery surrounding her sister's death at the end of the novel. In the meantime, the narrator slowly discloses her ill-fated family history, tracing back to her grandparents' marriage and reflecting on the difficult relationship between her parents. Her grandfather Benjamin Chase, who was of a humble origin, but who became a successful button manufacturer, marries her grandmother Adelia of an aristocratic origin whose family was then almost bankrupt. As a sophisticated and intelligent woman, Iris's grandmother makes a great effort to create a proper home with culture and cultivation, naming their newly built home Avilion. Further, she invites high-rank politicians to Avilion so as to enhance her husband's status and promote his button factory business. The outbreak of World War I and its aftermath destabilize the family in a fundamental way. Although Iris's father survives World War I, the loss of his two

¹⁰ W.H. Auden, "Herman Melville," <http://jclarkmedia.com>, quoted in Daryl Koehn, *The Nature of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 10.

¹¹ Cited in Amelie Rorty, (ed.), *The Many Faces of Evil: Historical Perspectives* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 16.

brothers and the terrible shock of the war devastate him, which also damages his relationship with his wife whose premature death grieves the family. After some peaceful years, another disaster from outside threatens the family: the Depression. In a desperate attempt to save the factories and prevent massive lay-offs, Iris's father apologetically asks Iris to consider marrying Richard Griffen, a successful manufacturer of knitwear. At the age of eighteen, Iris concedes to marry a man in his mid-thirties to respect her father's wishes. It is the choices she made during her married life that create moral issues, the details of which I shall discuss mainly in Chapter 3.

Now that I have introduced the plot, if I concisely specify my aim in this thesis, it is to prove that the narrator Iris is an evil narcissist. That is, I shall attempt to show that her self-love was and is a key principle in her life, which dictates the course of her action, and controls the contents and the form of her memoir. Certainly, the way she reveals buried secrets and the way she describes her situations and her interpersonal relationships raise a number of questions about her motives for uncovering her troublesome past. As Kearney rightly points out, in an attempt to recount our life we must consider carefully both the moral and existential implications as to "how and what we recount."¹² It is true that "stories are told from 'positions,'"¹³ from a certain point of view, and the urge to tell one's life is hardly an impartial and disinterested undertaking.¹⁴ But when one presents oneself as a kind of witness and claims to tell the reader the truth, this writing of one's own life becomes morally relevant. The question of whether Iris is a reliable narrator¹⁵ thus arises out of the nature of her memoir, which is both testimonial and confessional.

In discussing secrecy dominating Atwood's novels, Lorna Irvine (1988) finds Freud's interpretation of religious writings quite illuminating and relevant in understanding Atwood's

¹² Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 31.

¹³ Jens Brockmeir & Rom Harre, "Narrative, Problems and promises of alternative paradigm", in Jens Brockmeir and Donal Carbaugh (eds.), *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2001), pp. 39-58, p. 46.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 51

¹⁵ Earl Ingersoll, "Waiting for the End: Closure in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*", in *Studies in the Novel* (Winter, 2003), Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 543-558, p. 548.

works. In those religious writings, Freud points out the conflict “between clarification and obfuscation, between a manifest story and a latent one.”¹⁶ I shall quote some of Freud’s comments on the story of Moses in the Old Testament, which as Irvine indicates, shed light on the nature of texts prevalent in Atwood’s novels including *The Blind Assassin*:

On the one hand, certain transformations got to work on it, falsifying the text in accord with secret tendencies...On the other hand, an indulgent piety reigned over it, anxious to keep everything as it stood, indifferent to whether the details fitted together or nullified one another. Thus almost everywhere there can be found *striking omissions, disturbing repetitions, palpable contradictions*, signs of things the communication of which was never intended...that is why in so many textual distortions we may count on finding *the suppressed and abnegated material* hidden away somewhere, though in an altered shape and torn out of its original connections. (my italics)¹⁷

Indeed, omissions, contradictions, signs of unconscious revelation along with Iris’s repressed memories and suppressed desires are found in Iris’s narration. In a similar vein, Ruth Parkin-Gounelas (2004) indicates that *The Blind Assassin* represents the disjunction between the conscious mind, which rationalizes our reactions to the past, and the unconscious, which disrupts this process of ordering and explaining erratically.¹⁸ In addition to Iris’s conscious narrative control, certain workings of the unconscious is crucial to catching a glimpse of ‘the other side of the story.’ While introducing basic issues involving the relationship between the author and the reader, Marissa Bortolussi points out that on the basis of the text itself, it is possible for the reader to surmise what the author tries to communicate and what state of mind he or she is in.¹⁹ Here the author is not the actual author, but the “implied author” whose existence is constructed based on the content of the text, which means that certain messages and intentions that can be deduced from the text are not

¹⁶ Lorna Irvine, “Murder and Mayhem: Margaret Atwood Deconstructs”, in *Contemporary Literature* (Summer, 1988), Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 265-276, p. 265.

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 52, quoted in Irvine, p. 265.

¹⁸ Ruth Parkin-Gounelas, ““What isn’t there” in Margaret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin*: The Psychoanalysis of Duplicity”, in *Modern Fiction Studies* (Fall, 2004), Vol. 50, Issue 3, pp. 681-700, p. 684.

¹⁹ Marissa Bortolussi, *Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literary Response* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), “The Narrator”, pp. 60-96, p. 66.

necessarily the real author's.²⁰ If I confine my reading of authorial intention to Iris for the moment, as an author of her memoir, I aim to prove that, to her disadvantage, Iris inadvertently leaves signs of the discrepancy between what is said and what is implied in her memoir. Readers can thus infer from those signs her hidden goals as well as her psychological state, which Iris does not intend to convey.

As far as the possible moral scope for Iris's narration is concerned, what I take to be primary moral dimensions in the novel arises from Iris's bystander attitude, her partial description of Laura as well as her husband and her sister-in-law, and her claim to truth. In the opening part of the novel, *The bridge*, which significantly suggests the main direction of the novel, the narrator interprets Laura's white gloves as a "Pontius Pilate gesture" (*BA*, 4), by which I mean acting like a looker-on who does not want to be involved in a situation which often creates a moral dilemma. It is rather significant that Iris uses this phrase in reading Laura's last message and in so doing reveals her morally ambiguous attitude towards her sister. As it turns out, it is the way Iris acted in critical moments that is highly reminiscent of a Pontius Pilate gesture.

Iris's way of seeing truth also raises a moral question, in the sense that her relativist view of truth presents her belief as the sole mark of 'relative' truth. As Snare points out, the relativist view regards "everyone" as "an authority" in the "empowerment" sense, which allows for the claim that it is not about discovering "what is already true", but about "me" making it true by believing it.²¹ On the other hand, Iris also seems to have the subjectivist view, according to which in a moral dispute, "the nature of the dispute is such that neither party need be mistaken."²² Thus her subjectivist view of truth can also effectively function as supporting 'no-moral-judgement' stance.

²⁰ Bortolussi, p. 66.

²¹ Snare, p. 99.

²² *ibid.*, p.112.

From a narratological perspective, the narrative structure of the book also seems to lend support to Iris's construction of truth, which in turn in a way reflects Atwood's control. It consists of two main narratives: Iris Chase's memoir as a primary text and *The Blind Assassin*, a "novel-within-a-novel" with fantasy and science-fiction elements, supposedly written by her sister, as an embedded text. Newspaper clippings, which hint at an official and public version of Iris's life, are inserted throughout the novel. Staels points out that like Atwood's earlier novel *Alias Grace*, *The Blind Assassin* belongs to postmodern historical fiction whose main features are "metafictional self-reflexivity and the thematizing of the problems of historiography."²³ In this kind of novel, the distinction between fiction and fact is often blurred through the embedding of various texts. The manner in which they are "interrelated, mirrored or doubled" does encourage the reader to speculate possible "deeper meaning of the characters," opening up different perspectives.²⁴ However, my approach to this "specular" narrative will be limited in a way that only looks at certain aspects relevant to the construction of (narrative) truth and its moral dimension.

In order to clarify the direction of my thesis, in the following chapter I will introduce some theories of evil and of narcissism including some features of self-narratives, which I think can also be linked to the problem of narcissism and self-deception. These preliminary studies will provide a basis for my discussion of 'evil narcissist' in my actual analysis in Chapters 3 and 4. To be more specific, in Chapter 3, Iris's interpersonal relationships will be examined, and in Chapter 4, I shall discuss Iris's manoeuvre as the author of her memoir, i.e. her attempt to persuade the reader to perceive her memoir as a 'tragedy'.

To support my arguments, I will focus on Kant's moral theory and apply his account of evil as violations of the moral law resulting from partial attention to self-love to Iris's strong narcissistic

²³ Hilde Staels, "Atwood's Specular Narrative: *The Blind Assassin*", in *English Studies* (April, 2004), Vol. 85, Issue 2, pp.147-160, p. 148.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 149.

tendencies. In this connection, different forms of self-deception will also be discussed. Some of the insights produced in psychoanalysis concerning the nature of narcissism will be utilized in comprehending the nature of her relationship with other main characters. In my discussion of Iris's authorial manoeuvre, while continuing to pay attention to marks of her secret narcissism, I shall consider Hume's idea of morality in connection with Iris's moral deliberation and her attempt to block direct criticism of her action. Some narrative aspects, e.g., morally relevant features of self-narratives will be looked at as well in relation to Iris's self-creation, which is arguable and has a significant bearing on her construction of 'truth'.

Searching for authorial intention, as Carroll points out, is a tricky task because no generally acceptable epistemological principle seems to exist. It is hard to tell whether in a given instance, the implied point belongs to the actual author or the narrator²⁵. It does not follow, however, from this difficulty that we can dismiss authorial intention without hesitation like some formalist critics who regarded the author as being outside his or her own work. Contemporary literary criticism agrees on the point that we need to at least conjecture the author's reason to use this or that method in a way that illuminates and enlarges the interpretive scope. Hence, I will explore the possible rationale behind Atwood's narrative strategy as well as Iris's manoeuvre to appeal to the reader mainly in Chapter 4.

²⁵ Noel Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), "Part III Interpretation and Intention", pp. 157-213, p. 166.

2. Theories of evil and narcissism

There is no doubt that a great amount of research on evil has illuminated our comprehension of evil. However, our ambitious project of giving it a definite and comprehensive definition proves impossible because of the limitations of language in describing the phenomenon of evil. The point that “what can be said in words is finite and necessarily approximate”²⁶ implies that we can only cover some aspects of evil and that no one theory is adequate to produce a satisfactory account of evil. Yet this insurmountable obstacle should not prevent us from pursuing a better understanding of evil, which enables us to recognize and confront evil in a more effective way. Thus we need to look at different definitions and various perspectives, which, as Kubarych (2005) points out, belong to the same phenomenon.

Since Kant’s moral psychology involving egoism and self-love will be an important tool for my analysis, I will examine more carefully the Kantian notion of evil closely linked to what he calls the authority of the moral law. This Kantian model provides a possible connection to the concept of ‘banality of evil,’ which I shall elaborate as some of contemporary interpretations of his moral theory proceed. In contrast with Kant’s moral theory, I will also look at David Hume’s idea of morality, which emphasizes the influence of human emotions in matters of moral judgements. Nietzsche’s sceptical approach to the idea of truth and the notion of morality will be mentioned in relation to his criticism of one’s general tendency to evade responsibility by resorting to already given conclusions of a moral theory. The exhaustive study of evil is beyond the scope of this thesis, so I shall limit my attention to those accounts which more or less can be related to my discussion of moral evil.

²⁶ L. Wittgenstein (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1922, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953) quoted in Thomas S Kubarych “On Studying Evil” in *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* (2005), Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 265-269, p. 265.

In section 2.2, I will offer a brief overview of narcissism from the psychoanalytic perspective. There have been a huge number of studies on this subject, but for the sake of relevance and brevity, some essential aspects concerning the nature of narcissism, which can be associated with moral issues, will be looked at. As is generally known, the smooth process of the early childhood developmental phases helps one to adapt and develop healthy relationships with others whereas failure to acknowledge the existence of other objects and come to terms with them not only hinders desirable interpersonal relationships but also inhibits personal growth. Since memoirs belong to self-narratives, which often entail moral scope as well as narcissistic aspects, characteristics of self-narratives will also be presented.

2.1. Theories of evil

According to Kant, evil is the adoption of maxims contrary to the moral law. Here maxims refer to “the subjective principle adopted by the agent.”²⁷ In this account, freedom of the will is an essential element in discerning the locus of both good and evil present in the will. Thus the idea of moral law and free will are the main constitutive elements in Kantian ethics. In this respect, it is easy to observe that for Kant evil is a phenomenon inseparable from human acts, which stresses one’s responsibility for one’s own choices and consequences. In this respect, it is worth looking at some contemporary scholars’ interpretations of the Kantian notion of evil, which would help to recognize the applicability of Kant’s account to modern and present-day situations.

Richard J. Bernstein points out that while rejecting the idea that our natural inclinations are themselves the source of evil, Kant focuses on how we respond to different and conflicting incentives that we confront in a moral situation. What is at issue here is not that good maxims

²⁷ Gary Banham, *Kant’s Practical Philosophy: From Critique to Doctrine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), “The Supreme Principle of Morality”, pp. 64-92, p. 69.

contain the incentives to obey the moral law and evil maxims constitute the incentives to follow our inclinations or desires. Rather, the focus is on “how these various incentives are *ordered*”:

man is evil only in that he reverses the moral order of the incentives when he adopts them into his maxim. He adopts, indeed, the moral law along with the law of self-love; yet when he becomes aware that they cannot remain on a par with each other but that one must be subordinated to the other as its supreme condition, he makes the incentive of self-love and its inclinations the condition of obedience to the moral law.²⁸

Thus, what matters the most is how we ‘order’ different and conflicting incentives. In other words, from the Kantian point of view, a morally good person is the one who “incorporates the moral law into his maxim and gives it priority.”²⁹ In other words, the fact that one recognizes certain moral values does not automatically make one a proper moral agent, but only when one is consistently ‘guided’ by one’s moral beliefs and acts in accordance with them does one become a ‘legitimate’ moral agent. Despite his awareness that there can be some grey areas in issues of morality, Kant adheres to his rigorous point that man is either morally good or morally evil. Further, while clarifying two types of imperative, i.e., hypothetical and categorical imperatives, Kant maintains that the criteria for moral evaluation must be given “in the test of universality,” by which he means the logic of categorical imperatives: “*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.*”³⁰ To put it another way, categorical imperatives demand that one act in such a manner that the maxim of one’s action can become universally applicable. By contrast, hypothetical imperatives rest on empirical grounds often serving questionable subjective ends, which allows for contingency and “a number of subordinate

²⁸ From Emmanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (from here on, *Religion*), trans. T.M. Greene and H.H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp.31-32 cited in Richard J. Bernstein, “Radical Evil: Kant at War with Himself”, in Maria Pia Lara (ed.), *Rethinking Evil* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 55-85, p. 60.

²⁹Bernstein, in Pia Lara (ed.), p. 62.

³⁰From James W. Ellington, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981) cited in Banham, p. 69.

conditions” in evaluating one’s action from a moral point of view.³¹ Hence, it can be assumed that Kant’s rigid moral standpoint stems from the unrelenting application of universality.

On the other hand, Bernstein raises a question of why Kant introduces “radical evil” whose meaning is nonetheless not clear at all. Bernstein observes that in spite of the strong connotation of the term, Kant is not referring to a specific *type* of evil or evil maxim. For instance, in her discussion of totalitarianism and evil, Hannah Arendt relates radical evil³² to “the attempt to eliminate spontaneity from the human race...the attempt to reshape human nature itself by doing away with the very unpredictability that lies at the root of human freedom and action.”³³ In brief, radical evil perverts both the law and human subjectivity. As the conditions for radical evil, Arendt suggests “the desolation of individuals who are economically superfluous and socially uprooted.”³⁴ As her closing comments in *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, Arendt again defines radical evil as a phenomenon that “confronts us with its overpowering reality and breaks down all standards we know.”³⁵ It is more or less clear that Arendt’s radical evil defined above points to a specific kind of evil, namely totalitarianism. By contrast, Kant conceives of radical evil as “the root of *all* moral evil, whatever its extent.” To put it more specifically in Kantian terms, it refers to “the universal propensity [Hang] to evil, which serves as the precondition of the adoption of maxims contrary to moral law, therefore, of evil actions in the familiar sense.”³⁶ If we follow this line of argument, radical evil can be identified with simply the propensity to violate the moral law for the sake of selfish desires. Bernstein thus argues that there is nothing new in Kant’s notion of radical evil

³¹ Banham, pp. 68, 70.

³² According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (seventh edition, 1982), ‘radical’ means: of the root(s); naturally inherent, essential, fundamental; forming the basis, primary; affecting the foundation, going to the root (*radical change, cure, reform*).

³³ Peg Birmingham, “Holes of Oblivion: The Banality of Radical Evil”, in *Hypatia* (Winter, 2003), Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 80-103, p. 87.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 88

³⁵ Cited in Bernstein in Pia, Lara (ed.), p. 63.

³⁶ Henry E. Allison, “Reflections on the Banality of (Radical) Evil: A Kantian Analysis”, from *Idealism and Freedom: Essays on Kant’s Theoretical and Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1996) reprinted in Pia Lara (ed.), pp. 86-100, p. 87. From here on quoted as Allison, “Reflections”.

because it is almost equal to restating what is already known: we sometimes refuse to do what duty requires, knowingly deviating from the moral law; and no matter how good one is, one cannot be completely free from this dark possibility. He concludes that the appeal to 'radical' evil as a kind of solution to the question of inscrutability of human will is not successful because it does not provide any fresh perspective to the matter.

Interestingly, Henry E. Allison approaches Kant's idea of radical evil from a different angle. He attempts to link Kantian radical evil to 'banal' evil. At this point, Arendt's concept of the "banality" of evil stands in need of explanation. Initially she adopts the expression 'radical evil' to describe the Nazis' terrible crime, but later agrees on Karl Jaspers's point that by employing the term radical, she might unintentionally confer "streak of Satanic greatness" on those Nazi perpetrators.³⁷ Emphasizing their "prosaic triviality," Jaspers coins the phrase "the banality of evil."³⁸ Thus, Arendt sees the danger of mythologizing them as some kind of heroes and consequently introduces the coined phrase, the banality of evil. Indeed, while attending the Eichmann trial, the former Nazi commander in a concentration camp, she detects no demonic will in him: he is like us, ordinary people. In her view it is Eichmann's shallowness and thoughtlessness that explains his failure to fathom the enormity of his crime. In her letter to Gershom Scholem, she states her changed view of evil:

It is indeed my opinion that evil is never "radical," that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension...it is "thought-defying,"...because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its "banality." Only the good has depth and can be radical.³⁹

³⁷ Robert Fine, "Understanding Evil: Arendt and the Final Solution", published in *Social Theory after the Holocaust*, ed. Fine and Turner (2000), reprinted in Pia Lara (ed.), pp. 131-150, p. 143.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 143.

³⁹ Quoted in Allison, "Reflections", in Pia Lara (ed.), p. 86.

Characterized in this way, her account of totalitarian evil as banal creates much criticism, the gist of which is that she diminishes the horrible extent of evil manifested in the Holocaust with her modest concept of the banality of evil. However, the term ‘banal’ does not necessarily make totalitarian evil trivial. As Elshtain notes, for Arendt, it is banal because it trivializes the most horrific realities imaginable and disengages evildoers from their evil deeds.⁴⁰ It is worth noting that Arendt mentions “the roots” of evil here, the question of which she finds unable to answer. Arendt finds herself in roughly the same position with Kant, who rejects considering any possibility of diabolical motivations. But she leaves the question raised by Eichmann unresolved by regarding it as incomprehensible. It is somewhat surprising to find that she criticizes Kant’s attempt to account for evil in comprehensible terms such as the temptation of self-interest, which might enable her to figure out a way to understand the Eichmann case. I shall soon return to her conclusion that Eichmann seems to have no clear motives, which needs to be reconsidered.

While focusing on the substantial effect of self-love on a moral agent’s behaviour, Allison points out the fact that Kant also briefly mentions the possibility of accounting for envy and spitefulness as “diabolical vices” in terms of the original propensity to evil. This interpretation of Kant’s demonstrates the possibility of the emergence of monstrous evil when the extent of self-love is given a free rein:

...the vices associated with man’s inhumanity to man, which seems to differ qualitatively from the mere subordination of moral considerations to self-love, are actually grounded in this very self-love as it is affected by the competitive social context in which human beings find themselves...Although originally merely a desire for equality...it gradually becomes transformed into the craving for superiority, with which come inevitably jealousy and rivalry. Finally, from these stems what Kant terms “vices of culture,” since they only arise in a cultured or civilized state...At their most extreme, these vices of culture become the devilish vices.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Mathewes, Charles T, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 179.

⁴¹ Sharon Anderson-Gold’s abstract of Kant’s view of the possibility of ‘devilish’ evil in *Religion* cited in Allison, “Reflections”, in Pia Lara (ed.), pp. 94-95.

Thus, originally a harmless self-love, when viewed in competitive social context, can provide a source of the most horrible crimes. In other words, without the need of a diabolical will, the bare propensity to evil can potentially embody a seed of extreme evil transformed into a cultural phenomenon. In this respect, as Allison indicates, we can find a certain connection between Kant's notion of radical evil and Arendt's concept of 'banal' evil. On the other hand, Allison objects to Allen Wood's attempt to reduce the idea of radical evil to an "empirical-anthropological concept," namely, what Sharon Anderson-Gold terms "unsociable sociability."⁴² As an alternative view, he maintains that while the propensity to evil relates to the realm of pure moral philosophy, the anthropological feature belongs to the domain of empirical knowledge of human nature.

Even if the possible extent of the propensity to evil is convincingly shown by the extended application of the nature of self-love in a social context, there still remains a problem. From the Kantian perspective, Eichmann might be able to escape punishment because of his incapacity to recognize the criminality of his acts. However, Kant again suggests the possibility of "wilful ignorance, a self-imposed thoughtlessness" on the criminal's part, which involves the idea of self-deception.⁴³ Allison aptly states Kant's view of "moral deliberation":

...it is precisely the testing of maxims that provides the major occasion for self-deception, which here takes the form of disguising from ourselves the true nature of the principles upon which we act...immoral maxims appear to pass the universalizability test only because they ignore or obscure morally salient features of a situation.⁴⁴

This proves that the moral imperative can be applied in a wrong way by calculating evil agents, who nevertheless does not ignore or defy the authority of the moral law. Indeed, there are three grades of

⁴² Henry E. Allison, "On the Very Idea of a Propensity of Evil", in *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 36 (2002), pp. 337-348, p. 345.

⁴³ Allison, "Reflections", in Pia Lara (ed.), p. 95.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 98.

this propensity: frailty, impurity and wickedness.⁴⁵ If I explain them briefly, the first level refers to the “indecisive incorporation of the moral maxim” and the second degree concerns the “mixing of moral with non-moral motivations in the same maxim,” which produces “outward conformity but inward hypocrisy.”⁴⁶ Lastly, the third degree of this propensity involves “reversal of ethical order” so that selfish incentives subordinate the demands of the moral law, which implicates the “depravity” or “perversity” of a moral agent.⁴⁷ Self-deception operates through all these levels. It is thus quite possible that Eichmann might have some motives behind his callous acts. Arendt’s rendering of Eichmann as motiveless is problematic because it risks exempting him from his responsibility. Maeve Cooke also supports the idea that Eichmann can be read as representing ‘banal’ evil. Cooke rightly points out the fact that Arendt somehow concentrates her scrutiny on Eichmann’s inability to think, which seems to prevent her from seeing the very banal aspect of his motive. Cooke finds it inadequate and insufficient that she is somewhat hesitant to call Eichmann ‘evil.’ His action and deeds are deemed evil, but not the person. To clarify the issue, Cooke introduces the idea of an “evil heart,” which refers to “a perversion or corruption of the human heart that results from a faulty moral disposition.”⁴⁸ Here an evil disposition comes into being with “systematic transgression” and manifests itself in actions over time.⁴⁹ Cooke concisely states Eichmann’s cardinal motivation in life: self-interest. By placing his career and security of his home life above everything else, Eichmann ignores the necessity of moral reasoning, which might have made him act otherwise. To sum up, unlike its apparently narrow formulation of morality and evil, Kant’s moral psychology proves dynamic in answering some difficult and perplexing questions raised by contemporary thinkers.

⁴⁵ I shall further elaborate on these three levels of evil in Chapter 3.

⁴⁶ Gary Banham, *Kant’s Practical Philosophy: From Critique to Doctrine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), “Radical Evil and Moral Redemption”, pp. 118-151, p. 126.

⁴⁷ Banham, p. 127.

⁴⁸ Maeve Cooke, “An Evil Heart: Moral Evil and Moral Identity”, in Pia Lara (ed.), pp. 113-130, p. 122.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 124

As has been clear, Kant's moral principles are based on rationality, the power of reason. On the contrary, David Hume argues: "reason alone can never produce any action or give rise to volition."⁵⁰ In light of his view of the indeterminate role of reason in moral action, his claim that "rules of morality" are not "conclusions of reason"⁵¹ can be understood as suggesting that rationality alone is not sufficient for stimulating action. According to Hume, the faculty of reason can be divided into two kinds: one can be employed in finding "necessary truths," by which he means "truths which say what has to be the case," and which has to do with the abstract world of ideas; the other kind can be used in searching for "contingent truths," which involve the realm of 'realities' and are about "what is in fact the case".⁵² Hume thus points out that scholars on ethics often make a certain questionable transition, confusing abstract moral evaluation with statements of empirical facts: their discussion of "what is the case in the world" easily switches to "what ought to be the case."⁵³ In other words, without close examination, they often make a mistake by deriving "ought" from "is". While refuting any attempt to ground "moral thought and practice" in either of the two uses of the faculty of reason, Hume pays attention to the role of passion and sentiments in creating a desire in the agent to perform a particular action. What he attempts to clarify here is that the "practical nature" of our moral deliberation quite often, though not entirely, depends upon emotion.⁵⁴

As regards the issue of virtue, Hume makes a distinction between natural virtues and artificial ones. Natural virtues are those that are not systematically taught to the agent, and thus genuinely appreciated by the spectator.⁵⁵ In this respect, he argues that justice is an artificial virtue in that

⁵⁰ David Hume (1888) *A Treatise of Human Nature* (ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge), Oxford, (1888: 414) cited in Mark D. Platts, *Moral Realities: An Essay in Philosophical Psychology* (London, New York: Routledge, 1991), (Part two) "Fact and Action in Hume's moral theory", pp. 109-143, p. 110.

⁵¹ Hume 1888: book III, part I, section I quoted in Platts, p. 109.

⁵² Platts, pp. 110 -111.

⁵³ Snare, pp. 83-84.

⁵⁴ Platts, p. 117.

⁵⁵ Hume's Moral Theory in the Treatise, < <http://www.iep.utm.edu/h/humemora.htm#H3> >.

under the influence of education and social convention our sense of justice is ‘programmed’ to maintain social order. Certainly artificial virtues are not much different from what we would call ‘duties’ in that they are a result of ‘education’. The difference between natural and artificial virtues can be made from another angle. Acts stemming from natural virtues create genuinely sympathetic pleasure whereas acts derived from artificial virtues generate pleasure only in a limited sense because of the mixed motives of the acts.⁵⁶ What is worth noting from the spectator’s standpoint is that as Hume indicates, the reason why we often approve of virtues is that they are considered agreeable. Accordingly, one does not want to have any part in the kind of action that causes one “a special kind of pain.”⁵⁷ In respect of pleasure and pain associated with moral thinking, as Amelie Rorty aptly observes, Hume presents a good example where the sources of moral corruption can be located in the “dynamic patterns of ordinary psychological activity.”⁵⁸

Although in a different sense, the rejection of objective moral standards is also seen in Nietzsche’s questioning of the very idea of morality. For instance, in *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche strongly criticizes most of the dominant moral systems in western thought. Christianity and Kantian ethics are, among others, the main targets of his criticism. In his view, every attempt at the “grounding of morals” is nothing but “an erudite form of *good* faith in the dominant morality.”⁵⁹ What is intriguing in Nietzsche’s view is that the notion of truth can often be employed to shift one’s responsibility to an external source. As Ken Gemes points out, the invocation of God typically functions as a means of evading responsibility. In short, Nietzsche asserts the need that “we must become our own authorities, our own basis.”⁶⁰ It is not surprising then to find that he

⁵⁶ Hume’s Moral Theory in the Treatise, < <http://www.iep.utm.edu/h/humemora.htm#H3> >.

⁵⁷ Platts, p. 134.

⁵⁸ Amelie Rorty, “How to harden your heart: six easy ways to become corrupt”, from *Yale Review*, April 1998 in Rorty (ed.), pp. 282-287, p. 282. Quoted from here on as Rorty, “How to harden your heart”.

⁵⁹ Fredreich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of Future* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann & Judith Norman and translated by Judith Norman, p. 76.

⁶⁰ Ken Gemes, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Truth”, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (Mar.,1992), Vol. 52, No. 1, pp. 47-65, p. 50.

strongly suggests “a revaluation of values.”⁶¹ As an alternative to what he calls “slave morality,” which more or less refers to influential Christian ethics, he presents “master morality” whose main concern is not “principles of right and wrong” but rather “the assessment of persons.”⁶² As Snare points out, it is a virtue morality of “good and bad,” not a morality of good and evil, which stresses “actual achievements, actual successes, actual abilities and skills, actual excellences.”⁶³ In this respect, pride and egoism is a highly appreciated character trait. The central roles of intention, motive and will in Christian ethics are not regarded as crucial to master morality. Indeed, Nietzsche points out the manner that the notion of intention is expediently used:

Intention as the entire origin and prehistory of an action: under this prejudice people have issued moral praise...Shouldn't we be facing a renewed necessity to effect a reversal and fundamental displacement of values? Shouldn't we be standing on the threshold of a period that would be designated, negatively at first, as extra-moral? the intention is only a sign and symptom that first needs to be interpreted...it is a sign that means too many things and consequently means almost nothing by itself.⁶⁴

Further, he attacks slave morality, whose ideals are focused on humbleness and altruism, as a “morality of utility”:

Evil is perceived as something powerful and dangerous; it is felt to contain awesome quality, a subtlety and strength that block any incipient contempt...evil inspires fear; but according to master morality, it is *good* that inspires and wants to inspire fear, while the “bad” man is seen as contemptible... within the terms of slave morality, the good man must always be *unthreatening*.⁶⁵

His point that slave morality comes into being and takes root with “the inversion of values,” by which he means adopting the opposite values of master morality through self-deception, implicates

⁶¹ Nietzsche, p. 91.

⁶² Snare, p. 121.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 122.

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, p. 33.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 156.

some psychological elements in its development.⁶⁶ In short, Nietzsche attempts to show how people uncritically receive, accept certain values and regard them as ‘truths.’ Thus his argument runs: “It is no more than a moral prejudice that the truth is worth more than appearance... Let us admit this much: that life could not exist except on the basis of perspectival valuations and appearances.”⁶⁷ His argument that there are no moral phenomena, but only (moral) interpretations of the phenomena⁶⁸ seems to support his claim above. He might be seen as a kind of relativist whose scepticism often questions the possibility of judgements of right and wrong, but as Gemes rightly observes, the point Nietzsche is trying to make is that “all our beliefs are thoroughly conditioned.”⁶⁹ If we further look at Nietzsche’s question of the very idea of morality, it is necessary to understand general questions with regard to morality. There are two poles of ethics that influence our way of thinking: normative ethics and meta-ethics. The former involves the question of what are the general principles of morality whereas the latter concerns the question of what ‘is’ a moral judgement. To put it in simple terms, normative ethics is concerned with “what kind of acts are right” and with “what features of them make them right.”⁷⁰ Thus besides the identification of right or wrong acts, normative ethics requires some general moral formulas providing a ground or justification for particular moral judgements. As I have shown above, Nietzsche questions the validity of those various moral grounds, the implication being that the question of ‘what moral is’ is not even raised. To sum up, he contrives to lead us to see his standpoint and rethink what we believe are values.

2.2 Narcissism

⁶⁶ Snare, p. 129.

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, p. 35.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 64.

⁶⁹ Gemes, p. 51.

⁷⁰ Snare, p. 6.

Freud formulates two types of narcissism: primary narcissism and secondary narcissism. The former refers to a narcissistic state “without objects”, which means that no differentiation between ego and object occurs. The latter is identified with narcissistic object choice, which points to the realization of the existence of other objects and the struggle to come to terms with the loss of unity.⁷¹ The smooth transition from primary to secondary (normal) narcissism is hindered when one severs one’s contact with objects in the world outside. While taking an example of paraphrenics – those with dementia praecox, or schizophrenia, Freud points out that they suffer from megalomania and show no interest in the external world. Similarly, patients with hysteria or obsessional neurosis withdraw their interest from the world outside. But despite their apparent alienation from persons and things, it is proven that they retain them “in phantasy” by replacing actual objects with imaginary objects.⁷² This condition is termed as *introversion* of the libido. When one is able to manage without creating an imaginary relationship with the outer world in spite of one’s state of isolation, it can be said that it opens up a path to ‘recovery’— the possibility of leading the libidinal energy back to a real object, which marks a sign of normal narcissism.

Most interestingly, Freud links the matter of object-choice to that of an “impoverishment of the ego.”⁷³ The point regarding a ‘deficient’ state of ego is that the “anaclitic” type representing complete object-love can lead to an impoverishment of ego libido in favour of the love-object. By contrast, narcissistic individuals are incapable of developing a true object-love. Their need lies mainly in the direction of “being loved.” This also can cause the poverty of ego because one’s own inability to love can create feelings of inferiority, simultaneously lowering one’s self-regard.⁷⁴

⁷¹Jean-Michel Quinodoz, *The Taming of Solitude: Separation Anxiety in Psychoanalysis* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), (trans. Philip Slotkin), p. 40.

⁷² Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers Volume 4* (New York: Back Books, Inc., 1959) (authorized translation under the supervision of Joan Riviere), p. 31. (“On Narcissism (1914)” pp. 30-59)

⁷³ Freud, *Collected Papers, Volum 4*, p. 45.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 56

When viewed from another angle, this deficient state of ego can be connected to a sense of powerlessness whose effect creates humiliating narcissistic injury.

The notions of introjection and projection are also worth looking at in terms of the interaction between ego-libido and object-libido in primary narcissism. Most predictably, primary narcissism directs the ego libido to oneself, which in turn generates some self-satisfaction and indifference to the outside world. At this stage, the ego-subject is equal to what is pleasurable and the outside world coincides with what is indifferent. When the ego-subject recognizes objects in the external world and finds them intruding, if I borrow Freud's phrase, the first inner instinctual stimuli are pain. Correspondingly, the instincts of self-preservation are activated under the influence of the pleasure principle:

The objects presenting themselves, in so far as they are sources of pleasure, are absorbed by the ego into itself, 'introjected' (according to an expression coined by Ferenczi); while, on the other hand, the ego thrusts forth upon the external world whatever within itself gives rise to pain (v. *infra*: the mechanism of projection).⁷⁵

While the original *reality-ego* distinguishes external from internal on the basis of a reasonable objective criterion, this pleasure-ego endeavours to avoid any possible pain caused by the recognition of disturbing external objects. Moreover, the pleasure ego develops hate towards whatever object that causes painful feelings. In this situation while contriving to distance itself from the object associated with pain, ego-libido shows a sign of withdrawal from the external world and at the same time reveals its hatred and aggression towards the object.⁷⁶ What is in play in this object-stage is the ego's indiscriminate rendering of pain as harmful:

The ego hates, abhors and pursues with intent to destroy all objects which are for it a source of painful feelings, without taking into account whether they

⁷⁵ Freud, *Collected Papers, Volume 4*, p.78. ("Instincts and Their Vicissitudes (1915)", pp. 60-83)

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

mean to it frustration of sexual satisfaction or of gratification of the needs of self-preservation.⁷⁷

What is worthy of consideration in relation to hate is the first phase of incorporating or “devouring” the object of love, which is very close to “abolition of any separate existence on the part of the object.”⁷⁸ The fact that this preliminary stage of love borders on hate in respect of the destructive attitude towards its object implies the ‘ambivalence’ of love, which is often accompanied by feelings of hate.

Indeed, in discussing melancholics’ mourning process, Freud again points out the ambivalence of love and hate involving narcissism. The mourning process is: (1) an object choice – the libido attaches itself to a certain person; (2) this object-relationship is undermined; (3) while the object-cathexis loses its power, the free libido withdraws itself into the ego and is not directed to another object.⁷⁹ The characteristic thing about a melancholic is that the last part of the process serves to identify the ego with the lost or abandoned object. Here, the object-choice is made on a narcissistic basis i.e., the narcissistic identification with the object, the result of which is that a melancholic is susceptible to regression to a preliminary narcissistic stage of object choice involving ambivalent feelings of love and hate.⁸⁰ In his discussion of the initial reaction of ego to this loss of object, Freud holds that ego defends itself by splitting, and introjecting the lost object into the split ego. This naturally causes an intrapsychic conflict between two parts of the ego. This splitting of the ego is subsequently followed by a “partial disavowal of reality” while the other part of the ego keeps its contact with reality.⁸¹

It is clear now that central to the normal development of narcissism is how well ego libido is converted into object libido, dealing with challenges of the external world at the same time. The

⁷⁷ Freud, *Collected Papers, Volume 4*, p. 81.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 82.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 159. (“Mourning and Melancholia (1917)”, pp. 152-170)

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 160. (Otto Rank’s remark)

⁸¹ Quindoze, pp. 45-46.

danger of yielding to libidinal impulses and of regression to the primary narcissistic state can nonetheless be avoided if the formation of an “ego-ideal” and the process of “sublimation” are successful. In a normal development of narcissism, libidinal impulses conflicting with the subject’s cultural and ethical ideas are subject to repression whose source comes from the “self-respect of the ego”, by which Freud further means the formation of an ideal.⁸² To this ideal ego, the real ego directs self-love wishing to recover the early perfection. On the other hand, sublimation – the process of the object-libido directing itself towards an aim other than that of sexual gratification – also occurs in relation to the control over libidinal instincts. What is noteworthy in the relationship between the ego ideal and sublimation is that the existence of a high ego ideal does not necessarily mean that from the claims of the ego ideal, the complete sublimation of primitive libidinal instincts follows.⁸³ Similarly, following Freud, Grunberger and Chasseguet-Smirgel suggest that all human experience is “oriented toward the reunification of the individual and his ego ideal, the carrier of the image of narcissistic perfection.”⁸⁴ The question is which direction the pursuit of renewed unity might take: progressive or regressive. Interestingly, they hold that narcissism could be the basis for a new sense of direction with regard to reality, bridging the pleasure principle and the reality principle. To be more specific, narcissism binds these principles by putting a great emphasis on real gratification brought by the perfect handling of aspects of reality. Simultaneously, it is very demanding in that it does not allow for compromises such as half-hearted adaptation to reality or isolated effort, which are “false substitutes for genuine satisfaction.”⁸⁵

Another major figure whose contribution to the study of narcissism deserves attention is Melanie Klein. She basically agrees with Freud that the primal processes of projection and introjection, which affect the infant’s emotions, often creating anxieties, initiate object relations.

⁸² Freud, *Collected Papers Volume 4*, pp. 50-51.

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 52.

⁸⁴ C. Fred Alford ““Eros and Civilization” after Thirty Years: A Reconsideration in Light of Recent Theories of Narcissism”, in *Theory and Society* (Nov., 1987), Vol. 16, No. 6, pp. 869-890, p. 874.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 873.

But she differs in one point: “the infant has from the beginning of post-natal life a relation to mother (although focusing primarily on her breast) which is imbued with the fundamental elements of an object relation, i.e. love, hatred, phantasies, anxieties, and defences.”⁸⁶ That is to say, the differentiation between ego and object exists from birth with the accompanying psychological reactions. As regards the super-ego formation, unlike Freud’s ego ideal, which represents only good, she suggests that its beginning originates in the introjection of the mother’s breast, which represents “both good and bad”. This developmental process extends over years revealing rapid vicissitudes: namely the “fluctuations between love and hate; between external and internal situations; between perception of reality and the phantasies relating to it; and, accordingly an interplay between persecutory anxiety and idealization.”⁸⁷ As the ego’s ability to integrate and synthesize good and bad aspects of objects increases, the possibility of healthy narcissism becomes higher.

With a view to deepening our understanding of complicated aspects of narcissism, it is worth looking at the theory of anxiety and guilt inextricably linked with narcissism. Klein puts forward the hypothesis that the primary cause of anxiety stems from the death instinct – the fear of annihilation. The desire for devouring, destroying an object and the fear of being devoured by the object, e.g. mother or father, coexist side by side creating anxiety and tension between the two states. Simultaneously the life instinct conceives of the internalised good breast as an important internal object, attempting to preserve and protect it from the threat of annihilation, for the breast is indispensable for self-preservation.⁸⁸ With this mechanism in mind, if we pay attention to the nature of anxiety, while pointing out that there is no clear-cut distinction between them, Klein suggests two main forms of anxiety: persecutory and depressive anxiety. The former is dominantly

⁸⁶ Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and other works 1946-1963*, (London: Virgo Press, 1988), p. 49. (“The origins of transference (1952)”, pp. 48-56)

⁸⁷ Klein, p. 50.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 30. (“On the theory of anxiety and guilt (1948)”, pp. 25-42)

concerned with the annihilation of the ego and the latter is primarily related to “the harm done to internal and external loved objects by the subject’s destructive impulses.”⁸⁹ It is easy to observe that depressive anxiety with its manifold contents and with its tendency to make reparation is more closely bound up with guilt. On the other hand, persecutory anxiety persists along with depressive anxiety, but the intensity of it lessens, which enables depressive anxiety to ascend and take control over persecutory anxiety. Klein also suggests that depressive anxiety, guilt, and the compensatory urge are palpably present only when destructive impulses are overwhelmed by love for the object.⁹⁰ According to Klein, the reparative tendency can also be interpreted in a way that throws light on the interaction between life and death instincts, namely as “an expression of the life instinct in its struggle against the death instinct.”⁹¹ In terms of the emergence of anxiety associated with narcissism Charles Shepherdson is quite right in perceiving the basic structure of the event of narcissism as a “trauma”. As Freud notes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the moment of narcissism signals the “experience of war,” which repeats itself, “returning in dreams or nightmares that bring the subject back to the experience of trauma.”⁹² Thus the past, says Freud, is “*repeated instead of being remembered*.”⁹³ What Freud finds far more significant in this regrettable repetition is an indication that one never recognized the traumatic event as such, which hinders the necessary process of putting it in temporal perspectives and giving it a place in any symbolic link. It should be noted here that where narcissism is concerned, Freud is not referring to actual historical trauma, but to a structural characteristic of the event of narcissism, which “happens without happening” in the sense that it is not experienced as such.

⁸⁹ Klein, p. 34.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 36.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 41.

⁹² Charles Shepherdson, “Telling Tales of Love: Philosophy, Literature, and Psychoanalysis” in *Diacritics* (Spring, 2000), Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 89-105, p. 94.

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 95.

To sum up main points regarding narcissism, Freud holds that in primary narcissism the child experiences “hate” as soon as it discovers the object whereas Klein argues that it is “envy” that arises when it realizes the existence of the object. If her view that there is differentiation between the subject and the object from birth is accepted, narcissistic rage can be seen as being an expression of envy. Then narcissism is more like “a defence against envy.”⁹⁴ The first expression of the life instinct is the idealization of the object, which is nevertheless a “temporary” narcissistic state. The relationship with the idealized object is then replaced by the recognition of an internal object as “good” rather than idealized, which facilitates the normal development towards the love of both internal and external objects. The death instinct and envy, on the other hand, create both destructive object relations and unstable, precarious internal structures, which can turn into a pathological narcissistic state.

If we pay attention to possible moral implications, which the main features of narcissism might create, Heinz Kohut regards “the right kind of self-love” as “foundational for moral agency.”⁹⁵ His idea of ‘selfobjects’ concerns the way narcissistic individuals with “fragile selves” use others to strengthen their self-esteem, which reflects the ‘instrumental’ nature of their relationship with others. In this context, other people do not stand as the whole of a person but only in a certain relation to narcissistic individuals’ self-interests and needs.⁹⁶ Therefore, the capacity to create an intimate and mature relationship with others is not found in those who are preoccupied with their unstable psychic structure endeavouring to stabilize it by often resorting to wrong methods. It is not difficult to notice that Kohut’s thinking about the functions of selfobjects is similar to that of Freud’s object relations concerning narcissism. Kohut mentions that selfobject

⁹⁴ From Segal, H. and Bell, D (1991). ‘The theory of narcissism in the work of Freud and Klein’, in J. Sandler, E. Person, and P. Fonagy (eds), *Freud’s ‘On narcissism – an introduction’* (Yale University Press), cited in Quindoze, pp. 71-72.

⁹⁵ Pauline Chazan, *Moral Self* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 63.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

functions remain irrespective of time, but go through “transformation and maturation,”⁹⁷ which suggests a normal development of narcissism and the prospects of healthy adulthood. What he stresses in filling the emotional vacuum caused by the effort to protect the misguided self-love is to love oneself as one is in contrast with loving oneself for certain qualities or talents,⁹⁸ which might enable one to treat others the same way. In relation to morally relevant self-transformation, it goes without saying that proper self-understanding with sufficient self-reflection can prompt this desirable development.

Now that we have seen essential features of narcissism, if we pay attention to possible effects of one’s narcissism on self-narratives, it is necessary to look at some main characteristics of self-narratives including the nature of narratives. Here my immediate concern is written self-narratives such as autobiographies and memoirs.

Undoubtedly, narrative is an effective way to approach the self. In an attempt to answer the question of ‘Who am I?’ one typically starts to tell a ‘story’. By situating oneself in a narrative life history, one can trace the origin of one’s desires, plot their development and link them to the life stories of others. In self-narratives, ‘I’ is not only the central character but also the author or co-author.⁹⁹ While discussing the Aristotelian notion of *mythos*, Kearney states a fundamental reason for our dependence on narratives:

Every human existence is a life in search of a narrative. This is not simply because it strives to discover a pattern to cope with the experience of chaos and confusion. It is also because each human life is *always already* an implicit story. Our very finitude constitutes us as beings who, to put it baldly, are born at the beginning and die at the end. And this gives a temporal structure to our lives which seek some kind of *significance* in terms of referrals back to our past (memory) and forward to our future (projection).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Chazan, p. 79.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 84.

⁹⁹ Jopling, p. 47.

¹⁰⁰ Kearney, p. 129.

The pursuit of meaning of life, i.e., the attempt to give a certain unity to life is thus one reason why one searches for a narrative. The other reason arises out of the temporality of human existence, which makes one's life more or less "pre-plotted." In other words, life is "pregnant with stories," a "nascent plot" waiting to materialize in a certain form of narrative. Through narratives, each life-story has an opportunity to be "transformed into the story of a life."¹⁰¹ In this respect, mimesis whose original meaning is to "discover *and* to create" entails "both a free-play of fiction *and* a responsibility to real life."¹⁰² Ricoeur's circle of triple mimesis succinctly shows the creative retelling process: "(1) the prefiguring of our life-world as it seeks to be told; (2) the configuring of the text in the act of telling; and (3) the refiguring of our existence as we return from narrative text to action."¹⁰³ What is noteworthy here is the referential effect of the refiguring process, which leaves room for the author's place in the narrative text, and for the reader's role as well in the interpretive process. In connection with the role of a narrative in self-understanding, if we look briefly at the theory of philosophical narrativism, there are four premises concerning the relationship with narrative and the self: (1) The self is intricately related to the narrative that is woven across the history of a life; (2) The unity of the narrative enables the self to find a certain unity for itself; (3) no final understanding is possible as long as life goes on, which allows for new narrative orderings; (4) Discrete components of the narrative about the self require some understanding about the narrative as a whole, but without some knowledge of individual components, there would be little understanding of the narrative (i.e. the hermeneutic circle).¹⁰⁴ Apart from their varied standpoints, they agree on the point that narrative is essentially the constitutive form of reflexive self-relations such as self-understanding.

¹⁰¹ Kearney, pp. 130-131.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, pp. 132, 133.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁰⁴ Jopling, p. 48

In terms of truth-value, philosophical narrativism holds that “narrative truth” should be distinguished from “historical truth.” To put it another way, narrative truth involves an “interpretive” account of the self, which provides a different and more relevant kind of basis for self-knowledge compared to “factual” description of the self.¹⁰⁵ According to the narrative theory of self-knowledge, there are four criteria of truth, each of which should be considered ‘together’ in examining truth-claims. The first criterion is internal coherence, which in spite of its necessity, is an insufficient condition for truth due to the possibility that false narratives in terms of both the factual and psychological accounts can exhibit coherence whereas incoherent narratives can be “historically and psychologically” true. The second criterion is external coherence, which is not an adequate condition for narrative truth, either, because those who know the real picture of certain events can be tempted to be silent about it and cooperate in endorsing an illusionary invention of how things are. As the third measure, applicability tests how a self-narrative fits with the practical and existential demands of life. This criterion pays attention to a “forward-looking” involvement of the self in the world. The reason why this is not adequate to support narrative truth is that it is possible that the self’s prediction of the future with careful plans can be based on “coherent forms of self-deception and wishful thinking.”¹⁰⁶ The last standard is empirical adequacy, which questions whether a self-narrative is able to digest a limited set of basic facts that cannot possibly be removed or manipulated. This is also proved to be insufficient for narrative truth because equally feasible “narrative permutations” can compete with a finite set of intractable experiences. It can be said that the difficult nature of narrative truth becomes more complicated with its intermingling of factual and interpretive statements. Further, in accounting for the self, certain aesthetic decisions with a certain perspective can rule out a number of alternatives, disregarding otherwise significant

¹⁰⁵ Jopling, p. 49.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

information.¹⁰⁷ The bottom line seems to be that self-representations will count as true only if they show “the essential truth of the whole self” despite minor omissions of details.¹⁰⁸ Although it is not clear what the essential truth might be like, it nonetheless seems probable to infer, from patterns of a self-narrative, its truth-value.

More specifically, in relation to the configuration of the self, narrative devices such as “narrative-generated artefacts” are useful in creating coherence and forming a certain purpose. They are “those psychological and phenomenological states” that appear to be identified prior to a narrative but “whose existence is dependent on the presence of the narrative under which it is identified.”¹⁰⁹ Thus a narrative has the potential power to be “self-confirming” with the piling up and insertion of narrative artefacts such as “crystallization” of indeterminate desires and retrospective interpretation of ambiguous aspects of past experiences: “With enough narrative streamlining, filling in, selective emplotting, and re-emplotting, and “smoothing over,” simultaneity can be represented sequentially, and sequence can be represented teleologically.”¹¹⁰ Although this can be an economical and useful device that serves to concisely structure a narrative, as Jopling rightly notes, it can risk allowing for little room for reflective self-inquiry, which is a key issue in autobiographies or memoirs, not to speak of the possible moral problem of inventing oneself in ways that are not true to life. It can be assumed that narrative self-understandings does not essentially reflect the “prenarrative” self in that the possible transformation of the self during the process of narration can raise a number of moral or non-moral questions.

¹⁰⁷ Jopling, p. 51.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 52.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 52, 53.

3. Iris as an evil narcissist

The apparent reason for Iris's action – her decision to write a memoir – seems to be the realization of her impending death. She is the only surviving member of the family who knows the other side of the official version of her family's history and her married life. It turns out however that she is holding back certain information, something fundamentally important regarding her motives for the course of action she took in the past. Here, Peck's argument that the enemy of truth is evil is relevant.¹¹¹ The notion of evil in this respect borders on 'lies.' Similarly, Kant conceives of lying as violating one's essential duty to oneself and warns of its harmful effect: the evil of untruthfulness contaminates one's relationship to others¹¹², which I shall elaborate in due course. It is Iris's narcissistic desire to protect her self-image that causes her, on both the conscious and unconscious level, to describe other main characters in an unfavourable way, i.e., to put them in negative light. To put it in Kantian terms, she does place the requirement of her self-love above everything else while turning away from the demands of the moral law, which is evil, a violation of the moral law. In this important respect, the worth of her 'testimony' is naturally undermined.

Another significant aspect of Iris's memoir is the manner she deals with her repressed memories. Kubarych points out that the reason why evil narcissists depend on self-deceptive strategies is that they do not want to undergo the emotional turmoil caused by their crimes.¹¹³ In other words, evil narcissists push painful memories to the periphery of their consciousness so that they may stay balanced albeit on the surface level. In an effort to protect themselves from the attacks of anxiety caused by the surfacing of painful truths, they resort to varying degrees of self-deception. While elaborating on Kant's three levels of evil, I will investigate Iris's self-deceptive

¹¹¹ Cited in Kubarych, p.265.

¹¹² Allison "Reflections", in Pia Lara (ed.), p. 97.

¹¹³ Cited in Dan J. Stein, "The Philosophy of Evil", in *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* (Sep., 2005), Vol. 12, No.3, pp. 261-263, p.261.

strategies and examine how they are camouflaged in Iris's memoir. I shall also consider where Iris stands in terms of the moral dynamics of self-love.

What is worth noting in her relationships, especially with Winifred and Laura is the role of 'shame' and 'envy' in terms of narcissistic injuries, which I believe influences the way Iris writes about them. I will thus take a close look at the defence mechanism of narcissistic wounds and how this affects her writing and at the same time considers its moral implications.

Before moving on to her interpersonal relationships, the process of Iris's decision-making regarding the unexpected marriage proposal from Richard Griffen deserves attention because that decision marks the beginning of her new relationship with people from outside her family, which eventually ends acrimoniously. Arguably, it is a turning point in her life meriting investigation.

3.1 Iris as a virtuous daughter and sister

It is true that Iris decides to marry a man she scarcely knows for the sake of her father whose love and trust, though he seldom expresses those feelings, Iris wants to secure. Laura, who was strongly against this sudden marriage from the beginning, makes her last attempt at persuading Iris not to get married the night before her wedding, saying that it is not too late. Feeling impatient with Laura, Iris explains to the latter that her marriage with Richard will save Avilion and some factories, which would relieve their father of great distress. After listening to this, Laura says: "It's for him then, ... What you're doing. I guess that explains something. I guess it's brave" (*BA*, 242). But Laura's subsequent remark – "Well, you will have nice clothes anyway" – upsets her extremely because as she admits, that was her "secret consolation" (*BA*, 242). Iris's calculation about how she can at least benefit from this marriage might be read as being morally impure, but in this phase of her life, taking into account the fact that she is still herself in a confused state of mind due to her loveless

early marriage, her seeking of some sort of compensation does not seem to deserve harsh criticism. Besides, there is nothing deceitful happening here, which indicates no serious problem on the moral horizon.

But her relatively innocent and noble cause is not rewarded as she wished. As soon as she returns to Canada from her honeymoon in Europe, she receives a phone call from Laura. It turns out that during her idle honeymoon, her father's factories were all closed down, which naturally has a devastating impact on her father, who drinks himself to death. Her anger at Richard was great, but for some reason, by the time she visits Avilion the intensity of her anger loosens and it is at this point that Iris adopts self-deception and opts for security and wealth. When Laura says that the permanent closing of the factories is what killed their father, Iris grieves:

Poor Father – trusting to handshakes and words of honour and unspoken assumptions ...I'd married Richard for nothing, then – I hadn't saved the factories, and I certainly hadn't saved Father. But there was Laura still; she wasn't out on the street. I had to think of that. (*BA*, 323)

It is interesting to see the change in her direction of thought from her father to Laura. In fact, it is here in terms of the Kantian notion of moral impurity that Iris presents her excuse for remaining married. While describing the second stage of evil – moral impurity, Kant argues: “self-deception explains how we can take ourselves to be acting from duty alone, when in fact, we require some extra-moral incentive in order to do what duty dictates.”¹¹⁴ Considering that Laura strongly objected to Iris's marriage to Richard, and that Laura was not of her first concern at all, it is quite clear that Iris's attempt to be seen as a virtuous sister is questionable. It seems closer to truth that she somehow uses her sister's underage status as a pretext for staying married, which in fact would bring 'her' financial security with no need to be “out on the street”.

¹¹⁴ Allison, “Reflections” in Pia Lara (ed.), p. 96.

Here, another moral question needs to be considered: the problem of “moral weakness”. Besides the fact that she has some “extra-moral incentive” behind her posing as a virtuous sister, Iris’s grave problem turns out to be her moral weakness. In his account of the first stage of evil – the idea of moral weakness or frailty, Kant points out that although the good is recognized as an invincible incentive when considered objectively, when considered subjectively, it turns out to be “weaker in comparison with inclination”.¹¹⁵ Thus, it is evident that by relegating her moral duty to a secondary choice, Iris violates the moral law. According to Kant, even when one chooses against the moral law, one still recognizes the authority of the moral law, which leads one to appeal to self-deception. The logic of self-deception in the case of moral frailty results in providing an excuse for evading one’s responsibility. The process is as follows: this susceptibility to temptation, which Kant calls the bare propensity to evil, is turned into a “brute, given fact, a part of one’s nature, which one laments, but for which one does not hold oneself responsible.”¹¹⁶ It is thus, as Kant sharply notes, “self-imposed” weakness. Although Iris is not unaware of her moral weakness, she does not press any further for narcissistic reasons. There is one moment when she mentions that she has no firm belief in her thoughts and judgements: “I cared what people thought. I always did care. Unlike Laura, I have never had the courage of my convictions” (*BA*, 208). It is hard to tell if Iris employs this self-deceptive strategy consciously, but the above admission of her indecisive and indeterminate personality attests to the later turns of events: rather than confessing her narcissistic pursuit of self-interests, Iris seems to appeal to her morally feeble “nature” – supposedly one of the consequences of the threat of her imposing new family.

¹¹⁵ Allison, “Reflections” in Pia Lara (ed.), p. 96.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 96.

It is relevant to mention here three ways of maintaining self-deception suggested by Bach: *evasion*, *jamming* as “covering up” and *rationalization* as “explaining away.”¹¹⁷ All of them seem to operate here, but it seems that Iris most visibly adopts evasion regarding her father’s death: “I tried to avoid thinking about Father, and the way he had died, and what he might have been up to before that event, and about how he must have felt, and about everything Richard had not seen fit to tell me” (*BA*, 328). She knows that if she keeps thinking about her father’s death, it would lead her to cancel her marriage. She could not have lived with a man who treated her father’s wishes as trashes. She is well aware that it is morally wrong to live with a man who made an indirect contribution to her father’s premature death. However, she keeps that poignant thought from occurring. When Laura says it is Richard that killed their father, though not directly, Iris protests: “That’s not really fair...Father died because of an unfortunate combination of circumstances.” But she subsequently thinks, “I felt ashamed of myself for saying that: it sounded like Richard” (*BA*, 337). Like Richard, she finds herself explaining her father’s death away. It is true that she concedes to marry Richard to relieve the pain her father is going through, which can be seen as being dutiful and virtuous, but as I have pointed out above, her original motive is tainted by her moral compromise and self-deception.

3.2. Winifred and Richard as evil enemies

When one speaks of one’s enemies, one has a tendency to “magnify” one’s freedom.¹¹⁸ There could be several reasons for this, but in terms of the symptoms of narcissism, the probable reason

¹¹⁷ Kent Bach, “More on Self-Deception: Reply to Hellman”, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (June, 1985), Vol. 45, No. 4, pp. 611-614, p. 612.

¹¹⁸ Koehn, p. 12.

can be one's "desire to escape social embarrassment".¹¹⁹ In order to preserve one's self-regard and evade humiliation, one adopts several strategies engendering self-deception. Iris does seem to more or less abuse the above-mentioned freedom when she depicts her 'enemies.' The problem is that Winifred and Richard are not actually simple enemies with bad intent. In his discussion of the highest degree of evil – wickedness, Kant defines it as "intentionally" relegating moral considerations to a secondary status and thus self-love taking priority over moral reflection. Even at this last stage of human evil, holds Kant, the authority of moral law is still intact, so the agent again engages in self-deception not to be confronted by the moral law.¹²⁰ This definition of wickedness can be read as bordering on lies and one often does lie in order to escape one's own shame. It is interesting to see how Iris reacts to and makes a judgement about her sister-in-law Winifred with whom she has a double relationship.

In her meeting with Winifred before her wedding, while noticing that her future sister-in-law does not think much of her, Iris resents Winifred's patronizing and condescending gesture. But rather than gathering up courage and showing her dignity by expressing her anger, she finds herself listening to Winifred "humbly, resentfully" (*BA*, 238). Simultaneously, Iris feels Winifred's high spirits overwhelming her: "I could feel my will seeping out of me—any power I still might have left, over my own actions" (*BA*, 239). It is obvious that Winifred's self-confident presence makes Iris feel somehow inadequate, which in turn evokes self-conscious emotions such as envy and shame. These feelings typically involve "cognitive appraisals, comparisons, and interpretations of other people and situations," not to mention behavioural aspects. At appropriate levels, they help one function more constructively and develop adaptive behaviour.¹²¹ However, in narcissistic individuals, they can also work in a destructive way. Envy is often manifested in the form of

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.36.

¹²⁰ Allison, "Reflections" in Pia Lara (ed.), p. 93.

¹²¹ Elsa Ronningstam, *Identifying and Understanding the Narcissistic Personality*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 37.

admiration of another's superiority, but underneath the apparent admiration there is a desire to be "equal to or surpass" the person in question. The next thing he or she experiences is a "narcissistic humiliation with feelings of inferiority and decreased self-esteem," which secretly germinates the seeds of "anger at the desired person and urges to destroy what is seen as good".¹²² It should be stressed here that feelings of envy also evoke feelings of shame caused by diminished self-esteem. Indeed, it seems to me that it is shame that affects Iris more strongly causing seething narcissistic rage. What she experiences during her meeting with Winifred is "a sense of exposure, a sense of shrinking, and feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness".¹²³ Apart from her remark that she envied Winifred and "longed to be able to duplicate that walk, so smooth and fleshless and invulnerable" (BA, 240), Iris twists Winifred's image in a way that gives the latter a very negative picture. Thus, the point that shame-based anger can easily be redirected towards others and secretly seek revenge while at the same time doing defensive activities¹²⁴ applies to Iris's manoeuvres to give Winifred unfavourable images.

More importantly, Winifred's active role in 'transforming' Iris into a society wife is judged disapprovingly by Iris, who seems to want to claim that she is 'forced' to act as one. The idea of a society wife in the 1930s in Canada concerns both the image of a homemaker whose taste and creativity are exhibited and appreciated in the decoration of their houses, and of an 'activist,' who supports and promotes their husbands' business or political career by planning parties, organizing charity balls or cultural events as well as participating in various parties and public events. Being a society wife also means that they are familiar with the latest fashion trends, dressing beautifully and in style especially in those parties, which suggests their 'decorative' function. Thus assuming a

¹²² From Spielman, P.M. (1971), Envy and jealousy. An attempt at clarification, *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 40, 59-82 and Ronningstam, E.& J. Gunderson (1990), Identifying criteria for narcissistic personality disorder, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 147, 918-922, cited in Ronningstam, p.38

¹²³ From Lewis, H.B. (1971), *Shame and guilt in neurosis*, (New York: International University Press) cited in Ronningstam, p. 88

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 88

supporting role in the background, a society wife in those times is basically submissive, supportive of their husbands' careers regardless of their intelligence and cultural sophistication. In openly proclaiming that she is making a protégée of Iris, Winifred does all the organizing and planning and asks Iris to be in the process. Iris seems to suggest that all these activities were meaningless and hypocritical. It seems true that Iris is quite disillusioned with what is called 'high' society, but it is not fair to blame Winifred unilaterally, taking no account of her own passivity. She insists that her role in those parties and public events is restricted to just 'nodding' and 'smiling,' which can be read as suggesting that she was there for a mere decorative purpose. However, it is doubtful whether Iris was not really allowed to speak her opinion concerning her daily activities. As we shall see soon, it is Iris who chooses not to utter a word about whatever Winifred is planning for her.

If we now look at how Iris describes her sister-in-law in detail, it can be said that her wounded narcissistic pride functions as 'belittling' and 'devaluing' what Winifred does:

Winifred was a very busy bee..., but she made me increasingly nervous. She was in and out of the house constantly. I never knew when she might appear, popping her head around the door with a brisk smile. My only refuge was the bathroom, because there I could turn the lock without seeming unduly rude. (*BA*, 328)

She put a good deal of thought into cooking up meaningless tasks for me, then rearranging my time and space so I would be at liberty to perform them. These tasks are never too exacting, because she made no secret of her opinion that I was a bit of a dumb bunny. I in my turn did nothing to discourage this view. (*BA*, 342)

Although it seems true that Winifred is somewhat intruding and patronizing, it is Iris's twisted decision to be completely passive that allows Winifred to take the initiative and lead on. Winifred, who, as a devoted sister to Richard, is willing to help her brother with everything, embraces this opportunity and handles everything. Behind her seemingly contented smile, Iris ridicules everything that her energetic sister-in-law does on the grounds that she represents nothing but "new money" and has no "real" elegance or dignity in her, which is again a sign of ignoring and devaluing. Her

pretext that she does not need to make any effort to invent those meaningless things so she “could spend the mental time elsewhere” (BA, 342) shows her silent contempt for Winifred, which is a manifestation of her narcissistic aloofness.

On the other hand, Iris does seem to admit that it is not quite right to act like a dumb child: “What do you mean? I asked mildly. Collecting Winifred’s explanations of what she meant had become a reprehensible hobby of mine” (BA, 435) / “My pretence of incompetence had now become second nature to me, I scarcely had to think about it” (BA, 455). As Amelie Rorty remarks, corruption can be expressed “in nuance of speech and gesture,” and in habitual patterns of behaviour, which occur “without a second thought.”¹²⁵ She nods and smiles externally, and acts dumb, which is no less than deceit – the worst kind of evil. In discussing cognitive aspects of lying, David Simpson (1992) points out that while non-linguistic means such as nods, winks and shoulder shrugs can more easily create misunderstanding, they are also more defensible and justifiable.¹²⁶ Iris might claim that she did not ‘lie’ to Winifred, contending that acting like an ‘innocuous’ child was necessary for her survival, but her defence is far from convincing considering the nature of her lying involving untruthfulness. Although Iris’s lie is not so much intended as “invoked”, she fits the description of lying:

So in lying we directly or indirectly represent some state of affairs, present ourselves as believing that representation to be true, and act on the intention that the one or ones to whom we lie have reason to think that we intend them to take this as a sincere presentation of our belief.¹²⁷

By pretending to have other beliefs and making others believe what she represents, whether or not she is aware of it, Iris commits an act of lying. As it turns out later, Winifred does not seem to

¹²⁵ Rorty, “How to harden your heart”, in Rorty (ed.), pp. 282, 283.

¹²⁶ David Simpson, “Lying, Liars and Language”, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (Sep., 1992), Vol. 52, No. 3, pp. 623-639, p. 630.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 630.

suspect at all that Iris was in fact angry and spiteful during the whole time when the latter lived with her. It is thus plausible to assume that despite her nosy behaviour and disapproval of Iris, Winifred has no evil intentions towards Iris in the sense that she just regards the latter as a dumb girl and takes care of her for the sake of her brother. In contrast, Iris hides behind a seemingly innocent façade, so that her secret resentment and vindictiveness may not be detected. Iris becomes the evil one whose duplicity creates a false belief about her. Simpson succinctly states the moral dimension of lying:

When I lie to you I engage, at the core of the lie, the mutuality of our personhood. I do not just dismiss you as a person; I appeal to you as a person, and then use that against you. Lying has the moral intensity it does because it draws on and abuses the core of interaction and communality.¹²⁸

Compared to Winifred, her relationship with Richard is somewhat simpler in that he does not evoke envy or shame as Winifred does, but there seems to be one source that makes Iris resentful: Richard's high regard for and absolute trust in his sister. As I have already shown, Iris's envy towards Winifred is complex. From the Freudian perspective, Winifred is a kind of mother figure whose advice Iris admits proves very useful, but who does not 'love' her. Iris's narcissistic injuries and consequent narcissistic rages are secretly directed at Winifred. When Iris finds out that Winifred has been decorating her new home, she feels indignant: "I felt like a child excluded by its parents. Genial, brutal parents, up to their necks in collusion, determined on the rightness of their choice, in everything" (*BA*, 316). Even though she is entitled to expressing her frank opinions, she says nothing. When entitlement is violated, reactions range from fury, irritability, hostility or vindictive behaviour to "feeling surprised, hurt, unappreciated, unfairly treated or even

¹²⁸ Simpson, p. 637.

exploited”.¹²⁹ The point that entitlement is closely connected to a passive attitude with little self-initiative¹³⁰ can be made about Iris, who throughout her marriage never contradicts Richard or Winifred. As we shall see shortly, Iris places a great emphasis on how Richard treated her, suggesting a sense of exploitation, but remains silent about her passive, mechanical behaviour. While concealing her indignation, she plays the role of a submissive and obedient wife. As she does to Winifred, she ‘lies’ to Richard through the established behavioural pattern of outwardly smiling and agreeing. Hannah Arendt points out that when evil begins to become the norm, moral directives lose their forces and are perverted to corrupt goals.¹³¹ This is partly true of Iris because she does not seem to recognize the wrongness of her behaviour. However, Iris does admit to the fact that she refuses to properly ‘listen’ to Richard and has a share in the failure of their relationship: “This was one source of the tension between us: my failure to understand him, to anticipate his wishes, which he set down to my wilful and even aggressive lack of attention” (*BA*, 306). Although Richard does seem to want more from his marriage than just physical gratification, Iris has no intention of supporting him whole-heartedly. It is therefore her wilful indifference and habitual patterns of behaviour, which leaves no possibility of desirable relationship she might have had with Richard. The following passage shows her admission to her failure to describe him properly, but her relatively honest admission is subsequently followed by her contempt for and disapproval of him:

I’ve failed to convey Richard, in any rounded sense. He remains a cardboard cutout. I know that. I can’t truly describe him. I can’t get a precise focus...He was ruthless, but not like a lion; more like a sort of large rodent. He tunnelled underground;he killed things by chewing off their roots. (*BA*, 495)

¹²⁹ From Kerr, N.J. (1985), Behavioral manifestations of misguided entitlement, *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 23[1], 5-15, cited in Ronningstam, p. 93.

¹³⁰ Ronningstam, p. 93.

¹³¹ Mathewes, p. 199.

It seems that her conscious mind makes an effort to be fair, but the unconscious surfaces and distorts the picture of him. Her description of Richard as a despicable rodent is significant in relation to her own self-image, to which I shall return soon. Suffice it to say here that Iris is aware of her own faults, but does not regard them as morally problematic.

As I have noted above, Iris emphasizes the wrongness of Richard's treatment of her. Indeed, Iris's attack on Richard seems very direct, probably because though not intentionally, he makes Laura suffer and has an indirect part in her sister's death. For Iris, he is almost the same as a predator, which preys on weak, defenceless animals. It is especially when she refers to her physical relationship with Richard that she depicts herself as a poor victim: "This then, was where I was to grin and bear it – the bed I hadn't quite made, but now must lie in. And this was the ceiling I would be staring up at from now on, through the muslin fog, while earthly matters went on below my throat" (*BA*, 316). Indeed, Iris often hints at her 'pitiable' status as a wife by stressing the physical aspects of her relationship with Richard. She tells about "bruises" on her body, the implication being that Richard forces her to bed in a violent way. As she sums it, her daytime is filled with keeping up appearances, and her nightlife is just about opening her legs and shutting her mouth. Thus she attempts to show that besides Winifred's constant interference with her life, Iris is often coerced into fulfilling her marital "duties" in having sex whenever her husband demanded it. She recalls that her situation was rather suffocating: "In theory I could go wherever I liked, in practice there were invisible barriers. I kept to the main streets, the more prosperous areas: even within those confines, there were not really very many places where I felt unconstrained" (*BA*, 329). The focus here is on her being constantly 'under surveillance'. Further, she condenses aspects of her married life as follows: "Placidity and order and everything in its place, with a decorous and sanctioned violence going on underneath everything, like a heavy, brutal shoe tapping out of the rhythm on a carpeted floor" (*BA*, 383).

However, it is doubtful whether Richard and Winifred were really as much threatening and merciless as Iris would have us believe. The truth seems to be that it is her lack of courage and dignity, i.e., her cowardliness, which makes her so inactive and passive. Her fear of losing her position also seems to have a significant influence on her. She never dares to use a defying tone, which might disturb Winifred and Richard while living with them. By shifting the blame to them for her misery, Iris minimizes her responsibility for her own failure and casts Richard and Winifred as mistreating and exploiting tyrants. When it comes to Laura, her anger at them seems to increase. Undeniably, a more delicate and painful issue for Iris would be the circumstances under which Laura suffered and the role Richard and Winifred played in it. Laura firmly refuses to come to Toronto and disappears, but soon is found working in an amusement park, Sunnyside, where a lot of poor working class people gather and have fun in their own way. Laura literally wails after being dragged and forced to live with them and is extremely pessimistic about the possibility of having a life she wants. In retrospect, Iris admits her lack of watchfulness:

I thought I could cope with Richard, with Winifred. I thought I could live like a mouse in the castle of the tigers, by creeping around out of sight inside the walls; by staying quiet, by keeping my head down. No: I give myself too much credit. I didn't see the danger. I didn't even know they were tigers. Worse: I didn't know I might become a tiger myself. I didn't know Laura might become one, given the proper circumstances. Anyone might, for that matter. (*BA*, 337)

Here again, Richard and Winifred are pictured as “tigers”, which would trample on a “mouse,” especially when it attempts to voice its rights. There is no doubt that what they did – putting Laura into a mental institution to prevent a scandal – is wrong. But Iris keeps saying, “I didn't know,” on which I shall elaborate in terms of its moral connotations in 3.4. What I find quite disturbing and cunning here is Iris's attempt to align “Laura,” and even “anyone” with her, which is to say that they would act the same way as she did “given the proper circumstances.” By drawing our attention to the effect of circumstance on one's range of behaviour, Iris somehow seems to attempt to obscure

her significant past faults. It can be said that her hypothetical way of thinking in moral matters implicates her ‘contingent’ moral stance on critical past events. She hides behind the visible culprits, Richard and Winifred, claiming that she was just a ‘weak and suppressed’ victim.

However, there is one person who suspects Iris’s part in causing Laura to suffer: Reenie. She is their former nanny, who, as a kind of mother figure, albeit distant, took care of them after their mother’s death, and who has a very conservative view of woman’s chastity and duties, which influences adolescent Iris to some extent. Her loyalty to Iris’s parents prevents her from accepting the Griffens as the owner of Avilion and her anger at them grows stronger when she finds out what Laura has undergone because of them. In her meeting with Iris after Laura’s escape, Reenie tells her that Laura said that she had no part in it, but subsequently adds that that’s “what she said,” alluding to her own doubt about Iris’s negligence. Although noticing Reenie’s stiff attitude towards her, Iris feels at ease to find that Laura has no suspicion of her, revealing her opportunistic wickedness: ““She said that?”” I was relieved to hear it. Richard and Winifred had been cast as the monsters then, and I’d been excused—on the grounds of moral feebleness, no doubt” (*BA*, 458). Here, self-deception in terms of Kant’s concept of wickedness comes into the picture. It concerns a way of thinking that induces one to think that one has been “fortunate to avoid circumstances that would have led to actual immoral behaviour.”¹³² Here the illusion is that one regards oneself as doing what morality requires because one’s overt behaviour corresponds to the moral law. Thus Iris wants to believe that she did her duty as Laura’s older sister and simultaneously consoles herself with the fact that she was not the one who committed the actual crime. She also seems to regard her moral feebleness as if it were a part of her “nature,” which is a self-deceptive strategy employed to justify her non-action and to avoid her moral responsibility for the consequences. Thus when analysed in

¹³² Allison, “Reflections”, in Pia Lara (ed.), p. 93.

this light, it stands to reason that Iris is not in a position to blame Richard and Winifred in such a unilateral way.

Indeed, from Winifred's point of view, Iris is an evil figure who has destroyed Richard's life including her own in the sense that she lost the only person she loves. After Richard's death – he commits suicide due to the damaging effect of the publication of *The Blind Assassin* on his political career, Winifred “rails” at Iris on the phone:

I used to think you were stupid, but really you're evil. You've always hated us because your father went bankrupt and burned down his own factory, and you held it against us... We pulled the two of you out of the swamp, you and your dopey sister! If it wasn't for us, you would've been out walking the streets instead of sitting around on your bottoms like the silver-plated spoiled brats you were. You always had everything handed to you, you never had to make an effort, you never showed one moment of gratitude to Richard... All of that was just spite, spite, spite! You owed us everything and you couldn't stand it. You had to get back at him! (*BA*, 381-382)

Clearly, this demonstrates that Iris deceived them all the while, faking smiles and submissiveness. As I have noted earlier, Winifred never seemed to imagine that Iris bore a grudge against them. In short, Iris's duplicity comes as a shock to Winifred. While pretending to be affable to them because of the material benefits, Iris covertly hates them and the situation in which she has to depend upon them. Certainly her sly indirection and subterfuge are highly reminiscent of those of a “rodent,” the word she employs when describing Richard's behaviour.

It is worth noting here that despite Iris's effort to make her look different from Richard and Winifred, she nevertheless leaves some evidence that proves the opposite. As I pointed out earlier, She attempts to make us believe that she was forced to be a society bride: “I myself however was taking shape - the shape intended for me... Each time I looked in the mirror a little more of me had been coloured in” (*BA*, 312). But the hidden fact that she secretly envies Winifred's style and wants to look like her casts doubt on her claim. Iris's reaction to her first encounter with Winifred also

supports Iris's unpronounced thought: "how nice it would be to have such lovely clothes, such wicked new-money clothes, instead of the virtuous, dowdy, down-at-heels garments that were our mode of necessity these days" (*BA*, 181). It seems that Iris unconsciously projects her bad qualities onto them and criticizes them more harshly. According to Carl Jung, man carries his own shadows, which are not just a little weakness or flaws, but of a positively "demonic dynamism".¹³³ When man sees his own shadows in others, ironically the intensity of his hate and aggression is often doubled. Although man sometimes catches a glimpse of his own dark shadows, he usually turns a blind eye to the shadow-side of human nature.¹³⁴ When Richard mentions that a war can be useful in fixing things and give a chance to make a lot of money, Iris thinks: "The sliding moral scale they applied to almost every area of life had not yet ceased to hold my attention" (*BA*, 403). In Iris's view, Richard and Winifred represent the ones who are morally corrupt or have no moral principles. When it comes to her, she seems to think that she wanted to act right, but the threatening circumstances leave her weak and powerless. The residue of her consciousness and conscience sometimes recognize her own moral problems, but she refuses to think further about them by quickly averting her eyes from them. As Jung rightly points out, without a considerable moral effort, one cannot become conscious of the shadow.¹³⁵ Iris's evasive attitude towards moral issues created by her deceitful behaviour combined with the narcissistic injuries and rages makes it impossible to recognize and acknowledge her own shadows.

As I noted above, Iris does not recognize the wrongness of her duplicity towards Winifred. In a way she turns out to be worse than Richard and Winifred by being sly and deceitful towards them. Through her self-deception, Iris conceives of them as evil enemies, especially when the secret about Laura's suffering comes out. If Iris intentionally contrives to shift her responsibility to them by

¹³³ Carl Jung: On The Shadow p.1 of 7,< <http://psikoloji.fisek.com.tr/jung/shadow.htm>>.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 1.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 6

exaggerating their crime and minimizing her damaging acts, we could regard her as wicked. In fact, there is another instance that Iris seems to come close to this way of thinking. When Richard tells her that Laura has escaped from Bella Vista, the mental institution to which Richard and Winifred sent Laura and in which illegal abortion is secretly being practiced, and asks if she knows anything about this, she answers calmly but secretly takes pleasure in Richard's distress: "No I did not. (I kept my hands folded in my lap. I expressed surprise and mild interest. I didn't express glee" (*BA*, 456). Because it is not her, but him and Winifred that put Laura in that mental institution, she seems to think they deserve this 'blow'. The significant fact that she did nothing for Laura during the whole time when the latter was there, besides her tacit complicity in sending her sister away, does not seem to torture her. In this respect, it can be said that Iris's moral opportunism enables her to adopt a self-deceptive strategy of moral good luck. It is a good thing that she does not need to be in their position.

On the other hand, Iris does not seem to 'intentionally' deceive herself. She seems to want to believe the enormity of their crime. Mele contends that the majority of cases of self-deception, which he calls *ordinary* self-deception, are not those of *intentional* deceiving.¹³⁶ Although self-deception is created by desires or fears, the "non-accidentality" of self-deception does not guarantee that the person must intentionally delude himself. In other words, self-deceivers rarely act with *the intention of deceiving themselves*.¹³⁷ When seen in this light, Iris's verbal attack on Richard and Winifred shows that she acquires and retains a belief in their role in turning her into a society lady and causing suffering to Laura. Her narcissistic desire not to be shown as a collaborator with them probably creates self-deception, but it can be said that she attacks them verbally with no intention of

¹³⁶ Alfred R. Mele, "Self-Deception" in *The Philosophical Quarterly* (Oct.,1983), Vol. 33, No. 133, pp. 365-377, p. 366.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 367.

deceiving herself. Whichever self-deception is the question, it must be noted that her moral responsibility cannot be compromised.

At this juncture, if we look at the nature of self-narratives, it sheds light on the manner in which Iris reconstructs her relationships with Winifred and Richard. What is striking in Iris's description of her relationships with them is her 'self-victimization.' As is shown in 2.2, prior to exposure to narration, some inchoate desires are without a distinct structure and unity. The narrative gives them a unified shape "in such a manner that what appears to be discovery is in fact an artifact of the narration that would not have been encountered independently."¹³⁸ With this "crystallization" comes the confusion of "what is really desired" with "what is artifactually desired."¹³⁹ In this respect, Iris's apparent realization that she was a somewhat innocent 'victim' is not so much pure "discovery" as a by-product coloured with her desires. Further, when events are narrated, the temporal ambiguity of experience is interpreted "in light of results that were not knowable at the time of their occurrence" and ignored small details take on new meaning, as "signs portending a determinate development."¹⁴⁰ Thus, the confusion of "prospective" perspectives with "retrospective" perspectives can easily present a changed or distorted picture of the past. In light of this, Iris's depiction of Winifred and Richard as scheming evil persons also seems very much coloured by her narcissistic anger, and by the end results of the deplorable turns of events. The truth appears to be that Iris actually got along with them most of the time, albeit on the surface, and that she did not seem to conceive of them as particularly threatening. These important features of self-narratives are also applicable to Iris's description of her relationship with Laura, which I shall examine in detail in the next section.

¹³⁸ Jopling, p. 52.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

3.3 Haunting Laura

In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” Freud indicates that memory traces most powerfully and persistently when the incident in question never entered consciousness.¹⁴¹ He also points out that present (conscious) recall often activates defence mechanism because the incident in point is too painful to face. What follows is the conscious effort to block the penetration of the painful memory to the deeper intrapsychic scene.¹⁴² Without doubt, what torments old Iris the most is Laura’s suicide. The interesting thing about Iris’s attitude to the tragic events surrounding Laura is that on the one hand, she admits to her guilt, but on the other hand, her description of Laura is often accompanied by a tinge of irritability and scepticism, which poses a question of the nature of her remorse. As Philip J. Koch rightly points out, emotional ambivalence is resolved only when the subject deals with conflicting emotions in such a thoroughgoing way that they finally vanish or become insignificant in a permanent sense.¹⁴³

Similarly, in discussing the mourning process of object-loss, Freud divides mourning into two types: normal mourning and pathological mourning. Melancholics are often subject to the latter, which proceeds unconsciously. Self-reproaches are its distinct feature. What is most intriguing in this self-criticism is that the melancholic’s self-accusations are actually directed at someone else in his or her near neighbourhood – “some person whom the patient loves, has loved or *ought to love* (my italics).”¹⁴⁴ It would be somewhat inadequate to cast Iris to a melancholic in that she does not show sadistic aggression towards herself. Besides, she expresses some shame, but not signs of explicit self-debasement.¹⁴⁵ However, considering the fact that Iris does not undergo proper

¹⁴¹ Parkin-Gounelas, p. 684.

¹⁴² *ibid.*, pp. 683-684.

¹⁴³ Philip J. Koch, “Emotional Ambivalence”, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (Dec.,1987), Vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 257-279, p. 273.

¹⁴⁴ Freud, *Collected Papers Volume 4*, p. 158.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 155-157.

mourning process, which would lead her to relieve her of the burden of her past, it would not be unreasonable to assume that some similarities between Iris (her reaction to Laura's death) and the melancholic patient exist. As Freud remarks on the essential characteristic of melancholics' psychology, they succeed in taking revenge on the original objects by "the circuitous path of self-punishment," which enables them to hide open hostility against the loved ones.¹⁴⁶ Klein's point that the oscillation between persecutory anxiety and depressive anxiety persists over a long period of time is also applicable to Iris's state of mind, and helpful in identifying Iris's biased and unfinished, incomplete portrayal of Laura. As will be shown in the next sections, Iris's guilty conscience does not seem deep enough to overcome her unresolved feelings toward her sister. As a narcissistic person whose main goal is to protect the wholeness of her self-image, behind her self-critical and guilty front, Iris unknowingly reveals her anger at Laura whose death she buries in the periphery of her consciousness.

Another important aspect of her relationship with Laura is Iris's feelings of envy. It is not easy to identify them because envy can be very subtle and cunningly indirect undermining the envied object in a circuitous and disguised way.¹⁴⁷ As I have noted earlier in Winifred's case, envy causes narcissistic individuals to feel their own inferiority and insufficiency, which triggers shame and hatred in a way that desires to damage the goodness of others. Naturally narcissistic people make a great effort not to reveal their envy. Indeed, Iris's envy is hard to pinpoint, but appears to be there influencing her tone and ambiguous way of describing Laura. Iris again attempts to assuage her moral guilt by indirectly suggesting that Laura has her own problems, the gist of which has something to do with the latter's 'abnormal' thinking and behaviour.

¹⁴⁶ Freud, *Collected Papers, Volume 4*, p. 162.

¹⁴⁷ From Schwartz-Salant, N. (1982), *Narcissism and character transformation. The psychology of narcissistic character disorder*, (Toronto: Inner City books) cited in Ronningstam, 2005, p. 90

In the ensuing sections, with Iris's insufficient dealing of the loss and her covert envy in mind, I shall take a close look at the way Iris talks about Laura's supposed idiosyncracies, which I find morally problematic. That is, I shall examine some aspects of Laura described by Iris, which betray the latter's complicated, ambivalent attitude towards the former. Her narcissistic self-deception regarding Laura's alleged mental problem will also be discussed because it tellingly shows Iris's conscious betrayal. Lastly, I will look at how Iris attempts to evade her painful memory, which nevertheless surfaces and haunts her.

3.3.1 Odd Laura

On the basis of Iris's memory of Laura, one trait seems to be noticeable: Laura was "different," which is equivalent to "strange." In her recollections, Laura was an uneasy baby with "unaccountable crises", but on the other hand, she had an "uncanny resistance to physical pain" (*BA*, 88), which seems to suggest Laura's ascetic aspects. In a similar vein, Laura does not mind doing rough and dirty work most people would try to avoid. Laura shows no disgust at "bedpans and vomit" (*BA*, 433) when she was asked to do volunteering at a hospital. Nor is she scared by "the swearing and raving and general carryings-on" (*BA*, 434). Iris's mention of Winifred's regarding of Laura as "bizarre" also seems to lend support to Iris's depiction of 'odd' Laura. Another strange habit of Laura's is cutting up and handtinting photographs, which Iris claims gave her a "chill" down the spine. It seems quite clear that Iris, in retrospect, both half-consciously and half-unconsciously, selects certain character traits which apart from their verifiability, can be connected to her sister's choice of an extreme act, colouring Laura's character in a somewhat mentally problematic way.

The following example further shows Iris's somewhat devious way of implying that Laura is not normal. Iris recalls that Laura has a tendency to take words literally and "carry it extremes" (*BA*, 89), bringing up Little Laura's uncritical belief in God:

Laura had a way of believing such things, not in the double way everyone else believed them, but with a tranquil single-mindedness that made me want to shake her. (*BA*, 100)

She had a heightened capacity for belief. She left herself open, she entrusted herself, she gave herself over, she put herself at the mercy. A little incredulity would have been a first line of defence. (*BA*, 171)

Being Laura...was like being tone deaf: the music played and you heard something, but it wasn't what everyone else heard (*BA*, 204).

Here we can detect Iris's irritation and frustrated anger at Laura whose unconventional belief and behaviour, Iris seems to suggest, are the very source of her sister's misfortunes. Further, her mention of Laura's tendency to "absolutism" and her "ruthlessness" appears to imply her sister's capacity for an extreme act. By emphasizing Laura's weirdness and extreme sides, Iris seems to attempt to obscure her significant neglect of duty as her big sister, which I find manipulative. Iris's narcissistic pride again prevents her from pointing out Laura's good qualities in a straightforward and unequivocal way.

3.3.2 Eniable Laura

As I have already indicated, Iris's relationship with Laura includes an element of envy, which is a little different from her envy towards Winifred in that there is no explicit disdain or contempt detectable. Yet Iris's thinly veiled narcissism betrays its incapacity to genuinely appreciate good qualities Laura has. Indeed, Iris's description of Laura's appearance, which reflects Laura's

straightforward and honest character, does not sound like full praise: “Laura had such a direct gaze, such blankly open eyes, such a pure, rounded forehead, that few ever suspected her of duplicity” (BA, 201). This is initially mentioned in connection with a local photographer Elwood Murray and Iris points to Laura’s “ulterior” motive for seeking him out besides learning film developing. This act of Laura’s, not telling him the real motive, which was to find and develop the negative of the ‘picnic’ picture in memory of her shared moment with the socialist Alex Thomas, is fairly harmless and not adequate to be considered real duplicity, which often conceals aggression. It is not clear why Iris uses the word “duplicity” in connection with Laura, but it is possible that her narcissistic envy unconsciously desires to spoil her sister’s pure image.

Iris’s scepticism and cynicism towards Laura’s active participation in charity work also twists Laura’s altruism: “Of course they resented Laura and all the churchy do-gooders like her. Of course they had ways of letting their feelings be known. A joke, a sneer, a jostle, a sullen leer. There is nothing more onerous than enforced gratitude” (BA, 201). It is clear where Iris leads us to: Laura does charity work to feel good about herself. By making Laura’s charity activities the same kind as Winifred’s hypocritical and condescending charity work, she misrepresents her sister. The fact that Laura is not class-conscious and thus treats other people equally is here ignored. For instance, when Laura first came across the socialist, anti-bourgeois Alex Thomas on the button factory picnic, she somehow disarms him with her genuine attitude. Elliott Sober states that altruistic desires are of two types: either “ultimate” or “instrumental”.¹⁴⁸ The former refers to wishing others well “as an end in itself” and the latter implicates some calculation about the benefit the one involved in charity would in turn get. Considering Laura’s other-regarding nature, which does not necessarily mean that she is completely selfless, it is clear that Laura’s altruism is not instrumental. Laura’s altruistic desires seem to be combined with her Christian perspective, creating firm grounds for helping needy people

¹⁴⁸ Elliott Sober, “The ABC’s of Altruism”, in Stephen G. Post (ed.) *Altruism and Altruistic love: Science, Philosophy and Religion in Dialogue* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 17-28, p. 19.

consistently. Iris's suspicion of the possibility of sincere altruism somehow seems to reveal her own lack of love, which is bound up with narcissists' incapacity for love.

Another important difference between Iris and Laura is that Laura acts on her moral principles. As we saw earlier, after their father's death, Laura is initially asked and then forced to live with Iris and Richard. Laura insists that she cannot live with a man who made an indirect but substantial contribution to their father's death. Laura makes it clear that she would rather get a job and live among poor people than live with an immoral greedy capitalist. It is no wonder that when Richard told her like an "indulgent" uncle what kind of advantages she would have if she moves to live with them, she "didn't thank him" (*BA*, 325). Laura's message seems obvious: she is not a beggar and she does not need his charity. It is here that the contrast between Iris and Laura is shown strikingly. Unlike Iris, who accepts Richard's charity and Winifred's control over her and does not dare to contradict whatever they say, Laura remains dignified and courageous. Certainly, Iris recognizes Laura's moral uprightness: the "refusal to compromise and her scorn for the grosser human failings. To get away with that, you have to be beautiful. Otherwise it seems mere peevishness" (*BA*, 296). On the other hand, Iris resumes her disapproving attitude towards Laura by making a passing remark with a tone tinged with sarcasm that Laura has "such disdain" for the material world. As a person, who opts for the comfort money brings dismissing moral issues revolving around her choices, Iris must be extremely disturbed by this stark contrast. The point that "paradoxically envy can also apply to another person's capacity to tolerate *not* having something"¹⁴⁹ is worth noting here. Truly, Laura's managing of absence or lack of material comfort, i.e., her relative independence from the temptation of a luxurious life and her indifference to what others think of her contrast markedly with Iris's passive dependence on wealth and others' view of her, which activates her narcissistic defence – her reluctance to give Laura genuine and full

¹⁴⁹ From Shwartz-Salant, N. (1982), *Narcissism and character transformation. The psychology of narcissistic character disorder* (Toronto: Inner City Books) cited in Ronningstam, 2005, p. 90.

approval. Iris and Laura respectively seems to fit Chazan's account of distinct and different features of a narcissist and an ethical person: a narcissistic person easily gives in to unlucky turns of events with hopeless self-pity and resignation whereas a virtuous person faces up to the various contingencies of human life with self-possession and inner strength.¹⁵⁰ To summarize, Iris's morally questionable way of staining Laura's good attributes can be read as being her narcissistic manoeuvre to divert our attention from her lack of moral principles, from her cowardly compromise.

3.3.3 Hateful Laura

It is not unusual that big sisters often feel jealous of their younger sisters, especially when they are little. Iris's jealousy of Laura is of a similar kind to a certain extent. What is different about Iris is that she is obliged to promise to take good care of Laura to respond positively to her parents' wishes at a very young age. Although Iris tries to be a caring big sister, her mixed feelings towards Laura linger: her jealousy of Laura being treated as an exception and receiving more attention and pity. As she grows older, she becomes tired of being Laura's big sister:

I was tired of keeping an eye on Laura, who didn't appreciate it. I was tired of being held responsible for her lapses, her failures to comply... I wanted to go to Europe, or to New York, or even to Montreal – to nightclubs, to soirees, to all the exciting places mentioned in Reenie's social magazines – but I was needed at home. *Needed at home, needed at home*—it sounded like a life sentence. (BA, 178)

It is obvious from this passage that Iris grows sick of her life in Avilion, where nothing seems to happen. It is not clear whether she cannot go anywhere because of Laura, who is in fact no longer a little child, but a fourteen-year-old girl. She seems to say that she could not be spared 'under the

¹⁵⁰ Chazan, p. 67.

circumstances', but this is what she repeats in her memoir, which casts doubt on her moral stance on the things that happen to her later. In her recollections of their cooperation in helping Alex Thomas, who was then wrongly accused of burning down their father's factory and thus wanted by the police, Iris conjectures with resentment that Laura must have thought of herself as Mary:

We were two good little Samaritans, lifting out of the ditch the man fallen among thieves. We were Mary and Martha, ministering to- well, not Jesus, even Laura did not go that far, but it was obvious which of us she had cast in these roles. I was to be Martha, keeping busy with household chores in the background; she was to be Mary, laying pure devotion at Alex's feet. (*BA*, 221)

Nevertheless, Iris does seem to care about Laura and does retain her sisterly love for the latter. It is after she marries Richard that their relationship becomes more and more distant.

As we have already seen, because Laura is a minor, she is dragged into living with them. Iris feels like a "traitor" in yielding to Richard's insistence in spite of her knowledge of the intensity of Laura's loathing of him. To her surprise, Iris spots Laura and Richard on the *Water Nixie*, originally their father's boat which has long been out of use, but which Richard has managed to repair to please Laura. Because Laura does not usually want to be in the same place as Richard, she interprets this change wishfully:

I was relieved: maybe Laura would unbend a little now, maybe she would let up on the deep-freeze campaign. Maybe she would start treating Richard as if he were a human being instead of something that had crawled out from under a rock. That would certainly make my own life easier, I thought. It would lighten the atmosphere. (*BA*, 406)

To Iris's great regret, her observation proves wrong. As it turns out, Laura has not loosened at all. In fact, later on, Laura leaves a significantly critical message with Iris by colouring and blotting the latter's wedding pictures. Because of Richard's threat of putting her in an institution for juvenile delinquents if she again attempts to run away and get a job, Laura gives up on the idea, but her

negative attitude to him remains the same. Outwardly Iris tries to act as a dutiful and caring sister, who pretends to worry about Laura's striking thinness, but inwardly she becomes more and more angry at and indifferent to Laura, who does not "bend" and does not know how to conceal her dissatisfaction and adapt. Laura's undiminished abhorrence of her surroundings makes Iris feel uneasy and anxious, which Iris probably begins to hate. Koehn indicates that narcissistic persons are likely to alienate themselves from others due to their preoccupation with themselves. They often react to others "mechanically." And such mechanical responses are "insensitive to other people's needs, desires, and interests".¹⁵¹ Surely, Iris's pattern of behaviour turns habitual and cursory because she is preoccupied with her own feelings of deep dissatisfaction. There is one moment when Iris realizes that Laura looks strikingly incongruous and even surreal against her surroundings. She momentarily recognizes the kind of life Laura is forced to live and pities her. But she pushes this impression to the periphery of her consciousness again and does nothing substantial to help Laura feel better.

Although Iris knows her own repellent feelings about her married life, she is nonetheless not ready to abandon her material comfort and the superficial security it brings. When Laura expresses her view of marriage in half-anger, Iris feels afraid of Laura seeing through her: "I only said marriage is an outworn institution...Love is giving, marriage is buying and selling. You can't put love in a contract...Did getting married keep your life from being ruined? Or is it too soon to tell?" (BA, 436) It is highly plausible that Laura's direct and sharp criticism of Iris's marriage could be the last thing that the latter would want to hear because of its disquieting, subversive effect. Iris subsequently "ignores" Laura's tone and resents Laura's acquired habit of talking to her as if she were the younger sister. She also fears that she might be found out: her affair with Alex might somehow be betrayed. As a matter of fact, she accidentally spots him on a street during one of her

¹⁵¹ Koehn, pp. 72-73.

aimless wanderings right after her marriage and begins her affair with him. If Laura found out about this, then she could no longer justify her marital position in front of her sister. For unhealthy narcissists, the moment that someone turns out to be impervious to their manipulation, he or she becomes “hateful” to them.¹⁵² This applies to Iris, who takes no action when she finds out that Laura has been suddenly sent away to a mental hospital. As she shows in her relationship with Winifred and Richard, Iris reveals her duplicity towards Laura – externally caring but inwardly hating. Of course she contrives to conceal this truth and present herself as a caring sister throughout her memoir. Indeed, the most telling evidence that Iris is not working through her past sins properly in her supposedly confessional memoir is found in the description of her last encounter with Laura.

3.3.4 Creating blind spots – Iris’s self-deception and self-defence

According to Goleman, “lacuna” – gap or hole in Latin – is an “attentional mechanism that creates a defensive gap in awareness.”¹⁵³ Thus lacunas mean creating blind spots, which help one to divert one’s attention from distressing information. When one starts to think about painful experiences, one stops pursuing them at some point or other. As has been proved above, Iris evades thinking about her father’s death and her false existence as a society wife. The more serious lacunas with self-deception concern her painful memories surrounding Laura’s death.

According to Winifred and Richard’s version, Laura has gone mad and become very dangerous. In doubt, Iris tells them that she wants to see her, but subsequently her train of thoughts is deflected:

I had a hard time believing that Laura had suddenly fallen to pieces, but then I was so used to Laura’s quirks that I no longer found them strange. It would have been

¹⁵² Koehn, p. 74.

¹⁵³ Daniel Goleman, *Vital Lies, Simple Truths* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1986), p. 107.

easy for me to have overlooked slippage—the telltale signs of mental frailty, whatever they might have been. (*BA*, 442)

Iris's tendency to describe Laura as mentally unstable, as I questioned in 3.1, is a suspicious gesture, but not surprising, given her narcissistic self-defence. What is surprising here is that Iris accepts Winifred's pure invention: Laura is "insanely jealous" of her. Winifred concocts a story that Laura has in fact wanted to live Iris's life and have Iris's position to herself. Iris's self-deceptive acceptance of this fabricated story gives rise to a question of her motive behind this. Her self-deception works like this: she gathers only the evidence which might support Winifred's false account of Laura. For example, Iris focuses on Laura's "quirks" and her insensitivity to the idea of ownership:

I turned Winifred's story about her this way and that, looking at it from every angle. I couldn't quite believe it, but I couldn't disbelieve it either. Laura had always had one enormous power: the power to break things without meaning to. Nor had she ever been a respecter of territories. What was mine was hers: my fountain pen, my cologne, my summer dress, my hat, my hairbrush. Had this catalogue expanded to include my unborn baby? (*BA*, 454)

However, she says other things about Laura, which contradict Winifred's claim above. First of all, Iris says about her sister that "pretty and nice were not categories of thought for her" (*BA*, 345), which means that unlike her, Laura has no interest in fancy clothes or beauty tips. Another similar comment on Laura's character is made when she observes Richard wanting approval from Laura: "with some other young girl he might have tried presents—a pearl necklace, a cashmere sweater—things that sixteen-year-olds were supposed to long for. But he knew better than to foist anything of this sort on Laura" (*BA*, 393). Thus, it is self-deceiving and against her judgement of Laura's character if she attempts to believe that Laura envies her life with Richard tremendously. Iris's inconsistent remarks cast doubt on her real reason for wanting to believe Winifred's story. It seems

right to argue that, as I pointed out in 3.3, her narcissistic self comes to hate Laura's presence because it more than often begins to remind Iris of her false self and weakness of will.

On the other hand, from Hume's moral point of view, the passage above is interesting evidence of Iris being affected by her hidden emotion. It alludes to Iris's moral reasoning being overshadowed by her old envy and hate towards Laura, which suggests the significant role of emotion in moral decisions and action. Iris's reason reminds her of her duties as a big sister to Laura, but her sentiment works in a way that makes her choose non-action. By letting her negative feelings towards Laura lead her to disregard an urgent moral issue and at the same time calculating and protecting her self-interests, Iris sinks lower than a criminal whose pure 'passion' makes him or her commit a crime. Indeed, Iris admits to the shameful fact that she preferred Laura's absence when she gives birth to her child:

Was I grateful that Laura wasn't there? That she was shut up somewhere far away, where I couldn't reach her? Also where she couldn't reach me; where she couldn't stand beside my bed like the uninvited fairy at the christening, and say, What are you talking about? She would have known, of course. She would have known right away. (*BA*, 444)

The truth is that Iris was pregnant with Alex's baby and that she fears that Laura might figure this out. In order to spare herself from the disgrace of being found out, she overlooks what they are doing to Laura. Her inattention to her non-action concerning the sudden manner Laura was sent away and her sister's imprisonment is thus added to her list of self-imposed blind spots. Although her guilty conscience and her doubt with regard to Laura's alleged madness once compel her to think about "defying them all", she does not dare to ask exactly where Laura is and as usual succumbs to the temptation of convenient non-action: she does nothing for months.

Naturally, Iris "dreads" hearing from Reenie what Laura went through, again revealing a sign of morally 'convenient' thinking: "Laura could be fabricating...Laura could be suffering from

delusions. That couldn't be ruled out" (*BA*, 458). In spite of Reenie's remark that Laura suffered a great deal in such a terrible place and her subsequent reproachful remark that Laura was not and is not a "loony bird," Iris still wants to give more weight to Richard and Winifred's fabricated story. Even though she says she was so ashamed that she felt like a criminal, at the same time she secretly resents Reenie's indirect regarding of her as being accountable for Laura's suffering and death:

"Once Laura had gone off the bridge, she forgave me even less. In her view I must have had something to do with it" (*BA*, 458). Here, Iris again does not acknowledge her responsibility, attempting to stress the 'relative' aspects of Reenie's judgement of her. Reenie's cold answer to Iris's expression of gratitude for what she has done for Laura – "I did what was required," (*BA*, 457) "I only did what was right" (*BA*, 459) – certainly hits home, reminding Iris of her own negligence and betrayal. The morally right course of Iris's action after this would be to find out their real reason for putting Laura in a mental institution, but Iris is not interested in the truth about it. This choice of hers is very crucial because if she had dug further, she would have known the truth. Then, she could have acted in ways that would have prevented Laura's death. But it is also possible that considering her narcissistic personality, even though she hears the truth from Laura – there was one moment Laura seems to want to confide in Iris, but stops short of it, probably because the latter might not believe her, Iris might deny what she hears. Indeed, Iris seems to want to deny what she hears from Reenie, whom she has known since a little child, and who would not lie to her about such an important matter. Her reason now seems clear: she can protect herself from severe criticism by doubting and denying Reenie's story. Her self-imposed 'unthinking' regarding moral issues makes it possible for her to continue to live with Richard and Winifred, who did great harm to Laura. Her self-justification is:

"But half a loaf is better than none, I would tell myself, and Richard was just a kind of loaf. He was the bread on the table, for Aimee as well as for myself. Rise above it, as Reenie used to say, and I did try. I tried to rise above it, up into the sky, like a

runaway ballroom, and some of the time I succeeded...Richard kept up appearances. So did I...Half a life is better than none.” (BA, 494)

Here, her daughter Aimee’s welfare is added to her list of excuses. Further, Iris does not elaborate on exactly what she did to “rise above” her habitual dependence, which implies that she might not have made any actual effort despite her claim that she “did try”. Again, her lack of courage and the absence of the spirit of independence not to mention her usual excuse – her circumstances – pave the way to the final act of tragedy.

After a long silence, that is, right after the end of World War II, Laura contacts Iris to get information about Alex Thomas’s whereabouts. When Laura called Iris, Iris describes Laura as someone with mental problems: “she was by this time an unknown quantity to me—perhaps of questionable stability” (BA, 498). It turns out that after her escape from the Bella Vista, the mental institution she was put in, Laura has been doing voluntary work and managing quite well thanks to her trust fund from their father. Laura’s curious, but not malicious question of what they told Iris about her makes Iris feel very uncomfortable and her defence mechanism goes on alert. Iris’s calculating reason operates fully here: “This was the crossroads: either Laura had been mad, or Richard had been lying. I couldn’t believe both” (BA, 500). Iris’s way of putting this situation is disturbingly cunning in that she attempts to find a way out of this moral dilemma by taking neither side, even though which side she is on is by now clear. Although she admits that she feels “treacherous”, her feelings of guilt are shallow, as is common among narcissistic individuals. She comes to know that Laura was really pregnant and the Bella Vista is a kind of illegal abortion centre. Noticing that Iris knows nothing about the real father, Laura refused to reveal the father’s name. To her heightened dismay, Iris presumes that the father must be Alex Thomas, which makes her embarrassed and angry because it means that Laura must have known about Iris’s affair with him all along. But when Laura says that she accepted and endured all her suffering to save Alex

from being caught, from being killed in the war, Iris becomes so confused and irritated with Laura's "loony metaphysics" (BA, 502). Laura's calm but firm belief that God must have saved Alex from the peril of the war owing to her sacrifice annoys Iris immensely. Out of spite, Iris tells Laura that Alex was killed in the war and they had been lovers for quite a long time. Iris recalls painfully: "Laura said nothing. She only looked at me. She looked right through me ...the look...terrified, cold, rapturous. Gleaming like steel" (BA, 503). Then comes the news that Laura drove straight off the bridge and died. From Laura's notebooks, she finds out that Richard was the father. It is convenient for her to lash out at Richard and Winifred for what happened, but their attempt to cover up the scandal does not kill Laura directly. Laura lives on after escaping from the Bella Vista. The truth is that what Iris said is what prompted Laura to the extreme act. Under the circumstances, for Laura, Iris's cold and sadistic revelation of the news of Alex's death and her affair with him must have been the last straw. Although Iris at times hints at her complicity in Laura's death and she confesses that "out of love," she should have lied, as I repeatedly pointed out, her thoughts and descriptions always make a detour around it, creating a cunning, narcissistic cycle of self-defence and self-justification. Thus Iris creates another blind spot and again attempts to defend herself:

"Should I behaved differently? You'll no doubt believe so, but did I have any other choices? I'd have such choices now, but now is not then. Should I have been able to read Laura's mind? Should I have known what was going on? Should I have seen what was coming next? Was I my sister's keeper?" (BA, 440)

In discussing the relations between moral action and ignorance of fact, Daniel Kading gives an example of a failure in saving one's life through negligence and its moral connotation:

...what is prescribed is not based on what the agent *does* believe at the time for action but on what he *would have believed* at that time if...he had not been negligent or in other relevant ways lacking in conscientiousness...For a person to say "But I *didn't* know" when he could and should have known something is no

excuse.¹⁵⁴

Iris seems to suggest that she “didn’t” know what was going on and the consequences her action might bring about, but as indicated above, that cannot be an excuse for her questionable (non-) action. Instead, as Kading says, “I *couldn’t* have known” can be an excellent excuse (339). Iris does not claim that she “couldn’t” have known, but does attempt to say that she “couldn’t have acted otherwise” because she had “no choice,” which I find not very different from “couldn’t have known” in essence. Iris admits to her faults, but contrives to lead us to think that she is not ‘blameworthy,’ which raises a question of the nature of her moral conscientiousness. It is cunning rationalization with a combination of ignorance and inability. I thus disagree with Staels, who naively interprets Iris’s admission of her negligence as a real regret, not noticing the moral implication of Iris’s manner of excusing herself with claims of ignorance of the situation (156). Her narcissistic endeavour to be seen as a dutiful sister, who tried hard in her own way, but failed, once again inhibits Iris from fully acknowledging her moral responsibility for her sister’s suffering and death.

There is what I take to be another inappropriate gesture of Iris’s with respect to her decision to find out exactly what it is in Laura’s notebooks. She describes herself as a person of courage, who does not choose ignorance for the sake of her mental peace, but who makes up her mind to face whatever truth is there in Laura’s message: “I could have chosen ignorance, but I did what you would have done... I chose knowledge instead” (*BA*, 509). Considering the fact that Iris turned a blind eye and chose not to dig further with regard to Laura’s alleged insanity, her thinly veiled gesture of doing something morally right after the tragic incident cannot be justified. Certainly, Iris’s inattention to her own “Pontius Pilate gesture” concerning her own sister’s security – the fact

¹⁵⁴ Daniel Kading, “Moral Action, Ignorance of Fact, and Inability”, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (Mar., 1965), Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 333-355, p. 339.

that she evaded unearthing the truth in fear of doing any damage to her position – and her attempt to minimize the effect of her vicious and malicious final words that drove Laura to suicide demonstrate her entrenched narcissistic attempt to avoid sharp criticism.

Furthermore, Iris explicitly blames Laura for “leaving such evidence” behind her:

But what about those who plant such clues, for us to stumble on? Why do they bother? Egotism? Pity? Revenge? A simple claim to existence, like scribbling your initials on a washroom wall? The combination of presence and anonymity—confession without penance, truth without consequences—it has its attractions. Getting the blood off your hands, one way or another. (*BA*, 509)

Seemingly, this criticism is directed at Laura, who, in Iris’s view, should not complain after leaving such evidence, if some strangers poke their noses into it. But it is highly suggestive of what Iris is doing while writing her memoir: “confession without penance”. The ample evidence of “truth without consequences” is also found in her manoeuvre as an author, which I shall examine in detail in Chapter 4. It is hard to believe that Laura’s act of leaving a clue to the identity of the real father has something to do with “egotism,” or with avoidance of responsibility. Laura’s act of leaving evidence here is simple and straightforward in comparison with Iris’s, who plants carefully designed clues to past secrecy. Ingersoll is right in perceiving Iris’s allusion to a “revelation” as a bait to lure the reader, and in noting Iris’s attempt to frustrate the reader “with a maddening arrays of details”(548, 550).

On the other hand, her conscious attempt to identify with the reader seems to be fused with Atwood’s voice: “Curiosity is not our only motive: love or grief or despair or hatred is what drives us on. We’ll spy relentlessly on the dead: we’ll open their letters, we’ll read their journals, we’ll go through their trash, hoping for a hint, a final word, an explanation from those who have deserted us...we’re voyeurs, all of us” (*BA* 509). Atwood is well aware of the fact that dead authors, especially famous ones can have little privacy: all her or his private correspondence, journals, etc.

are often dug and examined for the sake of ‘research’ unless they are strictly protected. Thus the question arises how far those who do research can go in unearthing and revealing certain private information about the author in question. Yet it is also true that writers often or at least occasionally rely on this kind of method when they get down to writing: “Stick a shovel into the ground almost anywhere and some horrible thing or other will come to light. Good for the trade, we thrive on bones; without them there’d be no stories”¹⁵⁵ (BA 13). In this respect, as a writer, Atwood seems to convey a self-critical message through this comment. Thus authors are also involved in voyeurism in their creative activity, which can create a moral dimension. In a similar fashion, Iris as a memoirist attracts readers with a sign of dark mystery, but she nevertheless reminds them of the moral dimension of being “grave robbers” in a sense. As in Iris’s comment on daytime talk shows where the participants “spill the beans,” one aspect of the reader’s participation in reading is to be “a sort of spy,” who does not hear, but “overhears.”¹⁵⁶ I shall discuss more how Iris’s consciousness of the reader’s reaction affects her authorial control and intentions in the next chapter. For the moment suffice it to say that reading activity can involve ethical questions.

If I pay attention to Atwood’s possible stance on Iris’s evil sides, she remarks: “Value judgements on the characters or the outcome need not be made by the writer, at least not in any overt fashion.”¹⁵⁷ Throughout the novel, the word ‘moral’ is only used a couple of times in Iris’s passing remarks on her “moral feebleness” and on Richard and Winifred’s sliding “moral scales,” which seems to suggest Atwood’s reserved attitude towards value judgements on her characters. While quoting Nadine Gordimer, Atwood remarks the double process a writer engages in: both deep involvement in the characters and a “fiendish” detachment.¹⁵⁸ Atwood seems quite detached from Iris’s narcissistic manoeuvre to be found ‘not guilty’. She is well aware of the dubious nature

¹⁵⁵ Originally, it is Alex’s comment on how stories take shape.

¹⁵⁶ Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), Northrop Frye’s remark, p. 126. From here on quoted as Atwood, *Negotiating*.

¹⁵⁷ Atwood, *Negotiating*, p. 110.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 29.

of autobiographical texts and seems to introduce Iris's metafictional comments on her memoir – which I shall show in 4.2 – to warn the naïve, gullible reader against Iris's narrative manipulation. But it can also be read as suggesting Iris's relative honesty, which could evoke the reader's sympathy. Atwood thus seems to intentionally create a dubious character whose narration raises a number of moral issues, but she seems to want to leave room for some positive interpretations of her protagonist through whom she communicates with the reader. This double relationship between the writer and the narrator is worthy of consideration alongside with interpretive space created by the different narrative layers in the novel. I shall thus attempt to connect these aspects to my discussion of evil in the next chapter in more detail.

To sum up this chapter, I have examined Iris's relationships with other main characters, the picture of whom, for various narcissistic reasons, Iris distorts in ways that are unfavourable and unfair to them. Her inattention to her deceitful behaviour and morally problematic bystander attitude also hints at her manoeuvre to keep her innocent 'victim' image more or less intact. By placing her wrongly oriented self-love above everything at the expense of moral deliberation, Iris becomes evil and does evil to those close to her.

4. Iris's manoeuvre as an author and memoirist

In the previous chapter, I have dealt with Iris mainly as a character and narrator and showed how her narcissistic personality brings into being certain negative images of the other main characters, overlooking and minimizing her evil sides.

In this chapter, I shall concentrate on the way Iris approaches the past events as an author referring to her way of constructing truth, which I think also has an important bearing on Atwood's structural design and her authorial intentions. What Freeman & Brockmeier calls the "moral space of self-interpretation" in autobiographical writing¹⁵⁹ is relevant to Iris's manner of self-creation and her claim to affording truth. That is, the manner in which Iris constructs her narrative identity with the aid of various narrative layers creates another kind of moral dimension. I shall also pay attention to Iris's real motivation for writing a memoir, which turns out to be something other than her alleged reasons, and which she herself is not quite conscious of.

4.1 "Other me" in *The Blind Assassin*

As Staels succinctly summarizes, the popular romance in this embedded novel illustrates Iris's secret affair with Alex Thomas, which the former deliberately omits in the memoir, inducing the reader to identify nameless lovers in it. The SF story Alex spins is a parody version of brutal ancient history, which in spite of the spatio-temporal difference, mirrors political and socio-economic

¹⁵⁹ Mark Freeman and Jens Brockmeier, "Narrative Integrity", in Brockmeier & Carbaugh (eds.), pp. 75-105, p. 86.

history in Canada in the tumultuous 1930s. More specifically, on the planet Zycron, in the city of Sakiel-Norn, civilisation thrives under the leadership of the Snilfards, the aristocrats of the city, but the prosperity of Sakiel-Norn is in fact guaranteed by the subjugated and suppressed group, the Ygnirods, who are “smallholders, serfs, and slaves” (*BA*, 18). For instance, exquisitely woven carpets, which were one of the most profitable trade goods, are produced by ‘children,’ who go blind after long hours of work in the dark and end up being an assassin for survival. On the other hand, the fate of a Snilfard who goes bankrupt is to be relegated to that of a Ygnirod unless he sells his wife or his daughter to pay his debt. More importantly, as a way to silence the voice of dissent, e.g. strong criticism of slave labour, the Snilfards make it a rule to sacrifice their daughters regularly in rituals, which they claim is a gesture of obeying gods whose justice and benevolence are claimed to have a great influence on their wealth and prosperity. The sacrificial virgins are muted to make sure that they do not cause trouble in performing the ritual smoothly: “Thus, tongueless, swollen with words...each girl would be led in procession to the sound of solemn music, wrapped in veils and garlanded with flowers, up the winding steps to the city’s ninth door” (*BA*, 31-32). In this sub-narrative, though not exactly, Iris’s personal history is intertwined in ways that reveal parallels to the story of the blind assassin and the sacrificial virgin in Sakiel-Norn on the planet Zycron. In the popular romance subtext, Iris’s status as a society bride and Alex’s fugitive state as a communist agitator are also hinted at.¹⁶⁰ Thus both these narratives and Iris’s memoir are interrelated and mirrored in certain important respects. My immediate concern here is narcissistic aspects of the embedded romance subtext, i.e. her affair with Alex, and their meaning in comparison with Iris’s memoir, which, I would argue, function as lending support to her self-defence in the memoir. Thus, I shall here limit my attention to the popular romance subtext with a view to uncovering Iris’s narcissistic attempt to create a false picture of her.

¹⁶⁰ Staels, pp. 149-152.

First of all, while presenting fictionalised autobiographical facts in her relationship with Alex Thomas, Iris seems to take liberty in creating a desirable self-image. Her narcissistic desire to be admired and loved, which is not articulated in the memoir, is revealed in ways that contradict Winifred's view of her and is at variance with her real character. Young's suggestion of three core schema moods operating in narcissistic people is useful to analyse Iris's psychology. The three moods are "entitlement, emotional deprivation, and defectiveness", which along with the secondary schemas such as approval seeking, can be further associated with three groups representing separate aspects of the self. Thus, in narcissistic individuals the "special self" mood, the "vulnerable child" mood and the "self-soother" mood operate separately or together, depending on the situation.¹⁶¹ The special-self mood is clearly visible in the depiction of Iris reflected in Alex's eyes. She casts Alex into a man who is deeply in love with her but puts on an indifferent front, and herself into a girl with discretion and decency who does not easily "give herself away" (BA, 258) and does not use foul language. For example, Alex's train of thoughts points to her being a virtuous girl: "despite her sorrow, she's never been so luscious" (BA, 372). Alex's longings for her are also expressed a number of times; Alex wants to take the glove she drops to "inhale her, in her absence" (BA, 19); or he wants Iris to "put the receiver against her throat" (BA, 22); he also asks her to stand at her bedroom window to catch a glimpse of her; he wants to "memorize" her to "have her later" (BA, 128) once he is away. In addition to Alex's yearnings for her, Iris adds a 'mysterious' shade to her character: "she gazes around in that dazed way she has, as if she's just been wakened from a puzzling dream" (BA, 258) Another example of this is the scene in the Top Hat Grill: "A soft and milky glow surrounds her" (BA, 372); "Despite those eyes, the pure line of her throat, he catches a glimpse in her at times of something complex and smirched" (BA, 282). Alex's passing comments on her body also seem to reveal her narcissism. For example, his mention of "her lovely distressed

¹⁶¹ From Young, J. (1994), *Cognitive therapy for personality disorders: A schema-focused approach* [rev.ed] (Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Press) cited in Ronningstam ,2005, p. 22.

face” (BA, 372) seems to function as invalidating Winifred’s casual remark before her wedding – “Make yourself beautiful”(BA, 240), which Iris secretly resents because it means that her sister-in-law does not find her beautiful. Another example of Iris’s narcissistic injuries, as I have already shown in Chapter 3, is Winifred’s rendering of her as a ‘dumb’ kid who is not able to do anything alone. Interestingly, there are some instances in which Iris attempts to show that, apart from her innocent look, she is actually an intelligent woman. Her comments on Alex’s story of Sakiel-Norn surprised Alex: “You’ve got a surprising amount of bric a brac in your head” (BA, 354). She also says to Alex, “I’ve always had my own ideas,” (BA, 353) implying that she does not just express them often. The fact that Alex never really included the love story of the blind assassin and the sacrificial girl in his pulp fiction casts doubt on the authenticity of his deep love for her expressed in the embedded novel. Her narcissistic craving for being adored and respected allows for her portrayal of Alex as a love-stricken man, which does not seem to be true in that he more or less regards love as an idle bourgeois concept and “sentimental drivel” (BA, 356).

Young’s two other narcissistic moods, the vulnerable mood and the self-soother mood are closely related to each other in the sense that narcissistic personalities often switch from the former mood to the latter to avoid the negative effect on the vulnerable mood. More specifically, in order to eliminate the vulnerable feelings, narcissistic individuals often resort to undesirable methods such as drug abuse, sex or fantasies.¹⁶² In Iris’s case, her narcissistic fantasies are the source of her escape from her weak, humiliated self. She describes her mental state as empty and deprived and states that other people are “more real than she is” (BA, 259). She also mentions at one point that her heart has become like a “stone” with no blood in it. While trying to evoke sympathy for her “ruined maid” (BA, 124) situation, she simultaneously fantasizes herself as an imprisoned noble girl. As Freud notes, fantasies can be deemed a source of defence because in fantasizing “judgement

¹⁶² From Young, J. (1994), *Cognitive therapy for personality disorders: A schema-focused approach* [rev.ed] (Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Press) cited in Ronningstam, 2005, p. 22

about the truth is suspended, or better, never enters as part of the cognitive frame.”¹⁶³ “*The tower*” part is probably the most explicit evidence of the extent of her narcissistic fantasy:

But he bypasses all of that, comes through it unscathed, all the way to this city, the one containing her, its houses and steeples encircling her where she sits in the most inward, the most central tower of them all...She’s the tremulous heart of everything, tucked into her white bed. Locked away from danger, but she is the point of it all. The point of it all is to protect her. That’s what they spend their time doing – protecting her from everything else. She looks out the window, and nothing can get at her, and she can get at nothing. (*BA*, 421)

Though she is imprisoned, they “can’t reach her, lay a finger on her” and can’t “pin anything on her”(BA, 421). Here Iris is depicted as a noble girl who calmly endures her hardship and has a strange power of keeping other people of evil intentions at bay. The bad world ready to prey on her is also found in Alex’s concern for her: “Maybe it wouldn’t be such a bright idea, her out on her own. Out there in the big bad world, where every guy from here to China could take a crack at her. If anything went wrong, he’d have only himself to blame” (*BA*, 373). This appears to be Iris’s wishful thinking. Staels argues that through his SF parables, Alex attempts to lead Iris to re-evaluate her shallow and functional bourgeois life and encourage her to make a new start in life.¹⁶⁴ I find Staels’s point closer to the truth considering that Alex seems to adhere to telling about “wolves” in his stories by eliminating the love story of the blind assassin and the sacrificial virgin in his published pulp fiction. In addition, he is aware of the nature of their affair, which I shall show shortly. To summarize, Iris’s fantasy of her as a pure innocent girl with integrity whom everybody adores and the implication that the corrupt world attempts to defile her clearly demonstrates that her unconscious narcissistic desire for grandiosity emerges more freely under the guise of a fictional character. Fantasizing oneself as someone else with better qualities does not necessarily makes one

¹⁶³ Nancy Sherman “Emotional Agent”, in Michael P. Levine (ed.) *Analytic Freud: Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 154-176, pp. 163, 164.

¹⁶⁴ Staels, p. 156.

evil, but her affair with Alex is an important missing bit in the memoir, in light of which it can serve to affirm that what Iris says in her memoir is ‘true’. As we saw earlier in Chapter 3, this self-creation of hers – victim with integrity and dignity – has little to do with her real self.

In her discussion of narcissistic personality, Koehn indicates that narcissistic persons, instead of asking themselves why their behaviour is leaving them unhappy, blame the world for giving them a hard time and often lapse into sentimental self-pity.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, people of narcissistic disposition demand that their needs and desire should be fulfilled, but they often resort to external sources, which result in reinforcing their passivity.¹⁶⁶ That her affair with Alex is actually as much narcissistic flight from reality would be a shameful truth Iris would not want to acknowledge. As seen in her memoir, when she unexpectedly spotted Alex Thomas on a street during her aimless wanderings, without thinking, she reaches out her hand “like a drowning person beseeching rescue” (*BA*, 330). It is equal to “betrayal” rather than “an act of courage,” though she claims that it could be both, according to her devious logic. Indeed, there is a passage in the book where Alex speculates on Iris’s motive to seek him out. It seems that Alex is aware of the nature of their affair:

Why does she keep arriving? Is he some private game she’s playing, is that it? He won’t let her pay for anything, he won’t be bought. She wants a love story out of him because girls do or girls of her type who still expect something from life. But there must be another angle. The wish for revenge, or for punishment. Women have curious ways of hurting someone else. They hurt themselves instead; or else they do it, so the guy doesn’t even know he’s been hurt until much later. (*BA*, 282)

Here, Iris’s authorial manipulation changes Alex’s train of thought from his doubt about and anger at her possible motive to her vulnerable situation in which she has no actual freedom and power. Another important passage where Iris herself also gives a hint at her narcissistic avoidance of reality also includes her usual self-justification:

¹⁶⁵ Koehn, p. 73.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 65.

She hasn't examined her motives. There may not be any motives as such; desire is not a motive. It doesn't seem to her that she has any choice. Such extreme pleasure is also a humiliation. It's like being hauled along by a shameful rope, a leash around the neck. She resents it, her lack of freedom, and so she stretches out the time between, rationing him...But in the end, back she comes. There is no use resisting. She goes to him for amnesia, for oblivion. She renders herself up, is blotted out; enters the darkness of her own body, forgets her name. Immolation is what she wants, however briefly. To exist without boundaries. (*BA*, 267)

As she admits here, sexual pleasure and her needs for “amnesia,” “oblivion,” are her main reason to keep going back to him. It is true that she feels a deep sense of shame, but her subsequent excuse that she has no choice and the implication that her act is a kind of “immolation” again show Iris's narcissistic control over the way her affair with Alex should be envisaged. Iris's attempt to make their relationship a beautiful one, and to memorialise him in an affectionate and nostalgic way, as her cherishing of the *picnic* picture shows, can be read as being a harmless gesture and even understandable to a certain extent. However, as I have already shown, Iris's narcissistic strategies for balancing her unstable, low self-esteem with another self with admirable traits, and for manipulating and constraining the reader's view of her, whether conscious or unconscious, points to her defective moral consciousness. Further, defending her book, she says: “I didn't think of what I was doing as writing—just writing down. What I remembered, and also what I imagined, which is also the truth” (*BA*, 529). Her claim to truth sounds flimsy considering the implication of her self-creation and her unwarranted use of Alex as her admirer, and most importantly, the reduction of her narcissistic escape from reality to a self-justified way of coping with her problem.

Iris's comments on *The Blind Assassin* in her memoir also serves to manipulate the reader in the sense that she confers extra meaning on it based on the aftermath of her publication of the book under Laura's name. Unexpectedly and surprisingly, the book, though not a best seller, creates a sensation putting Laura in the spotlight and bringing posthumous fame to her sister despite the

moralistic strong criticism of the book. The fact that the book indirectly contributes to tracing the secret about the Bella Vista and causes Richard's downfall in his political career seems to affect Iris whose covert vengeful spirit finally betrays its true colour. Her mental state appears to show the combination of what O. Kernberg calls "aggressive entitlement," which means "the sense of the right to pick on, blame and misuse others" and "revengeful or malignant entitlement," which refers to "the right to retaliate".¹⁶⁷ Her malicious joy in torturing Richard to whom she used to 'cling' seems to border on psychological exploitation. For her, it is an easy thing to attack a visible culprit, who is nevertheless not the one who actually "pushed" Laura off the bridge. Even after Laura's death, her narcissistic way of thinking still persists. Iris also contrives to justify her decision to borrow Laura's name claiming that Laura was there with her in a spiritual sense during her writing:

It was no great leap from that to naming Laura as the author. You might decide that it was cowardice that inspired me or a failure of nerve—I've never been fond of spotlights. Or simple prudence: my own name would have guaranteed the loss of Aimee, whom I lost in any case. But on second thought, it was merely doing justice, because I can't say Laura didn't write a word. Technically that's accurate. But in another sense—what Laura would have called the spiritual sense—you could say she was my collaborator. (BA, 529-530)

Taking into account the fact that while writing Iris was absorbed in creating her and Alex as doomed lovers, it is hard to believe her claim to her supposed consideration of Laura. Iris's way of thinking is morally opportunistic in that by believing that she 'punished' Richard through her book not to mention make Laura famous, which was not her initial attention, but an unexpected result and by using it as her self-justification, Iris once again endeavours to look like a virtuous big sister, who 'avenges' her little sister. Her attempt to make reparation turns into a kind of "moral trade-off", which does not recognize or respect "objective requirements, which do not allow any hypothetical

¹⁶⁷ From Kernberg, O. (1984), *Severe personality disorders* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press) cited in Ronningstam, 2005, p. 99.

reasoning.”¹⁶⁸ The fact that Richard received punishment for his crime should not obscure Iris’s morally condemnable choices she made at critical moments concerning Laura’s fate. Iris’s claim that she is “doing justice” to Laura does not exempt her from her own crime, which weighs much more heavily than Richard’s.

4.2 Traumas and Tragedy

Undoubtedly, Iris’s long memoir in which real people are described bears heavy moral responsibility. As Kearney points out, narrative retelling plays a crucial role in our actual lives and “questions of how and what we recount” are more than a matter of selection or method, involving our existential and ethical standpoints.¹⁶⁹ If we look at a bigger picture of Iris’s shaping of her life story as a memoirist, her memoir appears to point to two elements closely associated with each other: traumas and tragedy. In the following, I shall examine the way Iris utilizes these two components in relation to her construction of truth. Her metafictional comments on her writing and her occasional references to the reader whose presence Iris seems more and more conscious of will also be considered. In respect of Iris’s (and Atwood’s as well) authorial intentions, it is also important to differentiate “what narratives describe” and “what the telling of a narrative accomplishes.”¹⁷⁰

To begin with, while tracing back to her family history, Iris directs our attention to family traumas. Iris’s father survives World War I, but as Iris puts it, he is a “shattered wreck” suffering “the nightmares and sudden fits of rage” (*BA*, 80). The man with ideals in the past comes to see everything in a sceptical way, as a result of which his bond with his wife, who is a devout Christian,

¹⁶⁸ Koehn, p. 49.

¹⁶⁹ Kearney, p. 31.

¹⁷⁰ Brockmeier and Harre “Narrative: Problems and promises of an alternative paradigm”, in Brockmeier and Carbaugh (eds.), pp. 39-58, p. 51.

is irretrievably lost in a fundamental sense. Further, along with his newly developed alcoholism and restlessness, he begins his “disreputable rambles” (BA, 82). However, as Iris says, her father does not mean to make her mother suffer, but it turns out that her mother’s constant and great effort to always forgive him and take good care of him takes a heavy toll on her: “Her hair has begun to go white prematurely. She would no more think of dyeing it than she would have of cutting off her hand, and thus she has a young woman’s face in a nest of thistledown” (BA, 83). After Laura’s birth, her mother’s health deteriorates further and her third pregnancy ends up with miscarriage, which eventually causes her mother’s early death. While recollecting those tragic events, Iris describes how she reacts to her mother’s sudden worsening health:

It was as if my former mother had been stolen away by the elves, and this other mother—this older and greyer and saggier and more discouraged one—had been left behind in her place. I was only four then, and was frightened by the change in her, and wanted to be held and reassured; but my mother *no longer* had the energy for this...I soon found that if I could keep quiet, without clamouring for attention, and above all, if I could be helpful—especially with the baby, with Laura...I would be permitted to remain in the same room with my mother...So that was the accommodation I made: silence, helpfulness. (BA, 88)

Old Iris subsequently thinks: “I should have screamed. I should have thrown tantrums” (BA, 88), which might have helped her discharge some of her suppressed desires. Freud argues that anxiety is “the original reaction to helplessness in the trauma” and emerges later again in the danger-situation “as a signal for help.”¹⁷¹ Iris’s fear of losing her mother and her love – object-loss in Freudian terms – causes acute anxiety, which turns into a resentment at her mother when she somehow apprehends the possibility that her mother might not be there anymore for her:

I was sulky during these visits. I could see how ill she was, and I resented her for it. I felt she was in some way betraying me—that she was shirking her

¹⁷¹ From Sigmund Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926d), pp. 166-7, SE 20 (*Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*) cited in Quinodoze, p. 52.

duties, that she'd abdicated. It didn't occur to me that she might die. I'd been afraid of this possibility earlier, but now I was so terrified that I'd put it out of my mind. (BA, 96)

It is evident here that little Iris senses her unsatisfied needs, which her mother might not be able to meet. Feeling confused, Iris "nodded" to her mother on her deathbed when the latter asks Iris to be a "good sister" to Laura. It is not hard to believe that her mother's sudden aging, declining health and the final death became little Iris's trauma. Besides, her father's subsequent apologetic request that she look after Laura, "if anything happens" (BA, 104) also suggests that it must have been unfair to little Iris. Old Iris reflects on her mother's mysterious remark, "*Underneath it all*, your father loves you" (BA, 105):

Even if love was *underneath it all*, there was a great deal piled on top, and what would you find when you dug down? Not a simple gift, pure gold and shining; instead, something ancient and possibly baneful, like an iron charm rusting among old bones. A talisman of sorts, this love, but a heavy one; a heavy thing for me to carry around with me, slung on its iron chain around my neck. (BA, 105-6)

Here, Iris claims that her promise to look after Laura, the promise she made in order not to lose her parents' love, turns out to be a 'huge' burden. However, it is not adequate to be used as an apology for what happened to Laura in the sense that Iris did not need to worry about or keep an eye on Laura as much as she would have us believe. By emphasizing her own trauma, besides her parents' difficult life, Iris seems to attempt to solicit sympathy from the reader. It is interesting to find that Iris regards her mother's death as a significant turning point in her life: "*This event changed everything*" (BA, 89). It is not clear what Iris means by this remark. The loss of her mother at such an early age must be a tragic event, but it almost seems as if Iris is trying to evade or relieve some of her moral burden by claiming that everything would have been different if her mother had been alive. Although it is not explicitly suggested, there is a minor incident, which nevertheless appears to be somehow connected to her future dubious behaviour. Recalling her and Laura's violent, sexist

private tutor, Mr. Erskine, Iris says something quite similar to her way of acting towards Richard and Winifred: “I’d learned half-concealed insolence and silent resistance. I’d learned that revenge is a dish best eaten cold. I’d learned not to get caught” (*BA*, 171). It is not certain whether Iris implicates the negative effect of Mr. Erskine on her deplorable future behaviour as a kind of defence or apology, but there is a possibility that old Iris could perceive the outcome of his tutoring as having a detrimental effect on her.

To repeat, what is more problematic is Iris’s coherent endeavour to turn the reader’s attention away from the graveness of her sin and create another way of seeing the past events. As Ingersoll rightly points out, Iris endeavours to obscure “the knowability of both what caused the suicide and even who the culprit is.”¹⁷² By postponing revealing who is the criminal until the very end and diffusing our attention across family traumas and scandals, Iris creates her version of tragedy in which she, Laura and Alex are main characters. In discussing autobiography, Jerome Bruner mentions “a criterion of versimilitude, lifelikeness”, by which he means:

... “the story of my life” ...is not composed of a set of testable propositions in the usual sense, but is composed as a narrative. And this imposes constraints that have as much to do with the requirements of narrative as they have to do with what “happened” to one, or what one remembers as having happened.¹⁷³

Here, the requirements of narrative refer to “a form of organizing experience” which enables a narrative invention to be interpreted in a certain way along with its possible metaphorical connotation.¹⁷⁴ Iris’s authorial control thus seems to lead us to a point where it all began and show how it reached its end, attempting to persuade us to see things from her perspective. While recollecting the button factory picnic, Iris suggests it being the origin of the tragic denouement:

¹⁷² Ingersoll, p. 544.

¹⁷³ Jerome Bruner, “Self-making and world-making”, pp. 25-37, in Brockmeier & Carbaugh, (eds.), pp. 25-37, p. 28.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 28

Was that the beginning, that evening—on the dock at Avilion, with the fireworks dazzling in the sky? It's hard to know. Beginnings are sudden, but also insidious. They creep up on you sideways, they keep to the shadows, they lurk unrecognised. Then later, they spring. (*BA*, 195)

The point that in narrating one's life-story one configures one's previous experiences in a way that assigns a new meaning of "origin" and "cause"¹⁷⁵ and the argument that when one attempts to make sense of one's life and one's life history "in terms of meaning and intentionality," issues of objectivity and truth of one's representation only occupy "secondary status"¹⁷⁶ seem reasonable, but if the attempt results in distorting reality and telling half-truth, it raises an ethical question. It is quite disturbing to find Iris placing an emphasis on the nature of beginnings as "insidious," unrecognisable, which seems to serve the purpose of her usual self-defence: it was impossible for her to see the signs of them; she was herself vulnerable to their sudden attack. Further, her view of tragedy poses the same kind of moral question:

I've looked back over what I've set down so far, and it seems inadequate. Perhaps there's too much frivolity in it, or too many things that might be taken for frivolity. A lot of clothes...A lot of dinners...Breakfasts, picnics ocean voyages, costume balls, newspapers, boating on the river. Such items do not assort very well with tragedy. But in life, a tragedy is not one long scream. It includes everything that led up to it. Hour after trivial hour, year after year, and then the sudden moment: the knife stab, the shell-burst, the plummet of the car from the bridge. (*BA*, 429-430)

In Iris's view, the tragic fate of slave children who had no other option for survival but being blind assassins, her father's war trauma, and her trivial daily routines as a society bride have part in the final tragic event: Laura's suicide. In other words, Iris's approach to the idea of tragedy is not a single event, but embodies a perspective on the whole of a person's life, "everything that led up to it." This certainly supports her argument that the beginning and its development are imperceptible

¹⁷⁵ Jens Brockmeier, "From the end to the beginning", in Brockmeier and Carbaugh (eds.), pp. 247-280, p. 277.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 270.

and gradual, which makes their eventual manifestations look so sudden. However, as I have argued thus far, her passive, mechanical behaviour with the questionable choices at crucial moments is the most important factor in this tragedy. Ingersoll is right to argue that Iris encourages readers to “focus on all of these players as moving in a tragedy” for which Iris is the “stage-manager and recorder.”¹⁷⁷ That is, Iris is not so much concerned with her treachery and her complicit behaviour as with the desire to confer a special meaning on the story of Laura, Alex and herself by turning it into a tragedy with a secret love story. In discussing Aristotle’s idea of tragedy, Eugene Garver indicates that the tragic effect can only be understood through “the structured action that produces it.”¹⁷⁸ As is well known, the end of tragedy is the experience of catharsis, which is not quite adequate to be considered in moral terms. What Iris tries to achieve by asserting her notion of tragedy is, I would argue, the reader’s willing suspension of moral judgements of her. Here, Hume’s idea of morality involving a distrust of reason as the basis of moral decisions and judgements can conveniently serve Iris’s purpose. That is, the reader’s initial criticism of Iris’s neglect of her duties can be less severe if the emotional appeal of a ‘tragedy’ comes into the picture. As Hume sharply notes, in everyday practices of morality, an “ineliminable” appeal to sentiment and sympathy is present in making moral judgements¹⁷⁹, of which clever Iris seems to be aware.

By the same token, in respect of narrative manipulation, Jopling points out the blurring of the distinction “between truth-telling and lying,” “between expressions of personal preference and serious claims to knowledge” in self-narratives and its moral implications:

¹⁷⁷ Ingersoll, p. 551. However, in spite of his sharp observations of Iris’s authorial manoeuvre, Ingersoll seems to pay too much attention to Iris’s trope of memorial in a form of tragedy and the relationship between art and life. His comments on the novel’s closure end up endorsing Iris’s version of the story. I also disagree about his “gothic” interpretation of Iris’s hint at Myra’s paternity. It seems more likely that narcissistic Iris secretly wants to taint Reenie’s image because she was the only one who knows the truth about Iris’s wilful betrayal of Laura and suspects Iris’s complicity in Laura’s death. Her shallow guilty feeling may well be replaced by covert resentment at Reenie’s moral judgement of her. Her relativistic moral stance seems to be revealed in this minor attempt of hers: “Who are you to judge?”

¹⁷⁸ Eugene Garver, “Aristotle’s Genealogy of Morals”, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (Jun.,1984), Vol. 44, No. 4, pp. 471-492, p. 475.

¹⁷⁹ Grant Gillett, “Moral Authenticity and the Unconscious”, in Michael P. Levine (ed.), *Analytic Freud: Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 177-192, p. 180.

If these distinctions are blurred, then with enough interpretive flexibility and evidentiary malleability, and enough coherence-preserving revisions across the peripheries of the self-narrative, narrators would have the interpretive freedom to generate narratives that satisfy the criteria for internal and external coherence, and the criteria for applicability, while remaining driven by *personal preference* or *self-deception*. This would serve *the needs of moral convenience* by supplying a ready basis for *self-centered excuses and moral exemptions*. (my italics)¹⁸⁰

As I indicated in 2.2, neither internal nor external coherence is sufficient for proving truth-claims.

The force of narrative alterations can also overshadow the meaning of certain empirical facts. What Iris attempts in her memoir is not discovering truth about her past, but making her self-portrayal true by believing it, which borders on a combination of the relativist and subjectivist view whose sceptical attitude to ‘objective’ truth can be used for a wrong purpose. It is true that depending on the situation, this kind of view can be compelling with little moral controversy. However, in Iris’s case, her claim to truth is arguable due to her self-deception, which creates a moral dimension. As I have shown in Chapter 3, Iris employs various self-deceptive tactics in order to obscure her problematic way of moral thinking and accuses Richard and Winifred of Laura’s suffering and death. Further she describes Laura as some kind of psychotic, someone with sudden mood swings and unpredictable “lapses.” On the other hand, Iris attempts to portray Laura as a penitent, self-sacrificial virgin whose mythical image is created afterwards. Further, she contrives to show that like Laura, she was a sacrificial virgin herself in a symbolic sense. As I have introduced in 2.2, and also mentioned in Chapter 3, narrative-generated artefacts – artefacts of crystallization and temporal artefacts – are “those psychological or phenomenological states” that appear to be given prior to their identification but without “the presence of narrative” they remain somewhat formless with no meaning, thereby not being materialized.¹⁸¹ As is also shown in 4.1, in a general sense, the two sub-

¹⁸⁰ Jopling, p. 51.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 52.

narratives serve to confirm Iris's narrative identity as a sacrificial virgin: she is construed as an innocent woman with dignity, who becomes a sacrificial victim of the evil manoeuvre of her husband and sister-in-law, but who is temporarily rescued by the man she loves. It is Iris's 'tragic' drama in which the two sisters fall in love with the same man, which apart from their sisterly love, creates rivalry and competition between them, but in her tragedy their fate is made to look essentially similar.

Freeman and Brockmeier also indicate that narrative construction of identity involves an ethical dimension as well as a psychological and aesthetic one.¹⁸² Thus, through "self-distancing," autobiographical self-construction demands that one "confront oneself "honestly" and own up to the troubling spots of one's history."¹⁸³ On the contrary, Iris seems to covertly emphasize her illusional role of saving Laura from her suffering. Towards the end of her memoir, from Laura's notebook Iris quotes the story of Dido in Virgil's *Aeneid*, who has stabbed herself mourning her vanished lover Aeneas, who has gone to war:

Then powerful Juno felt sorry for her long-time suffering and uneasy journey, and sent Iris from Olympus to cut the agonizing soul from the body that still held onto it. This had to be done because Dido was not dying a natural death or one caused by other people, but in despair, driven to it by a crazy impulse. Anyway Proserpine hadn't yet cut off the golden lock from her head or sent her down to the Underworld... Iris flew down, and hovering over Dido, she said: As I was told to do, I take this sacred thing which belongs to the God of Death; and I release you from your body. (BA, 515)

Here Laura's suicide becomes parallel to Dido's, which was "not caused by other people" but committed "in despair" and it is "Iris" who saves Dido from terrible suffering. Quite probably, Laura must have been in agony when she heard about Alex's death, but here Iris quite cleverly blurs her own part in causing Laura to kill herself and in a way embellishes her self-deceptive role of a

¹⁸² Freeman and Brockmeier, "Narrative Integrity: Autobiographical identity and the meaning of "good life"", in Brockmeier and Carbaugh (eds.), pp. 75-105, p. 75.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 80.

saver. In her closing remarks on the memoir, recalling her initial intention of creating a kind of memorial, Iris says: “But what is a memorial, when you come right down to it, but a commemoration of wounds endured. Endured and resented. Without memory there can be no revenge” (BA, 525). J. Brooks Bouson also thinks of Iris as an illusionist and notices Iris’s invoking of “literary-mythical discourse,” as she depicts Laura as a “mythic, fated type,” and her collusive behaviour¹⁸⁴ but does not press further. Her feminist reading of the novel somehow endorses Iris’s conclusion, failing to notice Iris’s narcissistic authorial manoeuvre. Both Bouson and Staels seem to read Iris’s writing of a memoir as a “healing” and transformative process, which can only be true in an illusional, self-deceptive sense. As noted in Chapter 3, Iris’s unresolved feelings towards Laura and her narcissistic concerns prevent her from feeling truly and deeply repentant. Hence, her writing of a ‘confessional’ memoir does not transform narcissistic Iris. She remains more or less the same as her ‘deficient’ younger self.

It is not surprising then that Iris’s narcissistic authorial effort to add an aesthetic dimension to her life-story and memorialise it culminates in her circumvention of her duty to tell the whole truth. Indeed, her view of truth is somewhat elusive and ambiguous. She admits to the fact that she omitted certain important information, and that she is doing some revision of what she has written thus far:

The only way you can write the truth is to assume that what you set down will never be read. Not by any other person, and not even by yourself at some later date. Otherwise you begin excusing yourself. You must see the writing as emerging like a long scroll of ink from the index finger of our right hand; you must see your left hand erasing it. Impossible, of course. I pay out my line, I pay out my line, this black thread I’m spinning across the page. (BA, 291)

¹⁸⁴ J. Brooks Bouson, “A Commemoration of Wounds Endured and Resented: Margaret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin* as Feminist Memoir”, in *Critique* (Spring, 2003), Vol. 44, Issue 3, pp. 251-269. pp. 253-254, p. 264.

But at the same time Iris contrives to argue that truth is not something simple that one can easily define or explain, and defends herself by resorting to the possible complexity of uncovering the truth:

I look back over what I've written and I know it's wrong, not because of what I've set down, but because of what I've omitted. What isn't there has a presence, like the absence of light. You want the truth of course. You want me to put two and two together. But two and two doesn't necessarily get you the truth. Two and two equals a voice outside the window. Two and two equals the wind. The living bird is not its labelled bones. (*BA*, 407)

Her argument that the truth about her life is not to be equated with “its labelled bones”, albeit to the point in a certain sense, does not justify her manoeuvre to reinvent herself as someone she is not and interpret critical events in the past in non-moral terms. Whether or not this voice is actually reflecting Atwood's view of truth is unclear. In her comments on *Alias Grace*, Atwood mentions that the difficulty of grasping the truth about Grace makes her conclude: “truth is sometimes unknowable, at least by us.”¹⁸⁵ On the other hand, Atwood is well aware of not only a storyteller's strong motives to narrate but also “strong motives to withhold.”¹⁸⁶ Considering Iris's metafictional, self-reflexive comments above, which hint at the other, absent, latent story and the situational difference between Grace and Iris, it is quite probable that Atwood recognizes the elusiveness of Iris's approach to truth. But the reader might not see Iris's manoeuvre to complicate the simple truth of the critical events, pointed out in Chapter 3. Iris seems to appeal to “narrative truth,” which refers to “the combined result of specific ways of meaning-making that are highly flexible with respect to verifiability, truth conditions, or logical justifications.”¹⁸⁷ In this respect, narrative truth can come close to ‘contingent’ truth, which can be arbitrarily used in a self-defensive way by a manipulative

¹⁸⁵ Margaret Atwood, “In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction” in *The American Historical Review* (Dec., 1998), Vol. 103, No. 5, pp. 1503-1516, p. 1515.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 1515.

¹⁸⁷ Jerome Bruner cited in Freeman and Brockmeier “Narrative Integrity: Autobiographical identity and the meaning of “good life”” in Brockmeier and Carbaugh (eds.), p. 82.

agent. What is morally at issue here is that Iris's idea of tragedy combined with her concept of truth can serve her narcissistic purposes. Her somewhat expedient interpretation of truth obscures the simple truth about her: her incapacity to love, which allows for envy and hate to possess her in her last meeting with Laura. It is thus not at all justifiable that she uses her ambiguous notion of truth to avoid her responsibility and prevent any strong criticism from moral quarters.

Most probably, "the dead" people would contradict what Iris supposedly presents as truth. Iris implies that she has a high price to pay for her writing, which is to confront painful memories of her dead family. Indeed, while writing her memoir, Iris goes through many an evil night with anxiety dreams. Once in a while during her writing Iris finds herself questioning if she has the right to write about them: "Why stir everything up again after that many years, with all concerned tucked in, like tired children, so neatly into their graves?" (*BA*, 294); "To pronounce the name of the dead is to make them live again, said the ancient Egyptians: not always what one might wish" (*BA*, 196). Here, Atwood's warning that writers should be cautious about "appropriating the voices of others"¹⁸⁸ is worth noting:

As a grave-digger, you are not just a person who excavates. You carry upon your shoulders the weight of other people's projections, of their fears and fantasies and anxieties and superstitions. You represent mortality, whether you like it or not.¹⁸⁹

Despite Iris's consciousness that she might be misrepresenting and even doing injustice to the dead because of her unwarranted and wrong use of their voices for her benefit, she does nonetheless guard against possible criticism of this kind by arguing: "Nothing is more difficult than to understand the dead, I've found; but nothing is more dangerous than to ignore them" (*BA*, 525). But her consideration of them, as we have seen, is subverted by her narcissistic desires to be thought of

¹⁸⁸ Atwood, *Negotiating*, p. 119.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 26.

as a victim like Laura, the result of which is that she not only wrongs Richard and Winifred but also arbitrarily conjectures Laura's feelings and thoughts. In the epilogue, Iris makes one last attempt at self-defence and self-justification:

How could I have been so ignorant? she thinks. So stupid, so unseeing, so given over to carelessness. But without such ignorance, such carelessness, how could we live? If you knew what was going to happen, if you knew everything that was going to happen next—if you knew in advance the consequences of your own actions—you'd be doomed. You'd be as ruined as God. You'd be a stone. You'd never eat or drink or laugh or get out of bed in the morning. You'd never love anyone, ever again. You'd never dare to. (*BA*, 534)

It is of course impossible to know possible consequences of our every act, and it is true that it would be really difficult if we came to know the consequences of our every action in advance. However, this again sounds like another apology of Iris's. The same pattern of Iris's narcissistic endeavour to protect her deliberately constructed self-image – a relatively innocent victim and dutiful big sister in pain – seems quite obvious now: she blames herself and then invalidates or nullifies the effect by generalizing, complicating or obscuring the simple truth about her. Moral authenticity involves the action of working one's inner conflicts and self-deception through, as a result of which one's regrets and guilty feelings become deep and genuine.¹⁹⁰ It is thus clear that Iris's inauthentic 'I-am-responsible' gesture cunningly aims at the opposite effect: not being held accountable for what happened. If she was a kind of 'sleepwalker', as she claims Laura describes her as, it can be said that she was a 'wilful' sleepwalker, who did not want to see what she ought to have seen. As we saw earlier in 2.1, Kant also mentions the role of self-deception in adopting immoral maxims: "wilful ignorance" or a "self-imposed thoughtlessness" is only possible when "morally salient features of a situation" are 'ignored' or 'obscured'. Cooke's point that one's "moral disposition" is gradually formed by one's patterns of behaviour over a long period of time is also relevant here. It

¹⁹⁰ Gillett in Michael P. Levine (ed.), pp. 177-178.

is because of her “faulty moral disposition” that she overlooks morally important issues, placing her self-interests above moral duties. More specifically, as I argued in Chapter 3, it is not her ‘accidental’ faults such as ignorance and carelessness, but her deep-rooted narcissistic character with the evasion of moral deliberation that damages her interpersonal relationships irreparably. Consequently, Iris experiences no real ‘catharsis,’ which would make personal transformation possible and relieve her of the heavy weight of her shameful moral bargain in the past. Ironically, old Iris’s self-pity seems to suggest her empty narcissistic state: “I had no heart any more, it had been broken; or not broken, it simply wasn’t there any more. It had been scooped neatly out of me like the yolk from a hard-boiled egg, leaving the rest of me bloodless and congealed and hollow” (BA, 460). Indeed, the point that narcissistic individuals have no “core” because of their dependence on others’ opinions of them, which implicates the precarious nature of their feeling of “self-worth”¹⁹¹ is also relevant here considering Iris’s constant worries about what the reader might think of her, including Sabrina, her granddaughter for whom the memoir is written. In this sense, her lack of serious self-inquiry and self-reflection can be read as being caused by her absorption in controlling the reader’s view of her.

Now that we have seen Iris’s authorial manoeuvre to attract the reader’s attention to her concept of tragedy and truth, which seems to partly coincide with Atwood’s intention, it would be in order to contemplate what Atwood tries to communicate through her narrator and her narrative structure. Steven Mailloux rightly notes that some reader-response theorists place too much emphasis on the reader’s role in the literary transaction with little consideration of “the writer’s considerable input into the quality and shape of the reading process.”¹⁹² In a similar vein, Peter J. Rabinowitz specifies four conventions of reading, which would influence the reader’s ability to

¹⁹¹ Chazan, p. 130.

¹⁹² Quoted from *Interpretive Conventions; The Reader in the Study of American Fiction* (1982) in Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, *Formalist Criticism and Reader-Response Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 68.

reflect upon the author's "overarching" message: (1) notice – this rule instructs readers about "where and when to concentrate their attention during the reading experience"; (2) signification – refers to the manner in which authors implicitly or explicitly draws the reader's attention to certain instances in a given narrative; (3) configuration – refers to "the ways in which the structure of a literary work impacts the reader's ability to realize the narrative's possibility of outcomes"; (4) coherence – points to "the reader's capacity for recognizing the unity, fundamental patterns, and larger meaning inherent in a given narrative."¹⁹³ Besides a number of semiotic, referential signs found in chapter titles, Atwood does seem to attempt to encourage the reader to see the interconnectedness of her narrative layers and figure out its "larger meaning." In discussing "peritexts," which refers to "what immediately surrounds the text" such as title(s), epigraph, preface, chapters, etc., Mikko Keskinen indicates that they can be interpreted "in classical narratological terms which presuppose a controlled, (intentionally) prestructured textual wholeness."¹⁹⁴ Certainly, Atwood's epigraph seems to allude to central themes of the novel. The epigraph from Ryszard Kapuscinski hints at the subtext's brutal ancient regime with carpet-weaving slave children, who survive as blind assassins later, and the second epigraph, an inscription on a Carthaginian Funerary Urn refers to the voice of children, cremated and sacrificed to the Carthaginian fertility goddess Tanit. In this respect, the title of the novel can be read as functioning as "discourse"¹⁹⁵ with its semiotic, referential and symbolic connotations, rather than as pointing to, for example, a character (or characters) in the novel. It is not hard to find that Atwood's preoccupied theme here is violence and human suffering. She seems to suggest that violent human nature has not changed despite the influence of civilisation and culture, which sounds similar to

¹⁹³ Quoted from *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (1987) in Davis and Womack, p. 71.

¹⁹⁴ Mikko Keskinen, "Reading on the Threshold: Gerard Genette's Peritexts as Interpretive Commentary" pp. 159-182, in Andrew Bennett (ed.), *Reading Reading*, Tampere English Studies 3, (Tampere: University of Tampere Press, 1993), p. 160.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 168.

Freud, who holds that civilisation cannot completely sublimate destructive unconscious human drives. While mentioning the role of the foundation stories, Kearney points out that they serve to camouflage memories of “primordial blood-letting beneath the official mythology of divine genealogy,” which is to say that at the level of “symbolic unconscious” surface civility and “subterranean traces of originary blood-letting” coexist.¹⁹⁶ This interestingly resonates with Iris’s remark on the fixed pattern of her married life pointed out in 3.2: “Placidity and order and everything in its place, with a decorous and sanctioned violence going on underneath everything, like a heavy brutal shoe tapping out the rhythm on a carpeted floor” (*BA*, 383). It is easy to observe that Atwood’s SF and popular romance subtexts contain almost the same kind of message. The meaning of the third epigraph, “The word is a flame burning in a dark glass” (Sheila Watson) appears related to Atwood’s idea of writing, which “has to do with darkness, and a desire or perhaps a compulsion to enter it, and with luck, to illuminate it, and to bring something back out to the light.”¹⁹⁷ When seen in this light, Iris’s attempt to write an unnarrated, buried story takes on a creative meaning, though what she brings back out to the light is a tragedy with half-truth. Atwood seems to be in line with Iris at some points, and diverge at others, which can be understood in terms of the writer’s involvement and detachment. There is no doubt that Atwood is well aware of Iris’s authorial manoeuvre, but instead of judging her narrator, she only shows and hints at Iris’s wrongdoing. From a bigger perspective, she seems to suggest to the reader that the idea of improvement of human nature is an illusion and warns that worse things can happen in the new millennium unless we remember the horrible events of the twentieth century. The novel’s closure seems relatively clear. It ends with Iris’s obituary and bequest of the novel to her estranged granddaughter Sabrina, which I think is indicative of a new beginning, albeit with no guarantee of a better future, but still of a beginning.

¹⁹⁶ Kearney, p. 86.

¹⁹⁷ Atwood, *Negotiating*, p. xxiv.

4.3 “Remember me”

Iris mentions several times the rationale behind her writing, which does not however seem to be the real reason. Where does her sudden urge to grasp a pen come from, after decades of silence? Is the overwhelming need to tell the ‘silenced’ truth or “set things in order” (BA, 513) her real motivation? What makes her claim suspicious is that as I have already proved, she is not a strong advocate of truth: she only tells us half-truth. As should be by now clear, Iris’s narcissistic attempt to cast her into a sacrificial virgin along with Laura is a distortion of the real picture, and her wishful thought that her memoir would make her sister able to rest in peace is no more than a delusional thought. Then, comes the question: what is the real reason behind her writing at the last moment? As a matter of fact, she is silent about her secretive narcissistic desire to be acknowledged and appreciated, but unknowingly reveals it in some instances in her memoir. In other words, she is a ‘shy’ narcissist, who hides her desire for grandiosity, some aspects of which have been looked at in the manner that she fantasizes herself in the embedded novel. Despite their apparent indifference to ambition or success, shy narcissistic personalities have “their secret wish to exhibit themselves”.¹⁹⁸ But on the other hand, the shy narcissist is easily prone to feel “ashamed, embarrassed, and humiliated, especially when confronted with the recognitions of unsatisfied needs or deficiencies in his or her capacities” and is thus extremely sensitive to exposure and attention, which generates strong feelings of shame and anxiety.¹⁹⁹ Accordingly, the shy narcissist prefers silence and withdrawal and hates to be in front of the public.

¹⁹⁸ From Akhtar, S. (1997, May), *The Shy Narcissist*, Paper presented at the 150th American Psychiatric Association annual meeting, San Diego, CA, cited in Ronningstam, p.101.

¹⁹⁹ From Gabbard, G.O.(1989), Two subtypes of narcissistic personality disorder. *Bulletin of the Messenger Clinic*, 53, 527-532; Cooper, A.M. (1998), Further developments of the diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder. In E. Ronningstam (Ed.) *Disorders of Narcissism: Diagnostic, clinical, and empirical implications* (pp. 53-74) (Washington, D. C: American Psychiatric Press) cited in Ronningstam, p. 103.

Indeed, *The presentation* part of the book, which is at the beginning of her memoir, seems to reveal the essence of Iris's shy narcissistic sides. She is asked to attend the graduation ceremony in a local high school and present the Laura Chase memorial prize to the winner who wrote the best short story. What she feels on the morning of the presentation is "dread": "This morning I woke with a feeling of dread. I was unable at first to place it, but then I remembered. Today was the day of the ceremony" (BA, 37). While preparing herself, she thinks: "I am not at my best without scaffolding. (Yet what has become of my real clothes? Surely these shapeless pastels and orthopedic shoes belong on someone else. But they're mine; worse, they suit me now)" (BA, 37). Iris's acute self-consciousness of her present state is also found in the waiting room where she looks in the mirror: "The lights around the dressing-room mirror were small round-bulbs, as in theatres; they cast a flattering light, but I was not flattered: I looked sick, my skin leached of blood, like meat soaked in water. Was it fear or true illness? Certainly I did not feel a hundred percent" (BA, 39). While listening to Winifred being lauded as a "saint on earth," Iris's old indignation at Winifred surfaces again:

I suppose the old bitch pictured the whole thing when she made her bequest, stingy as it is. She knew my presence would be requested; she wanted me writhing in the town's harsh gaze while her own munificence was lauded. *Spend this in remembrance of me.* I hated to give her the satisfaction, but I couldn't shirk it without seeming frightened or guilty, or else indifferent. Worse: forgetful. (BA, 41)

It is obvious that Iris feels indignant to be put in such a position – "writhing in the town's harsh gaze," and becomes verbally aggressive. Not noticing that not many of the town people may hear about her and have a more or less indifferent attitude to a quaint octogenarian, Iris reveals her extreme sensitivity to and fear of exposure, which in turn might reveal her shame and guilt. The last two sentences support this argument. Although she attempts to suggest that she is not "frightened" or "guilty" or "forgetful", the opposite may be true. If she had clean conscience about anything

concerning Laura, she would not feel any anxiety or fear. The fact that she took “a vow of silence” after Laura’s death and concurrently her “bad nights” began implies that Iris has tried to bury the painful truth surrounding Laura’s death rather than dealing with it properly, which might have given her peace of mind. As Iris admits, this event brings back everything unpleasant in her past life: “the old wound has split open” (*BA*, 44).

Apart from Iris’s extreme vulnerability, her secret desire to be properly recognized is also found in her train of thoughts. Iris finds it unfair that they have only a little mention of Laura, and feels extremely upset that “nothing at all about the book,” (*BA*, 41) is mentioned. The fact that people of her town seem to want the book to be forgotten regardless of “its aura of brimstone and taboo” (*BA*, 41) outside the country even after fifty years seems to lead Iris to react narcissistically to their indifference and lack of acknowledgement of the book. After awarding the prize to the winner in a confused state of mind, Iris is quickly hauled back into her chair by some alert functionary. The realization that the only thing they want from her is that she would not “disgrace” herself makes Iris feel bitter: “Back into obscurity. Back into the long shadow cast by Laura. Out of harm’s way” (*BA*, 44). I would argue that her compulsion to write is actually motivated by this event and her secret wish to be acknowledged as the real author of the book. There is another occasion on which she comments on where she stands in relation to Laura: “For them, I’m only an appendage: Laura’s odd, extra hand, attached to no body—the hand that passed her on, to the world, to them. They see me as repository—a living mausoleum, a *resource*, as they term it” (*BA*, 295-296). Her remark that “I’ve never been fond of spotlights” (*BA*, 529) can thus be read as suggesting the opposite. When seen in this light, her passing comment, “Laura touches people, I do not” (*BA*, 197) turns out to be something other than just an innocent, factual remark.

Iris’s answers to “for whom” she was writing her memoir should not be taken at face value, either: “For whom I’m writing this? For myself? I think not...For some stranger, in the future, after

I'm dead? I have no such ambition, or no such hope" (BA, 46). Her criticism of people's desire to "memorialise" themselves, to "assert" their existence makes her look as if she had no such desires. It sounds quite true when she says that she at least wants a "witness" and wishes to leave a message: "we can't stand the idea of our own voices falling silent finally, like a radio running down" (BA, 98); "What we all want: to leave a message behind us that has an effect, if only a dire one; a message that cannot be cancelled out" (BA, 432). In the middle of her memoir, she decides to leave her memoir with Sabrina, who, Iris probably hopes, would not burn it and might even publish it after her death. In his discussion of the possibility of transformations within the narcissistic personality, Heinz Kohut argues that the narcissistic desire to be admired is "not relinquished," but a more "mature narcissism" controls the narcissist's exhibitionism and grandiose fantasies. Basic features of mature narcissism are: (1) *personal creativity*; (2) *empathy*; (3) *acknowledgement of the finitude of the self*; (4) *capacity for humour*; (5) *wisdom*.²⁰⁰ Iris seems to fit these descriptions except the last part – I doubt if she gains wisdom through the process of her writing. Her occasional mention of her octogenarian appearance is humorously self-deprecating and she clearly knows the meaning of mortality. Kohut however points out that "empathy" is not so much love of another as an end as "one's identification of oneself in the other."²⁰¹ In this sense, it can be said that Iris shows empathy towards others to a certain extent. But the first feature is most relevant to Iris's act of writing. While not seeking "personal acclamation and admiration" anymore, one desires to be acclaimed by "the products of one's creativity."²⁰² Thus, desire to be personally admired is replaced by desire for admiration of one's creative work. It is quite plausible to assume that Iris wants to attract others' attention as an author of one of "*Neglected masterpieces of the twentieth century*" (BA, 291). In this respect, her long memoir also seems to turn into an ambitious project of

²⁰⁰ Cited in Donald Capps, "Augustine as Narcissist: Comments on Paul Rigby's "Paul Ricoeur, Freudianism, and Augustine's Confessions", in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (Mar.,1985), Vol. 53, No. 1, pp. 115-127, p. 124.

²⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 124.

²⁰² *ibid.*, p. 124.

her narcissism with questionable revisions and linguistic decoration. In her daydream where Sabrina is surrounded by Winifred and her ‘money-worshipping’ friends, Iris tells them that she also has a gift for Sabrina:

Winifred and her crew laugh and point. *You? You were banished long ago! Have you looked in a mirror lately? You’ve let yourself go, you look a hundred and two. Go back to your dingy old cave! What can you possibly have to offer? I offer the truth, I say. I am the last one who can. It’s the only thing in this room that will still be here in the morning.* (BA, 452)

Initially this could count as one of her reasons for her writing, but as we have seen thus far, she ends up using the notion of truth to let the world know about her suffering and to receive attention and sympathy not to mention attempt to evade her grave moral responsibility, which points to her moral compromise with insufficient handling of her past actions of great consequence. Iris herself seems to admit that her motive was not what she thought: “I did believe, at first, that I wanted only justice. I thought my heart was pure. We do like to have such a good opinions of our own motives when we’re about to do something harmful, to someone else” (BA, 513). But again her subsequent remark functions as reducing this effect of her confession: “Clumsy blind gods with edged weapons: Justitia totes a sword, which, coupled with her blindfold, is a pretty good recipe for cutting yourself” (BA, 513). She does not add the essential point: she “cuts herself” ‘slightly’ and then quickly ‘covers’ the ugly sights in a very clever way. In her closing remarks on her memoir, Iris tells Sabrina that she only wanted a “listener,” and asks her granddaughter not to “prettify” her. Her remark that she has “no wish to be a decorated skull”(BA, 538) also fits Freud’s idea of “negation,” by which he means, “the subject-matter of a repressed image or thought can make its way into

consciousness on condition that it is *denied*.”²⁰³ When analysed in this light, the assertion that “I’ve no such intention” can mean the exact opposite.

As she corrects quickly in her last words to Sabrina, the real reason becomes intelligible, though she unconvincingly maintains that it is written for her granddaughter:

When I began this account of Laura’s life—of my own life—I had no idea why I was writing it, or who I expected might read it once I’d done. I was writing for you, dearest Sabrina, because you’re the one—the only one—who needs it now. Since Laura is no longer who you thought she was, you are no longer who you think you are, either. That can be a shock, but it can also be a relief... (BA, 530)

It would be embarrassing and shameful to Iris if she admits that it was a narcissistic impulse and drive that prompted her to grasp a pen. Through her long memoir, preoccupied with the account of her own ‘miserable’ life, Laura’s life is put in the shadow. It is also doubtful whether it is a relief for Sabrina to know that there is “not a speck of Griffen” in her. Just as she ends up ‘using’ other people for her narcissistic purposes in her memoir, so she in a way uses her long neglected granddaughter to defend the *raison d’être* of her memoir. The insistence that the former forcibly ‘muted’ girl finds courage to write the untold truth becomes much less convincing. Her excuse that she did not mean to wrong the dead does not absolve her from her responsibility for misrepresenting close people around her and for revealing family secrets, which, Iris herself says, based on her better judgements, are better to be left unsaid. Her secret wish to be memorialised – “Remember me” – will probably be fulfilled if Sabrina publishes the memoir, which can be read as being a sign of the latter being trapped by Iris’s dense web of emotional appeal and narcissistic self-defence. Iris’s last remark seems to suggest that her memoir is the only source for comprehending what and who she is: “But I leave myself in your hands, what choice do I have? By the time you read this page, that—if anywhere—is the only place I will be” (BA, 538). If we agree on the definition of

²⁰³ Sigmund Freud, “Negation (1925)”, in *Collected Papers Volume 5* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1959), pp. 181-185, p.182.

“drives” as “*primitive mental representations* of needs, rages, and longings,” which are not only urges but also “constitutively related to objects,” affecting how we feel and act,²⁰⁴ it can be said that Iris’s “drives” surface, leaving clues to her true self. But as I repeatedly noted, clever Iris is very good at defending herself, which is tantamount to manipulation and distortion. In any case she is quite right to say that it is after all up to the reader to decide whether she deserves to be forgiven for her ‘slip of the tongue’ and to receive sympathy or not. My reading of Iris, as has been clear, concludes that she deserves strong criticism for her morally evil manoeuvre caused by her ultimate principle of self-love, which subtly, but persistently subverts her moral commitment to truth.

²⁰⁴ Sherman, in Levine (ed.), pp. 160-161.

5. Conclusion

As I have tried to show in my analysis, the moral dimension I have explored in my thesis is created by banal, narcissistic desires, which we all have as human beings to a greater or lesser extent. The question arises whether this narcissistic tendency within us will transform into one of our assets or grave faults. The narrator in *The Blind Assassin* turns out to belong to the latter example. Atwood deliberately creates a devious first person narrator with something to hide. More significantly, it turns out that she has no objective standards except 'contingent' values, but it is nevertheless through the first person narrator and protagonist Iris that Atwood attracts the reader in dealing with her themes. Regardless of the author's occasional exposure to the reader of the narrator's questionable revisions and omissions in Iris's comments on her writing (e.g. "the only way you can write the truth is to assume that what you set down will never be read. Not by any other person, and not even by yourself at some later date. Otherwise you begin excusing yourself" (*BA*, 291); "I look back over what I've written and I know it's wrong, not because of what I've set down, but because of what I've omitted. (*BA*, 407)), Atwood is quite reserved about making any decisive judgement on her narrator whose evasion of moral issues caused by her narcissistic concerns is quite a grave corruption. Most probably, Atwood entrusts that moral appraisal to the reader, refusing to be didactic and just leaving signs of Iris's dishonesty aimed at saving her face and avoiding disgraceful self-revelation at all costs. However, considering the reader's considerable investment in a first-person narrator, who is apparently a wronged victim, the reader can be 'duped' by Iris's clever way of excusing herself and even feel great sympathy for her. I am not suggesting that Atwood attempts to 'trap' the reader like Iris does, but that the novel does allow space for that possibility. Readers might see evil aspects of, for example, pride, greed, self-love manifested in ambition, and envy in Iris's memoir, but affected by the narrator's 'suffering,' might not condemn her morally evil

choices and (non-) action let alone notice them. They encounter both horrible evils such as wars and massacres and small personal evils, but all of these elements seem to point at human tragedy, so they quite probably suspend moral judgements of the narrator, reflecting on a rich array of the narrator's (or Atwood's) comments on human nature. Indeed, it seems to me that Atwood's concern for coherence and structural artistry, especially towards the end of the novel (e.g. chapter xiv and the epilogue), in a way endorses or at least lends support to Iris's wishful and delusional thinking: her role in relieving Laura of the great pain and her claim to co-authorship with Laura. Considering Laura's absent voice in her memoir, Iris's argument that "The real author was neither one of us: a fist is more than the sum of its fingers" (*BA*, 530) sounds like an empty echo. It is more likely that "the other hand" seems to be there not in the "collaborator" sense but to support the structural unity of the beginning and the end. What Iris's narrative retelling of her past achieves seems to more or less resonate with her conclusive remark, "a commemoration of wounds endured." In this framework, the narrator's problematic self-love, which I have argued is the source of evil, seems to be of secondary importance.

Further, whether Atwood poses a fresh question concerning moral evil is debatable. In discussing the relation between moral and aesthetic criteria for evaluating a work of art, Amy Mullin holds that our exploration of the moral dimensions of our lives can be imaginative insofar as it involves raising unconventional questions, reorienting our approach to everyday life and arranging discrete representations in a new manner.²⁰⁵ Her argument that morally "imaginative" works, to this extent, have aesthetic value thus supports the idea of some possible connections between moral relevance and artistic value. These kinds of work can prescribe moral or immoral responses clearly or exhibit an attitude of an explorer with regard to moral ideas and emotions.

²⁰⁵ Amy Mullin, "Evaluating Art: Morally Significant Imagining versus Moral Soundness", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Spring, 2002), Vol. 60, No2, pp. 137-149, p. 140.

They can also be “ambiguous and ambivalent about its moral subject matter.”²⁰⁶ It would not be true though that the author’s ambiguous or ambivalent stance on moral matters automatically make a work particularly artistic or morally imaginative. She also points out that the evaluation of “the aesthetic value of the moral dimension of artworks” necessarily includes “our responses to the work as moral agents,” that is, “how we are addressed as moral agents”.²⁰⁷ Although Atwood deposits substantial evidence of Iris’s moral evil throughout the memoir, which encourages some exploration of moral dimension on the reader’s part, her main concern in the novel does not seem to lie in moral evil on a personal level. Rather ‘the sins of fathers’ seem to be an overarching issue. There can be found some tension between moral values and extra-moral values, between truth-claims and unpronounced truth, which might enhance the moral worth of the book, but this seems to remain implicit, in the shadow of the all-embracing message. As I mentioned above, it is more likely that Atwood maintains her ambivalent attitude towards the narrator in moral matters, which in itself does not create a particular moral problem, but which nevertheless allows some room for the possibility that the narrator’s cunning tactics to evoke sympathy affect readers in a way that makes their moral alertness dull and inactive. Iris might succeed in her attempt, resorting to her narrative identity and the idea of narrative truth. Indeed, Gelven’s remark fits the description of Iris’s evil. He points out the difficulty of grasping evil because it “thrives in the dark, in misty, in subterranean caverns,” and further states what evil attempts to do: “it seeks not merely to harm or alter us but also to *confuse*, to *blind*, to *addle*, to *mislead*.”(My emphasis)²⁰⁸ As I have tried to prove in my analysis, the narrator’s implicit, covert evil certainly attempts to “confuse,” “blind,” and “mislead” readers.

²⁰⁶ Mullin, p. 140.

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 144.

²⁰⁸ Michael Gelven, *This Side of Evil* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), p. 108.

Because of my focus on the narrator Iris and her evildoing, I had to exclude other interesting topics worthy of discussion such as a semiotic reading of chapter titles including intertextual elements and the representation of the female characters as well as class and power issues in the book. As regards the relation between the narrative layers in terms of both content and form, I somehow scratched the surface by limiting my discussion to certain similarities between them. It would thus broaden and deepen our understanding of the book if these other subjects were more explored. For the moment, I have to be content with presenting my 'evil' reading of the book, which I hope opens up some space for discussion of moral evil.

6. Bibliography

- Alford, C. Fred. ““Eros and Civilisation” after Thirty Years: A Reconsideration in Light of Recent Theories of Narcissism”. *Theory and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 6. (Nov., 1987), pp. 869-890.
- Allison, Henry E. “On the very idea of a Propensity to Evil”. *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 36, (2002), pp. 337-348.
- “Reflections on the Banality of (Radical) Evil: A Kantian Analysis” from *Idealism and Freedom: Essays on Kant’s Theoretical and Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1996) in Pia Lara (ed.), 2001, pp. 86-100.
- Atwood, Margaret. “In Search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction”. *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 5. (Dec., 1998), pp. 1503-1516.
- *The Blind Assassin*. New York: Random House Inc., 2000.
- *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*. New York: Anchor Books, 2002.
- Bach, Kent. “More on Self-Deception: Reply to Hellman”. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 45, No. 4, (June, 1985), pp.611-614.
- Banham, Gary. *Kant’s Practical Philosophy: From Critique to Doctrine*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 3. The Supreme Principle of Morality, pp. 64-92, 5. Radical Evil and Moral Redemption, pp. 118-151.
- Bennett, Andrew (ed.). *Reading Reading*. Tampere English Studies. Tampere: Tampere University Press, 1993.
- Bernstein, Richard J. “Radical Evil: Kant at War with Himself” in Pia Lara (ed.), 2001, pp. 55-85.
- Birmingham, Peg. “Holes of Oblivion: The Banality of Radical Evil”. *Hypatia*, Vol. 18, No.1, (Winter, 2003), pp. 80-103.
- Bortolussi, Marissa. *Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literary Response*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. “The Narrator” pp. 60-96.
- Bouson, J. Brooks. “A Commemoration of Wounds Endured and Resented: Margaret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin* as Feminist Memoir”. *Critique*, (Spring, 2003), Vol. 44, Issue 3, pp. 251-269.
- Brockmeier, Jens (contributor and author) and Carbaugh, Donal (eds.). *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2001.

- Brockmeier, Jens. "From the end to the beginning: Retrospective teleology in autobiography" in Brockmeier and Carbaugh (eds.), 2001, pp. 247-280.
- Brockmeier, Jens and Harre, Rom. "Narrative: Problems and promises of an alternative paradigm" in Brockmeier and Carbaugh (eds.), 2001, pp. 39-58.
- Bruner, Jerome. "Self-making and world-making" in Brockmeier and Carbaugh (eds.), 2001, pp. 25-37.
- Capps, Donald. "Augustine as Narcissist: Comments on Paul Rigby's "Paul Ricoeur, Freudianism, and Augustine's Confessions". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 53, No. 1. (Mar., 1985), pp. 115-127.
- Carroll, Noel. *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, Part III Interpretation and Intention pp. 157-213.
- Chazan, Pauline. *Moral Self*. London: Routledge, 1998
- Cooke, Maeve. "An Evil Heart: Moral Evil and Moral Identity" in Pia Lara (ed.), 2001, pp. 113-130.
- Davis, Todd F and Womack, Kenneth. *Formalist Criticism and Reader-Response Theory*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Fine, Robert. "Understanding Evil: Arendt and the Final Solution" from Fine and Turner (ed.) *Social Theory after the Holocaust*, 2000, in Pia Lara (ed.), 2001, pp. 131-150.
- Freeman Mark and Brockmeier Jens. "Narrative Integrity: Autobiographical identity and the meaning of the "good life"" in Brockmeier and Carbaugh (eds.), 2001, pp. 75-105.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Collected Papers Volume 4*. (authorized translation under the supervision of Joan Riviere) New York: Back Books, Inc., 1959.
- *Collected Papers Volume 5*. (authorized translation under the supervision of Joan Riviere) New York: Back Books Inc., 1959, "Negation(1925)", pp. 181-185.
- Garver, Eugene. "Aristotle's Genealogy of Morals". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 44, No. 4. (Jun., 1984), pp. 471-492.
- Gelven, Michael. *This Side of Evil*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998.
- Gemes, Ken. "Nietzsche's Critique of Truth". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 52, No. 1. (Mar., 1992), pp. 47-65.
- Gillett, Grant. "Moral authenticity and the unconscious" in Levine (ed.), 2000, pp. 177-192.
- Goleman, Daniel. *Vital Lies, Simple Truths*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1986.

- Hume's Moral Theory in the Treatise <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/h/humemora.htm#H3>>.
- Ingersoll, Earl. "Waiting for the End: Closure in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*". *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 35, No. 4. (Winter 2003), pp. 543-558.
- Irvine, Lorna. "Murder and Mayhem: Margaret Atwood Deconstructs". *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 29, No. 2. (Summer, 1988), pp. 265-276.
- Jopling, David A. *Self-Knowledge and the Self*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Jung: On The Shadow <<http://psikoloji.fisek.com.tr/jung/shadow.htm>>, pp.1-7.
- Kading, Daniel. "Moral Action, Ignorance of Fact, and Inability". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 25, No. 3. (Mar., 1965), pp. 333-355.
- Kahn, Sholom J. "The Problem of Evil in Literature". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Special Issue on Symbolism and Creative Imagination. (Sep., 1953), pp.98-110.
- Kearney, Richard. *On Stories*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Keskinen, Mikko. "Reading on the Threshold: Gerard Genette's Peritexts as Interpretive Commentary" in Bennett (ed.), 1993, pp. 159-182.
- Klein, Melanie. *Envy and Gratitude and other works 1946-1963*. London: Virago Press, 1988.
- Koch, Philip J. "Emotional Ambivalence". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 48, No. 2. (Dec., 1987), pp. 257-279.
- Koehn, Daryl. *The Nature of Evil*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Kubarych, Thomas S. "On Studying Evil". *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, Vol. 12, No. 3. (Sep., 2005), pp. 265-269.
- Levine, Michael P (ed.). *Analytic Freud: Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 2000. Part III Ethics, pp. 135-192.
- Mathewes, Charles T. *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Mele, Alfred R. "Self-Deception". *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 133. (Oct., 1983), pp. 365-377.
- Morrison, Sarah H. "Mothering Desire: The Romance Plot in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Susan Fromberg Schaffer's *The Madness of a Seduced Woman*". *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 19, No. 2. (Autumn, 2000), pp. 315-336.

- Mullin, Amy. "Evaluating Art: Morally Significant Imagining versus Moral Soundness". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 60, No. 2. (Spring, 2002), pp. 137-149.
- Nietzsche, Fredreich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. (Edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, translated by Judith Norman), New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Parkin-Gounelas, Ruth. "'What Isn't There' in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*: The Psychoanalysis of Duplicity". *Modern Fiction Studies*, (Fall, 2004), Vol. 50, Issue 3, pp. 681-700.
- Pia Lara, Maria (ed.). *Rethinking Evil*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001.
- Platts, Mark D. *Moral Realities: An Essay in Philosophical Psychology*. London: Routledge, 1991. "Fact and Action in Hume's moral theory", pp. 109-143.
- Post, Stephen G (ed.). *Altruism and Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy and Religion in Dialogue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. pp. 1-64.
- Quinodoz, Jean-Michel. *The Taming of Solitude: Separation Anxiety in Psychoanalysis*. (Translated by Philip Slotkin). London: Routledge, 1993, Part Two: The place of separation anxiety in psychoanalytic theories, pp. 36-103.
- Robinson, Sally. "The 'Anti-Logos Weapon': Multiplicity in Women's Texts". *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 29, No. 1. (Spring, 1988), pp. 105-124.
- Ronningstam, Elsa. *Identifying and Understanding the Narcissistic Personality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Rorty, Amelie (ed.). *The Many Faces of Evil: Historical Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- "How to harden your heart: six easy ways to become corrupt" from *Yale Review* (April, 1998) in Rorty (ed.), 2001, pp. 282-287.
- Shepherdson, Charles. "Telling Tales of Love: Philosophy, Literature, and Psychoanalysis". *Diacritics*, Vol. 3, No. 1. (Spring, 2000), pp. 89-105.
- Sherman, Nancy. "Emotional Agent" in Levine (ed.), 2000, pp. 154-176.
- Simpson, David. "Lying, Liars and Language". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 52, No. 3. (Sep., 1992), pp. 623-639.
- Snare, Francis. *The Nature of Moral Thinking*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Sober, Elliott. "The ABCs of Altruism" in Post (ed.), 2002, pp. 17-28.
- Staels, Hilde. "Atwood's Specular Narrative: The Blind Assassin". *English Studies*, Vol. 85, Issue 2, (Apr., 2004), pp.147-160.

Stein, Dan J. "The Philosophy of Evil". *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (Sep., 2005), pp.261-263.