

**Selfhood, Identity and Madness
in the Works of Milan Kundera and Peter Carey**

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Abstract

Despite all the critical attention Milan Kundera's and Peter Carey's fiction has received, relatively little has been said about the way in which these authors problematise selfhood. In this study, I argue that these two writers share a preoccupation with the strictures placed on the individual by his/her location in language and discourse. I show that they deconstruct subjectivity with a view to intimating the possibility of momentarily transcending discursive control, and thereby inhabiting authentic selfhood. In addition, I demonstrate that both authors draw attention to the nature of language through their thematisation of madness, and I then trace the implications of this nexus between language and madness for the reader, who of course is a subject in language. My contention in this regard is that Carey and Kundera seek to instil in the reader a self-reflexive awareness of the ways in which his/her location in language shapes his/her perception of others. In turn, this awareness charges the reader with the responsibility of questioning his/her judgements, and thereby enables him/her to negotiate a measure of authenticity from his/her position in language.

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Introduction

What is unique about the ‘I’ hides itself in exactly what is unimaginable about the person.

(Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* 195)

At first glance, the narratives of Peter Carey and Milan Kundera seem to have little in common: there are few overlapping themes, the language differs greatly due to different historical influences, and the way in which the texts are structured virtually situates them as polar opposites. However, on close reading, it emerges that the narratives share a concern with the possibility of authentic selfhood, and with how to realise this possibility when faced with powerful discursive structures.

Kundera, the Czechoslovakian-born author of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, often sets his writing in the Cold War. Due largely to the nature of his background, many of his characters, and indeed many of the locations he mentions, are concerned with Cold War European history. His characters regularly find themselves faced with political dilemmas and, invariably, these problematic social issues affect their personal interactions. A relationship between the personal and the social is often foregrounded in his texts, and it is clear that he is disturbed by the conflation of the public and the private. His characters are often aware of the interaction between the private and the public, and seem perturbed by the lack of privacy in their personal lives. For example, in “Let the Old Make Room for the Young Dead”, as a nameless character muses upon her reflection in a mirror, the narrator explains that what “she had in the center of her body” – that is, her selfhood which is informed by the public – “she wore like a secret badge of dishonor” (*Laughable Loves* 48). In this scene, attention is drawn to the author’s problematisation of the private and public, as the character’s self, or rather private being, reflects the conventions of the public domain. The dishonour spoken of is a result of losing, or being unable to acknowledge, a private, independent self. Essentially, the tension between the private and the public introduces Kundera’s focus on the constitution of subjectivity and the constraints that it places on the possibility of authenticity. In his treatment of subjectivity, he concentrates on, amongst other things, the body, sexual intercourse, eroticism and love. For him, these notions are informed by overarching systems of thought that seem, finally, to permeate subjectivity to such an extent that authenticity is precluded from the subject.

In addition, Kundera's texts point to the dilemma faced by the subject in extricating the private from the public by making the nature of subjectivity apparent. That is to say, the way in which subjectivity is infiltrated by the public is made clear so that the subject, who is largely incapable of understanding his/her predicament because he/she is located in the public, is able to grasp the extent of his/her implication in the social world. The author's texts make it obvious that subjectivity is conventional, and that the subject must encounter the world around him/her from a particular subject position, thereby obviating the possibility of authenticity. Subjectivity precludes an authentic experience of life. As the narrator explains in "Nobody Will Laugh", subjectivity means that "man passes through the present with his eyes blindfolded. He is permitted merely to sense and guess at what he is actually experiencing" (57). Kundera therefore exposes how the conventional nature of subjectivity precludes an authentic experience of life, as it inhibits authenticity. His characters often struggle to control their destinies or to extricate themselves from the past, and in this way the author indicates that their lives are managed by external forces. After having read his texts, the reader feels a strange affinity with the characters, and the discomfiture he/she perceives helps enlighten him/her as to the nature of his/her own subjectivity. Consequently, Kundera is able to intimate a possible approach of authentic selfhood.

Carey, though also concerned with autonomous selfhood, differs from Kundera in fundamental ways in his treatment of this issue. Primarily, his writing reflects his own geographical location, that is, Australia. Moreover, most of his characters are notably 'Aussie', and his incorporation of various dialects, cartographical descriptions and references to numerous historical events ensure that his texts are read with the continent's past in mind. Yet, while he draws on the past, he sometimes overrides any/the historical knowledge that the reader may have, which has the effect of disorientating him/her, and, ultimately, undermining the way in which he/she approaches the text. Unlike Kundera, who reveals the nature of subjectivity, Carey lures the reader into a false sense of ease, only to subvert his/her reading and, by implication, those systems of knowledge that inform it. While both authors attempt to make their readers aware of the nature of subjectivity, Carey differs from Kundera by confronting the reader with the fact that it is a social construct. For example, in *Oscar and Lucinda*, Carey suggests that the text can be read in a certain way, since he often writes from the perspective of the coloniser. However, he subsequently disestablishes that reading and places the reader in the position of the colonised. He frequently overturns the preconceptions of the reader in order to draw attention to the way in

which the text is read, and, by extension, to those structures that imbue the reader's presuppositions. Given this, Carey's exploration of authentic selfhood is interwoven with an inquiry into the use of language, the expectations of the reader, the predictability of plot, and a lack of closure and historical fact.

Despite their differences, both authors grapple with the highly problematic and somewhat generic notion of selfhood by manipulating discourse and jointly embracing a postmodern literary style. In other words, both authors approach the text as a linguistic construction, or rather a vehicle for manipulating discourse through the use of a self-reflexive narrative. Steven Connor suggests that postmodernism has "the tendency to assume that literature is intrinsically narrative" (63), and though he is here suggesting that literary analysis has shifted away from the analysis of poetry, his notion extends to the idea that postmodern texts seem to be constantly aware of their own textuality. It is this concept which is made apparent in the novels of Carey and Kundera.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines selfhood as "the quality that constitutes one's individuality" ("Selfhood"). Selfhood is often thought of as that which is specifically individual, independent of others, and which distinguishes one person from the next. The writers challenge this notion by investigating the origins and construction of selfhood – that is, how it is created and what influences it. Their texts focus primarily on the tenuous relationship between identity and selfhood and its frequent misinterpretation.

According to Stuart Hall, selfhood is integrally related to identity. For him, identity "bridges the gap between the 'inside and the outside'", or in other words, the "personal and the public worlds" ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 276). Often, identity is seen to exist as an external component of the self, and as such is a variable concept which, when studied closely, is seen to enact larger, powerful and overarching discourses such as religion, politics and race. When understood in this manner, identity is juxtaposed with a fixed, already formed personal selfhood, which is perceived as autonomous and constant. Yet what is worrying here, and what clearly troubles Kundera and Carey, is the way in which selfhood is implicated in subjectivity. Indeed, identity and subjectivity are closely related, in that they are in near proximity to subject positions inscribed by language. At issue here, then, is how subjectivity distorts and shapes selfhood in certain ways, and how this distortion may, finally, inhibit the possibility of authenticity.

The Formation of Subjectivity

The formation of subjectivity or, more precisely, the location of a person in language has been discussed extensively. Commentators have focused on many different ideas, ranging from Kantian perspectives on the Enlightenment subject, to the linguistic analyses of Derrida and Saussure, psychoanalytic discussions of Lacan and Freud, and also the valuable contributions made by Foucault in his work on discourse. Albeit from different disciplines, with the possible exception of Kant these theorists share the opinion that in society consciousness is subject-centred. In other words, awareness of self – in proximity to others – is predicated on subjectivity and results in subject-centred consciousness.

Consciousness of self requires the understanding that the I is, according to René Descartes, a “thing that thinks” (“Meditation II” 433). For him, it “affirms, denies, wills, refuses, [. . .] imagines and feels” (433). Importantly, however, it is thought itself which is problematic. A thinking entity, in so far as he/she is located in language, must think of himself/herself in direct relation to others. The I is inconceivable in the absence of another person who is able to acknowledge its existence. If, as Hall has noted, subject-centred consciousness has developed from the Enlightenment notion that “the essential centre of the self [is] a person’s identity” (“Cultural Identity” 275), that the person is “endowed with the capacities of reason” (275), and that “identity is formed in the interaction between self and society” (276), then it follows that reason, or thought, is born of society and that the capacities which constitute the essential centre of the self are intimately connected to the social, or rather to that which is external to the self. There seems to be a disjuncture between self and identity here – one which is hidden behind the concept of reason. Subject-centred consciousness, as the rational cognisance of one’s own existence, can only come into being within stipulated social parameters. Consequently, the I can only exist in relation to the outside world and is only actualised within a social context. The self, or essential centre, is thus a constructed entity. Jacques Lacan explains that the I eventually becomes “objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other”, and that in this identification “language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject” (“Mirror” 2). The I, then, is in relation to the other, and this is a point of considerable concern: if the I is translated through the other, and if it can only exist because of the other, through what medium is this

translation made possible? How is recognition of the other enabled, and does the mode used adequately represent individuality – indeed, is it ever able to do so?

Arguably, the personal knowledge of the I is an assimilation of the way in which the other perceives it, since identity, being the interface between what we understand as the personal and the public, is primarily informed by the other. When the individual enters subject-centred consciousness, his/her need to be recognised socially is intertwined with selfhood. In other words, acknowledging the other distances the subject from him/her, thus predicating the subject's identity on that separation. It is this distance which facilitates subjectivity and which is always necessary to maintain it. The other is different to the subject, and that difference affirms subjectivity. Therefore, the binary opposition between subject/other affirms subjectivity, and the notion of the other becomes deeply engrained in the subject. It is, indeed, always present. Seemingly, then, the distance between the subject and other regulates what the subject conceives of as selfhood, thus constraining his/her authenticity. Lacan explains that at the moment of self-recognition there is the image of a “gestalt” (2): one recognises what is foreign – the other – which, disconcertingly, “symbolizes the I's mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination” (2). The subject necessarily apprehends his/her being through, and from within, language, thus making him/her other to himself/herself (2).

As mentioned, the medium which enables this complex recognition of the I through the other is language. However, language itself is problematic, thereby further complicating its relationship with subjectivity. Roy Harris suggests that thought on the “unreliability” of language dates as far back as the writings of Francis Bacon (*Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein* 3). Though language is effective in providing a form of communication, it may indeed fail to do what its practitioners profess that it does, namely, enable authenticity.

Language shapes subjectivity and restricts authenticity, and its ability to do so is largely facilitated by discourse. Drawing on Foucault and Weedon, Robin Usher and Richard Edwards define discourse as

ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the [. . .] unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. (72)

Discourse, which is created by language, is assimilated by the subject in order that he/she may interact with others in society. Subjects relate to one another through the use of information disseminated by discourses such as race, gender, medicine, religion, politics or indeed almost any other sphere of knowledge. For this reason, discourse is inculcated in subjectivity to such a degree that both the subject's relation to the other and his/her conception of selfhood are discursively mediated. In essence, the subject inhabits a specific subject position, the nature of which is regulated and maintained by discourse. The fact that the individual's communion with himself/herself is mediated by discourse precludes the possibility of authenticity. Because discourse is conventional, and informs the subject, he/she is imbricated in a system foreign to authenticity. In *Immortality*, Kundera's narrator suggests as much when he explains that, for him, the advertising agencies of the communist party "have created their own language, their formulas, their aesthetics [. . .] their idea of the right lifestyle which they cultivate, disseminate and force upon their unfortunate peoples" (126). Discourse is not only forced on the subject, as the narrator explains, invariably the subject inscribes that discourse onto others too. Because subjectivity is implicated in discourse, the subject's actions project certain discourses onto others. In turn, the other, in attempting to maintain his/her subjectivity, assimilates the discourse communicated by the subject. Thereafter, the subject once again encounters the other, and internalises that discourse for the second time. The interaction between self and other, then, is an exchange of discourse which perpetually regulates and affirms both subjectivities. This communication of discourse ultimately precludes the possibility of authenticity, as discourse constantly ensures that subjectivity is intimately related to the individual's conception of selfhood, and that the subject is articulated in public through convention.

Harris argues that words are often recognised as "a faithful reflection of the corresponding thoughts or mental operations" of the self (*Language* 3). It seems, however, that selfhood cannot be separated from subjectivity, as the ability to conceive of selfhood is dependent on linguistic systems and the discourses they create, which are always public and conventional. Because language creates subject-centred consciousness, the public is mirrored in the private, and, moreover, informs it. In Kundera's *Immortality*, the public nature of the private is presented by what the narrator calls the "method of addition" (112), which is the way in which the individual collects certain information from the public and incorporates it into his/her daily life. Kundera's narrator suggests that the individual creates himself/herself, or rather identity,

through collecting and cultivating personal attributes, such as a liking for the colour green or for cats. The details of why a particular colour should be liked, or why cats are preferable to dogs, are received from the public domain. Importantly, the narrator makes apparent the conventional nature of such collected information, as well as its ability to undermine authenticity. For him, there

is the strange paradox to which all people cultivating the self by way of the addition method are subject: they use addition in order to create a unique, inimitable self, yet because they automatically become propagandists for the added attributes, they are actually doing everything in their power to make as many others as possible similar to themselves; as a result, their uniqueness (so painfully gained) quickly begins to disappear. (112)

It is clear that the conventional nature of discourse is what finally precludes the possibility of authenticity.

It is not only through discourse that language prevents an approach of authentic selfhood. For speakers, language seems an adequate medium for articulating subjectivity. But linguistic systems are flawed because their dependence on convention obviates the possibility of an accurate definition of anything. As Ferdinand de Saussure and others have pointed out, language's relationship to reality is constitutive rather than referential. According to Saussure, language is "something acquired and conventional" (*Course in General Linguistics* 10), and the "faculty of articulating words [. . .] is exercised only with the help of the instrument created by a collectivity and provided for its use" (11). The difference between world and word, then, occurs because in order for words to work they must be iterable, which in turn means that they generalise, and therefore elide, specificity.

Authenticity is in fact deferred by language, and, as such, the authenticity of the subject, whose consciousness is implicated in language, is similarly deferred. Jacques Derrida introduced the concept of infinite deferral in a discussion of what he terms the "supplement" (*Acts of Literature* 96). He explains that all experiences are supplements in the form of words, and in this sense they are only inferences enabled by language. For him, the supplement is chimerical, because "it is neither presence nor absence" (96), but instead "promises itself as it escapes" and "gives itself as it moves away" (96). While it names something, the supplement also removes the subject further from that which is being named, thereby substituting convention for an accurate definition, and giving the subject language when it defers the actual meaning of the named object.

The supplement defers meaning due to its conventional nature. This deferral means that subject-centred consciousness precludes the subject from approaching authenticity, as he/she constantly misinterprets the world, and, essentially, experiences only a false version of it.

Furthermore, its deferral of meaning points towards language's self-sufficiency. The success of linguistic systems relies on a preoccupation with taxonomy. Because language is used as a way to understand and define the world, its main objective is to provide individuals with comprehensive knowledge. However, as mentioned, language's conventional nature cannot facilitate this outcome, and, rather than drawing the subject closer to the object, language seems to separate him/her from it. With the separation of the subject from what is being named, meaning is deferred. Importantly, it is this deferral which validates language. While language attempts to taxonomise, it also creates an unknown distance between itself and the object. The gap created in the naming process becomes a perpetual site on which language can inscribe itself, and yet it is one that will always elude language's attempts to do so. Language creates an "absent presence" which, for Derrida, leads to a "frustration" that ensures another attempt (96).

Language is therefore preoccupied with definition, and ironically it is its inability to supply accurate knowledge of objects which ensures its usage. For the subject, this is highly problematic, as his/her subject-centred consciousness is constructed by language and thus shares its obsession with taxonomy. In other words, the subject's experience of the world lacks authenticity, because the way in which he/she apprehends his/her surroundings defers authentic meaning. Similarly, language is focused on that which is unknown, and thus is located in the future thereby negating the present. In effect the present and authenticity are lost because linguistic systems aim to know what exceeds them.

Given the deferral of meaning by language, the subject who is located in language is denied the possibility of experiencing the present and, as such, authenticity. An authentic state would mean an immersion in the present moment, so much so that the individual would lose his/her subjectivity and, accordingly, the ability to distinguish any period of time altogether. However, language disallows this possibility. For Jean-Paul Sartre, a lack of the present generated by the subject's position in language translates into the loss of the individual's authenticity, and what remains, of course, is the subject's representation in language. Ostensibly, it is the gnawing fear that experience is mediated by a medium that fails to signify adequately which precipitates existential crises. In Sartre's play *No Exit*, the following dialogue between

two of the characters, which takes place during their incarceration in hell, can be used to apprehend the effect of language on the subject in so far as linguistic systems deny the authenticity of the individual by restricting him/her to his/her subjectivity:

ESTELLE [opens her eyes and smiles]: I feel so queer. [She pats herself.]
Don't you ever get taken that way? When I can't see myself I
begin to wonder if I really and truly exist. I pat myself just to make
sure, but it doesn't help much.

INEZ You're lucky. I'm always conscious of myself – in my mind.
Painfully conscious. (19)

The anxiety created by language and discourse is constant, and, as Inez explains, the subject is always conscious of it. Authenticity is obviated by the very system in which the subject is located, and escaping that system, that is, trying to inhabit authenticity, is highly problematic.

The Madness of Language

It is clear that language functions in particular ways, and that its preoccupation with definition is mirrored in subject-centred consciousness. However, because language is focused on taxonomy, the unknown functions not only as that which must be defined, but also as threat. The danger of that which exceeds language is precisely that it lacks order, and when juxtaposed with the order inherent in language, it threatens to cause disarray. If orderly linguistic systems were infiltrated by the unknown, unstructured space beyond them, language would fail to function. In other words, the distance between the subject and object, which is created by language, would disappear and subjectivity would no longer be possible. Because subjects require language for the maintenance of subjectivity, the loss of subjectivity would mean that language would be redundant. In fact, the individual would no longer require language. With the breakdown of subjectivity, a person would be completely private and beyond convention. He/She would retreat from the social world and would therefore not need names. Accordingly, to ensure its survival language must protect itself by constantly cordoning off the unknown, even as it attempts to define that which exceeds it.

Madness is perhaps the most telling example of language's treatment of the unknown. By definition, madness is that which is without order or reason, and it presents the best example of

how linguistic systems function when faced with the unknown. Essentially, madness exemplifies how language tries to impose order on disorder. In an attempt to diagnose madness, medical discourse seeks to rationalise what Michel Foucault terms “unreason” (*Madness and Civilization* 201). Unreason is approached from a position in language, and, as Lillian Feder suggests, the approach of the unknown must then use language, because it “depends upon linguistic laws” (*Madness in Literature* 12). Significantly, because language approaches the excess beyond it by using convention, it always fails to define that space accurately. When what is unknown is approached in this manner – that is, through language – discourse is inscribed on it, and authenticity is lost. Such an undertaking merely reiterates what exists. Furthermore, this approach strengthens the boundaries between language and what lies beyond it.

The same holds true for the subject. Being implicated in language, his/her subjectivity increasingly restricts the possibility of approaching authenticity by strengthening the separation between the subject and the unknown. Medical discourse’s treatment of madness draws attention to this issue. For Foucault, madness is “a matter of social sensibility” (*History of Madness* 125). In other words, the treatment of madness is dictated by convention. Essentially, discourse attempts to define what madness is in order to quell the threat it presents. And, as subject-centred consciousness is imbued with discourse, the subject then uses that definition in his/her daily life, thus affirming discursive control. Both language and the subject seek to define the unknown so as to safeguard the order inherent in subjectivity and linguistic systems. Because the subject is informed by language, he/she shares the fear of the unknown. For the individual, however, the unknown does not culminate in what discourse calls madness. He/She is faced with the unknown other instead. The other always remains unknown to the subject, and the relationship between self and other is characterised by continual discursive inscription, which regulates the subjectivity of both. In many ways, the discursive exchange between self and other is mirrored by that of language and the unknown, or rather what discourse calls ‘madness’. Just as language separates the unknown from itself and inscribes on it particular discursive terms such as madness, so too the other is approached, and inscribed upon, by the subject operating from within language. The other is approached by the subject from a particular position in language, and is thus inscribed with discourse, thereby containing the threat of the unknown which he/she poses. This interaction between subject and other, located in language, parallels the way in which language approaches that which exceeds it.

Interestingly, it is this precise obsession with defining the unknown – or the other – which draws attention to the madness inherent in language itself, and by extension the subject. Though Chapter Four discusses this notion in greater detail, it is important to mention it briefly here. Language can never do what it purports to do, namely, provide an accurate definition. As mentioned, this is because it requires that which is unknown in order to exist. What this means, however, is that its preoccupation with order is doomed to fail, and yet language continues to pursue it. It can be argued, then, that the constant attempt to do that which is impossible to do is madness, and because language does precisely this, it is, in my opinion, mad.

If language is mad, so too is the subject, since he/she is located in language. The subject's madness is made apparent by his/her desire to know the other. His/Her pursuit of the other is doomed to fail, as the distinction between the subject and other maintains the subjectivity of both. Knowing the other would lead to the loss of subjectivity, and therefore the inability to conceptualise what the other may be. Ironically, the subject must approach the other by using a system that simultaneously enables a notion of him/her and creates a division from him/her.

The madness of repeatedly attempting the impossible instils anxiety in the subject. In my opinion, the subject's anxiety is a function not simply of language's inability to know what is other to it, but of his/her separation from what is othered by his/her subject-centred consciousness. The subject himself/herself precludes the possibility of knowing the other. What is more, because subject-centred consciousness shares language's fears, the subject is afraid of the unknown within himself/herself. That is to say, discourse constantly constrains subjectivity, and thereby confines the unknown in the subject. And because the subject is permeated by discourse, he/she is always aware of the threat that the unknown within poses for his/her subjectivity. Because the subject is informed by discourse, he/she may actually assist his/her own demise. Niall Lucy's explanation of the binaric structure of language facilitates an understanding of the subject's predicament:

There is no inside without an outside. Everything is 'inside' the field or the play of spatial and temporal relations 'outside' of it. This means that what a thing 'is' must include its difference or differences from what it is not; its difference belongs to 'it', inhabiting its identity. (*A Derrida Dictionary* 27)

To an extent, then, the excess of subjectivity inheres in the subject. The subject's desire to understand that which exceeds him/her is part of his/her subjectivity. Just as language creates remainders by deferring meaning, so too the subject, whose authenticity is deferred by language, contains within him/her the excess of language, or rather the excess which systems of difference cannot contain.

To the extent that the subject is constituted by order but also carries disorder within him/her, he/she is mad. And it is this madness which, for Foucault, is a disease that, importantly, stems directly from culture. In the introduction to *Madness and Civilization*, David Cooper suggests that Foucault views madness as

nothing less than a peculiar disease of our civilization. We choose to conjure up this disease in order to evade a certain moment of our existence – the moment of disturbance, of penetrating vision into the depths of ourselves, that we prefer to externalize into others. Others are elected to live out the chaos that we refuse to confront in ourselves. (Introduction viii)

It is then the constant desire to name mental diseases, and thereby to allay fears, which draws attention to the madness, or disease, inherent in language and, by association, subject-centred consciousness. There is a tension between subjectivity and that from which it is separated. The subject's madness stems from his/her attempt to know that from which he/she came, and that which threatens his/her subjectivity, by using the very system that separates him/her from it. An understanding of that unknown cannot be achieved, and it follows that his/her subject-centred consciousness ironically creates his/her madness. It is as though the subject is made perpetually accountable for the unknown that exists in him/her by the very system that created it.

Language and Approaching Authentic Selfhood

How then is the subject able to approach authentic selfhood if subjectivity provides the only means of apprehending what it may be? Because the subject is implicated in language, he/she is able to conceive of the concept of authenticity. Language facilitates an understanding of what authenticity may be. It is, of course, counterintuitive to attempt to obtain authenticity through the use of language, given that language is conventional, but without linguistic systems there would be no appreciation of what authenticity could be. For this reason, if authentic selfhood were to be

inhabited, the subject – as an agent acting in the world of possibility – would have no way of knowing he/she was doing so. In fact, subjectivity would be destroyed, and therefore inhabiting authenticity would be, as Feder suggests, the “ultimate self-expression that is inevitably self-destructive” (xii). Given that language would restrict authenticity, and that subject-centred consciousness is created by language, authentic selfhood would have to be something that happens to the subject rather than anything he/she actively causes. If he/she were to attempt to inhabit authentic selfhood from (and through) his/her position in language, the attempt would always fail. In the course of my thesis, I hope to indicate that what Kundera and Carey achieve is a unique way of undermining discourse which, ultimately, disorients the reader and opens the potential for the dissolution of subjectivity. Thus, the reader is unwittingly prepared for approaching authentic selfhood.

Importantly, I suggest that inhabiting authentic selfhood – if this is a possibility – would be akin to authentic madness, or at least that which exceeds language. Authentic madness is discussed in detail in Chapter Three, but in essence it refers to a state without order. Kundera and Carey intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood by leading the unknowing reader to a location of disorder from his/her location in the order of discourse. In the process, the reader’s subjectivity is challenged by the authors’ manipulation of discourse, so as to release him/her from discursive control. Though I cannot state what authentic madness or selfhood may be (as I would need to rely on discourse to do so and thus would undermine my objective), it is necessary, again, to add that such a state would be characterised by a lack of subjectivity, and the subject would therefore be unaware of its authenticity. However, as I hope to indicate, Kundera and Carey both seem to believe that inhabiting such a state, albeit briefly, may promote an understanding of discourse that challenges the way in which discursive regimes direct subjectivity. If the texts were to affect the reader in the manner I contend, a genuine possibility for a more authentic and individual experience of the world – from within subjectivity – would be achievable.

Conclusion

This thesis aims to compare the ways in which Carey and Kundera approach and deal with ideas such as love, fear, sexual intercourse and death, so as to indicate how their texts examine

madness and the possibility of authentic selfhood. In particular, I indicate how these two writers expose the discursive nature of subjectivity and in the process intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood.

In the study, I examine Kundera's *Immortality* and *Laughable Loves* alongside Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* and *My Life as a Fake*. Chapter One focuses on the imagination, and specifically its implication in discourse. Additionally, it examines the presentation of the imagination in the novels, how it affects the subject, and its involvement in hindering a possible approach of authenticity. Chapter Two deals with eroticism, the body and gender. It includes an examination of beauty in the texts, so as to demonstrate how aesthetics are implicated in discourse, as well as how they inhere in subjectivity. The chapter also discusses both authors' presentations of these concepts as discursive power structures which, when manipulated correctly, may provide the means to undermine their own authority. Chapter Three seeks to understand the consequences of inhabiting authentic selfhood. Death, madness and freedom are explored in detail, and the matters discussed in the preceding chapters are reviewed in order to assess what escaping discourse and language might mean for subjectivity, and whether this is a possibility.

Chapter 1: Imagination

Introduction

This chapter examines the unique manner in which Kundera and Carey each approach the imagination – that which is discursively informed. While explanations of their respective treatments of the imagination have been offered by several critics, little attention has been given to how and why they continually problematise it. Few discussions explore how the authors expose the constructed nature of the imagination, that is, the fact that it is implicated in discourse and, in Walter Kauffman's words, is simply an "expression of the love of language" (271). Imagination as such does not function independently of linguistic imperatives. Even fewer critiques assess how both authors approach this dilemma, specifically, that the imagination is fabricated in and articulated by language. There thus seems to be a general lack of material pertaining to what, I argue, is one of the most integral aspects of Kundera's and Carey's work, namely, their problematization of the imagination by locating it in discourse. In what follows, I enquire into the way in which these two novelists foreground the imagination as a complex and discursive concept in the hope of discerning that which they intimate about its construction, the consequent ramifications of this for 'authentic selfhood' and, finally, the need for and possibility (if any) of a transcendence of it.

Although literary analysis of Carey's work in particular does discuss, in varying degrees, the author's creative use of the imagination, it never highlights his deeply ingrained distrust of that faculty as one which is informed by discourse. Writers such as Margarete Rubik, Christer Larsson and Paul Kane pay attention to the manner in which this writer constructs his novels, and even though they call attention to the ingenious "blend of innovation and tradition [which make] his novels extremely complex and intriguing" (Larsson 176), they do so in order to underscore not his theoretical concerns about the imagination but the fact that the narratives themselves are structurally innovative, they challenge literary convention, and they are "provocative" and "gripping" (Rubik 169). As such, criticism of Carey's work, though informative as a foundation for discussing the author's texts as postmodern due to the "deviations and violations [they] impose on the rule of closure" (Larsson 177), does not sufficiently elaborate upon the manner in which his writing illustrates and stages both the

construction of the imagination and its profound influence on subject-centred consciousness and on authentic selfhood.

Criticism of Kundera's work – especially in terms of the imagination – falls prey to the same limiting perspective as that which focuses on Carey's texts. Writers such as Milan Jungmann, Igor Webb, Roger Kimball and David Lodge consider Kundera's "conceptual and stylistic brilliance" (Jungmann 122), and while this aspect of his work cannot be ignored, discussions such as these tend to be somewhat reductive in that they often link the form of his work solely to his concern with the subversion of political ideology. And though these political interpretations foreground the author's subversion of discourse, such criticism fails to acknowledge the highly sophisticated manner in which his texts underscore the structured way in which imaginative processes function – that is, the nature of the imagination and how it constructs and informs the individual. The existing criticism's preoccupation with the ability of Kundera's works to influence politics, relationships and even history is useful when attempting to identify the texts' ability to challenge discourse, but denies what I feel is more important, namely, the writer's masterful exposure of the imagination as primarily constituted by discursively constructed paradigms. Kundera not only reveals the role of discursively informed imagination in proliferating discursive control, but uses his own imaginary scenarios to expose and thus undermine it. In other words, a discussion of his objectives concerning only politics or history, for example, reduces his texts to precisely the kind of commentary that he exposes as being highly predetermined. In my opinion, such criticism encourages a burgeoning of those discursive power structures that the writer seeks to circumvent when it should attempt to transcend them. As such, similarly to analysis of Carey's texts, discussions of the Czechoslovakian author's narratives fail to acknowledge his concern with the very nature of the imagination (as opposed to an imaginative use of form), as well as the concept's influence on subject-centred consciousness and potential authentic selfhood.

In this chapter, I define consciousness which is informed by discourse as 'controlled imagination', and as I focus on discussing the concept's construction, I describe two distinct ways in which such a state is enabled. In response to 'controlled imagination', I propose that Kundera and Carey seek a position beyond discursive determinants which challenges discursively informed imagination and which may be termed 'authentic imagination'. Both authors promote the recognition of discursive control, and in doing so, enable a momentary

relaxation of discursive influence, and thus allowing for authentic creativity. ‘Authentic imagination’ differs from ‘authentic madness’ in so far as the latter notion suggests a prolonged extrication from discourse and thus complete loss of subjectivity. In support of my hypothesis, I provide a textual analysis that demonstrates the ways in which these authors suggest the possibility – and the desirability – of authentic imagination. (While this notion of a state beyond discourse is discussed briefly in what follows, Chapter Three offers an extensive and detailed commentary on it.) I hope to illustrate that both authors implicate the imagination in the construction of selfhood, and that they do so in a way that highlights the faculty’s problematic nature. Accordingly, I suggest that, in the process, they ingeniously use the imagination to insinuate the possibility of transcending it.

Controlled Imagination

As suggested, imagination is for Carey and Kundera a deeply worrying concept. Both writers indicate that it is not separate from language or discourse, and as such does not function independently, but that it is instead part of a system which elides creativity and authentic selfhood. For them, it is the product of language, and is articulated and conceptualised from a position within this system. In what follows, I discuss the constructed nature of the imagination, its relationship to subject-centred consciousness and some of the ways in which it is utilised. Finally, I examine the notion of an authentic imagination.

One notes the discursive construction of the imagination once its didactic influence on subject-centred consciousness has been explored. As indicated, subject-centred consciousness is fundamentally informed by discourse – it is born of, and influenced and maintained by, external power structures enabled by language. In other words language pre-exists the individual, who must assume a subject position within it. He/She is predisposed to respond in certain ways to the life-world. Subjects are informed by that which is foreign to them, and are strangers to themselves. David Pavón Cuéllar indicates that the subject is in a “state of alienation” and “cannot recognise [his/her] real being” (212). In an interview with Robert Polito, Carey suggests that the subject inhabits a certain “false consciousness” (56), and that subjectivity inhibits “self-perception” (56), which is an experience of authentic selfhood. Consequently, in responding to linguistic imperatives which invalidate authenticity, subjects themselves limit their selfhoods, as

they unknowingly embody and re-enact their own negation. They entrench the discursive power structures which produce them by continually reasserting them in their daily interactions as subjects. The subject is therefore unable to escape discourse due to the pervasiveness of its power.

It is at this point that the proximity of the imagination to subject-centred consciousness becomes concerning. Conventionally, the imagination is assumed to offer an escape from discursive control. Mary Reichling defines imagination as “the power of the whole of human consciousness that employs intuition, perception, thinking and feeling” (282), while Matthew Maguire explains that “to appeal to the imagination is to evoke an encounter that creates, sustains, and exceeds the boundaries of self, of the communicable, of the temporal” (2). The use of the word ‘exceeds’ calls to mind the notion of the ‘new’, that is to say, what is not yet known, or rather that which is beyond what exists. And herein seems to lie an alarming discordance: if the subject is inscribed in language, which pre-exists him/her, a medium that creates, sustains and exceeds what is known must be enabled by subject-centred consciousness, or more precisely by language.

It is this paradox which Carey and Kundera find highly problematic. They suggest that subject-centred consciousness cannot accommodate that which is not defined and controlled within language and discourse, and that the imagination is largely a manifestation of that which seems to inform it, namely discourse. This notion therefore problematises the function of imagination. In addition, if the very nature of novelty implies a singular, original aspect which cannot be categorised, the reception and understanding of an imaginative concept within a communal linguistic framework must necessarily eradicate its uniqueness. The concept of the imagination is an impossibility without subject-centred consciousness, as it is the linguistic structure of the subject’s consciousness which allows for the existence, articulation, translation and understanding (both individually and communally) of the imagination and the products thereof. Imagination’s discursive function, or more precisely its communal linguistic foundation, nullifies its defining condition of being able to produce novelty in any authentic way. Ultimately, then, the imagination is enabled and continually informed by discursive structures. Both Carey and Kundera illustrate this concern: the fact that the imagination is fundamentally a repetition of discourse and that it is highly controlled and fabricated by a closed, predetermined linguistic system.

Also at issue here is what Judith Butler might call the ‘performative’ element of the imagination – a notion that I discuss in more detail in Chapter Two. Both Carey and Kundera illustrate the re-enactment of discourse as manifest in the relationship between the imagination and the subject, and both regard this as detrimental to authentic selfhood. In other words, the imagining subject believes himself/herself to be experiencing authentic creativity, but because of the linguistic nature of his/her construction, the imagination and its articulation must conform to that predetermined structure. As the subject imagines, so he/she performs and displays to others his/her linguistically limited selfhood which is presented under the guise of creativity, that is, as truth or originality, and therefore as being outside the confines of discursive determinism. In doing so, the subject internalises and proliferates that which is external to his/her authentic selfhood, namely, discursive parameters born of language. The self’s performance of these referents, which he/she believes to be authentic and unique to himself/herself, transposes them onto others. Hence, by conferring them onto others by way of articulating himself/herself (writing himself/herself, he/she writes others), the self denies the other in so far as he/she assimilates the negating, linguistically fabricated restrictions for use in his/her own construction. A controlled, self-sufficient discursive paradigm comes into being in which negated selfhood is further advanced both in self and other, and in which the possibility of true creativity is continually denied. It is this ironically constructed and continually performed imagination which both authors problematise and which, for the purposes of this thesis, I term ‘controlled imagination’.

I have thus far suggested that language’s discursive structures control and regulate imaginative processes, both when they are first conceptualised and in their articulation. The variety of discourses which aid this objective is extensive, and in what follows I discuss two of these: first, the sympathetic imagination and, secondly, psychoanalysis. Later, my discussion includes the work of Jung and Lacan. I focus on these two exemplars of discourse in relation to Carey and Kundera because, as will be made apparent at a later stage, the chosen texts each problematise the discursive nature of, specifically, sympathy and the type of confession involved in psychoanalysis.

‘Sympathetic Imagination’ as a Discourse

As noted, the possibility of authentic selfhood has been debated and problematised by many theorists, philosophers and novelists. These discussions often have differing conclusions, but inevitably the arguments are grounded in the distinction between self and other, in the isolation that comes into being with subject-centred consciousness. The sympathetic imagination does not differ in its essential theoretical objective, which is to attempt to overcome this binary, and the theory suggests that the imagination may offer a way of doing so. In this section, I discuss the theory of the sympathetic imagination, and explore what it proposes for the subject, and why it fails to culminate in authentic selfhood and, due to its position in language, itself becomes a discourse. I suggest that the sympathetic imagination does not facilitate authentic selfhood, and that its dependence on the imagination ensures the inaccessibility of its objective.

The sympathetic imagination proposes that imagining the other, or imagining the experience of the other, may enable knowledge of him/her and of the self. It posits that an attempt at transcending the self/other binary imposed by language results in an experience of the self which exists beyond discursive and linguistic determinants. In effect, the theory implies that, by imagining the other, one is able to sympathise with him/her in a “non-conceptual way that does not reduce [his/her] otherness” (Marais, “Violence, Postcolonial Fiction, and the Limits of Sympathy” 94), but instead allows otherness to have value independently of linguistically constructed subject-centred consciousness. Fascinatingly, this understanding of the sympathetic imagination postulates that the self may overcome the binary opposition language imposes between self and other by inhabiting the other through imagining him/her. Hence, sympathetic imagination claims that the distinction between self/other may be transcended, and that the seeming amalgamation of self and other results in a holistic experience of selfhood – one which dismantles the binary opposition which denies the discursive determinants that limit it. The sympathetic imagination places great importance on the imagination: to conceptualise the plight of the other, and to experience the self through this interaction.

My critique of the sympathetic imagination is founded on two particular concerns. First, the subject, due to the subject-centred necessity of his/her consciousness, must sympathise from a specific linguistic position, and as such the value of that sympathy is questionable. As Mike Marais notes, he/she has the “impossible task of sympathizing outside the limiting positions in

the discursive economy in which [he/she] is situated” (95). Language limits sympathy as “it cannot be unlimited” within language (101). Interestingly, in this regard, the narrator in Carey’s *Oscar and Lucinda* notes that language needs “fences” in order to contain subjectivity and to control its discursive imperatives – it is ultimately a “disease of neatness” (67). Hence, for sympathy to be sympathy, it must be unlimited (Marais 101), and this situation of an unlimited subject-position is not possible within language. Language “absolutely skewers our difference” from the other (Palumbo-Liu 62). To truly sympathise would mean to escape language and, as the subject is incapable of doing so since it is language that enables his/her interaction with the other, sympathy becomes an extension of language. Sympathy mainly functions as a form of discursive control over the subject, rather than as a way of circumventing linguistic parameters.

Due to the subject’s position in language and the performative quality of his/her subject-centred consciousness, sympathising generates and promotes discursive power. When the subject sympathises, being limited by discursive parameters he/she projects those same limitations onto the other. This occurs precisely because the subject cannot transcend himself/herself and must therefore constantly approach the other from his/her determined linguistic position. Martha Nussbaum suggests that subject-centred consciousness, or more precisely the subject’s position within language, predetermines the structure sympathy takes. She notes that “cognition is always entailed in, and actually precedes, human emotion” (qtd. in Ratcliffe 15). This idea suggests that subject-centred consciousness is necessary for sympathy. Moreover, its necessity, or rather the subject’s mandatory interaction with language, demands a linguistically predetermined response to and interaction with the other. Such an approach fundamentally precludes the possibility of sympathy and therefore an experience of the other. It follows that sympathy is inherently violent, inhibiting and prescriptive. The notion is largely paradoxical and even harmful.

My second concern is with the imaginative dimension of the sympathetic imagination. While sympathising is itself problematic, the emphasis that the sympathetic imagination places on imagining sympathy is equally concerning. One cannot employ that which is not unique, since it is part of controlled imagination, in attempting to understand that which is quintessentially unknown – the other. As discussed, language imposes controlled imagination on the subject, thus ensuring that his/her imaginings are initially conceptualised via language and, later, translated through it. When imagining the other, the self employs the discursive power structures inherent in the imagination, and in the process the other becomes subjected simultaneously to discourse

and to controlled imagination. In other words as the self imagines the other, so he/she renders him/her entirely invisible apart from the discursive signifiers being projected onto him/her which, ironically, constitute and limit the self correspondingly. As such, imagining ensures that the other is stripped of his/her uniqueness by subjecting him/her to controlled imagination which is born of discourse and language. The other becomes predetermined by and translated through convention. In effect the imagination inscribes the other with the discursive attributes he/she will be known by later, thus nullifying the very notion of imagining him/her as unique. As David Palumbo-Liu notes, there is an “essential inability to imagine an other” as controlled imagination inherently denies this possibility (50). Within this framework, the other is reduced to what the sympathetic imagination ostensibly seeks to avoid: a publically recognisable discursive stereotype. In Palumbo-Liu’s words, the “private” becomes connected to “the intersubjective and the public” (51).

As a result of controlled imagination, the self that imagines the other constricts the manner in which the other is able to imagine himself/herself. This occurs because the imagining self utilises a conventional system which, finally, reduces and limits the other by translating him/her through a communal medium. By its nature, controlled imagination delineates the parameters through which the other can be a subject. These criteria are prescribed by subject-centred consciousness born of language, and are continually made communally perceptible by the linguistic nature of the imagination. Kundera’s persona in *Immortality* underscores this point when he writes of one of his characters that “[he] imagines her and [he] is sure she sees herself that way too” (280). One finds that imagining the other involves the inscription of the self onto him/her, and, given that the self is discursively constructed, the other is a negation of the self and an extension of discourse. Sympathetic imagination thus reduces the other to a knowable entity, understood only from a particular position within subject-centred consciousness. Moreover, the other’s authenticity is constantly negated by being constantly imagined, an action which is fundamentally communal and therefore inherently contradictory to the intention of the sympathetic imagination, which is to sympathise with the other.

Hence, in my opinion, the sympathetic imagination manifests in a limited understanding of the other which is facilitated by both language and controlled imagination, and which consequently inhibits authentic selfhood. In short, the existence of self and other is maintained by a binary opposition enforced by language (the dialectic between these two binaries having

been explored earlier). When sympathising, neither party is able to transcend discourse, as both rely on, are constructed by, and inhabit a position within it. If the binary were to collapse, as true sympathy ultimately requires, subjectivity would follow suit and sympathy would itself be impossible. When using controlled imagination to sympathise, both parties are also continually subjugated by that which is external to their authentic selves. The interaction between self and other in this context constantly enforces discursive control over selfhood, as imagining is, finally, an inscription of discourse both on self and other. I therefore feel that the sympathetic imagination leads not to a greater understanding of self or of other, but rather to a continued negation and alienation of both entities by the notion's distinguishing quality, the imagination.

In summary, the sympathetic imagination lacks the ability to perform what it proposes to do, that is, to engender a better understanding of the other and the self. This inefficacy is due to the impossibility of true sympathy within a linguistic framework, and the constructed and controlled nature of the imagination. Consequently, the application of the sympathetic imagination entrenches the discursive control of the subject and thus negates authentic selfhood. As a result, I suggest that the sympathetic imagination is imbricated in discourse, owing to its position in language, its composition thereby, and finally its promotion of discursive control.

As with the sympathetic imagination, love purports to be an other-directed form of behaviour. It negates the other in a similar way, and denies the potential authentic selfhood of both self and other. In other words love cannot be separated from discourse because it involves the projection of qualities of the self onto the other. This occurs because subject-centred consciousness cannot be transcended and, as such, that which is external to it cannot be approached from a position outside discourse. What is external to subject-centred consciousness remains obscured by the discursive context in which the subject is located. Love, therefore, mirrors the sympathetic imagination in that loving someone involves the superimposition of the self onto the other under the guise of an altruistic, other-knowing venture. The other is imagined – controlled imagination is used to conceptualise the other. As the self is itself imaginary, or foreign to itself, the projection of qualities external to authentic selfhood ensures that the other is known only by that which negates both self and other, namely, discourse. Like the sympathetic imagination, love validates subjectivity by inscribing qualities pertaining to it onto the other. As Lisa Meyer notes in an interview with Carey, love “suggests that we need somebody else in order to substantiate ourselves” (85). This notion is also underscored in the novelist's short story

“Do You Love Me?”, in which several characters repeat the question that informs the narrative’s title in an attempt to avoid “dematerializing” (10), that is, disappearing and losing their subjectivity. One character aptly explains that “we no longer love one another” and that “when we realize that we need one another we will stop disappearing” (8).

Seemingly, then, as the self loves, and therefore as the other is increasingly negated, the subject comes to extend those discursive qualities pertaining to him/her onto the other in a way which ensures that the other performs them; that is to say, as the other is loved so he/she conforms and enacts the discursive qualities of the one who loves him/her. In this manner, love ensures the maintenance of subjectivity and the purveyance of discourse. Accordingly, love is much like the sympathetic imagination in that it is a devastating and successful discursive tool.

Psychoanalysis as a Discourse

In the previous section, I outlined my concerns with the sympathetic imagination. I now approach psychoanalysis, which, in many ways, functions similarly to the sympathetic imagination. The former is actively involved, I believe, not only in establishing and purveying controlled imagination, but also in defining the form that imagination takes and dictating the manner in which it is to be assimilated by the subject. However, psychoanalysis differs from the sympathetic imagination, as the latter conforms to discourse rather than simultaneously creating and actively shaping it. I thus propose that psychoanalysis is essentially a constructed discourse, and a site at which discourse relating to the imagination is produced. In what follows, I outline the position of psychoanalysis within medical discourse in order to underscore its discursive construction, psychoanalysis’s main objectives regarding the imagination, how it utilises an invalidating form of confession in order to attain those objectives, and finally how it therefore defines and controls both the translation of the imagination and its reception. To recapitulate: I argue that psychoanalysis proliferates and determines controlled imagination and that, accordingly, it does not result in authentic selfhood, nor is it a suitable platform for realising such a state. I refer to the theories of Jung and Lacan throughout, as their discussions of the imagination are particularly apposite.

The term ‘psychoanalysis’ is defined by Adolf Grünbaum as a “method of clinical investigation by means of free association” (2). It is a “clinically based theory of personality,

psychopathology, and therapy” which makes “manifest dream content and [. . .] various sorts of ‘slips’” in order to release repressed thoughts from the subject’s subconscious mind (5). Through the prolonged observation and documentation of the patient’s mental afflictions, as well as a sustained patient–analyst dialogue, psychoanalysis aims to continually address and abate these afflictions.

Importantly, the definition above raises a number of concerns, the first of which is psychoanalysis’s seeming linguistic structure. As noted, language constantly battles against that which “threatens to destabilise and infiltrate” the “‘rational’” (Olivier 2); it is fundamentally opposed to what challenges the “symbolic order” that governs the “laws of society” (5). Psychoanalysis epitomises this antagonism to an alarming degree. Here, and as described in the Introduction, the unknown, ungoverned space beyond discourse is defined as madness. Language safeguards its structure by categorising the ruptures made by what is foreign to it as a disorder. In reality, this ‘disorder’ is enabled by an ill subject, who is consequently ostracised and made other to the symbolic norm. The mad subject is then regarded as deviant – his/her subjectivity is presented as being somehow faulty. Once discourse has defined the unknown as madness, it proceeds to oppose that madness while suggesting a sustained, ironic cure in the form of psychoanalytic therapy. In other words, language secures the threat by categorising it as madness. It acknowledges the existence of what Roger Horrocks terms “unknown [. . .] forces” (3), but instantaneously limits them to a stereotypical definition which seemingly dispels their potential destructiveness, and which ensures a clear delineation of what is acceptable within discourse and, by definition, subject-centred consciousness. Then it provides a suitable solution: it facilitates rehabilitation in the form of psychoanalytic therapy which, finally, entrenches the power structures that limit the subject. Consequently, discourse maintains its power by presenting itself as the mode by which a deviance from the linguistic norm may be rectified. The subject can retrieve his/her subjective position through incorporating and adhering to discursive regimes delineated by metanarratives such as psychoanalysis. This is to the detriment of authentic selfhood, because the limiting discursive attributes are both internalised and proliferated, as noted earlier.

At this point it becomes evident that psychoanalysis is both imbricated in and inscribes discourse: it identifies deviance (those mental disorders it seeks to treat), and presents itself as a solution thereof. As Horrocks explains, psychoanalysis “can be said to have made sense of

nonsense, or to have imposed a rational method of interpretation” upon fragmented and mutilated messages (8). Psychoanalysis uses the rationality of discursive linguistic systems to identify and name that which is unknown and irrational in order to further its own agenda, which is to control and exercise discursive power over the subject. More precisely, psychoanalysis safeguards control of the symbolic order by quarantining threats against it. It uses those threats to define and construct madness, and delineates the parameters of subjectivity by juxtaposing itself against that deviance. In being linguistically structured, psychoanalysis creates the malady experienced by the subject. It then positions itself as an ever-present indication of what defies the symbolic order and, thereafter, of how to quarantine it. In this way it ensures its proliferation and sustainability through the subject.

Psychoanalysis, however, does not propose an immediate rectification of the illness, or rather deviance from the symbolic order. Instead, it is a prolonged interaction between the subject and the therapy. To my mind, this constant dialogue suggests a recurring attempt by discourse to engender and to further discursive control. What promises to be a remedy is in fact a curse: the subject both internalises new discursive imperatives which limit his/her subjectivity, and performs them, therefore subjecting others to discursive control. In effect the subject internalises, identifies with, performs and propagates his/her own subjugation by discourse, as prescribed by psychoanalysis. This ensures debilitating existential anxiety for the subject who, finally, repetitively seeks therapy and thereby ensures a recurrence of discursive control. Thus, psychoanalysis is a site at which madness is literally written and where it is used to proliferate discursive power – it is a discourse itself.

As illustrated, the linguistic framework of psychoanalysis is problematic. But it is the discipline’s particular use of therapies involving the imagination that further complicates an already complex matter. Work by Lacan and Jung, specifically, serves to illustrate the manner in which discourse, through the utilisation of the imagination, is inscribed upon the subject. Their postulations inadvertently indicate how the subject proliferates discourse, and how their theories themselves do the same. In what follows, I briefly discuss some of their most pertinent arguments in the hope of highlighting how their reliance on the imagination not only undermines their objective of healing the subject, but actually alienates him/her from authentic selfhood, thus leading him/her into a “further kind of alienation” which results in the extension of discursive power in a number of ways (Horrocks 9). I show that Lacan’s Mirror Stage utilises the

imagination in order to illustrate the *creation* of the subject. In the case of Jung, I demonstrate that his notion of the active imagination serves as a way of healing the subject. Though I discuss the two theories from different perspectives, I hope to indicate that they share three important characteristics which relate directly to my concerns about psychoanalysis: first, they utilise controlled imagination, thus instantly becoming discursively controlled; secondly, they require a form of confession which negates the subject and proliferates discourse; and thirdly they are imbricated in discourse in that they are written and continually disseminated. By extrapolating on these problems, I aim to foreground the didactic relationship between psychoanalysis and the volatile nature of discursively constructed selfhood and, ultimately, the inability of the imagination to function as a tool for experiencing authentic selfhood within such a discursively constructed theoretical framework as psychoanalysis.

Jacques Lacan and the Mirror Stage

Jacques Lacan is best known for his theories on the symbolic and the Mirror Stage. His work, which according to Bert Olivier is “poststructuralist [and] psychoanalytical” (2), remains crucial in any debate concerning the “distinction between the ‘subject’ and the ‘self’” (2). In Lacan’s essay entitled “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”, he explains that the Mirror Stage occurs when the child may “recognize as such his own image in a mirror” (1). Once the child has seen his/her image, and “once the image has been mastered and found empty” (1), it

immediately rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates – the child’s own body, and the persons and things around him. (1)

Here the child enters the “‘imaginary’”, which Olivier defines as “the sphere of images, which is also, for Lacan, the sphere of identification” (3). For Lacan, then, the ‘imaginary’ is synonymous with the symbolic order which the ‘subject’ enters upon childhood, that is, once he/she becomes aware of his/her “own mirror image” (3). Of course, the ‘mirror image’ is metaphorical and does not necessarily refer to the literal observation of oneself in a mirror – rather, it is the image

reflected by society. That image is ostensibly an amalgamation of discourse being performed by others and being employed by subject-centred consciousness when “entering the symbolic order of language” (5). After this “transformation” (Lacan, “Mirror Stage” 1), the subject “has left the mute order of the organic, its ‘being’ or the ‘real’, behind forever” (Olivier 5). Due to the fact that subject-centred consciousness – the ‘I’ which exists in language – necessarily requires words to know itself, his/her removal from language would result in a lack of identification of both self and other. This final notion underpins my concern throughout that, being grounded in language, subject-centred consciousness eradicates the possibility of entering a pre-linguistic, authentic state.

However, I find problematic Lacan’s distinction between self and subject, particularly his conception of the recognition process through which the subject comes into being at the Mirror Stage. For Lacan, the symbolic order is not ‘organic’, it is not real. He suggests that the subject is split from an organic space and is invariably doomed to inhabit an “alienation” from ‘self’ while inhabiting the symbolic order (4). Here lies my concern: while he notes that there is a definite loss of the organic, he inscribes upon that ‘real’ space the term ‘self’. One is thus meant to understand the subject as an infinitely divided entity, but more importantly as an entity that has an inherent, authentic self born of the organic space beyond the symbolic order. Though the organic is a viable notion, understanding the existence of self within this space is, in my opinion, problematic: because subject-centred consciousness enables an understanding of self, conceptualising the existence of such an entity beyond it (at least in any capacity that is available to the subject) is paradoxical since such an apprehension is impossible without language. That language affords Lacan the opportunity to classify the organic state as self is worrying. In the moment of naming it, the self loses its real, or perhaps more precisely its authentic quality, and becomes eternally subject to linguistic determinism. By categorising the self, he places that entity within language and thus fundamentally removes the possibility of experiencing it authentically. His distinction between self and subject, though seemingly plausible, suggests a deeply rooted linguistic agenda which, albeit unavoidable in many respects, invalidates the claim.

Lacan goes even further. He suggests that the self, which is for him the organic and real element of the subject, continues to exist, that it is situated within a repressed realm known as the unconscious. Entry into the symbolic order ensures the repression of the organic and of self which is, according to Olivier,

that aspect of the human mind that, as a different ‘place’, not only escapes the possibility of direct conscious access, but also continually threatens to destabilize or infiltrate conscious, ‘rational’ intentions and volitions when one expects it the least. (2)

Lacan thus proposes that the unconscious – due to the split of the subject at the Mirror Stage – cannot be inhabited fully, through ‘direct conscious access’. Olivier explains that

the subject’s ‘desire’ in the psychoanalytical sense is hidden from him or her in so far as it has always been repressed, and only manifests itself in those discursive-linguistic peculiarities such as certain intonations, mumblings, gaps and slips, and so on, that provide the analyst (or another kind of interlocutor) with the means to fill in these gaps and allow a ‘coherent’ [note the scare quotes] narrative to emerge. (15)

Hence, for Lacan, the unconscious can be uncovered differently, so that the released, repressed aspects of the subject may “facilitate a ‘coherent’ narrative” (13). Access to the self may be gained through a medium which he regards as being distinct from the symbolic order, but which may be observed and commented on by an analyst – this ‘alternative’ approach, which is to be distinguished from direct conscious access, is discussed later in this chapter. Jung’s theories will inform that examination.

I further find problematic Lacan’s assumption that the unknowable nature of the organic state is accessible to the subject, who is, finally, the embodiment of the symbolic order. Just as concerning is the fact that the subject’s continual restoration to health is facilitated by an intermediary who, being a subject himself/herself, is equally constructed by discourse. Psychoanalysis seemingly approaches the subject in a way which facilitates a type of linguistic determinism that negates authentic selfhood, and which, in my opinion, limits the possibility of escaping discourse and the control that it exercises over the self.

Lacan suggests that the unconscious is “structured like a language” (10), and can therefore be, albeit partially, *understood* and approached from within the symbolic order. This is troubling since in order to grasp the existence of an unconscious state one must employ the symbolic order (subject-centred consciousness cannot be transcended), thereby confining the unconscious to limiting linguistic structures. In fact, in this scenario, the unconscious state is

subjected to the imaginary world Lacan's subject enters into at the Mirror Stage, that is, language. In as far as language dictates, the unconscious becomes an imagined space and thus is the product of controlled imagination. In other words, the unconscious occupies the position afforded it by language.

Moreover, because language precedes subject-centred consciousness, understanding the unconscious as a language implies a linguistically predetermined approach. For me, this is largely contradictory. If experience is enabled by language, and if the organic is separate from the symbolic order, how then can the subject experience it, or return to it, given that he/she is the product of, and exists in, language? Lacan's answer to this is an *imagining* of what the unconscious might be. In my opinion, he positions the imagination outside language and therefore attributes to it the ability to access the organic. However, his imagining of the unconscious must necessarily utilise the discursive linguistic structures of controlled imagination, thus inscribing the unconscious with those linguistic qualities he suggests the imagination evades.

And so, the unconscious displays three fundamental issues: first, it is *named* and is accordingly mediated by language. If it were to resist categorisation (an outcome Lacan's theories invariably preclude), it would exist as an authentic space. Secondly, the unconscious is limited by controlled imagination because the unconscious is imagined as existing at the split of the subject. The nature of that imagination may actually facilitate the subject's alienation from the unconscious. Lacan explains that the unconscious is organic and real, and yet imagining it as such at least in part excludes the possibility of it actually being so. Lastly, Lacan seems to conflate an experience of the unconscious with the ability to imagine it. His argument suggests that the unconscious is structured like a language, and his equation of the unconscious with language seemingly foregrounds the very mechanism of controlled imagination and its proliferation of discourse.

It is important to locate Lacan's theory and objective within a broader understanding of psychoanalysis. His Mirror Stage is one single example of psychoanalytic theory, and in as far as it can be seen to limit authentic selfhood in some ways, specifically with regard to its didactic and often deterministic relationship with subjectivity, its governing principles and objectives are often echoed in other psychoanalytic work. An example of this is the use of language and dialogue during therapy, as discussed below.

As suggested, psychoanalysis is born of language, or is an extension of discourse which reiterates power structures within language. It names what is fundamentally unnameable. Lacan proceeds to do precisely this by naming those aspects of the subject which essentially resist categorisation. He thus subjects the unnameable to the same linguistic determinism madness is subjected to. His arguments superimpose a larger linguistic schema on the individual, making his/her personal mental affliction a public site. Furthermore, as the individual internalises the diagnoses, so he/she enacts them. In this manner, Lacan's definitions (of 'unconscious' and 'self') enable a unique discursive paradigm that has come to shape how the subject is to be understood in contemporary society. Seemingly, his methods prescribe the way in which the organic state is to be known – they control how the subject, the public, and future academic and disciplinary studies approach the organic. In this way, psychoanalysis is undoubtedly a discursive tool, as its power in the field of biopolitics ensures that it creates and purveys discursive control.

Additionally, Lacan's solution for the alienation which occurs at the split of the subject – that is, his attempt at incorporating what he terms the self within the subject – involves an unearthing of that which he conceives of as repressed qualities existing in the unconscious. However, in my opinion, this amounts to a type of confession which both proliferates discourse and ensures that the subject internalises discursive power structures, particularly those suggested by psychoanalysis. I use the word 'confession' intentionally because, for me, the term denotes an act of speech by the subject which, when uttered, is received by the listener as an acknowledgement of the speaker's sin. Moreover, his/her statement is usually accompanied by a pardon from the speaker's audience. I believe this concept may be applied to psychoanalysis.

To that end, as psychoanalytic therapy is administered, the patient is asked to speak of those mental afflictions with which he/she is burdened. It is here that a type of confession comes into play, apparent in the specific manner in which psychoanalysis approaches the treatment of patients. In the first place, it suggests that the subject is ill (and therefore deviant, or in opposition to the symbolic order, as mentioned earlier). Thereafter, in the hope of ascertaining the nature of the deviance, it requires the patient to speak. In this way psychoanalysis seeks to translate into the symbolic order that which is unknown so that the subject may be healed, and so that discourse may thereby categorise and control the threat constituted by the unknown. Finally, psychoanalysis names the ailment, that is, the "analyst [fills] in the 'gaps'" (13) and urges the patient to internalise the diagnosis through his/her use of specific language. The subject is

prompted to assimilate the jargon fashioned by psychoanalysis, or else he/she risks losing his/her subjectivity.

In some respects, the prospective solution to the malady is a veiled threat by discourse. Psychoanalysis writes and ensures the proliferation of discursive control. It is replete with its own lexical set, as at the level of individual patients it is able to dissect and reinscribe mental deficiency constantly, while ensuring that the diagnosis is assimilated and proliferated successfully by the subject. The result is that the patient's subjectivity becomes transparent and indefinitely reliant on discursive determinants such as those displayed by psychoanalysis. He/She is entirely 'known' by discourse and no longer poses a threat to the symbolic order. In sum, in order that the patient does not risk his/her subjecthood, that he/she remains a 'subject' in language, psychoanalysis requires both the confession of the sin against discourse (through the use of linguistic structures which pre-exist the subject and therefore serve to doubly negate him/her, as seen in the introduction) and the performance, via speech and written text, of what is suggested to be the solution for the deviance, namely, new discursive power regimes such as those which can be found, in my opinion, in the practices and theories of Jung and Lacan. In effect, psychoanalysis positions itself as judge and arbitrator, granting pardon to subjects once they confess their deviance, which is in turn categorised (formed into discourse) and serves to further confine selfhood.

I now turn to an important tension between the self, healing and the imagination. As indicated, Lacan locates the notion of a self within what he terms the unconscious, and explains that via psychoanalysis repressed thoughts in the unconscious may be brought to the fore and may thereby more effectively unify the organic self and subject. I find this distinctly problematic. As argued, psychoanalysis's linguistic construction inevitably sabotages its seemingly altruistic objectives. And there is a further concern worth noting: psychoanalysis, by requiring the patient to speak his/her illness, simultaneously prompts him/her to imagine that ailment so as to correctly place it within the discourse that informs his/her enunciations. In other words, for the patient to elaborate upon his/her mental disorder, he/she must be able to imagine what the illness may be. He/She must pre-empt the analyst's response and articulate his/her feelings accordingly. Doing so means that discourse *enables* the anxiety, as it fundamentally creates it prior to its existence. That is to say, the utterance of the patient is directly influenced by the way in which it will be received by the listener – he/she constantly safeguards his/her subjectivity by conforming

to what is expected of him/her. Discourse quarantines the deviance by ensuring its categorisation even prior to it being spoken. Hence, there is a further alienation from the actual distress. The patient experiences his/her ailment solely through discourse; it could never have existed as something like Lacan's organic.

Furthermore, due to the subject-centred nature of consciousness, the subject must employ linguistic structures, that is, controlled imagination, in order to conceive of his/her affliction. My argument is therefore that the patient never articulates the unknown, insofar as he/she never realises its existence, but rather constantly reiterates that which precedes him/her due to his/her reliance on controlled imagination. Discourse pre-empts the deviance and therefore excludes the possibility of experiencing the organic. Finally, as he/she translates his/her imaginings, the subject internalises them. What occurs thereafter is integral to my overall argument: the subject, by imagining his/her deviance, imagines himself/herself via controlled imagination and in this way becomes imaginary himself/herself. The subject becomes, at least in part, the product of discourse. Authentic selfhood cannot be attained in this manner. For me, the emphasis psychoanalysis places on unearthing the unconscious, repressed state of the subject is in some ways disturbing, because the necessity of imagining that unconscious space seemingly negates the possibility of experiencing it authentically. Lacan's Mirror Stage evinces the recurring dominance and purveyance of discourse in a manner which, to my mind, inhibits an experience of authentic selfhood.

In conclusion, I argue that Lacan's Mirror Stage is imbricated in discourse because it proliferates discursive power (both in practice and in the writing of texts), because it utilises a form of confession which invalidates authentic selfhood, and because it inevitably does so by returning to what is an inherently inhibiting, linguistically constructed faculty: the controlled imagination. His psychoanalytic approach, especially with regard to the imagination, not only denies authentic selfhood in a manner which highlights the inability of controlled imagination to enable such a state, but also inscribes the subject with a discourse which, at a base level, constantly denies the possibility of achieving an experience of authentic selfhood.

Carl Jung and Active Imagination

I believe Carl Jung's psychoanalytic approach to be analogous to that of Lacan – at least with regard to the highlighted concerns. In terms of the imagination, Jung's work is implicated in discourse in that it proliferates and engenders discursive power constantly. In my discussion of Lacan's theory, I have emphasised the creation of the subject. I now hope to demonstrate that Jung's preoccupation with a form of therapy which he terms active imagination focuses on the healing function that he proposes for the subject. After outlining the mechanism of active imagination, I discuss its reliance on imagination and the ramifications of this reliance. Finally, I analyse active imagination for its confessional aspect so as to illustrate, once again, the discursive influence and power inherent in its design. My ultimate contention is that the imagination serves as a disseminator of discourse, and that it precludes the possibility of experiencing authentic selfhood.

Jung's revolutionary psychoanalytic therapy known as active imagination is defined by Dorothy Davidson as “a sequence of fantasies produced by deliberate concentration”, which is translated and recorded in the hope of producing a coherent narrative within the subject (135). Jung argues that, in order to release the repressed thoughts within the ‘unconscious’ which make of the subject a “prisoner” (135), the patient should imagine those “unrealised, unconscious fantasies” (135). Supposedly, as the patient confronts these fantasies, his/her anxiety is duly alleviated. Davidson explains that “the record can become unstuck if the enacting of the drama has been, so to speak, realized by being lived through and worked through” (135). The patient is subsequently “freed to possess and use his own emotions and imagery instead of being compulsively driven by the unconscious drama within him” (135). Seemingly, then, Jung suggests that the subject may heal himself/herself over time through the act of imagining those disturbances within him/her.

Of concern here is the type of imagination being employed and the manner in which it is suggested and enforced. As argued, the subject cannot escape controlled imagination since subject-centred consciousness delineates the parameters of both how one imagines (through language) and, in many ways, what one imagines. When the patient is asked to “concentrate [his/her] attention on some impressive but unintelligible [. . .] image” (136), he/she is necessarily required to utilise controlled imagination in order to do so. To conceive of the unintelligible is

impossible and, as such, the subject unwittingly structures the unknown, using discourse in an attempt to conceptualise it. In the process, what was unintelligible is lost in being rendered intelligible in language, that is, by controlled imagination. As is the case with Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Jungian patient, when seeking to imagine his/her mental disturbance, must employ discourse and therefore inevitably imagines those discursive qualities predetermined by his/her subject-centred consciousness. The subject does not release what is repressed but instead reiterates his/her own repression. He/She thereby reconstitutes the parameters of his/her subjectivity and, under the guise of a notion of imagination that is proposed to be beyond discourse, is deceived into believing he/she encounters the organic self and is knowing a holistic state, or rather is experiencing a ‘complete narrative’. Essentially, as illustrated in my discussion of Lacan, the subject imagines himself/herself and is not healed, but rather is alienated even further from authentic selfhood by a discourse that disguises and quarantines the organic in a complex and inexorable way.

Of further concern is Jung’s suggestion that, once the subject imagines his/her afflictions, or rather once those afflictions are “observed and noted with absolute objectivity” (136), he/she is healing. For me, this solution is primarily dependent on a confession which, as noted, presents a didactic form of pardoning. As the patient speaks of those things which he/she imagines, his/her imaginings are recorded and placed within a “theoretical model” (136). The analyst invariably acts as a scientist by categorising and studying the patient’s ailment and then administering, from his/her discursively constructed position, formulae which will hopefully restore the patient’s health, or more specifically his/her subjectivity, in time. As noted, this solution becomes a veiled threat: in being treated, the subject is prescribed the parameters to which he/she must adhere if his/her subjectivity is to remain intelligible within the discursive realm. If one takes into account the role of controlled imagination here, the patient is doubly negated: first, he/she necessarily utilises discourse in order to both imagine and translate repressed aspects of himself/herself, thus denying any actual understanding of them. Secondly, in doing so, he/she inevitably internalises and constantly retells the new parameters of his/her subjecthood, thus purveying discourse and casting himself/herself further asunder from authenticity. Ultimately, Jung’s active imagination theory exemplifies the manner in which psychoanalysis is both implicated in and, seemingly, the creator of discourse.

In summary, one may note that Jung's active imagination is both a discourse constituted by linguistic power structures, and a generator of discourse. Its simultaneous reliance on and employment of both controlled imagination and a negating form of confession also serves to indicate the inadequacy of the imagination as an avenue for experiencing authentic selfhood. Active imagination purveys discursive authority by inscribing discourse onto the subject and, in this manner, didactically informs the subject of the parameters of his/her subjectivity, thus limiting his/her selfhood. In my opinion, Jung's theory, and especially his preoccupation with the imagination, entrenches discursive restrictions in the subject rather than providing him/her with the complete narrative or, more precisely, the unity between the organic and the symbolic which psychoanalysis ultimately hopes to engender.

In this section, I have attempted to highlight the inability of psychoanalysis to facilitate an experience of authentic selfhood. I have done so by foregrounding its position within discourse, that is, both its constitution thereby and also its generation and distribution thereof. Most importantly, I have noted its troubling dependence on controlled imagination, its resultant entrenchment of controlled imagination's discursive imperatives within the subject and, consequently, the negation of the psychoanalytic theory's initial objectives. In my argument, the employment of controlled imagination is fundamentally detrimental to an experience of an authentic selfhood that exists beyond the symbolic order.

What Kundera and Carey Propose

While this chapter has problematised the concept of the imagination, it is for Carey and Kundera a potential avenue for approaching authentic selfhood. Nevertheless, their work *intimates* the possibility of a new type of imagination which eludes discursive implication, as it exists beyond the symbolic order. If attainable and employable, this form of imagination would extricate the subject from the control of discourse and enable an experience of authentic selfhood. For the purposes of this thesis, I term these writers' unique conception of the imagination 'authentic imagination'.

As noted, it is of course difficult to conceive of a form of imagination other than controlled imagination, due to the faculty's discursive construction. Carey and Kundera, however, succeed in promoting an authentic form of imagination by denying a definitive reading of it. In

other words, in contrast to the previously discussed metanarratives, their fiction eludes linguistic taxonomy – they intimate the possibility of authentic imagination rather than explicitly stating the potential for it in their texts. Accordingly, the concept simultaneously eludes linguistic determinism and therefore the engendering of discursive power that controlled imagination facilitates. Their evocation of authentic imagination thereby avoids the employment of discursive structures which limit selfhood, and enables an advancement of potential authentic selfhood.

Both authors thus share a corresponding objective: to intimate authentic imagination in order to promote authentic selfhood. They do this by illustrating the constructed nature of controlled imagination through demonstrating its presence in the lives of their characters, and by undermining that faculty's discursive power through subverting the narrative expectations which relate to it.

Despite these similarities, there are differences in the way these two interlinked objectives are accomplished. Carey stages the role of imagination in his novels by investing many of his characters with either artistic ability or the desire to express their imaginings. He also frustrates their attempts at achieving their goals in this regard, and often implicates the reader in this disappointment. Essentially, the author stages the role of controlled imagination by illustrating its pervasiveness in the lives of his characters, after which he forestalls or alters their creativity in a manner that disturbs or harms them. Typically, he illustrates that they have very little control over their own imaginations. By exploiting “conventional techniques and narrative styles” (Kane 519), and by radically altering the narrative line in a manner that frustrates readerly expectations, thereby exposing the reader's own construction by controlled imagination, he mirrors the experience of the characters in him/her. Carey foregrounds the reader's own discursively informed expectations. He challenges the position from which the text is approached and the processes that inform its reading. By laying bare the conventionality of texts and of their readers' expectations, he suggests that reading itself is informed by controlled imagination and, as such, is discursively influenced. As noted later in this chapter, by foregrounding the reader's constructed subjectivity, and thus his/her limited authenticity, Carey is able to manipulate discourse. In order to intimate the possibility of authentic imagination, the author highlights the multifariousness of discourse and language, and thereby undermines discursive control.

By contrast, Kundera is more self-reflexive in highlighting and subverting controlled imagination. Where Carey involves his characters in artistic ventures so as to stage their

confinement by controlled imagination and to mirror that of the reader, Kundera interpolates into his narratives discussions of the literal creation of his characters, and thereafter suggests that the process involved in their creation extends to the reader's own subjectivity. By likening the reader to his characters, he suggests that the former is both written and read. He moreover proposes that the reader writes – in reading the characters, he/she writes their narratives. Insofar as the reader is constructed by controlled imagination, he/she proliferates those same discursive power structures by inscribing them onto others. Importantly, Kundera also implies that he, as the literal writer of the text, is similarly implicated in this process. He mirrors this notion by indicating that he is both informed by controlled imagination – his potential authentic selfhood is largely limited in this way – and is its purveyor. He is inhibited by it and, in writing the text, he inscribes its confining qualities on his characters and on those who read them. He thus ingeniously conflates reader, writer and character in order to underscore the similarities in their discursive control and function. Through this alignment, and by exposing and deconstructing the discursive parameters of subjectivity, Kundera, like Carey, intimates the possibility of authentic imagination.

These authors use different methods to foreground and subvert controlled imagination. Importantly, though, they both use the text, its inherent discourse, to illustrate controlled imagination and disrupt its power structures. Ironically, they use discourse in order to undermine its power, to make visible its construction of the subject and, consequently, to suggest a position beyond it – that of authentic selfhood.

In the context of this common endeavour, it is important to examine the authors' presentation of love. In what follows, I hope to indicate how Carey, in *Oscar and Lucinda*, and Kundera, in *Laughable Loves*, present love as a locus for discursive determinants – as a site constructed by controlled imagination. More importantly, I discuss how they attempt to subvert the discursive determinism present in love in order to intimate an authentic imagination. Ultimately I propose that, in intimating the possibility of authentic imagination, both authors facilitate an approach of authentic selfhood which transcends discourse.

Oscar and Lucinda

Many of the issues dealt with thus far are apparent in Carey's and Kundera's texts, especially their respective conceptualisations of love, which ultimately suggest the possibility of

approaching potential authentic selfhood. Though differing both in form and content, the texts treat love similarly: they present the emotion ironically and, in doing so, they not only exemplify the concerns explored previously, but do so in a manner which manipulates discursive regimes in order to intimate an authentic imagination and authentic selfhood.

In *Oscar and Lucinda*, a narrative concerned with the romantic relationship of its two eponyms, Carey continually foregrounds the linguistic construction of his characters, as well as the reliance of their subjectivity on the problematic concept of language. He draws attention to the characters as characters, as linguistic constructions, by associating them with metaphors and symbols that connote linguistic phenomena, and which they in turn personify. One such metaphor is glass. For the author, glass typifies language's ability to alter in relation to context, connotation, denotation and individual reception. Given this, glass echoes linguistic attributes insofar as it is

a thing in disguise, an actor, is not solid at all, but a liquid, [. . .], even while it is as frail as ice on a Parramatta puddle, it is stronger under compression than Sydney sandstone, [. . .] it is invisible, solid, in short, a joyous and paradoxical thing, as good a material as any to build a life from. (*Oscar and Lucinda* 111)

Thus for Carey glass mirrors linguistic qualities. More precisely, glass represents the relationship between the subject and language. Glass and language are mediums which distort and which are all but invisible. In other words, language is much like glass in that it is almost unseen, and though it is presented as indestructible, it is capable of fracturing and splintering when scrutinised and placed under pressure – in my opinion, Carey's text seeks to apply precisely that pressure. The author seemingly proposes that glass has a propensity to provide a structure of sorts, much as language enables subject-centred consciousness and subjectivity. In fact, glass, with its "[strength] enough to withstand [a] sledgehammer" (108), epitomises for him the necessity of language and its interminable construction and control of subjectivity. However, he notes that both mediums – glass and language – cannot maintain their structural integrity indefinitely. Carey's metaphor seemingly implies the fragility of the overall structure of language – it speaks of its inadequacy to define and contain the individual permanently. What the narrator says of glass, that "if you put down your hammer and take down your pliers instead" (108) it may shatter, suggests that the structure which maintains subjectivity is fragile and,

ultimately, inadequate. Significantly, in this regard, the narrator elaborates as follows on the vulnerability of the structure of glass:

For although it is strong enough to withstand the sledgehammer, the tail can be nipped with a pair of blunt-nosed pliers. It takes little effort. And once it is done, it is as if you have taken out the keystone, removed the linchpin, kicked out the foundations. The whole thing explodes. (108)

Just as glass fashions beautiful objects capable of withstanding great pressure, so too language is capable of constructing and maintaining subjectivity. And just as glass cannot withstand all types of pressure, so too is language unable to quarantine all which threatens its structure. Eventually, both dissolve and return to “silence” (111), that is, they are overcome. At this point, one notes Carey’s skilful amalgamation of his metaphor with Lucinda Lepastrier. He does so not only to indicate her linguistic construction, but to expose how she maintains her subjectivity by using her relationship with Oscar, thus commenting extensively on the nature of love. As will be noted, he positions her love as an attempt at safeguarding subjectivity; it is as fragile as the very structure of glass, and negates possible authentic selfhood.

Carey introduces his narrative concerns by presenting Lucinda as a character born with “the disease of neatness” (67). Her mother Elizabeth Lepastrier demands “neatness in the most ridiculous degree”, and in her adulthood Lucinda comes to “think about her own neatness”, which has been “with her from a very young age”, and which the author describes as “a cage constructed by her mother’s opinions and habits, one she could not break free from” (67, 68). Here, Carey suggests that ‘neatness’ and language are related, that they both share “a sense of containment, [and] of order” (68), and that Lucinda’s neatness is “a great construction” (67) – she seeks to emulate her mother in this regard – and much like her subjectivity which is implicated in discourse, she is informed by it. Neatness can be read, then, as a metaphor for her implication in discourse. She is largely determined by her past, her history. Indeed, as she seeks to maintain her subjectivity, she continually conforms to the discursive regimes of the historical context in which she is located, and which locates her values and attitudes. It is noteworthy that she takes particular care to preserve the neatness she inherits. She is written, both by her mother and by the author, and continually writes herself, that is, maintains her subjectivity. Her fastidious nature mirrors her fragile discursive position, and hers is a subjectivity which, like

glass, distorts her authenticity and ultimately reflects the discursive structures that inform her subject-centred consciousness. Because of this, her subjectivity is maintained and her neatness repels threats beyond discourse which may disrupt it.

Lucinda's neatness, metaphorically her linguistic construction, is translated into a deep-rooted love affair with glass. Indeed, she becomes "The Glass Lady" who, with her "reliable library" near her residence in Sydney, decides to "study glass" (68, 113). In terms of the logic of the metaphorical association between glass and language, Lucinda uses language to study language – she internalises it to such a degree that she personifies its qualities and is therefore able to maintain her subjectivity. Glass becomes "her only connection with life" (242), much as language ensures her subjectivity. Regarding the bet she makes with Oscar (an event discussed later), Mr Jeffris, another character who is prone to "meticulous order", explains that he "could not help but admire Miss Lepastrier for the way she looked after the details of her own deception" (373). Although referring specifically to Lucinda's organisation of the expedition Oscar undertakes, this statement encompasses the way in which Lucinda literally safeguards her subjectivity, that is, through her obsession with glass. She cannot know herself beyond language. Invariably, she becomes an extension of discourse, and her subjectivity is controlled by a substance with "incredible attractiveness" (108) but also with the ability to "slice and cut" the subject (76). It is here that a discussion of Lucinda's love for Oscar becomes important.

The protagonist's subject-centred consciousness ensures that she must approach her love for Oscar from a specific discursive position. Lucinda cannot "fathom the workings of his mind" and therefore has to imagine them (209). She uses controlled imagination to conceptualise Oscar and to inscribe him with those linguistic qualities she personifies. He is "reduced" by her, and becomes "rebuilt [. . .] in her imagination" (212, 222). In fact, their relationship is laden with "preconceptions" and Oscar is constantly misunderstood and misread because Lucinda can utilise only her discursively grounded knowledge to communicate with him (322). Language fails her in her interpretation of him, and as a result all authenticity is negated; Oscar's selfhood is limited and known only by those qualities she projects onto him. At one point, Lucinda unwittingly comments on her predicament when she reflects that another character in the novel is a "dull man" who "will kill God with the dullness of [his] imagination" (211). This statement applies equally well to her own interaction with Oscar in that she destroys his authenticity by using controlled imagination. Seemingly, their love does not result in authentic selfhood.

Through the metaphor of glass, Carey thus illustrates how Lucinda uses controlled imagination to love Oscar from her particular discursive position. Because she “cannot separate love from glass” (326), she cannot enable the authentic selfhood of either Oscar or herself.

Given this, their love serves merely as a means with which to safeguard Lucinda’s subjectivity. Oscar becomes “the subject of her passion” (328), and their love neither enables a holistic understanding of self nor leads to intimate knowledge of the other. In fact, Carey proposes that their relationship culminates in the death of potential authentic selfhood. Lucinda hopes to draw closer to Oscar using glass. She projects discourse onto him and affords “him all the armour she had hitherto used to keep herself safe” (329). Eventually, she asks him to build a glass church of her design – a “kennel for God’s angels” (318) – which he, for love of her, seeks to erect in the outback after having journeyed through inhospitable terrain. This agreement comes about in the form of a wager, the outcome of which will ultimately determine the destiny of both characters. Lucinda fashions Oscar’s subjectivity according to hers and, consequently, maintains her own: the construction of the church would prove that he loves her, or rather has internalised those qualities she has projected onto him, and the literal existence of the church would act as a symbol for the maintenance and power of Lucinda’s discursively constructed subjectivity. However, the result of the expedition is unexpected: Oscar drowns in her church, leaving her without a fortune and a lover. This surprising scenario comments extensively on both the limitations of, and link between, language and love.

The protagonist binds her love for Oscar to the glass church – she unveils her relationship as discursively constructed by literally investing the metaphor of her discursive construction with the love she feels for him. The narrator says that “she had never, in all her life, made a bet like the one she was about to make with Oscar Hopkins” (328). The wager is, as the narrator explains, a “code for a betrothal, a token of love” (353). By wagering her “inheritance” and “everything” she has on Oscar (328), she indicates that her selfhood, or rather her subjectivity, rests in the construction of the glass church, and more importantly in the fruition of their love through that construction. Given this, Oscar’s completion of the church or, more precisely the furthering and performance of Lucinda’s discursive subjectivity, becomes the only means of securing that fragile subjectivity. He becomes a vessel for the proliferation and maintenance of her discursive position. Through the glass church metaphor, Carey links language to love and thereby

foregrounds the complex and inhibiting relationship between these concepts and authentic selfhood and authentic imagination.

Oscar's death brings into focus Carey's concern with selfhood and love. First, Oscar's incongruous end may be read not only as his physical death, but as the metaphorical death of his authentic selfhood. That is to say, the glass church signifies language, and as he drowns in its confines he is completely excluded from authenticity and the organic. What is more, because it is Lucinda's church, Carey seems to suggest that her love acts as a discursive limitation – the emotional connection to the church indicates love's construction in language, and its ability to limit authentic selfhood and purvey discursive control. Secondly, Lucinda disappears from the text once Oscar dies. As the church sinks, her love does not become a reality, and therefore her subjectivity cannot be maintained nor can she be articulated. In fact, the reader is left to conceptualise her by the image of the glass church alone and, in this way, she is once again reduced to discursive control. Her love does not enable authentic selfhood, as it does not allow for a unity between the characters. Rather, Oscar's death symbolises the inevitable split between self and other in the act of love, and as such indicates that approaching authentic selfhood through love – an inherent discursive tool – is impossible. Lucinda's disappearance signals the death of her own subjectivity, as the love which promised to maintain it is lost. For me, the ending of Carey's novel comments extensively on the nature of love and the limitations it places on authentic selfhood.

It is here that the author begins to intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood. He does so by intricately mingling the text, author and reader, while implicating the latter in both the containment of the characters' subjectivity and the death of Oscar. As discussed, Carey indicates that Lucinda's love for Oscar is a product of language and that it maintains her subjectivity. He also suggests that the reader approaches the text similarly to the way in which she approaches Oscar – he/she approaches the narrative from a specific subject-centred position and therefore expects the novel to conform to those discursive cues inherent in his/her construction. As Rubik notes, “readers have to instantiate the appropriate schema, which will provide ‘the skeleton around which the situation is interpreted’” (171). In other words, the reader inherits linguistic determinants much as Lucinda inherits her ‘neatness’, and he/she expects *Oscar and Lucinda* to be a conventional romance that ultimately leads to the fruition of the protagonists' love. Essentially, this expectation – which is enabled by subject-centred consciousness – promises to

affirm the reader's linguistically constructed subjectivity. The potential union of the protagonists could be read as the reader's own glass church: if their love were to transpire, the reader's discursively constructed subjectivity would be affirmed as his/her expectations would be realised. Accordingly, the reader's expectations of the novel echo Lucinda's expectations regarding Oscar or, more precisely, the manner in which she determines how he loves her. Her discursive impact on him is thus mirrored in the act of reading, as the text is limited by the reader's foreknowledge of it. Crucially, though, Carey invalidates the reader's preconceptions and in the process comments on the nature of reading, the reader and the author alike.

The reader's expectations are dashed by the death of Oscar; indeed, as Sue Ryan-Fazilleau points out, he/she is likely to be "extremely disappointed by the terrible fates that befall the two protagonists" (15). This confusion draws attention to the fact that, as Erica Lombard and Marais note, Carey's narrative is "designed to manipulate the reader into expecting an outcome which the novel later subverts" ("Through a Sheet of Glass" 55). Ryan-Fazilleau explains that "the author's literary subversion ventures outside the reader's comfort zone when her expectations are strikingly frustrated at the end of the diegesis" (12). The result of this subversion affects the reader, author and characters. First, as noted, the reader approaches the text using predetermined knowledge "regulated by the codes of the literary system" (Lombard and Marais, "Sheet of Glass" 57). By denying the expected outcome – by "[manipulating] cognitive frames" (Rubik 181) and "rendering visible [his/her] expectations of the novel" (Lombard and Marais, "Sheet of Glass" 57) – the text unsettles the reader by foregrounding the fallibility of his/her approach, and, importantly, thereby awakening him/her to his/her discursively constructed and predetermined subjectivity. Like Oscar, the reader becomes "aware of the limitations of his own understanding" (*Oscar and Lucinda* 418). For example, Oscar sees wasps and dragonflies "[bash] against 'nothing'", that is, against the glass which becomes "the walls of hell itself" (418). The church contains and ultimately destroys them. Later, Carey's protagonist becomes like these creatures: just as they collide with the glass and have "the wrong intelligence to grasp the nature of glass", so too is he contained by the "contradictory, impossible" walls (418). The narrator's following description calls to mind a frightened insect:

The man inside the church waved his hands, gestures which appeared, from the perspective of Marx Hill, to be mysterious, even magical, but which, inside the crystal furnace of the church, had the simple function of repelling the large and frightening insects which had become imprisoned there. (418)

Once Oscar tries desperately to kill the insects, he becomes like one himself. Importantly, the insects – which could be understood in terms of Lacan’s organic, as they do not have subject-centred consciousness – die within the confines of the glass. As Oscar becomes a hypothetical insect, so too the glass contains him. This may be read as his potential authenticity being curtailed by language. Interestingly, Oscar’s attempt at killing the insects is indicative of his discursive performance in so far as his subject-centred consciousness denies the other’s possible authenticity. Being trapped by his subject position within discourse, he performs those limitations and inscribes them on others. In other words, the symbolic glass inhibits his authentic selfhood and that of others. Just so the reader is aligned with the “blue-bellied dragon-flies” which “[fly] against the glass in panic”, and which Carey suggests do not “understand what glass [is]” (418). In effect, as the insects “demonstrate to Oscar Hopkins the limitations of his own understanding” (418), the reader is faced with his/her own discursive construction, and feels discomfort at its limitations.

Once the reader reaches this understanding, the author illustrates that his/her discursively informed reading of the text limits the subjectivities of its characters: both Lucinda and Oscar are predetermined by his/her expectations. In the process, the limitation that such a reading places on the subjectivity of the reader is exposed. During this reading, a limited understanding of the characters is internalised, and the reader’s own subjectivity is again reduced. The result is the negation of characters and reader, self and other, and therefore of authentic selfhood. Accordingly, the protagonists are subjected to the same type of misunderstanding (inflicted by the reader) to which Lucinda is guilty of subjecting Oscar. As Lombard and Marais explain, the author “prevents readers from occupying a detached position in relation to [the text] and its themes” (“Sheet of Glass” 50), and it is this which allows Carey to highlight the limiting nature of subjectivity. It permits him to comment on love and its proximity to the act of reading, an act which promotes discursive control. Differently put, the dashed expectations of the reader (and resultant discomfiture at Oscar’s death) allows Carey to mirror Lucinda’s love of Oscar in the act of reading. Love, like reading, limits subjectivity. The Australian writer thus ironically

undermines a conventional reading of the text, or as Kane claims, “[exploits] conventional techniques” in order to illustrate that a predetermined linguistic approach to the text echoes Lucinda’s reading and love of Oscar (519), and that both interactions conclude in the constriction of selfhood for all parties involved.

Essentially, the reader is forced to acknowledge his/her formulaic approach to the text. Lombard and Marais note that “*Oscar and Lucinda* compels readers to reflect on the subject-position they take up in relation to it” (“Sheet of Glass” 50). The novel is presented as “a *trap*, designed to frustrate us”: it comments ironically on the reader’s apprehension of the text by meticulously laying the foundation for a reading of a “nineteenth century ending” only to deny any such closure (55, 54). Consequently, the surprising conclusion enables the novel to intimate the possibility of an authentic selfhood and authentic imagination, for at this point the glass cracks, and language’s fallibility and fragility is exposed. The organic rushes in like the “white fingers of water” that end Oscar’s life (*Oscar and Lucinda* 432). It follows that the ending of the text may facilitate a different reading, one in which Oscar, through the use of language as symbolised by the glass church, is able to escape his subjectivity and enter a position beyond discourse. In other words, when Oscar dies, he enters a space beyond language and therefore can no longer be read. He enters into a state of ultimate authenticity. By frustrating the reader’s preconceptions, Carey thus allows him/her to inhabit Oscar’s death. Just as the reader is denied the maintenance of his/her subjectivity once the discursive determinants are forestalled, so too can his/her controlled subjectivity no longer be maintained and he/she thus dies. The reader, having momentarily lost his/her subjectivity, finds authentic selfhood and authentic imagination, albeit for a split second. Carey thus ironically uses discourse to expose its fallibility, to circumvent the control it enforces on subjectivity and to intimate authentic selfhood. As Carey manipulates discourse he is able to momentarily circumvent its control. The novel’s narrator aptly elucidates this notion as he explains that “glass, for all its great strength under compression, cannot easily tolerate this sort of twisting” (417).

Through Lucinda’s relationship with Oscar, Carey illustrates that love is predetermined in language, that language itself is fallible and characterised by misinterpretation and misunderstanding, and that love therefore acts as a discursive tool which negates selfhood. He indicates this by manipulating discourse and frustrating readerly expectations, thereby drawing attention to the reader’s own position in language and discourse and his/her use of controlled

imagination. Ryan-Fazilleau suggests that “Carey lures the reader into playing a different kind of game in order to provoke awareness of the distress of the subject who is marginalised by [. . .] discourse” (12). Carey ironically ensures that the reader is made aware of his/her identity as the ‘marginalised subject’. As the reader’s own subjectivity is questioned, the author is not only able to circumvent discursive determinism, but also “alert readers to the limitations of their ways of knowing” (Lombard and Marais, “Sheet of Glass” 50), and, as such, intimate the possibility of authentic imagination and authentic selfhood.

Laughable Loves

Like Carey’s text, Kundera’s *Laughable Loves* examines the relationship between selfhood and imagination by specifically implicating love in the engendering of discursive control. In this section of my chapter, I discuss the first embedded narrative in Kundera’s novel, namely, “The Hitchhiking Game”. My intention is to note that this novelist, like Carey, manipulates discourse and calls into question readerly responsibility in order to intimate authentic imagination and authentic selfhood.

Although both writers focus on love to do so, Carey and Kundera differ in other ways in approaching their objective of drawing attention to the reader’s constructed imagination and subjectivity. On the one hand, Carey lures the reader into thinking that his characters have a substantial amount of volition. He suggests that their actions are independent of discursive determinants. For example, initially Oscar and Lucinda’s relationship seems to be free of discursive influence. Later, however, Carey undermines such a reading, and this allows him to call into question the reader’s own subjectivity. On the other hand, Kundera immediately presents his protagonists as automata whose interactions and relationships are largely determined. In many instances their personalities are indistinguishable. Unlike Carey, Kundera ensures that his characters often lack specificity, as they frequently lack names – most of them are conventionally referred to as either ‘man’ or ‘girl’. They are stripped of individuality and, importantly, are aware of “the law of universal transience” which makes their actions ephemeral and their lives subject to external forces (*Laughable Loves* 4). His characters are presented as “ready-made” (5), and are aware of their construction. As such, while both writers aim to expose constructed selfhood through a focus on love, their approaches differ dramatically.

Kundera calls into question the nature of constructed selfhood in a world of uniformity. As noted, the foundation of his discussion is the “unindividuated” nature of his characters (42). Most of the descriptions relating to his characters function merely as ways to draw attention to a shift in the plot, as “the impression that certain outlines [delineate them as individuals is] only a delusion” (21). They lack individuality, and minor differentiations seem only to drive the plot rather than distinguish any unique personality. Ultimately, he creates his characters as mediums through which he articulates greater philosophical concerns. Apart from the conventional nature of his characters and settings, he approaches his objective by paying particular attention to the role of love as a discursive tool. Kundera seemingly amalgamates the protagonists’ lack of volition with their expressions of love, thereby drawing attention to this emotion’s discursive determinism. He foregrounds the way in which love is facilitated by discourse, thus determining how the other is approached and how the self is consequently informed and limited by it.

As Elisabeth Snyman and Elsa Crous explain, “The Hitchhiking Game” is a story about “love play” (27). The text clearly foregrounds Kundera’s concerns about the emotion being a discursive tool and foreign, even hostile, to potential authentic selfhood. In the narrative, a couple known only as “the young man” and “the girl” go on holiday together (Kundera, “The Hitchhiking Game” 3). As they travel, they decide to play a ‘hitchhiking game’ in which each character inhabits the role of an imaginary persona (a hitchhiker and a driver). Importantly, Kundera suggests that his protagonists are in love: the young man puts “his arm around the girl’s shoulders” and kisses her forehead, while the girl is happy with him (3, 5). It is this scenario of role playing and its proximity to love which enables Kundera to problematise the concept of selfhood. By aligning love and acting, he is able to foreground the constructed nature of subjectivity and thereby draw attention to the reader’s own subjectivity.

As mentioned, love is a discursive tool, it is a means to safeguard subjectivity and engender discourse. Kundera explores love’s discursive function in detail, as emerges from the fact that the protagonists’ relationship is marked by a continual need to validate the self. For example, the young man is presumably quite arrogant, because when the girl disagrees with him on a minor issue he calls her a “pig” (3). Seemingly, he cannot tolerate opinions different to his. The girl vehemently protests against the young man’s slander, finally calling him a pig instead of her (3). Clearly each character constantly projects qualities of the self onto the other, thus advancing his or her own opinion while negating the other’s selfhood. Each character wants the

other to love him or her enough to alter his or her identity. That is to say, both the boy and the girl want to be affirmed by the other. For this reason, the notion of role playing is important.

The game itself is predicated on the possibility of fulfilling desire and so validating the self. Each character wishes for the other to love him or her absolutely, and thereby to validate and assimilate qualities of the self. Love aims to safeguard subjectivity by way of subsuming the other. The girl insinuates as much when she states that she wanted the young man “to be completely hers and she to be completely his” (5). Initially, then, the enactment of different roles functions as a means to fulfil their desires: by changing into the perfect wish of the other, the self gains the ability to inscribe, at a later stage, qualities of the self onto the other and thus validate itself. As the narrator says, “childish desires withstand all the snares of the adult mind and often survive into ripe old age. And this childish desire quickly took advantage of the opportunity to embody itself in the proffered role” (10). While the girl takes on the role of hitchhiker, she is “freed [. . .] from herself” (10), just as the boy experiences freedom from his limited subjectivity. However, it is here, where the characters move beyond their subject-positions, that both are vulnerable to being inscribed by discourse. The narrator explains that “right behind the happiness lurked suspicion” (5), the origins of which are to be found in the construction of the subject and in the nature of selfhood.

The substitution of identities results in a dramatic loss of self, with the characters becoming the roles they act and “the game [merging] with life” (22). Each protagonist finally loses the ability to distinguish reality from fiction, as he and she forget that he and she are playing a game (22). Ultimately, the reader sees them only as their roles. When the game is over they cannot return to “their customary relationship” and their individual identities are lost (25). Importantly, this outcome speaks of the nature of selfhood. Because each character performs what the other desires and thereafter can no longer distinguish the true identity of the one he or she loves, the nature of subjectivity is called into question. In other words, if the other conforms to the self only to be confronted by the ever changing nature of that entity, then the self is exposed as constructed and inauthentic and, what is more, the other has become a product of that same construction. When the self is a product of discourse, its desires are a product of controlled imagination and, as such, the other is approached from a particular discursive position. By assimilating discursively constructed roles, both self and other forfeit the ability to be authentic. Through this story, then, Kundera highlights the volatile nature of identity and selfhood.

Importantly too, as is discussed later in this chapter, he self-reflexively involves both the author and reader in the issues at stake by mirroring the implication of their own subjectivities in the game that the two characters play. In this way, his narrative begins to intimate the possibility of potential authentic selfhood.

In order to play the game – that is, to love and to inhabit different identities in a way that validates the self – the self thinks of itself as a fixed entity. The self must believe itself to be unchanging and incorruptible. It is this concept of the self which Kundera problematises. His characters, first so self-assured, begin to lose the ability to understand and know themselves. The girl, from being strong-willed and defiant of the boy's false accusations, becomes but a puppet "pleading" with him (3, 25). In an impossible attempt to reclaim herself, she says rather sadly: "I am me, I am me" (25). Kundera's narrator points out that in this simple sentence there is a "sad emptiness [. . .]" in which the unknown was defined in terms of the same unknown quality" (25). The girl tries to assert who she is – her selfhood being discursively informed already – using pre-existing discursive structures which always negate her. Thus, she becomes an extension of discourse, her identity echoing only the desire of the boy, whose own identity is itself just a discursive construction. According to the narrator, the girl who the boy "loved was a creation of his desire, his thoughts, and his faith and [. . .]" the *real* girl now standing in front of him was hopelessly alien, hopelessly *ambiguous*" (21). The boy's desire is implicated in discourse, and as the girl assimilates it she becomes an empty discursive tool, ironically mirroring the boy's own fabrication. Similarly, the boy, who thought he "was old and knew everything that a man could know", and who loved the girl, becomes imperious and violent at the end of the story (4, 24). Both characters "crossed a forbidden boundary" (25); "the game merged with life" and the boy and girl lose their conception of self (22). While trying to love, their subjectivities become increasingly limited and they finally emerge as mere discursive roles which limit potential authentic selfhood. The game "is a trap for the players": "everything is permitted" and no one can escape (20, 17). This loss of self exposes the volatile nature of selfhood, which its implication in discourse and its limitation of potential authenticity. Moreover, Kundera draws attention to the discursive control inherent in love, owing to its proximity to controlled imagination. He makes it clear that love is a medium through which controlled imagination engenders discourse.

At the point at which the characters become aware that “it was all over” and that they are incapable of “returning to their customary relationship” (25), Kundera turns his attention to the reader, commenting on his/her subjectivity and on the act of reading itself. Whereas Carey forestalls a conventional reading of Oscar and Lucinda’s relationship, Kundera ensures that his protagonists’ relationship is characterised by a sense of foreboding, as though the reader foresees a calamity. Importantly, the reader is not made uncomfortable only at the end of the novel, but rather feels somewhat disconcerted throughout. Uncannily, the reader almost shares the anxiety of the protagonists and is led through the story as if aware of an impending crisis. Indeed, the reader’s fears are affirmed as the story ends with the girl being raped. Because it seems as though the reader knew of the disaster prior to it happening, my argument is that the reader’s anxiety stems not only from the narrative’s conclusion, but from the position from which he/she approaches the text. Indeed, the reader feels uneasy precisely because his/her reading seems to make him/her at least partly responsible for the tragedies that befall the characters. Essentially, Kundera creates a story with a plot that causes the reader discomfort, and he does so by foregrounding the ease with which the reader is able to read and relate to the roles being portrayed. It is this which disturbs the reader and momentarily removes him/her from his/her subjectivity thus ensuring that Kundera is able to intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood.

Seemingly, Kundera suggests that by reading and relating to the text, the reader himself/herself is able to inhabit the roles acted by the characters much as they do. As the reader reads, so he/she assimilates the discursive information in the text and inscribes that information back onto the characters. Like the boy, the reader begins to read the girl not as the girl she is initially but as the hitchhiker. She loses her identity as the reader inscribes on her a new one. Much the same occurs with the boy: he becomes first a driver and then a rapist. As the characters are approached from a predetermined position – as the reader increasingly associates them with the conventional discourse inherent in their roles – so they are finally reduced to their parts. Invariably, the characters can only be read as their enacted personas because they were not allowed to have a fixed individuality at the beginning of the narrative: they become empty shells used only for the purpose of exhibiting and proliferating discursive control. The characters are read in such a way as to safeguard and validate the subjectivity of the reader. Kundera allows the reader to validate his/her constructed subjectivity by ensuring that his/her expectations are met. He ensures that the reader is allowed to maintain his/her selfhood because he/she inscribes

preconceived discursive determinants on the characters. In effect the characters are othered and then read by the reader from a specific, determined discursive position.

What is more, as the text begins to affirm the reader's selfhood, the reader assimilates discursive information from the text, thus negating not only the characters but also himself/herself. The reader takes on the role of a predetermined discursive subject by reading and imagining the characters according to discursive cues in the text. Like the characters, he/she becomes an actor/actress and, eventually, cannot escape discourse. The imagined self becomes the real one. He/She conforms to the expectation of the text, and thus possibly loses potential authentic selfhood.

Finally, as the text reaches its conclusion, and as the characters and reader lose their selfhood and identity, there is violence. One may read this as a metaphor for an attack on selfhood by discourse: when the girl is raped, both the reader and the characters lose possible authenticity and become products of discourse. The discomfort felt here is attributed not only to the fact that the girl is raped, but also to the implication that the reading of the text enables this act, and therefore that the reader is himself/herself responsible. In affirming his/her selfhood, the reader negates the other and the indeterminate guilt felt by him/her draws attention to this.

Once the reader's misgivings are realised, he/she is made aware of the conventionality of his/her reading. That is to say, as his/her expectations are met, attention is drawn to the notion that he/she orchestrated the ending. However, since the reader's approach of the text is facilitated by a conventional reading of the roles Kundera's characters inhabit, he/she is led to read the text in a particular way. He/She assimilates discursive information that is provided by the story. In effect, the reader's reading of the text is exposed as being informed by discourse, and as being inherently violent. Kundera draws attention to the fact that the reader's approach of the text, or rather his/her reading of the roles inhabited by the characters, invariably determines the protagonists' fates. The author allows the reader to affirm his/her subjectivity, but does so in a way which highlights the negation of an other's subjectivity. He/She is made to feel guilty and, importantly, his/her implication in discourse is revealed in a way that indicates that he/she too inhabits a role foreign to himself/herself.

It is through making the reader realise that he/she is implicated in discourse, and therefore that he/she is not necessarily a free agent in control of his/her existence, that Kundera intimates the possibility of potential authentic selfhood. So, whereas Carey draws attention to the

subconscious, unnoticed associations the reader makes with the characters, or rather to the discursively informed manner in which he/she unknowingly approaches the text, Kundera foregrounds the way the narrative is read. Through bringing to a crisis his/her relationship with the narrative, and through inducing a sense of guilt and discomfiture, the text guides the reader to a realisation of his/her own construction. It is here that the reader is forced to choose between acquiescence and wilful ignorance, or to read the text differently, from an informed position and with a mindful approach. By manipulating discourse so that it foregrounds its own inefficacy and violence, Kundera calls for a responsible reading and, in so doing, intimates authentic selfhood rather than stating its possibility outright. In this way, he circumvents discursive control and determinism by suggesting a reading which is aware of its own limitation. He is able to promote a reading which frees the other of the controlled imaginings of the self, and liberates the self from being informed by discourse, albeit briefly. By drawing attention to the reader's culpability, Kundera is able to intimate possible authentic imagination and therefore suggest approaching potential authentic selfhood.

In sum, Kundera's text highlights the construction of the subject and his/her location in language. It does so by drawing attention to the violent nature of love, especially its proximity to controlled imagination. Moreover, his narrative enables an intimation of potential authentic selfhood by implicating the reader in the negation of its characters and, ultimately, in the discursive limitation of his/her own selfhood. By assimilating discursive information from the text, and by limiting the characters through a discursively informed approach of them, the reader confines himself/herself. By drawing attention to that negation, he/she is made aware of his/her implication in discourse and is perhaps able to approach the text from a position which may enable, albeit briefly, authentic imagination and possible authentic selfhood.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the role of imagination as a discursive tool, as a means by which discursive control is engendered and maintained in the subject. By focusing on two particularly important concepts – the sympathetic imagination and psychoanalysis – I have indicated how discourse constructs and utilises the imagination to maintain and exercise power. Moreover, I have focused on love as a vehicle for controlled imagination in order to foreground the emotion's

affiliation with discourse and, ultimately, its nature as a medium for discursive proliferation. Through a consideration of two texts by Carey and Kundera respectively, I have also shown how these narratives evince an awareness of the discursive limitations of the imagination, as well as the ramifications of this for potential authentic selfhood. In my opinion, both texts intimate potential authentic imagination by manipulating discourse in order to simultaneously expose and circumvent its control. By implicating the reader in the writing of the narratives, both novelists ultimately undermine his/her approach to the texts, and thereby expose his/her subject-position and readerly responsibility. In drawing attention to the reader's location in discourse, the authors suspend discursive control and, finally, present him/her with an opportunity to read the text in a way that cultivates both authentic imagination and authentic selfhood, however briefly.

Chapter 2: The Body, Beauty and Eroticism

Introduction

Throughout this thesis, I have focused on discursive power, particularly with regard to the possible negation of potential authenticity in the subject. My Introduction discussed language and its creation of discourse as well as its maintenance of subjectivity, while Chapter One examined the role of imagination in facilitating discursive power and implicating the subject in language. In both chapters, I indicated that the subject is informed by discourse and ultimately denied an experience of a potential authentic selfhood that exceeds language and its control. Chapter Two discusses the body, specifically the way in which Carey and Kundera approach it and posit possible ways of circumventing its discursive power.

The contention of this chapter is that the body is a site on which discursive power is recorded and through which that discourse is then articulated and engendered. I focus primarily on the idea that the body is, as Michel Foucault explains, “an object and target of power” (*Discipline and Punish* 136). For Bryan Turner, “the body raises an important and perennial problem about the relationship between nature and culture” (1). At stake here is a “tension between the body as a living organism and as a cultural product” (1). Being a space which is, as Judith Butler explains, “positioned within a field of cultural possibilities”, the body is “engaged in an ongoing cultural interpretation” and because of this is discourse’s most important tool (“Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*” 36). Discursive influence and control are made visible on the physical body: race, gender and sexuality are but a few examples of this.

In addition, the body’s physicality literally delineates the difference between self and other and, in this way, demarcates the subject position of the self physically. In other words, the subject actually inhabits discourse, because the body serves as a physical symbol of his/her restrictions. Inhabiting a body means living in, displaying, engendering and exercising discourse. For these reasons, this chapter discusses how discourse is inscribed on the body, as well as how the body mirrors and informs subjectivity in order to inhibit authentic selfhood, maintain control and proliferate power.

Ultimately, then, the body is a discursive palimpsest which constantly assimilates and reiterates discursive control. This notion greatly influences Carey’s and Kundera’s texts, which

often focus on the body in order to explore profound misgivings about its discursive nature. Because their narratives tend to explore potential authentic selfhood and the possibility of overcoming subject positions, it is no wonder that the body features so prominently in their work. Thus it is strange that much of the literary criticism on these novelists' fiction seems to marginalise the importance of the body. In fact, in some instances critiques fail to notice the writers' complex analyses and offer interpretations largely informed by existing theories of the body. For example, while Herbert Eagle explores the body in Kundera's work, he does so by mentioning the author's paralleling of the body with history and forgetting, and by associating it with communism. He foregrounds Kundera's possible political agenda rather than what is this writer's deeper concern with discourse encrypted on the body. Similarly, Roger Kimball discusses Kundera's concern "with the fate of the individual in modern society", and suggests that the author presents a politicisation of "private life" which, for Kimball, denotes the body (200). However, the critic does not mention the inherent linguistic construction of the private itself, and therefore he too fails to discuss the novelist's profound examination of subjectivity and the body. I suggest that Kundera's work is more incisive, and provides integral insight into a possible escape from the discursively inscribed body rather than an academic discussion of its theoretical implications alone. Both Kundera's and Carey's texts exceed such reductive readings, as their work depicts the body in a way that intimates a possibility of authentic selfhood.

Accordingly, this chapter focuses on the way in which Kundera and Carey present the body as a site of discursive control, and, fundamentally, on how their texts aim to undermine discursive mastery and approach the possibility of authentic selfhood. I begin by outlining some existing theories on the body as a discursive locus. Thereafter, I provide a close reading of Carey's *My Life as a Fake* and of Kundera's *Immortality* in order to indicate how these authors seek to expose and undermine discourse written on the body. In my analysis of the texts, I touch on the abject, beauty and eroticism, which in my opinion advance the authors' investigations of the body and subjectivity, and allow them to ingeniously intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood.

The Discursively Informed Body

Hortense Spillers explains that "the human body is the metonymic figure for an entire repertoire of human and social arrangement" (66). Similarly, for Foucault, "the body is the inscribed

surface of events” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 148). Indeed, he suggests that “language, the formulation of truth or morality, has a direct effect on the body” (*History of Madness* 327). The body becomes a locus for discursive inscription founded by language. Butler makes the same point: “the body is a site where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves, a nodal point or nexus for relations of juridical or productive power” (“Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions” 601). As mentioned, the body exists as the physical outline of discursive control – it fundamentally displays the discursive power exerted on subjectivity by discourse, and it is often regarded as perhaps the most powerful medium used by discourse. For this reason, this section explores how the body becomes a medium for continually precluding the possibility of potential authentic selfhood while enabling a constant reiteration of discursive power.

In my Introduction, I discussed the self/other binary which language creates with the construction of the subject. This binary is necessary, as it maintains the boundaries needed for language to justify itself. Due to language’s inability to provide holistic definitions, it severs that which is being named from its original, authentic meaning or state. What is identified in language is separated from the unknown, the existence of which, in turn, erroneously justifies linguistic taxonomy. In other words, that which exceeds language – and which is simultaneously created by language – constantly invites linguistic systems to define it. Similarly, linguistic automatism is extended to subjectivity. At the birth of subject-centred consciousness, the subject is separated from that which exceeds language and must thereafter constantly attempt an understanding of the unknown. This endeavour, however, is futile, as it must proceed through language because subject-centred consciousness cannot be avoided. Moreover, due to the fact that the self cannot extricate himself/herself from linguistic control and inhabit the unknown, the other is reduced to a binary opposite of the self. So the other must exist as the eternal unknown. Hence he/she must also be that which is constantly sought by the self and which is forever subjected to negating discursive inscription: the self inscribes his/her constructed subjectivity on the other. In this way, both self and other are limited, as they can neither evade their subject-centred consciousness nor overcome the binary divide between them. Seemingly, authentic selfhood may never be approached. It is here, then, that the body becomes important, as it exists as the most visible discursive tool used to reinforce the self/other binary and, essentially, to inform and limit selfhood.

At the onset of subject-centred consciousness, the subject is immediately made aware of his/her discursive limitations – the boundaries within which his/her subjectivity is to be articulated and maintained. So subject-centred consciousness provides certain ingrained discursive principles and parameters devised by language, such as gender and race (which will be explored in more detail later). At this point, the body conforms to and articulates that discursive information in order to mirror subject-centred consciousness. An awareness of the body is discursively informed and reinforces discursive control. Because the subject can only be made aware of himself/herself through language, and given that subject-centred consciousness is necessary for subjectivity, the body must be approached from within those linguistically predetermined parameters. As outlined in the previous chapter, everything is known from within a particular subject position, even the body. Discourse manipulates the way in which the subject is made aware of his/her body, as subject-centred consciousness ensures predetermined cognition, the nature of which is implicated in discourse. The body becomes the corporeal dimension of subjectivity, as it serves to affirm the discursive information gained from subject-centred consciousness. In sum, as the subject becomes aware of himself/herself, so he/she becomes aware of his/her body, and given that that awareness is delineated by language the body becomes regulated and is located in discourse.

What is more, as the subject assimilates discursive information, his/her body reiterates it, or rather re-enacts the limitations placed on him/her by language, which ensures a dialogue between the body and subject-centred consciousness. By inhabiting a body the subject animates his/her subjectivity, and he/she internalises information gained from his/her body. That knowledge, however, is inscribed on his/her body by the other, hence the other regulates the self's subjectivity and discursive body simply by recognising it. The nature of the data being internalised is therefore discursive and inhibiting. Fundamentally, discourse uses the body in two ways: first, to mirror subjectivity by inscribing physically the discursive parameters belonging to subject-centred consciousness, and secondly, to serve as an ever present discursive reminder so that the subject may continually be informed by it.

However, discourse also ensures that the physical outline of the body and, by association, subject-centred consciousness act as a literal barrier between the self and the other. The body actually demarcates the boundary between self and other because, being the physical extension of subject-centred consciousness, it cannot be evaded. Accordingly, the subject is limited to that

which is written on his/her body and can no more extricate himself/herself from racial or gendered discourse, for example, than he/she can from his/her subject-centred consciousness. Entrapped by the body, just as he/she is trapped by discourse, the subject can never reach the other. In this way, the subject's potential authentic selfhood is precluded both by a metaphysical disjunction between self and other and by that disjunction's physical articulation manifest on the body.

As suggested, gender is one of the discourses that is articulated through the body and used as a discursive device. Many theorists, such as Monique Wittig, Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, have examined this notion in great detail. All seem to agree with Beauvoir's famous statement in *The Second Sex* that

one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. (296)

What this means, as Butler states, is that "gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired" ("Sex and Gender" 35). When the subject enters subject-centred consciousness, he/she is located in discourse, which locates his/her values and attitudes. By extension, he/she engenders and is produced by the operation of power through discourse. Gender is articulated on the body by inscribing the physical sex of the subject with discourse. When a female baby is born she will gradually come to occupy a particular subject position, as a discursive reading of her biological sex takes place. She becomes a woman because she cannot escape her body and must interact as a subject from within it. As Vincent Leitch explains, Butler believes that "anatomical differences can be experienced only through the categories and expectations set out by the culture's signifying order" (2485), and, because the subject cannot escape her body, she will equally never be free of those limitations forced on her by her biological sex and its conventional reception. Wittig seems to agree with Beauvoir, as she suggests that

the division from men of which women have been the object is a political one and shows that we have been ideologically rebuilt into a 'natural group'. In the case of women, ideology goes far since our bodies as well as our minds are the product of this manipulation. We have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the *idea* of nature that has been established for us. (2015)

Woman's biological sex enables a predetermined, unconscious articulation of femininity, or rather womanhood. Written on her physical body are the limitations which discourse places on her particular subjectivity. Wittig goes on to comment that "it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature" (2015), and that the public has "appropriated the consciousnesses and bodies of women" (2016). Language ensures that a woman's body is approached through convention, meaning society makes her body public and thus foreign to what is, possibly, an authentic self. In turn, she incorporates that information and becomes increasingly distanced from authentic selfhood.

Importantly, the discursive inscription of womanhood on her biological sex not only distances woman from authenticity, but simultaneously positions her as other to man, thereby separating her from him. As other, she is constantly defined by the foreign self, by man, and can never inhabit a space undefined by him, because, according to Beauvoir, "he is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (16). Ironically, then, he – the gendered man – enables the existence of woman's subjectivity by being positioned as a defining binary. Beauvoir explains that "she [that is, woman] cannot think of herself without man" (16). Seemingly, woman's consciousness, which is to say her ability to think of herself at all, exists primarily because of the self/other binary that is affirmed by her physical being. She is bound to her body as she is bound to the binary which enables her subjectivity. Furthermore, the body proves to be a form of discursive control. Woman's discursive limitations seem almost impossible to overcome, since she can escape neither her subject-centred consciousness nor her body. If she did so, she would lose her subjectivity and be ostracised, or die. The co-dependence between the body and subjectivity is such that an escape from one immediately ensures the inarticulation of the other.

In sum, the gendering of bodies exists as a primary form of maintaining discursive control. It informs subjectivity and limits the possibility of authentic selfhood. Though the female body has been discussed here in detail, it is important to note that the discursive negation by the gendering of bodies extends to the male body as well. Man too is subjugated by the

discursive binary generated by subject-centred consciousness that is inscribed on his body. Ultimately, the gendered body facilitates the control of the subject by inscribing on the body the self/other binary which disallows authentic selfhood.

Race exists as a similarly negating discursive inscription on the body. Ethnicity, Spillers suggests, is “a scene of negation” (66). That is to say, much like the gendered body, the racial body becomes “a territory of cultural and political manoeuvre” (67). Frantz Fanon explains that for the racialised subject “consciousness of the body is a solely negating activity” (83). As one inhabits subject-centred consciousness so too one embodies racial discourse, and one’s subjectivity is informed by it. Racial discourse maintains subjectivity and directs the subject. Furthermore, by using the body, racial discourse – and its implications for the subject – remains inescapable, and therefore highly significant for discursive power.

The position of the racialised subject is defined by discourse that mediates his/her subject-centred consciousness and which is written on his/her body. What is more, this position is maintained by his/her interaction with and place in the social world. The negating information present in subject-centred consciousness becomes written on the body and this informs the way in which the subject is received and approached by others. Essentially, the subject is limited by the reception of his/her body. If, as the subject reaches consciousness of himself/herself, the body mirrors subjectivity, then that interaction is forever maintained by the way in which his/her body is conventionally approached by the public. Fanon suggests as much when he argues that

the body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. [. . .] A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of the spatial and temporal world – such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world – definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world. (83)

Seemingly, the racialised body shapes subjectivity and, finally, denotes the limited subject position which the subject must inhabit in the world. Such containment of the subject occurs because he/she constantly assimilates information from his/her body (which is acted upon by others) in order to maintain his/her subjectivity.

Like gendered bodies, the racialised body ensures that the divide between self and other is made physically apparent. As it is inscribed on the body, race demarcates a literal difference between self and other. Racial discourse thereby precludes knowledge of the other. Moreover,

given that it acts as a medium for proliferating discourse, race inhibits an approach of authentic selfhood.

Thus far, I have discussed two ideological inscriptions found on the body: gender and race. And while it has been noted that discourse informs subjectivity by ensuring that subject-centred consciousness is mirrored on the physical body, it should be added that the body simultaneously presents a veritable blank canvas for discursive inscription. Discourse continually writes itself on the body, and this process is made possible through what Butler calls “stylized repetition”, that is, the constant re-enactment of discursively imbued “gestures” and “movements” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 519).

Butler speaks of the re-enactment of discourse inscribed on the body as a performance. She maintains that by inscribing itself on the body, discourse engenders “associative semantic meanings” (519), or rather ensures that the body’s appearance and movements articulate particular conventional, discursive information. Discourse is translated through “performance and acting” by the body (519). In so far as the body displays the discursive information found in subject-centred consciousness, it persistently performs it, albeit unwittingly. By inhabiting his/her body, the subject constantly displays his/her subject position, a process which affects both self and other.

As mentioned, the body physically delineates the limit between subject and other. The performance of discourse inherent in subject-centred consciousness – the re-enactment of the subjectivity as it is inscribed on the body – draws attention to the relationship of the subject with the other. Since the subject may only approach the other from a particular subject position, the other’s authenticity is denied and he/she is known only through the subject. Consequently, while the subject’s body performs the negating discursive restrictions placed on subjectivity, the other responds to him/her from his/her own, relational subject-position. The subject enacts his/her subjectivity through the use of his/her body, and the other assimilates the discourse he/she observes. Thereafter, the other internalises that discourse, and, because his/her body performs his/her subject-centred consciousness, its actions are in relation to his/her discursively informed intercourse with the subject. The subject then repeats the interaction. This communication between self and other maintains the subjectivity of each party. As such, the subject physically displays his/her discursive position while the other, being read by the subject, alters his/her subjectivity and body so as to maintain the necessary binary between subject and other. Given

that subjectivity is informed by discourse, the other is increasingly informed by that which is foreign to him/her and which he/she unwittingly internalises, thereby altering and amplifying the restrictions on his/her subjectivity. The subject, too, by performing his/her own subjectivity and interacting with the other physically, must continually assimilate discursive information, which hinders the possibility of authentic selfhood. Essentially, as subjectivity etches itself on the body, the body performs the limits of subject-centred consciousness. That information is then re-assimilated by both self and other, and in this manner discourse rewrites and increasingly constrains the subjectivity of both entities. Given this, the body is a site utilised for its ability to proliferate discourse. Having the ideological discourses of race, gender and sexuality inscribed on it, the body changes continually in order to maintain subjectivity. In this way, discourse inscribed on the body regulates subjectivity and authentic selfhood is constrained.

The Abject

As noted, the body physically displays subjectivity. Thus it cordons off the unknown, acting as a barrier between discourse and that which exceeds it. Julia Kristeva calls that which lures linguistic systems and which enables subject-centred consciousness “the abject” (1). In *Powers of Horror*, she introduces this notion as follows:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects itself from the shameful – a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn towards an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself. (1)

Kristeva proposes that the abject, being created by language, constantly invites linguistic systems to define it. And while this may be so, the abject defies definition and thus becomes an incentive for linguistic systems.

The body clearly displays the subject's desire to define the abject. The subject's body pursues the abject, in the form of the other, in the same way that subject-centred consciousness does, and therefore he/she embodies the constant need of language to define the abject. However, he/she cannot escape his/her body and therefore may never experience that which lies beyond it. The subject is trapped in his/her body, yet is compelled by his/her subject-centred consciousness to try to define what lies beyond it – an objective that is futile, since it cannot be attained through the medium of language. By association, the body too is doomed to fail. It rewrites, assimilates and proliferates discursive control in a manner that echoes linguistic systems but which never enables the subject to inhabit the excess created by his/her subjectivity. It is this separation from the abject which precludes the possibility of authentic selfhood and engenders discursive control.

Interestingly, the abject draws attention to the duplicitous nature of language. As with psychoanalysis, the body, being a product of discourse, creates its own limits. These limits point towards what discourse permits for subjectivity. As noted in the previous chapter, the unknown space beyond language is necessarily approached from a particular subject position. The same applies to the body and its interaction with the abject. Language creates the abject, but its true meaning is constantly deferred due to it being encountered from a position in language. Given that the subject can escape neither his/her subjectivity nor body, the abject constantly eludes discourse. Since there can be no attempt to approach the abject without language, authentic selfhood is denied the subject.

Essentially, language tries to define the abject so as to enlarge its sphere of control. Though language creates the abject, as discussed, language's approach of it suggests that discourse may succeed in defining it. In other words, by creating the abject and ensuring that the subject seeks to understand it, language ensures the subject's constant reliance on linguistic systems. The subject acts as though he/she is able to taxonomise the unknown, and is thus apparently able to exercise power over it, thereby assuring himself/herself that the limits of his/her experience are being increased. He/She uses language's in the hope of facilitating a sense of limitless selfhood. This confidence in language occurs precisely because the subject cannot avoid his/her consciousness. Accordingly, the abject, that which is unknown, is increasingly denied and authentic selfhood is constantly and seemingly inexplicably negated.

In many ways, the body's approach of the abject is similar to the way in which subject-centred consciousness seeks it. Bodies that are strictly regulated by discourse are identified as

normative. Certain bodies are conventionally considered normal – they largely conform to discursive ideals; they display and perform acceptable discursive imperatives. Beyond these bodies lies the other, or rather bodies that do not qualify as the norm. Ostensibly, these bodies are abject as they are in excess of convention. They may include unhealthy bodies, homosexual bodies and, as the Introduction mentions, even mad bodies. The discursively inscribed body, which is presented as normal, identifies the abnormal body. Thereafter, that body is discursively inscribed by the normal body. The other's authenticity is then denied by the discourse forced on his/her body by the normal body. In effect, the abnormal, or deviant and abject, is normalised, though not understood (authentically), and the threat which its unknown position held is eradicated. So it is possible to discern how the linguistic structure of the mind is inscribed on the body in that the physical being of the subject performs those very discursive pursuits that his/her subject-centred consciousness does.

Given the above concerns of the subject's need to define the abject and the body's shared desire to do so, it is perhaps possible to note the madness inherent within language itself. While the Introduction and Chapter Three focus on this issue, it is necessary to mention it here as well. Because language can never achieve what it suggests, can never provide accurate definitions, it is itself madness. It is not the unknown, being that which is untouched by language, which is mad. Rather, it is the very system which defines that madness that is peculiar and, effectively, a truer presentation of madness. As discussed in detail below, the issue which is found in much of Carey's and Kundera's texts is precisely how the subject is to inhabit authentic selfhood without falling prey to the madness of language. These authors investigate how the subject can approach authentic selfhood, or rather the excess beyond language, without falling victim to the discourse that informs his/her subject-centred consciousness and which is, significantly, inscribed on his/her body.

In conclusion, as noted throughout this section, discourse is inscribed on the body and therefore is a medium for affirming subjectivity. The body also functions as a means by which to entrench discourse, because it seeks to define and determine the unknown, the abject. It acts as the physical extension of subject-centred consciousness and is, perhaps more accurately, a site used to constrict authentic selfhood and to inscribe, propagate and proliferate discourse.

In the following section, I explore how Carey and Kundera aim to circumvent the discursively constructed body in order to intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood. As in the

previous chapter, I indicate that their objective is achieved not by stating outright the feasibility of authentic selfhood, but by using discourse ironically to undermine discursive control and, therefore, intimate the possibility of authenticity. I focus particularly on writing, the abject, beauty and eroticism in their texts, as these concepts unveil the authors' concerns with the discursively mediated body, and serve to clearly illustrate how they suggest an escape from the discourse inscribed on the body.

My Life as a Fake

My Life as a Fake, Carey's novel that tells of a fictional poet brought to life, explores many of the outlined troublesome notions concerning the body. Carey's protagonist, Christopher Chubb, creates a fictional poet named Bob McCorkle. Early on, McCorkle mysteriously materialises as a physical presence, and the relationship between him and Chubb begins to unearth the author's deeper concerns about bodies and the discourse inscribed on them.

As the title suggests, *My Life as a Fake* is partly about authenticity. The novel problematises the legitimacy of writing, bodies, subjectivity and identity. These concerns, which are significant to the characters themselves, are the focus of the text; they draw attention to the reader's subjectivity and the discursive inscription of his/her body. By implication, the author uses discourse to circumvent and undermine discourse's control of the body. Once the reader is made aware of the way in which his/her body is implicated in discourse, the author is able to intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood. In what follows, I explore how Carey's story problematises the discursively inscribed body, that is, how it foregrounds the proximity between the body and discourse. I argue that his narrative makes the reader aware of his/her implication in discourse, and that by doing so he insinuates the possibility of escaping discourse. Ultimately, he suggests the possibility of authentic selfhood by using discourse precisely to undermine its control.

Carey's text focuses on writing. Initially his narrator, Sarah Wode-Douglass, who introduces herself as "the editor of *The Modern Review*" (4), sets out to write Chubb's story and, inadvertently, McCorkle's. Chubb himself is also a writer, and writes McCorkle into existence. What is more, the entire novel is Carey's fictional retelling, or rather rewriting, of an alarming piece of Australian history about a group of hoaxers who, in the 1940s, fabricated a poet called

Ern Malley and in the process misled “Angry Penguins” editor Max Harris (Harris and Kerr 1). Harris was discredited, causing him great embarrassment and, ultimately, ending his career (1). This event mirrors Chubb’s life, in that he too gives his editor David Weiss, a character referred to as “a man of letters”, “fraudulent poetry which had destroyed his life” (Carey, *My Life as a Fake* 31, 26). Seemingly, then, the narrative is fundamentally concerned with writing, history, recording and “artistic authenticity” (Snodgrass 173). This preoccupation with reading and writing signals Carey’s prime concern: the proximity between writing, discourse and the body. His exploration of the relationship between the body and discourse eventually enables the author to expose the detrimental ramifications of discursive control (facilitated by the discursively inscribed body) for subjectivity and authentic selfhood.

More precisely, Carey draws attention to the way in which discourse is inscribed on the body so as to foreground the subject’s implication in discourse, and eventually to undermine it. The relationship between his protagonists, Chubb and McCorkle, shows his overall concern clearly. He uses these characters in two important ways: first, to demonstrate the relationship between self and other, specifically in terms of the discursively implicated body, and secondly, to indicate how the discursively informed body disallows authentic selfhood.

Carey’s staging of the discourse–body association begins with Chubb’s creation of McCorkle. Being a writer, Chubb uses language, which the narrator feels stems “from the darkest recesses of [his] disturbed imagination” (Carey, *My Life as a Fake* 86), to create his fictional poet. In addition to the poetry, Chubb creates a photograph “patched together from three different men” (52) from pictures found in magazines. Eventually, McCorkle becomes famous and his “fantastic head, [and] huge powerful nose and cheekbones” are all publicly recognisable (52). After Chubb has “chopped him up and glued him” (52), McCorkle is made public and is given a life. Inexplicably, though, he materialises as a “bloody giant” (64). The “tethered beast”, or rather “wild man”, that Chubb creates suddenly intrudes on reality (84). Like Shelley’s Frankenstein, he is born of the poems that give him a name, an identity and, most importantly, subjectivity.

How McCorkle becomes a physical being is the underlying mystery of the novel and clearly indicates Carey’s concern with the body. Chubb creates McCorkle by thinking of him: the narrator explains that Chubb “imagined someone and he came into being” (100), and as such McCorkle originates from language and controlled imagination. He exists simply because Chubb

thought of him; he is given a subjectivity enabled entirely by Chubb's ability to imagine it. Moreover, McCorkle's being is enabled by the public's ability to recognise his subject position. In effect language, by outlining the space McCorkle should inhabit, enables him to have subjectivity. His subjectivity is publicly affirmed and communally understood.

Ostensibly, McCorkle is brought into existence by Chubb's mind; he is created by Chubb's discursively informed imagination, and his subject position is affirmed by its conventional reception. However, Carey makes sure to indicate the relationship between subjectivity and the body by giving McCorkle a physical presence. The fragmented photo, which serves as a symbol for the construction of his subjectivity, also represents the way in which discourse inscribes itself on the body. As Chubb glues the pieces of magazine pictures together, so the public inscribes certain discourses onto the representation of McCorkle's body. Finally, McCorkle's subjectivity mirrors the presentation of his body, as both are splintered and inauthentic, and moreover, created and informed by discourse. Once subjectivity is made visible on the body, the subject is maintained and implicated in discourse. For this reason, when McCorkle's subjectivity is verified by the public's reception of his poetry, and his picture facilitates an inscription of that subjectivity onto the representation of a body, McCorkle appears as a physical being. Importantly, therefore, it is the conventional nature of his subjectivity, which is staged by his represented body, that constrains his authentic selfhood.

Furthermore, the formation of his subjectivity, and the inscription of it on a represented body, draws attention to the way in which McCorkle is othered. The thought of him, inspired by Chubb's poetry and the description of his body, creates his subjectivity in the minds of his readers. Their own subjectivity is set against his and so the self/other binary comes into existence. Language creates subjectivity, inscribes it on the body and, finally, creates the other.

Carey draws attention to the link between subjectivity and the body. On the one hand, he suggests that it is necessary for subjectivity to inhabit a body. The self/other relationship which affirms subjectivity is strengthened by the existence of the body, for on it race, gender, sexuality and a myriad of other attributes contribute to the discursive inscription of the subject. On the other hand, Carey makes clear that the desire of the subject to inscribe discursive information on the other's body is essential because the subject must affirm his/her own body and subjectivity. The need for such an interaction, namely the discursive inscription of an other's body by the

self's, is made apparent once Chubb's audience, or rather the audience's response to Chubb's writing, actually brings McCorkle to life.

This relationship between the self and the other's bodies mirrors the desire of the self to understand the abject other. The other's body, or rather the unknown, is delineated and inscribed by the self. For McCorkle's subjectivity to affirm the subjectivity of Chubb and the reader, they must give him a body. They have to read him as a body with attributes different to theirs. By extension, they must other him, and can only do this if they define his body, erase the threat of the unknown and read him through discourse, or rather through their discursively directed subject-centred consciousness. Chubb himself does this, as is evident from Sarah's recollection of his description of McCorkle's body:

Although not technically a giant, he was very close to seven feet in height. Chubb had noted his strong Australian accent and had formed an impression of someone working-class, not well educated. His long-flowing hair, being also dark, served to accentuate his pale skin and his striking features, all of them distinguished by their individual size: strong chin, large prowed nose, prominent cheekbones, high forehead from which the mane of hair was brushed straight back. It was a powerful face – masculine, intelligent, and rather angry. (76)

This portrayal of McCorkle's body makes the reader aware of specific physical attributes which McCorkle has, but also of his subjectivity because it is inscribed on his body. Importantly, his body is presented as grotesque. It deviates from the norm – it is not healthy and beautiful – and it reveals how McCorkle is approached throughout the text. He is provided with a body which resembles a "creature" and a "lunatic" (154, 76) – in fact McCorkle is actually referred to as "the other" later in the text (156). His othering enables Chubb to construct his own body as normal and therefore less grotesque. Accordingly, Chubb can maintain his own subjectivity by ensuring that McCorkle is othered.

As mentioned, McCorkle is created by discourse. He is the construction of thousands of readings informed by discourse, each validating the reader's own subjectivity by ascribing McCorkle's with various limiting attributes. Furthermore, the inscription of McCorkle's body with discourse coincides with the fashioning of his subjectivity. It is at this point, that is to say, where McCorkle's body is made apparent as an other, a "bloody horror" and a "bastard" (100,

101), that Carey exposes how discourse seeks to define the abject. Simultaneously, he draws attention to the reader's implication in discourse and his/her proliferation of it.

In Carey's text, the abject is an invaluable part of exploring the discursive inscription of the body and its ramifications for authentic selfhood. The author positions McCorkle as the abject so as to draw attention to his creation by Chubb, the impulse for his creation and the damage done by it. First, the threat that McCorkle embodies is the product of Chubb's own thought and therefore subject-centred consciousness. As such, discourse, embodied by Chubb and utilised by him, creates McCorkle. By implication that which threatens to destroy his life, or more precisely his subjectivity, is produced by his discursively mediated consciousness. Secondly, Chubb tries to curb this threat by defining and controlling McCorkle. When Chubb tells Sarah McCorkle's story, his desire to categorise McCorkle in discourse becomes apparent. However, Chubb's need to speak of McCorkle becomes something he is ultimately indentured to, and in telling McCorkle's story he becomes a "[slave] to that damned creature" (248). His account is a tireless attempt to limit the threat constituted by McCorkle by seeking to understand him better. However, his only means of doing this is discourse, as he can escape neither his subject-centred consciousness nor his body. This is problematic, as Chubb must therefore read McCorkle through a predetermined discursive structure that will always limit them. Experiencing the abject in any authentic sense is impossible here. Chubb's ceaseless attempt to do so, to understand and define McCorkle, is a futile activity which eventually sees him coming undone and limiting his authentic selfhood still further (103). Moreover, McCorkle remains a constant threat. Chubb's attempted narration of him, as well as his discursively informed reading of his body, inevitably prevents an accurate understanding of him. Not being able to apprehend McCorkle increasingly restrains Chubb from approaching authenticity. By indicating how Chubb's authenticity is constrained in his attempted apprehension of McCorkle (the embodiment of the abject), Carey is able to demonstrate the problematic way in which the subject approaches the abject.

The abject, then, is constantly deferred by a predetermined discursive reading of the other's body, and therefore the subject fails to understand it. Moreover, as Chubb reads McCorkle's body and tells his story, thereby investing it with a specific discursive meaning, he limits his own subjectivity with discourse. Invariably, his discursively informed reading of the abject engenders his controlled subject position. Chubb becomes increasingly removed from

authentic selfhood, as each attempt at understanding the abject leads only to predetermined knowledge. He wanders into McCorkle's "dark" abject world which consists of "foetid odours of gutters", and finally loses himself, becoming an "oily, ragged figure" (117). Sarah explains that to her "he seemed a soul in hell, like a prisoner turning the capstan in the drowning room, forever indentured to something to which he himself had given birth" (123). As though aware of his own predicament, Chubb comments: "You see what has become of me" (123). Finally, he dies. What Carey seems to suggest through his description of the constant attempt at defining the abject by using discursive structures ensures that the possibility of authentic selfhood eventually perishes.

Another reading of Chubb's death suggests itself, though. If, as explained above, Chubb is driven by his discursive construction to define the abject, that is, McCorkle, then the point at which McCorkle and his body disappear signifies the end of Chubb's subjectivity and *his* body. As much is implicit in his following words to Sarah on his separation from McCorkle, shortly before his death:

You might think I would now feel free at least. I could lie in bed without fear the monster was about to creep into the room, yet in truth he had become a part of me. After all, he had shaped my life, stolen my heart, cramped my fingers, made me a homeless traveller when I had never wished to leave my street. (255)

Soon after, Chubb says that he needed McCorkle, that he was his life and that "the more damn vile he was, the better it suited [him]" (259). Because his consciousness is subject-centred, Chubb requires the existence of McCorkle to validate himself and his body. He creates McCorkle, that is, the abject, to maintain his subjectivity. Tellingly, in this regard, the protagonist's death follows McCorkle's disappearance. Once McCorkle is gone, Chubb can no longer validate and maintain his discursively inscribed subjectivity. Furthermore, it is not only McCorkle's subjectivity that disappears but also the descriptions of his body. This is important because McCorkle is the abject, and his body presents a site on which Chubb can inscribe discourse. When that site no longer exists, Chubb cannot read McCorkle and, by association, himself. The self/other binary is destroyed and neither subjectivity can remain. Before his death, McCorkle tells Chubb "we are one, you and I" (262), and it is this which draws attention to precisely how, having given birth to the abject, the subject is eternally indentured to it and is constantly denied authentic selfhood.

In the novel, McCorkle is made a symbol for the abject. Through him, the author stages the subject's continual desire to know what is essentially unknowable in language. By making apparent the subject's desire to define the abject, the author is able to foreground the reader's own subjectivity. Once the reader is made aware of his/her own implication in discourse, Carey can expose the relationship between reading, writing, the abject and the reader's approach of the text. Chubb's death heralds this undertaking.

Once McCorkle and Chubb's bodies disappear from the text, Carey focuses on the reader. The final chapter of the novel stages the reader's relationship with the characters and their bodies. Because the text describes these bodies in detail, the reader immediately associates the characters with their appearances. In other words, the reader locates them in specific subject positions using the descriptions of their bodies. By conceiving of the characters as subjects based on the discursive information provided about their bodies, the reader mimics the way in which McCorkle's audience, that is their response to Chubb's writing of him, brings him to life. As such, once McCorkle and Chubb's virtual bodies disappear from the text, he/she cannot identify them anymore. The characters lose their subjectivity when the descriptions of their bodies disappear, and the reader is incapable of understanding them. Once this happens, the reader too is unable to other the characters. As he/she others McCorkle and Chubb, he/she others their bodies, and thereby affirms his/her own subjectivity. The disappearance of Carey's protagonists, and, by association, the descriptions of their bodies, means that the reader is momentarily denied validating his/her subjectivity.

Furthermore, Sarah ends her narration shortly after the death of Chubb, which implies that her own telling of the story enables McCorkle and Chubb to come alive. In effect, her narration enables the subjectivity of both these characters, and once it stops, they die. Again, the manner in which the text is read is here mirrored. Once the characters are no longer read by the reader, that is, written by him/her much as Sarah writes them, they disappear. Through this mirroring strategy, Carey thus indicates how, just as Chubb and the public read McCorkle, so too the reader of his text brings to life its characters. Chubb's reading of McCorkle is mirrored in the reader's reading of Chubb, in that his character is othered by the reader and is limited by those qualities ascribed to him, and to his fictional body, by him/her. Carey seems to suggest that a reading of his characters is akin to a writing of them. When the reader becomes aware that he/she

is limiting the characters (as Chubb restricts McCorkle), the discursively mediated nature of reading is exposed.

Carey's preoccupation with subjectivity and writing emerges in his attempts to frustrate the reader's expectations. A completion of Sarah's story suggests that Chubb will finally be able to exorcise McCorkle from his life. Because Chubb is so eager to relate his story, one senses that its completion would set Chubb's madman and himself free. Carey does not allow this, though, and instead 'kills' them both off. I believe the author does this for a number of important reasons. First, he engenders an awareness of the reader's own discursively constructed subjectivity. Since the reader expects Chubb to free himself of McCorkle, that is, to exorcise him from his thoughts, the death of the protagonists startles him/her. The reader's confusion is caused by the author's rendering of freedom as ambiguous. Of course, Chubb *is* free of McCorkle, but not in the way the reader expected him to be. He/She is forced to look at the concept of freedom differently from how he/she expected to encounter it in the text, because the characters (and the description of their bodies) are gone. Finally, the preconceptions with which he/she approached the text and the presentation of their bodies are undermined.

Essentially, how the novel is read determines how much the reader is able to understand. In Carey's text, he/she realises that certain information, such as descriptions of bodies in the text, has led him/her to read the narrative in a particular way. In other words, the reader is made aware that he/she is located in discourse and that his/her subjectivity is inscribed and located by it. Accordingly, the efficacy and validity of subject-centred consciousness becomes a concern. The reader begins to understand that he/she had read the discursive information in such a way as to constrain the authenticity of the narrative. Hence, the discursive implication of the reader is made apparent to him/her, and this disorientating realisation allows Carey to intimate an approach of authentic selfhood.

Furthermore, the reader's awareness that he/she has written and restricted the characters by approaching them from a particular subject position problematises the nature of his/her writing. If the reader wrote the characters, and if they do not conform to that reading, then the reading itself is predetermined and limited, and the reader, from whose subject-centred consciousness the reading stems, is similarly so. Moreover, Carey suggests that the reader, in reading the text from his/her discursive position, constantly assimilates discursive information. Discourse exercises power over him/her. Ultimately, as in *Oscar and Lucinda*, by frustrating the

predetermined expectations of the reader, and by drawing attention to the mediated nature of reading, Carey foregrounds the subject's implication in discourse and intimates the possibility of undermining his/her discursively informed subjectivity.

Carey attempts to make the reader's approach of the text parallel Chubb's attempt at defining the abject. Just as McCorkle is seen by Chubb as a "monster" and a "tethered beast, a wild man inside a cage" (83, 84), or "the bastard [. . .] hiding in the dark" (101), so too the text that the reader approaches becomes an unknown, abject space. The narrative is as yet unknown, and in reading it the reader tries to make sense of it. Once he/she becomes aware of his/her implication in discourse, he/she understands that the text is the abject and its authenticity will remain unknown if approached from that location in discourse.

Because the reader is implicated in discourse and approaches it from a particular subject position, he/she continually fails to understand the text. Moreover, his/her subject-centred consciousness ensures that the abject, or unknown, exists. McCorkle is created by Chubb and is part of him, and similarly, the reader's subjectivity facilitates the existence of the text but nonetheless denies an understanding of it. The abject, which is created by subject-centred consciousness, must remain obscure because it validates language and therefore subjectivity. Both McCorkle and the text are the abject, foreign to their creators but no less a part of them, in that Chubb fashions McCorkle and the reader's subject-centred consciousness enables the text. Discourse suggests that the narrative is that which is unknown and which the reader needs to define in order to validate his/her subjectivity. However, the story is also fabricated by that which informs his/her subject-centred consciousness – language – which seeks to define that which it has already known.

In the same way that Sarah's telling of McCorkle's story is "a vain attempt to establish the true nature of [that] gigantic man" (86), the reading of the text is the futile attempt at defining what lies beyond language, as it is mediated by linguistic systems. Like Chubb who fails to understand McCorkle, the reader is precluded from grasping the true meaning of the text because his/her reading is enabled by language. His/Her subject-centred consciousness actually restricts him/her from reaching such an understanding. In reading the text from a position in discourse, the reader assimilates discourse and constricts the possibility of his/her authentic selfhood. Both the characters in the text and the reader are therefore constrained, and they are denied even the possibility of authenticity. By using the relationship between Chubb and McCorkle to stage the

reader's relationship with the text, Carey suggests that the act of reading restricts the reader, character and author alike. All become subject to discourse and are increasingly limited.

What is more, the readers write the characters from a particular subject position. Chubb and McCorkle are othered so that the reader's subjectivity and discursively constructed body are validated. Once Carey's protagonists die and their bodies disappear, the reader is disorientated: the lack of a body means that he/she can no longer affirm and engender his/her discursive subjectivity or body. The binary opposition necessary for subjectivity dissolves. In effect, in so far as Chubb and McCorkle die, so too the reader dies – his/her body can no longer interact with the representation of the characters' bodies in the text. Essentially, the reader cannot read those bodies and, as such, can no longer read himself/herself.

Again, the death of the protagonists and the disappearance of descriptions relating to their bodies are important. As outlined, the reader can no longer understand McCorkle and Chubb, and this is because the representation of their bodies no longer informs their subjectivity. Consequently, the reader is incapable of validating his/her own subjectivity or discursively inscribed body and he/she is cast into the confusion discussed earlier. He/She realises that his/her subjectivity is dependent on a discursively informed interaction with the description of the other's body, and it is here that Carey is able to intimate a circumvention of the discursively located body. He is able to suggest the possibility of authentic selfhood by drawing attention to the reader's implication in discourse. Thus he challenges Sarah's assertion that "there [is] no escaping either the teller or the tale" (81).

At this point Carey charges the reader with the responsibility of understanding the ways in which reading, writing and the discursively informed body relate to one another and subjectivity. The reader is awakened to the notion that his/her discursively constructed subject-centred consciousness predetermines a reading of the other's body and subjectivity, and that this negates both self and other. For a moment, the reader, by being aware of his/her discursive mediation, is able to sense the possibility of authentic selfhood. And though he/she cannot permanently inhabit such a state, he/she may attain it temporarily in that the power dynamic which underlies the self/other binary fabricated by language is momentarily undermined. Self and other are briefly freed from discursive control. Carey thus requires the reader to respond to the text with a certain responsibility. Having been made aware of his/her construction and the way in which he/she approaches the other, specifically in terms of his/her body, the reader is

capable of (and should aim to grasp) an informed reading, the nature of which may promote, at least in part, authentic selfhood.

To conclude, Carey's ingenious novel *My Life as a Fake* stages the problematic relationship between subjectivity and the body. In doing so, the text highlights the complex nature of writing and reading, especially with regard to the construction of the other. By revealing the subject's desire to define the abject, and thereafter by manipulating discourse and frustrating the predetermined expectations of the reader, Carey is able to draw attention to the reader's own subjectivity. As such, he foregrounds the way in which the reader is read and written and, finally, the way in which he/she writes others. This places the reader in a position that may circumvent discursive control, albeit momentarily. Carey thus manipulates discourse in order to undermine its control of the subject, and in the process intimates the possibility of authentic selfhood. He does what Chubb is incapable of doing: he evades discursive control. The following words of Chubb seem to reflect Carey's own desire to approach authenticity:

Think what you like. I set out to prove the truth. These people had become so hooked on the latest fashion. No substance. Action only. The truth was dead or rotting. There had been a complete decay of meaning and craftsmanship in poetry.
(40)

Immortality

Like *My Life as a Fake*, Kundera's *Immortality* is concerned with the discursively inscribed body and its relation to subjectivity. Both texts foreground discourse's control of the body in order to undermine it. Importantly, each narrative draws attention to the abject to achieve this. But in contrast to Carey, who focuses on writing to expose and manipulate discourse, Kundera turns his attention to beauty and eroticism. Nevertheless, these authors both stage the subject's desire to define the abject, and therefore they share a preoccupation with the abject and its attempted apprehension by the subject. Moreover, Kundera also draws attention to the reader's interaction with the text, which heightens his/her awareness of his/her constructed subjectivity and, ultimately, his/her responsibility both in terms of reading and writing the text, and in inscribing the subjectivity of the other. In my opinion, the novelist is able to intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood by forcing the reader to recognise his/her own discursive construction. This

awareness is achieved by manipulating discourse in order to undermine its power over the subject.

Immortality's narrator identifies himself as Kundera, thereby conflating author with character. In the text, he investigates how and why he creates his characters. At one point, the narrator explains that he is "trying to grasp the *Grund* hidden at the bottom of each of [his] characters and [is] convinced more and more that it has the nature of a metaphor" (*Immortality* 265). '*Grund*' is the German term for "reason", "basis" and "ground" (265). As he introduces his characters, Kundera offers insight into their construction, while outlining his desires for each of their personalities. The novel's plot is fairly uncomplicated. It tells the story of Agnes, a married woman whose sister, Laura, has an affair with her husband. Eventually, Agnes dies and the story comes to an end. Dispersed throughout the narrative there are also various sub-narratives dealing with the lives of characters unrelated to Agnes, and whose names – Goethe, Salvador Dali, and Rilke, for example – point towards a myriad of subtexts. The entire story is told, however, by a single narrator who the reader is led to believe is Kundera himself. Interestingly, the characters seem to embody most of the author's philosophical positions rather than enacting an extended narrative drama. And while this is perhaps no less compelling than an action-packed thriller, the novel is certainly different. As will be discussed, by using his characters as mouthpieces, Kundera draws attention to the proximity between writing, subjectivity and discourse. In my discussion, I focus on beauty and eroticism, which exemplify Kundera's concern with subjectivity, the abject and, finally, authentic selfhood.

As with Carey, Kundera makes his characters focus on the abject in order to establish a parallel between their interaction with it and that of the subject's own approach to it. The author does so to make the reader aware of his/her discursively imbued subjectivity, and this enables him to intimate a possible approach of authentic selfhood. He draws attention to the abject, first, through his text's sustained reflection on beauty, and secondly, through an exploration of eroticism.

The novel is largely concerned with the nature and construction of the idea of beauty, and how it is seen in and on the body. I believe that Kundera's intention is to indicate the relationship between beauty and the abject, and to make the subject aware of his/her location in discourse and the way in which it constrains his/her authenticity. The author investigates what beauty may be, especially with regard to the body, and suggests that it is largely a product of discourse. Due to

the communal nature of language, the acknowledgement of beauty is only possible if convention recognises it. In other words, for beauty to be so, it needs to be recognised, and that recognition, which is enabled by language, immediately denies authenticity. Beauty is necessarily conventional, as an understanding of it without language is impossible. In suggesting that beauty is created by discourse, Kundera undermines the word's definition.

Significantly, then, the body is for Kundera a site on which to inscribe beauty and thereby to proliferate conventional ideas about beauty which limit selfhood. In his text, gestures present the best example of how discourse informs ideas about beauty, because according to the narrator, they "use us as their instruments, as their bearers and incarnations" (8). Gestures, like discourse, inform the subject of his/her subject position, but most importantly they present the discursive ideal of what beauty may be, in that they display "the essence of [. . .] charm, independent of time" (8). For Kundera's narrator, gestures help to make the body beautiful, and for this reason they are discursive mediums.

Despite the divergent histories and backgrounds of Kundera's characters, these people perform the same gesture at one time or another, thereby indicating that language, which informs the subject-centred consciousnesses of all, also informs their gestures. Gestures illustrate clearly the way in which discourse is written on the body. Because they are conventional, they always fail to articulate individuality, and in fact "there are far fewer gestures in the world than there are individuals" (7). The way in which gestures that are imbued with discourse and convention are received by others determines and regulates their subjectivities. Kundera's narrator proposes that this "finding leads us to a shocking conclusion: a gesture is more individual than an individual" (8). According to him,

a gesture cannot be regarded as the expression of the individual, as his creation (because no individual is capable of creating a fully original gesture, belonging to nobody else), nor can it even be regarded as that person's instrument; on the contrary, it is gestures that use us as their instruments, as their bearers and incarnations. (8)

Because of their conventional nature, Kundera suggests that gestures are important in fabricating beauty. If gestures are suggested to be beautiful, their repetition makes the subject increasingly beautiful, at least conventionally, while the response by others affirms his/her subjectivity.

Furthermore, the other thereafter uses that gesture again, thereby proliferating discourse. Gestures restrict authentic selfhood due to their inherent conventionality.

Kundera, then, proposes that subjectivity is embodied – a public, conventional space – and, more specifically, the body performs a handful of conventional gestures which are received by others as the sum total of him/her. Essentially, Kundera questions what constitutes a beautiful body, how that body is recognised and whether it is fabricated. For him, if the body is limited to a series of conventional gestures, then the beautiful body, being informed by those gestures, is similarly conventional. As a result, convention has become beautiful and authenticity has become grotesque. The beautiful face, which lacks “individual essence” because it is formed by convention, denies authenticity: it “reflects neither character nor soul, nor what we call the self” (13). Kundera’s narrator names this “the individualism of our time” (34), by which he means that though one could “have two hundred and twenty-three faces side by side”, they are, in fact, “all just one face in many variations and that no such thing as an individual ever existed” (35). This face, which he calls the “serial number of the specimen” (13), is essential for subjectivity and integral in limiting authentic selfhood. Most notably, however, it is beautiful. What interests Kundera is precisely how we have reached a point at which beauty is manufactured; he is concerned with how conventional beauty has been so normalised as to colonise the body and alter subject positions. For him, the answer is to be found in the signs and features of modern life, in “imagology” (127).

Through ‘imagology’ gestures are created, distributed and ultimately woven into the fabric of subjectivity. Further, discourse manipulates and regulates those movements that are made by the body and which are, finally, assimilated by the subject so that he/she may be discursively controlled. In the opinion of Kundera’s narrator, imagology

finally let us put under one roof something that goes by so many names: advertising agencies; political campaign managers; designers who advertise the shape of everything from cars to gym equipment; fashion stylists; barbers; show-business stars dictating the norms of physical beauty that all branches of imagology obey. (127)

It seems then that imagology is, in essence, public. And crucially, in its aim to communicate certain discourses to the individual, and in the subject’s assimilation of that information, imagology is also the means by which the private is made public. As the subject incorporates the

discourse displayed by imagology, his/her private life becomes public and, in due course, the public reflects the private. Finally, the subject becomes incapable of knowing himself/herself or seeing his/her own image as separate from the public. Imagology offers imperatives for beauty, and as the subject conforms to them and is affirmed by the response of the other, he/she is increasingly controlled. The self/other binary is enacted by the discursively informed body as it tries to make itself beautiful.

For Kundera, the opposition between the subject and the other is first made apparent once they sight each other's bodies, as emerges from his narrator's question of whether there exists "another kind of direct contact between myself and their selves except through the mediation of the eyes" (143). The narrator also believes that "for us our own image is our greatest mystery" (140), as it is hidden alongside authentic selfhood. Imagology forces the individual to be implicated in discourse by inscribing itself on his/her body. He/She believes that the discourse inherent in imagology defines him/her, because when he/she makes "this opinion an attribute of [his/her] self, attacking it is like stabbing a part of [his/her] body" (136). The individual literally embodies discourse and his/her restriction from authenticity is facilitated by the conventionality of the beauty he/she displays. It becomes clear that it is

naive to believe that our image is only an illusion that conceals our selves, as the one true essence independent of the eyes of the world. The imagologues have revealed with cynical radicalism that the reverse is true: our self is the mere illusion, ungraspable, indescribable, misty, while the only reality, all too easily graspable and describable, is our image in the eyes of others. (143)

As such, imagology creates a beauty which seemingly eradicates the potential of authentic selfhood altogether.

Ultimately, then, the subject identifies with his/her gestures – those predetermined by imagology and discourse – and necessarily does so in order to maintain his/her subjectivity. The narrator feels that

without the faith that our face expresses our self, without that basic illusion, that arch-illusion, we cannot live or at least we cannot take life seriously. And it isn't enough for us to identify with ourselves, it is necessary to do so *passionately*, to the point of life and death. (14)

These sentences suggest that, as the subject inhabits his/her body, he/she performs his/her limited subject-centred consciousness so as to be recognised by the other, and so as to maintain his/her subjectivity. For as the narrator suggests, “that’s the only real life: to live in the thoughts of another [. . .] otherwise I am the living dead” (176). The subject assimilates limiting discursive information from the way his/her gestures are received by the other. In effect, he/she becomes more beautiful and begins to “[see] in his face the original blueprint drawn up by the designer of the prototype” (277). In other words, his/her subjectivity is regulated and increasingly controlled by the gaze of the other – by the way in which the other perceives his/her beauty. The subject “[accepts] as important whatever is accepted by others” (340), and this is inscribed on his/her body. Fundamentally, the subject’s gestures become more beautiful, and through his/her discursively constructed body he/she is additionally controlled. The narrator seems to propose that one comes to eternal trial, or rather a lasting separation from the possibility of authentic selfhood, not by arguments but “with [one’s] beauty” (238), that is, the conventionality of one’s physical attributes and behaviour (238).

According to Kundera’s narrator, beauty is a concern for various reasons, all of which relate directly to the problematic relationship between the subject and the object. First, he suggests that the beautiful mannerisms, shapes and movements of the body are learnt, and, what is more, taught by discourse. Therefore, in relating to his/her body, the subject immediately assimilates discourse and is controlled. Secondly, because discourse is written on the body, it is limited. Each gesture is informed by discourse, each movement becomes public property, and the body becomes conventional. One of Kundera’s characters explains that “she knew that looks were like weights that pressed her down to the ground, or like kisses that sucked her strength; that looks were needles that etched the wrinkles in her face” (30). Everything about the body is made visible and becomes predetermined in discourse, and the subject himself/herself unwittingly surrenders his/her private life. When the private is public, there is “nowhere to hide” and “everyone is at the mercy of everyone else” (33). Convention, as well as subject-centred consciousness, which is written on the body, ensures that “the eye of one has been replaced by the eye of all” (33). Importantly, because the subject assimilates information from his/her body, the increasingly public, beautiful body facilitates a strengthening of discursive control. Discourse constantly limits subjectivity, and the predetermined, communally accessible body displays those restrictions.

Significantly, these limits also delineate that which lies beyond them, or rather the abject is outlined because discourse is inscribed on the body. Subjectivity is made beautiful, while what lies beyond, or rather that which is not controlled by discourse, is made ugly and is to be avoided. For the subject to approach the excess beyond language, he/she must risk his/her subjectivity by escaping his/her body and conventional beauty. The narrator's description of the protagonist tells of the tension between authentic selfhood and beauty:

[He was] afraid of all eccentricity even though it also strongly attracted him, and when he committed some eccentricity he subsequently tried to trim it down so as to keep it within the bounds of that sunny equanimity which he sometimes identified with beauty. (81)

It seems that as discourse creates beauty and inscribes it on the body, it limits subjectivity and controls the subject by disallowing an understanding of what lies beyond his/her body. Simultaneously, however, discourse demands an approach of the abject, so as to engender discursive beauty and, by association, discursive control.

Because the abject is predetermined by language and inscribed on the body, any movement towards it, or indeed any experience of it, is also fundamentally predetermined and made public. That is to say, the subject cannot experience the abject without utilising his/her subject-centred consciousness, and in fact the abject cannot be recognised as such without language and discursive convention. The subject must articulate it either through the body or through his/her subject-centred consciousness, thereby immediately negating authentic selfhood and placing it back within the power of discourse. By using the body in this way, discourse ensures that the abject is constantly written and rewritten so as to test discursive boundaries, reinforce them and engender discursive control. Kundera's novel indicates that the body functions as a means of proliferating discursive control, and it is, in terms of beauty and the abject, one of the most visible discursive sites.

Whereas Kundera uses beauty to make visible discursive control of the body and subjectivity, he uses eroticism and sexual intercourse to show how the body attempts to explore the abject, and thereafter tries to write it using discourse. If love is the projection of qualities of the self onto the other, as discussed in the previous chapter, then for Kundera sexuality becomes the means by which to inscribe those qualities onto the body of the other. Discourse received

from the self as he/she loves the other is written on the other's body. According to the author, this inscription is often facilitated by sex. The narrator makes clear the connection between love, the body and sexuality when he describes Laura's opinion of love. He says that for her

loving somebody meant delivering to him one's body as a gift; delivering it the way she had a white piano delivered to her sister; putting it in the middle of the house: here I am, here are my one hundred and twenty-five pounds, my flesh, my bones, they are for you and I will leave them with you. She regarded such a gift as an erotic gesture, because for her the body was sexual not only during exceptional moments of excitement, but as I said earlier, it was sexual from the very start, *a priori*, continuously and in its entirety, with its surface and insides, asleep or wide-awake or dead. (178)

Ostensibly, sexuality is a medium for approaching the other's body – that is, for inscribing on it discursive qualities which inhibit and control him/her because, as Nancy Hartsock explains,

we should understand sexuality not as an essence or set of properties defining an individual or as a set of drives or needs (especially genital) of an individual. Rather, we should understand sexuality as culturally and historically defined and constructed. [. . .] Rather, sexuality must be understood as a series of cultural and social practices, meanings, and institutions that both structure and are in turn structured by social relations more generally. (252)

In this understanding, sexuality is used as a means to engender discursive power, because it is regulated by convention, assimilated by the subject and, finally, performed by his/her body. Eroticism is a way in which discourse aims to approach not only the body in discourse, but also the abject created by it. What lies beyond discourse may perhaps be encountered through intercourse. The narrator suggests as much when he says that “erotic adventures would lead [. . .] straight to the heart of life, a full, real, rich and mysterious life” (Kundera, *Immortality* 350). For him, the abject created by the body enables a “certain undefined and undefinable excitement about which [one is] loth to talk” (188). Erotic acts, or rather sexual intercourse, seem to cross a boundary which is a physical manifestation of the “border of love” (204), or the unknown space of the other. In this conception, sexuality is an “erotic battlefield” which lures the subject's body towards the mysterious other, since his/her bodily desire mimics the nature of his/her subject-centred consciousness (186).

Seeking to define the other, particularly in erotic acts, requires the subject to deviate from the norm. In order for the subject to attempt an understanding of the other, he/she needs to extend the limits of his/her subject position. However, because the subject cannot escape his/her subject-centred consciousness, the attempt must proceed through discourse. Though considered deviant, irregular erotic acts are still discursively informed. Kundera indicates that imagology instructs eroticism, as emerges from the narrator's assertion that "society continually restocks the market of indecent fantasies and facilitates their distribution and circulation" (309). As such, imagology suggests that eroticism offers a way to approach that which lies beyond it, but in reality it merely inscribes the other's body with what is public and conventional. Accordingly, the other is controlled.

What concerns Kundera is precisely how that other body is explored, and interpreted and inscribed. Eroticism, like beauty, is implicated in discourse and is therefore conventional. As the narrator stresses, "one and the same stream runs through all men and women, a single common river of erotic fantasies" (310). What is learnt from discourses in the public world is inscribed on the public body and, during intercourse, maintains the boundaries or "border" of what is permissible (116). Deviant eroticism, then, prescribes how the subject explores what lies beyond his/her subject position. Georges Bataille suggests that deviance or "obscenity is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognised and stable individuality" (18). As the subject aims to explore the obscene – that which lies beyond discourse – so he/she attempts to understand the unknown, thus risking his/her subjectivity, but finally simply reiterating discourse.

While eroticism may be seen as a medium whereby an advance on the unknown embodied in the other is made possible, the manner in which that approach is informed is problematic. First, as noted, the abject embodied by the other is always predetermined and apprehended from a subject-centred position. Thus, the other's body is already negated, and the unknown therefore remains unarticulated. Secondly, because the other is explored, his/her body is subject to discursive control. Discursive power is proliferated by the self's body, and for Foucault,

the individual [. . .] is not the *vis-à-vis* of power; it is [. . .] one of its prime effects. The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle. ("Disciplinary Power and Subjection" 234)

As such, the self approaches the other from a position of discursive power and, because his/her body cannot be evaded, must always do so from a public, conventional and negating space. The other is only read through discourse. Thirdly, the other assimilates the information being inscribed on his/her body and thus is himself/herself controlled. Essentially, eroticism functions as a means to extend discursive control by attempting to exceed its boundaries from a particular subject position. The abject is then rewritten using predetermined structures which deny its authenticity in a similar way to that in which the other's body is negated and is controlled by discourse when approached by the subject. Thereafter, the other assimilates that information, and authenticity is further removed from him/her. Here the idea of *la petite mort* is correct. For Bataille, "eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation" (16), and Kundera echoes this notion by indicating that erotic undertakings use the bodies of self and other to validate and engender discursive control, thus negating authentic selfhood.

The above concerns about beauty and the body are evident in the interactions of Kundera's characters. Their stories present a relationship with the abject that is defined by discursive control. By narrating their lives, the narrator is able to alert the reader to his/her own implication in discourse, and he does this mainly by drawing attention to the way in which the reader reads and writes the text. First, the author clearly stages the relationship between reader, writer and text, as he names his narrator Kundera. By suggesting that his narrator is himself, the author lays bare the manner in which he writes his characters, and how he fabricates their personalities, their sexualities and even the narrator's descriptions of their bodies. The suggestion that the narrator and the author share an identity ensures that Kundera can draw attention to the characters' determined natures and the way in which his own subjectivity informs them. Secondly, because the text is a philosophical inquiry into some of the author's deepest concerns, the characters demonstrate that we read them as his products, and that they are not authentic. His characters, created by his subject-centred consciousness, which is located in language and discourse, share the same structure as language itself. Because the reader is able to understand

his characters, this recognition, which proceeds from the reader's subject-centred consciousness, indicates authorial similarities between Kundera and him/her.

When reading about the protagonists, the reader is able to write them. Thus, the characters' subjectivity is shown to be limited by both reader and author, and their roles are shown to reflect one another in many ways. The conventional nature of reading and writing is foregrounded, and the reader is exposed as implicated in discourse and thereby continually informed by it. Both author and reader negate the characters in the novel, and constantly inscribe them with restricting subjectivity. This inscription transpires because the author and reader approach the characters from a specific location in language. What occurs is that language merely reiterates itself, and the narrative "could have been accepted and retold only because people (including, shamefully, even a novelist!) have lost all sense of reality" (Kundera, *Immortality* 232). That is to say, by approaching the characters from a particular subject position, they are able to tell a story, but because they are articulated through discourse they lose their own reality. The story is made possible because of the linguistic nature of subject-centred consciousness and, by association, the constraint of authentic selfhood.

Kundera furthermore almost writes the reader. He is aware of the reader's predetermined approach of his characters, and for this reason the reader is informed by the text, by discourse. Finally, he/she becomes a character himself/herself. The alignment of reader and author results in the discomfort of the reader, because he/she is made aware of his/her culpability. Attention is drawn to the role of the reader in determining the characters' story, and by association the way in which his/her subjectivity is informed.

Where the reader is made uncomfortable, he/she is informed of various concerns regarding the body, writing and subjectivity. The reader is made aware that as the text is read the characters are written, and that during this process their represented bodies become discursively informed. He/she is instructed that by using convention to understand the gestures of the characters, the reader also writes the limits of their beauty. The reader inscribes the limits of their subjectivities by approaching the descriptions of their bodies through discourse and limiting their gestures to performances of discursively constructed beauty. Moreover, as the reader encounters erotic episodes, so he/she reads them using a predetermined discursive approach. In other words, the reader is incapable of escaping the self/other binary and must therefore constantly interact

with the characters as other, making their beauty and sexual interactions public, discursively shaped and inauthentic.

The reader also writes the abject, just as Kundera does, from a specific subject-centred position. Once again, he/she uses what is predetermined to articulate the unknown, thus nullifying his/her unknown objective of approaching authenticity. Nothing authentic can be known in this manner. Reading, being informed by discourse, creates the abject, and thereafter writes it using recycled discursive information. It follows that the reader constantly negates himself/herself, just as the other is negated by him/her. Both self and other become increasingly controlled by discourse and dissociated from authentic selfhood.

Kundera's genius lies in his ability to manipulate discourse in order to circumvent its control and thereby to intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood. *Immortality* stages the discursive construction of its characters, its author and its reader so as to implicate the reader in the writing of the bodies of both himself/herself and the other. Once the reader is made aware of his/her construction, he/she is able to circumvent discursive control and possibly inhabit authentic selfhood, albeit briefly. Certainly, Kundera charges the reader with the responsibility of approaching the text differently, that is, from a more informed, more self-aware position. Thus, the text, which is a discursive medium itself, undermines its initial unconscious objective, namely, to extend, engender and validate discursive control.

In conclusion, Kundera focuses on beauty and eroticism to foreground the relationship between the body, the abject and the discursive control of the subject. Doing so enables him to draw attention to the location of the reader in language and discourse, to his/her negation of the other, and to his/her own invalidation of authentic selfhood. The author makes the reader aware that the body, in being inscribed by discourse, limits the subject and constantly determines him/her. As a result, the discursively informed body incarcerates the subject; this body suggests an "immortal trial" (91), an unrelenting isolation from authentic selfhood. By manipulating discourse, and by using it to undermine itself, Kundera is able to circumvent a return to discursive control and to intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood, albeit momentarily.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the body. It has outlined how the body mirrors the discursively determined nature of subject-centred consciousness. First, I discussed how inhibiting discursive boundaries are inscribed on the body and used for maintaining subjectivity. Secondly, I examined how the body physically delineates the binary between self/other, thus literally presenting the linguistic position of the subject. I have also suggested that the body is a site for presenting linguistic and discursive control and, therefore, a means of maintaining its influence over the subject. Moreover, I drew attention to how the body creates the abject and, given this, how the abject is approached from a particular discursive position.

I also provided a close reading of Carey's and Kundera's texts, each of which intimates the possibility of authentic selfhood. I proposed that these authors focus specifically on writing, beauty and eroticism to explore the relationship between subjectivity and the body. Finally, they indicate the relationship between these concerns and the abject. In doing so, they draw attention to the construction of subjectivity and its dialogue with the body. By undermining readerly expectations and aligning reading and writing, Carey and Kundera are also able to foreground, albeit uncomfortably, the nature of the reader's own subjectivity and body and, moreover, his/her failure to apprehend the abject. The subject's implication in discourse is exposed, and the reader is momentarily relieved of his/her subject position. Having been made aware of the discursively informed nature of his/her subjectivity and body, the reader is briefly extricated from linguistic power. Carey and Kundera manipulate discourse so as to undermine its control. They are thus able to intimate a brief escape from the discursively inscribed body, and suggest a momentary approach of authentic selfhood without falling prey to discursive control.

Chapter 3: **Madness, Death and the Possibility of Authentic Selfhood**

Introduction

Throughout this thesis, I have examined how Kundera and Carey intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood with the intention of outlining how they problematise two important concepts, namely, the imagination and the discursively inscribed body. Chapter One paid particular attention to the writers' exploration of the former concern, while Chapter Two discussed the authors' shared preoccupation with the latter. Both chapters aimed at exposing the way in which they manipulate discourse to undermine it. Accordingly, I indicated that by implicating the reader and revealing his/her own discursively informed subjectivity, they ingeniously release their audience from discursive control, albeit momentarily, thereby intimating the possibility of authentic selfhood. Given this focus, I have paid little attention to how subjectivity is affected when authentic selfhood is achieved. Though my Introduction discussed the concept of madness in some detail, I have yet to indicate precisely why this term is an important one. In this chapter, then, I examine these issues. By returning to the texts previously discussed, I aim to clarify the often complex associations between death, madness and the possibility of authentic selfhood.

Madness and Authentic Selfhood

In my Introduction I discussed the notion of madness, and began to explore the complex power dynamic inherent in the term. I suggested that for language, that is, the symbolic order, the term 'madness' functions as a key tool used by discourse to affirm and proliferate itself. Also, I demonstrated that madness is a linguistic construction, and that discourse manipulates the definition of insanity to regulate the limits of subjectivity and to control it. In brief, I suggested that linguistically constructed madness fundamentally precludes the possibility of experiencing authentic selfhood. In this chapter I elaborate on some of what has been mentioned so as to clarify my overall argument that language is itself madness.

Michel Foucault's *History of Madness* explores in detail the idea that, for centuries, "madness was appropriated by reason" (28). The notion that that which is in essence

ungovernable becomes the product of order forms part of my argument. The ‘reason’ to which Foucault refers is a “critical consciousness”, or rather a certain pride “awarded to critical reflection” (28), which began to take shape in the 16th century. This “rationalist thought” was directed at madness (28), and “the tragic experience of madness was hidden” by it (27). Hence, the “Renaissance humanism that resulted was not an expansion, but a restriction for mankind” (28). During this time, medical discourse in particular began to restrict subjectivity even further, because

madness becomes a form related to reason, or more precisely, madness and reason enter into a perpetually reversible relationship which implies that all madness has its own reason by which it is judged and mastered, and all reason has its madness in which it finds its own derisory truth. (29)

As explained in the Introduction, language appears to be a medium that can accurately define and categorise the world. However, as noted throughout Chapters One and Two, the conventional nature of language precludes this very possibility. Language can only misinterpret that which it names because it defers its authentic meaning. What language purports to do, namely, to apprehend objects and concepts accurately, is impossible because it only generalises the specificity of that which it names.

Significantly, it is because language perpetually elides that which it names that its existence is guaranteed. While language labels and specifies, it creates an excess beyond the definition it gives because of its conventional nature. The ungraspable space made by language, which remains continually out of reach of linguistic systems, ironically becomes an incentive for them. That unknown space, which exceeds language, and which is created by it, forces linguistic systems to seek it out eternally. Language is driven by an obsession to define the unknown. In addition, the excess of language threatens to destabilise the order of linguistic systems. Therefore, as language aims to define the unknown, it seeks to cordon off and control that which may destroy it, despite its inability to name it. Importantly, if language *could* define the unknown it would undermine the necessity of the activity of defining.

A tension exists between language’s desire to define the unknown and its inability to do so. It is this relentless, yet futile, pursuit which is madness. In its obsession with categorising, language is mad. Hence, the system that defines madness displays its own lunacy, and for

Shoshana Felman, “madness is nothing less than the question of thought” (206). In other words, reason and language create madness. Foucault’s ideas about civilisation could therefore be understood as a comment on language itself: “Civilization, in a general way, constitutes a milieu favorable to the development of madness. If the progress of knowledge dissipates error, it also has the effect of propagating a taste and even a mania for study” (*Madness and Civilization* 206). It is this mania for knowledge, which is the product of language, that becomes insatiable and which, ultimately, ensures that language evinces its own madness.

Because language makes its madness visible, madness itself forms a crucial part of my argument. On the one hand, clinical madness is perhaps the most telling site of discursive power born of language. This is primarily because clinical psychology, as argued in Chapter One, functions at the very border of language and its excess. The medical diagnosis and treatment of madness are implicated in language and discourse’s attempt to define the unknown. Hence, by observing medical practices pertaining to lunacy, one may note how discourse defines and quarantines deviance and threats. Yet language fails to quantify that which exceeds it accurately, and every new illness seemingly gives birth to ten others. On the other hand, the word ‘madness’, meaning that which is without reason, aptly describes language itself. In its doomed obsession with taxonomy, language is ultimately unreasonable and therefore mad. It is ironic, then, that language creates madness and names it, and in so doing becomes what it most fears. Language is mad because it is, as Felman explains of psychological madness, “blindness blind to itself” (206). Accordingly, madness is perhaps the most accurate way of understanding language because it is created and used by discourse, but also clarifies the very nature of linguistic systems. Language, or rather order and reason, is mad because it can never achieve what it purports to do, and yet fails to acknowledge this.

To clarify this point, it is important to return to a notion discussed earlier, namely, subject-centred consciousness, and its proximity to madness. As mentioned, when subject-centred consciousness comes into being, the individual necessarily becomes a subject. Ultimately, this means that he/she is informed, limited and controlled by discourse. In order to maintain subjectivity, so that the individual may interact with the world around him/her, he/she must subscribe to discursive determinants facilitated by language. The position the subject inhabits is problematic, because the subject is articulated through language and therefore embodies those qualities inherent in linguistic systems. One of the most problematic properties shared by the

subject is language's preoccupation with what lies beyond it. Linguistic systems focus both on what exists and on that which has not yet come into being. This preoccupation with the undefined space beyond language is precisely because the unknown threatens to destabilise linguistic structures. To safeguard its ordering principles, language projects itself into the unknown, or the future, so as to attempt a definition of the threat. Because the subject is informed by language, he/she epitomises this tendency, as is evident in his/her propensity to exist for the future rather than in the present moment. He/She is projected into the unknown by discourse, and thus seldom experiences the present. In fact, his/her subject-centred consciousness precludes an experience of the self in the present, as it eternally seeks that which is not yet defined. Because the subject is implicated in discourse, and is unable to experience authentic selfhood, he/she cannot know the present. A character in Kundera's *Immortality* explains that "he who doesn't exist cannot be present" (239). By implication, a lack of authenticity prevents the subject from inhabiting the current moment. As a result, the subject is continually plagued by a sense of loss. According to Kundera, this ongoing existential anxiety is a great tragedy. In *The Art of the Novel*, he observes that "there would seem to be nothing more obvious, more tangible, and palpable, than the present moment. And yet it eludes us completely. All the sadness of life lies in this fact" (14).

The possibility of authenticity is therefore denied by language, leaving the subject in a perpetual state of deferral, with his/her subject-centred consciousness forever seeking to exist in, and to lay claim to, an excess beyond it. Achieving this objective is, of course, impossible. It would seem that the subject, who is located by language, embodies madness. In forfeiting an experience of the present moment, he/she aims to inhabit a space of disorder, albeit with the intention of inscribing structure on it. The constant search for the excess of language translates into a perpetual restlessness. Such agitation contradicts the order which characterises subject-centred consciousness, which is part of the order of language, thereby evincing the madness of linguistic systems.

Importantly, however, because the subject cannot escape his/her subject-centred consciousness – exit from the order imposed on him/her by language – he/she cannot comprehend that he/she is mad. He/She must internalise discursive structures in order to safeguard his/her subjectivity, and in so doing precludes the possibility of discovering that these

structures inform him/her. The subject must approach even himself/herself from a specific, limiting subject position.

Carey and Kundera concentrate on the subject's location in language, and the ignorance it instils in him/her as to his/her predicament. As noted, both authors suggest that language itself is confining. In my opinion, they also indicate that language, despite its attempts to normalise its ordering structures, is fundamentally peculiar. Disorder precedes language, which therefore exists as that which disrupts the natural state of being. Ironically, order becomes madness and that which exists beyond it, or rather that which language has termed 'madness', is essentially normal. I propose that this state – the excess of language, which language nevertheless seeks to categorise – draws attention to precisely those qualities in that which attempts to define it. For the purposes of my thesis, I will refer to this state beyond language as 'authentic madness'. The possibility of authentic selfhood is to be found in authentic madness – that is, in the excess beyond discourse and order.

If the subject is informed by discourse and epitomises order, is it possible for him/her to inhabit authentic madness? In what follows, I argue that Carey and Kundera intimate the potential for authentic selfhood by drawing attention to the subject's organised madness, and in so doing establish disorder amidst order. Both novelists aim to foreground the inherent madness of the reader to disrupt discursive control and enable authentic madness within a linguistic framework. In the process, they suggest the possibility of authentic selfhood. Through a close reading of their texts, I explore the way in which they achieve their shared objective. Thereafter, I discuss the proximity of authentic selfhood to death. Finally, I examine the ramifications of inhabiting authentic madness and selfhood for the reader, author and characters.

Authentic Madness

As mentioned, Carey and Kundera foreground the reader's own subjectivity in order to intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood. While I have discussed the way in which these authors approach this objective, I have provided little detail on the nature of authentic selfhood itself. I indicated earlier that the texts disorientate the reader, and this leaves him/her in a position from which authentic madness and authentic selfhood may be approached. In what follows, I use the four texts by Carey and Kundera that I have thus far discussed to demonstrate precisely why the

position in which these novelists place their readers is akin to authentic madness. However, I refrain from attempting a description of authentic selfhood, as it is ultimately impossible to attain. Moreover, an exploration of the features of authentic madness would be redundant, as I would be perpetrating discursive violence. At a later stage in this chapter, though, I explore the connection between authentic madness and death, albeit from a position that is aware of its own discursive limitations.

Oscar and Lucinda

Oscar and Lucinda is perhaps the novel in which Carey's preoccupation with madness is most apparent. On the one hand, madness is a major theme in the novel – its protagonists are considered deviant, disorderly and mad. On the other hand, the text also problematises the very notion of madness, and the author manipulates discourse so as to draw attention to its own abnormality. The writer also implicates the reader in that aberration by focusing on his/her location in language, thereby drawing attention to the relationship between his/her consciousness and discourse itself. Essentially, Carey's narrative foregrounds madness in order to, first, subtly introduce his main theme; secondly, expose the order of discourse as a form of madness itself; and, finally, reveal the madness of the reader by indicating his/her position in discourse. Consequently, the reader is left bewildered and unable to order his/her subjectivity. He/She loses linguistic control of himself/herself. By extension, he/she becomes authentically mad – that is, inhabits a position of disorder within order – and is therefore presented with the possibility of authentic selfhood.

At the beginning of *Oscar and Lucinda*, the reader is alerted to Carey's interest in madness by the narrator's random and often vague interjections. Carey's narrator frequently makes opinionated statements, such as "there is nothing mad in this particular bit" (6), which are signals that, in due course, something mad will indeed occur. In addition, the novelist carefully introduces his text as one that is preoccupied with neatness, as noted in Chapter Two. For example, Oscar's father is described as being "quite specific" and paying "attention to the tiniest detail" (7), while Oscar's entire world is characterised by form, and ordered like his father's entries in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (5). Importantly, Carey juxtaposes this world of order with the formless, "fizzing" and "splintered" ocean (13). Oscar is "afraid of the sea", so much

so that it “smelt of death to him” (13). His reaction to the ocean stages discourse’s approach of the unknown, because that which exceeds it constantly threatens to interrupt it. Early in the text, then, the reader is introduced to an undercurrent of foreboding, as though the formlessness of the ocean threatens the order of Oscar’s life. This has the effect of creating a barrier between order and the disorder, or madness, which is to follow. The reader is made to expect some future tragedy which will “dislodge” the order and which is, finally, tantamount to madness (15).

In this way, the author is able to expose discourse’s inability to do what it claims to do. Later in the novel, the related fallibility of the reader’s own subject-centred consciousness is made apparent. The reader envisages the novel including madness as a theme because of specific discursive cues. In other words, Carey ensures that his text constantly points at an impending disruption, thereby predisposing the reader to approach the disruption in a certain way. In a sense, the reader’s reading is prescribed by the novel. He/She is led to approach whatever the madness might be from a predetermined position. When the author refrains from describing that madness, and from fulfilling the text’s prediction of its meaning, the implication is that discourse is incapable of comprehending it. Language cannot grasp that which exceeds it. Discourse fails, precisely because it approaches what is unknown through a structure which only reiterates what it already understands.

By staging discourse’s failure to enter into the unknown space of madness, Carey indicates that the reader, too, is incapable of doing so. He/She cannot comprehend the space Oscar enters, as the medium he/she uses in his/her attempt will always fail. Subject-centred consciousness is exposed as being informed and maintained by discourse, and thus is limited. Suddenly, the order which the reader relies on to approach the text is revealed as incapable of ever truly grasping its meaning. The inability of discourse to execute what it proposes to do is made clear, and it is thereby shown to be fallacious. Carey thus indicates that discursive systems ironically exemplify that which they define as mad. As such, the reader becomes, like Oscar, a “drowning man”, and is flung into a formless state akin to the ocean (387). In essence, the reader inhabits disorder in the midst of order, and therefore experiences authentic madness. He/She feels the same disorientation as Oscar, who thinks “I do not even know where I am” (391).

In sum, by introducing madness in the text, and by then thwarting the reader’s expectation that it will be described in a particular way, Carey is able to expose a certain irony. He indicates that the order suggested by discourse is itself abnormal and mad, as it cannot do what it

purports to do. The corollary is that the reader himself/herself is also mad, since he/she is implicated in discourse. This realisation unsettles the reader, and exposes him/her to what lies beyond discourse, letting in “the ancient enemy” just as the water is let into the glass church in which Oscar drowns (432). He/She is made aware of the fallibility of what informs him/her, and therefore experiences an authentic madness, which, momentarily at least, constitutes a form of authentic selfhood.

My Life as a Fake

My Life as a Fake is about madness as much as it is about authenticity. As noted, this text is concerned with notions of the abject and, ultimately, with that which is unknown and which exceeds discourse. In this respect it echoes the way in which Carey treats authentic madness in *Oscar and Lucinda*. Throughout the novel, madness is emphasised, as is evident from the frequent use of words and phrases such as “creature” (*My Life as a Fake* 52), “madman” (78) and “wild man” (84). Like *Oscar and Lucinda*, the text prompts the reader about how madness should be understood.

Hence the reader is informed of the way in which he/she is to conceive of the madness in the story. For instance, Sarah’s narration suggests how the reader is to understand the novel’s protagonists. She records Chubb’s story, and in the process her opinions become the reader’s. According to Sarah, Chubb and McCorkle are mad; she refers to the former as “mad as a bloody hatter” (81). The reader assimilates these judgements and therefore also approaches Carey’s protagonists as mad. And he/she expects a certain outcome in the plot just as Sarah does.

Of course, Carey dashes the expectations of the reader, and the madness he promises to describe is ultimately undermined. Both Chubb and McCorkle unexpectedly die, and the reader’s faith in discourse is challenged because his/her preconceptions are not validated. When the narrative abruptly ends both Sarah and the reader are left bewildered. Their expectation of madness, particularly of the way in which it will be presented, is dashed. One of the corollaries of this subversion is that discourse is yet again exposed as fallible in that it fails to explain the madness and thus articulate the unknown from within a predetermined framework. Sarah’s story is incapable of describing authentic madness, as her discursive knowledge is limited. Another implication is that the reader, like Sarah, is also denied access to the unknown, as his/her reading

is informed by Sarah's telling of the story. The discourse in Sarah's narrative ensures that the protagonists are read as mad, and once her narration ends, the reader is left lost because he/she has a preconceived idea of what that madness should be. He/She is made aware that his/her preconceptions are informed by discourse, and his/her confusion signals to him/her that his/her subject-centred consciousness is implicated in discourse and thus in order. The inability of discourse to articulate that which lies beyond it limits the reader, and he/she becomes aware of that limitation as well as of the madness inherent in his/her apprehension of the world. Again, disorder is made to exist within order, and here the reader experiences authentic madness and may approach authentic selfhood. Like Sarah at the end of the narrative, the reader suffers a "nervous breakdown" (272), in that he/she can no longer use discourse to apprehend the characters.

Carey's treatment of madness exposes the lunacy of discourse and language; and since it also shows that subject-centred consciousness is implicated in discourse, it follows that it exposes the madness of the subject himself/herself. In my opinion, Carey promotes an experience of disorder amidst order, and intimates the possibility of approaching authentic selfhood by forcing the reader to inhabit authentic madness.

Laughable Loves

Unlike Carey, Kundera does not make the notion of madness explicit in his novels. While Carey alludes to madness in the very plot of his texts so as to draw attention to the madness of discourse, Kundera focuses on the concept of uniformity and the madness therein. He draws attention to the restrictive conventionality of subjectivity, and this enables him to foreground the way in which discourse constantly and obsessively restrains the subject. By investing his novels with a sense of futility that he ensures his characters share, and by implicating the reader, he suggests the madness of language. In other words, by making visible the manner in which discourse inhibits freedom, and consequently happiness, Kundera likens language to madness. This paralleling is made apparent by his characters' frustration when they try to attain authenticity through the use of language. For example, Martin, a character in the chapter of *Laughable Loves* entitled "The Golden Apple of Eternal Desire", realises that the "political rhetoric and sophistries" of discourse are "all a futile game" (111, 116). Despite this awareness,

he knows that he must play this “self-deluding game” because it is the only available medium for attempting to gain authenticity (114). He will always fight the “great metaphysical battle against time and against those damnably narrow confines, within which [his] life cowers” using the system which instilled those parameters (116). Kundera thus draws attention to the madness of language by making clear its inability to do what it claims to do – to facilitate authenticity. His novels force the reader to confront the madness of his/her subject-centred consciousness by indicating how subjectivity restricts freedom and happiness. Like Carey, he ensures that his audience is disorientated, and placed in a position that enables him/her to be critical of his/her own subjectivity. In this disorderly state, where discourse no longer exercises power, the individual is seemingly freed from his/her negating subjectivity and inhabits authentic madness. Here, then, he/she is able to sense the possibility of an authentic selfhood.

As noted, Kundera’s characters generally lack personalities. For the most part they resemble each other, and often do not have names or distinctive characteristics. The landscapes and settings of the stories also frequently lack specific features. In *Laughable Loves*, the seven seemingly disconnected narratives evince the uniformity found in many of his other works. Surroundings are presented in vague, forgettable terms. For example, generic descriptions such as “small Czech town” (29), and “the spa town in which this story takes place is not large” (173), do not convey specific information about the narratives’ settings. Moreover, while some of the characters do have names, they are developed minimalistically and therefore lack unique features. In “Let the Old Dead Make Room for the Young Dead”, the characters are simply referred to as “he” and “she” (29). Effectively, the author’s minimalist descriptions of his protagonists and their surroundings suggest that they are merely mouthpieces for conveying his philosophical concerns.

Accordingly, the figures in *Laughable Loves* are validated only by their ability to communicate the novelist’s thematic concerns, and seemingly lack hope, wishes and desires of their own. In effect their ‘lives’ are futile. For this reason, the reader becomes aware of an underlying sense of hopelessness and, ultimately, unhappiness in his/her own life. Through his preoccupation with uniformity, Kundera purposefully engenders despondency in the reader, thereby drawing attention to his/her own subjectivity.

By making the reader share the discontent of the characters, Kundera alerts him/her to the way in which he/she understands and assimilates information from the text. In *Laughable*

Loves, he suggests that the reader is able to comprehend the philosophical debates engaged in by the largely superficial characters due to his/her discursively informed reading of the novel. Furthermore, by predisposing him/her to read in certain ways, Kundera exposes the fact that the reader writes the characters from a certain position in language, and thereby indicates that he/she is himself/herself authorial. Insofar as the characters are discursively restricted by Kundera, a reading of the information articulated by them ensures that the reader engenders their constraints. Kundera also suggests that the reader is simultaneously a character. After reading the text, the reader is able to retell the story. Importantly, however, he/she can only do so using the discourse provided by the text – his/her retelling is restricted by discourse as are the ‘lives’ of the characters in the novel. Hence the reader is exposed as a character himself/herself, and his/her situation is thereby likened to that of the characters.

Reader, author and characters are equally constrained by language and social convention. The reader realises, as a character in the chapter “Nobody Will Laugh” does, that he/she is informed and guided by discourse:

All at once I understood that it has only been my illusion that we ourselves saddle events and control their course. The truth is that they aren't *our* stories at all, that they are foisted upon us from somewhere *outside*; that in no way do they represent us; that we are not to blame for the queer path that they follow. They carry us away, since they are controlled by some *other* forces; no, I don't mean by supernatural forces, but by human forces, by the forces of those people who, when they unite, unfortunately still remain mutually alien. (88)

Subjectivity, then, precludes authenticity because of its conventional nature. As suggested, language's preoccupation with restricting authenticity is madness. So by drawing attention to the discursive implication of the subject, Kundera is able to expose his/her madness. The reader is cast asunder from his/her orderly subjectivity and is made to experience disorder. An experience of authentic madness is facilitated by ensuring that readers doubt the very nature of their subjectivity and, as such, circumvent the order imposed by their subject-centred consciousness, albeit briefly. Given that Kundera manipulates subjectivity in this way, he is able to suggest the possibility of approaching authentic selfhood.

In sum, *Laughable Loves* is characterised by uniformity, and this fosters a sense of unease in the reader. It also ensures that Kundera is able to liken the subjectivity of his reader to

that of his characters, thus indicating that the conventionality of the latter mirrors that of the former. The author implies that a sense of futility is engendered by discourse, and is a product of the madness inherent in language. He then demonstrates that, since the reader is constructed by discourse, he/she is similarly mad. The realisation of this by the reader promotes an experience of disorientation, and thus disorder, from within the ordered structure of language. Kundera enables an experience of authentic madness, and thereby intimates that it may be possible to approach authentic selfhood.

Immortality

Immortality differs from *Laughable Loves* in the way that it approaches the madness of language. In this text, Kundera seeks to foreground the frustration felt by his characters when they are confronted with the inability of language to facilitate authenticity. Whereas *Laughable Loves* engenders a sense of futility by indicating the conventional nature of subjectivity, *Immortality* tells of a struggle to conceive of and express individuality and possible authenticity. The former novel focuses on the unhappiness language causes, by depicting the characters as vehicles of discourse. Kundera suggests that language denies the possibility of authentic selfhood and is thus mad. In contrast, the latter text draws attention to the subject's continually misplaced faith in the ability of language to communicate authentic selfhood. Though the author still makes his characters mediums through which to voice his philosophical concerns, his objective seemingly shifts from seeking to stage the unhappiness language engenders to indicating the fallibility of language itself. *Immortality* exposes the notion that confidence in language's potential to facilitate possible authenticity is itself madness.

Throughout the text Kundera uses his characters to discuss the ways in which authenticity may be approached. From gestures and music, through to works of art and, finally, writing, he explores various creative outlets as modes with which to express the possibility of authentic selfhood. But the text never reaches a concrete conclusion and, consequently, the debates in the narrative do not provide any answers, nor do they state what authenticity may mean. Indeed, many of the discussions are about the art of musicians such as Beethoven, or conducted by characters sharing the names of famous writers such as Goethe and Hemingway. The quest for a means with which to express authenticity is thus facilitated by what precedes it – language – and

is therefore impossible to achieve. Any discussion pertaining to authenticity is rendered invalid and cannot achieve what it sets out to do. However, while Kundera does not succeed in communicating authenticity, he does something far more effective.

In denying the reader a reading of what authenticity may be, Kundera prompts him/her to discover what it may be. But like the characters in his novel, the reader can only make use of those structures inherited from discourse. That is to say, he/she has little choice but to attempt an approach of potential authenticity using a system which necessarily denies it. Like the characters, then, he/she is doomed to fail. In failing, the reader is made aware that language must approach what is possibly authentic from a position that is already known and which, ultimately, precludes authenticity. Moreover, he/she becomes aware that his/her own subjectivity is fallible because he/she uses information from the text in order to understand authenticity. Given that the text is discursively constructed, and that the reader assimilates the discourse inherent in it, his/her subjectivity is as ineffective as language in providing access to authentic selfhood.

The reader is thus once again made to doubt his/her subjectivity, thereby enabling Kundera to foreground the madness in language and, by association, in the reader who is positioned in and by language. At this point, he/she experiences disorder from within order and inhabits authentic madness. For Kundera's narrator, words such as 'madness' designate "an exaltation of feeling freed from censorship" (*Immortality* 234), and, having been freed from discourse, the reader inhabits this madness.

In sum, though Kundera does not explicitly state what authenticity may be, he achieves something far greater – he intimates a potential authentic selfhood by allowing the reader to apprehend the madness of his/her implication in discourse. Once this is achieved, the reader is dissociated from the order inherent in his/her subjectivity and encounters disorder, or rather authentic madness. From here he/she may perhaps approach something akin to authentic selfhood. By manipulating discourse, the author exposes its inherent madness, thus circumventing discursive control and ironically intimating his primary objective, which is the possibility of approaching authentic selfhood.

Both Kundera and Carey use madness in their novels to show how the qualities conventionally associated with this state are to be found in the system that defines it. They expose the madness of language so as to draw attention to the madness of subject-centred consciousness. When the reader is made aware of his/her implication in discourse and, by

association, of his/her madness, he/she is made to know disorder amidst order. Should they succeed in disorientating the reading subject, these two writers will have managed to intimate the possibility of approaching authentic selfhood. For this reason, madness is perhaps the best way of describing language, as its obsession with ordering principles always undermines its objective. Madness is arguably also the most useful tool with which to intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood.

Death and Authentic Selfhood

The possibility of authentic selfhood has been discussed in detail throughout this thesis. Each chapter explores how such a state is limited by discourse, and how Carey and Kundera intimate the possibility of attaining it. Each chapter concludes by suggesting that, if authentic selfhood exists, it does so beyond the limits of discourse. As the subject approaches authentic selfhood, his/her subject-centred consciousness is undermined. Though it would be counterintuitive to suggest a definition of the excess of language, or rather a description of precisely what authentic selfhood may entail, I propose that Carey's and Kundera's texts liken it to death. In what follows, I examine their comparison of death with authentic selfhood, consider how the texts draw attention to the correlation between the two concepts, and analyse what inhabiting such a position may mean for the author, characters and reader.

Death and Subject-Centred Consciousness

As indicated, subject-centred consciousness is informed by discourse, which is created by language. The subject is articulated through discourse and his/her subject position is predicated on his/her expression of discourse. He/She maintains his/her subjectivity by functioning from within discursive limitations while simultaneously engendering them for others. In Chapters One and Two, I suggested that discourse uses both the imagination and the body to exercise control over the subject – to enforce discursive limitations upon his/her selfhood. Moreover, the parameters set by discourse for the subject and his/her specific subject positions demarcate the ways in which he/she himself/herself is able to communicate. Straying beyond the discursive boundaries placed on subjectivity into authentic madness, for example, means that the subject

cannot articulate his/her subjectivity and thus his/her subject positions are lost. In essence, the subject loses his/her subjectivity and the positions he/she previously inhabited die. Authentic madness, or even possible authentic selfhood then is, as Lillian Feder suggests of madness, “the ultimate self-expression that is inevitably self-destructive” (xii).

Authentic madness, a potentially authentic selfhood and death are inextricably linked. Where the subject moves outside his/her subject-centred position by inhabiting that which lies beyond the parameters of his/her subjectivity set by discourse, he/she may gain authentic selfhood. This is largely because withdrawing from his/her subject position is a liberation from those discursive systems which enable the binary between self and other. The means by which to identify the self in opposition to the other – a process enabled by language – is removed. For this reason, the subject dies insofar as he/she is incapable of perceiving the difference between his/her consciousness and that of the other. In fact, the subject no longer employs his/her subject-centred consciousness to attempt differentiation at that point. Once he/she exceeds the boundaries placed on his/her subjectivity by discourse, the self/other binary disintegrates, his/her subjectivity dies and he/she may gain an authentic selfhood.

What occurs after the death of the subject, or rather once he/she inhabits potential authentic selfhood, is that having lost his/her subjectivity he/she does not think of himself/herself as a subject. He/She inhabits a position beyond language and thus does not utilise linguistic systems. Those subjects still functioning from within their discursive limitations now approach him/her as that which is unknown. Given this, he/she is othered by the subject in discourse. Language immediately apprehends the liberated individual as a threat, and ensures that he/she is defined and categorised accordingly. Finally, he/she is termed ‘mad’, as he/she embodies that which lacks order. Here one may note the inherent madness of language, as it seeks to ascribe ordering principles to that which is fundamentally disordered. Language can never apprehend the unknown, for it must continually return to its own conventional terminology. The irony is that, in defining madness, language exhibits insanity. In its inability to bring about what it claims to be able to do, namely to communicate the unknown, language is unreasonable and, as such, mad. Order is ultimately abnormal.

Seemingly, then, for the individual to inhabit possible authentic selfhood, subjectivity must die. Consciousness is no longer informed by discourse, is not subject-centred, and cannot be understood in language. It follows that the individual is relieved of the self/other binary

necessary for subjectivity. When this disintegration occurs, he/she cannot be a subject anymore and, in this sense, dies. By escaping language, he/she is able to inhabit what can only be termed ‘authentic selfhood’. Throughout this thesis, I have explored how Carey and Kundera intimate the possibility of approaching authentic selfhood. In the following section, I propose that their texts do so, without explicitly mentioning what inhabiting such a state may entail. Invariably, both authors focus on death in order to do so. The correlation is clear because subjectivity dies when an individual extricates himself/herself from language and thereby inhabits authentic selfhood. The unexpected instances of death in Carey’s and Kundera’s narratives, and the silence which follows them, draw attention to the fact that language is incapable of apprehending the individual who exists beyond subjectivity. Language and subject-centred consciousness fail to grasp what lies beyond death, and it is this which suggests that, for these two writers, death represents an entry into authentic selfhood. Moreover, because the reader, being located in discourse, cannot know what the protagonists experience after death, and because he/she is estranged from them once they die, he/she too is implicated in discourse. Though the characters are depicted as physically dying, their deaths may be read as the death of their subjectivity – that is, as their escaping the restrictions forced on their subjectivity by discourse. Carey and Kundera introduce death into their texts in order to suggest a beyond to language and discourse, and thereby to intimate authentic selfhood.

Oscar and Lucinda

As discussed in Chapter Two, Oscar’s death may be read as his escape from language. His drowning in the glass church can be interpreted either as his entrapment by language or as his release from discursive control. Though the text supports both readings, the latter clarifies Carey’s association of death with authentic selfhood.

Oscar’s death brings to the fore a number of concerns. It precedes silence – the reader is given no further information about him after he dies. He escapes from the narrative, and his withdrawal represents the subject’s exodus from language. When the “water rose into the church” (*Oscar and Lucinda* 431), and the “shining fragments of aquarium glass fell like snow” around Oscar (432), he loses his subjectivity. Similarly, when the subject dies, the unknown beyond language engulfs him/her, and the linguistic structures which maintained his/her subjectivity do

not inform him/her. Oscar meets his “ancient enemy” (432), the excess of language, and thereby attention is drawn to what occurs to the subject upon death. Lucinda vanishes from the text at the same time. Her “little cottage [is] deserted”, and we are told that she “was certainly no longer at Longnose Point” where she had resided (429). This means that Oscar’s death also signals the loss of his represented body, or more precisely Lucinda loses the ability to affirm her subjectivity in relation to the description of his body, hence her disappearance. Before his death, Oscar’s body is increasingly described in nebulous terms, for instance by being likened to “dragon-flies and wasps”, as well as “flying foxes” (431). When he dies, the reader has only these metaphors by which to read him. In other words, he/she cannot enter into the excess beyond discourse, because he/she remains a subject. He/She must use language to read Oscar, and consequently the representation of his body is lost. The reader is thus only able to guess at Oscar’s position beyond language. He/She can never know precisely where Oscar is, or accordingly where Lucinda may be.

For Carey, then, death is akin to authentic selfhood in various ways. When Oscar dies, the self/other binary which existed between him and Lucinda cannot be relied on. It disintegrates, and with its loss Lucinda is not able to affirm or articulate her subjectivity, and therefore she disappears from the text. At his death, Oscar metaphorically moves beyond the boundaries of language, and is released from the self/other binary. He is freed from language and can as such approach authentic selfhood. Importantly, when this binary disintegrates, the reader is incapable of understanding the protagonists. He/She cannot affirm his/her subjectivity by reading and inscribing discourse on Oscar or Lucinda. Accordingly, both characters and reader are freed from language. The former are freed from the text, while the latter is freed from subjectivity, and it follows that both are consequently afforded the opportunity of inhabiting authentic selfhood. Oscar and the reader lose their subjectivity because they cannot be validated. Through this loss self and other are finally united and, as Andrew Bowie explains, “the ultimate union” of self and other “requires the death of the subject” (69). With the forfeiture of the other, and therefore the death of subjectivity, authentic selfhood becomes possible, although it is not open to a subject acting in a realm of possibility. As mentioned, Oscar’s death silences representations of his body, and the reader can no longer affirm him/her own subjectivity by inscribing these representations with discourse. In this way, again, Oscar is released from the self/other binary which exists in language, thereby allowing him to inhabit authentic selfhood.

In this text, Carey suggests that authentic selfhood is a consequence of the death of the subject. Through this death, the individual extricates himself/herself from language and places himself/herself in a position that linguistic systems cannot know. The dissolution of subjectivity circumvents the self/other binary, and this may render authentic selfhood possible.

My Life as a Fake

My Life as a Fake is yet another text in which Carey uses death to suggest the possibility of authentic selfhood. As emerged in Chapter Two, the two protagonists eventually die, but their sudden ends suggest a freedom from discursive control. As in *Oscar and Lucinda*, their deaths signal a silence. When Sarah encounters Chubb's body, she "cannot describe the confusion in [her] mind" and the narration ends (Carey, *My Life as a Fake* 269). Moreover, after McCorkle dies, nothing more is heard of him. He vanishes from the text. No new descriptions of Chubb and McCorkle's bodies or information about them is provided.

This silence is important for a number of reasons. First, as in *Oscar and Lucinda*, there is a dissolution of the self/other binary which both protagonists use in order to affirm their subjectivity. Once McCorkle is dead, Chubb cannot validate his subjectivity by inscribing on his "creature" certain discourses (52), and Carey thus ensures that he too dies and leaves the text. When McCorkle says to Chubb, "we are one, you and I" (262), Carey draws attention to the self/other binary that exists between them. Thus, when one dies, the other does too. The self and other are no longer juxtaposed, and both protagonists move beyond the boundaries of language and approach authentic selfhood. Furthermore, Sarah ceases to write Chubb's story. His existence ensures that she is able to tell his story and, by association, affirm her own subjectivity. When he dies she thus cannot validate her subjectivity, and the narrative ends.

Moreover, descriptions of physical attributes cease, and again the reader is incapable of inscribing discourse on the representations of the characters' bodies. In fact Chubb's body is "dismembered" and the only thing that remains of it is the "blood that had coursed through his beating heart" diluted in a bowl of water (267, 270). The reader has no description of his body against which to pit his/her own and thus cannot affirm his/her subjectivity. His/her subject-centred consciousness cannot make the character an other, and the protagonist is thus once again freed of the self/other binary. Furthermore, the reader is also extricated from the opposition, in

effect ‘killing’ his/her subject-centred consciousness and, perhaps, allowing him/her to inhabit potential authentic selfhood.

Both *Oscar and Lucinda* and *My Life as a Fake* are marked by silence when the protagonists die. Because the reader is located in language, his/her inability to comprehend the space the protagonists inhabit after death indicates that, for Carey, authentic selfhood is only possible once subjectivity is lost. He suggests that neither reader, nor author nor the other characters can comprehend or interpret the deceased characters’ positions. Subject-centred consciousness, which is informed by discourse, must always approach death from a particular subject position and may therefore never understand it. This realisation leads to the momentary death of the reader’s own subject-centred consciousness, which enables him/her to escape linguistic inscription and, albeit fleetingly, gain authentic selfhood.

Laughable Loves

Like Carey, Kundera seems to equate death with authentic selfhood. His texts use death to draw attention to the dissolution of the reader’s subjectivity. Ultimately, he suggests that death and what lies beyond it cannot be understood, and that the subject loses his/her subjectivity once he/she ventures beyond his/her location in language and discourse. When the subject approaches and finally enters an authentic state, he/she is incapable of being understood and, in this sense, dies.

The narrative “Symposium” in *Laughable Loves* clarifies Kundera’s specific conception of death. In the text, a group of characters discuss “human worth” while on a break from work (Kundera, *Laughable Loves* 125). In the course of their debate, Alzhbeta, an intoxicated co-worker, begins to do a “striptease” (135), and thereafter goes to her apartment. Later, Havel, another character, finds her sprawled naked on her sofa while gas from the stove permeates the air. We find that she had tried to commit suicide, and after this the other characters analyse the meaning of her decision.

Kundera suggests that Alzhbeta’s attempted suicide is an effort to attain authentic selfhood, an implication that emerges from the characters’ conversation. Throughout their debate, the characters dissect Alzhbeta’s personality. In fact, her striptease suggests that she exposes herself to them. While the reader is told that their comments “question her in a fatherly way”

(134), some of these are premised on crude suppositions about her sexuality and naked body. Very little of Alzhbeta's own opinion is given and, as such, the reader can only approach her with biased information. He/She must understand the character from a specific discursive position, thereby negating and othering her. Hence, the reader treats Alzhbeta in the same manner as her colleagues do.

Throughout the story, Alzhbeta is treated to scornful looks by those around her (134). Their judgements of her body as well as her subjectivity restrict her subject position, and her interaction with others affirms the self/other binary necessary for discursive control. She is constrained by the way in which others apprehend her subjectivity and body. Due to this containment by discourse, her suicide attempt may be read as a struggle to escape the limitations placed on her by both her colleagues and the reader. Her desire for death is a yearning for freedom from the discursive inscription of her body and subject-centred consciousness, which is implicated in discourse. Kundera shows that her urge to die is, importantly, a longing to evade the discursive inscription imposed on her by others. She hopes to break free of her subjectivity and to find authentic selfhood. By having Alzhbeta literally try to take her own life, Kundera draws the reader's attention to the notion that the death of subjectivity enables authentic selfhood and therefore that approaching authentic selfhood entails evading language and discourse.

Interestingly, when Alzhbeta does not die, even more extensive descriptions of her body appear in the text. It is described as "magnificent", and "the remarkable fullness of her thighs" is related in detail (145). With this increase in descriptions, Alzhbeta's life is saved "beyond any doubt" (145). That is, when the details relating to her body become more comprehensive, her subjectivity is increasingly discursively controlled. The more discursively informed the descriptions of her body are, the more her restricting subjectivity is affirmed. Ultimately, she cannot escape discourse and accordingly her life, at least as a subject, is saved. The particularised description of her body also allows the other characters to safeguard their own subjectivity effectively when positioned relative to Alzhbeta's, and by association the reader is able to do the same. Therefore the self/other binary is reinstated and Alzhbeta fails to escape language as well as to attain authentic selfhood.

Immortality

Like *Laughable Loves*, *Immortality* is a text about death. More precisely, as its title suggests, it is a narrative about the avoidance thereof. As explained, the novel is preoccupied with the ways in which discourse is able to inform and direct subjectivity, particularly in terms of the body and sexuality. Kundera focuses on discourses which engender and maintain subjectivity to indicate how it makes the subject positions occupied by the individual virtually inescapable, and thus immortal.

Death is juxtaposed with the immortal state of the subject located in language, and occurs when subjectivity is lost. Kundera suggests this about death by, first, having one of his characters die, and secondly, making others converse in the afterlife. Agnes, the character who dies, is constricted by almost all aspects of her life: her marriage, her work and even her sister constantly limit her movement, thoughts and subjectivity. She is, as the narrator suggests, “at the mercy of everyone else” (Kundera, *Immortality* 33), including the reader, because the latter approaches her from a particular subject position. Her death may be interpreted as a release from these limiting factors and as a possible entry into authentic selfhood.

Unlike Kundera’s other narratives, *Immortality* gives voices to those characters who have already died, namely, Goethe and Hemingway, in order to demonstrate the linguistic compulsion to define death. More importantly, these characters tell of the failure of language in achieving its objective. When the reader encounters the dialogue between the two deceased characters, he/she does so from within language and, as such, uses discourse in order to understand it. Such an approach immediately loses the actual meaning of death and reflects pre-existing discourse rather than uncovering anything authentic.

Kundera’s texts reveal that death enables authentic selfhood by relieving the individual of his/her subjectivity. As *Immortality* suggests, the subject’s attempt at defining death – an authentic state beyond discourse – uses discourse, and as a result it cannot be known because death cannot be inhabited from within a subject position. This being the case, the fact that the death of subjectivity culminates in authentic selfhood is made clear.

For both authors, death is then tantamount to an experience of authentic selfhood. They also clearly suggest that authentic selfhood could never be articulated in language, just as death could never be understood from a particular subject position. Their texts use death to point

towards authentic selfhood. Importantly, neither author attempts to define it, and it is this which allows them to intimate an approach of that state. By avoiding a definition, they circumvent linguistic control and, instead of falling prey to discourse, shed light on the discursive implication of the subject. Finally, they make apparent the reader's lack of authenticity by introducing silence into the narratives, and they draw attention to the inability of the reader to understand the location of the characters after death, or rather their loss of subjectivity. He/She cannot enter the space of death and this confronts him/her with his/her limitation by discourse. In turn, this gives the reader the opportunity to approach what may be authentic selfhood.

Death, and the Author, Characters and Reader

As argued, Carey and Kundera suggest that, since the author, characters and reader are all implicated in discourse, each of them is read and consequently inscribed by it. The reader becomes the author when he/she writes the characters from a particular discursive position. However, he/she also becomes a character due to his/her performance of the discourse gained from the text. Moreover, the author is a reader of his audience, and in turn is interpreted by them, thus becoming a character himself. The categories of 'author', 'character' and 'reader' become interchangeable, as each party proliferates and writes discourse. For this reason, authentic selfhood, if entered into by one of them, must affect all.

There is, however, another way of understanding death. Throughout this chapter, I have explored how Carey and Kundera relate the death of subjectivity to authentic selfhood. What I have not discussed in detail here, but which has nonetheless been the foundation of my thesis, is the fact that subjectivity itself may be the death of authentic selfhood. Thus, where the death of subjectivity may lead to authentic selfhood, subjectivity is in fact the death of that state.

Given this, the implication of the reader, author and characters in language and discourse precludes the possibility of authentic selfhood. Essentially, the conventional nature of subject-centred consciousness means that they are located in discursive structures which constantly deny authenticity. The author's work is interpreted by readers who are themselves informed by discourse. As such, all readings fail to understand what the author may have intended. Catherine Belsey suggests that a narrative "depends on the existing conventions, thematic, generic, and linguistic" (201), and it is because of this that the text cannot be authentic. What is more,

according to Roland Barthes, “the author is never more than the instance writing” (145), and in this sense the reader conflates the text and author, and thereby negates him/her. Both the author and text are exposed to what Nico Carpentier calls a “multiplicity of identities” (188), all of which are informed by discourse and thus lack authenticity.

There is a disjunction between the intended meaning of the narrative and its reception. It follows that, if the author were to have authenticity, it could not be apprehended by the reader, as he/she approaches the text from within a particular position in language – a process Adrian Wilson terms “authorial deformation” (340). The author’s text cannot be a medium through which he/she is able to attain authentic selfhood, since the reception of his/her narrative is subject to convention. His/her identity is always subverted “by other identities” (Carpentier 188). In being misread, and identified with his/her work, the author’s authenticity dies. This is because he/she is at the mercy of convention. For Barthes, this loss of authenticity is a particular concern. He explains that “writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing” (142). In writing, he adds, “the author enters into his own death” (142), partly because the conventional reception of his/her texts denies him/her authenticity. The act of reading increasingly separates the author from authenticity. Simultaneously, the reader, who uses his/her subject-centred consciousness to interpret the text, is similarly negated, and thus denied authenticity.

What Carey and Kundera propose is an ironic escape from the death forced on the subject by his/her subject-centred consciousness, by precipitating the death of subjectivity. Through this death, the author gains authenticity, while the reader and characters are also able to approach authentic selfhood. Discourse no longer informs them, and they are released from subject-centred consciousness by an experience of authentic madness. Authentic madness extricates author, reader and characters from discourse, thereby facilitating an approach of authentic selfhood. By ingeniously manipulating discourse, Carey and Kundera instil disorder within the order of language, and thus provide a release from the discourse inherent in subject-centred consciousness.

Sustaining Authentic Selfhood

For Carey and Kundera, authentic selfhood is linked to the loss of subjectivity. Problematically, however, language facilitates a consciousness of self in the social world, and though it precludes authenticity it simultaneously allows the subject to conceive of what such a state may be. In other words, without language, authentic selfhood would be a state of nothingness. So, though I have shown that discursive regimes preclude authenticity, it is important to understand that the very conception of this state is only made possible by linguistic systems.

Therefore, a loss of subjectivity means that the individual outside language would not know that he/she was experiencing authentic selfhood. In Sebastian Faulks's *Human Traces*, a character called Tomas explains that "an awareness of ourselves" depends on "our development of language" (449). If this is so, a transcendence of language would eradicate an awareness of self and, accordingly, of authenticity. As such, the search for authenticity is enabled by a system which is incapable of providing it but nonetheless facilitates a conception of it. As mentioned in my Introduction, this predicament renders the subject anxious. He/She seeks to attain authenticity, but wishes to encounter it through language so as to be conscious of experiencing it, and this undermines his/her attempt, since language precludes an accurate definition of authenticity.

Yet if the individual remains outside language, authenticity could not be of concern to him/her. An inability to define authentic selfhood, or rather a state in which the individual is released from language, indicates that authentic selfhood cannot be sustained, at least not if the individual wishes to return to society. The individual who loses subjectivity permanently is aware neither of inhabiting authenticity nor of a need to communicate it. A subject who approaches him/her does so from a position in language, and thus fails to understand the location of an individual beyond linguistic control. Essentially, individuals lacking subjectivity are ostracised, othered and often referred to as mad.

Authentic selfhood, then, cannot be sustained if an individual is to return to his/her subject position. When he/she regains his/her subjectivity, authenticity escapes him/her because it cannot be articulated in language. This inability to speak of authenticity is thematised in the writing of Carey and Kundera. As suggested throughout my thesis, these authors tell of the

struggle to inhabit authenticity while remaining a subject capable of communicating himself/herself in the social world.

In *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera suggests that “a theme is an existential inquiry” (84), or rather a theme helps to explore the nature of the self. If this is so, the solution to the seemingly intractable problem of authenticity lies, once again, in Carey’s and Kundera’s use and thematisation of madness. Earlier, I indicated that these writers suggest the madness of language because it fails to provide accurate definitions, despite its claim to being able to do so. I also demonstrated that they draw attention to the relation between the madness of language and that of the subject by exposing the discursive implication of subject-centred consciousness. When the subject is made aware of the way in which he/she is informed by discourse, he/she then cannot but acknowledge his/her own madness. If their texts induce such a recognition, Carey and Kundera will have placed the reading subject in a position beyond language, from which he/she is able to approach authentic selfhood.

Importantly, Carey and Kundera intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood rather than using discourse to tell of it. By avoiding such use, they provide the subject with an opportunity to approach authentic selfhood in the absence of discursive determinants. The potential authenticity achieved by the individual when entering into authentic madness circumvents discursive control. Accordingly, the individual who approaches authentic selfhood does so in a manner that is entirely novel, because that authenticity lacks all linguistic systems and conventionality. The process by which authentic selfhood may be achieved, and which Carey and Kundera enable by circumventing discourse, ensures that each approach of authentic selfhood is singular and therefore differs from the others.

Because the individual’s movement towards authenticity lacks convention, upon returning to his/her subject position he/she will always be incapable of accurately communicating his/her approach of authenticity. Language cannot facilitate a telling of it. What this means is that the subject will always remember the sense of disorientation, but never be able to articulate it. This inability to express the moment in which his/her subjectivity was dissolved will continually remind him/her of the fallaciousness of his/her subject-centred consciousness. Furthermore, the inability to speak of the instant of authenticity will draw attention to the failure of consciousness to manifest authenticity, and as such, in Tomas’s words, to the fact that “it is consciousness itself that makes us aware of its own limitations” (Faulks 455). Invariably, the

subject is constantly reminded of his/her own madness. The restrained nature of the subject's position in language is made apparent, and at this point Kundera and Carey are able to suggest how it is possible to sustain a semblance of authenticity from within a subject position.

Though understanding his/her implication in discourse is not the same as inhabiting authentic selfhood, the subject's location in language enables him/her to at least communicate the idea of authenticity. In other words, even though he/she is incapable of recounting his/her habitation of authentic selfhood, he/she can, from his/her subject position, discuss how discourse constrains him/her. For the individual to achieve authenticity from within subjectivity, or at least to gain the wherewithal to act on discourse rather than simply be acted on by it, he/she must become aware that his/her subject-centred consciousness is located in and by discourse, and he/she must accordingly accept responsibility for the manifold implications of this state.

The form of responsibility called for by the authors thus requires the subject to be mindful of the way in which he/she interacts with the other. Because he/she is conscious of his/her implication in discourse, his/her communication with the other must be informed by an awareness of the way in which discourse inscribes both the other's subjectivity and body. Although discourse cannot be transcended in this interaction – as the opposition between subject and other, which is enabled by discourse, validates the subjectivity of both – it can be countered. It follows that the opposition between subject and other both sustains and restrains subjectivity. In Patrick White's *Voss*, one of the characters suggests precisely this when he claims that "others had entangled him in the string of human limitation" (178). He is restrained and limited by his subject-centred consciousness, but his subjectivity is nonetheless maintained by his discursively informed approach of others, and by their approach of him. Despite the apparent restraint of the subject by discourse, if there is a recognition of the other which is cognisant of its implication in discourse, the restrictions can be challenged. If the subject's approach of the other is conditioned by an awareness of his/her location in language, and informed by a critique of those discourses that shape his/her subject-centred consciousness, he/she will have attained a measure of authenticity.

To summarise, Kundera and Carey seek to render the reading subject conscious of his/her implication in discourse. If they succeed in doing so, he/she will enter into a state of authentic madness. That is, he/she will come to inhabit a state of disorder amidst the order of language. From here the individual may approach authentic selfhood, thereby exceeding the restrictions of

his/her subjectivity and briefly transcending his/her location in language. On reassuming his/her subjectivity, though, the individual is not able to tell of his/her disorientation, and this ensures that he/she is constantly aware of the failure of language to facilitate authenticity. In an interview with Alain Finkielkraut, Kundera explains that he has an ingrained “suspicion about words” (37), or exercises what he terms a “linguistic revolt” (37). It is this distrust of language – fostered by an awareness of that which lies beyond subjectivity – which both Kundera and Carey seek to instil in the reading subject, and thereby help him/her to attain a measure of authenticity. If the subject approaches the other from a position that is critical of its own implication in discourse, he/she will have achieved a degree of authenticity despite the fact that he/she is a subject in language and discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the madness of linguistic systems. I have also looked at how Carey and Kundera thematise madness so as to draw attention to the discursive position of the reader and therefore his/her own madness. Moreover, I have argued that doing so enables these authors to promote an experience of authentic madness, thereby allowing them to approach authentic selfhood. The way in which Kundera and Carey relate authentic selfhood to death has been examined, and I have argued that they constantly refrain from explicitly stating what authentic selfhood may be. Indeed, they look at death precisely because it exceeds discourse, thus making it a successful metaphor for the position the subject may inhabit once he/she enters into authentic selfhood. Thereafter, I discussed the implications of inhabiting such a state for the author, reader and characters alike. And I examined whether authenticity is sustainable from within a position in language.

In sum, I have suggested that Carey’s and Kundera’s texts are able to intimate the possibility of approaching authentic selfhood by using the concept of madness to expose the lunacy inherent in discourse and, by association, subject-centred consciousness. In my opinion, both authors are able to introduce disorder amidst order, thus momentarily undermining subject-centred consciousness and ultimately allowing the subject to enter into authentic selfhood.

Conclusion

In *The Story of an African Farm*, Olive Schreiner's narrator warns that "we have been so blinded by thinking and feeling that we have never seen the world" (151). Insofar as I have considered how the subject is precluded from authenticity by his/her subjectivity, this notion resonates throughout my thesis. I have examined how the subject is located in language, and importantly how his/her position limits his/her potential for attaining authenticity. My fundamental concerns have centred on how subjectivity, which is located in discursive structures, constrains authenticity, and how these structures may be negotiated in order to gain authenticity. Indeed, throughout this study I have reflected on whether such a release from linguistic control is in fact a possibility. In support of my argument, I have focused on the ways in which Peter Carey and Milan Kundera intimate the possibility of authentic selfhood by making apparent the discursive constraints placed on the subject by discourse, thereby enabling him/her to entertain the notion of authentic selfhood. Moreover, I have examined madness in order to show how this notion is thematised by these two writers, and to reveal its imbrication with language and subjectivity. In this regard, my contention has been that the texts under discussion, in varying degrees, self-reflexively draw attention to the madness of subjectivity through their very medium, and thereby suggest the possibility of authentic selfhood.

In order to show why authentic selfhood is desired by the subject, and also why Carey and Kundera focus specifically on language in order to intimate such a possibility, I have discussed, in my Introduction, the nature of language, suggested its inherent madness and indicated how the subject's position in language instils anxiety. For this reason, too, Chapters Two and Three have focused on the concepts of the imagination and the body, both of which, I have made clear, are loci for discursive determinants. This has enabled me to demonstrate how these writers problematise the discursively informed imagination and body, and thereby expose the reader's implication in discourse. By tracing the parallel that these authors establish between the reader's subjectivity and that of their characters, I have shown how they disorientate the reader in a way that permits him/her to critique his/her subjectivity, and consequently approach authentic selfhood.

After suggesting that Kundera and Carey intimate the possibility of approaching authenticity, Chapter Three has expanded on an idea that I had introduced earlier in the study:

the madness of language. I have explained why these authors focus on death in their texts, and argued that for them authentic selfhood is akin to the loss, or rather death, of subjectivity. Proceeding from this parallel, I have examined what permanently inhabiting an authentic state may entail for the individual. In turn, this has allowed me to demonstrate how these two writers attempt to make their reader aware of his/her discursively informed subjectivity with a view to engendering in him/her a sense of responsibility. Moreover, I have suggested that this responsibility would enable him/her to attain a measure of authenticity, despite his/her positioning as a subject by language and discourse.

I have also analysed what authentic selfhood may entail, though my discussion has been aware of its own location in discourse, and therefore of its inability to communicate that state accurately. As a character in Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net* suggests, "language just won't let you present it as it really is" (67). Finally, I have suggested that, for Carey and Kundera, authentic selfhood is achieved when subjectivity is lost, and is thus not a state that can be sustained by subjects in the social world. In the Afterword to *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Philip Roth reiterates this notion by suggesting that death is "the loss of self" (234), or rather the loss of subjectivity. Similarly, Laura Trevelyan, in *Voss*, maintains that "true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind" (446). That is to say, authentic selfhood can be inhabited, albeit briefly, when subject-centred consciousness is challenged and the linguistic systems that inform consciousness are manipulated and undermined, thereby releasing the subject from his/her subjectivity and, hence, discursive control.

Despite this fact, Carey and Kundera seem to suggest that a measure of authenticity may nonetheless be achieved from within subjectivity if the subject is aware of his/her implication in discourse, and approaches both himself/herself and others in a way that is critical of the madness that informs him/her through language. In an interview with Robert Polito, Carey tells of the inability of many American readers to acknowledge the affinities between themselves and the characters in *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*. He suggests that these readers are victims of a "false consciousness", and that one consequence of this state is "not having self-perception" (56). This statement, when applied to the predicament of the subject located in language, makes Kundera's and Carey's shared objective clear: to deconstruct false consciousness, which is to say subject-centred consciousness that is informed by language, so as to facilitate self-awareness and, accordingly, a degree of authenticity.

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