

**A Deconstructionist Study of the Writing Self and
the Ear of the Other in Joseph Conrad's *The Congo
Diary* and Terry Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper:
A Memoir***

**Ralia Maijama'a Abdullahi
SPS/10/MEN/00004**

**Being a Dissertation submitted to the Department of
English and Literary Studies, Bayero University, Kano in
partial fulfillment for the award of the Degree of Master of
Arts in English (Literature)**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this Dissertation is written by me and that it is a record of my own research work. It has not been submitted to any institution for the same purpose or submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and all sources of information are suitably acknowledged by means of reference.

Ralia Maijama'a Abdullahi
SPS/10/MEN/00004

May 2014

CERTIFICATION

This Dissertation, entitled “The Writing Self and the Ear of the Other in Autobiographical Representation: A Deconstructionist Study of Joseph Conrad’s *The Congo Diary* and Terry Eagleton’s *The Gatekeeper: A Memoir*” by Ralia Maijama’a Abdullahi meets the regulations governing the award of Master of Arts in English (Literature) of Bayero University, Kano and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary study.

Supervisor

Signature and Date

External Examiner

Signature and Date

Head of Department

Signature and Date

Dean, School of Postgraduate Studies

Signature and Date

DEDICATION

For My Malam, My Husband, IBK

For Spicing up my Life

For Teaching me to Dare

For Showing me there's always something more out there

To Learn, to Discern

To Reveal, to Uncover

To Know, to Discover...

For Shaking things up

And Shaking them some more...

With all my *Heart*.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page.....	i
Declaration.....	iii
Certification.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	viii
Abstract.....	xi
CHAPTER ONE: CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTS.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 A Brief Biographical Sketch on the Primary Authors	4
1.3 Brief On the Primary Texts	6
1.4 Problem Statement.....	11
1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study	11
1.6 Objectives of the Study	12
1.7 Justification and Significance of the Study	12
1.8 Research Design	14
1.9 Theoretical Framework.....	15
1.10 Conclusion	19
Notes to Chapter One	19

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	21
2.1 Introduction.....	21
2.2 Autobiography.....	21
2.3 On Memoir.....	32
2.4 On Diary	34
2.5 On the Theoretical Literature	37
2.6 On the Primary Texts.....	42
2.6.1 <i>The Congo Diary</i>	45
2.6.2 <i>The Gatekeeper</i>	47
2.7 Conclusion	49
Notes to Chapter Two	49
CHAPTER THREE: CONRAD’S <i>DIARY</i>	51
3.1 Introduction.....	51
3.2 The Unfolding of the Proper Name in <i>The Diary</i>	56
3.3 <i>The Diary</i> as Conrad’s Autobiographical Desire and Loss.....	61
3.4 Thanato/Thanatodiagraphy: “The Ear of Death” in <i>The Diary</i>	71
3.5 The Uncanny in Conrad and His Diary	80
3.6 Conclusion	85
CHAPTER FOUR: EAGLETON’S <i>MEMOIR</i>	87
4.1 Introduction.....	87

4.2 Auto-Affection and the Signature in <i>Gatekeeper</i>	93
4.3 The Memoir and Memory-Keeping.....	101
4.4 The Memoir and the Autos.....	107
4.5 The Ear that Signs <i>The Gatekeeper</i>	112
4.6 Conclusion.....	115
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	117
GLOSSARY.....	122
WORKS CITED.....	124
BIBLIOGRAPHY	130

ABSTRACT

This dissertation has examined the complex ways in which the concepts of “the writing self” and “ear of the other” have functioned into specific texts of life writing, namely Joseph Conrad’s *The Congo Diary* (1890) and Terry Eagleton’s *The Gate Keeper: A Memoir* (2001). The dissertation has used the conceptual and theoretical premises of Deconstruction for which the authors, the texts, the impact or reception of the authors or their texts by readers of all kinds is conditioned by the concept of “the other”, that is, of *oto-biography*, the figure of death, desire and loss. For not only is this the general condition of autobiography or life writing (the diary and the memoir in particular) but also the textual basis of life writing itself, since the loss of the subject of writing, the presence of the uncanny, the signature, the proper name are central to representational practices of the diary, in this case Conrad’s *The Congo Diary*, which, besides offering insights on the personality of its writer, also *shapes* and *undermines* that personality, both at once. The argument is that every diary has an ideal reader, and that reader is “the ear of the other” which, more often than not, resides within the author of the diary himself. This theme also figures in the discussion about Eagleton’s *The Gate Keeper* in which the signature, memory and its notorious unreliability, figure as the motifs for the memoir’s apparent identity as a representational practice. But here as well, the dissertation has demonstrated that the memoir (the signature of the memoirist) returns, or can return, only to the name, despite claims by Eagleton to have exploded the genre from within by distancing himself from the classical format of memoir as individualist memory-representation.

CHAPTER ONE:

CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTS

1.1 Introduction

In contemporary times, life-writing has witnessed (and is witnessing) an unprecedented rise in academic prestige. This is largely as a result of many factors, among which is the increasing prominence of the memoir on the literary scene, so much so that it is no longer regarded as a sub-genre of autobiography, as it traditionally had been, but as a genre in its own right (Couser 2012: 3). Indeed, according to Rainer (1998: 56), memoir is the “new autobiography”. Memoir’s academic popularity stems from its seemingly limitless flexibility and accommodating nature. Aside from the fact that what is depicted in a memoir is expected to be “true” (i.e. to refer to real events, places and people in the real world— however subjective such a truth may be), the memoirist has total freedom on what and how she writes (Sarton 1977; Walker 1988; Couser 2012).

Unlike in most conventional autobiographies, there are no restrictions on the memoirist to conform to a depiction of events in chronological order¹; the memoir can begin from any point and circle back (or forward) on itself as much as the writer wishes. In the same manner, no expansive research is needed when writing a memoir; for as Couser (2012: 19) writes, memoir is “based on memory rather than research”. A memoir is not, as is the case with traditional autobiography, a historical record, requiring extensive research to cover the entire life of the author, complete with dates and facts that are double-checked; it is simply how one remembers one’s own life during a particular period. Thus, the lens of the memoir is normally significantly narrower than that of conventional autobiography, for it usually focuses

on a time in the writer's life that was unusually vivid such as childhood, war, heartbreak, a journey, illness, or, in recent years, a period spent in a particular office.

Another genre that is rapidly gaining literary attention is the diary. The Diary has long been regarded as undeserving of being classed as literature or literary because, as Couser (2012), Smith and Watson (2010), Culley (1998), Felski (1998), Walker (1998) argue, it has been traditionally associated with women. Indeed, "the few diaries to have been published before the women's liberation movement were almost all by men" (Couser 2012: 42). Women's diaries often focused on domestic routines, which were not regarded as worthy topics for literary attention or even recognition. All that is changing, however, for with the rise of feminism, diaries, Couser contends, are now being "re-examined, preserved, and published with new appreciation for their distinctive qualities and functions" (42). The present study is an attempt to contribute to the growing critical literature on new autobiographical literary forms, such as the memoir and the diary.

The most obvious difference between the diary and the memoir lies in their different structures. While the memoir is a sustained narrative, the diary is fragmented, often giving an impression of incoherence. However, as Culley (1998), Felski (1998) and Walker (1988) point out, the diary is different from the memoir in an even more significant way: the memoir is a retrospective narrative, written from a point in the writer's life where the events of the narrative are already in the past, and the writer knows how the narrative will develop and end, whereas the diary is written as the events unfold, so that the writer is just as much in the dark as the reader as to what happens next, much less how it is all going to end. In the words of Sarton

Autobiography [or memoir] is the story of a life or a childhood written, summoned back, long after its events took place. Autobiography is 'what I remember,' whereas

a journal [or diary] has to do with ‘what I am now’, at this instant (cited in Walker 1988: 79).

This means that the diary has an immediacy to it that is not present in the memoir; and it displays a remarkable lack of constructedness and self-consciousness the way the memoir does— with its novelistic features and use of “literary” language. One of the central arguments of this dissertation is that the diary is not as unselfconscious as it may seem, for it involves a process of selection, as well as an implicit consciousness of a (real or imagined) reader; one who, or which, may be within, or external to, the author— what Derrida (1982) would call “the ear of the other”.

Autobiographical theory and criticism is saturated with discourses oriented either to the illumination of the activity of the writing self (subject) or to the loss (or dissolution) of the self in autobiographical narrative (Benstock 1988; Anderson 2001). Indeed, by all accounts, at the very heart of the autobiographical text is the more or less secure self-productivity or thwarted desire (by text and narrative) of the writing self, the real author². It is the author who plots his or her narrative representations of a life, or parts or aspects of a life, and how this life exists within the world of self-presentation and of experience in general. Until Jacques Derrida’s remarkable commentary on the genre of autobiographical writing in general and on Friedrich Nietzsche’s autobiographical self-representation in *Ecce Homo* in particular, very little attention, or, indeed, none at all, had been paid to the category of the non-self. This is the other of the self, the textual or narrative space of the other of the self, the addressee, the silent structure of representation that exceeds the self and makes it the space of alterity, that is, “the ear” of the other of autobiographical writing, narration, representation, and textual production.

The ear of the other is the ear that perceives the autobiographical writing, and, even, constructs it, for it is the argument of Derrida that it takes two to write and to make meaning. This study will explore how the other in this operation is the ear of the other whom the self must entrust with its signature for the text to take place.

This study is a contribution to a textual and theoretical analysis of Derrida's attempt to highlight the repressed or the sublimated subject of autobiography, through the concept of "the ear" that, Derrida argues, signs the autobiographical text. The dissertation deploys this conceptual structure of "the ear of the other" in the textual analysis of two key primary texts— Joseph Conrad's *The Congo Diary* (1890) and Terry Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper: A Memoir* (2001).

1.2 A Brief Biographical Sketch on the Primary Authors

Joseph Conrad

Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski was born on December 3, 1857 in Ukraine, a part of Poland which had been annexed by Russia since 1793. His parents were Ewa (nee Bobrowska) and Apollo Korzeniowski. At the age of sixteen, Conrad left Krakow by train for Marseilles where he started the sea-life that was to provide him with so much of the material for his early fiction. His life at sea spanned a period of twenty years (Davies 1981, II: 186).

Conrad's father Apollo Korzeniowski, initially belonged to the prosperous landowning gentry and was married in 1856 to Ewelina Bobrowska, from another prosperous land-owning family (Watts 1982: 12). According to Davies (1981, I: 296), by 1864, Apollo had been ruined by changes in the Polish economy, by the industrialisation strategies of the three occupying powers, Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary. Conrad's father was a mystic, given to fits of extreme mystical religiosity, as when he said that he always "kept my eyes on the cross and by that

means fortified my fainting soul and reeling brain” (quoted in Watts 1982: 15; see also Sherry 1971: 45).

In May of 1890, Conrad left Europe for Africa and arrived there, at Boma, in the then Belgian Congo, on June 12. He began his famous diary on 13 June, documenting his short river journey to Matadi and his gruelling overland trek to Kinshasa. The diary ended on the 1st of August 1890. Over the next few months, he travelled along the Congo River, a journey that is said to have influenced his novel, *Heart of Darkness*.

On March 24 1896, Conrad married Jessie George. They had two children Borys and John. From 1894 until his death in 1924 at the age of 66, Conrad was a distinguished writer of fiction, a canonical British novelist. Among his writings are *The Nigger of Narcissus*, *Lord Jim*, *Nostramo* and *Heart of Darkness* (see, on this, Knowles and Moore (2000); Peters 2010: 15-46).

Terry Eagleton

Terence Francis Eagleton was born on February 22, 1943 to Irish parents. He is a celebrated literary theorist and critic and is regarded as one of the United Kingdom’s most influential living literary critics. He is currently Distinguished Professor of English Literature at Lancaster University. He is widely regarded, especially in academic circles, as Britain's most influential living literary critic;, in the words of Regan, “one of the most colourful and controversial figures in cultural politics today” (Regan 1998: vii).

Eagleton grew up in a working-class Irish Catholic family in Salford, England. He served as an altar boy at a local Carmelite convent, a role he refers to in the title of his memoir *The Gatekeeper*. Eagleton was educated at De La Salle

College in Salford. He later attended Trinity College Cambridge, where he earned both his M.A. and PhD. He has written more than forty books including *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, and *The Meaning of Life*. His latest book, *The Event of Literature*, was published in 2012 (see, on this, Smith 2008: 4-8).

1.3 Brief on the Primary Texts

The Congo Diary

When Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) arrived in the Congo on June 12th 1890, he began a diary entitled *The Congo Diary* (henceforth *The Diary*) whose first entry was dated June 13th 1890. He spent six months there as an employee of the Belgian *Société Anonyme pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo*, a company with extensive interests in the then Congo Free State and identified in the diary as “the Company” (Sherry 1971; Jean-Aubry 1926). *The Diary* records Conrad’s 320 kilometre trek on the coast from Boma to Matadi, and then to Kinsasha; and, spectacularly, his enchantment and disenchantment, in equal measure, with the material and human landscape. *The Diary* is written in an elliptical style; it is episodic and structurally organised around the date entry (or a chronological narrative frame) (Nadger 1978). Yet the most dominant feature of *The Diary* is Conrad’s very personal and, to this extent, autobiographical, disenchantment with the *body* of the Congo as both a material-landscape and human presence. It records scenes and moments of anguish, discomfort, sickness, physical and mental exhaustion, the horror and horrid smell of decomposing bodies, and the disquieting sights of “white men’s graves” (Hampson 1981).

Although many Conrad scholars have traditionally seen the significance of *The Diary* as the background to Conrad’s short story, “An Outpost of Progress”

(1897) and the novella, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Marlow's fictional journey in the Congo (although the setting of the novella is not disclosed), nevertheless *The Diary* has immense autobiographical value in the manner it plots the self-confident narrative consciousness of a supposedly universal white European subject, travelling within, describing, and narrating an allegedly alien and, by implication, dystopian landscape and experiences. Knowles and Moore (2002) and Hawkins (1981) especially have discussed extensively on this subject and have provided extensive and deeper insight in their interpretation of the events.

Conrad's *Diary* consists of a central subject, a dominant writing self, the writing-seeing "I," moving through real and imaginative geographies— bodies and landscapes. It encodes a narrative of adventure, an adventure anchored to the consciousness of a first-person narrator, who is also a traveller (traveller-writer). This travelling writer emplots the situation, action, and "character" (identity) of the other in the form of a *perspective* on the other's body and landscape (bio-geography). To be sure, the diary as a whole is the autobiographical consciousness, whose narrative power allows it to plot, so to speak, its self representations of other physiognomies and physical difference itself. Moreover, the diary format foregrounds a mobile profile of the Congo: the author, the autobiographical subject, maintains his semantic³, intellectual, and moral authority (over the other) to the extent that he is able to tell the story of the other, to narrate their situation (pleasant, unpleasant, exotic), and their actions (moving, stationary), reactions and so on.

The narrative of *The Diary* consists of the central subject journeying through, and at the same time encountering and "negotiating", the physical and bodily geographies of the indigenous people, who are represented as the Other. There is the central subject (the I-writer) which plots its physical and imaginative activities; the

consequential subject, the ailing Prosper Harou (a Belgian agent of the Société); and the active yet docile native carriers (about thirty-one in all). Interestingly, all the people in *The Diary* are described in the light of the situation of their body: sick, heavy, ugly, Negroid, and so on. The narrative proceeds from a specific place (space) to a specific physiognomy (body), and vice versa, and then to “character”, or what Foucault (in *The Order of Things*, 1970) calls the “signs” lodged in their bodies (the qualities of being “good”, “bad”, and so on); and finally to “significance” (the implication of character, or affective states, for example, “fine”, “beautiful”, “ugly”). This process may be called a “physiognomical reading of character from the make-up and appearance of the face and body” (Shortland 1989: 22).

Conrad’s *Diary* seems on the surface to refuse narration and narrative concreteness by presenting a fractured narrative structure of the chronicle (the temporal diary entry). Nevertheless, the *Diary* cannot escape the order of sequence, which a narrative should possess, that is, a representational structure consisting of a central subject, a well-marked beginning, middle and end, and an identifiable narrative voice (that is, the recording subject of *The Diary*). As the title of the text implies, *The Congo Dairy*, there is a story of travel and observation within an alien non-European natural and cultural environment, with the daily diary entry being organised around a central subject (Conrad the writer and recorder of the events), and *The Diary* as a whole is this subject’s recording (textualisations) of the story of (his travels in) the Congo. Yet the *Diary* is also a *retrospective* account, written after the event had happened although this “retrospective” account is presented within a recurrent yet configured structure (the dairy entry) which assumes the structure of the plot. Again, in *The Dairy*, The Belgian Congo is presented as a *past* event but which is, nevertheless, a *continuous* present (as a diary entry). This is one reason

why *The Diary* has to take, and takes, a linear form; that is, the events (of the Congo), which the diarist insists are diary records only, must issue, in true literary discourse, as the writing subject's view of the events.

The Gatekeeper: A Memoir

On the other hand, Eagleton has the unusual, possibly unique, distinction among distinguished literary academics and the *literati* of having written a bestselling book about his life, a life narrative, *The Gatekeeper*, devoted to his childhood, early adult life, and career as a radical socialist and university academic. The text is reputed to have sold a million copies, chiefly on the strength of Eagleton's extraordinarily lucid prose, scathingly funny, yet tender and completely engaging narrative, irony, wit, and humour. As a 10-year-old, Terry Eagleton was the "gatekeeper" at a convent of Carmelite nuns in Salford, in the north of England. The narrative begins with a story of the young Eagleton, son of impoverished Irish immigrants, who was on hand when young novices took the Catholic veil and shut themselves away from the world beneath the convent's roof, which, in the words of the *The Gatekeeper*, was "more corrugated iron than Gothic pinnacle" (p. 1).

As a memoir, *The Gatekeeper* is a peculiar book consisting of personal record, impersonal journal, sentimental chronicle, a self-growth-narrative which documents Eagleton the person as an intentional agent, self-soaked in the events of a life, and within reflection on the events of that life. In this life narrative, Eagleton assumes the narrative voice and grammatical identity of the speaking "I" which offers both a free-floating image of itself and, as the book's blurb says, "a deep-etched portrait of those who influenced him, either by example or by contrast". Yet in this memoir, the reader is given sometimes scanty, sometimes engaged and rich narrativisation, glimpses of the formation and unfolding of Eagleton the person, the

subject and self of the writing and the narrative, his journey through life or the characters that shaped his identity and personality in one way or another (in similarity or contrast). Typical of the sub-genre of the memoir, Eagleton, in this text, veils much as he reveals much. For example, there are very few mentions of his relationships with others; his romantic relationships and biological children get only a line or two; and there is barely a word about how he views his own struggles or about whether his life has been happy or satisfying.

Why Eagleton chose to present his life story through the structure of a sub-genre of autobiography, the memoir, and whether the reasons for his doing so may be located in the distinctiveness of the sub-genre is of particular interest for this study. The sub-genre is usually the favourite medium of choice for academics and public intellectuals, concerned as they may be with their public image as public intellectuals, in whose life the public is also private and, the personal is often political. For example, Eagleton uses irony, sarcasm, wit, and humour as structural devices for holding together his narrative of both his own self as a contentious “I” and the representations of his own text. This appears to be an intentional subject subjected to both the events and the very narration of the subject himself. Coming from a literary intellectual and writer of prose, plays, and a clutch of poems, this may be significant in that it will be speculated whether Eagleton has, in practice, transformed the craft of the memoir itself. The question becomes pertinent given his fascination in the *Memoir* with the veritable image, or portrait, of the intellectual as a young man (possibly as a potential parody or vindication of his fellow Irishman, James Joyce, the author of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1917).

1.4 Problem Statement

The central problematic of this study is the specificity of the diary and the memoir as literary genres or sub-genres of life writing in general. It also involves the problematic of self-presentation, the counter-intuitive concept of *otobiography*, of a signing ear, vanishing proper names, the crisis of properness, lost signatures, textual contexts, and the failure to keep a promise, and the delineation of the limits of auto-affection within the two primary texts. This study also engages the problem of the Other from a Deconstructionist perspective, a perspective which conceptualizes the ironic situation of the ear as that which constitutes and signs the autobiographical as an event, proper name, signature, context in the loss of the subject of writing and auto-affection. As the case of the primary texts shows, in both the diary and the memoir, the writing self encodes and presents a self, an “I”, which would not yield, in principle, the “promise” to unveil, tell, narrate, or re-present a life, whether in part or in whole.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study is limited in scope to the selected primary texts; the scope is also defined by the subject matter outlined above. The study traces the more or less precise and complex relationship between autobiography as a literary genre and the self-productivity of the writing subject, as theoretically informed by the chosen analytical framework, which is Derrida’s theory of autobiography; and as illustrated in the context of the identified primary texts.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

This study has a set of objectives, namely:

- a) To show how deconstruction, the study's theoretical framework, complicates our understanding and interpretation of the diary and the memoir as sub-genres of autobiography and life-writing generally.
- b) To show the extent to which both Conrad and Eagleton have, through their literary practices of self-portraiture, opened up new possibilities for a more rigorous critique of the autobiographical text as both an act and an event
- c) To show the powerful ways in which textual criticism (of the primary texts), speculative critique of the subject (the primary authors), and the deployment of a critique of the text (the chosen theoretical framework, Derrida's theory of autobiography) can undermine, and have undermined, the traditional or conventional segregation of fiction and non-fiction, literature and non-literature, literary language and non-literary language.

1.7 Justification and Significance of the Study

Although autobiography is an ancient and illustrious genre of literature, its wider academic and literary-critical study had been relegated to the background. At best, it was usually accorded respect only by historians and anthropologists, who used it only to illuminate cultural or personal backgrounds of periods and epochs. This situation has changed, however, with the development of post-modernist, especially feminist, post-structuralist and postcolonial theories of representation.

Historically, autobiographical writing or representation was one of the major forms of knowledge, expression, and symbolic practice which have historically

produced and mediated the semantic structures of individual self-presentation and personal-cultural meaning-making. It was favoured by clergymen, philosophers, philosopher-kings, statesmen, intellectual rebels, and writers. Among the outstanding examples are Saint Augustine's *Confessions* (AD 400), Jean-Jacques-Rousseau's *Confessions* (1770) Friedrich Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* (1888), Adolf Hitler, *My Battle* (1924), Ahmadu Bello, and the Sardauna of Sokoto's *My Life* (1962). In this tradition of writing, the distinction between fictional and autobiographical writing was not conceived in clear-cut terms. Many autobiographical accounts deployed a mix of real and imaginative events, and used the technique of recall and re-invention to re-describe the world and the autobiographical subject's place in it.

However, despite the centrality of modern autobiographical writing to the formation of modernity, and the self-presentation and construction of modern subjectivity, research in the field within literary studies has been largely confined to specialist academic topics. Except within feminist literary circles, post-structuralist and postcolonial critique of the traditional, post-Romantic conception of Literature, research into the theoretical and literary-critical foundations of autobiography has been rather limited to the unhelpful and outdated distinction between the literary and the non-literary, fiction and non-fiction, with autobiography being conventionally consigned to the latter category.

This study is a contribution to the growing critical literature on autobiography. It grows out of the conviction that there is an urgent need to show, drawing on Conrad's *The Congo Diary* and Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper* as example, the complex relationship between a particular literary sub-genre and the instability of the larger genre itself, by drawing on one of the most interesting and academically productive theories of the text. This is Derrida's unique deconstructionist critique of

autobiography, in which the critic productively shows the affinity of the genre (as a whole) and the larger critique of auto-affection (or metaphysical narcissism) in the literary presentation of alleged facts, life and the matter-of-fact.

In sum, then, this study has demonstrated how particular literary intellectuals, Conrad and Eagleton, have exploited the resources of the diary and the memoir as literary vehicles, for the projection, more or less, of their own *anthropos*, the (more or less fabricated) properties of their subjectivities. In this task, this study will contribute to both a theory of the self-representation of the subject within textual spaces and a critical textual examination of the craft of the diary and the memoir as veritable literary forms.

This is yet another reason why this has shown, following Derrida, that the diary or the memoir, much like the novel or poem, cannot inaugurate a proper name (*autobiography*), cannot escape absence and become a transcendental structure of subjectivity (the autobiographical), but are, rather, the necessary vacant space of absence, a non-presence which is just as constructed as it is a construct and a construction, so that both the fictional (a novel, for example) and the allegedly non-fictional (the diary, the memoir) are dependent on poetic and rhetorical discourses, or what might be called representations (the *oto-bio-graphical*).

1.8 Research Design

This research is based on the use of *qualitative* methodology in which *interpretation* in the form of “words” and “arguments” act as observation concepts; and which themselves assume a pride of place in the substantive analysis of the primary literature. In this conception, the study will involve the use of theoretical premises by way of *conceptual* analysis. Thus, the study would not involve the use of

measurement and numeric data, but the deployment of antecedently existing analytical materials, namely “theory” based on a relatively small sample (Derrida’s theory of autobiography). Furthermore, the findings would be, more or less, *specific* to a context (for example, Conrad’s and Eagleton’s representations of the writing subject in their texts and Derrida’s approach to the autobiographical as the *otobiographical*).

The key point here is that this study has been designed to use *explanatory, interpretative, non-predictive, and inductive* methodology, itself based on a *grounded theory* (an analytical and theoretical approach to the subject matter informed by deconstruction, especially Derrida’s unique theory of autobiography). This is why the research would not involve the use of the questionnaire or other means of empirical testing of a hypothesis, such as field interviews or quantitative procedures. Rather, the relevant data would be generated via the textual and literary-critical analyses of the primary literature.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this dissertation is based on Deconstruction, or more precisely, Derrida’s theory of autobiography. Derrida’s conception of autobiography approaches the genre from what may be called a non-commonsensual perspective, which seeks to unsettle the complex, yet assumed relationship, between the autobiographical (the writing subject) on the one hand and the desiring, yet receding, self of writing, symbolised by the metaphor of “the ear of the other” (which Derrida says is the “ear”, the addressee, that signs the text), and the signature on the other.

In fact, it is the problematic of the ear, what Derrida calls “the *otobiographical*” (rather than just the *autobiographical*) that will be used as the

conceptual matrix in the study of the primary texts. In his discussion, in the *Ear of the Other* (1985), of the relationship between the autobiographical and the *otobiographical*, Derrida presents a view of the *otobiographical* (rather than just the genre of autobiography) as a relationship to the “ear of the other”. For Derrida, the ear is “uncanny”(beyond what is normally considered “the proper”), because the structure and presence of the Other effects the transformation of *auto* into *oto*. This means that while autobiography might function as the discourse of auto-affection, it is the *oto*, the ear, which he calls the “most tendered and most open organ” (1985: 33) that signs, and would sign, the narrative of autobiography. As he writes: “... it is the ear of the other that signs. The ear of the other says me to me and constitutes the *autos* of my biography” (1985: 51).

Derrida’s conception of the autobiographical as the *otobiographical* underscores the paradox, the strangeness, of the autobiographical event: for autobiography to be, or become, *otobiographical* it must be its opposite, that is, it has to be, or become, a signature; or, rather, its signature has to be, and ought to be, *entrusted* to the other (the not-self), in Derrida’s words, to the “one who comes along so late and so is unknown” (51). Thus, autobiography has to function as a *text*, as a textual structure of a proper name and a signature (of an event and a context), but which, to function at all, has to be the structure of textuality in general, that is, a differential structure of writing. However, as Derrida has argued, a text is signed only much later by the other, that this is not just mere chance or contingency, but a testamentary structure which befalls, and has to befall, any text; and that it is this contingency that, in fact, constructs the text, since all texts come about in this process of the testamentary.

Now, if it is “the ear of the other”, the *oto*, that signs the text in the end, then this raises important questions and issues about the nature of the signature within autobiography. For Derrida, the signature is not only the proper name or the word (a sign), which exists at the end (or even at the beginning) of the autobiographical text or narrative, but the “operations as a whole, of the text as a whole, the whole of the active interpretation which has left a trace or a reminder” (1985: 52).

If this is the case, then it is to “the ear of the other” (in this case the addressee, the bearer of the *oto-bio-graph* whether in the Diary or the Memoir) that the autobiographer, the autobiographical subject, “entrusts” her signature. However, as is well known, the autobiographical subject cannot, in principle, know in advance to whom (or to which “I”) she is speaking or writing. However, if this is the case, then the autobiographer’s signature, even subjectivity, is precarious (a potential structure of loss and death). Nevertheless, since we know that, in the case of autobiography, the addresser cannot be constituted, cannot be marked by the trace (writing) *before* the other’s signature, before the addresser assumes responsibility for the signature, then autobiographical writing is closely related to both desire and death: to desire because of the impulse to write, to produce the narrative of auto-affection, to strive for excess (of self-disclosure). Little wonder, then, that Derrida writes (in *Writing and Difference*) that desire “permits itself to be appealed to by the absolutely *irreducible exteriority* of the other to which it must remain *infinitely inadequate*” and that “the metaphysics of desire is a metaphysics of *infinite separation*” (1978: 93; my emphasis).

In the same manner, autobiographical writing is closely related to death because the identity of the signer (whether sexual or ideational or compositional) only awaits its determination by and from the other. In a word, it is the *other* who

will decide who or what the author of the autobiographical text or narrative is (notice that the “I” is *genderless* because it can be both male and female, both addresser and addressee, for whom, argues McDonald (1985: 48) “one always writes, and only in his/her absence”). In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida writes: “when we hear the word “I” without knowing who wrote it, it is perhaps not meaningless, but it is at least estranged from its normal meaning” (1973: xi).

It is in this sense that autobiography is also related to death: the autobiographer writes also for the dead. In this sense, too, the *autobiographical* is, at the same time, the *thanatographical*. Thus to stage signatures, proper names, texts, and the desiring projects of auto-affection is at the same time to stand face to face with something that is, and would be, their opposite. In Derrida’s elegant phrasing, every name is the name of someone dead...whom it can do without... one writes for ... the singular figure of death to which the text is destined and which signs” (1985: 53). One implication of this insight, which the present dissertation will pursue, is that autobiography is, in the last analysis, the *oto-bio-graphic* (in the fractured and compound, even typographic, sense), which may be construed as the “ear-life-writing” nexus, the “ear-of- the –writing”, the “writing-of-the-life-of-the ear”, or, even, the “ear-that-writes-a-life”.

Therefore, this research proposes to study Derrida’s complex, counter-intuitive theorisation of autobiography, the autobiographical act, which he calls an “event” and “the experience of the impossible” (as the *oto-bio-graphic*) via the critical themes of death, desire and loss which give us the deathly, yet desiring, structure of autobiography as “the ear-life-writing” (what Derrida famously calls “hearing oneself speak”) within a textual exploration of two seemingly different texts, Conrad’s *The Congo Diary* and Eagleton’s *The Gatekeeper*.

1.10 Conclusion

In the end, the present study seeks to emphasise the complex theoretical and textual determinations of the subject of writing in the representational practices of life writing, while also seeking to illustrate these within the distinctive contributions of Conrad to the craft of literary diary-writing, of Eagleton to the practice of memoir writing, and, not least, Derrida's theory of autobiography, both as a genre and a practice of writing.

Notes to Chapter One

1. This is to say that although events point to the existence of time, chronologically understood, that is, events occurring in strict linearity or uni-directional sequence, the memoirist need not follow this pattern in his or her depictions since she can "cheat" time as it were by upsetting linearity in the representations. This is the sense in which memoirs "bend time", by abandoning "the chronological" in favour of "the circular" in an effort to make their art "timeless". For more, on this see the discussion of this theme in Chapter 2 below (pp. 32-33).
2. The term "desire" is a highly problematic one, and has occupied philosophers over the ages. From Aristophanes through Plato and Aristotle to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Kojève, the abiding opinion on desire is that it is impossible to satisfy. Always, desire in itself is never fulfilled, for one is always caught up between past satisfaction and future lack: once a particular desire is satisfied, another takes its place. For more on this, see Dollimore (2001), especially chapter one.

3. The expression “semantic authority” implies a situation in which a narrator or a writer or a real author, as in Conrad’s *Congo Diary*, appropriates the other’s speech, or the native’s capacity for meaning to the extent that he or she anticipates what the other says, or tells the other’s story and narrates their situation as well. This would no doubt confer on such a narrator or writer a “semantic power or authority” over those he or she describes and whose “consciousness” he renders “narratable” (available to the reader without any effort on the part of this reader).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is a thematic review of the secondary literature on the primary texts, as well as literature on the topical concerns of the dissertation: the autobiography, memoir and diary; as well as the theory of deconstruction, in particular, Derrida's theory of the "Ear of the Other". The review is based on the theoretical, textual, programmatic, and thematic priorities of the study.

2.2 Autobiography

Philippe Lejeune (1982:183) defines autobiography as "a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality". In an essay entitled "The Autobiographical Contract" (1982), Lejeune is concerned to show the importance, in autobiography, of identity between the author, the narrator, and the subject of the autobiography. For Lejeune, it is this "identity" that authenticates autobiography, not for the author – who may not be present – but for the reader, from whose point of view, Lejeune maintains, he examines autobiography (182). In his view, the reader is important over and above the text and the author; for, as he asserts, he does not examine "each text as a thing-in-itself"; nor is he concerned about "the problematic internal state of the author" (182).

For this reason, then, Lejeune is less concerned about what autobiography is (or does) for the author than about what it should be for the reader; in other words, he is concerned about establishing the *identity* of autobiography. Arguably, his essay is less about autobiography and more about satisfying the terms of a "contract" with

the reader. Despite discussing at length the three “selves” involved in the production of an autobiography (and which should be identical), Lejeune does not describe in detail the specific nature of this all-important reader, nor does he attempt to analyse or even recognise that there are different types of reader and that, in fact, every reader is unique. The essay leaves the reader with the impression that readers are all alike; or, at least, that their expectations are generalisable.

This notwithstanding, Lejeune goes to great lengths to identify the problematics of autobiography, to show up areas where certainty about authenticity begins to shake or waver. The first is “the constant refrain of the autobiographers: “I” (1982:196), which Lejeune shows, has no referent outside its context. That is to say, the “I” is a public property, which at once belongs to the author and the reader; it does not refer to any particular concept, or entity; and this is a problem common to all pronouns.

Lejeune does also consider the problem of “authority”. For him, an author does not derive her reality from her autobiography alone (if it is her first book), but “from the list of [her] other works” (1982:200). Indeed, he argues further, “one becomes an author only with one’s second book”, preferably “non-autobiographical ones” (1982:200). This, for him, is important for the reader, for whom the author becomes more real on the basis of “the prior production of *other texts*” (1982:200, original emphasis). That is to say, an author should create an authorial identity by writing fiction first, and after that, write her autobiography; thus, she becomes more *real* to her reader. This analysis immediately raises the question of what to do with authors who have published nothing besides their autobiographies: are these, then, less real than the authors who have?

A third problem Lejeune identifies is the lack of an obvious difference with which “to distinguish the autobiography from the autobiographical novel” (1982:202). If analysis is restricted to the internal contents of the text, he points out, there is no difference at all; for, “all the devices that are used in autobiography to convince us of the authenticity of the story can be imitated by the novel, and that has often been done” (1982:202). He writes that the only distinction to be made between the two lies in the identity, in autobiography, between the narrator, the subject, and the author whose name appears on the cover of the text; even so, however, this distinction runs into problem in cases where the autobiography is written under a pseudonym; there are also cases where the text is written in the third person (he, she), and, more rarely, the second person (you).

Linda Anderson (2001) has a different concern from Lejeune’s: her focus is on “the status of autobiography as either truth or fiction” and on how impossible it is to make any final conclusions on this. According to her, the identity that Lejeune speaks of as essential to the autobiographical contract “can never really be established except as a matter of *intention* on the part of the author” (p.2; original emphasis). Considered this way, Lejeune’s “pact” would require an authorial intention oriented type of reading, in which case, Anderson argues, citing Olney (1972):

Autobiographies are seen as providing proof of the validity and importance of a certain conception of authorship: authors who have authority over their own texts and whose writings can be read as forms of direct access to themselves (Anderson 2001:3).

One of the desires that are encoded in autobiography, Anderson argues, is that of becoming one’s own progenitor, of assuming authorship of one’s own life (67 - 68). This presupposes an objective critical stance and an unmediated self presence,

both of which, after psychoanalysis, are difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Any so-called objective point of view, she maintains, always “implies a particular ideology of the subject,” and, thus, it becomes important to “be skeptical about the claim that the personal can ever automatically guarantee authenticity” (123).

In his essay entitled “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography”, Georges Gusdorf (1980) argues that “the man who recounts himself is himself searching his self through history; he is not engaged in an objective and disinterested pursuit, but in a work of personal justification” (39). For this reason, maintains Gusdorf, autobiography is “truer” than experience, “because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it” (38). For him, at the moment of experience (in the now, so to speak), the experiencing subject is too preoccupied by everything around her that she cannot or is unable to see the experience clearly or in its entirety. In retrospect, however, this becomes possible; untainted by the distractions that surround experience, the subject is able to see things clearly and, thus, recount a truer version of things. However, by making this claim, Gusdorf has completely overlooked the effects of time on memory and its inherently faulty or unreliable nature. Moreover, this claim completely undermines his previous argument that the “I” is not engaged in an objective pursuit. This means that, however true the truth of autobiography, it is yet “subjective”, and it is questionable how far such truth can stand, or indeed, how wise it would be to accept it as *the* Truth. The weakness, then, in Gusdorf’s argument lies in his generalising about the truth of autobiography. His argument would have been more convincing if he had qualified his claim by indicating that the truth of, or in, autobiography is truer than the experience depicted itself, but only for the subject, and not necessarily true in a general sense.

Indeed, Gusdorf himself admits that there is “a considerable gap between the avowed plan of autobiography... and its deepest intentions”; and that it is this gap that “explains the puzzlement and ambivalence of the literary genre” (39). Where *truth* is involved, if it is to be seen as such, if it *is* such, then puzzlement and ambivalence cannot accompany the experience of it. This is why Anderson (2001:156) argues that autobiography is “unstable” as a category; as such, it is not its truth or fictionality that is most important but that the study of autobiography “leads us to engage with some of the most intractable and important cultural questions of our time”.

The unproductiveness of the insistence on factual truth is another argument pursued by Gusdorf (1980). He argues that “in autobiography the truth of facts is subordinated to the truth of the man” (43) since every autobiography represents its author’s attempt at looking to her past in order to give meaning to her present; as well as provides a portrait of the author not necessarily as she was or is, but as she sees herself or wishes herself to be (45). “The significance of autobiography should therefore,” argues Gusdorf, “be sought beyond truth and falsity” (43). Even though Gusdorf acknowledges that autobiography “is also a work of art” (43), he nonetheless argues that a critique that seeks only to “demonstrate [autobiography’s] artistic value” is as insufficient as one that seeks only to verify its “literal accuracy”. What Gusdorf proposes is a “second critique” that instead of doing either “would attempt to draw out [autobiography’s] innermost, private significance by viewing it as the symbol... or the parable of a consciousness in quest of its own truth” (44). Indeed, for him, every autobiography is the “myth” of its author, a history of the author that is also a narrativization of the author, even though Gusdorf seems to

believe that the historian should be dealing with what he calls “the objective stages of a career”:

In the final analysis, then, the prerogative of autobiography consists in this: that it shows us not the objective stages of a career – to discern these is the task of the historian – but that it reveals instead the effort of a creator to give the meaning of *his own mythic tale* (1980: 48, my emphasis)¹.

Similar to Anderson’s argument on autobiography being a vessel for culture is Leigh Gilmore’s (1994), when she asks “whether and when autobiography emerges as an authoritative discourse of reality and identity” (ix). For Gilmore, the truth of a text has “less to do with that text’s presumed accuracy about what really happened than with its apprehended fit into culturally prevalent discourses of truth and identity” (ix). She maintains that “truth” and “lying” are “constructs with histories” (ix) and, as a result, she challenges the representation of women in conventional autobiographical texts. Autobiographies represent the subjects’ experiences; but although presented as factual, for Gilmore experience is not unproblematic because it “connotes a profoundly political, emotional, intellectual, and imaginative response, a series of alterations, differences and repositionings in relation to sameness” (238). The full implication of this insight is that the relationship between “truth” and “lies” becomes a complex one.

Gilmore argues that autobiographers use autobiography to acquire (or create) “structural or symbolic solutions to problems they cannot solve thematically” (xv). The two most important problems here are “identity” and “truth”:

If the problem is the mystery of “identity,” then a symbolic solution lies in the discursive production of autobiography’s *myth of identity*. Similarly, “truth” can be seen as a conceptual problem that may be addressed ... through an apparatus of truth production: [the autobiographical text] (xv, my emphasis).

Autobiography, then, serves the function, according to Gilmore, of “stabilizing” both the truth and the subject who may utter it. Her chief concern in her text, however, is with identifying and locating the position or space of women in autobiography or autobiographical writing.

On his part, Berel Lang (1990), like Gusdorf and Anderson, is less concerned with the truth or fictionality of autobiography than with the “type” of truth which autobiography claims, i.e. a subjective, rather than objective (verifiable through historical evidence) truth: “in autobiographical discourse, the reader credits the writer’s word initially because it is the writer’s self – as writer – which certifies it” (190). For Lang, central to autobiographical study is locating the “I” of autobiography in the narrative, rather than textual independence. That is to say, in reading autobiography, it is not “what happens next” that is important or central, but rather, “what the subject is,” “who she is,” “how she is”. This is borne out by the fact that in responding to autobiography, according to Lang, “the reader’s interest ... sets out from what the autobiographer says about himself rather than from what the historical ‘facts of the matter’ disclose (whether inside or outside the text)” (187). Hence, even if the autobiographer lies, that lie is an indication of her person, her personality, and so tells a (the) truth about her. In Lang’s theory, there are no lies in autobiographical representation, and the fiction/nonfiction distinction is not very useful. Indeed, Lang provocatively asks: “The distinction between fiction and nonfiction: is that fiction or nonfiction?” (169). For Lang, one crucial factor often overlooked in traditional autobiographical studies is “the central role of the autobiographer’s *present judgment* of the events in his past and of the “patterns” that he finds there” (175, original emphasis). Lang bases his claim on the fact that the act

of writing is distanced from the past that is being written about, and, the autobiographer relies mainly on her own discrimination and judgment of past events; a situation, argues Lang, which “opens” autobiographical statements to what he calls “epistemic doubt” (174).

Unlike Lejeune, who sees the reader’s primary requirement from an autobiographical text to be the identity between author, narrator, and subject, Lang sees as the central preoccupation of the reader “the autobiographer’s representation of events or states of mind, not their independent historical standing” (177). He does concur with Lejeune, however, in seeing the past works (and /or achievements) of the author as serving the function of a “tacit preface” to the autobiography, even if such “para-history” as Lang puts it, is not, strictly speaking, part of the individual autobiography(178).

Another important aspect of Lang’s thesis lies in his identifying and elaborating the similarities between fictional and nonfictional discourses. For Lang, a thin line divides the two in the sense that one could be (mis)taken for the other unless the reader has prior information as to the nature of the discourse. Secondly, the chronological limits of the autobiographical text, much like limits of the fictional, are a function of the “privileged view of the writer” (179). Thirdly, the autobiographical narrative voice, like the implied author in a fictional text, is also, according to Lang, “a *persona* within the text, active on and in the discourse”; thus, in both cases, the “Intentional Fallacy” argument applies (180-184, original emphasis).

In another essay, Gilmore (1994), rather than focusing as Lang does, on the non-usefulness of the fiction/nonfiction distinction, maintains that in postmodern times, “autobiography has fallen outside both fiction and history” because:

autobiography has often been seen as insufficiently objective because the eyewitness may be simultaneously

the most sought after and most suspect interpreter of events. At the same time, autobiography has been spurned as insufficiently subjective (or imaginative) because it relies too much on the constraints of the real to be taken as art (6).

The problem, from a postmodernist perspective, then, is not only the status of autobiography, but, even more important, the problems of genre. Any attempt to pin down autobiography as a genre necessarily involves, according to Gilmore, “critical maneuvers” that “avoid autobiography’s contradictory nature” and seek to “domesticate” its “specific weirdness” (6). For Gilmore, such definitions of autobiography derive from the reference between the person who says “I” and the “I” that is not a person but a *function* of language. She argues that this fact immediately establishes a “dissonance” which would always “destabilize” the definition. She illustrates this point by asking the rhetorical question: What readings of autobiography are possible when the linguistic element upon which one would most wish to depend for some sense of stability, some sense of being at home in a word, offers both collectivity and individuality?

Gilmore is referring here to the “I”; she argues that it is precisely the mark of autobiography – the “I”, that “indicates a disruption in genre, an eruption or interruption of self-representation” (7). Thus, the “I” both stabilizes and destabilizes. In the words of Starobinsky (1980:75), “the “I” of a [fictional, first person narrative] cannot be distinguished from the “I” of a “sincere” autobiographical narrative). It is held in constant tension, being both a “self”, an “*essential individual*” that is coherent and unified, the originator of her own meaning, and a “*postmodern subject*”, dynamic, changing over time, situated historically in the world and positioned in multiple discourses (9-10).

The problem of genre alluded to above is one that has (pre)occupied critics and theorists of autobiography long before Gilmore's postmodernist analysis. James Olney (1980) has pointed to the problems of genre associated with autobiographical writing as the reason why "a critical literature did not grow up alongside [it]" (25). For Olney, engaging with autobiography entails engaging with a paradox. He writes that autobiography both exists, and is impossible. On the one hand, any attempt to grasp autobiography as a genre leads one into doubt and indeterminacy because "there is no way to bring autobiography to heel as a literary genre with its own proper form, terminology and observances" (4). On the other hand, the critic who escapes such indeterminacy falls into an even bigger trap, that of arguing that not only does autobiography exist, "but that it *alone* exists" (4, original emphasis). The existence of this paradox means that inevitably, the subject of autobiography produces more questions than answers and raises more doubts than certainties (5).

According to Olney, "everyone knows what autobiography is, but no two observers, no matter how assured they may be, are in agreement" (7). This, he explains, is because "what is autobiography to one observer, is history or philosophy, psychology or lyric poetry, sociology or metaphysics to another" (5); further, it is this that explains the difficulty in trying to pinpoint the origin of autobiography or to identify the first of its kind. Olney's particular interest in the essay under discussion, however, is in evaluating the reasons behind the emergence of critical and theoretical interest in autobiography. He writes that autobiography had been neglected as a genre for literary study and criticism for a number of reasons:

First, there is the dual, paradoxical fact that autobiography is often something considerably less than literature and that it is always something more than literature. [Second,] critics of twenty-five years ago [the mid 1950s to early 1960s] insisted that for satisfying aesthetic appreciation a work must display (in Stephen Dedalus's phrase)

“wholeness, harmony, and radiance”. [Third,] autobiography is a self-reflexive, a self-critical act and consequently the criticism of autobiography exists *within* the literature instead of alongside it (1980: 24-25, original emphasis).

Olney demonstrates that the first reason leaves the critic in a state of indeterminacy; the second is impossible to achieve; and the third implies that the autobiographer is already the critic, or, the critic who approaches autobiography inevitably ends up as something else – the autobiographer. Indeed, Olney argues provocatively that every engagement with autobiography (as a reader or critic) already makes one an autobiographer albeit “a vicarious or closet [one]” (26). For him, critics of autobiography do not need to write their own autobiographies because, as he claims, “their autobiographies have already half emerged in the act of living and writing about the autobiographies of others [because] the open-endedness of autobiography... requires readers to continue the experience into their own lives” (26).

Rather than solving the critic’s problems, Olney’s argument raises even more disturbing issues which he either does not see or does not see fit to elaborate; for, indeed, seen this way, the critic and reader of autobiography is in a dangerous position, that of losing her own person, personality, becoming other, becoming the very thing which she has taken as her subject, the autobiographer, becoming thus the writer of a life not hers, and yet, uncannily, also hers since she now writes it. By its very nature, then, autobiography is subversive and invasive.

2.3 On Memoir

Vidal (1998: 1) writes that “A memoir is how one remembers one’s own life, while an autobiography is history, requiring research, dates, facts double-checked”.

Zinsser (1998) argues that the memoir has a narrower lens than autobiography:

Unlike autobiography, which moves in a dutiful line from birth to fame, memoir narrows the lens, focusing on a time in the writer’s life that was unusually vivid, such as childhood or adolescence, or that was framed by war or travel or public service or some other special circumstance (15).

Zinsser’s view is shared by Rainer (1998: 5) who argues that “A memoir puts a frame onto life by limiting what is included”. Indeed, for Rainer, the memoir is the “New Autobiography”. For Zinsser, narrowing the lens allows the writer to achieve a focus that is not possible in autobiography. However, Stanek’s view of the memoir is similar to Vidal’s:

If you were to write an autobiography, you would have to spend a lot of time at the courthouse, looking up the date your great-grandfather was born, what year your father bought the house on Elm Street. The research for a memoir can be done in an easy chair (1996: 2).

A memoir, then, is an exploration of a point of the writer’s life, not necessarily a complete life story; and it does not rely heavily on facts, dates and history the way autobiography does. This probably explains why Couser (2012: 7) sees the memoir as “the novel’s sibling genre”, although he is quick to point out the differences between the two. Couser describes the memoir as a fundamental human activity, which involves a narration of our lives in our own terms (9). This freedom which the genre allows its writer has led to its eclipsing autobiography as the term and form of choice for a certain kind of life narrative (3). Indeed for Yagoda (2009).

Memoir has become the central form of [contemporary] culture: not only the way stories are told, but the way arguments are put forth, products and properties marketed,

ideas floated, acts justified, reputations constructed or salvaged (cited in Couser 2012: 8).

Yagoda (2009) traces the history of autobiography, which, he says, helped give rise to the invention of the novel in 1719, when Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe*. Couser concurs with Yagoda on this, and goes on to show that *Robinson Crusoe* resembles a memoir more than it does an autobiography, and it is, at least on this argument, the memoir that gave birth to the novel form.

One important argument Yagoda puts forth is the unreliability of memory, and this is what makes the issues of truth and fiction in autobiography and memoir so nettlesome. He suggests that readers want both truth and entertainment from memoir and autobiography, and this often leads memoir writers to exaggeration or even invention. Yagoda is at pains to remind readers that the human memory is by nature untrustworthy: constrained not merely by gaps, but also by distortions and fabrications that, inevitably and unconsciously, creep into it. Despite all that, however, the memoir is experiencing a literary boom because, as Yagoda argues, under its auspices, voices and stories have emerged that otherwise would not have been expressed at all.

Like Yagoda, Birkerts (2007) also observes that memory is nonlinear and unpredictable. Rather than being concerned with the truth/fiction debate, his argument is that the real point of memoir is the search for patterns and connections. He, therefore, explains how and why memoirs bend time, abandoning the chronological for the circular; and reveals how writers turn the indelible times of their lives into art that is, somehow, timeless.

2.4 On Diary

Diaries have not always been respected as literature because, as Couser (2012:30) points out, they are usually not intended for publication. The genre, in fact, was more popular with women, who used it, in the words of Anderson, “to circumvent a historical prohibition” (2001:34). Through the diary, women could become “authors in private” presumably because of its compatibility to their experience: the informal nature of the diary, coupled with its repetitive narrative structure reflected almost perfectly the lives of women prior to the seventeenth century. According to Anderson, this “‘female form’ of the diary created a space where the traditional ordering of narrative and meaning could begin to be undone” (30).

The diary’s lack of a conventional narrative structure (the seeming absence of a story, so to speak) is one reason why it has, in the past, not been considered as sufficiently literary. In fact, as Felski (1998:86) argues, the diary “often shores up its claims to authenticity and truthfulness by consciously distinguishing itself from the category of literature”. In the diary, she argues further, aestheticism is treated with suspicion because “it implies disturbance and control rather than an unmediated baring of the soul” (86). Artistic features such as irony, parody, self-reflexivity, symbolic and “poetic” language, as well as extended narrative structures, all of which mark a text as “literary”, are absent from the diary, for reasons of authenticity. Indeed, what the diary seeks to achieve, according to Felski, is the very opposite or “reverse of defamiliarization”, which the Formalists identify as the key function of literature; she also emphasizes that “the author [of a diary] shares with her audience an uncertainty as to the final outcome of the text, which is determined by external factors rather than the logic of aesthetic form...” (86).

According to Couser, the diary is “a variant of first-person narration”, although “the story is told in discrete, successive instalments as it unfolds, rather than in one sustained burst after the action is completed” (2012: 59). Hence, with a diary, even the narrator does not know how it will turn out; and it is this that gives the diary an enhanced sense of immediacy. Indeed, while the memoir may be thought of as a whole, the diary is always in process, in some sense a fragment, largely because it is created in, and represents, a continuous present. Culley (1998) distinguishes between the diary and autobiography or memoir: while the former is written in “present” time, the latter is written retrospectively, from a fixed point in time from which events of the past may be viewed and analyzed. In this way, the memoirist knows how events in the narrative will unfold or end in a way that the diarist does not:

...the obvious difference in the “plots” of diaries and those of most other narratives is that the novelist, poet, oral storyteller, or writer of an autobiographical memoir knows what happens next and directs the reader’s response at every point. Most diaries, on the other hand, are a series of surprises to writer and reader alike, one source of the immediacy of the genre (221).

In the words of Felski, a diary “is created in and represents a continuous present... from entry to entry, the text incorporates its future as it reconstructs its past” (220). On this view, Culley (1998) cautions that the textuality of the diary must not be overlooked; that is to say, diaries are *texts* which also involve a process of selection and arrangement of detail (216). Although its seeming lack of “artistry” may make it seem more authentic and truthful, it is yet a “verbal construct”, and it is this constructedness that prevents it from being exempt from literary concerns such as “questions of audience (real or implied), narrative shape and structure, persona, voice, imagistic and thematic repetition” (217). Besides, there is always a story at the

end of the diary, which is “truer” and more profound than that which is narrated in the autobiography or memoir.

For Culley, a paradox lies at the heart of autobiographical writing, especially of the periodic sort contained in diaries and journals. She maintains that the diarist is involved in “complex literary as well as psychological processes” which, instead of “establish[ing] self-continuity”, as is the original goal of the diarist, paradoxically end up bringing about “a dislocation from the self, or a turning of subject into object” (217). Thus, as the self stands apart to view itself, a sort of “double consciousness” emerges, a double consciousness, this dissertation argues, which is akin to the relationship between the writing self and the ear of the other. Indeed, it is the ever present consciousness of the Ear, in the words of Culley, “the presence of a sense of audience” (218), that prompts the diarist into a process of selection. However immediate the genre may appear, all diarists are, according to Culley, “involved in a process, even if largely unconscious, of selecting details to create a persona” (218-19). Such a process of selection is a clear marker of the “distance” that exists “between the character created in the diary and the far more complex life lived” (219).

In an essay on Emily Dickenson, Alice James and Virginia Woolf, Walker (1988: 275) points out, in a related argument to Culley’s that “authors of letters, diaries, and journals have often displayed a consciousness that these documents would eventually be in some way public”, even if the “artifices of poetry and fiction – devices such as metaphoric and symbolic structures – [are] nominally absent” (273). Despite this, however, she does emphasize that the immediacy of the diary makes us feel closer to the humanity of the writer as she records the minutiae of life

(275). One of Walkers subjects, Woolf, wrote in a diary entry of the communicative nature of writing and how this makes writing for one's own pleasure impossible:

... [writing] for my own pleasure... But that phrase inhibits me: for if one writes only for one's own pleasure – I don't know what it is that happens. I suppose the *convention of writing* is destroyed; therefore one does not write at all (cited p.277; my emphasis).

On this view, any form of writing is intended to communicate, as Walker argues, not only to oneself, but to an assumed reader; as such, the convention of writing presupposes an audience (277). Susanna Egan (1999) makes a similar claim when she remarks that writing is not only a matter of narrative involvement or self-recognition, “but also of co-respondence, in which two or more voices encounter one another, or interact” (3).

2.5 On the Theoretical Literature

More than any other genre, autobiographical writing seems to revolve around the figure of the author; it is thus important to analyse or review what the concept “author” means for critics. Traditional conceptions of autobiography read at the centre of the autobiography a self, in the words of Betty Bergland (1994) “an essential individual, imagined to be coherent and unified, the originator of her own meaning” (134). Secondly, the relationship between the subject and the language the writer uses is considered unproblematic, since language is here taken to be transparent; as such, “a speaking subject automatically conveys in language an intended meaning that is immediately apprehended” (134). These views are challenged by Bergland as “humanist and essentialist” notions, whereby a “self” is located at the “center” of autobiography. She argues that the nature of the speaking subject needs to be reviewed in “postmodern” terms: instead of a unified subject, a

“dynamic” one that “changes over time” and “is situated historically in the world and positioned in multiple discourses”; and instead of seeing language as a transparent medium, “understand that the discursive practices in which the speaking subject is situated and positioned shape possible utterances” (134). In other words, we do not speak language, language speaks us.

Indeed, it becomes important, in the argument of Fischer (1994) that the “autonomous bounded egos” be replaced (and already have been) by “decentered selves” (80). In his discussion of the nature of the relationship between language and the speaking/writing subject, Fischer argues that in the modern world, subjects are not products of single cultures, but of multiple discourses, which are, invariably, linked to different ideological approaches to the world. As such, structuralist and poststructuralist theories undermine “behaviourist” and “symbolist” models of language as consisting of “unproblematic tokens, combined and rearranged in meaningful chains of sentences or utterances”; and symbols being “not univocal simple tokens... but more complex sign tokens... richly polysemic yet discrete” (85). In structuralist and poststructuralist models, symbols and metaphors are “decomposed” into

chains of metonymns or associations that play into disseminating, ramifying, transmuting dynamics, attempting to model, in the structuralist case, the semantic-symbolic parameters of variation and transformation, and, in the poststructuralist case, the transmuting ambivalences of meaning... that keep texts and communication labile (unless forcibly controlled, in which case poststructuralist deconstructive sensibilities highlight the tensions and pressures of alternative meanings subversive to those intended and authorized by the controls) (85-86).

Roland Barthes declares, in a polemic on the traditional conception of the author as a guarantor of meaning, that “to give a text an Author is to impose a limit

on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (2000: 147). It is noteworthy that Barthes is not here talking about “the author” but “the Author” – that entity traditionally considered to be fully in control of its self and consciousness, and capable unproblematically of conveying its intentions through the medium of (a transparent) language which it can bend to its will. It is this concept of Author that Barthes declares “dead”, not literally or empirically so, but figuratively and metaphorically, in the “radical sense” to borrow a phrase from Bennett and Royle (2009), of being “absent from the text” (21).

Although this is a poststructuralist perspective, Derrida, whose theory of deconstruction provides the frame for the present dissertation, does not fully subscribe to the idea of the death of the author. According to Nicholas Royle (2003), Derrida “has always been extremely attentive to the importance of what the author means or is trying to say” (7). Rather than being concerned with the death of the author, Derrida is, according to Royle, “in fact absolutely obsessed with the *life* of the author... (7; original emphasis). This is why, in his engagement with an autobiographical text (discussed in more detail below), Derrida does not kill off the author, but argues that the author needs the ear of the other to sign her text, to, in effect, complete the writing.

For Derrida (1985), “there are... aleatory, or chance elements at work in every kind of message” (108); and the writer does not know to whom she speaks. As such, the autobiographical subject cannot know in advance to whom, to which “I” she is speaking or writing. This is the space of the Other, who, Derrida says in the *Ear of the Other*, signs the text (and not the autobiographer).

The *Ear of the Other* is the key theoretical text for the present study. In it is a lecture, “Otobiographies”, delivered by Derrida in which he elaborates some of the

far-reaching implications of twentieth-century reinterpretations of human sensitivity. As a post-structuralist, Derrida's theories about literature are founded largely on a critique of classical conceptions of subjectivity and history. These were traditionally conceived as unproblematic terms and mutually exclusive. McDonald writes in the preface to *The Ear of the Other* that Derrida reopens for debate the question of "how to think about the relationship of an empirical, individual life to the structure of the written text" (McDonald 1985: ix).

For Derrida, for a signature to take place, what is crucial is not the *I* who signs, but the *I* who discerns the signature; in other words, the ear that hears, that will perceive the signature and only after the ear has perceived the signature will the signature have taken place. In this sense, the *autos* (the self as the subject of biography) is displaced into the *otos* (the structure of the ear as a perceiving organ). The implication of this is that a text "does not fully control its interpretation, nor can any single reading pre-empt the field of readings" (ix). On this view, both the text and its interpretations remain plural.

This brings to the fore one of Derrida's central philosophical concerns, the speech/writing opposition. Historically, speech has always been considered as the "truth" and writing, to borrow a line from Smith (1995: 172), is "the inauthentic proxy which truth will use only in order to record itself". Uncannily, however, this "record", this presentation (in other words, writing), becomes itself primary, more crucial because it now becomes, after speech has died, the only access to truth. As Smith puts it, "Truth is succeeded by its representation, the authentic by its copy" (180). For Smith, then, this is the ultimate conclusion that can be drawn from Derrida's concept of writing and autobiography. Smith's thesis is that writing displaces the human subject, and that, "with Derrida, autobiography disturbs the very

value of the human” (191) because although it is ordinarily considered to be a human activity, autobiography exceeds (and thus escapes the control of) the human subject which produced it, forcing the human to be reformulated according to its rules:

The human must be reformulated according to the very thing which exceeds it, namely the autobiographic function of writing, which writes itself and whose structure takes the form of an inability to be reduced to an end (Smith 1995: 191).

However, as a poststructuralist, Derrida is out to undermine and subvert “structure”; so why would Smith be talking about structure here? Derrida does not deny the existence of “structure”, but of structure with a “centre”. The traditional conception of structure is that it has a point of origin, a sort of fixed centre upon which it is built or around which it revolves. This makes every structure totalizable, even if considered infinite or open (such as language). For Derrida, however, totalization is impossible especially in language because the field of language is in effect a field of “play”; and as such, even if language is conceived of as a finite field, it is a finitude which contains within itself, or allows, the *infinite*, because it allows endless substitution and supplementarity:

If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field – that is, language and a finite language – excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a *centre* which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. One could say ... that this movement of play, permitted by *the lack or absence of a centre or origin*, is the movement of supplementarity (Derrida 1978: 289; my emphasis).

It follows, then, that if every text is a closed system, and, therefore, finite, it will resist totalization for reasons of supplementarity. No text has a centre (the author in autobiography) around which it revolves, because such a centre is not *presentable* but a *re*-presentation, and every representation implies an absence, a lack. In the same vein, a point of origin for any text is problematic because such a point is plagued by indeterminacy. For example, in autobiography, the author is conceived of as being the point of origin of the text. The question, however, is, where does the life (the subject of the autobiography) end and the text begin? As such, autobiography is plagued by an originary irruption, an originary indeterminacy. Herein lies “the essence or the energy of the *graphein* (writing) ... the originary effacement of the proper name” (Derrida 1967: 108). The question remains then: who or what signs the autobiography; is it the author or is it the text itself? Derrida addresses this problem in “Otobiographies” by making the counter intuitive argument that it is the ear of the other that signs the text, and, indeed, constitutes the subject (the *autos*) of the autobiography.

2.6 On the Primary Texts

Joseph Conrad

Achebe describes Conrad as “a bloody racist” (1989); Mphahlele describes him as one of the few “outstanding white novelists who portray competently characters belonging to cultural groups outside their own”; for Goonetillike, he is “a distinguished minority of radical contemporary critics of imperialism” (cited in White (1996:179)). According to White, the comments of these critics are an example of the “antithetical responses” that Conrad excites; she writes that “for some readers, Conrad’s works re-present his time’s dominant congratulatory discourse; for others they subvert it” (179). In her essay, “Conrad and Imperialism” White explores

the complex nature of Conrad's writing through the prism of how he experienced the world and his perception of imperialism and colonialism; as well as the impact these have and make on both colonizer and colonized, in other words, on both civilized European and savage native. White argues that Conrad's works "reveal that imperialism was never the stable monolith that it might appear to be from a distance" (180). Indeed, she claims that Conrad's fiction depicts "a more holistic attitude towards imperialistic Europe's 'civilising mission'" (181).

At the time that Conrad boarded the steamer for Congo, "he was at least partially a victim of the Victorian myth of the Dark Continent" (181): the "white man" as an efficient, benevolent bearer of civilisation's torch (184). Being in the unique position of experiencing things firsthand, what Conrad discovered instead was "men cut off from and nostalgic for Europe, and drunk on power, their presumed racial superiority, and alcohol (184). He was, thus, able to see beyond the rhetoric of the empire's civilizing mission to the disparity between that discourse and the actuality of grabbing whatever could be got, purely for economic gain (183-4). In the words of Knowles and Moore (2000), he "saw through the philanthropic pretence to the commercial interest behind colonialism" (78). The central argument of White's essay, then, is that Conrad's experience, as well as his discovery that the rhetoric employed to legitimize imperialism in the eyes of the people back home in Europe, contradicted what he witnessed himself, informed and profoundly shaped all his fiction (185).

The view that Conrad's experiences informed his works is one shared by John G. Peters (2010) when he writes that "Conrad's varied experiences... would profoundly guide the direction of his writing" (3). Peters also sees Conrad as "a particularly strong critic of imperialism... [one who] consistently questions the

justifications behind the colonial endeavor” (5). Even more significant about Conrad for Peters, however, is the former’s “experiments” with narrative technique and narrative time and sequence; for Peters, it is this that makes Conrad a modernist writer. He argues that it is Conrad, rather than James Joyce or Virginia Woolf (as is the common belief) who began “making minor alterations and augmentations to traditional narrative techniques such as flashback... point of view... and frame narratives” (6). Peters also argues that Conrad did not see the universe as “indifferent” as did many of his contemporaries, instead, he saw a fragmented and absurd universe in which human beings could neither control their existence nor find any ultimate meaning in their lives or in the world they inhabited. For him, meaning was not transcendental, but constructed (8).

Conrad’s view of progress was, thus, not optimistic and he did not trust in the “ultimate benevolence” (8) of the universe. For Conrad, progress was neither an eventual given, nor a natural process (for example, from savage to civilised). This is why he questioned “the privileged position that Western civilization held in the world” (8); and gave more attention to investigating “the nature of the self and its relation to the society” according to Peters, than he did to social issues which occupied writers of the time (5).

Knowles and Moore (2000) also argue that a distinguishing feature of Conrad’s colonial fictions “is that they repeatedly strip the imperial adventure of its claims to anything finer than crude commercialism” (79). Thus, according to them, Conrad exposes “the immorality of colonialism and its disturbing implications for the Western image” (79). As an example, they cite a comment from his *Last Essays* where he describes African colonialism as “the vilest scramble for loot that ever

disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration” (78).

Conrad’s revulsion is also expressed in a letter to Roger Casement in 1903:

It is an extraordinary thing that the conscience of Europe which seventy years ago has put down the slave trade on humanitarian grounds tolerates the Congo State today. It is as if the moral clock had been put back many hours... in 1903, seventy-five years or so after the abolition of the slave trade (where ruthless systematic cruelty towards the blacks is the basis of commercial policy) (cited in Knowles and Moore 2000, p.78).

2.6.1 *The Congo Diary*

According to Knowles and Moore (2000), Conrad’s experiences in the Congo “were the turning point in his mental life... and determined his transformation from a sailor to a writer” (82); for it is the *Diary*, along with some letters written by Conrad that “provide the only firsthand information about the events on which *Heart of Darkness* is based” (83). Knowles and Moore’s piece on the *Congo Diary* is however, more descriptive than analytical.

A more literary-critical analysis of the *Diary* is done by Ibrahim Bello-Kano (2005) in an essay in which he explores the effects of travel and being different on the “Gaze”. He discusses how The Same views (gazes upon) The Other, not disinterestedly, but, on the contrary, constructively; that is to say, the Same, through its Gaze, gives to (imposes upon) the Other a form, shape, and structure of its own making, which is not necessarily natural to the Other. Bello-Kano writes that the *Diary* “consists of a central subject”, what he calls the “writing-seeing ‘I’”, in other words the author, who “maintains its semantic authority (over other bodies), to the extent it is able to tell their story, to narrate their situation (pleasant, unpleasant, exotic), and their actions (moving, stationary), and so on” (59). A major concern of

Bello-Kano's essay is to emphasise that the *Diary* is (a piece of) *writing*, and, as writing, it

exists only as a documentary account of travelling, written, for the most part, after the events it describes *had already taken place*, and therefore is, to this extent, a *reflection*, textually and rhetorically, on the events of the journey, on the past (extra-travel reflection) (60, my emphasis).

On this view, Bello-Kano maintains that it is the “gaze” alone that “constructs, orders and arranges” the events in the *Diary* (61). He concludes his paper on the argument that “the diary, as writing, is a representational device, and a *fictional* one at that” (71, my emphasis). Bello-Kano's reading of the *Diary* is a deconstructive one and he bases his argument on Derrida's claim that writing “never touches the soil, as it were” (71). He explains in parenthesis that what is supposed to be, or in reality is, “a list of facts”, is, in the diary, “transformed into a narrative, or narrativized, i.e. the events or facts ‘speaking themselves’ as a story or fiction” (71).

Now, although the present dissertation also reads the *Diary* from a Derridean perspective, its analysis of the *Diary* does not aim to show the fictional nature or otherwise of the diary, but to explore the effects, as mentioned earlier, of the Ear on the writing self, as well as to explore opposing readings of the text, or readings that subvert the literal meaning of an author's intention behind the text. The latter type of analysis will be based on Derrida's proposal, in the *Ear of the Other*, that in every utterance (or piece of language) two opposing forces are at work (or play!): “active forces” and “reactive degeneration” (1985: 29). The former signify, for all intents and purposes, the author's intention (synonymous often with the literal or surface meaning of the words); the latter comprises all the subversive (and not-so-subversive) readings that can be applied to the utterance. Both readings are arrived at

through and from the same words, the same utterance, the same piece of language. For Derrida, this means that the readings share a “family resemblance” so to speak, “however incompatible they may sometimes appear” (29). Derrida, then, questions whether there might not be some “powerful utterance-producing machine that programs the movements of the two opposing forces at once,” thereby coupling, conjugating or marrying them in a given set, a set whose limits (despite its *being* a set) cannot be set, nor arrested, but is constantly in a state of play, with the opposing forces continually passing into each other so that ultimately, the opposition itself collapses, or cannot stand fixed.

It would seem, then, that the reactive degeneration mimics or imitates the active force, since “what passes elsewhere as the “same” utterance” could say “exactly the opposite and correspond instead to the inverse” (1985: 30): a sort of reactive inversion to the thing it mimes. The reactive degeneration functions, then, much like the unconscious. For this reason, Derrida claims, it is “necessary to account for the possibility of this mimetic inversion and perversion” (30).

2.6.2 *The Gatekeeper*

Blake Morrison (2002) describes Eagleton’s text as an “anti-memoir” because of Eagleton’s disdain for the immodesty of the genre of autobiography in which both author and reader are united by less than noble intentions and desires: the former, a desire for self-display, the latter, the desire to enter into the inner life of another, to discover hidden secrets, so to speak. *The Gatekeeper*, however, according to Morrison, frustrates both desires because in it, Eagleton tells “a lot about what he thinks, but almost nothing of what he feels” (1). This notwithstanding, the text displays a common feature of memoir, its limited scope.

For Terrence Hawkes, Eagleton's memoir chronicles the latter's "journey from the periphery to the centre, from working-class outskirts of English culture to its middle and upper-class core, from outlandish Salford to a chair at Oxford" (2002:1). Hawkes describes Eagleton's memoir as "frequently hilarious"; and in it, according to Hawkes, Eagleton "set himself to undermine [English civilization]" through covert attacks on the person of Greenway, his supervisor. As Eagleton writes, in fact, "Greenway was the first truly civilized man I had ever encountered, and about as warmly spontaneous as a shaving brush" (*The Gatekeeper*, p. 127).

Nicholas Wroe describes Eagleton as "Britain's best-known academic rebel and literary critic" (2002:1); and that "the increased prominence of largely forgotten texts by women writers, working-class writers or black writers, in part came from work undertaken by Eagleton" (2). This he ascribes to Eagleton's technique of taking familiar texts, roughing them up and reading against the grain (2). Wroe, like Morrison mentioned above, also maintains that Eagleton dislikes the genre of autobiography despite its being "enormously popular in Britain"; he thus calls his book a memoir, which for Eagleton, according to Wroe, is a way of writing about ideas which can be weaved in and out of a life (2). Wroe also observes that *The Gatekeeper*, although "a captivating read," is yet "tantalizingly non-disclosive" (2). It would seem, then, that in his memoir, Eagleton privileges analysis over genuine insight into himself, and that is why the reader comes away with the impression that Eagleton the human being, the man behind the witty words, is missing from the text. This play of concealment is an aspect of the text that the present dissertation explores in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

2.7 Conclusion

The preceding pages of this review do not, in any way, present an exhaustive review of the literature on the topics discussed. Nevertheless, the slant of the presentation is intended to highlight the relationship between the diary and the memoir on the one hand, the truthfulness or otherwise of their content, and a description of their form or structure as opposed to that of autobiography, on the other.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. Contrary to Gurdorf's implied separation of "autobiography-writing" and "history-writing", there is a sense in which even "history" or, in this case, "history-writing" is a genre of literature. According to Lawrence Stone, "historians have always told stories. From Thucydides and Tacitus to Gibbon and Macaulay the composition of narrative in lively and elegant prose was always accounted their highest ambition. History was regarded as a branch of rhetoric" (Stone 1979: 3). This argument is echoed by Dover for whom the historian has no choice between history and literature (narrative) because "we study poetry and fiction without being poets and novelists... all classicists, whether they know it or not, are historians: of linguistic, graphic, and literary behaviour" (1983: 55). Or consider Jameson's famous remark that "history is inaccessible to us except in textual form [and that] it can be approached only by way of prior (re) textualization" (1981:82). Thus in history, as in any art, reality and form are inseparably interconnected because literary composition and historical narrative blend into each other. Finally, according to White (1984:29), the narrativisation of events is also a means of symbolizing events

without which their “historicality” cannot be indicated. The point is that there is no historical account without it being a story of some sort or kind, without, in other words, a plot (with sub- plots). Storytelling is indispensable to any form of discourse; what writers (historians, economists, journalists, and so on) narrate in their depictions or representations is selected and shaped by storytelling, and creative imagination. Indeed, even for Karl Popper, Scientific discovery is akin to explanatory storytelling, to myth making and to poetic imagination (Popper 1981: 87).

**CHAPTER THREE:
CONRAD'S *DIARY*: FORM, CONTENT,
AND CONTEXT OF PRESENTATION**

3.1 Introduction

The *Congo Diary* records Joseph Conrad's impressions and movements from 13 June to 1 August 1890, together with notes on the weather, the nature of the terrain, and the meanings of certain native terms. It chronicles his 320 kilometre trek on the coast from Boma to Matadi, and then to Kinsasha. The *Diary* is written in an elliptical style; it is episodic and structurally organised around the date entry, with discrete entries linked to a calendar and presented in temporal sequence. This gives an impression of immediacy, created by a minimal gap between event and narration, and, as is often the case with diaries, Conrad's *Diary* lacks a retrospective narratorial intrusion. The *Diary*, thus, becomes, to borrow a phrase from Judith Butler, a "performative act", whereby there is the "coincidence of signifying and enacting" (1995:197). While acting as a diegetic narrative, it is also mimetic, a showing as well as a telling; that is to say, although it is a document of real events and landscapes, it is also told in language that is dramatic, pointing to the creative nature of the text.

Conrad's *Diary* was written against the background of the pervasive belief within the European literati of his time, about the moral and intellectual superiority of Western Europeans or the white race. These, along with the "consolidation," according to Carr (2002:73), "of narratives of progress, development, scientific advance, and white supremacy" had provided "ideologies that made imperialism possible". By the time of Conrad's journey in 1890, the leading colonial powers, Britain and France, controlled more than half of the world's territories (Knowles and Moore (2000)), under the guise of a humanitarian mission to bring education and

civilisation to the so-called primitive or savage societies. At the time of Conrad's journey, the Congo itself (called the "Congo Free State") was the personal property of the Belgian King, Leopold II, who had established stations along the Congo River and made "treaties" with local village chiefs appropriating their land and labour. What was supposed to be a civilising mission was, in reality, chiefly a concern with grabbing ivory; and, with the coming of the "rubber boom", the stations, according to Knowles and Moore, had become "prisons and collecting points for the wild rubber that natives were forced to seek in the jungle while their wives and families were held as hostages" (2000: 83).

These atrocities informed Conrad's disenchantment with the Congo as both a material landscape and human presence. Although the *Diary* gives very general descriptions of the landscape and only mentions certain people and places, it yet records moments of anguish, discomfort, sickness, physical and mental exhaustion, the horror and horrid smells of decomposing bodies, and the disquieting sight of "white men's graves". The final entry of the *Diary* summarises Conrad's horrific journey: "Harou not very well. Mosquitoes. Frogs. Beastly. Glad to see the end of this stupid tramp. Feel rather seedy" (161). His lifelong friend Edward Garnett would later say that "Conrad's Congo experiences were the turning-point in his mental life and their effects on him determined his transformation from a sailor to a writer" (1928:8).

Conrad's *Diary* consists of a central subject, the writing-seeing "I" which moves through real and imaginative geographies, landscapes and bodies, encoding a narrative of adventure, an adventure which is anchored to the dominant body of the narrator traveller. It is this travelling narrator who emplots the situation, action, and "character" (identity) of the other in the form of a perspective on the other's body

and landscape (bio-geography). The narrator is able to do this because he remains invisible, in his words, an “invisible Body”. The narrator, being the dominant body in the *Diary*, maintains semantic and intellectual authority over other bodies, to the extent it is able to tell their story and narrate their situation.

Being a first-person narrative and a most self-centered genre, the diary (in this case Conrad’s) does not allow any other voice to intrude, least of all that of the narrator’s objects of scrutiny. The Gaze of the writing-seeing “I” inscribes meaning and significance upon the Other, giving it a form and shape which derives its validity and truth only from the perspective (subjective perceptions) of the seeing “I”. As such, the narrator’s adjectives used to describe the external world and the bodies that inhabit it are true and faithful descriptions only to the narrator. This informs the slant of the descriptions whereby all the people in the diary are described in the light of the situation of their bodies: sick, heavy, ugly, Negroid, and so on.

The author of the *Diary* is on the move, as mentioned earlier, and a traveller. Interestingly, however, while the author is on the move, the *Diary* strives for “synchronic essentialism”, immobility, or what Homi Bhabha (1994:71) calls the “signifiers of stability”. Arguably, immobility determines immortality, which, consciously or unconsciously, is the goal of every writing. It is this struggle between synchrony and diachrony with which the writer of the diary has to contend: while the *Diary* is strongly marked by the date entry (implying diachrony or development), the writing of the *Diary* is marked by tense and indexicality. The *Diary*, as writing, as such, like all diaries do, exists only as a documentary account of travelling, written after the events it describes had already taken place, and is, to this extent, a *reflection* on the events of the journey.

The real task for Conrad, then, was the effort to rescue significance and value from within his own experience, and these for the satisfaction of his consciousness, so that he could be satisfied that he had put down some important parts of the truth as he saw it. Therefore, as Said (2008) puts it, “Conrad’s stake in the structures of experience he had created was absolutely crucial, since it was rooted in the human desire to make a character of and for himself” (12). The character thus created, allows for the emergence of a “rational self-possession that regulates the exchange between the world and the self” (12). However, Said equates the exposure of the mind (such as is found in the diary) with the literary paradigm of the “idiom”: its purpose, he writes, is to arbitrate the relations between a problematic self and a dynamic object (9). For Said, “the more distinguished a mind [such as Conrad’s], the greater need there is that this habitual exercise be disciplined, regulated by serious and satisfying moral norms that derive from one’s personal experience” (9).

On this view, it could be argued that the more distinguished and educated a mind, the less faithful its rendering or representation of reality is likely to be (especially if such a reality is an alien space, unfamiliar and foreign) since the exercise of the mind and consciousness needs to be “disciplined” and “regulated” by *satisfying moral norms*. The contents of Conrad’s *Diary* must thus satisfy his “enlightened” and “civilized” mind, in other words his internal “Ear” which perceives, censors, gives the nod of approval, and, ultimately, writes the *Diary*.

In such a case, what the diarist’s (narrator’s) gaze encounters is meaningless chaos which, if accommodated, places a hopeless restriction upon human behavior. However, the narrator’s consciousness must impose order and significance over this as the platform upon which man’s will to live depends. The portrayal of self and other in the *Diary* becomes, then, to borrow Said’s words “a long drama in which the

arrangement of setting, act, and actor are Conrad's consciousness of himself in the struggle toward the equilibrium of character" (13). Therefore, what the *Diary* represents are fragments of Conrad's experience, which he had chosen to defy the chaos and alienness around him. As Said puts it, "for Conrad it was reason, or the intellect, that could illuminate and then master all the threats of chaos" (19).

In such a case, then, historical *reality* and imaginative *construction* become inextricably entwined. Indeed, most acts of knowing make a constant reference to two main elements, which are necessary to avoid distortions: an individual enquirer capable of rational thought and inductive argument, and a world of historical facts, which is potentially (though never fully) knowable. However, this already indicates an affinity between the objective inquirer and her opposite, the subjective romantic visionary, since both share a dedication to defining reality which transcends the untidiness of the actual (if there is one) process of knowing, in which the "objective and subjective", according to Horsley (1990) "endlessly collide and qualify one another" (2). Whatever knowledge is attained, she argues, arises merely from "illusions of certainty", since it is attained "from an imaginary vantage point, above ordinary perplexities" (2)

All this is not to fictionalise the *Diary*, but rather to deconstruct the self-assurance of such autobiographical narrative by pointing to the aporia of knowing. What every diary encodes is its author's *desire* not to forget; for rather than being a document of historical facts (or even, of subjective truth), the *Diary* is Conrad's desire to contain (and tame) time, to freeze it within the pages of his *Diary*, so that he could ultimately immortalize it for his (and every reader's) future reference. This already points to the unreliability of memory; but even more important, to *Desire* as the driving force behind every narrative. Desire, however, is by its very nature tragic,

for it is inextricably bound with and always precludes *loss*, and derives its very force from *death*.

3.2 The Unfolding of the Proper Name in the *Diary*

Robert Smith (1995) writes that when autobiography is “considered as a subjectivism”, presence will be at its heart; as it will be also when autobiography is considered in Lejeune’s terms, as a “retrospective story”. He points out, however, that self-presence cannot be assured, and once this happens, (i.e. once self-presence is disturbed or begins to fracture), “it is writing which will be disclosed” (77). In his reading of Derrida’s *Otobiographies*, Smith argues that autobiographical self-representation takes place “from mouth to ear”, a journey that describes a circle which closes back upon itself and is represented by a symbol of the “ring” (or “a serpent biting its tail”), a “symbol of infinity” (77).

The message (self-representation, autobiography), in describing the circle, runs the risk of harm, since the ear cannot receive it until it leaves the mouth, thereby becoming “broadcast beyond the circle of the self”; in principle, “dispatched at large” (78). There is always already, then, a possibility of misunderstanding or mistaking (“errancy”), always the chance that it may not return (to recall Derrida in the *Ear of the other*, “nothing ever returns to the bearer of the name; only the name can inherit” (1985:7)). In this sense, the message is an emission that cannot return to its origin in the autobiographer or sender; it is *disseminated*, simply infinitely repeated. Unlike a letter which is sealed and private, and which, according to Lacan, “always arrives at its destination” (cited in “preface” to *Of Grammatology* : lixv), the address (whether in the form of self-(re)presentation, autobiography, or text), is like a postcard, as Smith explains. It is ever open to the public: “for the circuit from mouth

to ear is also an a priori open or public thoroughfare”(78), and always might not arrive at its destination, like a boomerang caught in the branches of a tree.

In the *Ear of the Other*, Derrida explores the concept of “hearing oneself speak” and the immediate grasping of the sense of one’s own utterance. The act of auto-narration (telling one’s life to oneself), such as is found in the *Diary*, involves, in Derrida’s account, sending the text out into the world to be “signed” and returned to its meanwhile deceased sender. The act of auto-narration, then *entails a* detour via the Other—its signatory; but, again, it returns to the *name*. All this has implications for our interpretation of Conrad’s textual practices in his *Diary*, as we will soon see below.

Meanwhile, according to Lejeune (1982), the problems of autobiography must be considered in relation to the proper name; more so in printed texts where the entire utterance is assumed by a person whose name appears on the cover. Thus, the name sums up the whole existence of what is called the *author*, and is the only mark in the text of an outside-of-the-text, designating a real person. Arguably, the *name* becomes the point of contact between the inside and the outside of the text. Based on Lejeune’s insistence on identity between author, narrator and subject, the proper name becomes an authenticating device for the author. In the autobiographical discourse, the author cannot then afford to give up her proper name since it is this that guarantees that the autobiographical pact will not be violated. For Lejeune, the proper name points to a “real person whose existence is legally verifiable, a matter of record” (200). It constitutes, then, a sign of the author’s reality in the eyes of the reader; and this is why, he argues, “it is impossible for the autobiographical vocation and the passion for anonymity to exist in the same being” (209).

It would seem, from this perspective, that for Lejeune, the proper name and the author's name are the same, and serve or have the same function. This is not as straight forward a case for Foucault, however, who, in his influential essay "What is an Author?" examines the history of what he calls the "author-function" (1979:107). He argues that the name of an author is not precisely a proper name among others, and that its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of classification. As he points out, "an author's name is not simply an element in a discourse; it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuming a classificatory function" (107). As such, unlike the proper name, the author's name, Foucault argues further, "does not pass from the interior of a discourse to the real and exterior individual who produced it; instead, the name seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing its mode of being"(107).

Whereas for Lejeune the author's name is the only mark in the text of an indubitable "outside-of-the text" designating a real person, for Foucault, this is the function of the *proper* name, though he points out that a proper name cannot be turned into "a pure and simple reference...it is the equivalent of a description" (105). In a sense, Conrad's *Diary*, rather than pointing to the empirical "outside-of-the-text" Conrad, offers (or, is) merely a *description* of the person Conrad, in the sense that it describes the personality of the writing subject. In another sense, it is an instance of Conrad's personality accessed through his thoughts (the contents of his diary), and those thoughts, through his written discourse. In the *Diary* itself, proper names, such as Casement and Harou. "describe" (in the sense of indicating) Europeans; not one native is referred to by name. It can, thus, be argued that for Conrad, the natives are not "real" persons since they lack the "proper names" that would designate them as such.

Smith (1995) writes that with regard to proper names, an original multiplicity confuses the proper with the common as a result of “a multiple, rather than a simple or simply double, origin of the autobiography” (81). Since every autobiographical writing is a process of hearing oneself speak, a telling of oneself to oneself, the proper name, which grounds the discourse, thus, “repeats itself to itself” (84). In this sense, Conrad’s *Diary* “repeats” Conrad to himself; it is an instance of Conrad writing himself to himself. Derrida explains, however, that when an autobiographer writes herself to herself, she writes herself to the other who is infinitely far away and who is supposed to send her signature back to her (1985:88). In the case of the *Diary*, then, Conrad writes to an “infinitely far away” other whom he must wait upon to return his signature back to him; but it is an other who is unknown, and who sends the signature back, not to the “outside-of-the-text” Conrad, but to the proper name “Conrad”.

Similar to the year (“annulus”), however, which annuls itself by closing (circling) back upon itself, the proper name also, then, annuls itself by coming back around on itself. By sending forth his name, Conrad must await its return: the name is thus expected to return to itself, to be *repeated* to itself. Being (potentially) repeated, Conrad already becomes double: the sent forth and the returned. Such repeatability is, as such, a kind of polyphony which forces Conrad’s *identity* to be left, according to Smith, mostly in suspense since “identity must be bargained for through the name which is equally treacherous” (87-88).

The proper name is not then, a stable, fixed, reliable entity. It reproduces itself in near-identical repetitions over time: a kind of “sowing”, according to Spivak (1978) “that does not produce plants but is simply infinitely repeated; a semination that is not *insemination* but *dissemination*, seed spilled in vain, an emission that

cannot return to its origin” (lxv). Such repeatability entails an originary alterity, which always already “sets a deviancy”, to borrow Smith’s words, “into its machinery which imperils identity” (89). The ideality of the proper name is, thus, put at risk, because temporality marks it: repeatability and reproduction are both situated in time.

To sum up, three main things work to undermine the stability of the proper name: the *distance* covered between the mouth and the ear which undermines self-presence because broadcast; the *time* it takes for the circle defined to complete (close in upon) itself; and, iterability or repeatability which undermines identity and self-sameness. Finally, telling oneself to oneself is an affirmation; *signing* the text in one’s name is an affirmation; therefore, the proper name becomes an affirming “yes, yes”, a yes that says yes to itself, affirms itself. But like the “yes”, the proper name has no “content” *proper* to it. The “yes” is merely an affirmation, the proper name, an imprint. Indeed, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida argues that writing, rather than *placing* its subject, *displaces* it, for the text is always a sign of the subject’s absence rather than her presence; the autobiographer’s activity becomes, then, a deconstruction practiced upon the self.

Through writing, Conrad’s *Diary* gives itself up to a deconstruction, deconstructs itself:

The speech of hearing oneself speak is indebted to the mark [trace, writing] which imprints its ear with an equivalent seal of approval which also confuses it, pierces it, generates the autobiography, and lets or makes everybody come (Smith 1995:96).

In this context, Conrad must have recourse to textuality, to writing as a supplement to visibility and presence. The *Diary*, as a text, brings together the objects of visibility and the language in which the objects are described, re-

presented, or narrated. The *Diary*, then, is a vehicle for the re-tracing of visible objects so that they become legible; it is, essentially, a repetition of the same. But Conrad must pay a price for this: if he is to remain the subject of writing, he must cease to be a flesh and blood person; to remain the authorial consciousness of the *Diary*, he must also represent himself as a corporeal image in the *Diary*; inevitably, he must refer to himself as a written self in the *Diary*.

Conrad the author, the proper name, thus, splits into three: the investing (investigating) seeing (gazing) I (eye) (i.e. the travelling, mobile, and active Conrad; the seeing man); a writing subject (i.e. Conrad the real author); and Conrad the written subject (the textual trace). There is yet a fourth: Conrad the narratee, the ear, the other, the other ear, the ear of the other, the first addressee of the *Diary*, the other-ear-Conrad who must return Conrad's signature (the name) back to him; not "him" the person-Conrad, but "him" (or more correctly, "it") the name-Conrad in order for the *Diary* to exist, to happen, to be.

3.3 *The Diary* as Conrad's Autobiographical Desire and Loss

In his discussion of the philosopher David Hume, Dollimore (2001) explains that for Hume, the self is "completely mutable and entirely the prisoner of time" (93). Even meditation upon the self such as is contained in life writing is, for Hume, pointless since the kind of self which meditation presupposes is non-existent. Hume's point, explains Dollimore, is that "during introspection one is always caught up in the transient, fleeting impressions of consciousness itself", and that "one can never get behind those impressions to something more substantial and enduring" (93). This radically undermines all traditional notions of Self as knowable or even as discernible. Indeed, Hume's conclusion is that we are "nothing but a bundle or

collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are *in a perpetual flux and movement*” (cited in Dollimore 2001: 93).

Conrad’s *Diary* is written in the past tense, suggesting a time-lapse between the time the events depicted took place and the time of the writing. Since, on Hume’s argument, nothing within the self remains unalterably the same through flux and change, and since any notion of the self as stable and unchanging, or, at least, unified, is false, the events in the *Diary* can only be taken at face value. They should not be seen to point to any truth beyond or behind them, for what they are really are nothing more than, to borrow Dollimore’s phrase, “the movement and flux of consciousness” (93), Conrad’s consciousness. However, there is a further problem, for it seems one concept (“consciousness”) has merely replaced another (“self”). To argue that the *Diary* reflects Conrad’s consciousness is to suppose that Conrad has a consciousness which he can access on introspection; that is to say, even though there is, on Hume’s argument, no Self, Conrad, at least, could have self awareness through his consciousness.

Rather than providing stability, however, self-consciousness or self-awareness disturbs it, and this brings up the question of “Desire”. Alexandre Kojève, writing in the 1930’s, maintains that self-awareness entails a kind of disturbance and alienation. As Dollimore summarises Kojève’s argument,

What one is aware of is not so much one’s self, but one’s separateness from the rest of the world, and what one introspects is not a self-evident essence or identity, but an emptiness or nothingness which is the basis of desire – the desire to become, to possess, to be recognized... ‘the I of desire’ [is] ‘an *emptiness* greedy for content’ (163; original emphasis).

The implication of all this is that there is no such thing as a self, or a self-consciousness. What is conventionally regarded as a “self” or “consciousness” is

actually a no-thing which is inhabited by rapidly shifting perceptions which are impossible to grasp, fix, or contain, much less master. What exists is the desire to do so, the fulfillment of which gives the desiring subject a sense of identity and control. For instance, Conrad's primary desire is to reach his destination: "Nselembe"; before this can be fulfilled, however, there are other desires along the way such as the desire for clean water, mild weather, a good camping site free from mosquitoes, peace among the native carriers, improved health for Harou. It is for this reason that man is described as a desiring animal; and desire, doomed to infinite hunger, leaves man in a state of anguish and despair, a situation in which Conrad constantly finds himself. This is evident from his *Diary* where he writes, for example, "Very hot day" (161), "No sunshine. Gloomy cold day" (158), "No sleep. Mosquitoes" (155), "Row with carriers. No water" (155). Thus, desire is ever transient, its satisfaction always in the past, making happiness impossible. This is because the world is governed by time, and time makes mutability and change the only constants in existence. This clearly has implications for Conrad's *Diary* since it follows a temporal sequence. It is impossible, in a world governed by time, to fix origins, destiny, identity and so on. Conrad yearns to seize the day because of the passage of time but is unable to do so because of the very nature of time. As Dollimore puts it: "the very passing of time, which makes us so keen to seize the day, is also somehow what prevents us doing so" (xvi). For Dollimore, this "inability to seize the day" is more fundamentally an inability to realise our desires in a world governed and destroyed by time (xvi). As such, mutability is the inner dynamic of desire, rendering it seemingly impossible, or at least futile and self-defeating. Desire in its very nature is an "experience of lack rooted in loss: caught up somewhere between past loss and future lack, it will remain

unrealisable and always come to consciousness as the seemingly inescapable condition of restlessness, dislocation, lack and anxiety” (Dollimore 1998:13).

All this, according to Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* is because pure consciousness is not possible since being-in-itself refers precisely to a lack of consciousness, since it is simply “*that which is*, that which is self-identical” (1998:166). For Sartre, for Being to *be*, to be perfect *being*, it must not have consciousness of itself, it need merely *be*, exist. Since Being-in-itself entails a lack of consciousness, then achieving it is only possible through death (the absolute lack of consciousness) i.e. becoming nothing. Only then, thus, does the subject achieve true and absolute freedom from the desire inherent in, and which is the driving force behind consciousness (and life). For Conrad to be free of desire, he must, on this argument, cease to have a “self” consciousness since ultimate freedom lies in death: for desire to achieve its perfect state, its state of absolute being-ness, it must be motivated towards death. Paradoxically, for Conrad to be his perfect self or to achieve or attain his perfect state, that of “being-ness”, he must become nothing, nothing.

This has profound implications: desire itself drives life as it does the *Diary*; by implication, then, the aim of all life, and, therefore, Conrad’s *Diary*, as Freud would say, is death. For Schopenhauer, before Freud, ultimate freedom lies in death, but partial freedom is achievable in “those states of being which abolish self hood” (1998:173). Dollimore explains that in *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer discusses how “all *willing* springs from lack, from deficiency, and thus from suffering” (1998:173). On this view, Conrad’s *Diary* is a product of his “suffering” and feelings of “deficiency” in an alien world where “villages [are] quite invisible” and he can only “*infer* their existence from calabashes suspended to palm

trees” (152; my emphasis). As such, like Dollimore would contend, “Desire is a condition of continual, restless, longing – a striving that is bound to frustrate itself” (173), because every satisfied desire gives birth to a new one. For this reason, Dollimore explains, “the will strives to return to ‘the night of unconsciousness’ wherein is found ‘*the peace of the all-sufficient nothing*’” (173; original emphasis).

If the *Diary* is driven by a desire for satisfaction of any sort – be it vindication, self-analysis, confession, exposure, documentation etc, it is doomed to failure because, as Dollimore maintains, “satisfaction is elusive since it always lies in the future or in the past, never the present; the past is irrevocable and the future is uncertain” (175). This is evident from the *Diary’s* hazy descriptions of places that make the landscape seem enigmatic, sombre and almost impenetrable.

A more literary-theoretical discussion of “Desire” is given by Judith Butler (1995) in her essay of that title. There she discusses the relation of language to desire as “one that has assumed the status of an apparently necessary ambivalence” (370). Her argument is that language cannot deliver desire in its transparency because desire is always to some degree displaced by language. What this means is that language cannot perfectly represent desire without becoming itself that which it seeks to represent. That is to say, in attempting to represent desire, language seeks to ‘contain’ that which is external to it. To do so, it must itself *become* desire. In such a situation, the question is whether it is language that gives rise to desire, and whether it also sets limits on the representability of desire. Butler argues that “desire.... requires that writing seek to exceed its own constraints, to present what is “beyond” the word by and through the word” (374). As such, if desire is for what is beyond writing itself, then, argues Butler, the writing of desire will seek to cancel itself as writing and will always also fail to cancel itself completely” (374).

Discerning the relation between language and desire is necessary since desire always needs to be articulated through language. Language, then, must stretch itself to capture a referent that in effect, is beyond it; since, however it cannot do so, writing becomes, in the words of Butler, “condemned to figure that beyond again and again within its own terms” (374). Thus in Conrad’s case, the desire that moves his *Diary* of necessity precedes his writing and in that sense is before and beyond him in a fundamental sense. His desire is to capture and preserve his experience in the Congo against the effects of time and forgetfulness; but this desire precedes the writing, is *beyond* it, and so practically un-capturable except within the boundaries, rules and constraints of writing.

Desire, then, promises mastery but culminates in self-loss; this is always the result of the homoerotic impulse toward self-duplication found in all life-writing. Indeed, such homoeroticism describes the attempt by Conrad to appropriate the scene of reproduction to fulfill, on the argument made by Luce Irigaray, a fantasy of masculine autogenesis (a *masculine*, rather than feminine fantasy since women are biologically structured to procreate, to conceive and reproduce and so need not fantasize in that regard) (cited in Butler 1995:375). On this view, writing by men is an indication of a deep-seated masculine desire to procreate, to *reproduce*. Arguably, then, Conrad’s *Diary* is motivated by a double desire— the desire to preserve his experiences, and the desire to appropriate the scene of reproduction. This dual desire becomes subsumed under a third, more impersonal (impersonal because governed by its own rules) desire, the desire of language to contain the two.

In each case, desire is frustrated or even effaced (by writing). For example, Conrad must refer to himself with the pronoun “I”, which is common property and does not refer exclusively to Conrad alone: it could refer to anyone. Here, then,

language resists Conrad's desire for unmediated self-presence. Also, although they are a constant (and vital and necessary) presence all through Conrad's trek, the natives' individual identity, character and personality are not documented because they are an enigma to Conrad and, therefore, elude the mastery of his language. They become, in a sense, "unwritable", as, indeed, they are for him, merely "carriers"; and when he "made a speech", "they did not understand" (159). Just as his language has failed to *contain* them, so it is undecipherable to them.

Desire is never fulfilled, then, for it is the site where "demand and need are never reconciled" (381). Its fulfilment, according to Butler "would entail a full return to that primary pleasure, and that return would dissolve the very subject which is the condition of desire itself. Hence, the fulfilment of desire would be its radical self-cancellation" (381).

From this, desire unsettles the mastery and subverts the intentionality of the subject who desires. Desire cannot be mastered; this explains why the effort of language to (re) capture a (lost) origin mars every effort at referentiality within language. Desire is thus "defined as displacement, but also an endless chain of substitutions" (1995:380). Needless to say, this definition also applies to language itself, begging the question, is desire, simply, language?

Crucially for the present discussion, Butler discusses Jacques Lacan's thesis on desire. She explains that for Lacan, "language itself is structured as desire. Linguistic reference fails in the same way that desire is structured by failure; if language were to reach the object it desires it would undo itself as language" (283). The failure of desire, according to Butler, lies in its "displacement through an other or a series of others" and that this "renders it elusive, contests its 'apparent' aim, derails it from intentionality" (381). The subject's reliance on an Other (the Ear, the

Diary, readers) vanquishes the subject as a centre of intention, for it is decentered and dissolved through the other(s):

Desire fails not because of an originary foreclosure of the possibility of satisfaction, but because, quite simply, there is always someone else in the way, someone whose place cannot be appropriated [the other(s)] (1995:383).

Every self defines itself as Self by and through its being different from others. The self must thus *repudiate* the other, yet continue to *desire* that other against which it necessarily defines itself. This means that the subject is *structured* by the other. This is why also, in Conrad's *Diary*, the gaze is the gaze of difference, which at the same time, suppresses the "answering gaze" of the native body, of the Congo. For example, in the entry for "Thursday, 3rd July", the writing subject describes the landscape of the Congo as having mostly dense vegetation, so dense that the "villages (are) quite invisible" (152).

This observation about the "invisibility" of the villages registers the dialectic of difference in the *Diary*. The gazing body (Conrad) is dependent on the discriminating documentary powers of the representation of the visual as a desire for presence. In this sense, the fact that the villages are not "present" (visible) to Conrad, makes them to be represented as an "invisibility". This points to Conrad's attempt to "repudiate" the other, the natives. As such, the *Diary* becomes, as it were, the *death* of the living reality of the Congo. Just as the hills and valleys are distant and difficult to explore; just as the forest is dark and dense, the sky cloudy, and the water muddy, so the native body is exotic and utterly "deficient" in that it is always "suffering", "sickly", "horrid", and "negroid and ugly" (*Diary*: 153). Indeed, in the *Diary*, neither the landscape nor the native have subjectivity in the form of "voice-consciousness". This is the aesthetic ontology of ugliness and discomfort (that is, the non-European

environment seen as inherently or naturally deformed or lacking in beauty), which the *Diary* encodes, and applies in equal measure to both the native space and body:

Harou not very well. Mosquitoes – frogs - beastly! Glad to see the end of this stupid tramp – feel rather seedy. Sun rose red. Very hot day (161)

It is noteworthy that in the passage above, the native landscape, the Congo, makes Harou, the white man, sick; it breeds large quantities of mosquitoes, a menacing yet constant presence in the Congo; and harbours the “red” sun which makes the land fiercely hot. Also, the *Diary* depicts scenes of dead native bodies which smell horribly; the skeleton of a native tied to a post, as opposed to the “civilized” “grave” of a white man’s body which lay under a “heap of stones”. Thus, only the body of the natives is left exposed to the elements - it dies and decomposes, returning, as it were, to the landscape. Thus, both native and landscape become one: primitive, inhospitable, ugly, uncivilized. While the body of the native rots and disintegrates in the open landscape, without a sign of culture or religion, the body of the white man lies under a sign of culture and religion: a “heap of stones in the form of a cross” (158).

Again, in the *Diary*, the only value of the natives is a material one as porters or carriers (of the white man’s body and goods); thus they function as a labour supply. In this sense, the body of the other (the black native body) has a utilitarian rather than an aesthetic value. For this reason Conrad views the natives as a mass of bodies rather than as a group of distinct individuals, each with a unique identity. Not once in the *Diary* does Conrad describe any of the porters: their individuality is suppressed, whereas the whites have specific social markers such as proper names and addresses, for example, Roger Casement, Captain Purdy, and Prosper Harou. In a sense, the indigenous body is invested with the attributes of a beast of burden, fit

only for labour. This has consequences for the narrative because the natives *are human*, no less so than Conrad himself; depicting the indigenous body as *beast-ly* potentially undermines the comprehensiveness of the narrative since an essential element is clearly missing from it – the *human-ness* of the natives.

Conrad's *Diary* is full of scientific, geographical and technical diction, the very discourse that fixes the reality of the speaking/writing subject while at the same time establishing the non-presence of the natives (the Other). This makes the narrator the centre of the discourse of the *Diary* since the Other does not escape the narrator's visual field. It is in this sense that the writing subject displaces the natives and the Congo landscape and assumes the position of the ontological-primary self.

However, a close analysis of the *Diary* will disclose the fact that the Congo is a source of anxiety for Conrad, for the *Diary* is indeed a gloomy characterization of the Congo. Most of the days are described as "gloomy"; the wind is "remarkably cold" (157); everything is a constant "bother" (151) and the climb up the hill is "long"; there is a constant reference to mosquitoes, and at night, there are wild, threatening sounds or "shouts and drumming" in the invisible village (152-53). [The] Water [is] far [and] Dirty" (151); the trees are "tall and thick" suggesting impenetrability; things are wretched" (151) and in many places there is "no shade" (151). On the whole, "the country presents a confused wilderness of hills, landslips on their sides showing red" (155).

All this indicates that the Congo is a threat to the narrator's discourse of representation because it seems to defy an unproblematic representation within the observer's visual and semantic economy that projects many aspects of the Congo as unfathomable, threatening, wild or invisible. Added to this is the fact that his health suffers from exposure to the foreign landscape; hence, his description of the Congo

and its inhabitants is always on the verge of breaking down. This is where the power of the Other asserts itself, for, as mentioned earlier in the discussion of the loss of desire, the fragility of consciousness, and the instability of subjectivity, the Other is someone whose place cannot be easily and comprehensively appropriated.

Although the desire of Conrad to represent the Congo is temporarily yet tenuously resolved into fractured narration, the (bare) narrative is itself in a language which seeks to undo itself, so to speak, into its constituent desire; but which, in the end, only returns to re-enact the loss that afflicts every such linguistic effort. This comes about because desire is not what it appears to be, since it remains irreducible to appearance. According to Butler (1995), this implies that desire (such as the desire of the diarist to reduce phenomena into a frugal semantic economy) emerges (or, rather, fails to emerge) as an opacity in language. Yet, as we have seen in the case of Conrad's *Diary*, it is this opacity that reveals the secret of the "language" of the *Diary* itself. Perhaps this is why desire, especially of the sort found in the *Diary* is ultimately and irrevocably linked with Death. To attain desire is to die, for only in death does desire come to an end. If life is driven by desire, then the aim of life is death; it is Conrad's subconscious awareness of the presence of death in all things (mutability is a kind of death) that arguably motivates the writing of the *Diary*. It is to this Death, and the "gift" of Death that the present discussion will now turn.

3.4 Thanatography/Thanatodiagraphy: "The Ear of Death" in the *Diary*

To preserve for posterity and to protect from extinction and death – this is the reason behind all writing, and it applies even more to the diary or journal writing which seeks to preserve experience and protect it from the first kind of death – forgetfulness (for that which is forgotten has ceased to exist, has died). Death, then,

threatens all things, both internal and external to the subject because it comes in diverse forms – forgetfulness, mutability/change, and extinction or cessation.

Now the modern individual is a *self* aware, *self* conscious subject, with the self-motivated instinct of being the centre of things. This mentality is different from that of the pre-modern subject who saw herself as a part of a community, the rules of which determined and defined the parameters of (her) existence. The pre-modern had a role to play in her community, and she fulfilled her role to ensure the stability and continuity of the communal way of life. As such, her personal experiences were defined in terms of, and seen in relation to, the collective experience of the community, such that she was not (and could not be) motivated by any desire to be different, much less a desire to document *her* life for posterity.

Gusdorf (1980) writes of autobiography that it is a product of the emerging individual self-consciousness which characterises the move from the “cultures of antiquity” (30) characterised by communal thinking, to modern civilisation. In pre-modern societies, explains Gusdorf, “the conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual” did not exist since the individual “does not oppose himself to all others [and nor does he] feel himself to exist outside of others”; rather, he exists “*with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community” (29; original emphasis). In such a community, “no one is rightful possessor of his life or his death” and so “isolation is impossible in such a scheme of total cohesiveness” (29-30). On this view, autobiography becomes possible, then, only when “humanity must have emerged from the mythic framework of traditional teachings”:

The man who takes the trouble to tell of himself knows that the present differs from the past and that it will not be repeated in the future; he has become more aware of differences than of similarities; given the constant change,

given the uncertainty of events and of men, he believes it a useful and valuable thing to fix his own image so that he can be certain it will not disappear like all things in this world (30).

This view is shared by Andrew Wright (1987) who writes that autobiography is “rooted in the individualism that became possible at the beginning of the eighteenth century, against the grain of and in part a reaction to the intensified organisation of the communal state” (15). On this view, autobiography replaces old, traditional myths with personal ones, for the man who draws his own image must believe himself worthy, according to Gusdorf, of a special interest. No longer satisfied with (or believing in) old myths that were common property, the individual now turns to personal myth making to fill the void left by the former. For these critics, then, all autobiographical writing becomes possible only with the emergence of the modern mind. This view is strongly challenged by post-colonial critics. Moore-Gilbert (2009) points out that the early critics of autobiography, such as Gusdorf, see autobiographical writing as an exclusively western practice; and even when non-western individuals engage in it, they must have been influenced by western culture, education and civilization. According to Moore-Gilbert, postcolonial critics, such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri C. Spivak, “interrogate the idea that [autobiographical writing] is a distinctively western cultural practice,” and “question the common, if often implicit, historical equation of the ... western Self with the ‘human’”(xvii). In this way, post-colonialism has freed autobiography studies from the crippling essentialism of the early critics such as Gusdorf and Olney, and released it from the structure of exclusion predominant at the time when these critics wrote.

Whichever perspective is taken, however, it cannot be contested that autobiographical writing is driven by desire, the desire on the part of a subject to

create her own myth so that it survives her death. In her discussion of the philosopher Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Butler (1995) argues that in that work, Hegel defends the view that "self-consciousness is Desire in general", that desire is "the very movement by which consciousness redoubles itself as self consciousness" (379). For Hegel, Butler writes, "the possibility of having oneself reflected back to oneself is the inaugurating lure of desire; the lure of reflexivity, of mimetic reflection, initiates desire but immediately precipitates desire into a life and death struggle" (379). The argument is that the self, the subject, desires an Other who will reflect back the self to it, and it is this other who, or which, threatens the *singularity* of the self; this other who threatens death:

For the other, who will reflect back the subject's desire and whom, therefore, the subject desires (precisely on the reflection he or she promised), will inadvertently reflect back the subject's own duplicatability, exchangeability, nonsingularity, and will with this very power of reflection, threaten the singularity of the subject (379).

Desire takes off on its own and the desiring subject then tries to get it to come back even as it remains outside, even as it remains other. The Ear of the other, the Ear that signs and will return the signature back to the subject, is also the *Ear of Death*. This is why every autobiography is also a *thanatography*, a death writing, a writing for death, since such writing is driven by desire, and desire is linked inextricably with death, because the desiring project of auto-affection characterised by signatures and proper names entails standing face to face with something that would be its opposite. Derrida writes that "every name is the name of someone dead.... whom it can do without", as such, "one writes for the singular figure of death to which the text is destined" (1985:53). The proper name, for Derrida, must

not be confused with the bearer of the name for the proper name, by its very structure exists and is meant to exist without the bearer of the name.

In the last section, an allusion was made to the effect that all male writing is an attempt to appropriate the scene of reproduction. In an only slightly different manner, Derrida's analysis of *Ecce Homo* in *The Ear of the Other* could be interpreted in the same way. By Derrida's analysis, the signature is not only or just the name signed at the end (or at the beginning) of the text, it is the entire text itself. Every text has aporias, gaps, silences, unsaid; and in Conrad's *Diary* this is clearly evident from the fact that much in the dense, thick, unfathomable Congo is incomprehensible to Conrad, and thus, *resists*, so to speak, his signature (his text)—hence the fractured, clipped, and perfunctory nature of the *Diary*, which is both a desire for economy and a fatal semantic economy of description.

Now, if the "signature" is the entire *Diary* the question arises as to what the name is of that which has been excluded. Arguably, this would be the "dead" (thanatos) of the *Diary* which does not sign, the "dead – masculine" (since writing is feminine) which has not been permitted to sign by the "living feminine". Only the living can write (i.e. have agency). It follows then that the gender of the I who signs is feminine and the aporiae (aporias) of the text constitute its dead masculine, which, although it cannot sign, yet exists in the cracks and fissures of the feminine as its unconscious. Thanatos is, therefore, the unconscious and the suppressed of the eros, of the *Diary*. The figure of death thus haunts the writing of the *Diary* as represented in the *Diary*'s anxiety about dead bodies, skeletons, graves, and the cross (encased in the earth).

What all this implies is that Conrad's signature (the text), and, indeed, his subjectivity, is precarious, since it cannot be constituted *before* the other's signature,

or before the Ear comes to sign with him, return his signature to him. It is in this sense that Derrida claims “one writes also for the dead” (1988:53), since one always writes in the absence of the addressee who remains unknown, irreducibly exterior. An example of this is the *Diary*'s lack of properness, clarity, named-ness, subjectivity, identity, unicity, and transparency to all the properties and relations of the Other, the native presences; from the landscape to the physical bodies (physiognomies) of the non-European environment.

On the surface of it, it would seem that applying such an analysis to a diary is taking things a little to the extreme; after all, diaries are not generally intended for public consumption but are usually written for the self. Why then, it could be asked, this insistence on the significance of the other, the Ear? Since it is a *diary*, is not Conrad writing (himself) to himself (as Nietzsche does with *Ecce Homo*)?

This may well be so but Derrida argues in the *Ear of the Other* that *when the subject writes*, it is not yet present to itself since it is in a position of distance from the other. He says of Nietzsche:

When he writes himself to himself, he *writes himself to the other* who is `infinitely far away and who is supposed to send his signature back to him, he has no relation to himself that is not forced to defer itself by passing through the other in the form, precisely, of the eternal return (1988:88 original emphasis)

From this perspective, we could say that when Conrad writes his *Diary* to himself, “he has no immediate presence of himself to himself” because a “detour through the other” is necessary” (88). It goes as follows: “it is the other who will send me back to me and acknowledge my subjectivity and my individuality”. Pushed to the limit, this argument would mean that *at the precise moment* of writing (the *Diary*), the subject (Conrad) is metaphorically dead; dead because not yet brought to

life by the perceiving ear of the Other. In this sense, again, the autobiographical also becomes the thanatographical. But this is a general observation.

However, coming down to particulars, death also inhabits the contents of Conrad's *Diary*, and carries within it several significations. Going up the river (in a journey of "desire") was for Conrad like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of civilisation, making the Congo a source of anxiety for him. It had been a childhood boast of his to go to Africa, but when, finally, he arrives there, his mood, according to Cedric Watts (1982) "was one not of achievement but of disillusionment" (28). He cites a fragment from a letter written by Conrad about his experiences in the Congo, also the subject of the *Diary*:

A great melancholy descended on me. Yes, this was the very spot. But there was no shadowy friend to stand by my side in the night of the enormous wilderness... only the distasteful knowledge of the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration (28)

In the *Diary*, Conrad documents other horrors: "saw at a camping place the dead body of a backongo. Shot? Horrid smell" (152); "saw another dead body lying by the path in an attitude of meditative repose" (153); "On the road today passed a skeleton tied up to a post. Also white man's grave - No name. Heap of stones in the form of a cross" (158). Such horrors are an implicit comment on the hypocrisy of civilisation and on the brutal ways in which the supposed emissaries of European civilisation were plundering the land of resources such as rubber and ivory.

In the supposedly civilised world of Europe, the primitive, pre-civilised world of the past, along with all its savagery and savage instincts was (supposed to be) dead. In the Congo, however, such "dead" instincts came back to life in the Europeans. Explorations to other parts of the world were supposed to be a sign of "progress" on the part of Europeans. It would seem, however, that, to borrow

Dollimore's words, "civilisation and progress seem to engender their own regression and ruin" (2001:145). Conrad thus comes face to face with the falsity of what counts as the assumed difference between the civilised and the primitive. The Other returns to inhabit the Same, the subject. Dollimore writes:

This is the sense in which the land 'demoralises': it saps the motivating energy of those civilized subjects entering it. What they thought was the self-sustaining core of their being dissolves away, leaving an emptiness that fills up with otherness... in the very process of defining itself over and against the primitive, the civilized is invaded by the other whose history and proximity it requires yet disavows (2001:148).

Conrad is thereby faced with a battle: he must struggle to reassert himself in the face of the "oppressive" presence of the landscape which threatens to consume him, and which already threatens and puts to question all his notions of his own identity as a civilized being. This 'other' of the landscape is at once exterior and interior to him: interior because it links him to his not too distant past, yet exterior because it seems to defy an unproblematic representation by Conrad. This disturbing interiority of the other is why Conrad denies it a voice in his diary. Conrad does not document the speech of the natives for to do so would subvert his uneasy "victory" over the inert, chaotic, natural landscape. Although Conrad (along with the other white men) depends on the native carriers for survival, he appreciates more the reception he gets from Messrs. Heyn and Jaeger which he describes as "comfortable and pleasant" (156). The Mission of Sutuli is also described as "eminently civilized and very refreshing to see" (157).

From this, the natives and their landscape are *natural* while the Europeans are *cultural*, cultured. This is why the former is merely talked about while the latter is a sublime presence, one which is inspiring, comfortable, delightful and life enhancing. This is also how Conrad turns the natural from a source of anxiety to a

metaphorical image of unruly yet conquered sign. By writing up the other in this way, Conrad makes it less threatening, but at a price. To render the other familiar and normative by subverting it within what, arguably, is a discourse of *difference*, Conrad must take recourse to writing. Unfortunately for him, it is writing which threatens the very reality of the writing Conrad, for writing is a *supplement* to reality - both an addition and a substitute. Indeed, Conrad cannot write his way into an immediacy that would also eliminate writing.

According to Barbara Johnson (1995), “one of the ways in which colonial powers succeeded in imposing their domination over other peoples was precisely through writing” (47). On this view, the “function of writing is to enslave” (48); but, she argues further, what enslaves is not writing per se but *control* of writing”: (48; original emphasis). Since Conrad controls writing in the *Diary*, he also has control over what he documents and is able to *enslave* the other and make it function according to his desire, his intention. However, according to Derrida, writing marks the death of intention because when one writes, one writes more or less or other than one intends or means. Added to this is the inevitable destination of writing - the other. Writing could always pass into the hands of the other so that the other now comprehends the mechanism of her oppression.

From an empirical realist point of view, the price that Conrad must pay by having recourse to textuality (writing) is that he must himself cease to be a flesh and blood person and must render himself as a signifier, a mere “I” among other signifiers. Every signifier is a “text” subject to interpretation. By (necessarily) turning himself into a signifier, Conrad becomes, in the words of Johnson, a “manifestation of an open-ended, heterogeneous, disruptive force of signification and *erasure* that transgress all closure” (1995:40; my emphasis). He thus becomes

not a “meaning containing object” but a “significance scattering process”. Read this way, the *Diary*, or the writing of it, makes possible a situation in which a single body becomes more than one body. Scattered, the original flesh and blood Conrad becomes a figure of death in his own diary, a figure which, before writing, was unitary, but which has become, after writing, *dispersed* into an endless chain of signifiers. Autobiography becomes, again, thanatography. It is a dead man’s writing for the dead.

The ear of the other, upon which Conrad depends for a return of his signature, is also the ear of death, for the other reflects back to Conrad his own replaceability and duplicatability. And what can be replaced and duplicated is already inhabited by an originary death. And indeed, the signature never returns to the bearer of the name; the ear returns the signature not to the bearer, but to the Name: “only the name inherits” and there is no inheritance without first, death.

3.5 The Uncanny in Conrad and His Diary

In *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson discusses several definitions of the “Uncanny”: “indicating a disturbing vacuous area”; “that empty space produced by a loss of faith in divine images”; “not quite safe to trust to”; “dangerous, unsafe” (1981: 63-64). According to Jackson, the essay which provides “a clear theoretical introduction” to the uncanny is Freud’s seminal essay of that title (*Das Unheimliche* in German). She explains that in that essay Freud reads the uncanny “as the effect of projecting unconscious desires and fears into the environment and on to other people” (64). By denying the natives of the Congo a voice, Conrad projects his fear of becoming silenced onto them. It is necessary for Conrad that his discourse, the discourse of civilisation, remain the dominant (and dominating) discourse in his *Diary*. He must reject the native discourse, silence it,

render it voiceless (for nowhere in the diary are the actual words of a native recorded). In a similar manner his fear of the unknown is projected onto the landscape which becomes, for him, gloomy, dirty, “miserable” thick and impenetrable. In this way, Conrad interprets the native environment in terms of his apprehensions.

As mentioned in the previous section, Conrad was disgusted by the character of most of the “white” men he encountered in the Congo as a result of the “looting” they were engaged in. He writes in his diary that “[his] life amongst the people [white] around here can not be very comfortable. Intend avoid acquaintances as much as possible” (150). It is interesting to note that Conrad seeks “comfort” among his fellow “whites” and, perceiving he will not get it, he decides not to make too many friends.

The comfort Conrad seeks is the comfort of the familiar, the homely (in German, *Heimlich*, the un-negated version of the uncanny which “signifies that which is homely, familiar, friendly, cheerful, comfortable, intimate” (Jackson 1981:65)). However, the whites have regressed to primitive behaviour, uncivil and uncivilised in the eyes of Conrad who had been under the impression that what Europe was doing in Africa was bringing civilisation to the uncivilised. The whites encountered by Conrad thus constituted a threat to his idea of himself as a European and what a European should be. They become “uncanny”, then, in the sense that what civilisation and “progress” have repressed in Conrad, has returned in these whites in what could be termed “the return of the repressed”. Indeed, Jackson explains that according to Freud, the uncanny:

Is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and became alienated from it only through the process of repression. What is encountered in this uncanny realm... is nothing

but an *unconscious projection*, projections being those qualities, feelings, wishes, objects, which the subject refuses to recognize or rejects in himself and which are expelled from the self and located in another person or thing (66; original emphasis).

The whites are a disturbing indication of what Conrad could himself become; even more disturbingly, that which Conrad thought he (and the civilised world) has risen above (i.e. savagery, primitiveness, and so on) could return (and may have already returned) to inhabit him or even control him. Conrad rejects this, and his rejection is evident in his description in the *Diary* of these whites' lodgings as "tumble down hovels" (157).

Where Conrad would like to be assured of "unity" (of the self), the uncanny thus "asserts a *gap*". Conrad's desire is to place himself in a position of rational confidence towards the Congo, thereby establishing a positive unity over it, in effect, to close its open structure by imposing on it his own perceptions. The uncanny, however, does not allow this, for it empties the "real" of its meaning; it leaves "signs without significance". This is why, for Conrad, "The country presents a confused wilderness of hills" (155) and the villages are "quite invisible" (152). At night when he hears "shouts and drumming in distant villages" he "pass[es] a bad night" (153) because these shouts and drumming are sounds he does not understand. They are uncanny not because they are truly unfamiliar, but because they call to something in Conrad which has been long repressed: they call to his *natural*, as opposed to *cultural*, instincts. However, being repressed, such instincts are unable to fathom the meaning of these sounds which have now become "strange"; they constitute "signs without significance", to use Jackson's phrase. In this way, Conrad's primitive instincts are not dead, but, like ghosts, *un-dead* and, in the manner of ghosts, have

returned to haunt, so to speak, the white men whom Conrad wishes to avoid if he could.

The uncanny, then, disrupts “the crucial defining line” according to Jackson, “which separates real life from the unreality of death, subverting those discrete units by which unitary meaning or ‘reality’ is constituted ... in the place of these discriminations appears a space, *an absence of difference*” (69; my emphasis).

Nicholas Royle (2003) explains this disturbing character of the uncanny:

The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced. Suddenly, one’s sense of oneself (one’s so-called personality or sexuality, for example) seems strangely questionable. *The uncanny is a crisis of the proper...* it is a crisis of the natural ...one’s own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world (2003:1; my emphasis).

In this way, Conrad’s idea of himself and of “civilized” human nature is in crisis as a result of the experience of the uncanny. Royle points out, however, that the uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness or alienation. More specifically, it is a peculiar *comingling of the familiar and unfamiliar* (1; my emphasis). The “whites” of Conrad’s *Diary* are both familiar and unfamiliar, both homely (because they are like him) yet strange (because they have become something other, something Conrad cannot (or refuses to) recognise). In such a situation, Conrad, although always surrounded by company, must be experiencing a feeling of isolation and solitude, one which is alleviated probably only by the existence of his *Diary*, in which he could document his private experiences and perceptions without having to share them with or express them to external others whom he really cannot trust. He writes of the “prominent characteristic of the social life here [the Congo]: People speaking ill of each other” (150).

Conrad's *Diary* thereby constitutes the "comfort" he seeks; he finds solace in writing where he could assert himself, his individuality and retain his unity of self. Or so it seems. Freud's essay, explains Royle, shows how the "uncanny is a certain indecidability which affects and infects representations" (15). In effect, the uncanny eludes mastery because it is that which cannot be pinned down or controlled. As such, the uncanny is an experience of *writing*. It behaves or functions like a maddening supplement which is unpredictable and additionally strange. What is so maddening about writing is that one tries to keep oneself out, or put oneself in, but one cannot, so that one ends up with the uncanny feeling of being double, being something external to oneself, being other. Uncannily, the more Conrad seeks enlightenment, the more alienating the world becomes; and the more he seeks to free himself from primitive instincts the more tightly the uncanny holds him in its grip. The uncanny does not always (or only) elicit a feeling of fear, it elicits a feeling of strangeness and alienation in a world which should yield itself to the power of reason and rationality, but does not.

For Margo Culley (1998) the writing of a diary or journal constitutes a "paradox" because:

the process whose frequent goal is to establish self continuity involves at its heart a dislocation from the self, or a turning of subject into object... [There is thus a] kind of 'double consciousness', as the self stands apart to view itself (217).

It is for this reason that Culley emphasises the importance of the audience, "real or imagined, conscious or unconscious" in a genre (the diary, the journal) which is supposed to be private (218). She holds that the presence of a sense of audience greatly influences what is written and how it is written. The audience, she claims, "shapes the selection and arrangement of detail within the journal and

determines more than anything else the kind of self-construction the diarist presents” (218).

It follows from this that it is the ear of the other which shapes and constructs Conrad’s *Diary*. Interestingly, Derrida writes of this ear that it is uncanny: “The ear is uncanny. Uncanny is what it is; double is what it can become” (1985:33). It is to this ear that Conrad addresses himself in a structure of writing which uncannily puts to death the *writing* Conrad and brings to birth a *written* Conrad, a sign, a signifier which can (and continues to) survive without a living referent. Uncannily, it is the written Conrad, the proper name Conrad, and that only, which inherits the signature that the ear returns (or will continue to return) to it. Once there is writing, one is already in the realm of the uncanny.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the structure and style of Conrad’s *The Congo Diary* has been discussed and several provocative readings of the text undertaken. Being an instance of Conrad’s Desire, the *Diary* eludes any attempt at mastery because to attain the end-point of desire is ultimately to die. Also, the fact that desire is portrayed through language makes it slippery and beyond reach since language cannot capture that which is beyond it unless, of course, if it could become the thing itself, an impossible feat.

The chapter has also explored how Death (or the figure of death as a symbolic absence) inhabits writing both in the sense that the writing subject (Conrad) is not fully present to itself, and in the sense that the destination of writing is the wholly Other (the non-European “objects”) which threatens the subject with death (its structural dislocation as the source of meaning). Although writing is an attempt to elude death, it only ends up conferring death upon the subject, since the subject does

not inherit, only the name does. In this sense, writing is Uncanny since it makes the subject double by bringing the Other to inhabit the same; and, in this case, it turns Conrad the “white man” against his “natural identity” and makes him want to flee into nothingness (neither the Same nor the Other).

CHAPTER FOUR
EAGLETON'S MEMOIR:
FORM, CONTENT AND CONTEXT OF PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper* is organised as a series of themed essays in no particular chronological order. It opens with a description of his life at age ten when he was gatekeeper of a convent of Carmelite nuns. It is from this that the memoir derives its title. *The Gatekeeper* is an essay-like literary memoir which neither sticks to a single theme nor selects any one aspect of Eagleton's life to focus on or explore in depth. It is, in fact, like a scrapbook in which pieces of his life are pasted.

The Gatekeeper is not a single-experience narrative, nor is it a classic full-life narrative. Although the narrative addresses the author's childhood, adolescence and adulthood, long stretches of his life are omitted; and parts of the text are about the lives of other people. For instance, he devotes a considerable amount of space to analysing and speculating on the lives of the Carmelites who "rose to pray several times during the night, ate like birds, had no personal possessions, and needed enough forbearance to spend the rest of their lives confined with a bunch of crankish others within the same bleak walls" (12). He describes their renunciation of the world as "perhaps as much ignorance as courage" (11), and that "most of them were probably somewhere midway between martyrs and suicides" (12).

Indeed, the first chapter, titled "Lifers" goes on for eighteen pages largely about the nuns and their lives. There is very little about Eagleton himself or about his family in this chapter, where the reader would have expected to read about it. He

makes a passing reference to his mother as “a kind of convent groupie” and his father as someone who “did odd jobs around the convent” (8). The rest of the chapter Eagleton devotes to “a Dominican friar named Lawrence Bright”, “a tall willowy man ... with absurdly erotic blue eyes” (23) who could “give people a nasty knee-jerk in the ideology while seeming only to pass the time of day” (26). It was Lawrence, Eagleton claims, who finally “Liberated” him from his “stiff-necked papist correctness” by teaching him that although he was Catholic, he could go “as left as you like” (28-29).

Literally every chapter of the text is more about others than about Eagleton himself: Chapter two, “Catholics” reads more like an essay on the religion than like a chapter out of a life narrative. For Eagleton, Catholicism “bore only a tenuous relation to reality” and Catholics were “pious and heartless, strict-minded and mean, pure-living and pagan” (30). He goes on in such a manner for the next ten pages, and then he selects “Brother Damian”, his school headmaster as an example of what a Catholic is (or could be). Brother Damian, says Eagleton, “was a career-sadist” who “ought certainly to have been strangled at birth, or buried alive in infancy” because although he was “in charge of the spiritual development of children”, “he had about as much human understanding as a tortoise” (38-39).

Only after this does Eagleton describe the conditions amidst which he grew up: “secrecy and doubt, absolute refusal, Gothic grotesquerie, gestures of extremity, ginger-tufted virgins, rituals of asceticism and self-immolation, death-in-life” (40). These conditions, writes Eagleton, shaped his politics later in life. Rather than elaborate further, Eagleton quickly moves on with his discussion of the Christian

faith, refusing to go into detailed explanations about his childhood that one would have expected at this point.

The memoir goes on in this fashion, with Chapter Three, “Thinkers”, opening with a discussion about money and about how scarce it was in Salford where Eagleton was born. Although he writes of the poverty in Salford, Eagleton does not describe in much detail how this affected him personally. Instead, he projects what must surely have been the case with him onto “the boys at [his] primary school” who, he writes, “were sometimes so famished that they shoveled great mounds of beetroot into themselves at lunch” (48). Interestingly, though, it is in this chapter on “Thinkers” that Eagleton attempts to become somewhat more “personal”. He tells of his love for books, and how his mother took him shopping for the “classics”, although she “had no more notion of what the classics were than [Eagleton] did” (52). They eventually bought an old set of the complete works of Dickens which Eagleton read “in between fits of asthma, bouts of delirium, and prayers offered up for the release of whichever godforsaken soul in purgatory was furthest from the door” (52). The Dickens novels marked the beginning of what Eagleton was to become in later life – an intellectual. It was his love of books that was to propel him out of Salford “to higher things” (53).

For the rest of the book, Eagleton expresses his ideas about philosophy: “much of the philosophy that matters is ... anti-philosophy” (57); his preference for what he calls “anti-autobiography” which he describes as

not just writing your autobiography ... but writing it in such a way as to outwit the prurience and immodesty of the genre by frustrating your own desire for self-display and the reader’s desire to enter your inner life (57)

He also explains his idea of what “truth” is, that it was not “a matter of facts, states of affairs, statistics, of what was indubitably the case”, but was rather “a dynamic, conflictive, constantly evolving affair, so that what was true from one class-viewpoint was false from another” (79). As for politics, he maintains that being “radical” is a “thankless business”, but that “it is rational to resist an oppressive power” (82).

The fifth chapter entitled “Losers” should really have been the first because it is here that we encounter a relatively more sustained account of Eagleton’s childhood and family life. The chapter, thus, approximates more to the genre of memoir than do the other chapters in the text. Eagleton writes here of the poverty in which he grew up: “our life at home was as bare as a gerbil’s, without friends, trips, entertainment, social skills”(103). These “luxuries” were things the family “could not afford” or considered useless and even “offensive” given the “spirit of grim utility which being poor tends to foster” (103-4). In such a situation, the notion of “enjoying life for its own sake” becomes a “mystery” (104). In a world which was “lackluster”, language was compensation; lively aunts and uncles created a fantasy world of “extravagant anecdotes” and “exorbitant word-play” accompanied by tunes knocked “out of a busted mandolin”; all of these topped up by “superb” stories told by aunts and cousins (105). As Eagleton puts it: “Language was our edge over a lackluster world” (105).

Eagleton’s appreciation for the aesthetic thus developed out of these early encounters with stories and entertainment that were ends in themselves, free of the utility that characterized everything else in his life. For him, indeed, “utility was the enemy, and its opposite was art” (105). There were, thus, two types of people

according to Eagleton and these were the “good” and the “fine” : “it is the good who will enter the kingdom [of God], but the fine who make life worth living in the meanwhile” (105). For Eagleton, his parents were an example of the “good”, while his art loving relatives were the “fine” (106); and it was the good who were “just”, while the fine were “forgiving” (108).

In many parts of the text, Eagleton writes about the lives of others such as his Cambridge supervisor, Greenway, the philosopher Wittgenstein, Americans, a working-class intellectual called Fergus, and a supervisee of his called Gulliver. From all these, it is obvious that *The Gatekeeper* is not limited to one dimension of Eagleton’s life, nor does it attend equally to all of his life’s many dimensions. For instance, his love life and marriage go without mention, as well as his relationship with his siblings; he merely describes them as “a Dad’s army of adenoidal midgets” who “were a good few inches below average height” (111).

The structure of *The Gatekeeper*, thus, shows Eagleton’s life as involving discrete formative relationships, chronicling briefly the lives of others who were in one way or another important in his life. By focusing in this way on the lives, habits, idiosyncrasies, and character of others, Eagleton deflects attention from himself. Since these portrayals are not in any particular chronological order, the narrative does not seem headed toward any particular form of closure. Indeed, it could be argued that many sections of *The Gatekeeper* are not narrative per se, but expository in the sense that they do not really tell of things that *happened*, but of Eagleton’s *views* on issues that concern him (such as Catholicism, politics, socialism, Marxism, class-structures, and so on).

Arguably, much of the text is a critique or an analysis of something (concept, institution, ideology, etc) or someone. It would seem, then, that verisimilitude is not something Eagleton is out to achieve. On this, Couser (2012) writes that “in the case of non-fiction, especially the memoir, the embrace of verisimilitude may be counterproductive” (68). Couser justifies this claim by pointing to the distinction between what he calls “scene” and “summary”; these being concepts which are used in analysing fiction but which, on his argument, also apply to nonfiction. He explains the two terms at length:

In “scene” experience is presented through a verbal transcription of events as they unfold. Scene typically employs a great deal of description, but the surest sign of “scene” is dialogue, especially verbatim quotation of characters... scene trades in the direct (re)presentation of particular events.

In contrast ... summary involves the retrospective summation of experience ... if scene is cinematic or dramatic in form, summary is more expository. It is less detailed, more general or abstract ... Summary doesn't necessarily *narrate*, strictly speaking; it may present the product of *reflection* on experience ... In summary, the narrator is not recalling and re-presenting an experience that may have happened but rather trying to convey the essence, the significance, of a past experience ... It [summary] is more attentive to the understanding of the I-now than to the impressions of the I-then (68-69; original emphasis)

From this, Eagleton's text is more summary than scene and this is important if Eagleton is to maintain and sustain realism and authenticity (for more on this, see section 4:3 below). The narrative of *The Gatekeeper* has the form and pattern of the

Bildungsroman which, according to Smith and Watson (2010) “unfolds as a narrative of education through encounters with mentors, apprenticeship, renunciation of youthful folly, and eventual integration into society” (70). Indeed, in Eagleton’s case, it is integration into a “higher” society. The “paradigm” of the Bildungsroman, maintain Smith and Watson, is that of “a self developed through education, self-directed intellectual cultivation’ through reading, and encounters with social institutions” (102). This is clearly the case with Eagleton who tells in his memoir, of his love of books and reading, and of his inability to stop writing: “instead of finding myself unable to write books, I find myself unable to stop” (55). He is well aware that it is his intellectual capability that would take him out of Salford, knowing that his life would have turned out differently if he had not passed the examination for the local grammar school: “I might have spent the rest of my life in industrial working-class Salford, with no time between factory shifts to finish off *Bleak House*” (53).

4.2 Auto-Affection and the Signature in the Gatekeeper

Every autobiographical writing is an instance of auto-affection since it is a telling oneself to oneself, a hearing of oneself speaking. Auto-affection, according to Nicholas Royle (2003), “brings together ... self-pressure and narcissism” (54). Like its sexual counterpart, masturbation, auto-affection, in the words of Barbara Johnson, “is both a symbolic form of ideal union, since in it the subject and object are truly one, and a radical alienation of the self from any contact with an other” (198:xii).

Since the “purest form” of auto-affection is, according to Royle, “hearing oneself speak”, Eagleton’s *Gatekeeper* is one example of auto-affection. In it,

Eagleton the subject and Eagleton the object become one since he tells himself to himself. In the memoir, Eagleton is involved in listening to himself think. In this way, he becomes one with himself, so to speak, radically excluding contact with an (exterior) other.

In his effort to approximate most authentically the nature of thought and thinking, Eagleton structures his memoir in no particular chronological order: it is as though he wishes to put down his memories as they occur to him. He flits from childhood, to politics, to religion, to influential philosophers and critics such as Wittgenstein and Raymond Williams (16). Again, he goes back to childhood (30) and religion, on to school and more politics, back to childhood poverty, then university dons (139) and life as a don himself (163, 169), and back to when he was a new student at Cambridge waiting for an interview (174 – 176) with his superior Greenway, who ended up telling him of the death of his (Eagleton's) father. The narrative ends two pages later with the burial of the father, an event that took place many years before some of the incidents in the rest of the text.

Such a structure makes the *Gatekeeper* seem more spontaneous and immediate, wandering over contexts, situations and people, examining them and moving on, sometimes moving back and forth among them in the nature of thought and thinking. Yet Derrida argues, according to Royle, that “hearing oneself speak is not the immediate, unmediated, spontaneous affair we may like to suppose it is” (2003:54). This is because of what Derrida refers to as the logic of the “supplement”.

A supplement is something which both adds to an already complete whole and completes something unfinished; it is both a substitute and an addition. For example, writing could be seen as a supplement to speech: speech does not have *presence* in

the absence of the speaker, so writing “adds” presence to speech; at the same time, since speech lacks presence, writing becomes a “substitute” to speech.

However, how is hearing oneself speak or auto-affection related to the supplement? Obviously, thinking is not the same thing as writing; it implies immediacy and self-presence: the subject is present to itself when it thinks since no external medium is required. Yet a more careful analysis of hearing oneself speak would dislodge this assumption. To hear oneself speak entails summoning an other self since the operation requires a self that “speaks” and another that “hears”. Thus, a *difference* becomes necessary in the sense that the self must establish a distance (and distance implies difference since two *separate* things or entities cannot be identical) from itself in order for thinking, auto-affection, hearing oneself speak, to take place.

In this sense, then, right from its origin (and it is doubtful if it has one) self-presence is ruptured by the (il) logic of supplementarity. This is why a writer or an author, according to Derrida in *Writing and Difference*, “can always say more, less or something other than what he *would mean*” (1978:157-8), because he does not control the other who engages with him or who he engages in hearing himself speak. Thus, the same has become other to itself.

There is one example of the undecidability engendered by the supplement in *The Gatekeeper*, which could potentially undermine the entire text. Early in *The Gatekeeper*, Eagleton describes his familiarity with the “thirty or so mouths” of the Carmelite nuns in the convent where he was gatekeeper (6). He writes that he was as familiar with these mouths as he was “with the letters of the alphabet” (6). Eagleton is convinced that among the nuns, there is one with a “ginger” beard in the place, “having caught an appalling glimpse of her on one of the rare occasions when [he]

was allowed into the courtyard leading to the enclosure” (6). He expects to see the ginger-bearded mouth when the nuns receive communion but strangely enough to him, none of the mouths “seemed adorned by a beard” (6). Eagleton is forced to concede that his eyes may have deceived him: “maybe this moment of hermaphroditic horror is a *false memory, or maybe not*” (7, my emphasis). Clearly, Eagleton is undecided here as to whether he actually saw a nun with a beard: he says “I saw, or *I thought I saw*” (7, my emphasis).

From this seemingly minor incident, we could argue that Eagleton’s thoughts are not as clear, as *self-present*, immediate and *unmediated* as they should be, and this potentially questions or puts to question the rest of the text. Also, on the same page, he writes that he visits the convent years later when he had acquired a “reputation as a leftist theologian” (7). He had come to visit Mother Angela who had taught him Latin pronunciation when he was a ten year old “pale-faced urchin” (7). He writes of the urchin that he was “buried for ever beneath a truculent intellectual with a Julius Caesar haircut” (7). Now, if the ten year old urchin whose memory it rightfully is of the bearded nun is “buried forever”, then what is the status of what Eagleton writes of the urchin’s experiences? This, again, is undecidable since we now encounter two Eagletons – the intellectual and the urchin, and it is not clear which of the two supplements the other. Yet, this should come as no surprise since Derrida argues in *Of Grammatology* that the supplement is “the self’s very origin” (cited in Royle 2003:38). For Derrida, there is no identity without a disorder of identity since an identity is never given, received, or attained. In other words, there is no identity, only identification, and identification is inextricably and interminably bound up with supplementarity, since identifying entails a logic of adding on, making up (notice the “fictional” connotations), being in place of (2003:59). Thus, in

the case of *The Gatekeeper*, Eagleton stands “in place of” Eagleton, or he makes up the urchin Eagleton, since the latter is dead and “*buried forever*”.

In either case, the narrating Eagleton needs the narrated Eagleton, the urchin, to come and *sign* the text with him. This is in keeping with what Derrida in the *Ear of the Other* describes as the condition for the existence and even possibility of the signature. Derrida maintains that there has to be a pact or alliance between the dead and the living, between the thanatos and the autos of autobiography if the signature is to take place. This means that an alliance must exist between the dead-forever-urchin Eagleton, and the “I-now”, living, present, and narrating Eagleton if *The Gatekeeper* is to take place since all the other Eagletons (the liberal-Catholic, the Marxist, the Socialist, the Student, the Don, the Son) in the text are also “buried” beneath the narrating Eagleton who (or which) imposes its meaning upon them. All these buried dead must come back to life and *sign* (in the sense of make meaning) with Eagleton in order for his signature to take place. As Derrida puts it, “one buries or burns what is *already dead* so that life ... will be reborn and regenerated from these ashes” (1980: 26).

Moreover, that is not all. The possibility for the signature requires an even more radical othering, a more radical alliance than the one between Eagleton and his dead but internal others. For Derrida, in the *Ear of the Other* the signature does not take place unless it has been “honoured” by another; for example, the reader (9). In other words, the signature takes place on the addressee’s side, one who comes so late and so is unknown.

Eagleton presents himself in *The Gatekeeper* as a thinker, a critic, an observer of human nature. In giving these perspectives of himself (essentially hiding behind

or advancing behind masks), he manages to efface or hide himself (Eagleton the person, his private life, and family affairs) thereby removing *himself*, basically, from the memoir. This means or at least implies that the empirical Eagleton is *secondary*; what is primary is what obtains in the text, the *Gatekeeper*. In a sense, his empirical signature pales in the face of the “truth”, which is produced in his memoir. As such, Eagleton the individual, is nothing but an “empirical shell” to borrow Derrida’s words, “which can fall away without subtracting from the truth or from the history of meaning” (1985:56).

On this logic, Eagleton’s signature and his proper name can disappear without a loss to *The Gatekeeper*; indeed, this becomes even necessary to prove the autonomy of the text, to prove that *The Gatekeeper* can stand on its own. This is perhaps Eagleton’s intention in writing an “anti-autobiographical” memoir. However, the very fact that *The Gatekeeper* is a memoir (anti, or otherwise) defeats this desire on Eagleton’s part because autobiographical writing in general recalls names and stages signatures. Indeed, as Derrida has argued, “the signature is not only a word or a proper name at the end of a text, but the operation as a whole, the text as a whole” (1985:52). If Eagleton desires to do away with his empirical signature (and by extension, himself) he will then have to do away with the entire text. The anti-memoir becomes, thus, impossible because the logic of the signature disallows it.

To complicate matters further, Eagleton’s signature (as is the case with all signatures) does not take place at the time of the writing of *The Gatekeeper* since “the signature becomes effective – performed and performing – not at the moment it apparently takes place, but only later, when ears will have managed to receive the

message” (50). On this view, Eagleton’s signature does not take place when he writes *The Gatekeeper*, but much later when the ear of the other (the addressee, reader) will have perceived his signature. It is, thus, the ear of the other that signs, meaning that Eagleton’s signature is entrusted to the other.

This may seem a rather paradoxical state of affairs – to think of an autobiographical text (a signature) as being entrusted to an other, as not having taken place until the other comes to sign it. Yet this seeming paradox does not come about by accident; it is the very way that all texts (and not only autobiographical ones) are structured. The *signing* (in the sense of sign-making, i.e. meaning-making) by the other is actually what *constructs* the text, makes it come about. The text does not exist insofar as it has not been perceived by the other and, therefore, the signature will not take place until it has been acknowledged (*constructed*) as such by the other.

Eagleton writes that it is possible to evade the genre of autobiography by writing an “anti-autobiography”, thereby defeating the “prurience and immodesty” of the genre of autobiography by “frustrating your own desire for self-display and the reader’s desire to enter your inner life” (*The Gatekeeper*: 57). However, Eagleton cannot know in the present with present knowledge or in the present of *The Gatekeeper* whether anyone will ever honour the credit that he extends to himself in his name, that is to say, whether anyone will read his memoir and make his signature complete, thereby returning it to him – or to his name, since only the name can inherit.

This is a structure that Eagleton cannot escape, despite his desire to produce an anti-autobiography because, ultimately, he does participate in the genre, whether or not he describes *The Gatekeeper* as anti-autobiography or anti-memoir. His anti-

memoir defines itself necessarily by its difference from its other, the “proper” memoir; but in doing so, it incorporates the other, the other inheres within it so that there does not exist a proper borderline between the anti-memoir that *The Gatekeeper* is intended to be, and the conventional memoir.

Admittedly, Eagleton’s memoir *resists* the genre but it does not effectively escape it. The best that could be said is that it *modifies* the genre rather than escapes it, enriches rather than escape it. Authorial intention is hereby undermined, and the seeming absoluteness of auto-affection, hearing oneself speak, becomes, in the words of Derrida, “pure speculation”; this is because “the sign, the image, the representation, [i.e. *The Gatekeeper*] which come to supplement the absent presence [i.e. Eagleton] are the illusions that sidetrack us” (1978:154).

Ultimately, *The Gatekeeper* is the product of an instance of auto-affection by a self which seeks to supplement its empirical presence through (or in) writing. But “writing is dangerous” (1978:144) for it adds only to replace” (145): pure presence is replaced by writing. To give life, writing first implies the death of the writer. For Eagleton to “live” in the pages of *The Gatekeeper*, he must first necessarily “die”, be empirically absent. Like the urchin buried forever beneath the intellectual, the intellectual (narrating) Eagleton is also buried forever beneath or, in the writing, in *The Gatekeeper*.

The experience of auto-affection, then, is one of anguish, since writing reassures Eagleton of preserving his signature, even as it accords him the pleasure of doing so. At the same time, in writing the signature takes place only at the expense of Eagleton’s *presence*; indeed, at the expense of his *life*. Eagleton himself does not, and cannot *appear* outside of the symbolic system (*The Gatekeeper tekeeper*, the

signature) that was brought into existence through auto-affection. The Eagleton that is, thus, presented to us in the present form of our reading of *The Gatekeeper* is, to this extent, a chimera, an image, an illusion. The experience of auto-affection is, therefore, frustrated by the signature (the text, the writing), because the signature promises itself (pledges to preserve Eagleton) even as it escapes. It gives itself to Eagleton to use in creating and preserving his self, yet it moves away out of his reach and out of his control since it takes on a life of its own.

The signature, *The Gatekeeper* acting as a supplement to the empirical Eagleton, has the power to *procure* the absent Eagleton, yet also holding him at a distance (since the existence of *The Gatekeeper* implies or points to the absence of Eagleton) and mastering him (since the images we form of Eagleton could only be images allowed or sanctioned by the text through its signs). In this sense, Eagleton's name and life *belong* to the writing that we read.

4.3 The Memoir and Memory-Keeping

Memoirs are all about keeping memories and preserving past experiences from fading away; in effect, keeping the dead alive. The memoir writer, then, taps into a memory bank and selects which memories to write about and which to leave out. From this, it would seem that remembering is a simple process of retrieval from a mental archive in which memories are arranged neatly and in order, with all their meanings intact.

However, Smith and Watson (2010:16) maintain that remembering is not a “passive” process of “mere retrieval from a memory bank”, but an “active” one where “the remembering subject *actively creates* the meaning of the past in the act of

remembering” (my emphasis). Thus, they argue, “narrated memory is an interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered” (16). In this sense, memories are not *replicas* of events but, simply, *records* of how events were experienced. As such, memoirs (and all autobiographies) are constructed “from fragments of experience that change over time” (16). Therefore, when Eagleton writes his memoir, the events depicted are not replicas of what he actually experienced since he cannot literally *repeat* himself in the *Gatekeeper*.

In truth, Eagleton’s *The Gatekeeper* is a second reading of experience (the first reading took place at the time of the experience since we interpret –read– our experiences as they occur to us) which, according to Gusdorf, is “truer than the first because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it” (1980:38). Gusdorf’s argument is that the first reading of experience is “agitated” by “the things that ordinarily surround” the experiencing subject for her to see it in its entirety(38). The second reading, which Gusdorf calls “memory”, gives the subject “a certain remove” and allows her to “take into consideration all the ins and outs of the matter, its context in time and space” (38).

On this view, *The Gatekeeper* gives us a truer representation of Eagleton’s experiences since it is based on his memories. Yet Gusdorf is quick to point out the imperfections of memory. For him, every life, no matter how successful or brilliant, “[knows] itself inwardly botched” (39) and so, the writer of an autobiography, and especially the memoir, is out to provide only a picture of the subject’s life that the subject finds pleasing, desirable, acceptable or even redeeming. It is this, according to Gusdorf, that accounts for “the failures, the gaps, and the deformations of memory” (42). These gaps and failures, he maintains, are not due to chance or

accident, but “they are the result of an option of the writer who remembers and wants to gain acceptance for this or that *revised* and *corrected* version of his past (42; my emphasis). As such, “the truth of facts” becomes “subordinate to the truth of the man” (43); herein lies the artistic nature of autobiographical writing, in Gusdorf’s words: “it is also a work of art” (43).

From this, memory-keeping involves calling up the past— for the present and in the present. Since no one can revive the dead— the past cannot be recalled in the past, Eagleton must employ artistic (creative) means of bringing back from earlier times that which preserves meaning and value for him today. Yet, artistic creation is a struggle, and it explains Eagleton’s inability to capture the past perfectly. He uses words and phrases that indicate uncertainty; such as “perhaps”, or “it may be”: he writes of the Carmelite nuns that “[t]heir renunciation of the world was perhaps as much ignorance as courage”, and of the convent that “[i]t may be that the corridors of the place surged with lust and bile ...” (11). This is clearly conjecture on Eagleton’s part since he obviously does not know for certain whether this was the case. Since neither statement encapsulates a particular memory of Eagleton’s, we must conclude that he employs art to embellish reality, using pun and jokes (and there are plenty of these in *The Gatekeeper*) to enrich a dull reality.

This puts to question the reliability of the memories contained in *The Gatekeeper*: how many are “true” and how many “created”? There is no clear way of knowing. Besides, Eagleton’s memoir does not consist of only his memories, but of memories that belong to other people, such as his supervisor, Dr. Greenway. On page sixty-three of *The Gatekeeper*, Eagleton relates Greenway’s relationship with Ludwig Wittgenstein. Since Eagleton was not around at the time, he clearly must

have heard the story from Greenway; yet, he narrates it as though he had an omniscient view of the experience: “when the two men had drifted apart, Greenway spied Wittgenstein from the window of his college room, looking frail and ghastly”. Eagleton even documents Greenway’s thoughts: “Greenway ... considered running out to greet him [Wittgenstein]” (63).

Eagleton also records his mother’s memories of “young Walter Greenwood, author of ... *Love on the Dole*” and that “as a young girl, [his mother] also saw L. S. Lowry painting by the roadside” (53-54). These memories clearly do not belong to Eagleton; yet, he includes them in his memoir. It would seem then that the subject’s own memories are not enough, they need to be supplemented by memories from others.

More significant to this study, however, are Eagleton’s own memories and how these are preserved or kept in *The Gatekeeper*. At the very beginning of the text, Eagleton writes of his experience as gatekeeper in a convent of Carmelite nuns when he was ten years old. Although he uses the first-person pronoun for the ten year old, the narrated “I” (the child) and the narrating “I” (the Eagleton that narrates, the adult) are not strictly speaking, the same person. The ten year old gatekeeper is the subject of history – he is no longer here, in the present of Eagleton’s writing, in the present of *The Gatekeeper*, anymore than the past young man is alive to tell the story today. The narrating Eagleton is clearly the agent of the discourse and he employs language to depict the events. Eagleton conjures himself at the age of ten, giving that child a remembered or re-imagined consciousness of the experience of being ten. That child is the memory of a younger version of a self; but it must be noted that the child is not doing the remembering or the narrating of the story, neither is the

narrating Eagleton directly experiencing the past at the time of the writing of *The Gatekeeper*. What Eagleton is actually doing is remembering and *creating* the story at the time of producing the text.

To illustrate this point: it is hardly likely that a ten year old would be conscious of his life as being “fissured”; or have any ideas about what “secular reason” could be; nor be sensitive enough to perceive that the nuns “were constantly hungry” (4). Added to these is the clearly adult or sophisticated language used in describing the experiences of the ten year old: “vestiges of secular rationality” (2), “voyeurs, religious obsessives, nun-stalkers, sex-offenders, militant Protestants”, enraged atheists (1) “spectrally conceded” (5), “hermaphroditic horror” (7) “leftist theologian” (7), “outpost of ascetic traditionalism” (7), “permanently immured celibates”. Clearly, Eagleton is using a discursive practice that has become available to him through education to recreate the ten year old, and recapture his memories. Obviously, memories are indispensable to Eagleton’s writing of *The Gatekeeper*, but they are not the thing itself. What we see in the text are the narrating Eagleton’s interpretations and readings of what happened many years before, and we can understand that what ultimately emerges in *The Gatekeeper* has little to do with those memories. In the words of Berel Lang (1990:174), “the act of writing is distanced from the past [the memoirist] writes about”. It is this distance that accounts for the fading of memory and necessitates the embellishments employed to bring it back to life.

On this view, memory becomes, to borrow Couser’s words, “a notoriously unreliable, and highly selective faculty” (2012:19), since the memoirist can never fix this fluid and un-fixable situation. Yet Eagleton has no option but recourse to

language to supplement his memory. It is in language that *The Gatekeeper* is couched; language (writing) substitutes for memory, which is deficient and infirm. Thus, memory is “kept” in language, yet language is hardly able to capture memory satisfactorily. Eagleton himself concedes this fact when he writes, in *The Gatekeeper*, of the “meaninglessness” of pain. For Eagleton, pain “is so much the epitome of brute *fact* that it seems to *slip through the nets of language*” (113; my emphasis). The more factual and an experience, the more difficult it is for language to *capture* it. In this sense, language and memory, word and thought could never in fact become one. This means that Eagleton’s memories are one thing and his memoir, *The Gatekeeper*, is another.

This is not to assume, however, that memory, in its unarticulated unwritten state— that is to say, when it is located only within the mind of the subject— is unproblematic. This is because, even in the thought, even *as* thought, memory is kept in language since we think in language. In the words of Eugene Vance, in *The Ear of the Other*, “we assign verbal signifiers to them [memories], whether or not these signifiers are vocalized” (1985:81). Memories in themselves are, thus, a kind of interior, private language, a language which is, nevertheless, not the private property of the thinker. There is no individual language; this is why it is language that speaks us rather than the other way round.

Eagleton’s memory-keeping is done in writing; but “writing is”, according to Harland (1987:127), “language at its most self-sufficient because it is language at its most spatial”. Writing has *substance*, it has a *materiality* which endures in marks upon a page. This very materiality of writing is dangerous for Eagleton’s memory-keeping since the very *presence* of the writing already signifies the *absence* of the

memories which it depicts. In writing, then, Eagleton's memories are "orphaned, and separated at birth" (Harland 1987:128) from Eagleton the father, the origin(ator) of the memories. Indeed, the very physicality of *The Gatekeeper* stands in the way of any direct communication of Eagleton's intention.

The implication of all this for Eagleton is that his memories, being kept in writing, in the materiality of *The Gatekeeper*, now have a life of their own and are subject to multiple interpretations. Writing is impersonal, and Eagleton's reliance on it already signifies forgetfulness and the unreliability of memory. Therefore, the meaning(s) ascribed or ascribable to *The Gatekeeper* are liable to be quite different or even disconnected from the facts of Eagleton's life. This is because the meaning of *The Gatekeeper* comes from the *words* on the pages of the text and not from the *mind* of Eagleton.

All this is not to deny that *The Gatekeeper* is a text based on memories, or that it keeps Eagleton's memories. The argument here is that, in taking recourse to writing, Eagleton has placed his memories in the danger of being overtaken by the most abiding characteristic of writing, its resistance to a stable, unified meaning. Much like the "pain" he writes about in *The Gatekeeper*, writing is also "not part of the order of meaning. It is rather a disruption of meaning, a garbling of sense, a sort of solipsism" (113).

4.4 The Memoir and the Autos

The memoir is a genre of autobiography, a self (autos), life (bios) writing (graphein). The concern of this section is the *autos*, the self that writes of itself, which before it can (allow itself to) write must assume its sameness, its unitariness

and its self-presence. That is, it must believe itself to be in control of itself before it could undertake to write of itself. It must also be sufficiently egoistic to do so, and must consider itself worthy of being preserved in writing. Eagleton must believe at least some of this, or he would not write of himself in *The Gatekeeper*.

However, Eagleton's identity, his auto is, according to Robert Smith (1995:100), "generated by the very thing ... which prohibits its stability and autonomy". The 'thing' of which Smith writes is "iterability, the power-to-be-repeated". In *The Gatekeeper*, in his attempt to preserve himself, Eagleton *repeats* himself, making himself double, *othering* himself in order to become the subject of his memoir, and thereby undermining the *autonomy* of his autos. The repetition of himself in *The Gatekeeper* *alters* Eagleton, yet it is through this alteration (altering) that we form Eagleton's identity, and since this identity is a product of alteration, it is, then, impure.

Of the three elements of life writing mentioned above (auto, bio, graphien) the autos is the one that seems most grounded in truth, that seems most true, since life (bios) is filled with inconsistencies and is lived largely without knowing its purpose or its end. It is full of contradictions and ambiguities, and what one calls life is exceedingly difficult to grasp. Writing (graphein) on its part, is entirely external to the writing subject and hardly yields itself to the subject's control. Indeed, it is the most problematic of the three. The autos, then, seems more containable, stable and knowable, since it is the subject itself, inside, internal. It is the element most accessible to the subject since it is same and not the other (i.e. it is one and the same), and, therefore, it is that of which the subject can speak most truthfully.

We have mentioned in the previous section, however, that writing already implies the disappearance of the writer. This disappearance is, according to Derrida (1989), “the precondition of discourse” (165). For Derrida, writing is the “the disappearance of truth in order to represent it. Non-truth is the truth. Non-presence is presence” (165). Therefore, as soon as Eagleton appears in *The Gatekeeper*, as soon as he says “I”, he is already *doubled* since his *autos* (presence) is represented in his writing (non-presence). There is no way to escape this because the condition of the sign, any sign, is that it is repeatable, iterable.

Eagleton must, thus, add to himself the possibility of being *repeated* as Eagleton, and yet, by this necessary move, his *identity*, his *autos* is “hollowed out by that addition” (166). In writing his memoir, Eagleton has inscribed his *autos* with citationality, duplicatability, and even duplicity, for the name Eagleton has now become a mark, a trace, and what “belongs to the structure of every mark” according to Derrida (1982) in *Margins of Philosophy*, is “the possibility of extraction and of citational grafting” (320). This is why the *autos* acquires the “possibility of being repeated in the absence not only of its referent, [in this case Eagleton] ... but of a determined signified or current intention of signification” (320).

On this view, not only can Eagleton’s representation of himself function in his absence, it can equally function in the absence of what he intends by it. That is to say, *The Gatekeeper*, as signifier, literally *floats*, resisting fixity and stability. In order to function, in order to be legible, then, the *autos*, represented by the sign (or the signature) “must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, in altering its identity and singularity divides the seal” (328-9).

Writing, then, does not communicate or transport sense, nor is it an “exchange of intentions and meaning” or a discourse and “communication of consciousness”; writing, quite simply, is “read”, and, this being the case, it “does not give rise to a hermeneutic deciphering, to the decoding of a meaning or truth” (329). This argument undermines *The Gatekeeper* as the “transport” of Eagleton’s sense, intentions and meanings to the reader:

To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive, that my future disappearance in principle will not prevent from functioning and from yielding itself to, reading and rewriting (1982:316).

In writing, the *autos* leaves itself in order to return to itself. It must make itself other in order to return as same. But in doing so, it becomes altered and identity thereby becomes impure. The repeatability of the sign “Eagleton” already contaminates the *autos*. The memoir, then, is not an unproblematic rendering of the *autos*; rather it is a disservice to the *autos* since it sets its free and afloat, away from its origin, and there is no assured destination.

Eagleton is aware of all these (he is a literary theorist, after all); and it is perhaps in a bid to evade this logic that he writes an anti-autobiography or an anti-memoir. Yet, he cannot escape the use of the personal pronoun “I”, which implies self-consciousness and self-awareness. But the “I” is itself not a unified concept; on the contrary, Smith and Watson (2010) identify four types of “I” in an autobiographical narrative such as *The Gatekeeper*: the historical, narrating, narrated and ideological.

The *historical* “I” according to Smith and Watson, is the person producing the autobiographical “I”; and that the life of this “I” is “far more diverse and dispersed than the story that is being told of it” (59). This would be the real-life, flesh and blood Eagleton whose life is more diverse than the contents of *The Gatekeeper* show. The historical Eagleton, for instance, has a wife and children but his family life receives scarcely any mention. This is the Eagleton that is “unknown” and “unknowable” by readers.

The *narrating* “I” is described by Smith and Watson as “the “I” who wants to tell a story about himself”, and differs from the historical “I” in the sense that the latter has “a broad experiential history linked to the story he is telling” (59-60). For this reason, argue Smith and Watson, the narrating “I” is “split, fragmented, provisional, multiple, a subject always in the process of coming together and dispersing; in fact it speaks in tongues or heteroglossia”; and is “a composite of speaking voices ... a sign of multiple voices” (60). As such, the narrating “I” is the “agent of discourse” (60).

The *narrated* “I” on the other hand, is the “subject of history ... the object “I”, the protagonist of the narrative, the version of the self that the narrating “I” chooses to constitute through recollection” (60). In this respect, the narrated “I” is usually younger or less sophisticated (socially, ideologically, politically, morally, etc) than the narrating “I”. In effect, the narrated is literally a *creation* of the narrating “I”s. In *The Gatekeeper*, the ten year old Eagleton and Eagleton the college student, and then, young lecturer are examples of the narrated “I”, they are clearly far less sophisticated than the narrating “I” to whom belongs the words we read in *The Gatekeeper*.

The *ideological* “I” is described by Smith and Watson as “the concept of personhood culturally available to the narrator when he tells his story” (61). Ideological “I”s, then, “are possible positions for autobiographical narrators to occupy, contest, revise and mobilize against one another at specific historical moments” (63). For instance, Eagleton was raised as a Catholic, but, “years later” he had become what he calls a “leftist theologian” (*The Gatekeeper*: 7), a position scarcely in keeping with otherwise conservative Catholicism. Despite this, he is not rejected by Mother Angela whom he had come to visit: the world was changing, and the Catholic Church with it. Eagleton writes that “the Catholic Church was now awash with a tide of reform which was lapping up even against this outpost of ascetic traditionalism” (7). In the chapter entitled “Politics” he contrasts Right-wing and Left-wing politics, leaving no doubt in the reader’s mind about his affinity with the latter. Indeed, Eagleton himself points out that like history, ideology has no end: “one of the last expulsion orders served on history, or more exactly on ideology, was that of the so-called end of ideology movement of the 1950s ... it proved a singularly inept prophecy” (101).

From all this, it is obvious that several autos come together in the production of *The Gatekeeper*, pointing to the split or division inherent in every person. These autos (selves) do not exist independent of one another, but are, rather, repeated through each other thereby denying *The Gatekeeper* a single authorial voice which would have had no doubts, and whose memory would have been perfect, without flaws— or, for that matter, leaving us, the readers, with not a single, authoritative, reliable auto.

4.5 The Ear that Signs *The Gatekeeper*

In writing *The Gatekeeper*, Eagleton, in effect, tells his life to himself. He is the first ear to whom the text signs, and who, simultaneously, signs the text. As such, *The Gatekeeper* is both an auto-affirmation of life (Eagleton affirms himself to himself), as well as an auto-engendering of that life (in writing his memoir, Eagleton re-creates himself in its pages). *The Gatekeeper* affirms and re-creates, both at once.

There are, thus, two selves that converge at the moment of *The Gatekeeper's* writing: the self of the same (that which emits the words, the historical Eagleton), and the self of the other (the discerning ear, which approves the segments of the life chosen to be depicted). Importantly, there is no perfect concord between these two selves – even despite their existing within the same body. Their dissent centres essentially in the fact that the discerning ear has selective hearing (or, selective deafness): it hears only what it wishes to hear, or, and at the same time, it is deaf to the subtler nuances of what the emitting self writes or says. The evidence for this lack of concord lies in the fact that the meaning(s) of *The Gatekeeper* escape the intention(s) of Eagleton. Interpretations, meanings, significations escape (disseminate) into the space between the speaking/writing/emitting Eagleton, and the discerning/reading/listening ear. To put it in reverse logic: the intentions of Eagleton cannot, and do not, determine the meanings of *The Gatekeeper*.

This is the space that gives the *Gatekeeper* its autonomy and independence from Eagleton the writer; it is this space that makes it impossible to contain the language of *The Gatekeeper*; and it is this space that makes endless signification possible. This space raises the problem of the border, i.e. where the life of the historical Eagleton ends and the récit (*The Gatekeeper*) begins. In other words, where does the emitting self end and the discerning ear begin? As Derrida remarks in

The Ear of the Other, “the line that could separate an author’s life from his work ... becomes unclear. It’s mark becomes divided; its unity, its identity becomes dislocated” (1985:44-45).

Such dislocation is brought about by the fact that, as Smith (1995) writes, “to face the other involves a relinquishment, an interruption of self interest” (104). But this is necessary since “self-knowledge can be made only in the proximity ... of [the other]” (106). Through the ear of the other, Eagleton may “pass through a loss or oblivion which gives the possibility of becoming oneself again” (105). To become himself, Eagleton must first lose himself in the ear of the other, who, according to Derrida, must come and sign (make meaning) with Eagleton before *The Gatekeeper* (the signature) can take place. This is because, as Derrida writes:

no text can defend itself without the other first coming to its aid. No text has the necessary solidity, coherence, assurance and systematicity if the response of the other does not come and interrupt it, and by interrupting it, make it resonate (Cited in smith 1995:115).

A contract or pact, then, has to be put into effect between the historical Eagleton, and the ear of the other. This pact or alliance is not, however, between two living selves: it is between the dead and the living. The historical Eagleton is dead because he is not a sign that yields or perpetrates meaning; and he is also dead because he exists outside the text of *The Gatekeeper*, preceding it, *before* it, pre-existing it (and what pre-exists is not yet living). Yet this ‘dead’ Eagleton who or which yields (itself to) meaning, makes reading and interpretation possible. This is the immortal Eagleton, the Eagleton of *The Gatekeeper* in all his (or its) manifestations. Hence, there is a pact between the thanatos (dead) and the autos

(living) of *The Gatekeeper*. Put another way, history puts Eagleton to death since the existence of his name already implies his death (“every name is the name of someone dead” (Derrida 1985: 7)), and language brings Eagleton back to life, but only as writing, as words on the page. The ear of the other, then, destroys even as it creates, and does not exist only within Eagleton; it is also external since it “comes along so late and so is unknown” (51).

This is the ear of the reader who is supposed to send Eagleton’s signature back to him. Herein lie the consequences of the pact or alliance: if the life that Eagleton lives and tells to himself (autobiography, the memoir, *The Gatekeeper*) “cannot be *his* life in the first place except as the effect of a secret contract ... then as long as the contract has not been honored – and it cannot be honored except by another [such as the reader,] then the signature [*The Gatekeeper*] has not taken place” (1985:9; original emphasis).

The *autos* is thus transformed into the *otos*; autobiography becomes otobiography – a life as discerned (and signed) by perceiving ears. For this reason, the signature, *The Gatekeeper* becomes effective – in Derrida’s words, “performed and performing” (50) – not at the moment that it takes place, but only much later when ears will have managed to receive it, to read Eagleton in it. In this sense, *The Gatekeeper* takes place on the addressee’s side, on the side of the ear which comes to join with Eagleton in alliance and in order to do so, to hear and understand him. This is why Derrida maintains that “it is the ear of the other that signs. The ear of the other says “me to me and constitutes the autos of my autobiography” (51). It is, thus, the ear of the other that constitutes the autos of Eagleton’s *The Gatekeeper*; it is this ear which is necessary and vital for *The Gatekeeper* since, in coming to sign the text

with Eagleton, the ear of the other actually *constructs* the text, makes it to come about.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how autobiographical writing is an effect of auto-affection, a condition which brings together self-presence and narcissism; the process of hearing oneself speak. We have seen how this operation, although it occurs *inside* the subject, involves a radical othering which undermines the unitariness of the subject. The consequence of such a lack of a unified *identity* within the subject serves as a pointer to the problematics of memory which we explored in the subsequent section. The question as to whether the memoir keeps the memories it is entrusted with, and how effectively it does so were the central concerns of the section. Although it is acknowledged that the *Gatekeeper* is a product of memory, and that memories are central to the memoir, they are not the thing itself: the slippery nature of language makes it difficult to articulate memory; and the memoir, in fact, is not a passive record of experience, but actively *creates* experience in what is arguably an *artistic* manner.

The last two sections of the chapter took up the problem of the *autos* and how far it can stand; whether there are not, in fact, several selves engaged in the writing of the memoir; as well as how the autobiographical writing is constituted – that is, whether it is possible for the *autos* on its own to make the text, or whether it needs another (the ear of the other). The Chapter concluded on the premise that the ear of the other is vital to the constitution of the memoir, since, for *The Gatekeeper* to take place, the ear of the other must come to sign the text with Eagleton.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has been an exploration and critical analysis of Terry Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper: a Memoir* and Joseph Conrad's *The Congo Diary*. Through an application of Jacques Derrida's theory of the ear-of-the-other, this study has shown how both texts could be considered not merely as autobiographical, but as *otobiographical* and *thanatographical*. This has been possible because deconstruction, the framework employed in this study, is a refusal of closure, an exercise which puts things or concepts such as the autobiographical, for instance, in constant tension. In this way, the objectives of the study have been achieved since this study has shown how our understanding and interpretation of the diary and the memoir has been complicated through the application of deconstruction.

Furthermore, this dissertation has explored and critically analysed some key terms in autobiographical studies. These terms include the Proper Name; the Signature; the concepts of Death, Desire and Loss; Memory; the *autos*; and auto-affection. All of these were subjected to Derrida's style of reading autobiography in his *The Ear of the Other*, with interesting results. Through an analysis of two primary texts – Joseph Conrad's *The Congo Diary* and Terry Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper: A Memoir*, this dissertation had drawn out the following conclusions.

The Proper Name, which is supposed to be *proper* to its bearer, that is, which is supposed to be a personal property and a positive identity marker, itself undermines the function it is supposed to perform. Rather than point to the person whose name it is, it points to, or foregrounds, the person's death. The names Conrad and Eagleton

do not refer back to their bearers, but underscore the bearers' deaths, whether or not they are alive. This is because the proper name can function, and does function in the absence of its bearer and, in this way, becomes the name of someone dead. Even more radically than foregrounding its bearer's death, the proper name appropriates for itself what rightfully belongs to the bearer of the name: the bearer's "signature".

The signature does not here refer to the name an author or writer signs at the beginning of a text; it refers to the operations as a whole, the text as a whole, so that Conrad's signature as it concerns this study would be *The Congo Diary* as a whole, and Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper* in its entirety. Thus, the signature is that which the writer has kept, placed, or put in writing to preserve against death and loss. Yet, instead of the credit for their works returning back to Conrad and Eagleton, what the present dissertation has shown is that no credit (or even loss) returns to the writer. It is only the name, the Proper Name that inherits. Nothing ever returns to the historical, empirical Conrad and Eagleton, only the names Conrad and Eagleton inherit.

This is why, as this study has demonstrated, every autobiographical writing – such as the *Diary* and *The Gatekeeper* – every autobiography, is also a *thanatography*, a death writing, a writing for death, a writing towards death. Being driven by Desire (of whatever kind), both *The Congo Diary* and *The Gatekeeper* are inhabited by Death, since, as this study has shown, Desire is driven by Death. Moreover, since writing displaces the subject, thanatos (death) already drives the writing, and ultimately denies the fulfillment of the subject's desire. This is in keeping with the nature of Desire itself, which is (and can) never be satisfied. That is to say, Desire, in itself, is endless, and it is what drives life: once a particular desire

is satisfied, another takes its place, so that life itself becomes a series of endless desires, the end point of which could only be death. Only when the subject is dead, does desiring stop. Desire is a movement towards death: if the *Congo Diary* and *The Gatekeeper* are both driven by desire on the part of Conrad and Eagleton, respectively, then both texts are instances of a writing-towards-death, a writing-for-death, thanatography.

This study has also explored the problematic of memory and remembering, confirming its notorious unreliability. That memory is not an excellent reservoir of past experience has been illustrated through an analysis of Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper*, where he is himself not sure of what he remembers or whether he has remembered correctly. Indeed, this dissertation has demonstrated that the act of recall or remembering is not a passive one of retrieval, but an active and artistic one of re-creation. That is to say, in remembering, the subject actively re-creates the past that she remembers, filling in the gaps and correcting the inconsistencies of her memories. In this way, the *Gatekeeper* and the *Congo Diary* offer *interpretations* rather than mere records of the past they depict.

Since autobiographical writing is a product of interpretation on the part of the writer, the status of the *Autos*, the self, becomes unstable. That is to say, the *autos* is no longer a given but a *construct*, a self created and fashioned out of a selection made by the writer of his experiences. No matter how comprehensive, the life depicted in any autobiographical writing is always a partial picture: it is never complete. In this way, the *autos* becomes itself a mere fragment of the true self of the writer.

More importantly for this study, however, the autos must leave itself, escape itself, in order to return to itself. That is to say, for the autos to become itself, it must first lose itself in writing. To achieve immortality, Conrad and Eagleton must take recourse to writing: it is writing, in its materiality as words on the page, that will assure them immortality. But the materiality of writing points to the immateriality or transience of the writers. In writing, therefore, the self must lose itself – the autonomy of the autos becomes undermined. Rather than returning to the subject as a unified entity, the autos, now (in) writing, becomes disseminated and dispersed.

Auto-affection, then, the telling oneself to oneself becomes a complicated operation. As this study has made clear, the operation of hearing oneself speak involves a radical othering of the self. The autos, the self, must become other to itself in order to hear itself speak. Two selves are involved in this operation: the self that “speaks” and the self that “hears” or perceives. This implies that the self must establish a *distance* within itself, it must become different from itself before auto-affection can take place; and this argument brings this conclusion to the most central concern of this dissertation: the role of the Ear of the Other in autobiographical writing.

Throughout, this study has been a sustained analysis of the primary texts through applying Derrida’s theory of “The Ear of the Other” that virtually everything rests upon this vital organ. It is, in fact, the ear that signs both *The Congo Diary* and *The Gatekeeper* since both could not take place until the Ear comes to sign with Conrad and Eagleton, respectively. Following Derrida, this study demonstrated that both instances of autobiography (i.e. the *Diary* and *The Gatekeeper*) are also instances of *otobiography*, that is, ear-life-writing. Only when the Ear comes to sign

(in the sense of make meaning out of) the texts will the signature have taken place. It is, therefore, the Ear of the Other that *constructs* the texts and *constitutes* the autos of autobiography.

Significantly, this dissertation has critiqued some taken-for-granted concepts in diary and memoir studies and highlighted the fact that they are not as stable as they may seem. Reading Conrad's *The Congo Diary* and Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper* as *otobiographies* has opened up both texts to some surprising and interesting analyses. For instance, such a reading has undermined the seeming *immediacy* of the genre of the Diary by pointing to the *difference*, and, as a result, the *distance* between the writing Conrad and the Ear-of-the-other-Conrad, highlighting the conflict that necessarily exists *within* the writing subject. The same applies to Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper*, where the present study has revealed how, by focusing on the Ear, the stability of the autos, the self could be undermined, thereby opening up the text to endless interpretations.

By emphasizing that it is the "Ear of the Other" that signs the text, the reader of the diary, in this case Joseph Conrad's *The Congo Diary*, and memoir, in this case Terry Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper*, is given the critical acumen and the theoretical tools to interpret or read these texts in new and insightful ways. Now, aware of the power and the critical importance of the fact that it is the Ear that necessarily signs autobiographical texts, the reader can lend a more attentive, critical and sensitive ear to these texts, and others of their kind, in order to uncover the silent forces that went into their production, to, in effect, *listen* to them as they should be listened to, all in an effort to understand the complicated ways by which such texts, such productions of the "ear of the other" make it possible for the signature (in such texts) to take

place, and take its place in the realm of the eternal return, of “the ear”, ‘the signature”, and the Conrads and the Eagletons that such a return cycles and recycles as texts, signs, signifieds, autos, and narrative selves (one way or another).

GLOSSARY

Otobiography

This term was coined by Jacques Derrida which he uses to describe a relationship to the “ear of the other”. On this view, the ear is “uncanny” (beyond what is normally considered “the proper”) because the structure and presence of the Other (the not-self) effects the transformation of *auto* into *oto*. In this sense, while autobiography might function as the discourse of auto-affection (self-love or obsession), it is the *oto*, the ear, which Derrida would call the most tendered and most open organ that signs, and would sign, the narrative of autobiography.

Signature, The

In Derrida’s use, the signature is not only the proper name or the word (a sign), which exists at the end (or even at the beginning) of the autobiographical text or narrative but also the operations as a whole, of the text as a whole, for example, or even the whole of the active interpretation which has left a trace or a reminder in the act of reading or interpretation.

Auto-narration

In his book, *Ear of the Other*, Derrida conceptualizes “auto-narration” as a mechanism of “hearing oneself speak” and of the immediate grasping of the sense of one’s own utterance. This act of auto-narration (telling one’s life to oneself) can be

found in the Diary, where an author or the diarist sends the text out into the world to be “signed” and returned to its meanwhile deceased sender. In this sense, the act of auto-narration *entails a* detour via the Other, who turns out, strangely according to Derrida, to be its very signatory and, by implication, the subject to whom the signatory returns as its own *name*.

Proper Name, The

This structure sums up the presence or absence of what is called the *author*, which is the only mark in the text of an outside-of-the-text that designates a real person. The *proper name* is the point of contact between the inside and the outside of the text. As a structure designating identity between author, narrator and subject, the proper name is the authenticating device for the author.

Self, The

The “self” or “consciousness” is actually a “no-thing” which is inhabited by rapidly shifting perceptions that are impossible to grasp, fix, or contain, much less master. In this sense, the self is a shifting, fluid structure that does not settle or congeal into a hard or fixed identity.

Desire

By its very nature, “desire” is an experience of lack rooted in loss that is also caught up somewhere between past loss and future lack. This is why desire will remain unrealizable and is the inescapable condition of restlessness, dislocation, lack and anxiety.

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