

METAPHYSICAL HUNGER AND DISTASTE
in
THE NOTEBOOKS OF MALTE LAURIDS BRIGGE BY RAINER MARIA RILKE,
HUNGER BY KNUT HAMSDUN AND NAUSEA BY JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

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ABSTRACT

In many works of modern fiction the theme of alienation is presented in terms of a spiritual hunger or starvation. Concurrently images and metaphors of distaste crop up as the inevitable adjuncts to feelings of spiritual deprivation or hunger. The metaphor of distaste is projected onto the image of modern urban society and is consciously or unconsciously blamed for the hero's sense of estrangement.

Rilke's presentation of this problem in The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge centres on a young man's self-observation during a period of spiritual as well as national exile. The Rilkean hero's emphasis on childhood memories contributes a great deal towards establishing the premise that the modern hero's feeling of anomie or spiritual hunger is the consequence of a character predisposition towards introversion, daydreaming, and creativity, in short the "Tonio Kroeger" portrait of a specific type of artistic temperament.

In Hamsun's Hunger and Sartre's Nausea the two respective heroes are presented in terms of their current psychological reactions to a large, fundamentally anonymous city.

In all three novels I have focussed on the themes of hunger and distaste and attempted to explain the manner in which these psychologically motivated perceptions become confused with one another (in the mind of the protagonist) and in their confusion reflect the process of an estrangement which begins with an estrangement from society and ends with an estrangement from self.

While little reference is made to psychological theory, the particular approach of this study reflects indirectly my reading of the psychoanalytical writing of Dr. Edmund Bergler.

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INTRODUCTION

Hunger, the primal instinct of survival, appears in this study as a somewhat disguised entity. In this dissertation it functions as a metaphor for unfulfilled spiritual needs. Distaste, the apparently opposite manifestation of 'hunger,' functions as a metaphor for dissatisfaction with reality, a disgust with the material universe (including food); but it is only an apparent opposite. In the course of events, distaste for the given world of reality complements a hunger aimed at an unreachable goal. This hunger, both symbolic and real, expresses the modern hero's undefined yearning for some ideal condition to which the path is barred both by its undefined nature and its symbiotic connection with a distaste for reality. Yet reality is the only arena in which the hero may win or lose his battles.

The feelings of hunger and distaste are not only symbolic of attitudes towards the entire material world, but in their relation to the action of the novels or stories, they reveal the topographic effects of a profound inner struggle between conscious and unconscious forces. In one instance, what is desired consciously (such as food in Hamsun's novel) is not necessarily desired in the unconscious of the hero. This strange fact emerges after repeated observation of the hero's self-defeating actions, often following extravagant avowals of victory over 'fate'.

On one level, therefore, metaphors such as hunger and distaste emerge as symbolic focal points of a literary personality whose unconscious life clashes with consciousness on a daily basis. The often simultaneous appearance of 'hunger' and 'distaste', that is of two apparently

contradictory feelings, confirms the existence of this 'struggle'.

Often too, this struggle or inner conflict is expressed through projection and/or introjection wherein the hero begins to identify bodily with some symbolic representative of his unconscious. Gregor Samsa identifies with the insect, Brigge with the pauper outcast, Harry Haller with the wolf of the steppes.

The ambivalence characteristic of these hungry heroes (Brigge, Roquentin, Hamsun's hero) is clearly illustrated by Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, a character who is in many ways accessible to our understanding through the metaphors of hunger and distaste. In *Steppenwolf*, 'hunger' represents the desire to create oneself in the image of one's ego-ideal. For Harry, the *Steppenwolf*, this means becoming a solid intellectual, a creator of original ideas, a man surrounded by approval, love, and praise. Unfortunately, however, the quality of Harry's daily life runs counter to the attractive image of his ego-ideal. Like the heroes of *Hunger*, *Nausea* and *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, *Steppenwolf* lives the life of a failed intellectual, innovator, and in his case, family man. In the moments of his deepest sorrow Harry catches a glimpse of the 'golden track,' the symbol of his waking dreams. Initially soothed by this vision, *Steppenwolf* gradually lapsed into melancholy. The implied reminder of the goals which he has failed to achieve disturbs the fragile equilibrium of his moods. The source of his misery lies paradoxically in the ambivalent feelings represented by hunger and distaste when he is confronted by the superb vision of "the golden track". It is this combination of striving towards and at once pushing away from his dreams which fills his writing with a brooding and anxious quality. The world mirrored in these novels is lacking in plenitude. Unaware that he

is projecting his own spiritual vacuums onto the image of the modern city, the hero becomes convinced that his hunger can never be requited. His projections of dreariness and desolation leave him profoundly isolated. He remains in a state of spiritual inertia, hovering between extravagant wishes and an inextinguishable never fulfilled hunger.

The co-existence of a metaphoric hunger and distaste in The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, Hunger and Nausea forms a unifying and recurring thematic pattern. The importance of this phenomenon may be understood in terms of the consequences of the destinies of the heroes. In all three works, the movement towards the fulfillment of a goal (usually symbolized by some form of hunger) becomes an illusory one. It is either superceded or, more frequently, ironically undercut by some action expressing the hero's fundamental distaste for the attainment of his own wishes. This behavioral pattern can best be compared with the paradoxical philosophy of Dostoevsky's Underground Man:¹

¹ While other works of literature and literary criticism have offered important insights, my chief indebtedness is to the writing of Dr. Edmund Bergler, a psychoanalyst in the Freudian school who explored further the workings of the unconscious.

Originally interested in reading and understanding psychology for its own sake, I gradually saw how it might be possible to integrate certain basic psychological principles into the process of literary analysis.

Every literary character is described in terms of symbols and actions, each of which mirrors both conscious and unconscious aims. When these two are in conflict, this conflict is written into the appearance and/or behaviour of the literary character. The writer, insofar as he is a good or 'great' artist, has an intuitive understanding of physical signs and symptoms by which any character potentially reveals his true nature.

Perhaps the most decisive psychological pattern which lies at the base of some of the most diverse and dramatic conflicts depicted in literature, is the paradoxical "pleasure-in-displeasure" principle.

The "pleasure-in-displeasure" principle was first postulated by Dr. Bergler, and may be understood as a synthesis of the Freudian 'Eros', 'Thanatos' duality. Bergler believes that the unconscious has, in some instances, a way of libidinizing displeasure or suffering, so that on the

Man likes to make roads and create, that is a fact beyond dispute. But why has he such a passionate love for destruction and chaos also? May it not be that he loves chaos and destruction (there can be no disputing that he does sometimes love it) because he is instinctively afraid of obtaining his object and completing the edifice he is constructing? Who knows, perhaps he only loves that edifice from a distance and is by no means in love with it at close quarters... (207)

Although the duality of 'hunger' and 'distaste' is responsible for the discomfiture borne by the heroes of The Notebooks, Hunger and Nausea, there exists in two contemporary tales a more readily observable result of the antinomy between hunger, the desire to obtain real or symbolic 'food' and 'distaste', the opposing drive to refuse this same food. Since the themes are similar to those of the novels which are discussed in this dissertation, they provide a valuable and striking analogy to the psychological processes depicted in the novels. The themes are enacted by the chief characters respectively of A Hunger Artist by Franz Kafka and Bartleby The Scrivener by Herman Melville.

Both of the heroes of these tales die of starvation. In each case, the starvation is self-engineered and symbolizes a protest against eating and specifically, against society, the large and purportedly hostile source of nutrition. Here we can see, perhaps with greater

unconscious level of the personality conscious suffering is regarded as an irresistible attraction, a powerful source of unconscious pleasure. When the conscious sector of the personality objects, a struggle ensues, the observable result of which is ambivalence, emotional, intellectual or symbolic.

In the autobiographical novels, this ambivalence centers on 'hunger' and 'distaste'. 'Hunger' represents a symbolic statement by which the hero expresses his conscious wishes to attain his aims. In some cases, the question of consuming real food is incorporated into this general scheme. The real hunger of Hamsun's hero provides an example of this. In the majority of instances, the significance of hunger is the symbolic unconscious statement: "I want to get". Distaste expresses the opposite feeling translated into "I refuse" food, reality, pleasure, etc. The underlying unconscious motivation of wanting to be refused (because of the extravagant amount of unconscious pleasure this wish represents) is comprehensible only in terms of the fantastic and diabolically clever "pleasure-in-displeasure" principle exploited by the unconscious of man.

clarity than in the longer and more complex novels, how the state of hunger in A Hunger Artist and Bartleby expresses the contrary emotion of distaste. Because of their conscious decision to fast, the 'heroes' demonstrate their disapproval of a society which eats as it lives, without any aesthetic discrimination. The hunger artist and Bartleby both harbour artistic aspirations and thus find themselves tacitly opposed to what they regard as a philistine society. In the tale of the hunger artist, there is a continuous tone of irony resulting from the two distinctly separate modes of apprehension: the hunger artist's and society's. In effect, the hunger artist considers himself victimized by an unreliable and unsympathetic environment. Such remarks as "and he looked up into the eyes of the ladies who were apparently so friendly but in reality so cruel" and, "this suffering martyr which indeed he was, although in quite another sense" illustrate this point. After such evidence, it becomes plain that the hunger artist's fast is a chosen means of escape from a world which allegedly refused to supply him with the special food he required. His decision to create an art through the act of fasting merely adds to the ironic repudiation of socially acceptable values by the hunger artist. He demonstrates his superiority to his spectators and jailers by making something out of the 'nothing' society has given him.

In Bartleby The Scrivener, the ailing spirit of the hero is also expressed through the vagaries of an unhealthy appetite. Indeed so suppressed is the living soul of Bartleby that he develops a mad appetite for clerkship, an occupation which can, at best, be described as 'regular' and by any discriminating standards, 'insipid'. As Bartleby's own employer quite readily admits, "It is a very dull, wearisome and

lethargic affair, I can readily imagine that, to some sanguine temperaments, it would be altogether intolerable. For example I cannot credit that the mettlesome poet, Byron, would have contentedly sat down with Bartleby to examine a law document of, say five hundred pages, closely written in a crimped hand." Nonetheless Bartleby who may indeed have possessed the capacious appetite of Byron was unfortunately not endowed with the complementary instincts at which Melville hints. Bartleby approached the task of copying therefore, with something of the ardour of a thirsty desert wanderer before the mirage of an oasis. "At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion." (8) Quite soon however, the spirit of renunciation appears, and from this point on, the apparent hunger for volumes of copying turns out to be a mechanical act carried out by a man who finds in himself a rapidly dwindling will to tackle any further tasks on earth. His repeated refrain of "I prefer not to" expresses, as does the fasting of the hunger artist, a profound distaste for life itself. The consequence of his distaste is his own death. That Bartleby refused to feed his 'self' with either food or diversions of any kind symbolized an inner conflict whose ever expanding dimensions ruled over all his actions. As Bartleby's friend and employer remarked, "The scrivener was the victim of an innate and incurable disorder: I might give alms to his body, but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach." (18) Bartleby and the hunger artist experienced physical hunger only because of an irresistible drive towards self-destruction which was originally directed against renouncing the world but ended as a renunciation of life itself.

Yet despite all of these facts, the problem of the modern hero is not black and white. These apparently self-annihilating characters possess a spark of genius and idealism which complicates their lives and lends to their moment of defeat a strong note of pathos. Indeed, the very style of narration in Bartleby and in A Hunger Artist supports the supposition that the protagonist's very talent (as is explicitly the case in Steppenwolf) is somehow involved in the eventual destitution brought about by his feeling of world distaste. In the words of Steppenwolf's young landlord,

Haller's sickness of soul, as I now know, is not the eccentricity of a single individual, but of the times themselves, the neurosis of that generation to which Haller belongs, a sickness, it seems, that by no means attacks the weak and worthless only, but rather those who are strongest in spirit and richest in gifts. (22)

It would appear that according to the interpretation of modern psychology, specifically the 'pleasure-in-displeasure' theory, the possibility of a hero's strengths becoming the target and even the source of his weaknesses is a very plausible one. Just as the life-sustaining instinct of hunger is used in the service of the renunciatory will expressed through distaste, so the artistic sensitivities of the protagonists become the thralls of their self-destructive instincts. In the modern alienated hero we meet man at the end of a struggle with his own demonic spirit which has tempted him and wooed him with his own dreams only to leave him broken and deserted before the empty cupboards of reality. The literary paradigm of this generalized phenomenon may be found in the Kafka tale of The Metamorphosis. The demonic powers are represented by the foul insect who not long ago was known to himself and others as the man, Gregor Samsa. In his altered form, Gregor

discovers also that the food he once enjoyed like everyone else, no longer tasted even passably interesting. As the tale progresses, Gregor gradually begins to starve. The sources of possible nourishment are closed to him now that he has devolved into his final insect form. The present physical barrier cruelly symbolizes a once merely annoying question of unpleasant priorities, a life-style in which the fulfillment of pleasure was always deferred to second or third place. Now, on the threshold of oblivion, Gregor richly responds to the music of his sister and sees in it the doorway to the pleasures past and present of which he is so pathetically bereft.

Gregor crawled a little farther forward and lowered his head to the ground so that it might be possible for his eyes to meet hers. Was he an animal, that music had such an effect upon him? He felt as if the way were opening before him to *the unknown nourishment he craved*. He was determined to push forward till he reached his sister, to pull at her skirt and so to let her know that she was to come into his room with her violin, for no one here appreciated her playing as he would appreciate it. (76-77)

The epics and novels of the Western literary heritage have for many centuries occupied themselves with the exceptionally powerful magnetism of 'temptation' which, as has been suggested, may be interpreted as the 'pleasure-in-displeasure' principle. Odysseus who had to be bound and have his ears stuffed with cotton lest he jump overboard at the siren's call, is a classic image of man struggling to master his own self-destructive impulses. Because these impulses are allied with the promise of pleasure, they have an enormous potency.

In the nineteenth century realistic writers like Balzac documented the variety of consequences of responding to temptation. Raphael in Le Peau de Chagrin vacillates between a moderate, industrious life and

a fantastic one in which the mask of death lurks behind the beautiful face of pleasure. This basic theme is repeated again in Les Illusions Perdues which ends with the eventual moral fall of the handsome, gifted Lucien de Rubempre.

The overmastering moral strength of Odysseus is rarely repeated by the heroes of latter-day literature. In the modern novel, heroism becomes increasingly defined by the potential strength of the hero, and less and less by his actual deeds in the world at large. In scanning the literature of the early twentieth century, the main protagonists are doubtfully called heroes at all since they have lost all sense of direction and are at a loss in channeling the remnant of their idealistic energies. Neither the moral climate surrounding them nor their individual credos endow the protagonists with sufficient strength to withstand either inner or outer obstacles. This moral vacuum becomes closely linked to an unappeasable hunger. Bartleby, through a combination of personal weakness and pessimistic resignation about finding the food which might sustain him through another quarter century of life, eventually refuses everything including the will to live.

Not all modern heroes, however, languish next to a cold wall and die there. Some, like the heroes of Jean Genet's novels, and the narrative voice in Charles Baudelaire's poems invert the universe to suit their own eccentric appetites and make of evil a good, and of good an evil. Others, like Malte Laurids Brigge, the hero of Hunger, and Roquentin, transpose the language of ethical polemics into the language of sense perception and basic 'gut reaction'. The modern literary hero becomes the unwilling guest at the dinner of life and, either starves

himself, or, creates an elaborate ritual which must precede his acceptance of the smallest morsel of food. The ritual includes a projected view in which the world becomes an extension of the unpalatable meal. His pattern of behaviour dramatizes and exaggerates the reactions of an anorexic dinner guest. Erich Heller in writing about Rilke and Nietzsche in The Disinherited Mind says, "Happiness for them is not, as it was for Schopenhauer, in the absence of pain; it is the fruit of so radical an acceptance of suffering that abundant delight springs from its very affirmation. For the denial of pain means the denial of existence. Existence is pain, and joy lies not in non-existence, as Schopenhauer would have it, but in its tragic transfiguration." (131) While all modern heroes do not actually transcend the situation which brings them pain, the characters mentioned thus far share with Rilke and Nietzsche the experience of simultaneous suffering and joy. The heroes and poets of modern literature appear to be the most deeply involved in the fusion and awareness of good and evil, pleasure and displeasure.

The propensity towards introversion in these literary personalities has the effect of heightening the reader's awareness of this intricate duality. Rilke's character, Brigge, comes scathingly close in his own self-observation to uncovering the machinations of the pleasure-in-displeasure principle. In writing about his 'disease', he accurately observes that "it has no particular characteristics; it takes on those of the person it attacks." (60) The difficulty in ridding himself of this disease lies precisely in its intimate alliance with the seemingly healthy sectors of his personality. The cohabitation of pleasure and displeasure under the roof of a single personality results in either an

unusual alloy, or the victory of the strongest force. In the three autobiographical fictions discussed here, the common result is an alloy of pain and pleasure, expressed often as the co-existence of hunger and distaste. Brigge, for example, manages to transcend his fears, but he pays the price of attaching himself, in a mood of joyous exaltation, to persons whose very being symbolizes the mark of his intense former suffering. H. the unnamed hero of Hunger departs from Christiania, the site of his truly great hunger, with most of his illusions intact. The preservation of his happiness depends wholly on an opportunity to quit a situation which tested his strengths and weaknesses to the hilt. Lastly we look at Roquentin whose final decision to transcend his oppressive existence means ironically, that he will have to refocus on the details of his life once more in order to justify his existence through art. True to the tragic character of the modern hero, Roquentin dies once he has accomplished this task.

THE EMBRACE OF THE LEPER:
BRIGGE'S HUNGER AND DISTASTE

'I have always wanted you to admire my fasting', said the hunger artist. 'We do admire it' said the overseer affably. 'But you shouldn't admire it,' said the hunger artist. 'Well, then we don't admire it,' said the overseer, 'but why shouldn't we admire it?' 'Because I have to fast. I can't help it,' said the hunger artist. 'What a fellow you are', said the overseer, 'and why can't you help it?' 'Because,' said the hunger artist, lifting his head a little and speaking, with his lips pursed, as if for a kiss, right into the overseer's ear, so that no syllable might be lost, 'because *I couldn't find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else.*'

A Hunger Artist
--Franz Kafka

"I see a cleft pomegranate."

"The swineheard brought it me the other evening, when he hadn't been in for three days."

"Yes, it is a wild pomegranate."

"I know; it is almost unbearably sour; and yet I feel that if I were thirsty enough, I should set my teeth in it."

"Ah! Then now I can tell you: it was that thirst that I was seeking in the desert."

"A thirst which that sour fruit alone can quench..."

"No; but a fruit that makes one love one's thirst."

The Return of the Prodigal
--Andre Gide

The Kafka hunger artist makes an art of his aversion to food. Brigge's artistry on the other hand consists in overcoming a terrible distaste by changing the valuation of 'the object which *was* loathsome' to 'the object that *is* loved.' The 'art' of the hunger artist consists of a process of perfection and refinement of an already present tendency which, stripped of all its eccentric and historical attributes, manifests itself as a profound and seemingly innate incompatibility with food, and by inference, life. Brigge struggles against a mounting fear which is closely connected with his perception of life as an overwhelming, often fearful, force. It becomes the aim of both his life and art to come to terms with the intangible horror of reality. Eventually he evolves himself into a role of spiritual grandeur and, in a manner reminiscent of the Christian martyrs, embraces the very experience which had previously disgusted him. In this way, Brigge moves from the symbolic space of distaste to that of sated hunger. It is never wholly clear, however, whether he had really found the food he liked, or accepted, unlike the purist hero of Kafka's story, a very dissimilar substitute.

The patchwork quilt format of The Notebooks may make one wary of attempting a chronological tracing of the hero's journey. Clearly, however, Brigge's beginnings lie not in Paris, but in Denmark. His Notebooks mark the end of his Danish childhood and the beginning of his life as the Parisian emigre. From certain things which Brigge says, one is tempted to conclude that a good deal of Brigge's disaffection is related to this apparently painful shift in living patterns. He

seems to suffer from a precocious form of 'culture shock'. Uprooted, by force of circumstance, from an elegant and secure life he finds himself in a shoddy Parisian rooming house whose every defect aggravates his loneliness. The most elegaic of memories--the death of Brigge's father concomitant with the loss of the Ulsgaard estate--is a very persuasive 'cause' of alienation which, because Brigge believes it, the reader initially believes as well.

Even before my father's death everything had changed. Ulsgaard was no longer in our possession. My father died in town, in a flat that seemed hostile and strange to me. I was already abroad at the time and returned too late.

...Now the Master-of-the-Hunt was dead, and not he alone. Now the heart had been pierced, our heart, the heart of our race. Now it was all over. This, then, was the shattering of the helm: "Today Brigge and nevermore," something said within me." (140)

The personal unhappiness this implies is only deepened by Brigge's perception of himself as an artist. In addition to losing his home and family, he has lost an important part of his identity which has robbed him of an artistic mythology. His response, iterated at several points, is 'to begin afresh', to use the broken pieces to serve as images for an artwork compounding his life. In spite of the fact that Brigge feels a nostalgic longing for his lost childhood world, while he lived in the aristocratic household, Brigge was already removed from it by his propensity towards abstraction and day-dreaming. This distance is enhanced by a slowly emerging consciousness in Brigge's mind of the grotesque nature of the relationships in this seemingly secure domain. In the reminiscences of childhood which gradually emerge, we discover the powerful stamp of a melancholy, artistic personality whose imaginative impressions began to alter the

shape of the world in Brigge's mind.

It is naive to believe that Brigge's memorandum, "of my own heart I did not think...it was an individual heart...at its task of beginning from the beginning", means precisely what it says. In fact, the stance Brigge takes is one which has been forced upon him by the long series of internal events dating from earliest infancy. Not the outward change in circumstance--the movement from one mode of life to another--but a change necessitated by the role of inner (unconscious) passivity and fear incites him toward a new way of understanding his role in society. In his strange and passionate struggle with the city landscape and the populace around him, Brigge projects a private system of symbolism. His time and place provide him with the appropriate objective correlatives. Past and present are mingled under foggy reveries of the emerging personality which has a need to articulate a long-standing distaste with the way things are. Acutely self-conscious, he recognizes that his personality is an intricate web of sickness and health. In an attempt to separate the two he 'confesses' all.

And now this illness too, which has always affected me so strangely. I am sure it is underestimated. Just as the importance of other diseases is exaggerated. This disease has no particular characteristics; it takes on those of the person it attacks. With a somnambulant certainty it drags out of each his deepest danger, that seemed past, and sets it before him again quite near, quite imminent.... *And with whatever comes there rises a whole tangle of insane memories, which hangs about it like wet seaweed on some sunken thing.*¹ (60)

¹ The image of 'wet seaweed on some sunken thing' is a metaphor for a lurking undecipherable subterranean influence which is nearly impossible to identify precisely because of its integral connection to the seaweed which hangs about it and partially hides it from view. This poetic entity is being compared with the 'illness' of Brigge,

Brigge's eventual decision to break with his past and the symbolic repetition and conclusion of this act are all contained in the legend of the prodigal son at the close of The Notebooks. In retrospect, one can see that the rupture which is described symbolically by Brigge's version of the legend was foreshadowed in an incident which occurred during Malte's childhood. The prodigal son's realization of "how much he had then intended *never to love*" is a repetition (although the prodigal son actively reverses what the child, Malte, experienced passively) of the first time Malte Laurids Brigge felt himself removed from his customary surroundings. In the centre of this disruptive experience lies the germ of the feeling of distaste which the older Brigge later suffered in his city of exile, Paris.

Viewed objectively, the entire 'incident' involved the routine act of entering a dining hall to partake of the evening meal. Within the confines of the child's sensitive spirit, the situation is replete with all the horror of a gothic tale.

There remains whole in my heart, so it seems to me, only that large hall, in which we used to gather for dinner every evening at seven o'clock. I never saw this room by day; I do not even remember whether it had windows or on what they looked out; always, whenever the family entered the candles were burning in the ponderous branched candlesticks, and in a few minutes one forgot the time of day and all that one had seen outside. This lofty and, as I suspect, vaulted chamber was stronger than everything else.

equally dim in its essence and contour. According to Brigge the illness is composed of the characteristics of the person it attacks. Like the seaweed which derives its present shape from the outlines of the "sunken thing," the illness is ingeniously disguised by the most characteristic traits of its host. A third component of the metaphor is the memories of childhood which Brigge laboriously drags to the surface of consciousness with the zealotry and anguish of a spirit struggling to free itself of its own demons.

With its darkening height, with its never quite clarified corners, it *sucked all images out of one without giving one any definite substitute for them.* One sat there as if dissolved; entirely without will, without consciousness, without desire, without defence. One was like a vacant spot. I remember that at first this annihilating state almost caused me nausea; it brought on a kind of seasickness which I only overcame by stretching out my leg until I touched with my foot the knee of my father who sat opposite me. (4) (*italics, mine*)

One of the central images, implicit in the text of The Notebooks is that of the vampire. It is through allusions to the "lofty... vaulted chamber" which "sucked all images out of one" that Brigge gives us to understand that the spirit of the house was a malevolent one and that he, as did most of his family, eventually succumbed to its mysterious and awesome powers. It is this sense of powerlessness and victimization that Brigge transfers to other rooms and other occasions in his adult life. The passivity and the fantasy which emerged spontaneously in childhood, gradually come into conflict with Malte Laurid's more creative and self-assertive characteristics. The first stage of this is expressed through the metaphors and images of distaste. The gothic vampire images derive from those experiences toward which Brigge developed a feeling of distaste commingled with horror. Initially the author of The Notebooks informs us that this realm of distaste is composed of a memory collage, a large portion of which is the childhood home, but an equally large portion of which is Brigge's present place of exile, the city of Paris. What the reader is actually receiving is a projection, through time and space, of a feeling originating in very early days, in which horror formed the predominant emotion. What complicates this and, from a literary aspect, enriches it, is that overlapping with the realm of horror, grotesque 'distaste,'

is the equally powerful realm of the sublime. For instance, images suggesting the brooding vampire-like reality which drains the life-spirit of Brigge are situated on the very threshold of experiences filled with the delicate contours of a radiant joy. Although the latter 'beautiful' realm appears to be an expression of that part of Brigge's soul which has not been tainted by the unwholesome effect of "the whole tangle of insane memories," the two are in effect inextricably combined.²

The Brigge of Urnekloster days was afraid that he might disintegrate. The Brigge of early Paris days projects this fear to the world

² In one of the Sonnets to Orpheus Rilke expresses a theme which is as characteristically Briggean as it is Rilkean. This theme is that by actively grasping his fate man may gain mastery over his life in a spiritual sense, even if physically he appears to be controlled or victimized. The act of writing an autobiographical fiction is precisely such an act of spiritual self-assertion. In an autobiographical fiction the author has the privilege of recreating himself, and thus actively repairing a fate over which previously he had little or no control.

This passage comes from Erich Heller's The Disinherited Mind, from his essay on Nietzsche and Rilke. The poem is translated into English by J. B. Leishman.

Meide den irrtum, dass es entbehrungen gebe
Fur den geschenen entschluss, diesen: zu sein!
Seidener faden, kamst du hinein ins gewebe.

Welchem der bilder du auch im innern geeint bist
(Sei es selbst ein moment aus dem leben der pein),
Fuhl, dass der ganze, der rumliche teppich gemeint ist.

Do not believe you will be deprived
of something by your resolution: to be.
Silken thread, you have entered the weaving.

With whatever pattern you are inwardly blended
(And be it a scene from the story of Agony),
feel that the whole, the praiseworthy carpet is meant.

Although I read Mr. Heller's excellent book after most of my own work was completed I am indebted to him for his great insight and for the sense of confirmation his essay on Nietzsche and Rilke gave me on the question of "suffering and joy" in the philosophy of Nietzsche and Rilke.

outside. His description of the city street is filled with an oppressive awareness of external disease and decay:

So, then people do come here in order to live; I would sooner have thought one died here. I have been out. I saw: hospitals. I saw a man who swayed and sank to the ground. People gathered round him so I was spared the rest. I saw a pregnant woman. She was pushing herself cumbrously along a high warm wall, groping for it now and again as if to convince herself it was still there. Yes, it was still there. And behind it? I looked on my map: Maison d'Accouchement. Good. They will deliver her - They know how. Further on, rue Saint-Jacques, a big building with a cupola. The map said: "Val-de'Grace, Hopital Militaire." I didn't really need this information, but it can't do any harm. The street began to smell from all sides. A smell, of the grease of pommesfrites, of fear. All cities smell in summer. (13)

The content, as opposed to the tone, of The Notebooks does not suggest that either the memories of the ancestral mansion or the streets of Paris pose a viable threat to Brigge's existence. What it does suggest is that Brigge has been consumed with fear from his earliest years. The chief importance of Brigge's change in circumstance lies therefore in the imaginative process it releases.

While Brigge lives his solitary, single-room existence in Paris, he expresses a desire to return to the kind of life (in effect, an idealized portrait of that life) he left in Denmark. Rather than being the rootless poet excavating remembrances in the rubble of an alien city, he wishes himself back in that very ancestral house which effectually demolishes his spirit. As a result of this paradoxical attitude, we discover that the same object has the dual ability to diminish and elevate him; he vacillates in his recollections so that he forgets the horror when he thinks of the pleasure and vice-versa. Objects in the Briggean world function as catalysts of contrary

but co-existing emotions. The most notable of these catalytic objects is the house or home. For example, the ancestral home in Denmark contained within its noble precincts a grotesque nightmare world of which Brigge was only one more member in a numerous and bizarre family. In Paris, both the romantic elegance and the fearful grotesque are duplicated. When the darker gothic aspect of reality threatens to overwhelm Brigge's senses, he escapes into fantasies filled with elegant and idyllic images. It is for this reason that Brigge, in his quest for poetic equivalents to the city experience, leans on images which come from the country and desires to incorporate them altogether into his being. He claims that living in a country house would have made him an ideal man, an ideal poet.³ However, this roseate vision of pastoral life betrays Brigge's great attraction to the dark, chaotic side of experience, the imagistic complement of which is the modern city of Paris in which he resides.

The reverie of living in an ancestral house is, in fact, a momentary means of escape from the Parisian world which has become too much for him. Like the great dining chamber in Denmark, Paris was "sucking all images" out of him and giving no substitute for them, that is, no *acceptable* substitute. Brigge's vision is at this moment

3 Oh, what a happy fate, to sit in the quiet room of an ancestral house, among many calm, sedentary things, and outside in the airy, light green garden, to hear the first wrens trying their skill, and in the distance the village clock...and I would have had an armchair and flowers and dogs and a stout stick for the stony roads. And nothing more. Only a book bound in yellowish, ivory-coloured leather, with an old flowery design on the fly-leaf: in that I would have written. I would have written a great deal, for I would have had many thoughts and many people's memories. (44)

replete with "the refuse, husks of humanity that fate has spewed out." The paupers of Paris come to create the same sense of dread and helplessness within him as did the haunting presences of Urnekloster. His relation to them is at first parallel to his childish relationship with the vampire spirits. Soon however, the relationship metamorphoses slightly and we see that part of Brigge's fear of the paupers and "the refuse of humanity" stems from a deep and terrifying identification with them.

The paupers are the objective equivalent of his inner unarticulated vision of himself: the undefined thing beneath the seaweed. Here physical deprivation is intricately connected with psychic as well as bodily deformity. The paupers are *the human embodiment of the nature of 'distaste'*, symbolizing in their own person the very process by which they reject the ordered, healthy, well-fed world and are in turn rejected by it. These people are the correlatives of the Kafkaesque hunger artist, refusing and refused, desiring and abhorring life and food.⁴

⁴ The paupers and outcasts who populate Brigge's novel (see pp. 42-43, 50, 54, 59, 62, 68, 73, 158, 179 of The Notebooks of MLB) elicit two reactions from Brigge. On the one hand he is drawn towards them as though by some irresistible attraction; on the other hand, he is terrified by the claims of intimacy which it seems they might be making on him. The group of paupers and outcasts are people who on a material or psychological level have severed their connections with society. Either because of a life of denial *or* because they refused to accept what life offered, the outcasts have initiated an ongoing pattern of life in which their physical strangeness plays a major role in keeping them away from the more normal segment of society. In this way they resemble Kafka's hunger artist whose intentional refusal to eat is part of an overall refusal to participate in the life and customs of his society. One of the inevitable side-effects of his starvation is that he comes to be regarded as an extension of both pauper and outcast by his curious audience i.e. a freak. Steppenwolf, Gregor the insect, H the beggar, and Roquentin the crab, all participate in parallel forms of social estrangement.

Moist with the spittle of destiny, they are stuck to a wall, a lamp-post, an advertisement pillar, or they trickle slowly down the alley, with a dark, dirty trade behind them. What in the world did that woman want with me, who had crawled out of some hole, carrying the drawer of a night-stand with a few buttons and needles rolling about in it? Why did she keep walking beside me and watching me? As if she were trying to recognize me with her bleared eyes, that looked as though some diseased person had spat green slime into the bloody lids? And how came that little grey woman to stand that time for a whole quarter of an hour by my side before a shop-window, showing me an old pencil that came pushing infinitely slowly out of her miserable, clenched hands? I pretended to look at the display in the window and not notice anything. But she knew I had seen her, she knew I stood there wondering what she was really doing. For I understood that the pencil in itself was of no consequence: *I felt it was a sign for the initiated, a sign the outcast know*; I guessed she was indicating to me that I should go somewhere or do something. And *the strangest part was that I could not rid myself of the feeling that there actually existed a certain compact to which this sign belonged, and that this scene was in truth something I should have expected.* (italics mine)

I quote here from The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge to illustrate and underline that (a) a process of estrangement is taking place and that (b) this process is nonetheless resisted, to some extent, by Malte who wants to maintain his goodwill towards the outcast *without however becoming exactly like him.*

I went in, then, and at first only noticed that the table at which I usually sat was occupied by someone else. I bowed in the direction of the little counter, ordered and sat down at the next table. But then I felt him, although he did not stir. It was precisely this immobility of his that I felt, and I understood it all at once. The connection between us was established, and I knew that he was stiff with terror. I knew that terror had paralysed him, terror at something that was happening inside him. Perhaps one of his blood-vessels had burst; perhaps, just at this moment, some poison that he had long dreaded was penetrating the ventricle of his heart; perhaps a great abscess had risen in his brain like a sun that was changing the world for him. With an indescribable effort I compelled myself to look in his direction, for I still hoped it was all imagination. But then I sprang up and rushed out; for I had made no mistake. He sat there in a thick, black winter coat, his grey, strained face plunged deep into a woollen neckcloth.

To escape from this as yet inadmissible intuition of a 'compact' with them, Brigge flees to the one building in the city in which he feels safe. There the books, guarded by the heavy walls of the building, contain the imagistic sustenance which the vampire-like aspect of the 'houses' of Urnekloster and Paris have drained and continue to drain from him. The draining, or as Malte calls it, 'sucking' process is a private projection onto the 'tabula rasa' of reality. Nonetheless, the effect of these projections has a force equal to, if not more powerful than, the effect of the 'real' world upon Brigge. His choice of words in describing the relief he feels when he enters the library from which the real paupers remain excluded, clarifies his positive, but as yet naive, attachment to the 'pretty' world of poems, libraries and 'nice' homes. This world is in some ways akin to the Underground Man's Crystal Palace. It represents

His mouth was closed as if it had fallen shut with great force, but it was not possible to say whether his eyes still saw: misty, smoke-grey spectacle lenses covered them, trembling slightly. His nostrils were distended, and the long hair over his wasted temples, out of which everything had been taken, wilted as if in too intense a heat. His ears were long, yellow, with large shadows behind them. Yes, he knew that he was now withdrawing from everything: not merely from human beings. A moment more and everything will have lost its meaning, and that table and the cup, and the chair to which he clings, all the near and the commonplace, will have become unintelligible, strange and heavy. So he sat there and waited until it should have happened. And defended himself no longer.

And I still defend myself. I defend myself, although I know my heart is already hanging out and that I cannot live any longer, even if my tormentors were to leave me alone now. I say to myself: "Nothing has happened," and yet I was only able to understand that man because within me too something is happening, that is beginning to draw me away and separate me from everything." (51)

his "fantastic dreams" and no small measure of his "vulgar folly" in that, in their shape and context, these dreams are completely unrealizable. Hence the library is, to begin with, a symbol for the hunger realm, the realm of impossible fantasies and dreams which, in spite of their unrealizability, offer the author-hero/hunger artist a means of escape from a reality which has turned oppressive. In this strange dialectic, both realities--the malign and the ideal benign--are the creations of the protagonist.⁵

⁵ To illustrate this curious paradox let us look at two quotes, one from The Notebooks and the other from one of the Duino Elegies in which the reader will instantly recognize the Rilkean (Briggian) theme of inner world made outer. The point in placing these two apparently separate and contradictory visions together is that eventually they fuse. In effect the fusion of the two is the return of a full cycle: at the outset, as at the end, the realms of bliss and horror are fused characteristically into a single but indistinguishable entity (cf. "like wet seaweed upon some sunken thing") in The Notebooks of MLB. Neither the country nor the city are 'pure'. *Each* is a combination of the beautiful and the horrific.

He, the new one, shying off, how he was ensnared
by the grasping tendrils of interior events already
tangled into network, into choking undergrowth, into
stalking animal forms. And how he surrendered -- And loved.
Loved his interior world, his inner wildness,
This primal forest in whose mute fallen ruins
light-green his heart was standing. Loved. And left,
went out from his own roots into vast beginning,
where his scant birth already was surpassed. Loving,
he sank into the older blood, into ravines
where the frightful lay, still sated with his fathers.
And everything dreadful knew him, winked, seemed well informed.
The horrible smiled at him.... Seldom, mother,
with such tenderness had you smiled at him. And how
could he now love what smiled at him? Before you
had he loved it: When you carried him, it was dissolved
in the water that lightened the springing seed.

The Third Duino Elegy

But here, my dears, here I am safe from you. One must have
a special card in order to get into this room. In this card
I have the advantage of you. I go a little shyly, as one
may imagine, through the streets, but finally I stand before

The respite, due to its escapist nature, is brief. The identification with the country-dwelling poet is, in effect, a defensive screen against Brigge's deep fascination with the world of the grotesque and the horrific. Shortly thereafter, the entire *projected* world of monstrous images drives Brigge farther away from a 'realistic' evaluation of the world, and closer to a world of fantasy, in which only the primary process of images exists, while the secondary process of 'creation'--the process of reifying those images into art--is absent. Significantly, a great proportion of this fantasy is expressed through images of food which gradually deteriorate into the unsavory and the obscene.

I was worn out after all this, one might even say exhausted, and that is why it was too much for me that he too had to be waiting for me. He was waiting in the little cremerie where *I intended to eat two poached eggs; I was hungry, I had not managed to eat the whole day.* But even then I could not take anything; before the eggs were ready something drove me out again into the streets, which ran towards me *viscid with humanity.* For it was carnival and evening, and the people all had time and roved about, rubbing against each other. And their faces were full of the light that came from the showbooths, and *laughter bubbled from their mouths like matter from*

a glass door, open it as if I were at home, show my card at the next door (just exactly as you show me your things, only with the difference that people understand me and know what I mean--), and then I am among these books, and taken away from you as though I had died, and sit and read *a poet.*

You do not know what that is, a poet?--Verlaine... Nothing? No recollection? No. You did not distinguish him among those you know? You make no distinctions, I know. But it is another poet I am reading, one who does not live in Paris, quite another. One who has a quiet home in the mountains. Who rings like a bell in clear air. A happy poet who tells of his window and the glass doors of his book-case, that pensively reflect a dear, lonely distance. Just this poet it is that I would have liked to become. (43)

open sores. The more impatiently I tried to force my way forward, the more they laughed and the more closely they crowded together. Somehow a woman's shawl hooked itself to me; I dragged her after me, and people stopped me and laughed, and I felt I should laugh too but I could not. Someone threw a handful of confetti into my eyes and it burned like a whip. At the crossings people were wedged fast, shoved one into the other, and there was no forward movement in them, only a quiet gentle swaying back and forth, as if they copulated standing. But although they stood, and I ran like a madman along the edge of the pavement where there were gaps in the crowd, yet in truth it was they who moved while I never stirred. For nothing changed; when I looked up I was still aware of the same houses on the one side and on the other, the booths. Perhaps everything indeed stood fast, and it was simply a dizziness in me and in them which seemed to whirl everything around. I had no time to reflect on this; I was heavy with sweat, and a stupefying pain circled in me, as if something too large were driving along in my blood, distending the veins wherever it passed. And in addition I felt that the air had long been exhausted, and that I was now breathing only exhaled breath, which my lungs refused. (48) (italics, mine)

What we have then, if we look at the total effect of Brigge's images, is a portrait of an ancient ancestral home, suggesting the elegance and immutability of a medieval castle, which gradually, as the verbal portraiture continues, becomes a fragmented work of art-- a kind of stained glass window whose colors are increasingly obscured by the dark dividing lines enveloping the individual pieces.

Whole glass and shattered glass are important recurring images in this work. The sound of a broken glass accompanies one of Brigge's earliest fear episodes in Paris, in which his fantasy plays on the noises he hears from his solitary dwelling place. Here even the stillness of the night is eloquent with the fear of a small boy lying in his bed. The effect of this passage bears a striking resemblance to the effects of the master of the uncanny and grotesque: Edgar Allen Poe, as for example at the conclusion of the tale of The Fall of the

House of Usher.⁶ Brigge has internalized the broken images once and for all: "All that is still in me and will never cease to be in me. It is as though the picture of this house had fallen into me from an infinite height and had *shattered* against my very ground."⁷ (31)

When he was a boy, Brigge was surrounded by either haunting or haunted relatives, one of whom became completely dominated by her fear of needles and thence "carried with her small fine, silver sieve, through which she filtered everything she drank," (77) and another who had "missed another, a brilliant life, her natural one," and who therefore became transfigured by this fact so difficult to swallow, that she would persistently choke. Brigge explains that the metaphysical diet, if disagreeable, effects physical changes which accurately correspond to the psychical ones: the rough justice, in fact, of

6 I believe that in great conflagrations there sometimes occurs such a moment of extreme tension; the jets of water fall back, the firemen no longer climb their ladders, no one stirs. Noiselessly a black cornice thrusts itself forward overhead, and a high wall, behind which the fire shoots up, leans forward noiselessly. All stand and wait, with shoulders raised and faces puckered over the eyes, for the terrific crash. The stillness here is like that. (14)

I am lying in my bed, five flights up, and my day, which nothing interrupts, is like a dial without hands. As a thing long lost lies one morning in its old place, safe and well, fresher almost than at the time of its loss, quite as though someone had cared for it--: so here and there on my coverlet lie lost things out of my childhood and are as new. All forgotten fears are there again. (60)

7 Cf. p. 60: "the fear that this *crumb* of bread now falling from my bed may arrive glassy and shattered on the floor, and the burdensome worry lest at that really everything will be broken, everything forever."

Ovidian metamorphoses. The second relative, in Brigge's view,

had taken all this so deeply into herself, and had grown crusts over it, many hard, brittle, slightly metalsheened crusts, of which that for the time uppermost appeared cool and new. Now and again she nevertheless betrayed by a naive impatience that she was not getting sufficient attention; in my time she could suddenly choke at table in some obvious and complicated fashion which assured her of the sympathy of all, and made her appear, for the moment at least, as sensational and exciting as she would have liked to be in the larger sense. (106)

Finally, the accumulation of all this hard glassy swallowing of an undesirable portion of reality has its not unexpected parallel in Brigge. Regarding a solitary wall surviving the rubble of a demolished Parisian apartment building, Brigge stands transfixed. He recognizes the embodiment of his primal fear: the fragmented home with whose jagged edges he had long been struggling. "I recognize everything here, and *that is why it goes right into me.*" (48)

What does Brigge actually see in the world of objective reality? And, is his reaction to it commensurate with the cause? It may be of some interest to note that Brigge himself is filled with the sense of his own paradox. He senses that the 'spiritual' significance of his experiences is far greater than their objective correspondents. It is the profound inner changes which shake the very foundations of 'reality' for him. His responses are only marginally connected to the world; rather the world and its show of passing events provides a seismographic chart registering eruptions far removed from the earth's common turbulence and effectively linked to a "deep emotional explosion that shakes [Brigge's] privileged heritage of sentiments."⁸

⁸ Dante Della Terza, "On Pirandello's Humorism", "Veins of Humour", Harvard English Studies 3, 1972, p. 20.

A case in point is the rubble of the house that Brigge saw, for clearly what he sees objectively is wildly surpassed by what he sees with his 'inner eye.'

Will anyone believe that there are such houses? No, they will say I am misrepresenting. This time it is the truth, nothing omitted, and naturally nothing added. Where should I get it from? *Everyone knows I am poor.* Everyone knows it.

Houses? But, to be precise, they were houses that were no longer there. Houses that had been pulled down from top to bottom. What *was* there was the other houses, those that had stood alongside of them tall, neighbouring houses. Apparently these were in danger of falling down, since everything alongside had been taken away; for a whole scaffolding of long, tarred timbers had been rammed slantwise between the rubbish strewn ground and the bared wall. I don't know whether I have already said that it is this wall I mean. But it was, so to speak, not the first wall of the existing houses (as one would have supposed), but the last of those that had been there. One saw its inner side. One saw at the different storeys the walls of rooms to which the papers still clung, and here and there the join of floor or ceiling. Beside these room-walls there still remained, along the whole length of the wall, a dirty-white area, and through this crept in *unspeakably disgusting motions, worm-soft and as if digesting*, the open, rust-spotted channel of the water closet pipe. Grey, dusty traces of the paths the lighting-gas had taken remained at the ceiling edges, and here and there, quite unexpectedly, they bent sharp around and came running into the colored wall and into a hole that had been torn out black and ruthless. But most unforgettable of all were the walls themselves. The stubborn life of these rooms had not let itself be trampled out. It was still there; it clung to the nails that had been left, it stood on the remaining handsbreadth of flooring, it crouched under the corner joints where there was still a bit of interior. One could see that it was in the paint, which, year by year, it had slowly altered: blue into moldy green, green into grey, and yellow into an old, stale rotting white. But it was also in the spots that had kept fresher, behind mirrors, pictures, and wardrobes; for it had drawn and redrawn their contours, and had been with spiders and dust even in these hidden places that now lay bared. It was in every flayed strip, it was in the damp blisters at the lower edges of the wallpapers; it wavered in the torn off shreds, and sweated out of the foul patches that had come into being long ago. And from these walls once blue and green and yellow, which were framed by the

fracture-tracks of the demolished partitions, the breath of these lives stood out--the clammy, sluggish, musty breath, which no wind had yet scattered. There stood the middays and the sicknesses and the exhaled breath and the smoke of years, and the sweat that breaks out under armpits and makes clothes heavy, and the stale breath of mouths, and the fused odor of sweltering feet. There stood the tang of urine and the burn of soot and the grey reek of potatoes, and the heavy, smooth stench of ageing grease. The sweet, lingering smell of neglected infants was there, and the fear-smell of children who go to school, and the sultriness out of the beds of nubile youths. To these was added much that had come from below, from the abyss of the street, which reeked, and more that had oozed down from above with the rain, which over cities is not clean. And much the feeble, tamed domestic winds, that always stay in the same street, had brought along; and much more was there, the source of which one did not know. I said, did I not, that all the walls had been demolished except the last--? It is of this wall I have been speaking all along. One would think I had stood a long time before it; but I'm willing to swear that I began to run as soon as I had recognized that wall. For that is the terrible thing, that I did recognize it. I recognize everything here, and that is why it goes right into me: it is at home in me. (48)

The point then, is that Brigge sees more and more with his inner being and, in the process, sacrifices the feeling of wholeness and balance which a harmony between an inner and outer vision of the world might support. The continuing metaphor of distaste is composed of a series of devastating and cruel images in which the receptive, although passive, spectator, Brigge, is 'forced' to take in indigestible forms which he, with supreme irony, in his role of 'artistic agent' has himself invented. The tension which results from his inability to admit that he is confronting the face of his own fantasies, and his contrary striving to acknowledge this and discover its genesis, creates a tone at once dream-like, conflict-ridden and cataclysmic, yet through it all, serene, with the serenity of someone who is hypnotized by his own phantoms.

The theme of 'distaste' is finally blended with the theme of 'hunger'. The domain of the horrible is annexed to, though never annihilated by, the domain of the beautiful. Preceding this stage in Brigge's spiritual journey is the clear definition of the two realms which are as yet regarded as opposites. In addition, the world which is so painfully swallowed is regarded as something alien, imposing its malign will upon the predominantly passive Malte Laurids Brigge.

The existence of the horrible in every particle of air! You breathe it in with what is transparent; but inside you it precipitates, hardens, takes on pointed, geometrical forms between your organs; for whatever of torment and horror has happened on places of execution, in torture-chambers, mad-houses, operating theatres, under the vaults of bridges in late autumn: all this has a tough imperishability, all this subsists in its own right and, jealous of all that is, clings to its own frightful reality. People would like to be allowed to forget much of this; sleep gently files over such grooves in their brains, but dreams drive sleep away and trace the designs again. (68-69)

But outside, outside is beyond calculation. And when it rises out there, it fills up inside you as well, not in your blood vessels, which are partly under your own control, nor in the phlegm of your more impassive organs: in the capillaries it rises, drawn up by tubular suction into the outermost branches of your infinitely ramified being. There it mounts, there it overflows you, rising higher than your breath, up which you flee as to your last stand. Ah, whither then, whither then? Your heart drives you out of yourself, your heart pursues you, and you stand almost outside yourself and cannot get back again. Like a beetle that has been trodden on you gush out of yourself, and your little bit of surface hardness and adaptability go for nothing. (69)

Salvation lies in the world of love, the source of which, in Briggian mythology, is to be found in the figure of his Mother. She had shielded him from fear (night) and had helped to salvage a sense of positive spirituality within him.

O mother: o you only one, who shut out all this stillness, long ago in childhood. Who take it upon yourself, saying: Dont' be afraid it is I. Who has the courage all in

the night yourself to be this stillness for that which is afraid and perishing with fear....

Does any power equal your power among the rulers of the earth? See, kings lie and stare, and the teller of tales cannot distract them. On the blissful breasts of their favorite mistress terror creeps over them and makes them shaky and lifeless. But you, you come and hold the monstrous thing behind you, and are in front of it altogether; not like a curtain it can throw open here or there. No, as if you had overtaken it at the call that needed you. As if you had come far ahead of anything that may yet happen, and had behind you only your hasting hither, your eternal path, the flight of your love. (70)

Hence between the series of realms--hunger and distaste, country and the city, love and fear--we come upon the single image of Brigge's first home in which both mother and father represented the archetypal forces of two seemingly disparate worlds, that is in Brigge's imagination they are opposed to one another.

The legend of the Prodigal Son provides a point of thematic resolution. Here realms of hunger and distaste, which are synonymous with the father's and the mother's world, meet through the medium of the legend, and through the agent of the 'new' Brigge, in a close if somewhat bizarre metaphorical embrace.

Once we have understood that the Prodigal Son functions as an extension of Brigge's complex character, a fact, heretofore concealed by Brigge's emphatic eulogizing of country homes, bookshops and the vivid life to be discovered in the domain of frugal domesticity, we see the dual lines of development in Brigge's personality. In effect what the persona of the Prodigal Son reveals is that Brigge's feelings about the 'simple life' are by no means as unified as he previously suggested. While the childhood memories of Brigge are characterized by a fearful lonely child who yearns for the love of his beautiful mother, the parable of the Prodigal Son suggests a complete reversal in

attitude: the child is unhappy to the point of fleeing his home because he did not want the love that was showered on him by his family and his servants. An emotion roughly corresponding to distaste is therefore aroused by two diametrically opposite situations which however represent the wishes of one and the same person. The prodigal responds to being excessively loved in the same wise as the child Brigge responded to feeling insufficiently loved. The sudden confrontation of wish (wishing to be loved) and fear (fearing to be loved) lies behind the powerful scene of recognition (quoted at some length, above) in which Brigge's meeting with a wall "goes right through him" with all the agonizing impact of an unwanted remembrance. The importance of this dichotomy is that it uncovers an early and a radical source of the predominantly ambivalent tone in The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge which is represented by the vacillations from 'hunger' to 'distaste.'

It is as Brigge says at the beginning of his legend: "It will be difficult to persuade me that the story of the Prodigal Son is not *the legend of him who did not want to be loved*. When he was a child, everybody in the house loved him. He grew up knowing nothing else and came to feel at home in their softness of heart, when he was a child." The relationship changes by the time the prodigal son's growth has reached fruition, for by then "he recognized more clearly from day to day that *the love of which they were so vain* and to which they secretly encouraged one another, *had nothing to do with him*." (216) In short, *their* love meant nothing to him and he refused it in the same way that Brigge 'refused' to form a positive unambiguous relationship with the city of Paris, the mythically architechtonic super-image of the father's realm.

The schism resulting from the separation of the mother's world from the father's is, if not entirely responsible for Brigge's conflict in choosing between rejection (distaste) or acceptance (hunger) of the world, certainly parallel to it. The resolution of this conflict is a paradoxical one in that Brigge's eventual acceptance of what he believes to be 'reality' is achieved at the price of social exclusiveness and exclusion.

Hence, in his symbolic embrace of the leper, through the mythical surrogate of the Prodigal Son, Brigge embraces the epitome of his distaste and the nadir of his horror. The embrace is meant to transform and transcend the nature of reality. It, in fact, transforms Brigge while leaving the world, with its very real grotesque and repulsive side, unchanged. Why does Brigge do this? The answer lies in the entire paradox which Brigge inhabits and embodies. In writing of the Prodigal Son, he explains:

Even at the time when poverty terrified him daily with new hardnesses, when his head was the favourite toy of misery and utterly worn bare, when ulcers opened all over his body like auxiliary eyes against the blackness of tribulation, *when he shuddered at the rubbish upon which he had been abandoned because he himself was like it: even then still, when he reflected, his greatest terror was lest anyone should respond to him.* (213)

What ends as the Prodigal Son's final spiritual *refusal* of 'la nourriture terrestre', supplied by the house of his father, takes active shape in an episode during which the boy Brigge played truant to the world of order and ran away to the attic to indulge his fantasies. His rebellion against the established world of order began when as a child he realized that he was bored with the games, lessons and companions arranged on his behalf by his parents. The

activities which he himself was able to devise were quite another matter. They had the full allure of forbidden fruit:

When one played alone...one might happen inadvertently to trespass beyond this prearranged, on the whole harmless world and find oneself among circumstances that were entirely different and by no means to be foreseen. (90)

And the inevitable consequence of *tasting* it.... There is an unavoidable comparison between Adam, who decides against his better judgement to partake of the apple, and Brigge, who secretly and knowingly absents himself from the ordered world of his father's creation so that he may *do* what is in essence, an innocent thing but in context, a sinful thing. The act, comparable in charm and playfulness, to the eating of the renowned apple was to dress up in costumes found in the "forbidden" attic-room. The language in which they are described announces an entry into the magical 'hunger' realm, where dreams offer themselves in the seductive incipency of becoming.

But what transported me into a sort of intoxication were the capacious mantles, the wraps, the shawls, the veils, all those *yielding*, wide, unused fabrics, that were so soft and caressing, or so *slithery* that one could scarcely take hold of them, or so *light* that they flew by one like a wind, or simply heavy with all their own weight. In them I first discerned really free and *infinitely mobile* possibilities: being a slave-girl about to be sold, or being Jeanne d'Arc or an old king or a wizard; all this lay to hand.... (92-93)

Dressed in the robes of a potentate, Brigge sees that the effect of his costume is beautiful, fulfilling all his fondest hopes.

It was really grandiose, beyond all expectation. And the mirror gave it back instantly, it was too convincing. (93)

But it is soon changed into its opposite. Again the shattering of glass effected by Brigge's unwieldy movements in his costume sets off

a complicated alarm system whose bells ring loudest in Brigge's chest.

I pulled at all my garments, but they clung only the tighter. The cords of the mantle strangled me, and the stuff on my head pressed as though more and more were being added to it. Furthermore the atmosphere had become dim and as though *misty* with the oldish *fume* of the spilled liquid.

Hot and angry, I rushed to the mirror and with difficulty watched through the mask the working of my hands. But for this the mirror had just been waiting. Its moment of retaliation had come. While I strove in boundlessly increasing anguish to squeeze somehow out of my disguise, *it forced me*, by what means I do not know, to lift my eyes and *imposed on me an image, no, a reality, a strange, unbelievable and more monstrous reality, with which, against my will, I became permeated.* (95) (*italics, mine*)

The role of truancy or trespassing is central to our understanding of Brigge's extreme and fearful reactions to his own misdemeanor (the breaking of the glass figurines). The point is that the child's wishes were ambivalent. One part of him was seduced by the 'forbidden' and made haste to get there at the first opportunity,⁹ a second portion of his personality was filled with a sense of wrong-doing and guilt of which the eventual outbreak of fear and hysteria was the outcome. Curiously enough, the breaking of the glass figurines became the focal point of Brigge's anxiety, although it was, comparatively speaking, a lesser infringement of household laws than hiding from the coachman and *father*. The nature of the punishment, however, suggests that Brigge was overwhelmed by fear of his father. He was so excessively fearful in fact, that his *own conscience* anticipated his fear-wish and punished him in advance of the confrontation. The

⁹ "At times Mademoiselle had her migraine which was unusually violent, and these were the days when I was hard to find. I know that on these occasions the coachman was sent to the park, when it occurred to Father to ask for me and I was not there. From one of the upper guestrooms I could see him run out and call me at the entrance of the long drive."

two 'selves' which meet in the mirror reflecting Brigge's disguised and real images are equivalent to Brigge's projected worlds of hunger and distaste. The beautiful fantasy (closely linked to the mother's realm) meets face to face with the laws of a mundane and to Brigge, very stern, very cruel reality. In this episode, fear gains the upper hand and the child enacts the role of one who has become the victim of 'order.' The reaction of the servants, who see the whole situation on an entirely different plane, suggests that Brigge's expectations of punishment are disproportionate both to the nature of his 'crime' and to the nature of reality itself. For this very reason, Brigge is irreversibly marked by this episode, which, as it is described in The Notebooks, is a highly traumatic one.

...for now the mirror was the stronger, and I was the mirror. I stared at this great, terrifying unknown before me, and it seemed to me appalling to be alone with him. But at the very moment I thought this, the worst befell: I lost all sense, *I simply ceased to exist*. For one second I had an indescribable longing, painful and futile longing for myself, then there was only he: there was nothing but he. I ran away, but now it was he that ran. He knocked against everything, he did not know the house, he had no idea where to go; he managed to get down a stairway, and in his course stumbled over someone who shouted in struggling free. A door opened, several persons came out: Oh, oh, what a relief it was to know them! There was Sieversen, the good Sieversen, and the housemaid and the butler: now for a decision. But they did not spring forward to the rescue; their cruelty knew no bounds. They stood there and laughed; my God, they could stand there and laugh. I wept, but the mask did not let the tears escape; they ran down inside over my cheeks and dried at once and ran again and dried. And at last I knelt before them, as no human being ever knelt; I knelt, and lifted up my hands, and implored them: "Take me out, if you still can, and keep me," but they did not hear; I had no longer any voice. (95)

The Notebooks are replete with reversals. The magnificent tapestries which form the final image in the first book, through which

the longing for sublime reality is portrayed solely through symbols bursting with unuttered significance, is reversed at the outset of Book II where Brigge presents a 'hunger' image of young city girls, striving to contact the sublime by studying tapestries in a museum. They, alas, fall prey to the sapping, life-draining influence of the real world to which they are harnessed with invisible cords.¹⁰

The final and most important reversal is the one which Brigge undergoes himself. The person that he once lost in the childhood mirror appears to have been found again. In fact the 'new' Brigge is the outcast, the 'he' that took control of Brigge's personality

¹⁰ The world described in the tapestry is the idealized 'dream' world into which Brigge's soul enters in much the same way as he entered into the persona of his costumed self as a child. What emerges from this description with its final question addressed to the absent Abelone, is that for Brigge the distinction between the real world and his imaginary world is fluid:

There are tapestries, Abelone, wall tapestries, I am imagining that you are here; there are six tapestries; come, let us pass slowly before them. But first step back and see them all together. How quiet they are, are they not? (111) Abelone, I am imagining you are here. Do you understand, Abelone? I think you must understand. (113)

Part II begins with the reversal or 'other side' of the world portrayed in the tapestries. Here Brigge studies young girls who 'study' the world portrayed in the tapestries and whose sense of an ideal or ultimate reality has gradually faded because of their continuous and wearying contact with the world of everyday reality. Brigge's description of these young girls emphasizes his own personal contempt for the mundane.

Young girls one does occasionally find before them. For there are lots of young girls in museums, who somewhere have gone away out of the houses that no longer keep anything. They find themselves before these tapestries and forget themselves a little. They have always felt that this existed, a subdued life like this, of leisurely gestures never quite explained; and they remember dimly that for a time they even believed this life would be their own. But then they quickly bring out a sketchbook and begin to draw, whatever it may be--only to draw that is the main thing; for with this intent they one day left home rather violently. (117-118)

that fateful day in the attic. The true reversal is one of attitude. For where formerly Brigge begged to be taken out and kept ("I knelt before them, as no human being every knelt; I knelt, and lifted up my hands and implored them: Take me out, if you still can and keep me," [95]), the adult Brigge demonstrates, through his final parable of the Prodigal Son, that he no longer wants to save his former self (the 'I' of the above quote). If anything, he wants to safeguard the emergence of the new 'he', the person who has severed contact with the real world by pretending that he can reverse its laws. Like Christ, who spurned the worldly and embraced the spiritual, careless of his mundane costume, so Brigge in his final fusion into the identity of the outcast, leper (or hunger artist) embraces that which once evoked his deepest distaste, and lavishes upon it the tenderness and love which he formerly reserved for special moments in which his dreams peered through the oppressive veil of 'reality'. 'God' and by analogy the 'good and the beautiful' are once and for all located in the very nucleus of that which was, at the beginning of The Notebooks responded to as 'the fearful and the ugly'.

The Prodigal Son, Brigge, escapes from his 'weltanschauung' of 'distaste' by absenting himself spiritually from his physical union with the once dreaded disease.

Hunger and distaste in the life of Malte Laurids Brigge arise from his striving to incorporate the ideal while simultaneously attempting to slough off the mortal skin which binds him to reality. The image of the tapestry with its contingent of real dreaming girls on one side of it and an imaginary dream girl on the other side captures the sense of a dual reality with which Brigge's mind is characteristically burdened.

This it seems to me, is decisive: whether a man can bring himself to lie beside a leper and warm him with the heart-warmth of nights of love,--that could not end otherwise than well. (68)

But do not imagine I am suffering disappointments here--quite the contrary. I marvel sometimes how readily I give up everything I expected for the reality, even when the reality is bad. (68)

LE VIEUX SALTIMBANQUE (THE OLD CLOWN) :
THE DISTASTE OF THE HAMSUNIAN HUNGER ARTIST

At the end, at the extreme end of the row of booths--as if, in shame, he had exiled himself from all this splendor--I saw a poor clown, bent over, frail, decrepit, a man ruined, leaning with his back against one of the poles of his hut;

As I turned around, obsessed by that vision, I tried to analyze my sudden sorrow, and said to myself: I have just seen the image of the old man of letters who has survived the generation for whom he was the brilliant entertainer; the image of the old poet without friends or family or children, degraded by his poverty and the ingratitude of his public, and standing at the booth which the forgetful world no longer has any desire to enter!

from *The Old Clown*
(*Le Vieux Saltimbanque*)
--Charles Baudelaire

Auguste felt that he was getting somewhere. His real tragedy, he began to perceive, lay in the fact that he was unable to communicate his knowledge of the existence of another world, a world beyond ignorance and frailty, beyond laughter and tears. It was this barrier which kept him a clown, God's very own clown, for truly there was no one to whom he could make clear his dilemma.

And then and there it came to him--how simple it was!--that to be nobody or anybody or everybody did not prevent him from being himself. If he were really a clown, then he should be one through and through, from the time he got up on the morning until he closed his eyes. He should be a clown in season and out, for hire or for the sheer sake of being. So unalterably convinced was he of the wisdom of this that he hungered to begin at once--without making up, without costume, without even the accompaniment of that squeaky old violin. He would be so absolutely himself that only the truth, which now burned in him like a fire, would be recognizable.

The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder
--Henry Miller

By comparison with the over-sensitive hunger artists of Kafkaesque and Rilkean tradition, Hamsun's hero, or H, is a clown. He shares with the two former hunger artists an intense longing to communicate his illuminations, visions and fantasies, but the road he selects, in order to arrive at this desirable end, varies markedly from the highly refined journey of Malte Laurids Brigge, and the inverted picaresque of Kafka's hunger artist.

H is the Charles Chaplin of Hunger Artists. Self-conscious, he however lacks the piercing, self-examining eyes of *The Underground Man* (a not too distant cousin of the genus 'hunger artist'). Endowed with a bounteous, even fulminating, imagination, his fantasies and dreams lean toward the baroque glamour of the 'Arabian Nights', in contrast to the more classical beauty of Brigge's distinctly European reveries. H's grotesque fantasies are akin to the comic grotesque style of Breughel who utilizes the baroque style to laugh at society as well as himself. In entering H's world with its marked signs of prolonged fasting, we can find many structural parallels with the worlds of other hunger artists. Emotionally or affectively, however, H is in another class. His every last bite is underscored by Hamsun's delicate yet clownish humour which evokes a mixed response of pity and laughter.

Notwithstanding the fact that the personal style of H is permeated with greater unconscious humour, the nature of his metaphysical plight bears a direct resemblance to the other hunger artists of this study. It will be remembered that the Kafka 'martyr' died because he could not

find the food he liked. His discriminating need for super-refined nutrition was like Bartleby's obsessiveness, the source of his physical demise. On the other hand, Brigge's intense appetite for the beautiful clashed with his inability to control his perception of the grotesque. His 'artistic' solution was to elevate the grotesque reality to the level of the sublime. He satiated his hunger by recasting the very foundation of reality and thus obviating its jarring effect on his sensitive nerves. Inevitably, in doing so, he placed himself at a considerable remove from the world. Undercutting the magnanimous gesture of embracing the epitome of ugliness lies Brigge's message that reality, specifically the city of Paris, is a horror show. It was from this implied statement that the problem of his distaste arose as a question closely associated with the thematic problem of a metaphysical hunger.

H shares this fundamental metaphysical distaste. In his case however, the problem seems to be of a different nature, in that he is literally starving from hunger and, unlike the Kafka hero, and even for that matter Bartleby, does not appear to have solicited nor expected this form of penury. The key to the thematic and thence, structural link between H and the other characters may be discerned in his, and their, relation to the universe which they inhabit. This universe is sometimes a house, a home, or an office building. Most often it is "the city".

The European city at the turn of the century is unfailingly 'the antagonist' as viewed from the perspective of hunger artists. Kafka's artist for example is caged like an animal, because by the standard of his society (which in the fiction becomes synonymous with "city")

his life's work is valued as something between the antics of a wild beast and a freak. Brigge finds most of the Parisian 'sights' repulsive, but it is slyly suggested that he is in turn regarded as something of a madman-outcast by at least some of the more regular citizens.¹ In this respect, he has much in common with Dostoevsky's aristocratic underdog and Melville's princely clerk, who both play the role of outcast with a dogged and angry determination.

H is also an outcast. He is unemployed, poorer than the only recently disenfranchised Brigge and unconscious of practicing hunger as an art. H's hunger seems to come by the hapless force of circumstance. This anonymous force appears, however, to be on uncannily intimate terms with our hero, and seems moreover, to mimic his comic-tragic movements to perfection as he mimics the movements of chance passersby and changes their characteristic nature of 'chance' encounter to that of incontrovertible destiny:

The old cripple was still making the same wiggly movements ahead of me in the street. Finally it began to irritate me to have this feeble creature in front of me all the time. His journey evidently had no end; maybe he was determined to go to exactly the same place as I and I would have him blocking my view the whole way. (8)

H becomes increasingly absorbed in following this man with his eyes.

¹ The doctor did not understand me. Nothing. And certainly it was difficult to describe. They wanted to try electric treatment. Good. I received a slip of paper: I had to be at the Salpetriere at one o'clock.... (p. 53)

...it crossed my mind that I had been directed here, among these people, to this overcrowded, general consultation. It was, so to speak, the first public confirmation of the fact that I belonged among the outcast.... (p. 54)

At the end he runs up to his alleged 'follower' and slaps him on the shoulder.

H's dualistic attitude to Christiania typifies the ambivalence which permeates all his thoughts and actions. H's rapid shifts from childish admiration to impotent wrath irradiate his internalization of paradox. The invariable route to these emotional states leads him to the brick wall of dilemma where any solution quickly becomes unfeasible. The most radical examples of this paradoxical opposition are hunger and nausea, which follow one another as quickly as day does night in the silent film.

This fatal (though sometimes comical) knot of opposing impulses surfaces whenever events are connected to the question of either physical or spiritual nutrition.² H's comically exaggerated 'bind' is in fact

² H's writing comes under the category of spiritual nutrition: H expresses great joy at having produced a good piece of writing. "I became giddy with contentment, gladness swelled up in me, I felt myself to be magnificent." (36) Even the room which he inhabits is at this moment viewed with disdain since "it is not furnished in a way appropriate to intellectual effort."

In contrast to this self-confidence which the act of creation bestows on H, the result of idealizing the chief editor slowly eats away at our hero's self-love and turns him back into an anxious, neurotic hobo.

I had ominous feelings about the fate of my sketch; the more I thought about it, the more unreasonable it seemed that I could have written anything worthwhile in such a short time, and half asleep besides, and my brain wild and feverish. I had deceived myself, that's all, had been overjoyed all morning for nothing! (43)

What is also interesting is that H's relation to the chief editor is as ambiguous as is the relation of most hunger artists to the authority figure in their lives. The chief is both the source of 'milk and honey' *and* 'long bloody marks'. In relation to him, H plays the role of a child:

the essential 'Gordian knot' of all the hunger artists from Dostoevsky to Sartre. Why? Because the special bill of fare which any hunger artist carries in the portmanteau of his threadbare soul is as difficult for the world at large to decipher, and supply, as would be a proposed menu from Mars.

Hunger artists by and large behave as though they were haughty foreign visitors. The 'food' that Christians and Parisians so carelessly and happily consume is utterly distasteful to these metaphysical gourmets. Their behaviour implies that they feel 'above' the city or culture which they inhabit; but, because they are unable to wrest recognition of this 'fact' from their fellow citizens, they lower themselves, spitefully, to a level commensurate with 'the refuse and husks of humanity'. Neither these feelings of superiority nor those of inferiority are adequately understood by others. This fact further prolongs the inconvenience or agony of the hunger artist and gives him additional fuel for his suppressed ire. Lack of understanding is generally regarded as the spiritual equivalent to a lack of 'proper' food by the hunger artist. His death, when it occurs, is a silent protest against this 'deficiency' in society. Society, however, is prone to regard a death reached by a self-inflicted

So this is how he looked, close-up, the man whose name I had heard since I was a child and whose paper had a tremendous influence on me all my life. His hair was curly, and his fine brown eyes a trifle restless; one on his quirks was brushing his nose with his thumb every once in a while. A country preacher could not have looked more full of milk and honey than this formidable writer whose words had always left long bloody marks wherever they fell. A strange feeling of fear and awe toward this man came over me, I felt tears coming to my eyes, and I involuntarily moved a step closer in order to tell him how much he meant to me for everything he had taught me; and to ask him not to be too hard on me. (119-120)

fast as evidence of a deficiency in the double 'agent-victim' of this action. Only once in a long while does an 'average' non-fasting citizen closely observe a hunger artist and understand the meaning of his mute dissent. In the tale of Bartleby the Scrivener, where this kind of understanding does occur, it comes, alas, too late.

The round face of the grub-man peered upon me now. "His dinner is ready. Won't he dine to-day either? Or does he live without dining?"

"Lives without dining," said I, and closed the eyes.

"Eh! -- He's asleep, ain't he?"

"With kings and counselors," murmured I.

The life and death struggle to obtain (or to refuse) food is invariably expressed by the special feelings which the author-hero reveals in describing his home or city. His general distaste for life is given concrete form in his relationship to the town and its random inhabitants.

The city in the tales of the hunger artists often takes on the characteristics of a seductive, 'appetizing' woman who, upon closer inspection, either vanishes like a mirage, or disappoints like a hag. This is particularly the case with H, who is disappointed both by the city of Christiania, and later by his dream-girl Ylayali. Hunger begins at the end with the retrospective vision of the hero who has come, seen, but not conquered.

"All of this happened while I was walking around starving in Christiania...that strange city no one escapes from until it has left its mark on him...." writes H. From this initial brief description we learn that H feels that Christiania *actively* left a mark on him and that it (or she) is in some oblique way responsible for his

starvation.³ Because H is generally unconscious of his own motives, he does not see how he 'type casts' both Christiania and later Ylayali, not to mention a host of lesser characters, to behave exactly as they do. H begins where Brigge leaves off: he loves and hates the same object. At the end of the novel, H, very much like the bourgeois-worshipping character, Steppenwolf, depicts Christiania as an example of virtue and contentment.

I straightened up, wet from fever and exertion, looked in toward land and said goodbye for now to the city, to Christiania, where the windows of the homes all shone with such brightness.⁴

However H's ambivalence steadily widens the gap between himself and the world. He not only vacillates between like and dislike but between idolization and hatred. Since, generally speaking, both

³ This passive attitude compares remarkably well with Brigge's sense of being drained by the dining chamber.

⁴ Cf. Steppenwolf before the bourgeois temple:

And now I came to the araucaria. I must tell you that on the first floor of this house the stairs pass by a little vestibule at the entrance to flat which, I am convinced, is even more spotlessly swept and garnished than the others; for this little vestibule shines with a super-human housewifery. It is a little temple of order....

Sometimes when I know that I am unobserved, I use this place as a temple. I take my seat on a step of the stairs above the araucaria and, resting awhile with folded hands, I contemplate this little garden of order and let the touching air it has and its somewhat ridiculous loneliness move me to the depths of my soul. I imagine behind this vestibule, in the sacred shadow, one may say, of the araucaria, a home full of shining mahogany, and a life full of sound respectability--early risings, attention to duty, restrained but cheerful family gatherings, Sunday church-going, early to bed.

from Steppenwolf by Herman Hesse (30)

the idealization and the demotion of the same object are misplaced feelings, H's inability to cope adequately with his environment is calculated to land him in the mire. In fact, his eventual departure from Christiania comes not a moment too soon, his 'fall' being nearly complete. The physical deterioration accompanying the advanced stages of hunger and despair threatens to overcome him a moment before he sights the ship which finally takes him away from his misery.

I wasn't hungry any more, though the sweet food I had eaten was beginning to give me a stomach ache. Wild ideas popped up again in my head. What if I quietly went over and cut off the mooring ropes on one of the ships? What if I suddenly cried fire? I walked farther out on the pier, found myself a wooden box to sit on, and folded my hands; I could feel my brain moving nearer to chaos. I did not move this time, did absolutely nothing to prevent it. (231)

At the outset, H is an already defeated man, one whose many refusals have squashed his courage and worn his clothes to shreds. "I couldn't really present myself any longer for a job that required someone respectable," he says. H's imagination controls him to such an extent that the practical consideration of 'keeping body and soul together' does not enter his head. He lives in a world of fantasy which rarely links up to the hard world of reality. In describing his journalistic efforts for example, H reveals to us why he is going hungry.

I had spent the entire summer sitting in cemeteries or in public gardens near the castle, writing articles intended for some newspaper: *page after page on almost any subject, filled with odd ideas, inspirations, quirks rising from my restless brain.* In desperation I would choose the most outre subjects; the pieces would cost me hours and hours of labour, and were never accepted. (6)

H, insofar as he is a writer, is genuinely creative. His attempt at writing for 'some newspaper' is a laughable pose. He is too much of an artist at heart to pander to the demands of newspapers. He

is, however, too little acquainted with himself to know this or to appreciate its full import. Perhaps unconsciously H does not want a regular job with the added bonus of regular meals. Certainly one cannot call his efforts at respectable employment even minimally earnest. When, for example, does H apply for work? One typical instance occurs at the end of a day during which H has followed an old man with a 'mysterious' bundle, followed two unknown ladies half-way through town, and pawned his last waistcoat in order to buy a glass of milk for a total stranger. Only after dispensing with these multifarious deeds of inconsequential importance does H get down to the business of applying for the post of grocer's clerk. Perhaps the thought of being eternally surrounded by groceries throws H off balance. In any case he blunders, writes '1948' as the year of his application and loses the golden opportunity of steady employment.

The entire novel with its four sections reinforces the impression that H is far from being a practical man where his own welfare is concerned. He overcompensates for this carelessness about 'bread and butter' issues by expending enormous amounts of energy in isolated harebrained schemes which keep him alive for one more day. This is the essence of H's endless hamletizing on the theme of 'whether tis nobler' to pawn Hans Pauli's blanket or, by not doing so, to remain a pillar of virtue, albeit skeletally thin.

A study then of H and his particular hunger becomes a study in paradox. H works so hard to keep himself from going hungry that, more often than not, he misses his meal as a result of overzealousness.

The moment being the all-important unit of time in H's life, he rarely refers either to the past or to the future. He gives in always

to the evanescent but brilliant passions united with his fantasy-life. He continuously projects these fantasies to the ultimate detriment of that ever-hovering, but never consummated, moment of dining.

The 'reality' H sees transforms him either into an idolator or a knave. In the latter condition, he works himself up into a state of acute intestinal spite. The paradoxical result is a man dying of hunger, suddenly and bewilderingly nauseated by the sight of food.⁵ There are often attendant circumstances which 'explain' this curious stalemate. However, upon further inspection of this 'circumstance', one discovers the message, in the adamant and unreasonable hieroglyphics of all hunger artists: "I could not find the food I like."

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- 5 *If one only had something to eat, just a little on such a clear day!* The mood of the gay morning overwhelmed me, I became unusually serene, and started to hum for pure joy and for no particular reason. In front of a butcher's shop there was a woman with a basket on her arm, debating about some sausage for dinner; as I went past, she looked up at me. She had only a single tooth in the lower jaw. In the nervous and excitable state I was in, her face made an instant and revolting impression on me...the long yellow tooth looked like a finger sticking out of her jaw, and as she turned toward me, her eyes were still full of sausage. *I lost my appetite instantly and felt nauseated.* (7)

When I came down to the park gate, I saw the little old troll again whom I had chased away in a rage. *The mysterious bundle was lying alongside him on the bench, opened; in it were several sorts of food which he was just eating. I immediately had the impulse to go to him and apologize, ask him to forgive my behaviour, but his food put me off.* His ancient fingers which looked like ten folded claws, were clutching the sandwiches in a repulsive way. *I felt nauseated and walked past without speaking.* (34)

The metaphysical distaste for food is so named precisely because it transcends the hunger artist's relation to food; Christiania and her citizenry appear to have the same unfavourable effect on the moral and aesthetic plane. Predictably the two fuse into a series of metaphysical problems for H. His 'distaste', generally expressed as anger, is too often provoked by trivialities. As a result, H's *responsibility* for the condition of chronic hunger is a little easier to isolate than, for instance, Malte Brigge's or Roquentin's. The following discussion makes this clear.

When H is frustrated by the fact that he cannot write, a somewhat unsavory-looking old man is held responsible. But at the moment that H's misguided anger is going to be vented on this innocent 'screen', the 'screen' comes to life with its own 'script' and develops into a type well-known to H. The old man now carries the role of 'H's starvation' and H plays the part of 'benefactor'.

For the last ten minutes an old man had been limping ahead of me. He had a bundle in one hand, and was using his entire body to move forward, working with all his strength and yet making very little progress. I could hear him puffing from the effort. It occurred to me that I might carry his bundle; but I made no attempt to overtake him--

...However the old cripple was still making the same wiggly movements ahead of me in the street. Finally it began to irritate me to have this feeble creature in front of me all the time.

...In my excited condition I had become convinced that at each crossing he had hesitated, as though waiting to see what direction I would take, and then had a stronger hold on his bundle and limped off with all his might to get a head start.

...It was clear *he was destroying my good spirits* bit by bit, little by little dragging the pure and magnificent morning down to his own ugliness. (8-9)⁶

⁶Cf. Hopping scene in Malte Laurids Brigge.

As hunger turns to nausea, by what seems a mere sleight of hand, so, In Hunger, does hate turn to love. As H's anger metamorphoses to interest and compassion, the old man retains his essential nature of an obstacle 'standing in the way' of H's goals. For whether he likes or despises the man H neither eats nor writes.⁷ Thus Christiania and her citizens retain the basic characteristic of an intransigent 'block' in the way of H's goals and appetites.

I walked on, looking at this tedious creature, and became more and more full of rage at him; it was clear he was destroying my good spirits bit by bit, little by little dragging the pure and magnificent morning down to his own ugliness. He looked like a huge humping insect determined to make a place for himself in the world by force and violence and keep the sidewalk all to himself. By the time we got to the top of the hill, I wanted no more part of it; I stopped in front of a shop window, and waited till he had time to get away; but when I started off again after a few minutes, the man cropped up in front of me again: he must have stopped also. Without thinking, I took three or four quick steps, caught up with him, and slapped him on the shoulder.

He stopped short. We began staring at each other. "Can you give me a little something for a glass of milk?" he said at last, and let his head fall to the side.

Now there was no turning back! I fumbled in my pockets and said, "Oh, yes, milk. Hmm. Money isn't easy to get these days, and I'm not sure how much you really need it."

"I haven't eaten a thing since yesterday in Drammen," the man said. "I don't have an ore and I still can't find work."

"What do you do?"

"I'm a welt binder."

"A what?"

"Welt binder. I can also make the whole shoe."

"Well, that's different" I said. "Wait here a few minutes, and I'll see if I can't find something for you, a little something at least." (9)

⁷ H puts the old man into the role of 'obstacle'. If H had ignored him as by all rights he should have then the old man would have lost his 'power' over H.

From this example, one can also see that H's acts of gratuitous kindness have extraordinarily little to do with a genuinely philanthropic attitude. His acts of benevolence are carried out in an automatic dream-like state and if, as sometimes happens, the dreamer awakens, his magnanimity of soul vanishes like a wreath of smoke, readily replaced by the darker clouds of rancour and spite.

"Here you go," I said, giving him one of my coins.
"I'm delighted that you came to me first."

The man took the money and began to look me up and down. What was he standing there staring at? I got the sensation that he was inspecting my trousers and I became irritated at this impertinence. Did this old fool imagine I was really as poor as I looked? Hadn't I just as good as begun my ten-kroner article? On the whole I had no fears for the future; I had many irons in the fire. *What business was it of this heathen savage if I helped him out on such a marvelous day?* (10) (*italics, mine*)

The need to bestow 'the milk of human kindness' on unsuspecting passersby, while regarding abstinence as the highest form of virtue for oneself, may be interpreted as an unconvincing but workable alibi for much of H's impoverishment. This second 'alibi' again shifts the responsibility of H's deprivation from his own shoulders to those of Christiania. H's idiotic recalcitrance in securing even the smallest morsel for himself is erroneously interpreted as a sign of his own formidable virtue and 'honour.' In this case, mindless benevolence is united with chronic hunger and rationalized as a moral virtue which places the hero above the 'ordinary' inhabitants of Christiania. During one unusual hour, fate places our hero on the threshold of an action which may enable him to break his seemingly lifelong fast. At the dawning of this singularly sane tendency towards self-preservation, H's absurd scruples besmirch his reason and he withdraws again to a life of gustatory martyrdom.

All in all there was absolutely no sense in living this way; and by Holy Christ I did not understand what I had done to deserve this clear persecution either! Suddenly it struck me that I could just as well make a rat of myself right now and take the blanket off to "Uncle's" artesian well. I could pawn it for a krone and get three respectable meals, and keep myself going until I found something else...I would have to get around Hans Pauli later. I was already on my way to the well when I stopped in front of the entrance, shook my head doubtfully, and then turned around.

After I was some distance away, I grew more and more glad that I had won this severe test. The awareness that I was honorable rose to my head, filled me with magnificent conviction that I had character. I was a white beacon tower in the middle of a dirty human ocean full of floating wreckage. To pawn someone else's property for a single meal, to eat and drink oneself into damnation, to look in your own face and call yourself rat and have to drop your eyes--never! Never! (51)

Hamsun's Hunger is a four-part novel which deals with the aberrant cycles of H in the context of the more normal cycle of the four seasons as they travel over the city of Christiania. Where nature subtly transmutes her seasons, H remains unaltered from spring to fall. His cycle appears to be dictated by an inner mechanism which is sublimely heedless of the world of reality.

The mysterious affective myopia observed in relation to H's 'food' expeditions is duplicated in the area of writing, the chief domain of H's creativity. Paralleling the nausea which descends on the poor starving man in the instant before he is finally going to get a bite of food, is the wild daydreaming which supplants the original desire of committing on paper the otherwise insubstantial essence of the creative spirit. Added to an already sphinx-sized structure of paradoxes is the fact that H's imagination is 'fattened' by physical hunger. When H reaches physical prostration and mental dizziness, he dreams into being 'cornucopias swollen by shiny silver coins,' and

compensates for a missed meal by imagining himself 'stuffed' with money and food. "With my head held high, millions in stocks and bonds, and my hands clasped beneath my coattails, I departed from the city jail." The more hungry he gets, the more megalomaniac are his fantasies, and as daydreaming usurps the energy which he wished to allocate to writing, this wild feverish hunger adds another obstacle to the true consummation of his creative energies.

It will be remembered that Briggé like Flaubert's St. Julian achieved transcendence by embracing a leper. H does a comparable thing when he reaches the summit of his inspiration at the moment of fainting from hunger. Indeed H grows intoxicated by the lack of food and is inspired to formulate his most magnificent daydreams at the threshold of physical decrepitude.

Flowering from his wasted but intoxicated soul is the vision to end all hunger artists' visions. H is surrounded by opulence and beauty. All his senses are united in a joyous adoration of the object of his tenderest affections, and crowning this moment of baroque glory is the nearing of the 'promised land': H and the princess Ylayali are going to dine on that unimaginable delight, a portion of hot roast beef!

Where Christiania with her 'windows which shine so brightly' disappoints the ever hungry H, his own fantasies finally fulfill the idealist's appetite. Hunger is a state symbolizing lost or unobtained ideals. The hunger artist is thereby self-appointed heir to the idealistic and conquering hero of former days. His curious fasting vigil in the modern city expresses grief over the fact that the modern world can no longer house ideals for which he alone hungers.

THE CRAB IN THE CAFE:
SARTRE'S HUNGER ARTIST

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock
--T. S. Eliot

Thus he knows two things at once, and both with equal assurance: that there *is* no God, and that there *must* be a God. It is the perspective of the curse: the intellect dreaming of its dream of absolute freedom, and the soul knowing of its terrible bondage. (206)

The Disinherited Mind
--Erich Heller

Thus far in discussing Brigge's distaste and H's hunger we have seen how the reaction to food may itself be divided so that one part of the personality wishes it while another part of the personality disdains it. This ambivalence may be expressed either as having contrary feelings towards the same object or, as unwittingly, dividing experience into two realms, one of which is rejected. For this reason, hunger and distaste are seen as co-existent phenomena. The 'hunger artist' inevitably hungers for something which he may or may not have defined, while at the same time he feels a profound 'distaste' for something else. This something else is invariably the world of everyday reality to which the hunger artist denies himself access by refusing in both a physical and spiritual sense to feed on its substance. Roquentin's nausea is certainly a sign of refusal, for he, no less than Brigge and H, is suffering from an underlying metaphysical distaste. In his case, the concept of 'distaste' is sheer euphemism. Roquentin suffers from a profound, all-encompassing nausea which, because it reduces 'appetite-hunger' to a paper-thin entity, indicates that he is even more oppressed than either Brigge or H, who manage to salvage their idealistic dreams in the tattered remnants of a metaphysical crisis.

Roquentin wears nausea like a second skin. He is enveloped by it, and he in turn, envelops all his perceptions in it. In other words, he lives a 'weltanschauung' in which everything, including himself, is encased in nausea, a disgust so profound that he feels like vomiting.

There is, in some respects, a greater kinship between Roquentin and Gregor Samsa, the hopeless hero of Kafka's Metamorphosis, than between Roquentin and the hunger artist proper. They share a sense of fatal encapsulation in a revolting foreign body. Gregor, the clerk, awakens to find himself transformed into a gigantic beetle. Roquentin awakens from a 'six year slumber' only to find that the state of wakefulness brings with it a nightmare consciousness in which it seems he is changing into a crab.

Roquentin's nausea, like Brigge's distaste, is closely related to fear. There is a striking parallel between Brigge's perception of his unknown illness which is like 'seaweed on some sunken thing' and Roquentin's perception of existence as infiltrated by a lurking beastly potentiality. Because Roquentin sees that "The *true* sea is cold and black, full of animals; that it crawls under this thin green film made to deceive human beings and that the sylphs all round him have let themselves be taken in since they only see the thin film, which proves the existence of God. While 'I see beneath it' (167-168) he feels cut off from the rest of humanity who have an implicit, and by his standards, stupid faith in both Nature and existence. Roquentin believes that the Bouvillois are living a lie. As a result, he feels like an outsider, but one who actively dislikes the group which he is purportedly ignoring. Ironically, although he despises the citizens of Bouville, he fills his life and diary with these very persons. Roquentin's concentration upon the objects of his distaste is a self-imposed activity, the paradox of which goes beyond reason. This is the paralyzing dilemma of Roquentin's condition.

In the major portion of Roquentin's journal, the city, Bouville, is regarded as alien if not openly hostile territory. Whereas, in contrast, Brigge and H see Nature as a door to salvation, Roquentin confesses that he remains in the city only because he suspects the world outside is even more dangerous.

I am afraid of cities. But you mustn't leave them. If you go too far you come against the vegetation belt. Vegetation has crawled for miles towards the cities. It is waiting. Once the city is dead, the vegetation will cover it, will climb over the stones, grip them, search them, make them burst with its long black pincers. (208)

In short, Roquentin sees nature, anything that 'exists', as a crab or monster of whom he is the potential victim.

In the cities, if you know how to take care of yourself, and choose the times when all the beasts are sleeping in their holes and digesting, behind the heaps of organic debris, you rarely come across anything more than minerals, the least frightening of all existants. (209)

The importance of the crab image is its connection to Roquentin's underlying anxiety about himself and the nature of existence.

Fear of the underlying malevolence of things is the most direct cause of Roquentin's distaste or nausea. Thus we have once again the kind of disturbing fantasy-life which was dramatically portrayed in The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge vis-a-vis the 'vampire' room.

Roquentin, like Brigge, is initially horrified by misshapen people and things:

When I was eight years old and used to play in the Luxembourg gardens there was a man who came and sat in a sentry-box, against the iron fence which runs along the Rue Auguste-Comte.... We had a horrible fear of him because we sensed he was alone. One day he smiled at Robert, holding out his arms to him from a distance:

Robert almost fainted. It wasn't this creature's poverty-stricken look which frightened us, nor the tumour he had on his neck that was rubbed against the edge of his collar: but we felt that he was shaping thoughts of crab or lobster in his head. And that terrified us, the fact that one could conjure thoughts of lobsters on the sentry-box, on our hoops, on the bushes. (17)

However, eventually he himself becomes that which he most feared becoming. ("Is that what awaits me then? For the first time I am disturbed at being alone. I would like to tell someone what is happening to me before it is too late and before I start frightening little boys." [17])

I don't know where to go, I stay planted in front of the cardboard chef. I don't need to turn around to know they are watching me through the windows: they are watching my back with surprise and disgust; they thought I was like them, that I was a man, and I deceived them. I suddenly lost the appearance of a man and they saw a crab running backwards out of this human room. (166)

Through this process, Roquentin alters his physical perception of himself in accordance with the series of inner 'revolutions' which he undergoes. This 'Dorian Gray'¹ metamorphosis is equally at the root of Gregor Samsa's insect transformation. The latter behaved like an insect for so long that he finally came to embody one. Roquentin only imagines his physical transformation, but the effect which this has on his life proves equally devastating.

Early in the diary, Roquentin asks himself an epistemological question: "Am I the one who has changed? If not, then it is this room, this city and this nature; I must choose." (12) But, in the

¹ The analogy between Dorian Gray and Roquentin is based on the fact that both men undergo considerable psychological change before a physical sign becomes manifest--in other words, the psychic life determines the physical changes which are much more apparent to outsiders.

last analysis, Roquentin does not answer this question. He is swept away on a tide of awesome imaginary perception which convinces him that the source of the change is outside his person. He adopts the belief that his strong reactions are a response to the 'waste-land' morality of Bouville. Roquentin grows increasingly alienated from his surroundings, with ironic consequences. Although he frequently takes the superior posture of 'standing above' Bouville and passing censorious judgement on it, he also passes harsh judgement on himself. Hence his mood of endless melancholy, alienation, and the feeling of nausea which is related as much to a dissatisfaction with self, as to his relation to the town. Hence also, the recurring references to such beastlike creatures as the crab, which symbolizes the shy, angry, hermit in wordless conflict with its environment. The 'lower' animals indeed characterize the identifications of several 'hunger artists'. Roquentin's crab is paralleled by the underground man's mouse, Gregor Samsa's beetle, H's beggar and the metaphysically analogous leper-outcast of Malte Laurids Brigge.

The grotesque image of the crab is the perfect complement to Roquentin's vision. The crab threatens to devour the inhabitants of Bouville in much the same way that Bouville appears to be subtly ingesting Roquentin's consciousness. One of Roquentin's most disturbing episodes of nausea is provoked by a novel conception of the Self-Taught Man as a devouring beast who copes with reality by lumping everything together and swallowing it whole. "There is a race of beings, limited and headstrong, who lose to him every time: he digests all their violences and worst excesses, he makes white frothy lymph of them. He has digested anti-intellectualism,

manicheism, mysticism, pessimism, anarchy and egotism; they are nothing but stages, unfinished thoughts which find their justification only in him." (159-160)

Sartre's hero sees the world through a wall of gelatinous slither. This wall is Roquentin's projection, which acts like one-way glass. Once he has adjusted his vision to a vantage-point beyond the 'wall' Roquentin cannot, in fact, evaluate what he sees. The continued presence of elaborate, and often fearful, fantasies in Nausea reveals that his early wish to be clear-sighted and see the truth has no tangible effect in modifying a grotesque vision of the world.

In The Notebooks of Malte Brigge a greater energy informs Brigge's artistic vision. The 'vision of the beautiful' transcends the grotesque fearful fantasies. When Brigge, for example verbally weaves himself into the superb images in the Lycorne tapestries, he suggests that his imagination is sufficiently rich to have originated those images. This idealistic side of Brigge's imaginative personality helps him to arrive at an artistic solution of his distaste.

Roquentin's creative energies, in this positive sense, are comparatively slight. Nonetheless his struggle to comprehend and order his life is characteristic of the artistic personality. "What summits would I not reach if *my own life* made the subject of the melody," (55) he says at one time. Near the end of the diary, Roquentin makes it clear that his 'nausea' is related to the experience of an idealist who has been severely disappointed by the nature of reality.

There was a poor man who got in the wrong world.
He existed, like other people, in a world of public

parks, bistros, commercial cities and he wanted to persuade himself that he was living somewhere else, behind the canvas of paintings, with the doges of Tintoretto, with Gozzoli's Florentines, behind the pages of books, with Fabrice del Dongo and Julien Sorel, behind the phonograph records, with the long dry laments of jazz. And then, after making a complete fool of himself, he understood, he opened his eyes, he saw that it was a mis-deal: he was in a bistro, just in front of a glass of warm beer. He stayed overwhelmed on the bench; he thought: I am a fool. And at that very moment, on the other side of existence, in this other world which you can see in the distance, but without ever approaching it, a little melody began to sing and dance: "You must be like me; you must suffer in rhythm." (234)²

The notion of having entered reality, the only reality there is, on the wrong side is tantamount to confessing that one is seeing 'wrongly'. In the sense that Roquentin means it, there is no 'right world'. It is the human encounter with the world which determines how 'right' or 'wrong' it will look. Roquentin *sees*, then, like a crab whose vision registers only the changing patterns, and not the concrete objects from which those patterns emanate. His idealism causes him to suffer a great deal because he cannot locate its source in the world of public parks and bistros.

There is a considerable body of evidence in Nausea which suggests that Roquentin (like H and Malte) is not only the creator of the opprobrious 'changes' which plague him throughout: something inside him is deeply desirous of bringing these formidable changes about. Here, in his attraction to irrational forces, Roquentin forms an alliance with Dostoevsky's underground man. The latter expresses a view, on a different level (because Dostoevsky's hero *speaks rationally* however

² Cf. Brigge's description of the Lycome tapestries at the end of Book I of The Notebooks.

irrationally he may behave), which accurately 'speaks for' Roquentin and all hunger artists.

Man everywhere and at all times, whoever he may be, has preferred to act as he chose and not in the least as his reason and advantage dictated. And one may choose what is contrary to one's own interests, and sometimes one positively ought. (201 Notes)

Roquentin's early descriptions of his self-appointed solitude indicate a choice against reason. "You let events flow past; suddenly you see people pop up who speak and go away, you plunge into stories without beginning or end: you'd make a terrible witness. But in compensation *one misses nothing, no improbability or story too tall to be believed in cafes.*" (15) Roquentin is obviously attracted by his own detachment and in a peculiar way enjoys the unusual perspective which this stance affords. Side by side with expressions of doubt and despair, (Shall I awake in a few months, in a few years, broken, deceived, in the midst of new ruins? [13]) are words of courage which support Roquentin's trend towards solitude.

You must be a little bit lonely in order to feel them [these harmless emotions] just lonely enough to get rid of plausibility at the proper time. But I remained close to people, on the surface of solitude quite resolved to take refuge in their midst in case of emergency. Up to now I was an amateur at heart. (16)

Brigge's surprised joy at loving the fruits of loneliness ("My God, if any of it could be shared! But would it *be* then, would it *be*? No, it *is* only at the price of solitude." [68]), grows from similar roots. Each man believes that only by avoiding conformity to the commonly held 'realistic' vision, will he be able to maintain his individuality. Once again, the 'mouse' from the underground articulates the definitive hunger artist position:

Of course, this very stupid thing, this caprice of ours, may be in reality, gentlemen, more advantageous for us than anything else on earth--And in particular it may be more advantageous than any advantage even when it does us obvious harm, and contradicts the soundest conclusions of our reason concerning our advantage--for in any circumstance it preserves for us what is the most precious and most important--that is our personality, our individuality. (204 Notes)

The Nietzschean superman turned sub-human thus describes the hunger artist's psychology. In the role of superman, the hunger artist displays his powers as a social critic. In this craft, Roquentin is well practiced. He is able to fasten on society's weaknesses, and having dissected them with an anatomical zeal, to reject the remains outright. Authority figures, and the large body of citizens who trust them, become the most persistent target of Roquentin's bilious, often ironic, evaluations:

Women in black who come to exercise their dogs glide beneath the arcades, along the walls. They rarely come out in the full light, but they cast ingenué glances from the corner of their eyes, on the statue of Gustave Impetrax. They don't know the name of this bronze giant but they see clearly from his frock coat and top hat that he was someone from the beau monde. He holds his hat in his left hand, placing his right on a stack of papers: it is a little as though their grandfather were there on the pedestal, cast in bronze. They do not need to look at him very long to understand that he thought as they do, exactly as they do, on all subjects. (42)

Other targets of Roquentin's criticism include the upper and middle class habits observed and recorded on a Bouville Sunday. Dr. Roge, the uncouth customer at Camilles who dismisses Achilles with such phrases as "So it's you, you old swine," "aren't you dead yet?"; and ends with "He's crazy as a loon, that's that", elicits Roquentin's unmitigated contempt. In addition, the ancestors of Bouville society, who sit painted in the Bouville Museum, are treated with due severity

by the inquisitorial eyes of Antoine Roquentin. However, placing the middle-classes on a fantasied pillory does not carry Roquentin a single inch further from the nausea. He unsurprisingly finds it mirrored in the portraits he is studying. In explicating them, he reveals his deep cynicism and his total inability to trust anything or anyone in the world.

His eyes, [the portrait of Jean Parrotin] which I stared at in wonderment, indicated that I must leave. I did not leave. I was resolutely indiscreet. I knew; as a result of studying at great length a certain portrait of Philip II in the library of the Escorial, that when one is confronted with a face sparkling with righteousness, after a moment this sparkle dies away, and only an ashy residue remains: this residue interested me.

By dint of the belief that he can *see beneath* the surface of reality, Roquentin condemns himself to an eternal nightmare. A seat on a tramway car becomes the dead body of a donkey, a thin line under the seat becomes an unnerving smile, a passenger with a lump on the side of his neck becomes so terrifying that Roquentin leaps out of a moving train. By the end of the diary, Roquentin is overwhelmed by panic; the distorted vision turns tangible and seems to be physically as well as emotionally oppressive.

I drop onto a bench between great black tree-trunks, between the black, knotty hands reaching towards the sky. A tree scrapes at the earth under my feet with a black nail. I would like to let myself go, forget myself, sleep. But I can't, I'm suffocating: existence penetrates me everywhere, through the eyes, the nose, the mouth... (170)

The turning point in the novel is Roquentin's realization that this peculiar thing which he calls "nausea" is an integral part of his personality. "The Nausea has not left me and I don't believe it will leave me so soon; but I no longer have to bear it, it is no longer an

illness or a passing fit: it is I." (170) Yet in spite of a seemingly crucial revelation, Roquentin returns to his former obsession concerning the untrustworthiness of objects and persons:

Suspicious: that's what they were, the sounds, the smells, the tastes. When they ran quickly under your nose like startled hares and you didn't pay too much attention, you might believe them to be simple and reassuring... But as soon as you held on to them for an instant, this feeling of comfort and security gave way to a deep uneasiness. (175)

The images of immense menacing beasts reassert themselves and definitively mark the vision of Roquentin. "Existence", he finally concludes, "is not something which lets itself be thought of from a distance: it must invade you suddenly, master you, weigh heavily on your heart like a great motionless beast." (177)

Roquentin alters the 'cogito ergo sum' of Descartes to 'sum nauseo ergo sum'. The moment which might have meant deliverance through self-knowledge becomes a momentary lapse in an otherwise unbroken mood of melancholy. We have, near the end, an image of Roquentin sitting like a crab at the bottom of a vast and burdensome ocean. The wall of thick jelly has expanded over Roquentin and he has become the prisoner of his own existential fantasy:

I shouted "filth!" what rotten filth!" and shook myself to get rid of this sticky filth but it held fast and there was so much, tons and tons of existence, endless: I stifled at the depths of this immense weariness.

The diary charts Roquentin's passage through the few remaining alternatives of living represented by the Self-Taught Man, Rollebon and Anny. In the end, all three are rejected: Rollebon because he had threatened to usurp Roquentin's own existence; the Self-Taught Man because he assimilated values without self-knowledge; and Anny, because

she has lost all her illusions and discovered that there was nothing to live for. Surrounded by an unbroken solitude, 'rather like death,' Roquentin is faced with a final decision in view of his still continuing nausea. He decides to leave Bouville. Accordingly he walks to his old haunt, the Cafe Mably, to bid it farewell. By chance he hears the music of a saxophone and is reminded of the one possible exit available to him. The experience of listening to music takes him out of the oppressive immersion in nausea. Music acts as a purifying liquid which magically cleanses Roquentin of the 'filth', in fact the dross he associates with mortality. "I find the same desire again: to drive existence out of me, to rid the passing moments of their fat, to twist them, dry them, purify myself, harden myself, to give back at last the sharp, precise sound of a saxophone note." (234)

Roquentin selects as his models the composer and the singer of the song. He imagines their existence as having been equally as constrained as his. He knows, however, that they succeeded in transcending their own circumstances through music. And so, Roquentin decides to write a novel--his own apologue--the novel perhaps, we have just read.

And there would be people who would read this book and say: "Antoine Roquentin wrote it, a red-headed man who hung around cafes," and they would think about my life as I think about the negress: as something precious and almost legendary. A book.

Through the act of creating a work of art the hunger artist in Roquentin can sustain an isolation which is bearable. Through language he repairs an injured sense of dignity; and becomes capable of imposing harmony on a chaotic and irrefragable destiny.

CONCLUSION

In reaching the end of my study on hunger and distaste in three autobiographical novels, the most interesting and important observation to emerge is the subtle relationship between hunger and distaste, or between that which seems to be desired consciously and that which is actually desired by the irrational and covert forces of the unconscious. The importance of this in literature, whether in realistic fiction or romantic, lies in its translation into literary symbol and metaphor. When the current of conscious intent and unconscious motivation begin to run counter to one another in the life of the fictional character, the literary artist suggests this phenomenon by selecting a symbol or description which will contain the various undercurrents or motifs. One of the most effective means that writers have of accomplishing this depth of vision is to state it indirectly through the appearance of the human body. Thus the appearance of the body reveals a truth of which the character himself may be largely oblivious. There are a variety of gradations of this technique; some more likely to be accepted as naturalistic phenomena, as for example King Lear's blindness; others functioning on a more symbolic level as for example the uncanny metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa.

In tracing the motifs of hunger and distaste in our three autobiographical fictions, we discovered that far from a direct allegorical relationship between the physical and emotional realms, there was an indirect one in which physical hunger sometimes expressed emotional distaste. This symbolic complexity was characteristic of the emotional complexity inherent in this type of fiction. Brigg's inspired description

of the beautiful contrasted sharply with his obsession with "the horrible". Roquentin's avowed revulsion against the entire fabric of life in Bouville invited the question of why he was so studiously attentive to its details. Lastly, H's very real hunger concealed the less apparent ways in which he led himself into his unfortunate circumstance.

The modern novel mirrors the modern writers' awareness of an emotional universe whose structure is created out of an immense variety of shapes and lines. The forms which the influential 'eros' and 'thanatos' take are by no means obvious nor readily distinguishable the one from the other. More often than not they cleverly hold each other at bay by combining together into a strange union in which happiness comes to depend on sorrow for its very existence. When this happens we see the hero of a given novel reaching out for something destructive in the same way that a dying man might strive to grasp the elixir of life.¹ Brigg's spiritual happiness, for example, is brought about by a blatant disregard for the repulsiveness of the object of his affections; H's daydreams of princely grandeur and eroticism are enhanced by his real poverty and solitude. Roquentin's self-acceptance is only achieved at the price of rejecting the social world.

In the more paradigmatic works of Kafka and Melville, the balance between joy and suffering is more precarious. The hunger artist and Bartleby die of starvation. Notwithstanding their dismal end, the

¹ Heller in his essay, *The World of Franz Kafka in The Disinherited Mind*, makes the following analogous observation: "To men suffering from spiritual starvation even a rotted fruit of the spirit may taste like bread from Heaven, and the liquid of a poisoned well like the water of life." (203)

conscious reasons these heroes have for coming to such a pass are not without a certain confused aesthetic and moral sensitivity. From their perspective, the course of action or non-action which they select is dictated by a perception of society which contains no redeeming features. For such persons the choice of outright starvation and death seems to be the only dignified course left open. The victim-hero's perceptions in these instances are affirmed by the unwitting participation of his society. Even in the eyes of the sanguine narrator and employer of Bartleby, the clerk appears to be swallowed by the concrete immensity of the Wall Street skyscrapers. Similarly, the hunger artist's feeling that society is cruel is heightened by his being caged like an animal. It is understandable why for such heroes the thought of death is not altogether an unhappy one. The circumstances of their lives conspire with their melancholy inner worlds to produce a desire for alienation and death as a means of rescuing their declining sense of dignity.

In spite of this stern morality in which to suffer and die appears to be a loftier aim than to live contentedly in an imperfect world, such protagonists bestow upon us an exacting extension of romantic ideology, a universe in which no sensitive being can survive and which only the author-hero comes close to comprehending.

The autobiographical fiction is a subjective one and makes no pretense at possessing the objectivity created by the separation of subject, (character) and object, (society) as is the case in realistic fiction. Because the autobiographical approach enhances subjectivity, an interesting and important aspect of behaviour emerges from this kind of writing. The behaviour I am referring to may be summarized as a

pattern in which the subject (protagonist) perceiving some attitude in the object (society, or a member of society) unconsciously transfers the ascribed intent or attitude of the object to himself, thereby acting with his own person the roles of both subject and object.

The mirror scene in The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge is one example of this process, and H's dialogue with the old man in the park, another.

If the hero first projects his own aggressive emotions upon the external world (as is frequently the case with the 'hunger artist' heroes) then he is apt to act out a self-destructive episode and erroneously blame the external world for the outcome. Gregor Samsa in his heart of hearts blames his unfeeling family and employer. In a certain sense they become responsible for his death. Analogously Roquentin mentally transforms himself into a crab, a creature whose appearance suggests and invites hostility. Along similar lines H's inner genius is concealed beneath the 'bona fide' costume of the dimwitted beggar, while the real descendant of European aristocracy, Malte Laurids Brigge, also channels himself into the unpropitiating weeds of pauperdom. In every instance the distaste which the hero directs towards a society is unconsciously aimed at himself, until finally he becomes in some sense, the object of his own, as well as society's distaste. The 'food' which the hero feels society denies him, he very fundamentally denies to himself. Hunger, the original instinct of survival and self-preservation, emerges in these novels and tales as the symbol of a curious addiction to the void expressed by a habitually impoverished and often empty stomach.

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