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Individualism in the Novels of Nuruddin Farah

By

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Abstract:

The subject conceived as “individual” is a sustained focus across the novels of Somali writer, Nuruddin Farah. This thesis locates a reading of individualism in Farah’s novels in the context of the historical and philosophical development of modern identity in the societies of the North-Atlantic. It relies primarily on the analysis of philosopher, Charles Taylor, who proposes that individualism makes modern identity an historically unprecedented mode of conceiving the person. By individualism, Taylor refers to the inward location of moral sources in orientation around which the self is constituted. Non-individualist conceptions of the self locate moral horizons external to the subject thereby defined.

The novel appears to be *the* most significant cultural form which mutually constitutes modern subjectivity. This is suggested by the centrality of the *Bildungsroman* sub-genre which fundamentally determines the form of the novel. Farah’s work spans the historical development of the novel from the proto-realism of his first publication, through modernism and postmodernism, returning to the “neo-realism” of his most recent novel. The representation of the subject in the novel suggests transformations in identity which belie the uniformity of the disengaged, autonomous self which is articulated in the novel as a genre. Tension thus is generated between the social commitment Farah expresses as a writer and the limitations of the form which deny representation to the heteronomous subjectivities who are the objects of Farah’s concern.

The introduction identifies the centrality of individualism to Farah’s project.

Chapter 1 explores the historical development of individualism and genealogies of alternative conceptions of self.

Chapter 2 addresses the articulation of individualism in the classic *Bildungsroman*, the sub-genre which defines the novel.

Chapter 3 interrogates Farah's use of the "dissensual" *Bildungsroman* to escape the contradiction of the classic *Bildungsroman*.

Chapter 4 focuses on how modernism in the novels allows aesthetic resolution of individualist contradiction through fragmentation.

Chapter 5 explores the resistance encountered when the novel attempts to represent heteronomy rather than autonomy.

Chapter 6 suggests the indispensability of coherent subjectivity to Farah's socially committed stance. Within the philosophical matrix of individualism, the "performative" or "stylized" subject is the consequential form of identity.

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Introduction

Somali writer, Nuruddin Farah Hassan (b. 1945), is known in literary circles as a dramatist, novelist and short story writer. He is also known as an essayist and as a writer of non-fiction. It is, however, as a novelist that he receives most attention. Farah's development as a writer is interesting since his oeuvre seems to compress a history of the novel into the life work of a single author. Farah's novels trace a trajectory from a kind of proto-realism to modernism and postmodernism. Through a broad overview of the criticism of Farah's novels, this section attempts to show the various ways in which the individual is key to an understanding of Farah's work.

For reasons to be explained in a later chapter, Farah's first published novel is also one of his most fascinating. *From a Crooked Rib*, which was written while Farah was a student of philosophy at the University of Chandigarh in the Punjab, was published in 1970. Despite criticism of the book's lack of aesthetic accomplishment (Wright *Novels of Nuruddin Farah* 27), it was acclaimed for its representation of female consciousness so convincing that the author subsequently received mail addressed to "Dear Ms Farah" (Jaggi). This first novel with a central female character was followed in 1976 by *A Naked Needle* with its peripatetic male protagonist. Farah's literary inspiration is varied and includes Dostoevsky, Hugo, Woolf, Joyce and Hemingway among others. (Farah "Why I Write"). Influenced by Samuel Beckett (Sugnet "Maps" 741), Farah, after publication of *A Naked Needle*, began to compose his novels as trilogies with characters recognizable from earlier books populating later novels. The convention of the trilogy, Farah has explained, structurally permits the breadth to develop key ideas. The first trilogy, titled "Variations on

the theme of an African Dictatorship”, includes the novels *Sweet and Sour Milk*, *Sardines*, and *Close Sesame*. The second sequence is titled the “Blood in the Sun” trilogy. This includes *Maps*, Farah’s novel which has received the most scholarly attention, *Gifts* and *Secrets*. These books have been followed up by two other novels, *Links* and *Knots*, which presumably form part of a third trilogy, as yet to be named.

This thesis argues that the novel is a genre which in fundamental ways ideally embodies Farah’s worldview. Farah’s novels represent a dense collage of themes, issues and concerns, reflected in a kaleidoscopic body of criticism. It will be suggested that beneath these shifting hermeneutic patterns an underlying foundation in philosophical individualism is discernible which motivates the content, the form and the interplay of both in the novels.

Since Farah’s novels are situated at the nexus of so wide and varied a range of issues, critical approaches have been legion. One thematic concern in the literature has been a focus on the representation of feminist concerns in the novels (Alden and Tremaine, Stratton and Okonkwo, among others). Attention has also been paid to Farah as an explicitly political writer, dissecting colonization, postcolonial dictatorship and civil war (Gugler, Mnthali, Ntalindwa, Pajalich, Turfan and Wright among others). The representation of Somali culture, religion and orality in the novels has also been a focus of attention (Hawley, Mazrui, Phillips, Samatar, S.S. and Sparrow among others). A very important thematic concern has been the novels’ critique of nationalism (Cobham, Garuba, Ngaboh-Smart, Ntalindwa among others). The re-imagining of extended and nuclear family structures has also been considered (Bardolph and Alidou, among others). Questions of form have been addressed by various critics, in particular, the use of the techniques of modernism and postmodernism (Gikandi, Sugnet and Wright, among others). The novels have also been approached from the

perspective of genre study. Ian Adam, for example, considers the affinity of the novels with the detective story.

Despite the plethora of approaches supported by the novels, a broad survey of the literature suggests several ideas in common. One of these is that in various formal ways the novels resist hermeneutic closure. Critics observe that Farah's fiction is marked by "dialogics", "polyphony", "openness" and "multiplicity" (Pajalich). Hawley finds in the novels a hybridized reality in which no ultimate meaning can be found. At best the artist offers only an "inscrutability, a holding in abeyance of finality." (86) Wright encapsulates this effect as the "democratic pluralism" of Farah's political vision (*Nuruddin Farah* xix). Adam observes of *Sweet and Sour Milk*, which shares in the generic conventions of both detective novel and thriller, that closure is motivated by a repudiation of the idea of a final, monologic, dictatorial answer ("Murder of Soyaan Keynaan"). Phillips's reading of the symbolism of shadow in *Sardines* finds that the novel provides no definitive insights, only alternatives, variations and doubt. While Ruggiero provocatively proposes that the map presented at the end of *Maps* is a blank map, Garuba, suggests that what is finally tentatively revealed is only an "outline map" ("Postcolonial Geographies" 111). Similarly, Cobham states that *Maps* "challenges us to resist the reflexive urge to pin down a single version of the African reality as 'true'" ("Boundaries of the Nation" 96).

Associated with the radical hermeneutic indeterminacy outlined above, is a focus in the literature on the individualism displayed in the novels. Gikandi, for example, suggests that "Art ... prefigure[s] the author's major concern with the state of the individual in modern culture" ("Postcolonial Textuality" 756). The specific type of subjectivity which preoccupies the novels is what Eldridge terms a "self-sufficient individuality" (647),

symbolized by the fatherless character, Kalamani, in *Secrets* in whose genealogical and semantic “cul-de-sac of a name” this autonomy is realized. The focus on the individual often involves “an intense and passionate search for and assertion of identity” (Mnthali). The unremitting focus on the individual paradoxically splits the subject. In the context of an analysis of *Maps*, Gikandi refers to the textual construction of a hybridized or “split personality” (458), while Kazan suggests of the same novel that “the fissures rent in national and personal identity” (470) produce a schizophrenic self.

Placed in the historical and political context of the postcolony, the novels display a concern with the subject as individual operated on by the power of both the postcolonial state and tradition. Hand suggests that Farah’s books are about “individual men and women who have been denied their rights” (117). A primary individual right explored is the right to freedom (Wright, Bardolph, Dietche, Hand, among others). The fictions are also concerned with individual resistance to traditional and postcolonial state power (Mnthali, Turfan, among others). Individual resistance often takes the form of a development of the “capacity for self-regulation” (Stratton “The Novels” 154). The transformation of society, the novels propose, is an effect of the transformation of individuals (Pajalich 321). What finally is at issue in the novels, it appears, is a cosmopolitan, performative subjectivity. Ngaboh-Smart observes that the new individual constructed in the novels “underscores a new civic consciousness that connects the self and the local directly to the international” (“*Secrets*” 135).

The most expansive exploration of individualism in Farah’s novels occurs in the criticism of Juliet Okonkwo, Patricia Alden and Louis Tremaine. Okonkwo highlights the idea that, “Farah’s interest centers around the individual and his quest for personal and

political freedom ...” (“Novelist as Artist” 48), or in alternative formulation, Farah is preoccupied with the lack of rights of his characters. It is in Farah’s female characters in particular that this “extreme individualistic spirit”(Okonkwo “Novelist as Artist” 49) and “consciousness of [...] individual rights” (Okonkwo “Novelist as Artist” 49-50) are manifested. This leads Okonkwo to suggest that while African male writers (and many African women writers) represent their female characters stereotypically, Farah’s depiction of his heroines displays an egregious attention to their individuality. The individualism of Farah’s female characters is defined in terms of their rationality, potential for self-development and their quest for freedom. Freedom of expression, in particular, is foregrounded. For Okonkwo, in addition, Farah is unique in the African literary landscape in his successful reconciliation of aesthetic and political concerns. The political novel, Okonkwo suggests, can “be faithful to artistic aesthetics.” Quoting Farah himself, Okonkwo explains that art is served by “selectively taking the facts of existence and imposing order and form upon them in an aesthetic pattern, thereby making them meaningful and relevant.” (Okonkwo “Literature and Politics” 57) Aesthetic form imposes order upon the “facts of existence” of the subject as individual. Okonkwo stresses that Farah “champions the cause” of the freedom of the individual. Okonkwo reveals a connection here only implicit in the texts themselves between the individualism of the subjectivity presented in the novels and the formal resolution of the aesthetics-politics dichotomy. Exploring the link between the individual and this artistic resolution is a substantial concern of this thesis.

Alden and Tremaine, drawing on and extending Okonkwo’s argument observe that Farah’s fiction represents an extended meditation on the individual:

Our thesis is that the various strands in Farah’s writing are elements of a single pattern consistently developed from his first novel to his most recent: an ever

deepening meditation on the complex relationship between individual autonomy and social responsibility. In Farah's artistic vision no value is more precious or essential than the individual's freedom to define and shape the life of the self. To claim this principle requires, however, that such freedom be extended to all, actively promoted within every relationship at every level of human affairs, and defended through collective action when necessary. This vision generates and incorporates Farah's political philosophy, his treatment of gender, and his use of language (*Nuruddin Farah* vii-viii).

The assumptions and implications of Alden and Tremaine's thesis may be summarized as follows: Individual autonomy enjoys ontological status in Farah's novels. Proceeding out of this autonomy is the radical freedom to define the self with a consequent valorization of freedom above other values. The principle of equality is enshrined in the extension of the freedom of the autonomous self to others. The obverse of this principle is also true. (Equality can only be extended to selves who are likewise freely autonomous. They can only achieve equality when once they are autonomous.) The corollary is that the collective is an association of free and equal individuals.

If this is an accurate reflection of Farah's political philosophy, then social formations are secondary. They are not, "the inevitabilities, the givens, by which lives and identities are defined; rather they are instruments to be critically used, rejected or transformed for political purposes in which each individual, *as* an individual bears responsibility" (Alden and Tremaine 41). The critical literature fully supports Alden and Tremaine's observation of the novels' skepticism of the primacy of the social. Bardolph notes that the novels challenge the vertical relationships of fathers and sons, central to patriarchal, patrilinear, virilocal Somali kinship systems. Instead, across almost all the novels, the bonds between brothers and sisters are emphasized. In other words, a horizontal relationship of fraternity (or sorority) is

constructed which itself then comes under literary scrutiny. The horizontal bonds do not create a utopian space. *Maps* is the novel most widely considered to deconstruct both national and gender identity (Cobham, Garuba, Wright, among others), powerfully embodied by the “menstruating” central male character, Askar. Through the symbol of the foundling, *Gifts* interrogates biological parenthood (Alden and Tremaine). *Secrets*, through provocatively exploding the notion of fatherhood, fundamentally destabilizes both “blood and bones” theories of Somali clanship and the nuclear family.

What is passed over without illumination in the literature since it is obfuscated in the novels, is the paradoxical *ontology* of the individual in a philosophy which appears to reject ontology. The individual is constituted through procedural rationality which, in its self-validating universality, seems to exclude socially or transcendently constructed codes. As the discussion of the critical literature above suggests, the novels challenge the transcendence of national, clan and gender identity from the sublimely absolute, unquestioned certainty of the self-reflexive individual. The literature uncritically reflects what constitutes the “unthought” of the novels. What is effaced in the novels and in the criticism is the existence of a disengaged, essential prior self possessed of the tautological capacity to construct itself from the range of options open to it. While this self acquires the liberatory overtones encompassed by notions of “hybridity”, “creoleness”, “metissage”, and so on, it is predicated on the existence of a prior “disengaged” self which in Farah’s writing and in the criticism is completely naturalized. This thesis will attempt to show that individualism in the novels operates to occlude those codes external to the autonomous self.

Some sense of the process by which this occurs is encountered in the observations of Alden and Tremaine. Language, these critics emphasize, is fundamental to the individuals

Farah represents. Language is crucial to the liberatory acts of self-narration of these individuals. These self-narrations, one needs to stress, as Alden and Tremaine do not, occur in the context of and are constituted in *novels*. These acts of self-narration are also acts of self-definition. But it is only a secondary self which is constituted through these acts of self-narration. The primary self, this thesis argues, is the subject in part constituted by the novel form itself, which in the most extraordinary sleight of hand remains completely invisible but completely in control. In order to come into existence, this primary self, “the individual”, orients itself within a moral horizon which also remains imperceptible.

The moral horizon which does come into view is the subsequent ethics of intersubjective relations, what Alden and Tremaine refer to as the “ethical role of the imagination.” Individual autonomy expresses itself through imaginative acts of self-narration. When this self-narration is “fully performed, it is a profoundly social act, one that takes place not in a vacuum but in a world” (157). The self-narration of the autonomous individual is ethical “since it must be brought under the control of the inventor and projected outward into a social reality to engage other accounts of the world” (168). In this schema, the only ethics are the ethics which emerge secondarily in the mutual negotiation of the acts of self-narration of autonomous individuals.

The connection between a particular conception of the subject and what is variously termed ethics, morality, politics, commitment or the social, on the one hand, and the art of the novel, on the other, occurs explicitly, as we have seen, in the analysis of Alden and Tremaine. It also occurs explicitly in Okonkwo’s assertion of Farah’s “unideological” reconciliation through the category of the individual of the otherwise irreconcilable difference between politics and aesthetics. Across the board in the literature, however, using

various discourses and conceptual frameworks, the assertion is made that Farah's achievement in the novels is an aesthetically triumphant literature of commitment articulated through the individual.

This thesis argues that the triangulation of the individual, ethics and aesthetic form discernible in the critical literature on the novels of Farah, is not fortuitous. It is the necessary consequence of a culturally and historically limited conception of the person as disengaged individual in part entrenched by the genre of the novel. The philosophical milieu within which the novel defined itself was one in which social and/or transcendental ethics no longer appeared convincing. A complex interplay existed between decisive philosophical shifts in the understanding of the self and science, economy, society and culture in European society of the seventeenth century. No longer could the idea of an ontologically grounded or logocentric ethics be philosophically supported. Henceforward, morality, as a consequence of the manner in which the self was conceived, appeared to emanate from within this newly conceptualized subject, or "the individual". The decisive break in the new European understanding of the self occurs with the formulation of Cartesian rationality and is fully articulated in Lockean empiricism. The birth of this new understanding of the self as individual coincides with the birth of the novel, the new genre which culturally embodies, explores and reconciles the contradictions of the transformed subjectivity.

Like the new individual, capable of self-definition, form in the novel is not given as in the epic. Instead, form must be self-reflexively generated out of the life of the individual around which the novel acquires shape. It is in the complexities of this exchange that ethics is constituted. This thesis proposes that Farah's novels represent particularly clearly the dynamics and the dangers, the consequences and the contradictions, inherent in the

representation of the person through the form of the novel. Against this background, individual chapters explore the following areas:

Chapter 1 details the theoretical scaffolding which supports the ensuing analysis. It draws centrally on the work of philosopher, Charles Taylor, who suggests that individualism is the effect of the relocation of moral sources within the autonomous self. While drawing primarily on moral philosophy, the field expands into various other disciplines. The effects of individualism are encountered in the histories of sociology, anthropology, religious studies, political science, law, art and literature.

Chapter 2 explores the contemporaneous rise of the novel genre and the *Bildungsroman* sub-genre. It argues that the *Bildungsroman*, the novel type in which free and full personality is developed, articulates with sharpest clarity the individualist foundational premise of the novel genre. In various ways the *Bildungsroman* structure of *From a Crooked Rib*, Farah's first novel, replicates the eighteenth century rise of the novel in a postcolonial context. The chapter considers the implications for the postcolonial female of the use of the genre of incorporation of the white, middle class male into the modern nation state. Paradoxically, *From a Crooked Rib* both masks and boldly underscores the contradictions inherent in novelistic individualism. The autonomous, free subject ultimately is obliged to submit to a social role. The realist novel resolves this contradiction through *irony*.

Chapter 3 considers the ways in which the classical *Bildungsroman* has been appropriated by marginalized groups to negotiate inclusion. The chapter attempts to show some of the complexities and paradoxes of the dissensual *Bildungsroman* as they emerge in two of Farah's other novels, *Sardines* and *Gifts*. Determined by the individualist assumption

constitutive of the *Bildungsroman*, female novels of self-realization nevertheless proceed upon the naturalized and normalized *a priori* of disengaged subjectivity.

Chapter 4 focuses on the ways in which modernism in *A Naked Needle* and *Sweet and Sour Milk*, while rejecting some aspects of formal realism, entrenches the norm of a self-sufficient, alienated individualism. Modernist technique achieves this effect through allowing the irony, generated by individualist reconciliation with sociality in realism, to reflect upon itself. The effect of this move upon the subject is to produce fragmentation of identity which comes to be celebrated by postmodernism.

Chapter 5 considers the challenge faced by Farah when he attempts to represent a heteronomous subject in the novel, the genre constitutive of individual autonomy. *Close Sesame* is the exception in Farah's oeuvre since this novel, unlike the other novels, attempts to represent non-individualist Somali culture and religion through an elderly protagonist. In order to achieve representation in the novel, the heteronomous subject needs to be in various ways disengaged from the external sources which form his ethical horizon.

Chapter 6 picks up the thread from Chapter 4. This chapter argues that Farah's overtly postmodern novels, *Maps* and *Secrets*, celebrate the schizoid, fragmented identity constituted by modernism. Farah's political commitment, however, requires some form of coherent subjectivity. The later novels, which probably will form the third trilogy, suggest a model of cosmopolitan performative identity. This model of subjectivity effaces the prior disengaged, autonomous self out of which it is constituted. In so doing, the narrative marks a return to the origins of realism in the genre of romance.

What the trajectory traced by Farah's novels thus ultimately achieves, is resolution of the contradiction of the sociality of the individual. In effectively effacing the disengaged,

autonomous subjectivity out of which the model of performative identity proceeds, performative identity, unlike schizophrenic identity, reconstitutes an apparently unideological coherent subject, while completely denying the totality out of which that subject emerges. On this basis the complex within which the performative subject is formed, and the subject itself, is entirely naturalized and normalized, while other patently *social* subject formations, by contrast, are deemed totalitarian.

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Chapter 1

Individualism: A Theoretical Framework

This thesis takes as its point of theoretical departure the argument presented by Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self* about individualism, modernity and morality. “Individualism” is a term frequently invoked, but rarely defined or used with consistency. In what represents the most cogent elucidation of the topic, Taylor suggests that individualism is the historically limited form of identity constituted by modernity in the societies of the North-Atlantic. Individualism is the form taken by modern identity. Philosophically, he shows that any enquiry into the subject, requires that the self be situated within a moral horizon. For Taylor, “selfhood and the good, ... selfhood and morality, [are] inextricably intertwined themes” (*Sources* 3). According to Taylor, the final rupture with earlier forms of subjectivity occurs around the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries when an historically unprecedented break occurs. While the moral horizon hitherto had always existed externally in a social and transcendental ideal, in the period of modernity the ethical horizon against which the self is oriented is perceived to be internal to the subject it self-reflexively defines. For the first time, the higher order is not external to the person; instead, the moral sources of the self are seen to be located within the autonomous individual.

This is the core of Taylor’s argument. But the impact of individualism thus defined is at the heart of virtually every aspect of the modern worldview, from the economy to the public sphere to religion to art, and so on. These ideas are extrapolated in Taylor’s other works, among them *The Ethics of Authenticity*, *Modern Social Imaginaries* and *A Secular Age* which also inform the argument presented in this thesis. Taylor’s analysis presented in

Sources of the Self is supported in various ways by the work of other scholars, as will be shown, but without Taylor's clarity of vision regarding the changes wrought in perceptions of the self.

While Taylor's frame of reference includes the impact of individualism on art, he does not consider the novel in much detail. However, the novel appears to be *the* representational mode which, in a complex mutual relationship, is both informed by and forms modern identity. As Raymond Williams observes in *The Long Revolution*, the novel is "not so much a literary form as a whole literature in itself" (Williams 304). The significance of the novel to the culture of individualism is a key concern of this thesis.

As the previous chapter makes apparent, the individual is *the* major preoccupation of the novels of Nuruddin Farah. All the novels, without exception, are set in Somalia, what Farah, as a consequence of his extended exile, refers to as the country of his "imagination." Somali-Muslim culture, which Farah attempts to portray in the novels, resists unproblematic representation precisely since it appears not to share the assumptions of the novel about the nature of the person. This chapter thus seeks to trace the genealogies of various conceptions of the self.

I Historical Development of the Individual

Charles Taylor traces the origin of the modern understanding of the self to Plato. For Plato the self is oriented to the good when reason rather than desire rules. Self-mastery is gained through reason. Taylor associates Plato with the "rise towards dominance of the ethic of reason" (*Sources* 117) which culminates in the eighteenth century Enlightenment. The ethic of reason may be contrasted with the Homeric warrior ethic which recognizes a higher life in

action, bravery and courage. It may also be contrasted with Aristotle for whom reason exists not in the idealized realm of the Forms, but is realized only in social embodiment in the *polis*. For Taylor, “Plato’s view, just because it privileges a condition of self-collected awareness and designates this as the state of maximum unity with oneself, requires some conception of the mind as a unitary space” (*Sources* 119) This represents the crucial *centring of the self in the mind* which forms part of the prehistory of the development of modern individuality. The step beyond centring is embodied by *interiority*. But to speak about interiority in relation to Plato, Taylor maintains, is misleading since, for Plato, the higher order is *found* in the order of the Forms, it is not *made*. The self thus orients itself in relation to a framework outside of itself. Reason presents itself in a cosmic order which simply has to be recognized and acknowledged in order to gain access to the higher life. For Plato the source of the self remains outside of the self in an external rational order.

The Platonic duality of bodily and non-bodily is taken up by Augustine of Hippo in the Christian understanding of flesh and spirit. In St Augustine’s Christian engagement with Plato, the realm of the Ideas or Forms comes to be represented by the thoughts of God. The rational order of the universe embodies the external “signs” of God’s thoughts. Unlike Plato, however, the ability to perceive this order calls the subject not outward, but *inward*. Associated with this move is the change of focus from identifying self-realization in the external rational order to an attention to the activity itself of knowing. This change of focus inward, for Taylor, not only is a reflexive but a “radically” reflexive move for which the adoption of a first person standpoint is prerequisite. Taylor distinguishes the radically reflexive attitude from the reflexive by contrasting Augustine’s call with the advice of the “ancient moralists” to “the care of oneself” (*gnothi seaton*). This was an admonition to care

for one's soul rather than for one's property. This "stance" becomes radical through the adoption of the first person standpoint: "In our normal dealings with things, we disregard the [the] dimension of experience [concerned with a subjective perception of the object domain] and focus on the things experienced. But we can turn and make this the object of our attention, become aware of our awareness, try to experience our experiencing ..." (*Sources* 130).

The consequence of the radical reflexivity Taylor describes is the related phenomenon that *my* experience is uniquely different from *your* experience. The Augustinian "proto-cogito" is the *sine qua non* of the sense of inwardness of modern individuality. It is only from this standpoint outside of the world of experience that a view of an "inner domain of objects" can be produced. This move also makes the first person standpoint inescapable in the quest for truth. The good can only be accessed through ontological individualism. But with St Augustine, the break with an order external to the self is not quite complete. Taylor quotes Gilson who summarizes the Augustinian position as one which leads "from the exterior to the interior and from the interior to the superior" (*Sources* 136). Also, significantly, with St Augustine "the idea can grow that moral perfection requires a personal adhesion to the good, a full commitment of the will" – an important idea which is developed in the early modern period. Taylor suggests that, for Plato, the eye has the ability to see the external rational order. It merely has to be appropriately focused. For St Augustine, the eye has lost this ability which is restored only by God's grace through an internal search into the "I".

For Taylor, the Cartesian move is to locate the moral sources of the self wholly within the subject rather than in relation to an external ontic logos. Descartes, following

Galileo, understands the universe mechanistically. A representational view of the world applies. In other words, “To know reality is to have a correct representation of things” (*Sources* 144). Truth consists only in describing the universe as a machine without imputing any teleological purpose. This idea seems infallible and unchallengeable in this scientific outlook. Reality now has to be constructed through description in the mind. However, this “order of representations must ... meet the standards which derive from the thinking activity of the knower” (*Sources* 145). This epistemic “standard”, applied both to the world and to the being that knows the world, leads to an objectification of both the world, on the one hand, and mind and body, on the other. One begins to view mind, body and world functionally, mechanistically, instrumentally. Self mastery in this context does not involve the subordination of desire to reason, where reason consists in the right alignment to the higher order. Instead, “self mastery consists in our lives being shaped by the orders that our reasoning capacity constructs according to the appropriate standards” (*Sources*, 147). The world thus is “disenchanted” in the Weberian sense that it no longer is seen to reflect the “magic” of a meaningful order. Instead, the order is internally generated. In this way the subject is split from the world of objects, which exists to be described, categorized and ultimately controlled. If this is the case, then aspiration to the good no longer involves an orientation to an external ideal order. Moral perfection derives from “the agent’s sense of his own dignity as a rational being” (*Sources* 152). What this implies is that one no longer derives one’s sense of worth in the public arena. One strives for perfection within one’s own eyes. Platonic hegemony of reason translated into *rational control* means that life comes to be shaped “by the order of demands of reason’s dominance” rather than through orientation to an external order. In this way rationality comes to be defined not “substantively” where

reason consists in recognizing an external ideal or divine order. Instead rationality is defined “procedurally”, truth is determined by *how* one constructs order. For Descartes, self-sufficient certainty is generated “for myself following the right method” (*Sources* 156). Thus, although Descartes is not an atheist, God no longer is the moral source of the individual. With this “clarity and fullness of self-presence” which makes a divinely inspired order no longer requisite, “The road to Deism is already opened” (*Sources* 157).

The final step for Taylor in the development of the modern sense of self is taken by Locke. But Locke’s intervention needs to be seen in the context of the Neo-Stoicism of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in Europe, a philosophical trend in which Descartes’ disengaged self is indispensable. Neo-Stoicism was associated “with a broad movement among political and military elites towards a wider and more rigorous application of new forms of discipline in a host of fields ...” (*Sources* 159). This discipline, applied to Descartes’ disengaged self, produces Locke’s “punctual” self. Locke, according to Taylor, goes beyond Descartes in rejecting any notion of innate or instinctual ideas. Ideas are composites made up of the indivisible building blocks of direct experience. Accessing this unmediated experience requires a “clearing of the ground” of all ideas derived from habit or custom. The aim of this “disassembly” is the ultimate “reassembly” of a picture of the world through the agency of the reified mind. What this process ignores is the *origin* of the capacity of the mind to construct truth. For Taylor, “Locke’s theory generates and also reflects an ideal of independence and self-responsibility, a notion of reason as free from established custom and locally dominant authority” (*Sources* 167). What this view excludes are theories which see humans as tending through instinct, custom and religion to the good. The rational view becomes “hedonistic” to the extent that what is pleasurable becomes good

and what is painful is evil. Locke in this way foreshadows the utilitarianism Taylor subsequently considers. For both Descartes and Locke, *rationality is procedural*, dependent on *how* it is derived, rather than based on its content. And knowledge is true only if you have determined it for yourself.

Combined with the notions of discipline popular at the time, this radical disengagement permits “self-remaking”. The “extensionless” self which exists nowhere but in its ability to “fix things as objects”, directs its procedural discipline onto itself, to re-make itself in the image of the ideal of internally generated rationality: “The subject who can take this kind of radical stance of disengagement to himself or herself *with a view to remaking ...*” is what Taylor calls the “punctual” self (emphasis added) (*Sources* 171). What is created, is a picture of a disembodied, “perfectly detachable consciousness.” Taylor adds that what holds the “package together is an ideal of freedom or independence” (*Sources* 174). What is interesting in Taylor’s discussion of disengagement and the punctual self is the unarticulated suggestion that this process itself comes to be desired. Self-remaking becomes the moral ideal rather than a morality beyond itself. The idea that one fashions oneself is increasingly significant in the development of Farah’s novels, as the subsequent chapters show. Freedom of the subject to re-create the self, on this analysis, becomes the highest virtue.

In the French philosopher, Montaigne, Taylor inaugurates another line in the development of modern identity. If Descartes disengages Augustinian inwardness from its moral source in God, and replaces God with universal rationalism, Montaigne develops Augustinian inwardness in a more subjective way. For Montaigne, reason is not the guarantor of truth it is for Descartes. Instead, reason represents the obstacle to man’s natural

purposes. Animals live more happily than human beings, a boon of the absence of rationality. This emerges most strongly in the ways in which Montaigne prefigures debates around the idea of the “noble savage” through his defense of “primitive” cultures like that of the American first peoples. For Taylor, Montaigne’s quest is not one for universal, verifiable truth, but for the particular, unrepeatable truth within every one of us. Montaigne’s endeavour is thus as radically reflexive as Descartes’, but the nature of the disengaged subject thus constituted is different:

Each of us has to discover his or her own form. We are not looking for the universal nature; we each look for our own being. Montaigne therefore inaugurates a new kind of reflection which is intensely individual, a self-explanation, the aim of which is to reach self-knowledge by coming to see through the screens of self-delusion which passion or spiritual pride have erected. It is entirely a first-person study, receiving little help from the deliverances of third person observation, and none from “science”(Sources 181).

So for Taylor, by the turn of the eighteenth century, all the essential components of modern identity have already been forged: These include the sense of “self-responsible independence” traced back to Descartes, the “recognized particularity” of the individual, originating in Montaigne and a sense of personal commitment. Personal commitment is the modern form of the Stoic conception of the will which is taken up by St Augustine for whom sin consists precisely in the “inability to will fully”(Sources 185). Through the centrality of the will in the Augustinian heritage, personal commitment comes to play a vital part in the modern conception of the individual. What Taylor refers to as the “three sided individualism” is so fundamental to European culture and its offshoot in North-America that it seems an unquestionable given, “independent of interpretation”.

In various ways to be outlined in this thesis, Farah's oeuvre unproblematically assumes this model of the person as individual which the novel form itself colludes to construct. While almost every other concept is radically destabilized in the novels, the individual, whose historical development Taylor outlines, is unquestioned.

A number of consequences flow from this conception of the individual. Thought and valuation appear to be products of the mind, products of an inner process rather than in various ways embodied. An effect of this "new localization", is the constitution of the absolute difference between subject and object. The material world appears at a distance from the subject. Older beliefs in magic, where objects or speech acts hold power, require an "open boundary" between subject and object. The self thus defined is "porous." The open boundary no longer exists with the new conceptualization of the individual. Possession gives way to self-possession. The self is now in various ways "buffered" (Taylor *A Secular Age* 37-41).

In Farah's novels, the boundary between the natural and supernatural worlds appears fluid and permeable. But the source of this dimension of the novels is not the constitutive effect of a heteronomous notion of the subject, reflected in the representational mode of the genre. The supernatural elements in the novels are either aspects of the beliefs of characters or seem instead calculated to give the narrative an authentically Somali-Muslim aura – what Eileen Julien refers to as the "ornamentalism" of African, but also, by extension, of much postcolonial fiction (Julien 679). The contrast between the "porous" heteronomous self and the "buffered" autonomous self is explored in more detail in the context of the analysis of *Maps* in the final chapter.

Taylor proposes that a number of other consequences also flow from modern identity. While in the former dispensation community was a given, with the new formulation of the individual, community needs to be explained. This is the need filled by various versions of contractarian theory beginning with Locke. Flowing from the community forged by contract between individual members is the contractual cession of authority to the state – the “sovereign individual” is “‘by nature’ not bound to any authority” therefore, “authority is something which has to be *created*” (emphasis in original) (*Sources* 194). In the sphere of personal relations, a consequence of modern identity is that marriage is seen to be a contractual relation between free, independent subjects. The relationship between individualism, the nation-state and transformed personal relationships is symbolically represented in the sub-genre of the novel which paradoxically defines the genre, namely, the *Bildungsroman*. Virtually every one of Farah’s novels, as will be shown, shares in the normalized and naturalized assumptions about subject formation presumed by the *Bildungsroman*.

A crucially important qualification of Taylor’s conceptualization of modern identity is provided by Carole Pateman. Pateman’s feminist critique of contract theory proceeds from the observation that the model of the individual who enters into the mythical primal contract is male. The authority of fathers (patriarchy) gives way to the authority of “free” and “independent” brothers joined by contract (fraternity). Expressed in the terms used by Edward Said, Pateman’s argument is that submission to the authority of *filiation* gives way to submission to the authority of *affiliation* (Introduction *World, Text, Critic*). What this version of contract theory occludes, Pateman argues, is the prior sexual contract between men and women even before the contract creating community and submission to the state

can be conceived: “Only masculine beings are endowed with the attributes and capacities necessary to enter into contracts, the most important of which is ownership of property in the person; only men, that is to say, are ‘individuals’”(5-6). In other words, men’s freedom in the public sphere occurs at the expense of women’s subjection in the private sphere. And, for Pateman, the battle is not won if women through the “universality” of the notion of the “individual” ultimately in historical time are included as “individuals” since “the ‘individual’ is a patriarchal category” (168). Pateman suggests a similar paradox exists in relation to race and the “individual” but does not explore this avenue further.

Another consequence of modern individuality noted by Taylor is that “immunities accorded people by law” are “framed” “... in terms of subjective rights”(Sources 195). These rights belong to people in a manner analogous to the ownership of private property, what C.A.B. Macpherson in *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* refers to as “possessive individualism”. In other words, immunities which may have been articulated in the discourse of religious or civic obligation, now are articulated in terms of the individual’s ownership of a right. MacPherson suggests further that this fiction of ownership applied to the human being’s skills and capacities is indispensable in the transition from slavery to wage slavery. MacPherson’s analysis alerts one to the *culturally and historically specific* discourse which Farah’s characters employ in their self-descriptions, a factor which will be expanded upon later in the thesis.

To describe a further consequence of modern individuality, Taylor suggests the neologism “poesis”. By the individual’s “poetic” powers, Taylor refers to the “centrality of constructed orders in mental and moral life” (Sources 197), in particular, the constructive powers of language. Locke’s experiential, mental reconstruction of the physical world

quickly runs up against the power of language in constituting complexes from simples. The constitutive power of language considered in relation to the individual yields the idea of “Language ... as our way of manifesting through expression what we are” (*Sources* 198). What ensues is a “fascination”, if not “obsession” with the poetic powers of the creative imagination. In Farah’s novels this translates into the unique capacity of art to construct the world anew, a concern central to the project of the most recent novel, *Knots*, to be considered in the final chapter.

In the course of the eighteenth century, Taylor suggests that modern identity’s instrumental stance both to itself and to the surrounding world is given spiritual definition and meaning. This occurs through what is termed the “affirmation of ordinary life”. By “ordinary life” Taylor refers to the world of “production and reproduction”, the world of work and family, the world which not only is ignored in the aristocratic warrior ethic, but which is denigrated. By the eighteenth-century, commerce rather than military conquest comes to be valued. Commerce is deemed a “constructive and civilizing force” and as a consequence “sober and disciplined production was given the central place” (*Sources* 214). This transformed outlook in the material sphere is paralleled by a transformation in the Christian spiritual sphere. Crucial to the Protestant revolution is a rejection of the idea that the corporate body of the church is the vehicle of the sacred. Henceforward, the conviction gains ground that each believer stands in an individual relationship with God and that his salvation depends upon his belief and conduct alone. The individual is thus in a direct unmediated relationship with God. In this conception, particularly in Puritan discourse, work, labour itself is “spiritualized” and becomes a form of worship. Similarly, a rationalized Christianity allows the instrumental stance which produces a controlling self

with the potential to produce scientific knowledge itself to become a form of worship. The subject as individual may serve God through controlling himself and the world.

The Reformation influences the private sphere also. The “ordinary life” of marriage is transformed and elevated. Where marriage in the past was seen as an almost invariable and inevitable social institution, it is now reconceptualized as the contractual bond of two free and equal individuals. In this scheme, companionate marriage itself becomes a kind of “temple” in the worship of the Protestant God. Puritan conceptions of marriage in part contribute to the development of what has been termed “companionate marriage.” Brought to the fore in companionate marriage is not the idea of the family as cornerstone of social order, but rather the idea of a voluntary union of two individuals requiring a visibly heightened degree of personal and emotional commitment. A consequence of the rising significance of individual choice of life partner is the ensuing challenge to patriarchal authority. A further consequence of companionate marriage is the separation of the family from broader society. Concomitant also is the developing requirement both of privacy for the family from wider society and privacy for individual members within the family. In various ways, Farah’s novels chart many of these trends. The focus on privacy within which the individual constitutes him- or herself is symbolized by the recurrent motif in the novels, alluding to Virginia Woolf’s essay, of “a room of one’s own.”

Associated with the development of the subject as individual, is the increasing valorization of sentiment. Feeling occupies a hitherto unprecedented role in shaping the relationship both of husband and wife, and parents and children. In fact, Taylor observes that increasingly childhood and youth are regarded as separate phases of development rather than children as miniature adults.

For Taylor, sentiment becomes the “touchstone of the good” and feeling yields us access “to the design of things”. This idea may be traced through the Romantics towards the end of the eighteenth century (especially the German Romantics following Goethe) where nature itself becomes the source of sentiment. Nature as source cannot be disentangled from sentiment as discussed above which inspires transformed family relations. In a sense, Taylor contends that this move reifies nature. Nature no longer is part of a vision of order, instead it becomes the source of sentiment which informs virtue, the good of the already disengaged subject.

For Taylor, Rousseau is the philosopher at the fountainhead of those streams in contemporary culture which celebrate self-exploration and “which make self-determining freedom the key to virtue”(Sources 362-3). Rousseau is the progenitor of the modern conviction of inwardness, that the self has hidden depths. Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century foregrounds the access of the autonomous subject to the voice within which in turn is in tune with what Taylor refers to as the “élan” of nature. Locating the moral source in nature leads to an unprecedented appreciation of sensuality through which nature is accessed. In this way, sensuality and spirituality are fused. Furthermore, through the focus on sensual experience, the mode of appreciation of the world is emphasized. In this way at the close of the eighteenth century the concept of the aesthetic which in various ways merges with ethics comes into being. The realization of the truth in nature constitutes a form of expression. Interestingly, this expression is more than simply a making manifest of a prior truth. The process of adducing the inner truth itself brings something new into existence. Through this expressivism, something in addition to the truth of nature comes into being. This “something new” is what yields a sense that each individual is unique and that the

individual is under obligation to fulfill his originality. In this way, “a new and fuller individuation” (*Sources* 375) comes into being.

As already hinted at, Taylor suggests that these developments produce a new understanding both of art and artists. For Taylor, Herder states it too “bluntly” when he suggests that “The artist is become a creator God.” For Taylor, the artist may more appropriately be compared with a “soothsayer” or “seer” (*Sources* 378) and the work of art has a deep moral or spiritual significance. This attitude towards art which constitutes the artist as a prophet necessarily casts the artist also as martyr – the suffering artist. It also creates the myth of the avant-garde which deems the artist, in contact with the moral sources, a few steps ahead of society and with whom, in time, society catches up. Rather more ominously, Taylor suggests that the opposition between artist and society is simply the precursor of a connection embodied in the need of the capitalist endorsers of disengaged, instrumentalist reason for a kind of spirituality which artists supply: “Moreover, once this image [of the artist as trailblazer] becomes generally accepted; once it becomes not just the self-image of the misunderstood artist, but the socially accredited stereotype, the collusion between bourgeois and artist finds a language” (*Sources* 424).

If the product of disengaged individuality among the Romantics is self-expression, then the product of autonomous individuality among what may be termed post-or anti-Romanticism for Taylor is “subject-centredness”. Nature in various ways is demoted among the post-Romantics: In Zola’s naturalism, one encounters a “despiritualized nature”; Baudelairean epiphanic art is also “anti-nature” and it is an amoral nature which is uncovered in DH Lawrence, Fauvism and Surrealism. Early twentieth-century modernist art, like the Romantics before them, turns inward. But instead of discovering the voice of nature

within, modernism encounters a fragmented, splintered subject. Paradoxically, subject-centredness operates to decentre the subject which is deemed to represent the more authentic experience of life. But crucially for the question of the individual, decentring is not in opposition to the unitary self, rather it colludes with it. As has been suggested in an earlier chapter, Farah's oeuvre represents a kind of "potted history" of the novel. The fragmentation of the disengaged self is dramatized in Farah's more overtly modernist and postmodern novels. Farah's novels reflect a wider trend where fragmentation leads to the celebration of schizophrenic identity. But as subsequent chapters show, fragmentation presumes and masks the prior assumption of disengaged subjectivity.

Taylor shares his *philosophical* approach to individualism with moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. For MacIntyre, the person orients himself against "virtue" which necessarily embodies a social practice. Morality has to emerge out of a communal practice in order to constitute morality at all. Individualism, the philosophy that morality originates in the autonomous individual, for MacIntyre, is the cause of interminable contemporary "moral" debates. Since there is no shared ethical horizon, consensus is apparently precluded.

The *history* which Taylor traces here is in various ways informed by other studies. Ferdinand Tönnies's frequently cited distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* or community and association, is the index of a deeper distinction. Tönnies gestures towards a similar observation to that made by Taylor regarding the Cartesian move. For Tönnies, all social relationships originate in human will. He distinguishes between *Wesenwille* or "natural will" which is superseded by *Kurwille* or "rational will." While the former is constituted, "Not only [out of what the person] has learned but also the inherited mode of thought and perception of the forefathers [which] influences his sentiment, his mind, his

conscience”; the latter refers to when “the thinking has gained predominance and come to be the directing agent” (15). Ernst Troeltsch, Max Weber and R.H. Tawney draw attention to the different ways in which Christian fellowship is conceived in the period of modernity, of which the Reformation is part. Karl Joachim Weintraub’s work on representations of self in autobiography also concludes, as Taylor does, that considerations of the self are inextricably linked to questions of moral sources, “... self-conceptions are rarely detached from men’s vision of the desired society” (378). Maine, at the interface of law and jurisprudence, traces an evolution from status to contract societies. Emile Durkheim associates individualism with the increasing division of labour in society. For Marcel Mauss, the individual is a created category which originates in primitive ritual masks and develops through Roman law in particular (*Sociology and Psychology*).

While Charles Taylor is not necessarily expressing a wholly original view on the rise of modern identity, his achievement consists in articulating very clearly what often is only implicit in the arguments of the other writers considered. What Taylor says and the way in which he says it yields a highly productive approach to the dilemmas of the modern postcolonial world. The individual rather than the person is the product of the particular historical trajectory of the modern West. But, while for many of the authors above individualism is a triumphalist history, Taylor’s ambivalent reading of individualism regards it as the source both of the positive valorization of human freedom, dignity and equality, but also negatively as the origin of instrumentalist views which lead to the exploitation of both natural resources and other human beings on a scale historically unknown.

II Modern Identity and the Novel

It is not fortuitous that Farah's vision of the utopian potential of the individual comes to be embodied in the genre of the novel. Early in his career, Farah imagined himself a playwright. So strong was this intuition that Farah "inserted stage directions into the page proofs of *From a Crooked Rib*, a device that his publisher [Heinemann] declined to adopt" (Alden and Tremaine 32). Farah subsequently wrote a few radio and stage plays, none of which is published and in the most recent novel, *Knots*, theatre seems significant to the political and artistic aim of the narrative. One could say, that the genre of the novel chose Farah since it is the cultural form which symbolically represents the conception of the person which powers Farah's worldview. Understanding the origins of the novel and the dynamic which motivates its representational technique is central to the analysis of Farah's oeuvre.

It is commonly accepted that the novel developed as *the* central cultural form which is constituted by the Cartesian break consolidated by Locke (Watt). The person's worldview (and the position of the person in the world) were subject to a profound change. This epistemological transformation in how knowledge or truth was acquired by the person registered as the requirement for realism in narrative. The novel was the form which constitutively embodied these fundamental shifts.

Taking on board Taylor's analysis of individualism, requires that this preconception be expanded. Individualism and realism do give the novel narrative shape, but the novel is also crucially about morality, or, more accurately, morality sublimated in a secular worldview. Investigations into the rise of the novel seem to prove Charles Taylor's philosophical contention in *Sources of the Self*, that any inquiry into the subject is also an inquiry into morality. In other words, one cannot begin to conceive of the person outside of

some framework of happiness, *eudaimonia* or higher truth. Investigation into the subject is always an ethical inquiry. Studies of the novel tend to enter into a dialogue with morality through the epic and almost invariably become locked into a reconciliation of opposites: this binary assumes various names but at root is the same dilemma. How does the novel resolve the contradiction of “character and plot”, “individual life and overarching pattern”, “*sjuzhet* and *fabula*”, “self-determination and socialization”, “soul and the world of conventions/forms”, “realism of presentation and realism of assessment”, “the organic and the architectural”? The first term of each of the binaries represents the principle of individual freedom, while the second represents the social ethical horizon.

Various moments in the history of the novel negotiate the contradiction encapsulated in the binary in different ways. The successful realist novel employs *irony* to effect a superficial reconciliation of the contradiction. The modernist novel, by contrast, flaunts the contradiction through making irony reflect on itself. Through this operation, contradiction is rendered uncontradictory. The modernist novel releases the truth of the fragmented self from the stranglehold of the autonomous, disciplinary self. The postmodern novel endorses the radically fractured self constituted by modernism in terms of the principle of pure textuality. But, of course, the understanding of the self that the modernist novel liberates is the self constituted by the realist novel and, by extension, of modernity. Non-modern understandings of the person do not figure in this argument since such conceptions are necessarily lost in the post-Cartesian world of the novel. Farah’s novels very interestingly narrativize the history of the various negotiations of the contradiction generated when individualism ultimately and necessarily encounters sociality .

The contradiction between the individual and an external higher order articulated in the novel is itself a product of a transformed understanding of the self in relation to the world. John Richetti's observations are highly persuasive:

For the novel, the ordinary and the specifically and concretely experiential (along with the everyday language specific to that realm) come into this world of narrative to define the absolute boundaries or limits of reality *and by extension of moral significance*. Such an understanding is, potentially at least, subversive of traditional notions of the individual and his or her decidedly subordinate relation to a communal and often hierarchical reality, and to a supernatural order which upholds that community. But within the materialistic and probabilistic assumptions of the realistic novel, the supernatural can be treated as an object of belief or faith, but never presented as a matter of direct and unambiguous experience for the new kind of person who is taken absolutely for granted by modern individualism. The novel tends in these preferences to validate the perspective of the newly conceptualized modern individual, whose particularized and personalized view of the world is explored *as if it were somehow prior to a communal or social world*. Most readers of novels now, at the end of the twentieth century, take such an individual very much for granted, but the notions of autonomy, agency and self-consciousness (as well as the skepticism about the ideal or the transcendental) summed up in the persons dramatized in most novels were in fact only emerging as new and controversial ideas for European thought at the turn of the seventeenth century when the *modern individual is, in effect, invented and naturalized*, that is to say, presented as an inevitable feature of the world rather than as an entity constructed in a cultural moment, conceptualized and in that sense produced by modern historical circumstances (emphasis added) (4-5).

The history of the novel which Richetti cogently summarizes here runs parallel to the philosophical history Taylor describes. A transformation in what is held to constitute truth,

the realism of the novel form, is contingent upon the autonomous subject. The disengaged subject self-reflexively constitutes procedural truth. The novel is the most significant cultural form which embodies this fundamental shift of moral sources.

III Defining the Novel

Defining the familiar has the effect of making it unfamiliar. Defining the novel similarly “makes strange”, to use Viktor Shklovsky’s expression. In widest definition, novels are “extended works of prose fiction” (Abrams). But even the widest definition is not wide enough since it excludes the nonfiction novel (Quinn) and the verse-novel (Cuddon). Widely defined, the novel is a genre which significantly pre-dates the European Enlightenment. Novels exist which date back to c. 1200 B.C. E. from the XIIth dynasty Ancient Egyptian Middle Kingdom (Cuddon). Also extant are fictions in Demotic which date back to the seventh century B.C.E (Goody). The oldest surviving Greek novel is Chariton’s *Callirhoe* from c. 50 B.C.E. -50 C.E. (Hagg). Medieval chivalric romances (Pavel and Goody), pastorals, eg. *Daphnis and Chloe*, (Pavel and Cuddon) the picaresque (Abrams, Goody, Pavel, Cuddon and Quinn), long elegiac narratives (Pavel) and the Italian *novella* (Abrams, Cuddon, Pavel) all satisfy the wide definition and so might be called novels. Extended prose fictions in Japanese date back to c. 850-920 C.E According to Henry Y.H. Zhao, Chinese novels develop out of historiographies and the first Chinese novel dates back to the twelfth century C.E. Widely defined, the novel is a global form with origins in ancient history.

If, however, we consider the etymology of the word “novel”, a rather different understanding of the genre and its history emerge. The etymological origin of the word “novel” lies in late fifteenth century Romance languages, where the word meant simply

“news.” With the development of the printing press, news in ballad form came to be disseminated, called “novels.” By the sixteenth century, “novella” is used in Italy to refer to a short story. By the seventeenth century “novel” acquires its contemporary meaning, namely, a long fictional prose narrative distinct from a Romance (Goody 18).

In the complex dialectic of signifier and signified, the word “novel” thus appears to enter the English language only in the seventeenth century and is *projected back* to encompass those long prose narratives without a name which stood somewhere between epic and tragedy. That the ancient Greek “novels”, for example, unassumingly stood somewhere between epic and tragedy and had no name, until they proleptically come to be constituted by the new word, “novel”, suggests that they did not index any significant shift in the ancient Greek worldview. What distinguishes all of the pre-modern “novels” considered in the sources from their modern counterparts is that, while they foreground a hero, virtue remains indisputably an external horizon embodied by providence, God, the chivalric code and so on (Pavel 5-14).

IV The Novel and Modernity

The novel *stricto sensu* comes into existence only in the eighteenth century and is constituted around the morally self-validating hero, who henceforward is constituted as “beautiful soul” or, less poetically, as individual:

In the course of the eighteenth century, narrative idealism underwent a profound transformation. Moral norms ceased to be perceived as transcendent and were assumed to inhabit the human heart. [...] The premodern period assumed that moral values originate outside the human domain and placed the ideal far away from the everyday world, in a realm that was both external and superior. [...] The

eighteenth century novel revived the axiological question and offered a new answer that inscribed moral ideals within the human heart. The soul, which had long been assumed to follow norms coming from above, came to be seen as containing within itself (and being capable of deciphering) the eternal laws of moral perfection. Through a process that we might call the interiorization of the ideal or the enchantment of interiority [inverting Weber's disenchantment of the universe by procedural reason], all human beings, even the most ordinary ones, were deemed capable of seeking inner perfection, the beautiful soul being the one who always succeeds in the search for perfection. (Pavel 14-15)

This narrow definition of the novel suggested above as an extended prose fiction which foregrounds individual experience with moral sources internally located is variously pointed at. For Levi-Strauss, myth gives way to novel in the eighteenth century. For Bakhtin, the *prehistory* of novelistic discourse becomes the *history* of the novel in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries. For Lukács the novel as the genre of "transcendental homelessness" is born with capitalist modernity. For Ian Watt, the rise of the novel is an eighteenth century phenomenon.

The novel, the "new thing", thus in what must be more than happy fortuity, fundamentally shares in the newness of a self-proclaimed modernity. [Modern is derived from "*modernus*" which derives from "*modo*" which since the fifth century C.E. was equivalent to *nunc*, "now" (Benavides).] The newness with which modernity identifies itself is fundamentally informed by the newness required of the art produced in the period of modernity. This intersection is echoed in Ezra Pound's aesthetic maxim at the highpoint of literary modernism to "make it new."

Since the novel constitutively is a modern form, it may be associated with Cartesian procedural reason and Lockean empiricism (Watt and Bernstein among others), with the rise

of the middle class (Watt, Richetti and Armstrong among others), with print capitalism (Anderson and Watt among others), with circulating libraries and the dissemination of journals, magazines and newspapers (Habermas and Anderson among others). The novel, furthermore, is the genre of literate and leisured classes and comes to be identified, a point to be returned to later, with women. “Novels are also good commerce, and reading a novel commits the individual to no communal forum” (Thorel-Cailleteau 64-5). David Trotter observes that by 1899, Henry James “envisaged a profitable future for the novel. Popular taste had established it as a universal form, ‘the book *par excellence*’. [...] James was fascinated by the sway the novel appeared to hold over its readers. ‘It is not too much to say of these that they live in a great measure by the immediate aid of the novel.’ The novel’s uncanny penetrativeness, its ability to arouse and resolve an array of anxieties and aspirations, made it the great ‘anodyne’ of the age” (1).

V The Novel and Nationalism

It is no coincidence that the period of the rise of the novel is also the period of the establishment of the nation state. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* underlines the link between newspapers and novels, already suggested earlier in the etymological origin of the word “novel” in broadsheets. Andersen suggests that the novel’s realism shares in the facticity of newspapers and newspapers share in the fictionality of novels. In a footnote Anderson points out that, “Reading a newspaper is like reading a novel whose author has abandoned any idea of a coherent plot (33).” What the realistic novel does is to “provide the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (25).

Moretti suggests that: “[...] the nation-state [...] found the novel. And vice-versa: the novel found the nation state” (*Atlas* 16-17).

At the most fundamental level, the link between the novel and the nation state is necessary and inevitable. If the nation state is the necessary political resolution of philosophical individualism, then the novel, as the primary medium for symbolically representing the modern subject, is the adjunct of the nation state. If the subject is autonomous, then community or the social is not a given – it needs to be explained. The nation-state is the logical outcome of the social contract which establishes the community of the disengaged self. The self-regulating individuals who populate the imagined community of the nation are produced by what Joe Slaughter names the “tautological-teleological” mechanism of the novel (especially the *Bildungsroman*) which in various ways replicates the tautological-teleological discourse of founding documents of sovereign states: “We, the people ...” The national people is only retroactively constituted through the performative statement of its founding document. Slaughter suggests further that if “The narrative of enlightenment articulates the individual in a ‘state/citizen bind as the ultimate construction of sociality’” (Slaughter quoting Chakrabarty “Enabling Fictions” 1409), then the novel “is the most supple cultural form most often implicated in modern problematics of both individualism and nation-state formation” (Slaughter “Enabling Fictions” 1409). Layoun echoes the centrality of the novel to national formation in her observation that the late 17th and 18th century novel “begins to delineate and make familiar (everyday or ordinary) the national landscape, both literally and metaphorically” (20).

VI The Novel and Imperialism

If the novel in some ways is constitutive of the nation and vice versa, the novel also is partially generated out of trans-national imperatives as Edward Said's reading of *Mansfield Park* (*Culture and Imperialism* 95-116) and Spivak's analysis of *Jane Eyre* show. Moretti shows that production and distribution make the novel the most centralized of all genres, with city life dominating provincial life and with the metropolises of England and Paris dominating the semi-periphery of Europe :

“... the novel closes European literature to all external influences: it strengthens and perhaps it even establishes its *Europeanness*. But then this most European of all forms proceeds to deprive most of Europe of all creative autonomy: two cities, London and Paris, rule the entire continent for over a century, publishing half, if not more of all European novels. It's a ruthless unprecedented centralization of European literature” (*Atlas* 186).

Furthermore, Moretti suggests that latecomers to this novelistic literary scene follow a “narrower” road to which they are “constrained” by the success of the products at the core. Moretti terms this “the development of underdevelopment in the literary field” (*Atlas* 191). When the novel spreads through the world, the form or plot remains constant, only the content changes and becomes “local”. The “dispersal of forms” suggests “the power of the center over an enormous periphery” (*Atlas* 195). Some sense of the “innocent” dissimulating power of the novel is hinted at anecdotally by Layoun whose research revealed that “colonial officers paid local writers or literate storytellers to write novels in a deliberate attempt to promote the novel over other narrative or poetic forms” (Preface xii). Discussing more

specifically the *Bildungsroman*, Slaughter suggests that the novel provides the “plot for the incorporation of the previously marginalized” (1410). The novel thus is disseminated to the periphery as *the* modern genre and is often consciously adopted, but not adapted in respect of *form*. Pavel suggests that newly emerging literary traditions “choose the novel as a means of affirming their modernity” (31). Or as Layoun underlines, “the modern Western novel is apprehended as a step into modernity” (9). The Arabic novel is a case in point. Kilito asserts that there is no real precursor to the novel in the Arabic literary tradition. He indicates that “the form was borrowed from Europe precisely in order to speak about Europe. The discovery of Europe and of the novel are two simultaneous and correlative operations: one could not happen without the other” (Kilito “Al- Saq” 761). The Arabic *Bildungsroman* without exception is motivated by the encounter with Europe and the challenges of modernity (Al-Mousa).

Nancy Armstrong in *How Novels Think* makes the claim that the novel and the modern subject share the same history. She suggests further that the history of the individual in the novel is the story of how that subject had to fight “to keep other subjectivities at bay” (3). Extending the argument on an imperial scale, she suggests that “wherever novels are written, they’re reproducing the modern individual” (9) and that “new varieties of novel cannot help but take up the project of the universalizing individual subject” (10). The rise and dissemination of the novel may thus be read as the rise and global dissemination of modern individualism.

Moretti points out furthermore that the novel not only spreads modernity through its constitutive individualism but that wherever it goes, it decimates other genres. Moretti suggests that if one thinks of literature “as a kind of ecosystem”, then the novel is “the most

fearsome predator of the last half millennium” (235-6). The novel may be losing its predominance to electronic cultural forms in the periphery, as Farah’s most recent novel, *Knots* seems to suggest through its focus on electronic media, but such considerations lie outside of the ambit of this investigation.

VI The Novel and Individualism

Aristotle’s *Poetics* may appear an odd place to begin an enquiry into individualism in the novel. The novel is the one genre about which Aristotle has nothing to say, precisely since the novel had not yet come into existence. The inverse of what Aristotle suggests about tragedy is, however, highly suggestive: “... the life and soul, so to speak, of Tragedy is the Plot; [...] the characters come second [...]” (49). In the novel, on the contrary, character is primary and plot is the outcome of character. Some indication of the profundity of the transformation that occurs in the novel in respect of “character”, is suggested by Paul de Man in an essay on Lukács: “The emergence of the novel as the major modern genre is seen as the result of a change in the structure of human consciousness ...” (quoted in Bernstein xiv). This transformation in human consciousness occurs as a consequence of the novel’s response to Cartesian disengagement. If knowledge no longer is to be found in the external realm of objects but rather internally in *how* the subject comes to know, then a cleavage occurs between the world and the subject. This registers in the novel as the hero’s separation from a unity with the world, the integrated world of the epic. In Lukács’s memorable phrase the exile of the novelistic hero is referred to as the “transcendental homelessness” (*Theory of the Novel* 41) of the genre. Lukács here alludes to Novalis’s formulation of the drive of philosophy to be “at home everywhere.”

Lockean empiricism drives the novel towards a representational realism in which the hero must be seen to find truth in experience. Wilhelm Dilthey expresses the idea of the construction of truth from experience thus. It is “the constant translation of lived experience into form and form into lived experience” (45). Mikhail Bakhtin formulates the same idea as follows: “As opposed to a static unity, here one finds a dynamic unity in the hero’s image. The hero himself, his character, becomes a variable in the formula of this type of novel. Changes in the hero himself acquire plot significance, and thus the entire plot of the novel is reinterpreted and reconstructed” (*Bildungsroman* 21). In John Richetti’s assessment, “the reality the novel tends to deliver is, rather, a record of the productive interaction between a world of facts and heroic individuals who give it shape and meaning” (5). For Georg Lukács, “The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality” (*Theory of the Novel* 56).

If one expresses these observations about the novel in the philosophical discourse forged by Charles Taylor, then one could say that the novel dramatizes the relocation of the moral sources within the modern individual. The challenge of the individualism presented by the novel is to show how at every point, morality is generated out of the individual’s experience; how “form”, “plot,” “pattern,” “fabula,” “socialization” is a product of the autonomous individual with no external, social, transcendental or ontic framework. Walter Benjamin expresses the idea thus: “... the novel emanates from a solitary individual addressing other solitary individuals ... its appearance is linked to the impossibility of giving or receiving counsel” (quoted in Thorel-Cailleteau 64-5).

For Lukács, the novel resolves the contradiction of producing an apparently purely objective meaning generated out of the consciousness and experience of the “homeless” hero, through novelistic *irony*. For Lukács, irony is the means by which purely subjective meaning, truth or morality is given an objective cast.

Michael McKeon regards the reconciliation the novel effects between character and plot as the synthesis which is the outcome of the dialectic of truth and virtue. McKeon highlights the controversial contradiction in Ian Watt’s assessment of the rise of the novel, embodied in the dichotomy between Richardson’s realism of presentation (realism) and Fielding’s realism of assessment (romance). McKeon identifies this contradiction as an early modern epistemological crisis where “questions of truth” interrogate “questions of virtue”. In other words, how modern individualism negotiates the ethical with the loss of the ontic component. McKeon suggests:

“This insight- the deep and fruitful analogy between questions of truth and questions of virtue – is the enabling foundation of the novel. And the genre of the novel can be understood comprehensively as an early modern cultural instrument designed to confront, on the level of narrative form and content, both intellectual and social crisis simultaneously” (22).

Ian Watt suggests that the perfect novel is the novel with a perfect interpenetration of plot, character and emergent moral theme. The novel type *par excellence* where this is achieved is the *Bildungsroman*. The classic *Bildungsroman* through effective use of irony reconciles the contradiction of individualism. The successful reconciliation of individual freedom and socialization creates an “objective” effect. Morality appears to emerge naturally and ineluctably from the individual subject. It is not an external social or transcendental

imposition. This “objective” effect created by the novel is what Nancy Armstrong refers to as “bourgeois morality” :

Contrary to prevailing critical opinion, bourgeois morality is not a value in and of itself so much as a way of reading, assessing and revising existing categories of identity and whatever cultural apparatus may authorize them – often the novel itself. From this perspective, bourgeois morality cannot possibly draw its tremendous and enduring authority from institutional religion, the Bible, or even Judeo-Christian ethics in the most general sense. Bourgeois morality appears to emanate from the very core of an individual as that individual confronts established systems of value and finds them lacking. Often suspicious of pleasure, unconcerned with profit and heedless of life’s little necessities, bourgeois morality appears to be the assertion of pure individuality (349-50).

What the novel achieves thus is the complete naturalization of an historically and culturally contingent subjectivity. Armstrong suggests furthermore that *feminist* individualism, exemplified in particular by *Jane Eyre*, far from destabilizing structures of power, consolidates modern identity in the interests of middle class women (*Domestic Fictions*).

Individualism is so integral to the novel that attempts to represent the person, constituted in orientation to a social or transcendental order, appear virtually impossible. This is the struggle which seems to lie at the heart of the nineteenth century Russian novel, torn between an Enlightenment form and the worldview of the Russian Orthodox Church, embodied memorably in the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. It is the failed struggle also of the working class (Trotter) or revolutionary (Denning) novel and the source of discontent regarding the “extroverted African novel” (Julien). The novel’s resistance to representation of heteronomous selfhood is fascinatingly played out in *Close Sesame*, the final novel of Farah’s first trilogy.

VIII Individualism and Somali-Islamic Culture

Farah's novels draw modern individualism into unequal dialogue with the Somali-Islamic culture they attempt to represent. Many critics note the "democratic openness" of Farah's novels which pull a range of traditions, ideologies and opinions into polyphonic debate.

While the Somali-Islamic worldview finds representation in the novels, this worldview is portrayed as uniformly and incontrovertibly static, authoritarian and bound by conformity.

The one possible exception is the final novel of the first trilogy, *Close Sesame*, to be considered in a later chapter. In other words, the novels, in general, tend to represent Somali-Islamic culture as a threat to the ideal of freedom which in an individualist culture's reflection on itself uniquely represents the higher order. Paradoxically, the ideal of unqualified freedom as ethic ultimately precipitates the illusion of the absence of a higher order altogether, since freedom prescribes that one must be liberated from all ligatures.

An assessment of individualism in Somali culture comes up immediately against the very terms in which the enquiry defines itself. What is meant by individualism varies greatly in the sources and these loose definitions may be distinguished from a more rigorous philosophical understanding of the term, suggested by Taylor's analysis. The idea of "Somali culture" also runs the risk of hypostatizing in an archaic past a culture which has mutually interacted with a number of influences. Maritime trade accounts for most of Somalia's contact with other cultures. There is evidence of Greek and Roman trade going back to the first century A.D. and contact with the Chinese dating back to the 1400s. Trade relations with India likewise go back centuries. Arab and Persian settlement date to pre-Islamic times.

The Islamic influence has, however, been the most significant with contemporary Somalia virtually completely Muslim. Although historical evidence of Islam in the Horn of Africa dates back to the early eighth century A.D., popular mythology, particularly in the North, claims that Somalia was Muslim before there was Islam in Medina, the second most sacred Muslim city. Some Somalis also claim descent from the household of the Prophet of Islam. These links were forged when, very early in Islamic history, a group of adherents of the new faith fled to Abyssinia, seeking the protection of the Christian Negus, against persecution of the dominant powers in Mecca.

In seeking to define “Somali culture” one also runs the risk, noted in respect of most of the early anthropological and ethnographic enquiries, of confining the idea of this Horn of Africa culture to the ways of life only of dominant groups within it.

Sources on Somalia written in English or translated into English are quite limited. There is a significant corpus of Arabic sources, but none of these has been translated into English. The earliest source is *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* (60 A.D.). The peripatetic Moroccan Berber, Ibn Battuta, called on Mogadiscio in the first half of the fourteenth century. The record of his visit exists in his *Travels*, which has been translated from the Arabic. The most well-known English source on Somalia is Richard Burton’s *First Footsteps in East Africa*, whose stereotypes of Somalis Farah frequently alludes to in *A Naked Needle*. Most early scholarship on Somalia has been anthropological, most notably the work of the “doyen” of Somali studies I.M. Lewis. In recent decades, scholarship has widened into various other disciplines, including the work of scholars who are themselves Somali.

A common strand in many of the above sources is what is perceived to be the individualism of Somali culture, conveyed by the use of terms like “independent”, “self-

reliant”, “self-sufficient”, “freedom of the individual” and egalitarianism in respect of the “traditional” way of life. Leaving aside for the moment the question of armchair speculation and essentialism which the above profile might suggest, this cluster of terms associated with individualism should not, however, be mistaken for the individualism of denied social and ethical framework described by Charles Taylor. In other words, although “traditional” Somali society is frequently discussed using some of the vocabulary of individualism, at no point in any of the sources is it suggested that the crucial move associated with modernity occurs, namely, the location of moral sources in the independent self.

When the Somali are identified as “autonomous”, what is invariably implied is that both as single persons and as a group they are able to survive without any outside support in what is an excruciatingly hard natural environment.

The “independence” of the Somali is often also associated with the extreme egalitarianism of the political order. Somali society recognizes no social hierarchy and no political authority vested in any one man or constituted authority. Any member of the *reer*, or extended family, is entitled to participate in the *shir*, or deliberative assembly. Who exactly constitutes the *reer* is highly fluid, depending on the context. The smallest social unit is the household, contained within the primary lineage, contained within the *diya* paying group. *Diya* refers to compensation, most often in the form of camels, for the wrongful death of another clan member by a member of one’s own clan. In this way, contrary to the legal trend in truly individualistic societies where individual punishment is justified for individual wrongdoing, in the Somali scenario, collective punishment encourages also collective responsibility for precluding infringements of the *xeer* or customary law. While the opinion of certain members of the *shir* like the sultan or *soldaan* (a figurehead leader) or the expert in

religious law, the *wadaad*, or the oral poet may carry additional weight, in his own right, these figures have no authority to exact obedience – they would have to rely on their powers of persuasion. The absence of any politically constituted authority creates Somali democracy (often to the point of “anarchy”, as I.M. Lewis memorably described it), but this in no way suggests the equality-individualism nexus which is supposed to be the unique effect of individualism proper. (The *shir* in all the literature on the topic appears to be an exclusively male consultative forum.) In a study of traditional courts, A.H.I. Diblawe suggests the existence also in the Somali social code of pre-modern human “rights.” But what is translated as “the natural right of every man” and the “freedom of the individual” held dear to Somali society exists without the logic of individualism which in modernity’s reflection on itself is supposed to give birth to these ideals. .

Similarly, the much vaunted Somali “self-restraint” and “self-sufficiency” is not an aspect of an autonomously generated moral paradigm, but an element of a social code of conduct. What it refers to are the capacity to survive in a brutal environment and the personal discipline of one’s appetites with hospitality and generosity to one’s fellows as consequence and goal. “Self-restraint” thus does not refer to personal discipline of the punctual self, identified by Charles Taylor in the Lockean identity. Locke’s move allows the Cartesian extensionless self to direct its procedural discipline onto itself, creating the fiction of a punctual self-controlling identity. Neither is Somali “self-restraint” the “self-restraint” of the Calvinist capitalist, identified by Max Weber (48-52), inducing industry and frugality with wealth reinvestment rather than consumption as consequence.

Nomenclature also in the anthropological discourse on the subject is considered a marker of the development of individuality, central to individualism. The recognition of

personal names in a culture is a marker of the recognition of a degree of individuality. At the other extreme, teknonymy, or a name derived from one's social relationship, for example "mother of" or "grandfather of" is supposed to play down individuality associated with individualism (Geertz 90). What is interesting about the Somali case, is that each child carries three names: the given name, the name of the father, and the name of the grandfather. Most Somali children have been able to recite their lineage history back to its founding fathers. What appears to be recognized thus is both individuality and an "upward looking" system which places the person in a defined social order.

To the extent that language constitutes worldviews, Laitin, in his assessment of the impact of the use of English on Somali political concepts, makes the following observation:

One Somali intellectual had pointed out to me that Somalis rarely begin their sentences with the first person singular, and rarely use the word comparable to the English "I". He told me that he always felt "ego-aware" when conversing in English, almost unnaturally so (Laitin 193).

What this suggests, is that while the Somali language reflects/constitutes the existence of the notion of the person, the way in which personhood is constituted and the relation of the person to a whole range of social orders might be very different to the individuality constituted/reflected by the English language in contemporary usage.

What is called Somali "individualism" needs also to be gauged in terms of the relation of the person to human society and the natural world. Charles Taylor, drawing on Anthony Giddens, retrieves the history of the "disembedding" of the human person from the social order and the natural world. A consequence of this is the creation of subject-object relationships, where the human subject or more correctly, rational individual, views the social as a collection of individuals and the world around him as an object which can be

manipulated, exploited and dominated. Taylor refers to individualism as creating an “instrumentalist” view of the world for the disembedded, self-developing, individual. But this does not appear to be the nomadic pastoralist worldview. Ben Wisner points out the inappropriateness of concepts born of instrumentalist individualism like, for example, “the carrying capacity of land” to Somali nomadic pastoralism. The natural context within which rural Somali find themselves are still viewed as “humanized places” within which a sustainable way of life is supported, rather than as exploitable environments.

The absence of the subject-object divide signaled by modernity is suggested also by the idea that the Somali seem to live very much in an “enchanted” rather than “disenchanted” world. In Taylor’s terms, there is an “open boundary” between the subject and object worlds which invests speech acts and objects in the material world with power over the person. This is reinforced by the Islamic worldview which, in an apparent paradox, privileges substantive rationality within an horizon which simultaneously endorses the supernatural. The power attributed to speech acts is especially evident in the context of oral poetry, the “individualistic” aspects of which will be discussed in more detail below. Said Samatar refers to the “superstitious awe” with which “the talented poet is viewed” who attributes an almost “mystical power” to his creation (Samatar *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism* 1). *Godob* or poetic slander is regarded almost as a physical assault and the poetic curse is regarded as equally effective and certain as, for example, being stabbed.

But Somali oral poetry and “individualism” are linked in other ways also. In the context of a nomadic society, where, for practical reasons, the volume of portable property is severely limited, the greatest importance has been attached to oral poetry rather than to the plastic arts. Somali orature in a number of ways is distinct from the oral traditions of other

parts of Africa or the world and although it is the product of a nomadic pastoral society, as Alden and Tremaine warn, must not be confused with European pastoral poetry.

Somali oral poetry is wholly individually composed, albeit against a rigid and rigorous metrical, alliterative and stylistic paradigm. Alden and Tremaine go so far as to suggest that poems are associated with individual poets “to an even greater extent than in the Western written tradition” (Alden and Tremaine 13). Poems are never composed on the spot. They are the product of exhaustive labour, usually by those with a poetic talent and an extensive knowledge of the Somali language since, in order to achieve the prescribed alliterative pattern, an often archaic and “literary” vocabulary needs to be marshaled. Said Samatar notes that: “... the concept of ‘composition in performance’ associated with the propounders of the ‘Formulaic Theory’ does not apply to Somali oral poetry, nor do Romantic/folklorist notions of oral poetry as a ‘communal product ... an instinctive, artless outburst of feeling’ which ‘naturally’ springs to life without prior deliberation” (Samatar 74). On every occasion that a poem is recited by someone other than the composer, the original poet must not only be acknowledged, but also, in the *exordium*, the circumstance of the composition needs to be provided, while every word of the text must be faithfully and accurately reproduced. Infringement leads to strict penalties. In this sense then, Somali poetry is wholly individual, but against an external traditional aesthetic and social framework. Samatar emphasizes this social dimension of the poetic craft in the following way:

The phrase “communal experience” brings us to the heart of an important source of inspiration for Somali poets. While composition is intensely individualistic, pastoral verse finds its appeal by being firmly committed to the moral and spiritual experience of the community, by recapturing images and ideas which most people

in a given community would know and appreciate. As one scholar put it, “Somali poetry establishes truth by arousing in the people a sensation of shared memory.” It prefers the obvious, the known and the communal to the ambiguous, the esoteric and the individualistic (Samatar 86).

Thus, although the person is foregrounded in the Somali poetic tradition, the person is shown in relief against a social horizon. The artist does not as in the culture of modernity become a kind of creator-god, shaping the world anew. The artist remains firmly placed within the moral order of the social framework within which he is constituted.

What presents itself as “individualism” in Somali culture thus is not the individualism described by Taylor. Some of the markers of individualism which have been applied to the Somali worldview are more correctly an index of *socially* constituted codes of ideal conduct. Individualism proper, by contrast, presents itself as proceeding from the disengaged, procedurally rational subject. This independent subject oriented against an autonomously constructed morality then negotiates social bonds, primarily through contract. On this model, the social is constituted by a collection of autonomous subjects. Philosophically, this transformation of conception of self and society is indexed by the Cartesian break consolidated by Locke.

It is extremely difficult to winnow Islamic influence out from Somali practice since Islam in the Horn of Africa dates back so far. Where disparities exist between the provisions of Islamic law and Somali practice, however, the differences between the two worldviews become apparent. For example, Somali customary law ignores women’s right to inheritance inscribed in *shari’a*. Similarly, individual retribution for criminal misdemeanour dictated by Islamic law is trumped by collective compensation of the *diya* paying group governed by Somali customary law. Somali religious practice is virtually totally Sunni informed by

Ash'ari theological speculation, with the predominance of two sufi brotherhoods, namely, the Salihyya in the North and the Qadiriyyah in the South (Ahmed, C.C. "God, Anti-Colonialism and Drums"). In contemporary Somalia, this position is shifting with more literalist interpretations shaped by political Islam suppressing the sufi practices of Somalia's recent past (Jazhbay).

The study of "individualism" in Islam is limited since the person as the focus of critical attention is an avenue only recently being opened in Islamic scholarship in European languages. And while the person has a very prominent place in Islam, the scholarly focus on the person is paradoxically and necessarily a product of the individualist standpoint of modernity which constitutes the Islamic unthought. As Ebrahim Moosa suggests: "Our knowledge of how the self is culturally conceived in Islamicate societies and how it has served as a historical index of personal and social transformation is still at its infancy" (213).

In Farah's novels, Islam, like Somali culture, is represented, confirming dominant media images, as an authoritarian, highly conformist influence. This is contradicted in the scholarly sources which present Islam as one of the earliest expressions of "individualism." In significant ways, Islamicate history parallels the history of individualism traced by Taylor. Crucially for Taylor, individualism is associated with reason and interiority. Plato makes the first move which privileges thought, associated with the mind, over the desiring body. The higher life in relation to which the self orients itself thus is associated with reason located in the mind. This pre-history of individualism in the modern West in which reason comes to play so important a part is significantly replicated, sometimes controversially, in the religious philosophy and history of thought in Islam also. Reason often is rendered in Arabic by the term "*aql*" or "intelligence". In terms of Islamic tradition, "*aql*" is the first (sometimes

second) emanation from the divinity (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*) and the importance of “*aql*” or reason is undisputed.

What is disputed both between theologians and between theologians and philosophers are the sources and consequences of reason. In terms of theological debate, the most historically important exchange on the place of reason in Islam occurs between the Mu'tazili and the Ash'ari “schools”. Reason, on the Mu'tazili account, allows independent access to the higher order to which God, because He is God, also conforms. Revelation on this view exists more as a moral prompt for man to do good. The Mu'tazili creed dominated briefly in the third/ninth century in Baghdad, oftentimes ruthlessly. Ultimately, however, its philosophical opposite, Ash'arism held sway in Sunni Islam. Ash'arism holds that ethics cannot be independently determined by human reason without revelation and that good is good and evil is evil because God ordains it so. God thus is the ultimate source of morality and is not subject to a universal morality. God represents the ethical source.

The position of philosophy in Islamic tradition is also an index of the significance of reason. Philosophy (what is referred to here is classical Greek philosophy) is supposed to enter Islam in the ninth century. Jurists in Abbasid Baghdad relied upon Greek philosophy to extend the rules of legal reasoning. Philosophy thus was seen as a facet of “*ijtihad*” or limited independent reasoning, distinct from accepted tradition and authority. If one of the hallmarks of individualism is the place of privilege assigned to human reason, then the centrality of individualism in Islam is indicated by the vigour and vitality of philosophical speculation which is part of the Islamic tradition.

Taylor traces the interiority of individualism to St Augustine’s “radically reflexive” move which shifts the focus from God’s external order to the activity itself of knowing.

Interestingly, this move towards interiority forms part of the trajectory of development of Islamic theology and philosophy and occupies a crucial place in sufism. Persian Illuminationist philosophy comes remarkably close to the Augustinian intuition that God is the light which allows one, taking a reflexive step back from the self, to see. Sufism which develops out of poetic readings of the sacred text and contemplation of the spiritual dimensions of revelation, most frequently is associated with the interiority of “individualism.” This radically reflexive stance develops out of Qur’anic injunction and the concept of *ihsan* emerging from Prophetic tradition. *Ihsan* refers to the Prophetic advice to “worship God as if you see him” which, according to Annemarie Schimmel, leads to the “complete interiorization of Islam” (29).

According to Taylor, *individuality* is a spin off of the process producing interiority which can be traced back to Montaigne. Individuality or uniqueness is a recognized and celebrated aspect of the Islamic understanding of God’s creation of the human being. In terms of its cosmology, the Islamic concept of personality shares both universal and particular characteristics (Hamid). Man is the special creation of God, and enjoys, unlike other creation, limited free will, higher faculties and a moral conscience and original human nature which tends instinctively towards the ethical source in God. But the human personality displays also unique characteristics which are physically (and symbolically) embodied in the singularity of each person’s fingerprint, described in the Qur’an (75:4). Rashid Hamid suggests that: “By analogy, we should see that, like the physical fingerprint, each individual is a unique personality in a universe of personalities.”(265) Hamid quotes the philosopher, Seyyid Hossein Nasr, for an enlargement on the frequent trope which encapsulates this idea, namely, “man as microcosm”: “The uniqueness of the temperament of

each individual indicates that each microcosm is a world of its own, not identical with any other microcosm” (Hamid 265). The concept of the uniqueness of the person is contained also in the frequently used term in Islamic texts, “*shakhsiyyah*”, which refers to “the distinctive character, identity and way of life of a person” (Hamid 257). Ebrahim Moosa suggests furthermore in relation to the work of eleventh/twelfth century jurist, theologian and mystic, Abu-Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali that , “the idea of the individual was well entrenched in Ghazali’s Persianate world” and that “the notion of individuality” is an emphatically stressed idea (222). In some ways, thus, the history of the person in Islam is similar to the history of the rise of individualism.

Some of the themes associated with individualism include: self-development, autonomy, privacy and the dignity of man. Each of these themes, as will be shown below, is well articulated in Islamic literature.

The Iranian intellectual, ‘Ali Shari’ati (1933-1977) expands on the Qur’anic distinction between “*bashar*” and “*insan*”, which foregrounds the idea of self-development. *Bashar* refers to man as biological being and *insan* signifies man as a process of becoming. Self-development is perhaps most strongly represented in the sufi concept of the path or “*tariqa*” along which the initiate has to pass in order to reach self-fulfillment. Pilgrimage, with which frequently rituals of affliction are associated, be it to the shrines of sufi saints or the annual pilgrimage or “*hadj*” to Mecca are the symbolic equivalent also of a kind of self-formation (Moosa *Poetics of Imagination* 124). Personal development is also a key idea in the Islamic concept of *adab*, once again a general Islamic code, but achieving its apogee in the practices of the sufi brotherhoods. *Adab* is frequently inadequately translated into English

as “civility” or “etiquette” and often is associated with the classical Greek notion of *paideia*, or the practical instruction in self-realization as a member of the *polis*.”

Autonomy in the discourse of individualism is a product of man’s unique capacity to access universal reason. Reason is what elevates man above the beasts. Distinguished in this way, man has a dignity shared by no other creature. Human dignity appears also to be at the heart of Islamic teaching. Mohammad Hashim Kamali locates the source of the idea of human dignity in the Islamic worldview in both Qur’an and Hadith. Human dignity is also the source of human rights, those non-negotiable entitlements which attach to the human being simply through his being human. In its encounter with modernity, the protection accorded the person in Islam has also been articulated in the discourse of human rights. The most frequent Arabic word used to translate the idea of a right is “*haqq*”. Those who claim an Islamic rights dispensation suggest that the fundamental human rights recognized by the secular and republican break of the French Revolution in Europe only in the 18th century were already secured in 7th century Arabia. Both Qur’an and Hadith may widely be quoted to support individual liberty, equality and brotherhood. Women’s rights are deemed more extensive and to afford more protection than do modern, secular rights regimes. The “Medina Charter” is frequently cited to support Islam’s protection of minority rights. Islam is seen to protect the rights of children, the environment and animals before these categories were recognized in the North-Atlantic as constituting rights bearing legal “personalities”. In addition Islam, it is suggested, recognizes special rights categories which do not appear on the conceptual horizon of modern rights schemes: These include the rights of the self (in short) to lead a justly balanced life, the special rights of others, for example, neighbours and the sick, and the emphatic Qur’anic injunction to protect the rights of orphans and widows

(Mawdudi, Kamali, Moosa “Islamic Rights Schemes”). An Islamic rights framework is also sometimes constructed using the Qur’anic exhortation to mercy as basis (Osanloo). On this understanding, the scriptural encouragement to grant mercy to an offender is a recognition of the basic human rights of each person.

Privacy is another significant theme of individualism which finds expression in various ways. The separation of the private space of the home from the public sphere is suggested both by Qur’an and Hadith. The “Verse of the Veil” (33:53) in the Qur’an legitimated the separation of the private household of the Prophet from the business of the community. Privacy is also a very strong element of the self-realization which is the quest of sufi practice.

Based on the Islamic foregrounding of the themes of self-development, autonomy, dignity and privacy, a fundamental similarity may be suggested between Islamic culture and individualist culture.

Some of the effects of individualism include the transition from status to contract, the social reconceptualization of marriage, a transformed relationship with the transcendental, the development of autobiographical narratives and an attention to man’s creative powers. The highly individualistic nature of *shari’a* (Messick “Indexing the Self” and Ruthven), seems to attest a move from a status model to a society where responsibility is determined by contract. Marriage in a culture of individualism is conceptualized as the contractual union of two free and equal individuals. In various ways marriage in Islam appears to support this model. Marriage is highly contractual. For example, the female party to the union may contract away the male right to polygyny. Marriage is a voluntary union. Forced marriage contradicts the *sunnah*. Dowry or *meher* is given to the bride herself and not her family. The

parties are equal before God, and obligations are determined against a conception of a natural order.

Individualism achieves its contemporary form in part consequence of the Protestant Revolution. The Reformation brought the believer into an individual relation to God and salvation came to depend upon belief and conduct alone. The church as corporate body no longer was seen as the vehicle to the sacred. Again, many commentators on Islam confirm a similar transformation in 7th century Arabia, crystallized most strongly in the Qur'anic affirmation that redemption does not depend on intercessors but on the piety of the believer alone. In fact, the direct unmediated access of the believer to God is even more radical than in the Protestant traditions since Islam ordains no priestly class. A consequence of individualism of belief is what Taylor terms the "affirmation of the ordinary". In other words marriage, family life, work are imbued with a kind of divinity. Weber demonstrates how the spiritualization of work in the Calvinist ethic lays the foundation for capitalist take-off. Similarly, in Islam, apart from the ritual forms of worship, the quotidian round itself comes to be seen as a form of "*ibadah*" or worship. The ordinary is spiritualized.

Autobiography is also regarded as a marker of individualism. George Makdisi in an analysis of the eleventh century diary of Ibn Banna, suggests that this diary was "not an isolated phenomenon peculiar to him alone, but was rather the product of a wide-spread practice not only in his eleventh century but also in the preceding one, with its origins hidden further back still" (174). Another related genre is that of the biographical dictionary. Al Qadi defines the biographical dictionary as "a prose work whose primary structure is that of a series of biographies, regardless of the order in which these biographies succeed each other" (94). H.A.R. Gibb claims that "the biographical dictionary is a wholly indigenous creation of

the Islamic community” (Makdisi 175). Importantly, Al-Qadi suggests these biographical dictionaries are not genealogies, for which the primary criterion is the clan, tribe or race, but biographies which delineate the identities of prominent men. The biographical dictionaries may be traced back to the ninth century and were preceded by the single biography or monograph, of which none survive except the Prophetic biography or “*sirah*.” Prophetic biographies in the earliest period were transmitted orally; later in written form. Ebrahim Moosa suggests that by the eleventh century, the autobiographical genre was already firmly established in Muslim societies (*Poetics of Imagination* 84-5).

Based on the analysis above, Islam might appear, if not as an individualist worldview, then potentially at least as tending towards individualism. However, if the ultimate criterion for individualism is the internal relocation of moral sources within the disengaged, disciplinary individual rather than in an external idea of the good, socially or transcendently defined, then only a highly acrobatic interpretation of Islamic sources can posit an Islamic individualism.

Reason in all Islamic philosophical speculation reveals the perfect order which exists *externally*, either in the universe or in the divine. In Taylor’s terms, reason in Islamic thought remains substantive and at no point becomes procedural. The Mu’tazili position, outlined above may be seen as fundamentally rationalist, similar in some ways to the Neo-Stoicism of Justus Lipsius of sixteenth century Europe, similar in others to eighteenth century Deism, both, for Taylor, steps in the path to an exclusive humanism (Taylor *A Secular Age* 117). While Mu’tazili rationalism may be seen to be tending towards anthropocentrism, it is distinguished in the following ways: Firstly, the Mu’tazili were theologians not philosophers, thus their position is based on an interpretation of the revealed text of Islam, the Qur’an, and

the Hadith (actions and utterances) of the Prophet of Islam. Secondly, while the break embodied by the Enlightenment makes reason procedural, that is, knowledge is deemed true based on the method by which it is acquired, for the Mu'tazili, reason remains substantive, in other words, reason reveals a truth which exists in the world. Thus, while Mu'tazili doctrine may appear supremely "rational", it is a rationalism which reveals an external universal ethics, rather than the individual as moral source. Rationalist Mu'tazili philosophy holds that human reason is independently able to perceive the order of the universe. Revelation confirms reason. But revelation is an indispensable aid in supporting man to make the right moral choices. Reason on this analysis is substantive. Reason is even more patently substantive in Ash'ari speculation where the universal order may be perceived only through prophecy. Good is good and evil because God ordains it so. The divine is the exclusive ethical source. These are the extremes of conflicting theological views.

There is another interesting Islamic variation on European Enlightenment tropes which are located in the *source* of discrimination. Taylor suggests that the origins of individualism lie in the privileging of reason associated with the inwardness of the mind. Lockean empiricism privileges the visual. The mind is the "eye" which sees. The privileged location of discrimination in the Islamic tradition, by contrast, is the heart, "*kalb*". The heart according to the Qur'an is "the source of man's good and evil aspirations", "the seat of learning and religious apprehension" the origin of "man's knowledge or ignorance of God" ("*kalb*" *Encyclopaedia of Islam*). Messick suggests that in litigation, the interpretive problem which exists for Muslim jurists is that the heart is the source of intention, truth is regarded as residing in the "heart", which is inward and therefore inaccessible. ("Indexing the Self" 176-7). Thus while in European Enlightenment discourse the inwardness of the self is located in

the mind, in Islamic discourse, the inwardness of the self is located in the heart. (Al-Attas 149) If for the one tradition the mind is the eye which sees Truth, for the other, the heart perceives Truth. Thus the “shahadah” or the testimony of faith in Islam is “an assent from the heart” (“Islam” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*). Consequently commitment or “will” emphasized by Taylor in European discourse is powered by the mind, while in the Islamic tradition commitment is powered by the heart. In other words, and this is the significant difference, if in the history of individualism reason is privileged, in the Islamic tradition *spirituality*, symbolized by the heart, is the *precondition* of reason. *Myein*, the Greek word from which “mysticism” is derived, means “to close one’s eyes.” Spirituality thus comes before reason and represents that which, on the Islamic interpretation, makes reason possible. The ethical source in the Divine enables reason and reason remains substantive not procedural. The limits of reason are the ethics of revelation. The Faustian predicament constitutes the unthought of the Islamic conception of reason.

Similarly, individuality in the Islamic conception is not a product of the inwardness of the disengaged self but an attribute granted one by God. The Qur’an acknowledges the uniqueness of the person, but it is an individuality granted by God.

The suggestion was earlier made that elements of the sufi quest for self-realization was similar to the autonomous individual’s quest for self-development. In some ways the spiritual quest is a lonely, individual, hermetic journey, but also, paradoxically, it is a journey of confraternity in which the “*murid*” or initiate is induced into a brotherhood and where the most significant social bond is the allegiance to “*sheikh*” or spiritual guide. The Sufi brotherhood, unlike modern forms of association is not the coming together for mutual benefit of equal, independent actors. It is an hierarchical community with a shared value

system that comes into being out of a spiritual purpose whose codes are determined by revelation. The goal of this development is clear: “*fana*” or annihilation in God where man’s paltry self is subsumed into the majesty of the Divinity. So far from independence and autonomy, the quest in Islamic spirituality is complete absorption of the self. This idea of self-realization, as will be explored in a subsequent chapter, is negated by the representation of the sufi central character in *Close Sesame*.

As discussed above, “*adab*”, or “instruction” in the creation of a particular kind of person is a crucial element of development. While the education of the individual always quite literally is a self-instruction where the subject, through his independent reasoning, fortuitously comes to the conclusions ordained by society, “*adab*” quite categorically is social. In some ways *adab* is like the ancient Greek “*paedeia*”, but unlike classical instruction in citizenry is also wholly spiritual: “Though often brought to bear on men of deep religious belief, Hellenistic and late-antique *paideia* contained no religious code and imposed no religious sanction whatsoever” (Brown 29). The codes which come to constitute *adab* are the product of a hermeneutical engagement with revelation, and through revelation come to be social. *Adab* is never a self-constructed code, the product of procedural reason.

On the question of human rights, while Islam recognizes specific entitlements of the human person, the source of these “rights” and the form of their expression is significantly different from modern human rights frameworks. Moosa argues that “secular human rights” and “Islamic rights” are “conceptually different things” (“Islamic Rights Schemes” 187) and that “Islamic rights discourse has an entirely different genesis and pedigree compared to the secular human rights discourse” (“Islamic Rights Schemes 188). Moosa summarizes the history of the development of modern human rights conceptions as follows:

The notion of human rights as we know it today arises in the context of the evolution of the nation-state as a political system ... The legal culture generated by the nation-state increasingly imposed its own logic of social behavior and social conditions in societies receptive to it. A crucial feature of this model of statecraft is the relationship between the individual and the state, which brought about an awareness of the individual's encounter with a powerful and dominant entity unknown in pre-modern times. The state is a permanent legal entity, which exercises its claim over a territory and community through a legal order and organized government, and also demonstrates a measure of political identity. Those rights, now known as "first generation" human rights were especially designed to protect the individual from the overwhelming powers of the modern bureaucratic state. Since then human rights, [sic] have already advanced to second and third generation rights that cover socio-economic and political rights as well as environmental rights. ("Islamic Rights Schemes" 190).

The foundation of these understandings of citizen, state and rights, of course, lie in the idea of the disengaged, rational individual and its consequent need for explanations both of community and submission to authority described in Lockean political theory.

The Arabic word most often employed to translate the idea of a human right is "*haqq*". The semantic possibilities of this word already suggest some of the conflicts involved in equating Islamic and modern human rights schemes:

In Arabic a "right" or "claim" is called *haqq* (pl. *huquq*), but also has a wider meaning. While the original Arabic root of the term "*haqq*" is somewhat obscured it can be recovered from its corresponding Hebrew root. It means among other things "to engrave" onto some object, "to inscribe or write", "to prescribe and decree". And, it also means that which is "due to God or man". *Haqq* means "that which is established and cannot be denied",

and therefore it has more in common with the terms “reality” and “truth”. For this reason the opposite of *haqq* is “falsehood” (*batil*). The term *haqq* is considered polysemous or multivalent and thus could mean right/claim/duty/truth depending on context and the use of the word in a specific context (“Islamic Rights Schemes 191).

Moosa, as we shall see, elaborates on some of the conflicts between the two schemes, but does not fully explore the possibilities contained within the word “*haqq*” itself. Firstly, if *haqq* suggests “truth”, in Islamic metaphysical speculation, ultimate Truth lies with God. Thus God is the source of the truth embodied in rights. Moosa confirms: “The crucial point in the Islamic rights scheme is that God is the one who confers rights on persons, via revealed authority although human authority mediates these rights” (“Islamic Rights Schemes 193). Unlike modern human rights schemes where the right flows from the disengaged individual simply since he is human, Islamic rights originate in God, known through revelation.

Haqq suggests another contradiction between Islamic and modern rights conceptions. If the polysemic possibilities of the word “*haqq*” includes both the idea of “right” and the idea of “duty”, then it encapsulates also the Islamic idea that rights are created not in and of themselves, but rather as a consequence of duties or obligations. In this way, the word “*haqq*” crystallizes the ways in which rights in Islam are conceived as both constitutively theocentric and social.

The privileging of the ideal of autonomy in modernity above other ideals also is a consequence of the faculty of reason of the disengaged subject, where reason is procedurally defined. If all action must be justified only by reason, an autonomy is generated, producing a radical freedom which devalues tradition and religion. Freedom is the privilege of the self

which appears to generate its own ethical boundaries and seems to develop itself out of its own resources. Islamic freedom paradoxically arises from submission – submission to the Divine. For Abu al-Ala Mawdudi, the Pakistani revivalist, it is only through liberation from the self and submission to a Divine ethics that true freedom can be achieved (105-6). In the articulation of Sayyid Qutb, whose ideas are regarded as providing the theoretical framework for political Islam, ultimate freedom similarly is achieved when one bows to the law of God rather than man. Freedom is brought to man on earth by, “The establishing of the dominion of God on earth, the abolishing of the dominion of man ...” (104). Moosa also suggests the paradox of self-liberation through self-submission vis a vis the thought of Ghazali:

True knowledge, for Ghazali, is that which leads to the ethical. Knowledge has to lead to the path of the afterlife, to the ultimate salvation and the fulcrum of liberation. The emancipated subject is thus one who is truly liberated from all material dependencies. A truly free subject does not behave like a pseudodivinity on earth, one that perpetrates genocide and epistemicide – two notorious crimes often perpetrated by humans in material and mental bondage. Indeed, in his interpretation which is consistent with the Muslim tradition, the imperative of knowledge is to act. And an index of freedom is ethical action in the world. For a Muslim, a double emancipation inheres in a moral act: emancipation in this world and salvation in the hereafter (*Poetics of Imagination* 267).

Islam appears to resist the now commonsensical notion in a large part of the globe that there is an outside of religion. In Islamic terms, religion, that is, God, and the person’s heteronomous contact with the divine/ethical source, is everywhere. There is no outside of faith since in its fundamental philosophical constitution the person locates *eudaimonia* in an external sphere. In Taylor’s terms, in Islam an “exclusive humanism” is a “reasonable”

impossibility, it is unthinkable. Since there is no outside of religion, the split into public and private spheres where religion is a dimension of the private sphere cannot occur.

On the question of the extreme “individualism” of Islamic law or *shari’a*, suggesting a “status” rather than “contract” society, again what is missed in the analyses or better what is suggested by imprecise terminology is not that there exists a radically autonomous Muslim who establishes relationships through contract, but rather a heteronomous person who is constitutively linked to the Divine and is immersed in community through the Divine. The fine details of what this means in legal terms is comprehensively suggested by Brinkley Messick in his assessment of the implications of modern state formation in highland Yemen. What Messick observes is the transformation of what he terms the “*shari*” subject into the modern nation-state-era subject. The transition is not from one culture of individualism to another, but from a “status” society in which the person is variously acknowledged to a society which claims a pure contractual base, but variously creates status.

Taylor suggests that the autonomous self is a “buffered” self which creates the subject-object distinction which has as ultimate consequence Weber’s “disenchantment” of the world. The world of the autonomous self is not the world of magic and spirits since the objects in the world are fundamentally separate from the subject. The world created by Islam, on the other hand, remains an “enchanted” world. The heteronomous self is a “porous” self open to the influence of the world from which it has not disengaged. What for rationalism would constitute the supernatural is an undisputed part of the Islamic worldview. The Qur’an refers to God’s creation of both man from clay and *djinn* from fire. The *djinn* are invisible to the human eye, but are possessed of reason and responsibility and are more prone to evil than man.

Islam, based on the above analysis, appears to be between individualism and conformity and between status and contract. It appears in this light, I would argue, since it recognizes the person but orients the person clearly in relation to an external higher order encompassed in God as ethical source. The external orientation of the Islamic self constitutes a necessarily social being further entrenched by the inherently “public” nature of the content of revelation. Islam necessarily is social since it is embedded in a practice which cannot be construed exclusively as private.

In his study of Al-Ghazali, whose work is regarded as harmonizing Ash’ari theology and sufism, Ebrahim Moosa suggests the concept of “heteronomy” to describe the person in Islam:

For Ghazali, ethics was heteronomous. “Heteronomy” means “other” and “law”. The ethical imperative, for Ghazali, was not derived from the will of the autonomous agent, as Immanuel Kant would have it. Rather, the will of the agent is a response to the divine address and an invitation to give willing assent (*tasdiq*) to revelation. Thus, it is the Other which provides the human will with the law, instead of human reason being the provider of the universal law. A heteronomous agent derives principles of action from outside himself or herself. Such agents allow themselves to be influenced by the will of others – in this case by God’s will – by giving primary consideration to the goal or consequences of their choices. Thus, in the heteronomy of the will, morality and ethics are external to reason. A heteronomous ethics is derived from religious beliefs; it depends on social, cultural, and theological sources. Ethics, piety, and ritual, for Ghazali, were in the end designed to construct a largely heteronomous self, not an autonomous one. However, it does not follow that a heteronomous self is lacking in individuality. Individuality is not the opposite of heteronomy.

Rather, individuality is the locus of agency and ultimately responsibility
(Poetics of Imagination 231).

In terms of the Islamic conception, the moral source of the person remains indisputably external. Ultimately, God is the “only true subject” (Schimmel 146). The word “islam” itself suggests an external moral orientation. The word “islam” is translated as submission, related to the root “salaam” which means “peace.” Islam thus is the submission to peace. Another semantic shade of the word “islam” is that of “giving one’s whole self over”, in this case, a giving of oneself over to God (Arkoun *Rethinking Islam* 15). The “muslim” formed thus in relation to the external transcendental constitutively is not an individualist subject.

These then are the fundamentals of the Somali-Islamic view of the person which Farah’s novels purport to represent. As will be shown, however, this worldview is constitutively denied representation as a consequence of the novel form which privileges the individual. The only representational possibility for the novel is the autonomous subject whose moral sources are located internally. In the modernist and postmodern novel, moral sources are projected onto the form itself but through the medium of the fragmented identity, which remains nonetheless a disengaged subjectivity. To represent the person oriented against an external moral framework is a constitutive impossibility for the novel. The attempt leads only to what may be termed the “failed novel.” These are some of the issues to be considered in the chapters which follow.

Chapter 2

From a Crooked Rib and the Bildungsroman: Developing the Self, Developing the Nation

From a Crooked Rib (1970), Farah's first published book, drew its author onto the international literary scene, despite what were considered its aesthetic shortcomings. The book is supposed to have been written in less than a month when Farah was a philosophy student at the University of Chandigarh in India. Perhaps because of its perceived inadequacies it has not received as much critical attention as the later fiction, especially the trilogies. This novel is fundamental, however, in defining the boundaries of the novelistic sub-genre which constitutively embodies Farah's worldview. The features which characterize this sub-genre of the novel also define the novel itself. These elements are explored, expanded and sometimes even apparently subverted in Farah's later fiction. This chapter thus attempts to reveal the foundational individualist premise of the realist novel, from which the later modernist and postmodern novels proceed.

The novel takes its title from a Somali proverb: "God created woman from a crooked rib; and anyone who trieth to straighten it, breaketh it." The reference to origins in the title is echoed in the circumstances of the book's publication. *From a Crooked Rib* is both Farah's first published novel and the first Somali novel. It is also a novel composed and published in English since a script and orthography for Somali was determined only two years after the novel's publication. Like Farah's other novels, the first novel has never been translated into Somali. In these ways, *From a Crooked Rib* is an "original" novel; it is completely new, it is not traditional.

But the book is “original” in another paradoxical sense also, suggested by the etymology of the word “original”. As Ian Watt points out in *The Rise of the Novel*, the modern meaning of the word “original” as “underived, independent, first-hand” came to be fixed only in the epochal eighteenth century. In the Medieval period, “original” meant “having existed from the first”. By a strange “semantic reversal” (Watt 14-15) then, a word that suggested tradition, existing from the start and perpetuated through the ages, came to mean new, spontaneously generating itself out of itself, significantly *untraditional*. *From a Crooked Rib* reflects all of these nuances of “originality.” In terms of the eighteenth century definition, it is Farah’s first novel, the first Somali novel and the first Somali novel in English. It is completely new, underived. But “original” also, in the older semantic association of the word, continues a *tradition*. The novel in part emerges out of older inherited forms which ultimately tend to be occluded in the genre which paradoxically identifies itself as being “underived, independent, first-hand”, “new”, “novel” in its presentation of unmediated individual experience. The novel then goes on to create a tradition of its own. The novel form which Farah inherits is inaugurated in another geographical space. It does not emerge from the material conditions of the Somalia Farah writes about. Like the development of the novel genre itself, *From a Crooked Rib*, shares in the paradoxical, superficially denied reconciliation of tradition and newness, or as it may also be termed, modernity.

From a Crooked Rib has not really been the focus of sustained critical attention. Brief analysis of the novel usually forms part of broad author or thematic surveys. What emerges from these considerations of the novel is the sense of a generic engagement which has no name or that is misnamed. *From a Crooked Rib* tells the not unusual story of a young

woman, Ebla, who escapes from her nomadic household and passes through the small town of Belet Wene, where she stays in the home of a distant relative. Here she attaches herself to a young man who takes her to the city of Mogadiscio. This story is read virtually without exception as a story of individual development. The heroine's is a "journey towards enlightenment", "independence", "freedom", "awakening" (McDowell). What sustains Ebla is her "consciousness of her own subjectivity", of her power to reconceive herself and her world" (Alden and Tremaine *Nuruddin Farah* 47). Ebla strives after "individuality and independence" and "self-definition" (Wright *Nuruddin Farah* 25-26). Ebla's escape is a "self-emancipation" which allows her to test her "self-reliance" and allows her to establish "herself as her own self-creator", in this way finding her own "self-fulfillment" (Okonkwo "Individual's Quest for Self-Fulfillment" 68-9). Ironically, while defining the novel using the vocabulary of both eighteenth century European Enlightenment Idealism and Romanticism, the critics classify the novel as an example of picaresque adventure of the feudal period. (Okonkwo "Changing Roles of Women" and Wright *Nuruddin Farah*). Although the critics identify Ebla as a female picaro, for Bakhtin a hero-type with no development potential, merely a "point moving through space" ("The *Bildungsroman*" 10), the language which is used to describe her experience in the novel is the language of *Bildung*.

For a Somali example of the picaro, one might do better to look at a character like 'Igaal Bowkahlh the hero of Somali folktales, whose adventures have been recorded by Margaret Laurence (*A Tree for Poverty*). Like Ebla, he is a character of a world in transition to modernity, a world in which, what Lukács terms "the circle of life" (*Theory of the Novel*), is beginning to collapse. Like Ebla, 'Igaal Bowkahlh also leaves hearth and home to seek his fortune. Unlike Ebla's story, however, the focus in the 'Igaal Bowkahlh stories is not on the

inward development of the protagonist, the focus falls on the adventures themselves. The language of inwardness, the sense of a character with great inner resources is, by contrast, a significant part of Ebla's characterization. While the character of 'Igaal Bowkahh is a satirical response to a world in which the nomadic ideal is failing and cannot be revived, Ebla's character constitutes the entry into modernity. In the critical literature on *From a Crooked Rib*, the novel quite clearly is defined without being named as that sub-genre of the novel which seems constitutively to define the genre itself, namely, the *Bildungsroman*.

I Rise of the *Bildungsroman* / Rise of the Novel

Karl Morgenstern is credited with the first use of the term "*Bildungsroman*" to define through naming a sub-genre of the novel whose outline by the early 1820s was already apparent in the novel theory not only of Germany, but also France and England.

Morgenstern's definition perspicaciously discerns the parallel functions with which the *Bildungsroman* is encumbered:

It will justly bear the name *Bildungsroman* firstly and primarily on account of its thematic material, because it portrays the *Bildung* of the hero in its beginnings and growth to a certain stage of completeness; and also secondly because it is by virtue of this portrayal that it furthers the reader's *Bildung* to a much greater extent than any other kind of novel (quoted in Swales 12).

Already at this early stage, the double task of the *Bildungsroman* is intuited: The genre both represents the schooling of the autonomous hero in a particular kind of subjecthood and simultaneously schools the reader in a similar lesson of personality acquisition, consequent upon the particular dynamic of its representational technique. For this reason, the *Bildungsroman* is also referred to as the *Erziehungsroman* or novel of education since the

self-realization of the hero is “in itself formative and encouraging to others” (Lukács *Theory of Novel* 135).

The term *Bildungsroman* is re-introduced by Dilthey towards the end of the nineteenth-century in his *Leben Schleiermachers* (1870) where he proposes “to call those novels which make up the school of Wilhelm Meister ... Bildungsromane” (Beddow 1-2). The term, however, only acquires general popularity in literary circles in the early twentieth century when in *Poetry and Lived Experience* (1906), Dilthey favours the term with a crisp definition:

A lawlike development is discerned in the individual's life; each of its levels has intrinsic value and is at the same time the basis for a higher level. Life's dissonances and conflicts appear as necessary transitions to be withstood by the individual on his way towards maturity and harmony. The “greatest happiness of earth's children” is “personality,” as a unified and permanent form of human existence (Dilthey 336).

What this definition does not emphasize, but which is apparent elsewhere in the essay, is that the life which the *Bildungsroman* seeks to develop is the life of a young man. The novels Dilthey analyses “all portray a young man of their time: how he enters life in a happy state of naïveté seeking kindred souls, ... how he comes into conflict with the hard realities of the world, how he grows to maturity through various life experiences, finds himself and attains certainty about his purpose in the world” (335). In Dilthey's definition which is determined by Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, the commonly acknowledged apogee of the sub-genre, another implicit element of the *Bildungsroman* may be identified. Dilthey (referring to Goethe) suggests that the *Bildungsroman* form has a universal imperative – “personality”, becoming an individual, is the development goal of all mankind, as suggested in the quotation above,

the “ ‘greatest happiness of earth’s children’ ... is personality as a unified and permanent form of existence”. Dilthey stresses that what makes the *Bildungsroman* different from all previous biographical narratives is that it “intentionally and artistically depicts that which is *universally human* in [the] life-course” of its hero (emphasis added) (335).

The clarity of Dilthey’s definition of the *Bildungsroman* masks a contradiction which lies at the heart of the sub-genre. Wieland’s *Agathon* is supposed to be the precursor to Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* novels in which the *Bildungsideal* is supposed to achieve its perfect resolution. The paradox for criticism has been the fact that “one nineteenth-century German novel after the next failed to fit into the pattern allegedly established by Goethe” (Kontje 13). In fact, even Goethe’s supposed apotheosis of the sub-genre seems to be flawed: “... it seems debatable ... whether even *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* depicts that fulfillment and harmony which Dilthey sees as the necessary goal of the *Bildungsroman* [sic]” (Swales 3).

For Lukács, the paradox of the *Bildungsroman* is a particularly manifest case of the contradiction which lies at the heart of the novel genre as a whole. While for Lukács the epic is the cultural product of an integrated world, the novel is the genre of “transcendental homelessness” (*Theory of the Novel* 41). The loss of evident meaning in the world is replaced by the search for meaning within the hero himself – the novel’s acknowledged interiority. In other words, if the *epic hero* discovered meaning in a cosmic home, the *novel hero* finds his home within selfhood itself. For various reasons, finding the transcendental home within the individual is an inherently contradictory project. Lukács suggests that while “The outward form of the novel is essentially biographical” (*Theory of the Novel* 77), “The

inner form of the novel has been understood as the process of the problematic individual's journeying towards himself" (*Theory of the Novel* 80).

It is apparent that through drawing into sharp focus the process of subject formation itself, the *Bildungsroman* sub-genre accentuates the contradiction constitutive of the novel as a genre. Lukács regards Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* as a failed attempt at a synthesis of this constitutive contradiction. For Lukács, Goethe's is an attempted Humanistic reconciliation of Abstract Idealism and the Romanticism of Disillusionment. In narrative terms, this is the reconciliation of "the problematic individual, guided by his lived experience of the ideal, with concrete social reality" (*Theory of the Novel* 132). In Lukács's analysis, Goethe's synthesis fails since closure in *Wilhelm Meister* requires improbable elements whose "epic quality" the author attempts to disguise through "using them lightly and ironically" (*Theory of the Novel* 142). In other words, while in the epic the "ring of life" is complete or meaning is apparent, in the novel, the circle of life cannot be closed – it is constitutively impossible given the form of the novel since the "meaning of life" cannot be generated out of autonomous individualism. Lukács suggests that Goethe attempts to escape the constitutive contradiction of the novel through irony.

While Lukács reads the resort to irony in the novel of formation as failure, the development of irony as a narrative strategy may embody the novel's triumph, as will be considered in the chapter on modernism in Farah's novels. What is curious in Lukács's reading of *Meister* is that he does not link the irony of Goethe's closure in the *Bildungsroman* with his observation that the novel as genre is inherently and constitutively ironic. It is precisely irony, which the *Bildungsroman* brings into relief more clearly than any other sub-genre, which allows the novel ultimately to continue its social function of

development, cultivation, socialization, education, in short *Bildung*, but with a self-constituting legitimacy, that appears to exist without external authority.

What then is the paradox at the heart of this sub-genre of the novel which, on the face of its purpose, seems so clear? Martin Swales in *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse* addresses precisely this paradox. Swales examines the various debates which arise in *Bildungsroman* criticism and finds that they, without exception, articulate a similar contention. The dialectic Swales identifies in the *Bildungsroman* is one constituted out of the opposition between the founding principle of the sub-genre and the necessity for erasure of the founding principle in order for it to be represented. Very simply expressed, this is the paradox of the need to reconcile the life of the hero which seems to generate meaning out of itself with the life of the community.

One form the opposition takes in German literary history is that between Romanticism and Idealism: The inward, self-constituting, self-reflexive, creative potential of the human imagination of necessity comes up against practical social reality. Romanticism comes up against Idealism. Expressed in a different discourse, the linearity of experiential reality needs to be contained within the closure of a plot (or the plot of closure) since otherwise the *Bildungsroman* and the *Bildung* it represents would be interminable. Swales refers to Hegel's observation that in the *Bildungsroman*, "modern bourgeois reality" has to be anchored in a "time-honored epic pattern" (Swales 21). For Swales, the reconciliation of contradiction is unachieved even in the eighteenth century highpoint of the *Bildungsroman* which defines the sub-genre. For Swales, the *Bildungsroman* at the outset, is "an inherently self-critical genre" (Kontje 17), a self-criticism located largely in irony, which, as was suggested above, is the catalyst which reinvents the novel, reflecting in the process, the reinvention of the world.

Like Swales, Franco Moretti in *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* identifies the intrinsically contradictory nature of this sub-genre of the novel. For Moretti, the *Bildungsroman* “codifies the new paradigm” that sees youth as the most meaningful part of life. The shift from a traditional or status society where one is born into a role gives way to a social structure which “impose[s] a hitherto unknown mobility”. Defining one’s place in the world generates the interiority of the *Bildungsroman*. This narrative is charged with “build[ing] the Ego, and mak[ing] it the indisputable centre of its own structure” (11). The novelistic youth of this sub-genre (as Dilthey reminds us above) is the symbolic form of modernity, since only youth shares in the restless dynamism of modernity. Novelistic youth, in achieving self-realization, replicates the inner contradiction of modernity. For Moretti, this contradiction consists in the limitlessness of the new philosophical and economic paradigm which necessarily must betray itself in order to be represented. The “dynamism” of novelistic youth must be foreclosed by “limits.” The “restlessness” of youth must be curbed by the “sense of an ending.” The boundless “freedom” of the individual needs to be contained by “happiness.” “Socialization” seals “self-determination.” “Individuality” succumbs to “normality” (Moretti *The Way of the World* 3-72). These are the poles of the dichotomy which the *Bildungsroman* needs to negotiate.

For Moretti, the classical *Bildungsroman*, represented by Goethe and Austen, successfully negotiates the poles of the dichotomy. In doing so, the classical *Bildungsroman* provides modernity with its script for socialization through not resolving, but learning to live with contradiction. The dynamism of youth needs to be bounded by maturity. Like youth, the dynamism of modernity needs to be checked in some way. Without limits, both modernity

and youth would become monsters. The ring of life must be completed – somehow. The limits, the sense of an ending, *closure* is provided in both Goethe and Austen by prevailing aristocratic norms. Read in terms of an ethical understanding of the rise of the novel suggested in Chapter 1, one might say that reconciliation, socialization of the individual, is achieved only through modernity's adoption of the morality of pre-modernity. One might say that the *Bildungsroman* in some ways fuses tradition and modernity in a way that makes it superficially appear a rejection of tradition. But the sheer magic of modernity's resolution of this paradox is to make the limit disappear. The limit disappears when it seems to emerge from within the autonomous hero himself. As Moretti suggests, modern socialization is complete when the hero is able to proclaim, "I *desire* to do what in any case I *should* have done" (21). The limits imposed by morality appear to emerge from the free individual. For Moretti, this is the panacea of the *Bildungsroman* in modern culture; it is the "comfort of civilization":

It is also necessary that, as a "free individual", not as a fearful subject but as a convinced citizen, one perceives the social norms as *one's own*. One must *internalize* them and fuse external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity until the former is no longer distinguishable from the latter. This fusion is what we usually call "consent" or "legitimation". If the *Bildungsroman* appears to us still today as an essential pivotal part of our history, this is because it has succeeded in representing this fusion with a force of conviction and optimistic clarity that will never be equaled again. We will see in fact that here there is no conflict between individuality and socialization, autonomy and normality, interiority and objectification. One's formation as an individual in and for oneself coincides without rifts with one's social integration as a simple *part of a whole* (16).

Drawing on Moretti, Slaughter remarkably compresses this idea in the observation of the *Bildungsroman* as: “The tautological-teleological complex of inherency in becoming [which] articulates the impossibly anticipatory and retrospective (proleptic and analeptic) temporality of the story of modern citizen-subjectivation ...” (Slaughter “The *Bildungsroman* and International Human Rights Law” 1415).

The quotation from Slaughter preempts another dimension of the *Bildungsroman*. The *Bildungsroman* accentuates in a way that may remain fairly nebulous in other sub-genres the constitutive role the novel has played in the formation (*Bildung*) of the modern nation-state. It is no coincidence that the eighteenth century, the age of the classical *Bildungsroman*, is also the age of the birth of the modern nation state. Slaughter suggests that the *Bildungsroman* offers a “socio-aesthetic model of development and integration that served the emergent nation through two cooperating centripetal forces: centralizing the nation state and centering its citizen-subjects” (1410). In other words, the *Bildungsroman* “conventionalize[s] a narrative pattern for participation in the egalitarian imaginary of the new bourgeois nation-state, a plot for incorporation of previously marginalized people as democratic citizen-subjects” (1410).

In *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900*, Moretti shows how national space is a constitutive part of the *Bildungsromane* of this period, “*what* happens depends a lot on *where* it happens” (70). In this century, the “*Bildungsroman* of the European in Africa” (70) is inconceivable. This type of novel (and the novel generally) evolves in a national space and provides the plot for the incorporation of marginal subjects into the national imaginary, a process which simultaneously constitutes what Slaughter refers to as “the Westphalian unities of nation-time and nation-space” (*Human Rights Inc.* 92). If in the nineteenth century

the *Bildungsroman* of the European in Africa is unthinkable, by contrast in the early twentieth century the colonies represent the only space where *Bildung* of the middle class European male is possible, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* constituting the paradigmatic case.

In the later twentieth century, *Bildung* of the European male “survives only as parody (Felski 133), whose “absolute end” is embodied in Gunter Grass's *Tin Drum*, “ ‘the uninhibited tale of a dwarf whose most remarkable growth is purely phallic’ ” (Miles, quoted in Abel and Hirsch 13), or “in the form of a purely inward development which renounces all social activity (Felski 133-4).

By the second quarter of the twentieth-century, the novel genre is actively promoted among the colonized at the expense of oral forms (Layoun xii). The sub-genre of the novel which is most widely invoked is the *Bildungsroman*. Slaughter, drawing on Gauri Viswanathan and Leela Gandhi, emphasizes that the centrifugal drift of the *Bildungsroman* exports individualist subject formation to the margins with the difference that in the colonies the sub-genre is tasked with creating “subjects” not “citizens”:

The *Bildungsroman* is enlisted by colonial authorities to transmit “humanist ideals of enlightenment”: “the shaping of character or the development of the aesthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking.” However, ... colonial literary education enabled those ideals “to coexist with and indeed even support education for social and political control.” The differential application by the colonial power of universalist principles in the colony and at home has led a number of critics to conclude that the official modes of importation of the *Bildungsroman* to the “periphery” deployed the genre “as an intensely conservative discourse of socialization, viz.; one which aims to achieve the symbolic legitimation of authority” not by producing citizens (as it had in Europe) but by producing subjects. In other words, the foreign service of the *Bildungsroman* tended to

consolidate a split between citizen and subject that, in Europe, the genre aimed to reconcile (*Human Rights Inc.* 123-4).

The project of the *Bildungsroman* thus is the pro-jection of an evolutionary individualist ideal for all humanity which occludes its specific history and ideology in a paradigm which demonstrates the meaning of life as generated from within the modern autonomous, disengaged self. The *Bildungsroman* simultaneously occludes its enablement in pre-modern socially and/or transcendently constructed models of subject constitution.

What troubles this scenario further is the insight that, paradoxically, the *Bildungsroman* is the sub-genre of the novel which, in its fundamental premises, retrospectively defines the genre of the novel itself. Moretti suggests that even other sub-genres are evaluated in the terms established by the *Bildungsroman*: “Even those novels that clearly are not *Bildungsroman* ... are perceived by us against this conceptual horizon; so we speak of a “failed initiation” or of a “problematic formation” (15). The *Bildungsroman* brings into focus the fact that the novel is the form which originates both to constitute and give expression to the new relation of the subject to the world. The philosophical realism of Descartes and Locke is embodied in the Formal Realism of the early novel (Watt).

Privileging the representation of the everyday experience of the ordinary individual gives symbolic form to the seismic shift of reason substantively defined to reason procedurally defined. No longer does the hero find the meaning of life in an external paradigm. The novelistic hero discovers the meaning of life out of his everyday experience of it. Events in the novel do not simply test the apparently static and unchanging hero as in the picaresque. No longer is the hero simply a “point moving in space” , as noted above, or “the immobile and fixed point around which all movement in the novel takes place” (Bakhtin “The *Bildungsroman* 21). Instead, the focus shifts onto the effect of the event on the hero. The

focus in the eighteenth century novel moves onto the hero himself rather than on events. This is Bakhtin's novel "of human *emergence*" ("The *Bildungsroman*" 21); it represents "*man in the process of becoming*" (Bakhtin "The *Bildungsroman*" 19).

The mutually constitutive relationship between the hero and event is captured in Henry James's observation: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" (quoted in M.H. Abrams 137). Where in the epic, plot is external to the hero, in the novel, the hero is the plot. But as in the *Bildungsroman*, the *uncontradictory* fusion of plot and character cannot be achieved. The plot, it appears, cannot be constructed out of the moral qualities of the hero alone. Elements of traditional or transcendental plot surface in various ways, particularly in closure. This is the impasse identified by Ian Watt, and re-interpreted by McKeon, at the outset of the development of the novel between Richardson's "reality of representation" and Fielding's "reality of assessment". This is a variant expression of the dichotomy of the *Bildungsroman* between self-determination and socialization respectively. It might also be expressed as the dichotomy between the imperative of a modern morality putatively generated out of the inner core of the disengaged self coming up against a pre-modern paradigm of an external higher order.

It is not coincidental that the titles of most early novels take the form of a proper noun, the name of an individual, for example, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, *Tom Jones*. The novel is *the* symbolic form for the representation of the subject as individual, and in the *Bildungsroman* the dynamic and contradictions of this representation achieve sharpest crystallization. Although in narrow definition the *Bildungsroman* and all of its species the *Erziehungsroman*, the *Entwicklungsroman*, the *Kunstlerroman* are German,

the genre appears to emerge out of a continental imperative. Goethe's is a response to the "interest in inner culture that Rousseau had inspired in Germany" (Dilthey 335). *Wilhelm Meister* in Book V acknowledges Fielding, Richardson and Goldsmith's attempts to represent emerging individuality in the novel as opposed to the static representation of drama. Although Carlyle's translation of *Wilhelm Meister* was published only in 1824, Goethe was well known in England by reputation, even though it may have been a distorted reputation. Carlyle suggests that Goethe is known only "by the faint and garbled versions of his *Werter*" (3). The ideals of the *Bildungsroman* thus are implicated in the novelistic ideal from its origins to the highpoint of the genre as Otto Flake suggests: "The highest form of the novel was the novel of personal development: a man passed through the richness of the phenomenal world and attempted to discover its meaning" (quoted in Swales 2).

What makes Farah's novels completely compelling, is the way in which they severally and as a progression encapsulate this apparently incontrovertible history, incontrovertible since it "teleologically and tautologically" (Slaughter) seems to prove its own veracity.

II *From a Crooked Rib* and Postcolonial *Bildung*: The Paradoxes of Individualist Personality Development

What makes Farah's first novel also one of his most interesting is the way in which *From a Crooked Rib* replicates the intertwined histories of the novel and the *Bildungsroman*, reviving Enlightenment tensions and contradictions in a postcolonial context. As noted earlier, critical commentary on the novel classifies it as "picaresque adventure" (Okonkwo "Novelist as Artist" 50) or "comic picaresque" (Wright *Nuruddin Farah* 31), paradoxically,

however, employing the vocabulary of both eighteenth century European Enlightenment and Romanticism. *From a Crooked Rib* remarkably carries all the hallmarks of the classical *Bildungsroman* in both its German and English literary historical embodiments. For Dilthey, as indicated above, the *Bildungsheld* passes through various developmental stages, with inner transformation at every level gradually leading the hero on to “maturity and harmony” (336). Farah’s debut novel fits the pattern thus established insofar as the protagonist, Ebla, sets out on a physical trajectory, abandoning her homestead, which leads her through various “stations”, represented by the four parts through which the novel develops. At each of these “stations” experience impacts upon her, dialectically altering her worldview, leading her on to the self- realization of closure.

Jerome Buckley, in an overview of the English *Bildungsroman* proposes a plot template for this type of novel, which may not be absolutely true in every detail of all the English novels under consideration, but is virtually completely true of the Somali novel focused on here:

A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to his ambitions, and quite impervious to the new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading. His first schooling, even if not totally inadequate, may be frustrating insofar as it may suggest options not available to him in his present setting. He therefore, sometimes at a quite early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative innocence) to make his way independently to the city (in the English novels, usually London). There his real “education” begins, not only his preparation for a career but also ... his direct experience of urban life. The latter involves at least two love affairs or

sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values. By the time he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. His initiation complete, he may then visit his old home, to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success or the wisdom of his choice (17-18).

Substituting heroine for hero and grandfather for father, Buckley, perhaps not fortuitously, provides an admirable plot summary for *From a Crooked Rib*. Like the English hero, Ebla independently moves to the city where her true *Bildung* begins. Like the heroes Buckley describes, she has two sexual encounters, the one with the already married, Tiffo, “debasing” and the one with the man she has chosen, Awill, “exalting.” However, while the English hero’s estrangement is determined by excessive “unprescribed” reading, the alienation of Farah’s heroine, who is an entirely oral creature, becomes a creation more of the *Bildungsroman* itself rather than of the material and social conditions which shape her. If the “ring of life” or socialization of the classical English hero is completed with a temporary return home, in *From a Crooked Rib* the circle is completed when the rural “home”, embodied in Ebla’s brother, comes to the postcolonial city to inform her of her grandfather’s death. The symbolic break of the finality of the death of the patriarch suggests, as will be shown, an exacerbatedly irreconcilable postcolonial resolution to the contradiction contained in the *Bildungsroman* form.

If, as has been shown above, the *Bildungsroman* is the symbolic form which captures the dynamism and volatility of modernity, then the focus on youth is no surprise. Determined by the form, Farah’s first novel *cannot* be the *Bildungsroman* of the grandfather. The form does not allow the representation of the subjectivity of the grandfather. Likewise, the

Bildungsroman is the genre of the individual's emergence, not the emergence of the group. At the moment before Ebla catapults herself to freedom from the homestead, she hesitates. She is not sure as she leaves the nomads' hut whether she should wake her unnamed, sleeping female companion who "was still snoring her head off" (16). Ebla decides not to. Not that the decision is Ebla's. The form would not permit the "divine emancipation of body and soul" (*Crooked Rib* 13) of the apparently accepting, somnambulant young woman and the numerous other women, young and old, who populate the nomadic encampment. What would the *Bildungsroman* of an entire marginalized group look like? It probably no longer could be called a *Bildungsroman* since the genre is predicated on the development of the individual.

Similarly, the trajectory traced by the youthful heroine, plotted by the form, must be the path from the country to the postcolonial city of Mogadiscio. For it to be otherwise constitutes the unthinkable of the genre in its classical form. This may be contrasted with the female novel of self-discovery where the heroine might retreat from city life to discover herself in nature (Felski 142-3). This trajectory might also be compared with the reverse journey central to the sociology of fourteenth century Tunisian, Ibn Khaldun, frequently cited in Somali social and political science analyses, of the return to Bedouin life as a return to the natural attitude of submission to a higher order, referred to as "*fitrah*" or "original human nature" (Dhaoudi). Ebla's trajectory may also be compared and contrasted with what Ali Jimale Ahmed suggests about the journey motif in Somali narratives. Here there is a similar movement "from the known to the unknown and back to the known." The journey in these narratives "emulate[s] the paradigm of the rite of passage...". Unlike in the *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist is not socially alienated. He passes out of the community to

extend its social horizons. The journey to the urban centre, in the experience it allows the hero to accrue, “bring[s] a benefit or credit to his community” (50).

It cannot be fortuitous that Ebla story shares striking similarities with the *Bildungsroman* heroines who with the rise of the novel define the genre. Ebla shares with Moll Flanders, the earliest novel heroine, an inconsistency and contradictoriness, crystallized in the heroine’s claim to be entirely determined by oppressive social conventions, yet signally free and independent. As genres of a transition between two epochs, both novels bear the traces of an earlier mode, namely, the picaresque. Both characters manage to profit out of giving free rein to their desires. Like Clarissa, Ebla may or may not be the victim of a rape, depending on how one reads consent: Is Clarissa/Ebla’s consent manifested in her actions - she elopes with Lovelace/Awill - or is consent inwardly manifested in intention? Like Pamela, whose virtue in holding off her master is rewarded with entry into the middle class, Ebla’s lack of virtue symbolized by her prostitution (in an interesting postcolonial twist on the eighteenth century scenario), nevertheless secures her entry into the indigenous post-independence elite. The prostitute motif, incidentally, is a frequent feature of postcolonial novels (Stratton “The Mother Africa Trope”). Although the primary expression of individualism is male (Pateman), in significant ways, women secure entry to the middle class through perfecting personality ideals (Armstrong).

Lukács identifies the novel as the expression of “transcendental homelessness” (41). The novel hero, furthermore, “is the product of estrangement from the outside world” (66). Farah’s heroine, Ebla, exemplifies these dicta in the most fundamental way: “Escape! To get free from all restraints, from being the wife of Giumaleh. To get away from unpleasanties. To break the ropes society had wrapped around her and to be free and to be herself. Ebla

thought of all this, and much else” (12). Thus begins the process of Ebla’s *Bildung* in the novel. In desiring to be “homeless”, to “break the ropes society had wrapped around her” Ebla reflects a prior more fundamental metaphysical “homelessness”. The heroine is presented at the outset as being radically “out of joint” with her society and her times. She experiences the nomadic community of which she is a part not as enabling of herself, but as a limit of her self-realization. To fulfill herself, she must “Escape!” this community and its founding presuppositions. In this feeling of being confined, restricted, at odds with society around her, Ebla replicates the originary tension of the classical *Bildungsheld*.

Usually, protagonists of dissensual postcolonial *Bildungsromane* experience alienation; but alienation comes after the evolutionary development has begun. Consider, by way of example, Tambu, the heroine of Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Bildungsroman*, *Nervous Conditions*. The two stories are remarkably similar. Both are set in the same historical period, the period just before independence. Both focus on spirited young women. In both texts, movement occurs from country to city. But, while Tambu is alienated from her homestead, becoming aware of its embarrassing inadequacies only after the process of induction into modernity and modernization has begun, Ebla, by contrast is alienated at the outset. Ebla displays a radically modern consciousness despite the fact that she herself has not yet entered modernity. The text emphasizes in fine detail Ebla’s ingenuousness: The first time she sees a car, “she was almost petrified on the spot” (*Crooked Rib* 52). She touches the radio which plays the song of a female artiste thinking she may find the woman inside the magical box. She doesn’t eat spaghetti since she thinks the tubes are tapeworms. She thinks “police” is the name of a tribe. Despite these suggestions of a non-modern protagonist, Ebla thinks of herself in the person related terms Charles Taylor identifies as exclusive to the

modern reconceptualization of the moral order. Ebla wants the space “to be herself”. She does not want the role of daughter, wife or mother allocated by traditional kinship relations, neither does she want the status of “*abd*”, servant or slave of God in a cosmic conception of the world. She wants (the self-reflexivity of the language reflecting the reflexivity of the idea) to be herself. She will autonomously generate identity out of her self. By the deftest sleight of hand, the *Bildungsroman* narrative assumes as entirely natural a subjectivity that is through and through historical and ideological.

Ebla constitutes the unthinkable in the context which creates her. While the alienation of the *Bildungshelde* of the European generic models is created by too much “unprescribed reading”, Ebla’s alienation is spontaneously and autonomously generated. This does not mean, however, that in a non-individualist context the person may not behave in a wholly idiosyncratic or self-reflexive way. But idiosyncrasy and self-reflexivity occur within the parameters of that society’s worldview. Indeed, it is against the social norm that idiosyncrasy and self-reflexivity are gauged. What makes Ebla as a character unthinkable in her context is that the nature of her idiosyncrasy catapults her into an entirely transformed social frame. Ebla is an oral being in a society which does not yet even have a script and an orthography. The text’s premonition of this objection is evident from the disclaimer that: “She thought of many things a woman of her background would never think of” (*Crooked Rib* 8). There is one character in the novel who reads. That character is Awill, Ebla’s first husband. She interrupts him in his aunt’s home while he is reading an Italian novel. Lennard J. Davis has noted the tendency among novelists of “forever slipping other novel into the pockets of their characters” (148). Specifically in relation to the novel of development, Slaughter refers to *Bildungsromane* where, “in *mise en abyme* scenes ... we read of the *Bildungsheld*’s reading

of other Bildungsromane” (“The *Bildungsroman* and International Human Rights Law” 1418). Despite this, Ebla’s evolution towards individuality seems in advance of Awill’s. In fact, it is Ebla’s disciplinary fantasy that she will shape, mould, develop Awill into a fully-realized self. She contemplates her prospects with Awill to whom she intends to attach herself in marriage:

Will I get a positive reply? Only God knows.

‘But he is a man - like any other. But he may be different. In all probability he will be – otherwise I will try to reform him, to teach him, to break his pride, to turn him into a human being’ (*Crooked Rib* 85).

Ebla thus proposes to develop Awill if the *Bildung* which is associated with novel reading should fail.

Ebla in the postcolonial context is somewhat different from her eighteenth and nineteenth century counterparts in another way also. Franco Moretti suggests that with the attention of the novel to the ordinary life of ordinary people, rather than characters as types as in Medieval drama, the focus then falls on “language primarily as *conversation*” (49). The art of conversation is a significant technology of socialization. It allows “the double operation of ‘expressing oneself’ and of ‘understanding others’” (49). Conversation allows reconciliation, “reaching an agreement” (49). But the art of conversation, Moretti reminds us, is “something artificial ... one of many possible modes of discourse” (50). While there is a development of conversation as a rhetorical mode in Farah’s later novels, there is a signal lack of conversation in *From a Crooked Rib*. There is no conversation in *From a Crooked Rib* since there is no one Ebla may exchange thoughts with. She is an exceptional and egregious creature; she is out of place in her society. Whatever dialogue there is in the novel is purely functional. It serves the purpose of information provision or to drive the plot

forward. Conversation requires putatively free and equal individuals. In its Enlightenment ideal, it requires a fluid, procedural rational moral horizon which alters when it alteration finds. Conversation contains the possibility of the “converse”, the opposite, allowing the other to see the opposite point of view. Conversation is the potential of persuasion, an art which Austen arguably perfected and reflected in the title of one of her novels.

Conversation is an attenuated art in Farah’s first novel, since there literally is no one Ebla may talk with. The most significant parts of the novel are constituted out of Ebla’s thoughts which take the form of dramatic monologues. The observation of the narrator in the opening sequence that “Ebla thought of all this, and much else” has to be taken quite literally. A number of chapters, including the “Escape!” chapter cited above and the climactic Chapter 27, for example, where Ebla takes stock of her life and which precipitates her reconciliation in the final chapter, consists in nothing but Ebla’s thoughts. While we know a few things about Ebla’s external appearance from descriptions often shocking in their naturalism, it is an inward Ebla that we know through the text. We quite literally experience Ebla through her thoughts in the process of becoming in the novel. Although the text suggests Ebla’s thoughts are unplotted, the free, rational response to experience, canny use of free indirect speech masks authorial employment. Like the *Bildungsroman* form itself, quasi-direct discourse operates to occlude the narrator’s direction of the character who seems to create herself out of her own moral resources.

In Ebla’s textual representation as a creature of thought rather than constituted out of words or actions, a model of subjectivity already is suggested. It is a model of subjectivity, however, which does not emerge from a dialogic relationship with Somali culture and society. In Ebla, we witness an apparently wholly autonomous individualism. The complete

break with her social and cultural environment is signaled by the narrator's uneasy consciousness of her implausibility as a character, which has been alluded to earlier: "She thought of many things a woman of her background would never think of" (*Crooked Rib* 8). It is an uneasiness which the character shares: "She had been reticent all her life, because it turned out her opinions were different from what others expected" (*Crooked Rib* 65).

But Ebla's uniqueness is more fundamental even than the text's representation of it. Ebla is exceptional not because of what she thinks which may not find societal approval, but the *way* she thinks. The community around Ebla find limits to reason in tradition, going back to time immemorial, in some idea of a natural order, in a cosmic transcendently inspired plan; or in some combination of the aforementioned. Ebla, it is apparent, is estranged from all external sources which orient the self. She is alienated from the logic of the cultural practice which allocates the care of camels to boys and goats to girls, a logic which reflects in some way the limits imposed by an external natural order. Only *young* men, not girls or women encumbered with children, neither *old* men care for camels. The brutal exigencies of environment make this untenable. The text both reveals and ultimately conceals this dimension in its description of Ebla's brother, who, it appears, may have as compelling a reason to "Escape!" but does not at the beginning, and adamantly refuses at the end when the now urbanized Ebla half-heartedly suggests that he too remain in Mogadiscio, a month away from independence. The text describes the unnamed brother thus:

He was about sixteen, but, being the only son of a family whose mother and father had both died a long time ago, hard labour had aged him. He had a piece of cloth to cover his rough body – rough, because nothing protected it from the sun or the thorn-bushes which he walked over when herding the camels (*Crooked Rib* 4).

Ebla, by contrast, is not limited and defined by nature. She seeks independence from the harsh laws of nature: “She wanted to fly away from the dependence on the seasons, the seasons which determine the life or death of the nomads” (*Crooked Rib* 13). She wishes to escape the tedium of existence in the countryside, the monotony of which is struck home by the description of Ebla’s home: “A dwelling. It was a dwelling like any other dwelling in the neighbourhood. Not in the least different” (*Crooked Rib* 7). Against this “homogeneity”, Ebla’s individuality is all the more startling. It is interesting to observe, as has been noted of her brother above, that all of the characters in the encampment are named generically, for example, the grandfather, the archetypal patriarch is called “the old man.” Her somnolent friend is referred to as her “colleague” and none of the young men in the clearing whose sleeping bodies she passes as she makes her way out of the encampment are named.

It is salutary to compare the response of the *Bildungsroman* heroine to the rights infringements from which she has no option but to flee with the response to injustice of the heroine of another genre. John William Johnson notes the ways in which oral genres have been used by the marginalized in Somalia. A newly urbanized Mogadiscian housewife uses the *burambuur*, a specifically women’s genre, to address what she perceives as injustice in the household. Her husband’s nephew, taking advantage of kinship obligations (much like Ebla at her cousin’s home in Belet Wene) has come to stay with them. The woman feels the nephew unnecessarily burdens her. She composes a poem which she recites in the course of her work within earshot of her husband. The next day the nephew is subject to the husband’s vituperation for a host of transgressions, chief among them “interfering with the smooth routines of daily work in the household” (Johnson 113). As Johnson concludes the episode:

“ Message sent ... Message received ... All is now well between you and your husband. Confidence is restored” (Johnson 113). What is different between the two generic responses is that Farah’s *Bildungsroman*, in challenging what is primarily a perception of Somali patriarchy, and only secondarily a conviction of a more universal domination, addresses his work to a non-Somali audience, as is evident from the numerous textual glosses on the norms of Somali culture. The author of the *burambuur*, addresses the person whose obligation it becomes to make amends. While the *Bildungsroman* heroine escapes injustice, apparently creating her own freedom, “the divine emancipation of body and soul”, the *Burambuur* heroine appeals to an external, socially determined conception of justice, which in this case is unbalanced. While an external idea of *eudaimonia* is built into the *burambuur*, an internally generated conception of the good is built into the *Bildungsroman*, but not without paradoxes and contradictions. In this context, the free woman then is the woman who escapes (usually alone and into the middle class) and, through the power of liberated imagination, narrates her own life and freely constructs her own world (which the “tautological- teleological” structure of the *Bildungsroman* ultimately reveals to be a fiction). The unfree woman is the one who remains behind and finds freedom in openly recognizing the necessary limits to freedom.

Farah’s novels tend to invite a reading of all characters who do not “freely” choose “freedom” as submissive Somali women, victims of patriarchal, patrilinear, virilocal Somali culture. Consider, just as one example, a character sketch of Aowralla, Ebla’s cousin’s wife whose baby she helps deliver in Belet Wene: “The traditional impotence and subjugation of Somali women is epitomized in Aowralla ... who accepts her abject position in her husband’s house and conveys no sense of her own individuality” (Cochrane 71). The

“colleague” whom Ebla leaves behind in the hut is so somnolent as to appear almost “dead”. In representing Somali women, Farah appears unwittingly to replicate the Orientalist stereotypes Christine Choi Ahmed identifies in anthropological studies of the Somali. The liberation Ebla assumes will come in her move to the modernity of the colonial city of Mogadiscio is also in some ways illusory. Liedwien Kapteijns suggests that with modernization and urbanization, women lose the power they have in a traditional setting. Women’s work is absolutely indispensable in the nomadic pastoral Somali mode of production. And in their indispensability, Kapteijns argues, resides their strength.

A possible generically determined difference in response to similar issues is suggested in a consideration of the 1968 play by Hassan Sheikh Mumin, titled *Leopard among the Women: Shabeelnaagood*. The tradition of staged drama was unknown among the Somali. The oral poetry tradition is the most highly developed aspect of Somali culture. Somali theatre, however, successfully brought together foreign and indigenous traditions, and like Farah’s novels, sought through art to transform social conditions. Mumin’s play, like *From a Crooked Rib*, seeks to expose patriarchal exploitation of women. Like Ebla, who is taken advantage of by Awill and goes through the motions of a sham marriage, a young country girl in the play is lured into a “mini- marriage”, “ a secret relationship, with the ceremony presided over by a fake sheikh, a co-conspirator who mumbles Arabic-sounding nonsense and fools the ignorant girl into thinking she is properly married to an important government official” (Castagno 84). There is a striking difference between the resolution of the play which was in Somali, for a broad ranging Somali audience, and the novel. While the novel is compelled “lightly and ironically” to make “epic” closure or the closure of morality externally defined appear to be desired by the free, rational individual, the play

quite explicitly sets the plot in relief against a subplot which without contradiction dramatizes the higher order, virtue or *eudaimonia*.

That Ebla is free in terms of her moral philosophy even before she escapes the encampment is suggested by other considerations also. Not quite a secular being, Ebla's estrangement from an identity shaped by religion is suggested by subtle variations in the parallel tableaux which introduce Ebla's grandfather and herself. The Prologue of the novel is a flash forward in time to the period after Ebla's flight. In a posture charged with symbolism in Somali culture, the grandfather squats on the ground with his rosary in hand contemplating whether or not to curse his granddaughter. The curse in this context is not bare vituperation. The curse is a potentially destructive weapon like a dagger. In this world, not yet disenchanted, the curse can kill. He contemplates his action carefully since he loves his orphaned granddaughter. Elopement is not unknown among the Somali. He himself eloped with his wife. What cuts him to the quick is the mutual knowledge that Ebla's absence in the harsh, unforgiving Somali environment means his death; just as his refusal to care for Ebla as a child would have meant her death.

The rosary, symbol of a transcendental orientation of the self, is both the limit and in its infinite circularity, the limitlessness of his thinking. There are ninety nine beads on his rosary, each representing one of the *Asmaa'ul Husna* or the Beautiful Names of God, 1) Allah or God, 2) Ar-Rahman or the Compassionate, 3) Ar-Rahim or the Most Merciful, and so on. He grips the beads of his rosary and prays: "*Alhamdulillah. Istagfurullah. Subhanallah* ... He repeated and repeated and repeated the words. They aged with him. He must have said them more than a hundred billion times. They were on the tip of his tongue today, conveying no message, other than the vibration of his vocal chord and his breathing"

(*Crooked Rib* 5). The circle of life is complete in the rosary and the old man who tells it. The one is embodied in the other.

When Ebla escapes from the thorn gate of the encampment, she also prays, “*Alhamdulillah, Subhanallah, Istagfurullah*”, but the words no longer are hers and they do not constitute her as they enabled the existence of the grandfather:

She kept on repeating these words, which did not convey much to a young woman of her background. She said them because she had heard others say them. She knew the words were Arabic and that they were God’s words, and sacred. She counted on her finger-joints just as she had seen others do it. Actually, she let her thumbs run over her fingers one by one. Thus rhythmically, and sometimes inaccurately, she counted, saying each word three times, until she had said every word ninety-nine times: that was the number which represented God’s names
(*Crooked Rib* 18).

The categorical words of faith no longer are her words. She says them because she has heard others say them. As Volosinov suggests of the historical development of speech genres, the “*subjectivization of the ideological word-utterance*” makes it no longer “a monument, nor even a document, of a substantive ideational position; it makes itself felt only as expression of an adventitious, subjective state” (158-9). In the world in which Ebla “tautologically and teleologically” belongs even before she enters, the “the word ‘from one’s own mouth,’ the *declaratory* word” has an attenuated existence.

Delinked in this way from an external “higher order,” Ebla appears to rely on her own rational resources to create meaning in the world. Reason here no longer consists in discovering an external order. Instead it derives from Ebla’s own thinking processes. Ebla replicates the Cartesian break Charles Taylor identifies in the development of modernity in the postcolonial context. Reason for Ebla no longer is “substantive”. Reason is “procedural”.

Ebla quite literally reasons with herself. Large tracts of the novel consist in Ebla's debates with herself. No longer is her moral horizon external to herself. The horizon is within. The horizon consists not in what one sees, but *how* one sees. With reason procedurally defined comes a sense both of the subject's freedom and a sense of the subject's power. Ebla is free even before she has escaped the forced marriage and the encampment. Ebla displays the fundamental freedom of the being who has shed an external higher order. The higher order henceforward is in Ebla's own self. The philosophical move Ebla has made even before she has set foot out of her home apparently is "from pure subjection to self-regulation [which] describes the plot trajectory of the dominant transition narrative of modernization (Slaughter *Human Rights Inc.* 9). Ebla is "free" to choose the development plot which is already scripted. And, as Slaughter points out, this development which may be "freely" chosen is the development not only of the individual man, but also, in terms of the Kantian paradigm, of all of *mankind*, once mankind has sloughed off the dross of enslavement to tradition and religion. But, as Charles Taylor underscores, to be free in this radical sense of being without a social moral orientation is philosophically unthinkable; or as Aristotle suggests, man conceptualized outside of the *polis* can only be a beast or an angel.

If man no longer is a constituent part of the world, but is rather disengaged from it, if reason no longer reflects a cosmic order, but only its own procedurally rational powers, then the world becomes subject to man. Instrumental reason views the world as matter to be dominated and controlled. An impression of triumphant power over circumstance is similarly suggested in Ebla's relationship with the world.

Ebla embodies the historical road from Descartes to Locke which maps both modernity and, as Ian Watt suggests, its symbolic crystallization in the new mode of

representation inaugurated by the novel genre, namely, formal realism. Ebla is an empirical creature receiving and evaluating sense impressions, experiences, out of which she constitutes meaning. A through and through Lockean protagonist, she clears the ground and builds composite impressions of the world out of simples, on the basis of which she makes decisions. She responds with revulsion when her grandfather pledges her hand to an old man. But she controls her instincts and instead walks “out into the warm night to think over the situation.” She then proceeds to “sort out her ideas” and “see what [she] can do about them” (*Crooked Rib* 11). The decision she subsequently reaches is to leave.

For Charles Taylor, the development of a “disciplinary self” is part of modern identity, a subjectivity which, appealing to “natural reason” self-reflexively controls itself. This conception of identity is suggested by the way in which Ebla is represented. The first stage in her development is the town of Belet Wene. She has never been in a town before and finds the townspeople’s dress indecent. A sense of the supremely magisterial self which Ebla represents is suggested by her response: “ ‘But maybe I am wrong – let me get closer,’ she told herself, ‘and see how they dress exactly. Tomorrow; I will be able to pass judgement tomorrow, perhaps’ ” (*Crooked Rib* 23).

The model of a coherent subjectivity formed out of one self scrutinizing another, is potentially susceptible to the breakdown of schizophrenic identity, an idea to be explored in Chapter 6. Farah’s first novel suggests this idea in germ when Ebla shrinks back from the fully realized implication of interminable debates between different parts of her personality: “She had never been a split personality, but she had seemed slightly uncertain” (*Crooked Rib* 52).

C.A.B. Macpherson suggests that when the “disengaged”, “punctual” identity inaugurated by Locke and developed in subsequent philosophies articulates with the modern economy, then individualism takes the form of “possessive individualism”. What is meant by this term is that the self and its various skills and capacities come to be seen as “objects” to be owned on the model of the ownership of property. This element of modern identity is an aspect of Ebla’s textual representation also. Responding to the landlady’s contradictory objections to her polyandrous marriages, Ebla responds “Asha doesn’t have to tell me what to do and what not to do ... In future I will be myself and belong to myself, and my actions will belong to me. And I will, in turn, belong to them ... I am master of myself” (*Crooked Rib* 142).

As in subsequent novels, the centrality of individualism to the genre of the novel is symbolically realized in a scene with a mirror. When she realizes she is pregnant with a child of uncertain paternity, Ebla, like Dorian Gray in an earlier postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, studies her reflection in a mirror, a picture of herself - self reflecting self, a completion of the circuit of the internalization of moral sources, the ring of life seemingly hermetically sealed in the individual. (It is useful at this point to remember the fate of Narcissus.)

If Ebla’s mirror image towards the end of the novel is the symbol of the apparently closed circuit of disengaged individualism, it is nevertheless inadequate as novelistic closure. Ebla’s “monadic” self may find representation in the mirror, but her *Bildung* may only find representation in closure. In order to achieve representation, Ebla’s self-realization must be sealed by socialization. Youth cannot go on infinitely. Development has to stop - somewhere. Moretti suggests:

Self-development and integration are complementary and convergent trajectories, and at their point of encounter and equilibrium lies that full and double epiphany of

meaning that is “maturity.” When this has been reached, the narration has fulfilled its aim and can peacefully end (19).

How does Ebla’s *Bildung* end? Ebla’s development ceases when she gives up freedom for happiness. As is frequently the case, happiness is symbolized by marriage, the institution *par excellence*, which in its modern form replicates the ideal of the social contract. So frequently is marriage the culmination of development in the idealist *Bildungsroman* that it is satirized by Hegel as the form where “In the last analysis [the hero] usually gets his girl and some kind of job, marries and becomes a philistine just like the others” (quoted in Swales 20-1). The marriage envisaged by the *Bildungsroman* is not the inevitable marriage of status societies where the plot of life is pre-scripted. Marriage is the voluntary union of free and equal individuals, the “companionate marriage” which is one of the indices of modernity. This type of marriage is the symbolic cultural equivalent of the political union represented by the social contract. While in status or pre-modern societies community is built into the conception of the person, in individualist societies, collective association of the atomic subject needs to be explained by contract.

In an interesting twist on the classical *Bildungsroman* structure, *From a Crooked Rib* displays a double closure in a double marriage. These marriages are the same in the fundamental respect that, unlike Ebla’s other potential forced marriages, these marriages are the product of her “free” choice. Ebla chooses to marry Awill even though she coyly initially refuses in order not to appear too forward. The circumstance of her agreement validates the notion of a free union of equals. Ebla and Awill are alone in the widow’s house. They are not represented by family members as is the case for a traditional marriage. They negotiate the terms of their own contract. In a further reversal of the traditional scenario, when she contemplates marriage to Awill, Ebla shows concern about getting money for the sheikh’s

fee, “an inversion of the traditional method of contracting marriage in Somali society” (Ahmed 79). Awill goes away to Italy on a work assignment. His friend, by accident, allows Ebla to see a photo of Awill consorting with a “white” woman when he reads a letter from Awill to the illiterate Ebla. Ebla, in a familiar response which entrenches the construction of the idea of the individual as male, decides that if a man can cheat, then so can a woman. In what is thinly veiled prostitution, Ebla then of her own “free” choice marries Tiffo. If religion and society allow men polygamy, then Ebla will allow herself polyandry. If society treats girls like “materials, just like objects, or items on the shelf of a shop”, who can be “sold and bought as shepherds sold their goats at market-places” (*Crooked Rib* 84), then Ebla decides to be her own shopkeeper or broker and determine her own price. In another epiphanic moment Ebla “scratches her sex, then chuckle[s]. ‘This is my treasure, my only treasure, my bank, my money, my existence’” (*Crooked Rib* 160). What is interesting and ironical about this scenario is that the man Ebla enters into a polyandrous union with is as fat and old and rich as Giumaleh, the man her grandfather had arranged for her to marry. The only difference, is that marriage to Tiffo is the product of her “free” choice. Likewise, Ebla initiates divorce from Tiffo when she realizes Awill is expected home soon and she will not manage to keep up the bedroom farce. Her self-realization in the image of male individualism is suggested by her retort to Tiffo: “No. I am not telling you a lie. Why should I? You have another wife and I have another husband. We are even: you are a man and I am a woman, so we are equal. You need me and I need you. We are equal” (*Crooked Rib* 145).

But Ebla’s self-fulfillment is completed only in the closing lines of the novel once her true husband, Awill, has returned home. Already before his arrival Ebla is confident that she will not have to take her husband’s orders, “I am master of myself” (*Crooked Rib* 142),

she says. (Again, the nature of the discourse of self-realization suggests the installation of a male model of the individual.) The closing sequence of the novel suggests successful *Bildung*, confirmed when Ebla reappears as a successful shopkeeper in *A Naked Needle* and as a widow in *Sardines* who is a fully-realized individual (and completely financially independent to boot). In the final scene, Ebla wonders whether she should tell Awill about her amorous escapades during his absence:

“Tomorrow,” said Awill, moving towards her with desire.

“Tomorrow. We will tell each other everything tomorrow. You’ll tell me everything, and I shall tell you everything.”

Ebla smelt his maleness. She touched his forehead and, as usual, he was hot with desire. He smiled at her and she smiled back at him.

“Poor fellow, he needs me,” she thought. “He is sex starved.”

“Yes. Tomorrow,” Ebla murmured and welcomed his hot and warm world into her cool and calm kingdom (*Crooked Rib* 179).

The parallelism of the verbal structures of the sequence suggests the equality that exists between the two partners in the dialogue. This equality, in fact, is paradoxically emphasized by the failed parallelism of the final sentence. But what the words say suggests a little more than complete parity. Ebla retains her Olympian rationalism right to the end, and with “cool and calm” control directs Awill’s impetuosity. Ebla in some ways embodies the feminist individualists Nancy Armstrong analyses who manipulate the male model of the individual in such a way as to suggest that, as particular kind of women, they represent the very apotheosis of the new individualism and so guarantee their entry by marriage into the middle class. This is an idea which will be developed in Farah’s later *Bildungsromane*.

Although the novel, as Lukács suggests, is the genre of transcendental homelessness, Ebla nevertheless tracks her way to two “homes”, the one (Tiffo) less suitable than the other.

She ends up as her grandfather had intended her - married to a man with prospects, but with the crucial “difference” that she has “freely” chosen her union. The “tautological-teleological” structure of the *Bildungsroman* revives the dictates of traditional/patriarchal/religious authority while perpetuating the illusion of self-authorship. Totality, the meaning of life, is presented as immanent rather than transcendent or ontically determined. As Lukács suggests, the novel “surmounts itself” by “transforming itself into a normative being of becoming” (*Theory of the Novel* 73). Slaughter refers to this effect in the *Bildungsroman* in particular as its “normative and normalizing” social work. In this way then the external moral orientation of the self is presented as being a product of the disengaged, procedurally rational self.

Moretti suggests that the classical *Bildungsroman* is a genre of the transition from the aristocratic ethic of feudalism to the individualist ethic of early capitalism. The *Bildungsroman* is the “comfort of civilization” since it permits the illusion that the socialization of pre-modernity emerges out of the individualism of modernity. For Moretti, the *Bildungsroman* is “the symbolic form that more than any other has portrayed and promoted modern socialization.” But it is also a highly contradictory form. Contradiction, however, is not a weakness of the genre. “Interiorization of contradiction” is its strength since it teaches the modern individual “to learn to live with” contradiction (Moretti 10). In this sense it is fundamentally a “Novel of Education”.

The plot structure of *From a Crooked Rib* which is simultaneously linear and circular, highlights how pre-modern socialization is presented as the freely desired product of modern individualism. The point of departure of the *Bildungsroman* is the enlightened individual’s rejection of the ethics of mindless tradition and religion which cannot be proven

by procedural reason. The *Bildungsheld* then proceeds to discover a morality which develops immanently out of his experience. This conviction held by the genre ought to be evident from the analysis above, but is encapsulated in the epigraph with which Part Three of the novel is introduced. Farah quotes Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*, which itself alludes to William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming": "Why do I ever think / of things falling apart? / Were they ever whole?" While Miller may or may not allude also to Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, it is certain that Achebe's work does constitute an intertextual echo in *From a Crooked Rib*. Achebe's novel dissects the consequences of modernity upon a pre-modern worldview. With the arrival of modernity, the ring of life within which meaning is constituted for the protagonist, Okonkwo, is broken. The impact of Farah's use of the Miller epigraph is to implode a romanticized idea of traditional societies, which Achebe may be seen to be promoting. *From a Crooked Rib* rejects the ethical foundations of non-modern modes of existence and puts forward instead a potentially utopian ethics for which the individual is source. But for various reasons, as discussed in Chapter 1, the individual as moral source is a philosophical impossibility. The recourse of modernity reflected in the *Bildungsroman* is to assume an ethics which it then demonstrates to emerge out of the autonomous self. Oriented by the moral sources of pre-modernity, modernity installs a regime which excludes such sources.

III *From a Crooked Rib* and National Development

If *From a Crooked Rib* tells the story of individual development, it also tells the story of national development. The novel frequently is read as a national allegory. Jameson's observation that all third world novels are national allegories may not, *pace* Aijaz Ahmed, be

off the mark. The postcolonial novel may simply be revealing in clearer delineation the mutually reinforcing constitution in the novel generally of the nation state and the nation state era subject. Ebla's character has been read as "a symbolic analogue for Somalia on the eve of independence, her various polyandric marriages mirroring the nation's oppressive relations with imperial masters (Wright *Nuruddin Farah* 29). Ebla's escape to a plotted equality and freedom in various ways in the novel replicates Somalia's escape to the pre-scripted democracy and freedom of the modern nation state. In this way, Farah's *Bildungsroman* is a genre of the transition from pre-modernity to modernity, but it is a genre which in the Somali context is rootless. It replicates the tensions and contradictions which shape the eighteenth century European form, but in a philosophical, cultural, social and economic context where a smooth transition is precluded. The material conditions of the Somalia which receives Farah's *Bildungsroman* are not an environment where the genre can do its incorporative work with large scale potential success.

But even in the European context, the life of the classical *Bildungsroman* was relatively short-lived. For Moretti the idealist *Bildungsroman* runs to its end with Flaubert. The "bright normality" (Moretti 73) of classic *Bildungsroman* closure can no longer be achieved. As noted above, for others, Grass's *Tin Drum* embodies the end of the genre even as parody. This marks the terminus of the humanist ideal for the white, male, middle class hero. Hereafter the ideal is exported to the semi-periphery and the periphery in the attempted inclusion of marginalized groups, with greater or lesser success.

The way in which the *Bildungsroman* adapts and transforms itself hereafter is written into the genre itself since its inception. An inkling of the protean development of the genre is suggested by the disputes over whether the *Bildungsroman* ever existed in its Dilthean clarity

of definition. At the outset, the *Bildungsroman*, in particular, closure in the *Bildungsroman*, was either undermined or overdetermined (depending on one's interpretation) by irony, authorial irony. How seriously does Goethe (or Farah) want us to take the improbability of the ending? Is it really plausible that Wilhelm Meister desired what the Tower Society plotted for him? Does Ebla really think freedom consists in the freedom to trade herself? In both novels there is an irony at work that suggests the resolution whereby morality emerges out of autonomous identity is only a temporary one. The ethics which seem to come from the autonomous self are provisional. It ushers in the subsequent ultimately triumphant idea of an "ethics" which is purely relational, which emerges out of the instability and openness of artistic form itself. This development in the history of the novel is replicated in the development of the idea of the individual in Farah's later works, to be explored in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3

The “Gynocentric” *Bildungsroman* : *Sardines and Gifts*

Autonomous personality development is so crucial to Farah’s vision that *Bildung* is an element of virtually every novel, even if the formation ideal is invoked only to be in some way challenged. Frequently, however, the challenge to autonomous development paradoxically affirms disengaged subjectivity. Baldly stated, all Farah’s novels are *Bildungsromane* which, whether classical or dissensual, naturalize and normalize the disengaged self. Critics observe similarly that there is almost no novel by Farah which does not share some generic affinity with the detective novel, the narrative form constituted around the interrogation of a mystery which must be solved. These dual generic affinities may not counteract each other. The central mystery which Farah’s oeuvre may address is the question of identity – “Who am I?” – a question explicitly posed by the boy protagonist, Askar, in *Maps*. Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self* observes that the question of identity, framed as an existential question cannot arise in non-modern cultures. He suggests, this “issue [the question of identity] cannot arise in the reflexive, person-related terms that it does for us [modern individuals]” (42). While in a non-individualist culture the question may be asked as a consequence of momentary amnesia – I temporarily forgot that I am the daughter of X or the griot of the village – in an individualist culture, the question is an index of a disengaged, interiorized self. The answer to the question, “Who am I?” in modernity, in the novel generally, and in Farah’s novels in particular, is an answer which originates seemingly wholly from within the subject himself. The appeal, “Who am I?”, the quest and the fulfillment are all apparently wholly internal.

From the beginning of his career, Farah's social commitment has been articulated through the discourse of the liberation of women. In various ways across his fiction and non-fiction, Farah stresses that only when women are free can society be free. In the previous chapter an attempt was made to show some of the contradictions inherent in expressing emancipation of woman through the individualist male genre of the idealist *Bildungsroman*. In *From a Crooked Rib*, the familiar contradiction of the form emerges when the narrative is compelled to rely on traditional ethical horizons in order to achieve closure. The genre negotiates this tension through introducing the element of irony. Responsive to the multiple limitations of narrating individual freedom through a genre which reconciles with tradition's apparent foreclosure of freedom, none of the subsequent novels is structured around the classical template. Similarly, the contradiction involved in the attempt to narrate woman's freedom through a male form which brings traditional plot closure in the form of marriage, proves insurmountable.

After *From a Crooked Rib*, Farah does not again rely on the pattern of the idealist *Bildungsroman* in its classical form defined by Dilthey. Development remains a key aspect in the subsequent novels, but development is refracted through paradigms which apparently respond to the gender and historical specificities of the classic genre. In significant ways, Farah's response replicates a broader reaction to the exigencies of the classic genre. In various ways, Farah's subsequent novels with central female protagonists seem to imitate the new patterns established by the female *Bildungsroman*. The novels in question are *Sardines*, *Gifts* and *Knots*. In what must be more than mere coincidence, each of these female novels of self-realization occur at the centre of the trilogies of which they form a part, sandwiched between novels with a male hero. (*Knots*, released in 2007, is Farah's most recent

publication, which in all likelihood is the second novel of Farah's third trilogy.) While these three novels in significant ways are sufficiently similar to be discussed in a single chapter, *Knots* engages with the question of the public sphere, a key element in what Charles Taylor terms the "modern social imaginary", an horizon against which Farah's novels appear to be conceived. While, *Sardines* and *Gifts* will be considered here, the analysis of *Knots* will be reserved for a later chapter. This chapter thus seeks to show that Farah's subsequent challenge in the later novels to the classic *Bildungsroman* paradoxically reaffirms the disengaged, autonomous subject, in part constituted by the idealist novel of formation.

The first part of the chapter analyzes the novel, *Sardines*. What is suggested is that while *Sardines* superficially displays the pattern of the female novel of development, in fact, the novel resolves the contradiction of the classic *Bildungsroman* by extending the powers of the self-creating subject to the instrumental construction also of the world inhabited by that subject.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the novel *Gifts*. This section explores the connection between various understandings of the concept of the gift to conceptions of the person and the person's relationship with society. It is suggested that this novel implicitly distances itself from the idealist resolution of the earlier "gynocentric" *Bildungsroman*, *Sardines*. The "pure" gift in this novel symbolically represents "pure" individualism, unfettered by the limit prescribed by the social. Since the wholly autonomous identity is a moral philosophical impossibility, *Gifts* is obliged to resurrect ironic closure as discussed in relation to *From a Crooked Rib*. But *Gifts* is also a female *Bildungsroman* which makes the transition to textuality which becomes the hallmark of Farah's later novels. *Gifts* ultimately

allows the irony of closure to reflect on itself. Textuality – the idea that “There is no outside-the-text” - is generated as consequence.

I Trends in the Female *Bildungsroman*

Even though the *Bildungsroman* in its classical form is critiqued as a consequence of the patriarchal, bourgeois limits of its representation of subjectivity (Abel and Hirsch 13, Felski, 122-123, O’Neale 25-27) it nevertheless remains a vital genre for female self-realization. If, as has been suggested earlier, the male form peters out in parody, the female form remains popular, reflected in the vast numbers of novels of female development. Authors Elizabeth Abel and Marianne Hirsch stress that the *Bildungsroman* remains a viable symbolic form in contemporary times for women since in various ways women remain unincorporated: “It is ‘the most salient form of literature’ for contemporary women writing about women” (13). Female *Bildungsromane* do not simply adopt the genre, they also in the process adapt it since, “Even the broadest definitions of the *Bildungsroman* presuppose a range of social options available only to men” (7). The authors suggest that if in the male form the protagonist’s quest is for reconciliation of individual desire and social convention, the struggle of the protagonist of the female *Bildungsroman* consists in the attempt “to voice any aspirations whatsoever” (7). In the nineteenth century European *Bildungsroman*, adultery is the only form of resistance, marriage is the only conceivable “happy ending”, while socially irreconciled development encounters the abrupt closure of suicide or death.

It is interesting, casting a backward glance, to contrast Farah’s first heroine, Ebla, discussed in the previous chapter with the various eighteenth and nineteenth century European heroines the authors consider. While “women in nineteenth century fiction are

generally unable to leave home for an independent life in the city” (Abel and Hirsch 8), for Ebla, leaving home is not only conceivable, but does not appear too fraught with life or personality threatening risk. If the patriarchal tradition is that which chains Ebla, its *mores* also represent the possibility of her freedom of movement. She is guaranteed safe passage with an all male caravan to the town of Belet Wene, even though the young man who escorts her into the town gives her sexually charged glances. Similarly, her male “cousin” in the town unquestioningly takes her in based on kinship obligations even though he conveniently uses her as midwife and nurse to his wife who has just given birth. It’s ironic that tradition, the “unthinking” practices from which Ebla flees, are also the enabling conditions of her escape. It’s also interesting that a wider range of options seem available to the postcolonial heroine as opposed to the nineteenth century European heroine.

Abel and Hirsch identify two narrative patterns in the female “Coming of Age” novel: The first is a continuous development from childhood to maturity and the second is an “awakening” later in life, usually after marriage. But with both types, the hallmarks of the female *Bildungsroman* are the substitution of “inner concentration for active accommodation, rebellion or withdrawal” (8) and a deeper social embedding of the protagonist in a community of other women (12).

Rita Felski suggests that the move away from the classical *Bildungsroman* among incorporated males is a consequence of a radical aesthetics of decentering of the autonomous self which, in actual social contexts, is not in fact politically radical for excluded groups. Felski confirms the key features of the female *Bildungsroman* identified by Abel and Hirsch but situates these not within a discourse of essential feminine difference from males, as implied by the former authors, but within the “ideological and discursive frameworks”

(Felski 123) which constitute these modes. In other words, the pattern established by the female *Bildungsroman* is not an index of women's essential difference from men, but an indication of women's marginalization which is addressed through the genre. For Felski, the contemporary female *Bildungsroman* develops the two patterns established by its nineteenth century predecessor. If the male hero has a voice and is free to participate in the rational-critical discourse of the public sphere, the heroine, by contrast, struggles to be heard. The apprenticeship type of novel traces the heroine's trajectory into the public sphere. The novel of awakening in the twentieth century involves an explicit rejection of (male) social norms of the public sphere. The heroine frequently abandons society in a Romantically inspired return to the true sources of nature. While the former type of novel is strongly represented in Farah's oeuvre, it is interesting that in the postcolonial context the latter, the novel of the return of the marginalized to nature as source, appears inconceivable.

An analysis of the *Bildungsromane* of black American female novelists notes the generic transformations above and augments the patterns established. These novels display altered conceptions of time and development. Time is not linear and teleological. Development does not reflect the childhood-adulthood dichotomy. Invoking John S Mbiti, what is reflected instead is an ontological sketch of an "African psyche": "Time is not an opponent lineally marking man's end. It is an accommodation in a circular journey between eternities. Likewise human age is not a measure of dichotomies between childhood and adulthood but is rather a seven-tiered lifetime developmental process" (O'Neale 36). As an aside, it is interesting that Farah does not draw upon this tradition at all.

The following general observations may be made of the twentieth-century gynocentric *Bildungsroman*: The stage on which the female novel of self-development is set

is often closed and constricted, frequently limited to a purely inner psychological self-fulfillment. The female novel of self-discovery rejects the “heterosexual romance plot” (Felski 122). Some form of physical separation from husband, family and society is prerequisite to self-knowledge (Felski 124). The gynocentric *Bildungsroman* generally begins when youth has ended, often after marriage. Strongly developed in the narrative is a supporting community of other women. The journey undertaken by the heroine does not involve social compromise. Instead, at the end of the journey, the woman is in a position to undertake oppositional activity.

While these critics make a very strong case for the psychological, social and political valency of the *Bildungsroman* form in the demarginalization of various excluded groups, what these analyses completely ignore is the prior and virtually invisible installation of the person as individual which the form itself in part constitutes. The classical *Bildungsroman a priori* proceeds from a conception of a disengaged subject (situated in nation-time and nation-space). The response in many of the variations on the classical structure is not to the idea of the subject as individual, but rather for the inclusion of significant others to individuality with the attendant modifications to individuality this entails. This is apparent from the “common ground” Abel and Hirsch claim is shared by variant novels of formation with the traditional *Bildungsroman*:

belief in a coherent self (although not necessarily an autonomous one); faith in the possibility of development (although change may be frustrated, may occur at different stages and rates, and may be concealed in the narrative); insistence on a time span in which development occurs (although the time span exist only in memory); and emphasis on a social context (even as an adversary) (14).

While a “coherent self” may complicate the Enlightenment “autonomous” self, it assumes the same fundamental disengagement from an external ethical orientation which the rational self inaugurates. “Development” thus remains the teleological transformation of the independent self out of its own moral sources. Time in the variant *Bildungsroman* is a response to the linear-historical (nation) time of the classical form and “social context” refers to Tönnies’s *Gesellschaft* based society or what Edward Said terms “affiliation”, which together constitute the modern social imaginary. Similar to Abel and Hirsch, Felski’s assertion of the radical political engagement of the variant *Bildungsroman* “proceeds from the assumption that autonomous selfhood is not an outmoded fiction but still a pressing political concern” (151). These rejoinders to the classical *Bildungsroman* operate upon the assumption that genre is simply an empty container into which new content can be filled, unpersuaded by Hayden White’s insight that form “already possesses a content prior to any actualization of it” (*The Content of the Form* xi). Privileging this genre operates to exclude other forms which may construe the subject in fundamentally different ways.

II *Sardines* as a Female *Bildungsroman*

On the face of it, *Sardines* might be construed as a novel which challenges the assumptions of the classical male *Bildungsroman*. If the hallmarks of the female novel of self-development are the restriction of action to small, enclosed spaces, explicit repudiation of stereotypical romance and marriage, some degree of physical separation from conventional confines to achieve self-realization, a more mature heroine supported by an enabling female network and closure which reveals the protagonist’s empowerment, then *Sardines* might be cited as an exemplary gynocentric *Bildungsroman*.

The canvas of *From a Crooked Rib* was an expansive one which depicted its protagonist's journey across semi-desert wastes through small town to city. The narrative of female development in *Sardines*, by contrast, is a cameo which sets its heroine in compressed relief against a city beneath the thrall of dictatorship. The novel tells the story of Medina, a leading member of the Mogadiscio "priviligentzia" who leaves the marital home since she is unable to compromise. She cannot compromise with her husband, Samater, who has acquiesced to the pressure placed upon him by the military regime. Unless he agreed to assume the post of Minister of Constructions, the regime would liquidate some of his kinsmen. Neither can Medina compromise with her mother-in-law, Idil, who came to live with them when her own daughter, Xaddia, put her out for interfering in her marital affairs. Idil insists upon a strict religious and traditional morality, which Samater and Medina do not observe. Soon after her installation in the home, Idil threatens that she will arrange for her granddaughter, Ubax, to undergo a traditional clitoridectomy and infibulation. Thereafter, Medina packs a few belongings, takes her child and relocates to her brother's apartment in the city. (The sequence of events is purely coincidental. The threat of her daughter's genital mutilation is not what actually motivates Medina to move as will be shown.)

Farah has remarked, "if you studied the structures of the novel, you could see that you could have done it in just two rooms" (Alden and Tremaine 56), presumably a room in Medina's own home and a room in her brother's home. Like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* which inspires Farah's novel, the more traditional developmental plot is contained in the protagonist's memory. Medina is the product of the union of her mother, Fatima bint Thabit, a Mogadiscian of Yemeni descent, and her father, Barkhadle, an orphan discovered on the steps of the Catholic church, "schooled in the Christian tradition in a country wholly Muslim

(*Sardines* 55). How this rather unlikely union between a Yemeni woman “bound hand and foot” and strangled by the strings of purdah, governed by a tyrannical despot of a father (a domestic reflection of the political tyranny of the Dictator) and an orphan of unknown cultural background, doubtless unacceptable to the ruthless father, came to be married is not explained by the novel. Similarly, the highly unlikely circumstance of Medina’s clitoridectomy and infibulation is not explained. The novel explicitly confirms that female genital mutilation is not part of the Yemeni tradition of the mother and the orphaned father, “a foreigner in his own country” (*Sardines* 55), is portrayed as a male feminist who certainly would not have forced upon his only daughter a tradition alien to his upbringing. But Medina *must* be infibulated to add persuasive force to the dichotomies of freedom and “unfreedom” established by the novel. Although Medina’s mother “lives as though inside a whale which hardly came ashore” (*Sardines* 6-7), the beautiful, intelligent Medina has a cosmopolitan upbringing in the glittering capitals of Europe.

The confined spaces to which the novel restricts itself is indexed in the title even before the narrative opens. *Sardines*, also the name of a Somali children’s game of hide-and seek, *dhundhunmashaw* (Vivan 790), alludes to the lack of privacy of life under dictatorship, the General’s incestuous hold on power concentrated among his clan family, the intimacy of female networks of support and the compressed space within which the narrative unfolds. The narrative opens with Medina’s highly charged, highly symbolic dream of “castles in the sky.” Medina constructs in her imagination a mansion which is wholly her own independent and autonomous construct, where she can be free. In what doubtless is an echo of Virginia Woolf’s essay of the same title, Medina wants a room of her own: “A room of one’s own. A country of one’s own. A century in which one was *not* a guest. A room in

which one was *not* a guest ...” (*Sardines* 3). The novel thus introduces itself as a narrative about women’s lack of freedom of movement in the closed, confined spaces available to them.

If the ending of *From a Crooked Rib* suggested acceptance of stereotypical gender roles in bourgeois companionate marriage – “Ebla welcomed his hot and warm world into her cool and calm kingdom” – then *Sardines* signals a determined refutation of this scenario. Medina and Samater do not represent gender stereotypes, in fact, their representation studiously reverses gender roles. Samater is the family cook and dishwasher. The family bank account is in Medina’s name. Medina’s development in the novel is motivated, but it does not in any way appear motivated by heterosexual romance. The fact that Medina’s self-discovery is detached from traditional marriage is suggested by her wish that her husband prove himself by having an adulterous affair after she leaves him.

If some degree of separation is pre-requisite in the female novel of self-knowledge, then *Sardines* complies. As already indicated, Medina moves out of the highly charged atmosphere of the marital home to the more neutral space of her brother’s apartment to find herself.

Like many other gynocentric *Bildungsromane*, the narrative relinquishes the magnetism of youth for the more mature stage of life after marriage, traditionally marking closure in the classic novel of development.

Sardines also sketches in fine detail the lives of the women who surround Medina and who in various ways provide indispensable support for women who narrate their own lives. For example, when Amina, the daughter of a minister in the government of the Dictator, is gang raped and impregnated as an act of political revenge against the regime,

Amina is able to refuse the sop thrown to her by her cowardly father who cannot challenge the General since she knows she can count on the assistance of Medina and her group.

Closure in *Sardines* also seems very emphatically to affirm self-realization in Medina's final empowerment:

Medina would supplement her intellectual activities – her translations and original writings with these social responsibilities. With one hand she would revise her translations and continue to write; with the other, she would nurse, medicate and do the social work she had always meant to. A guest, was she still a guest? she asked herself. No, she was definitely no longer a guest in her own country (*Sardines* 250).

In all the ways noted above - compression of action, rejection of conventional marriage, separation and a mature heroine in a nurturing female network - the novel seems to conform to the pattern established by female narrative resistance to the classical male *Bildungsroman*.

Despite the convincing parallels between Farah's novel and the paradigm established by the female novel of self-discovery, *Sardines* categorically is *not* a gynocentric *Bildungsroman*. The female novel of self-development is essentially an "optimistic" genre, testimony to the incorporation or empowerment of the marginalized. While an element of optimism is revealed in closure, as suggested by the quotation above, the happy ending is not the product of the heroine's incorporation or empowerment, since Medina possesses agency *ab initio*. Medina is not any more marginalized than any of the men in her circle. When she is excluded, it is on her own instigation.

However, there is development in the novel. That development springs from the narrative attempt to render the contradiction of the male *Bildungsroman* uncontradictory. The problem of individualist self-development in *From a Crooked Rib* was the necessity of

rearguard compromise with the morality of tradition. *Sardines*, by contrast, seeks the realization of a purely self-authoring authority. The challenge for Medina, her development, involves negotiating a *resistance* to the authority of dictatorship in the historical juncture in which she finds herself, but also *resistance* to tradition and religion. This resistance must not, however, become authoritarian. In other words, the challenge for the novel is to educate both Medina and its readership in a morality which is not repressive and authoritarian since it emerges as a “natural” response to context from within the self. Medina’s *Bildung* will be complete when she is able to resist the ideology of the dictatorship from a position which is unideological. She will have reached self-knowledge when she can challenge the irrationality of religion and tradition from reason which constitutively proves its own veracity. The end of Medina’s *Bildung* is the resolution of the contradiction of the idealist *Bildungsroman* and, by extension, the resolution of the contradiction of the novel and, by extension, the resolution of the contradiction of modernity. The project of development in *Sardines* is the project of presenting “totality” as self-authoring, self-validating and ultimately self-negating as “totality”. The project of *Sardines* is totality which masks itself as pure freedom.

The classical *Bildungsroman*, represented by *From a Crooked Rib*, develops out of the attempt to present the socialization of the self-authoring individual as the product of “free” choice. *Sardines* as variant idealist *Bildungsroman* takes the inevitable next step. The ironic tone of closure in *From a Crooked Rib* signals one negotiation of a potentially failed project. *Sardines* attempts to surmount the failure of the autonomous individual’s reconciliation with society by the more ambitious project of self-authoring both subjectivity *and society*. In *Sardines* this is symbolized by Medina’s quest for “a room of her own”: “A room of one’s own. A country of one’s own. A century in which one was *not* a guest. A

room in which one was *not* a guest. ...” (*Sardines* 3). The constant refrain of “a room of one’s own” through the novel clearly alludes to Virginia Woolf’s essay of the same title. If Woolf’s heroine, Shakespeare’s sister Judith, had a room of her own which she could lock and five hundred pounds a year, she probably would not have had to run away from home, submit to male overtures to find a place in the theatre and finally kill “herself one winter’s night” (Woolf 74). Alice Walker, incorporating the history of American slavery, rhetorically points out the race and class blindness of Virginia Woolf’s seemingly universal formulation in relation to the black female artist: “What then are we to make of Phyllis Wheatley, a slave, who owned not even herself?” (Walker 34) Woolf’s slogan taken up by Medina obscures the fact that for many women the struggle is not so much for a room of one’s own as it is simply to “own” one’s own body and find material means of survival. By implication also in an appeal for a “room of one’s own” to pursue artistic self-realization, is a consequent occlusion of women’s work. Ian Watt suggests that Woolf’s admiration for Defoe’s character, Moll Flanders, may proceed from the distance Moll manages to put between herself and traditional women’s work: “... one cannot help but feel that Virginia Woolf’s admiration for her [Moll Flanders] was largely due to admiration of a heroine who so fully realized one of the ideals of feminism: freedom from any involuntary involvement in the feminine role” (Watt 118). One might more accurately replace Watt’s “feminism” with “feminist individualism”. So far from valuing women’s work, a “room of one’s own” creates a space for the construction as individual of the middle class woman in the image of the middle class male as individual. Jean Railla in “A Broom of One’s Own” points out also the economic and symbolic devaluing of traditional women’s work inherent in the feminist individualist quest for a room of one’s own which really only provides a woman with the

space and the privacy to construct an individuality gendered male. Ironically, as Nancy Armstrong has shown in *Domestic Fictions*, it is middle class women who perfect the individualist formation ideal. Most eighteenth century novelists were women and as Ian Watt suggests “feminine sensibility” seemed to embody the rational-empirical ideal represented in the novel (310-1).

However, in the Woolf essay the room desired was the physical and psychological space for self-expression of the female artist. In *Sardines* the room more fundamentally represents the freedom of the already independent, autonomous self to construct a new world. Medina’s object is to have not just a room, but a room of her own, which she constructs to her own design.

Medina’s struggle is not for a room of her own in Woolf’s sense since as the text states at the outset, “She had a room of her own” (*Sardines* 3). Medina’s voyage, unlike that of other female heroines, is not from a space where she is not heard to a space where she is empowered to articulate resistance. From narrative opening to narrative closure, Medina possesses a freedom at odds with the stereotypes of oppressed Somali womanhood, or even, for that matter, Somali manhood. The privilege of her liberated upbringing is encapsulated in the following retrospective vignette:

Medina’s father had been an ambassador ... Medina talking about her past put it this way: “I prostrated before the powers of femininity at the age of thirteen in a hotel in Stockholm, looking like an over-nourished pet. I stood on the kerb of a cobbled street waving to the chariot which carried my father away into the winter silhouette of a Scandinavian night. ... At fourteen, New York women’s magazines welcomed her as the daughter of the most well-known African ambassador at the UN. Paris a year later, pampered her with token presents, a hand-delivery of “Joy” perfume signed by the master himself. ... (*Sardines*) 179.

As Alden and Tremaine and Okonkwo suggest about Medina, she has the power to imagine herself outside of Ebla's impasse by virtue of her education. (Ebla, however, has not done too badly for herself – in this novel, she is mother to Sagal, Medina's protégé, divorced from Awill from whom she obtained custody of Sagal, despite doubts about paternity, and owner of a five bedroomed house and shop, courtesy of a second husband whom she outlived). Medina has a degree in journalism from an Italian university and enjoys a polyglot command over Somali, of course, and four European languages as well as a lesser fluency in Spanish and Arabic. Not only does Medina have a room of her own, she also, unusually, owns the marital home, controls the joint bank account and has her own car. Her husband, Samater, studiously performs the stereotypical woman's work (to his mother's profound disgust). He is the family dishwasher and cook. Medina's predicament is not the compromised life of a Mrs Dalloway, the eponymous heroine of a novel which clearly informs *Sardines*. Indeed, Medina is not excluded from the centres of power. Medina is the successful feminist individualist who has broken the male hold on power. She is the only female member of the underground organization of ten which opposes the General and "was almost always a woman among men, sharing things with them, drinks, reading the same books as they, borrowing or lending them ideas" (*Sardines* 83).

So profound is the power attributed to Medina that she is associated with Prometheus, the Titan who stole fire from the gods and also saved mankind from authoritarian extinction by the god, Zeus. This association is both implicit and explicit. Implicitly, fire is symbolically employed throughout the text to represent Medina. In this link with Prometheus, Medina is associated both with Prometheus as apotheosis of Enlightenment Man and Prometheus as symbol of the artist, alluding also to Joyce's Stephen

Dedalus. Explicitly, the protagonist is identified with Prometheus in the observation of Medina's protégé, Sagal, that with power/fire concentrated in the hands of the Dictator, "A Promethean intervention is in order!" (*Sardines* 115). Medina alone can change the course of history.

Medina's lack of freedom, when it occurs, is not a consequence of her sex. It is a consequence of life under a dictatorship which affects men and women alike. But even her particular restriction by the military regime appears more a consequence of her own strategic maneuvering than of victimhood. Medina is appointed editor of the national daily and within the space of just four days, through "daredevil" editorial changes that might be contemplated only by a "mad person" (*Sardines* 84), Medina manages to get herself sacked with a ban on publication of her work. The restriction imposed upon Medina is of much lesser magnitude than the curtailment of freedom of the male characters, some of whom are imprisoned or killed, or like her husband, Samater, tortured by the regime.

Bildung is a patently clear element of the structure of the narrative, but as has been shown, it is not the self-discovery of the woman who has been denied her freedom. The Epilogue repeatedly refers to Medina's development as a "journey", a journey after which she returns home.

A frequently noted aspect of the *Bildungsroman* is the existence in the narrative of an alter-ego for the *Bildungsheld*, a double against whom the protagonist's development may be measured. There is a developmental double or alter-ego in *Sardines* also. In *Sardines*, this role is played by Ebla's daughter, Sagal. If the dominant trope in Medina's textual representation is fire, the metaphors which surround Sagal are the metaphors associated with water. There is an element of autogenesis in the birth of both Medina and Sagal seen against

the backdrop of patrilinear Somali society. Right to the end of this novel also, the identity of the man who impregnated Ebla remains uncertain, so in a sense, Sagal has no father.

Medina's father, Barkhadle, an orphan left on the steps of the Catholic church, cannot trace clan lineage. Thus Medina also is without a father since she is without clan. While Sagal's failed *Bildung* is revealed in the final chapter of the novel, Medina's successful *Bildung* is revealed in the Epilogue.

Before the final touch is placed on the portrait of each of these characters, they experience an autotelic mirror moment: For Sagal it occurs when she sees her reflection, the "distorted shadow" of which she stares at "with horror", in the pool before the swimming competition (*Sardines* 230). Medina stares at the "full-length mirror" before the closing sequence imagining her development as a child, but in a suggestive allusion to Gunter Grass's *Tin Drum*, she is a child "who willed not to grow; in the distance a tin drum was beaten and to its rhythm she marched *one-two-three, three-two-one, one-three-two*" (*Sardines* 241). The drumming image is significant also with closure of Sagal's development, but with Sagal the discordant drumming suggests failed *Bildung*: "Would somebody loosen the braced drum, confiscate the drumsticks and break them into smaller pieces so they would create no noise and wouldn't talk the secret of the drummer? If this continued for another second, she would faint" (*Sardines* 239).

But not everyone in the novel, it appears has the same potential for development, even if, as in Sagal's case, it is a failed formation. Medina is often contrasted with two other women, her mother, Fatima bint Thabit, and her mother-in-law, Idil. The former is a Yemeni woman, who lives "as though inside a whale" and who is "chained ankle and wrist and foot to the permanence of her homestead". This woman, "strangled with the strings of purdah"

represents Arab-Islamic tradition. Medina's mother-in-law, Idil, represents Somali-Islamic tradition. Her lifestyle is nomadic and, having lost her husband who died "serving the Italians" (*Sardines* 77), she is economically independent. Idil, however, comes to represent the power of Somali traditional patriarchy which can be exercised by either sex and which, refracted through a national lens, supports the dictatorship.

While the "democratic openness" of Farah's novel allows everyone to be heard, including the articulate, dissensual voices of Idil and Fatima bint Thabit, not all characters have the same potential for development. This occurs not because "development" contradicts the worldviews of these two characters, but because the novel cannot recognize development which orients itself against a social and transcendental framework and does not emerge from the disengaged self. The democratic openness of the text thus allows *representation* of the mother and mother-in-law, but not their *development*. Lack of development in this respect is a symptom of the tendency to see all worldviews explicit in their external moral orientation as static and unchanging.

The polyphony of the text is deceptive in that its spirit of openness masks authorial control over the content of speech. On the question of female genital mutilation, tradition as represented by Idil in *Sardines* is a non-negotiable cul-de-sac. The text occludes the transformations, the development, which occurs when paradigms of ethical horizons externally defined come up against each other. Regarding clitoridectomy and infibulation, one may cite the example of Somali oral poetry which, locating tradition within the higher order of religion, decries the practice in the name of justice. Both the poem, "Hufane" by male poet 'Umar Ma'allin and the untitled poem by female poet Dahabo Eline Muse (Dahabo Farah Hassan et al) challenge female genital mutilation by setting the social

morality of tradition against the transcendental morality of religion. Monologia in the sheep's skin of polyphony here seems more fraught than explicit monologia.

While Idil and Fatima bint Thabit in the spirit of democracy gain admission to the novel as *types* of the ideologies they stand for, other characters do not similarly qualify for representation. It is salutary to recall Raymond Williams's observations on the ideological nature of conventions. Minor characters conventionally appear in the text "as instrumental [...] merely environmental [...] or indeed as essentially absent" (Williams 175). Emile Durkheim furthermore, in *The Division of Labour in Society* suggests that, "The more primitive societies are, the more resemblances there are among the individuals who compose them. [...] On the other hand, among civilized peoples, two individuals are distinguishable from each other at a glance, and no preparation is needed for such an observation" (133-4). These observations are true of the representations of Medina's cousins whose lives are literally closed within the apparent hidebound absolutisms and superstitions of tradition.

On a visit to her mother, a number of Medina's cousins return to the extended family home. Because of their *purdah*, on the street they are unidentifiable, they are like ghosts. One cannot tell the one from the other. When they return home, they file in like sheep, one by one, and peel off their *purdah*. They are no longer ghostly and mysterious, but to Medina, they are still completely unidentifiable. "Do you remember me?" asks a woman, described as "completely shapeless", of Medina. But Medina does not remember her nor any of the others, and their questions are dismissed as idle gossip-mongering. For Medina, these women live a "caged existence" as though they "lived in the innards of a whale which hardly went ashore." (Sardines 145). (Three days and three nights in the innards of a whale might encompass a room of one's own for transcendental self-realization; but this is another

story the novel cannot tell.) This wholly unindividuated mass of covered Arab cousins and elsewhere thorn-scratched Somali cousins who inexpressively inhabit the pages of *Sardines* form the matrix against which the highly individuated Medina comes to matter.

When the novel opens, Medina already represents the fulfillment of the *Humanitätsideal* which is the outcome of *Bildung*. She is the autonomous, free subject, who potentially might integrate in a relationship of association into a society of other independent subjects. Medina's dilemma in the postcolonial nation in which she discovers herself is that other fully realized individuals are few and far between. As a consequence, she needs to construct them. Medina's imperative is to transform *persons* into Edward Said's definition of novelistic characters: "[...] thus the novelistic character is conceived as a challenge to repetition, a rupture in the duty imposed on all men to breed and multiply, to *create and recreate oneself unremittingly and repeatedly*" (emphasis added) (Said 117). In short, Medina must transform a society where "repetition" occurs by "filiation" into a society based on "repetition" by "affiliation" (Said *World, Text, Critic* 110-2), she needs, in short, to hasten the process of *Bildung*. Much like the colonial authorities of the Raj, considered by Gauri Viswanathan, who replace naked power with masked conquest, a sound literary education is employed to forge subjects. Medina assumes responsibility for the development of many of the other characters in the novel through the dissemination of a particular kind of literature and films. Medina, like Wilhelm Meister's Society of the Tower, is in the business of constructing individuals who are in a position to choose "freely" what Medina has prescribed for them. Among her charges are her husband, Samater, her young protégés, Amina and Sagal, and also her daughter, Ubax.

In Samater, Medina wishes to develop independence. He is dependent upon her and upon traditional and postcolonial systems of authority. He tolerates the intolerant habits of his Somali mother and bows in obeisance to his Yemeni mother-in-law. He is a “bender of head.” He compromises with the regime which threatens the life and liberty of his clansmen and becomes the Dictator’s Minister of Constructions. During their courtship in Italy where they both studied, Samater has “difficulty adopting his nomadic ways to her uninhibited sophistication.” Medina says to him: “You will have to change your nomad ways.” She then makes him “read the world’s classics”, introduces him to “music, jazz, and to cinema.” She takes him “to see *Bicycle Thieves*, *Casablanca* and a series of Chaplin classics. She took him by the hand and led him through life’s unread guides” (*Sardines* 178).

In a similar way Medina channels the life of the two young women in her circle, Amina and Sagal. Medina’s endeavours with Amina are more focused after her politically motivated gang rape. The kind of literature Medina gives her shows the similar ways in which political and patriarchal power operate, so that Amina is led to see that every rape is political. When Amina compromises with her father who is a minister in the Dictator’s cabinet, Medina summarily excludes her from her circle. Medina’s relationship with Sagal is a little more complicated. Sagal is both Medina’s bridge with her youth and the bridge to the future. Linked through the opposite tropes of fire and water, Medina’s development and Sagal’s *Bildung* may be contrapuntally interpreted. The books Medina gives Sagal are a fascinating instance of the mise-en-abyme tableau in the *Bildungsroman*, noted by Joe Slaughter (“Enabling Fictions” 1418), where the *Bildungsheld* reads other *Bildungsromane*. The books Medina gives Sagal are *Oblomov* and “Flann O’ Brien’s *Swim-At-Two-Birds*

[sic]” (*Sardines* 37). Sagal has promised Medina furthermore that she will read the O’Brien after the Goncharov “for comparison” (*Sardines* 37).

The invocation of *Oblomov* takes *Bildungsroman* self-reflexivity to vertiginous depths. *Oblomov* is the nineteenth century *Bildungsroman* by the Russian author Goncharov, which had such impact on the Russian society of its time that it spawned a Russian neologism, *Oblomovshchina*, which signifies the pathological indolence of its eponymous anti-hero. Goncharov incidentally was the author of only four works all of which, including a travelogue, *Frigate Pallas*, have been identified as *Bildungsromane* (Rubins and Yevsukov). (*Frigate Pallas*, incidentally, is a *Bildungsroman* writ on a global scale, with different peoples at various evolutionary stages of *Bildung*.) Goncharov himself was deeply immersed in European Enlightenment culture (Rubins and Yevsukov) as the references to Wieland, Herder and Goethe in *Oblomov* suggest (153, 470). The *Bildung* of the central character, Oblomov, is a failed development, hardly surprising for a character whose journey in life rarely takes him beyond his bed. Oblomov’s failed development is calibrated against the successful *Bildung* of his double, his (not coincidentally) German friend, Stolz. It is also contrasted with the Romantic development of the young woman, Olga, whom Oblomov loses to Stolz. Olga is the “beautiful soul” whom her husband, Stolz, in his realist pragmatism needs to assure that she has “completed the circle of life” (*Oblomov* 477), has “reached maturity, the time of life when one stops growing ... when there are no riddles left and the whole of life is seen plainly. ...” (*Oblomov* 481). [Stolz also in attempting to console his wife suggests that the anguish she experiences is the price “one has to pay for Prometheus’s fire” (482). The spark which has been stolen from the gods thus represents the new, searching questing, modern individual. As has been noted above, Medina is the Somali

Prometheus who challenges the authority of the Dictator.] Oblomovism is Goncharov's explanation for the failed *Bildung* of the Russian people, why they cannot follow the precepts of the European Enlightenment. Failed *Bildung* of the traditional Russian landed gentry, Oblomovism, is also the reason, underscoring Moretti's conviction of the reformist nature of the genre, for the Revolution of 1917.

If Goncharov *laments* failed Russian entry into modernity, just less than a century later from the island on the Western periphery, Flann O'Brien *laughs* at his hero's failed *Bildung*. Shea suggests that the ending of *At Swim-Two-Birds* parodies "one of the two traditional endings of the *Bildungsroman* in which a recalcitrant youth is finally reconciled with the prevailing adult community" (276). These then are the books which Medina gives to her protégé, Sagal. Whether these *Bildungsromane* decry a failure to develop or parody the Enlightenment ideal, they both assume a self-begetting individualism.

Medina's other charge is her eight year old daughter, Ubx. Medina refuses to allow her daughter to attend any of the state-run schools since she will be exposed to the indoctrination of the Dictator. Instead, Medina chooses to educate her daughter herself. Richard A. Barney, while acknowledging the cross-fertilization of British and European literary developments, locates the origin of the English *Bildungsroman* more specifically in the *pedagogic* treatises of the eighteenth century rather than in German models. The German distinction between *Bildung*, "formation" and *Erziehung*, "education", in this context tends to be broken down (17).

The thrust of Medina's pedagogic strategy is to give Ubx stories to read. The stories Ubx is given are world classics. But Ubx does not read them in the original. They are Medina's translations for which Ubx forms the limited audience of one since Medina is

subject to a ban on publication. A key story in Uba's formation is Medina's version of an Igbo oral tale which she adapts from Achebe's written version in *Things Fall Apart*. In both novels, the story is one told by a mother to a daughter, educating a new generation in the ways of life. But, while in *Things Fall Apart* Ekwefi's is an oral tale told verbally to her daughter who responds verbally with another story completing a circuit of giving and receiving, Medina's is a written interpretation of a written story which Uba must read herself. While the context of the former induction is both social and sociable, the latter is an individual, solitary exercise. While the former story forms part of a repertoire of stories which suggests shared values and understandings, which enables the daughter's return of a story which she heard from a co-mother/sibling/friend/grandparent to the mother, Uba is not similarly enabled. (Interestingly, Uba does crayon drawings which Medina then interprets.)

The story in question is a trickster tale about a tortoise who cheats the birds out of a feast in the sky hosted by the gods. He tells them that for the auspicious occasion they have to take on new names. He will call himself "All of You". In response to the tortoise's preemptive enquiry regarding who the feast is for, the host replies "For all of you". The tale thus is about wiliness and greed which ultimately meet retribution when the rest of the birds plan a nasty revenge on the tortoise. (The tail end of the story is also a cosmogony myth.) Medina gives the Igbo tale which is unnamed in *Things Fall Apart* the interpretive title "He", a clear allusion to the Dictator and his cunning manipulation of and personal accumulation of power. The context in which Uba is exposed to the story and Medina's individualizing interpretation, which robs the tale of its punch at the moment which matters most as described above, turns the narrative from one which teaches a virtue, "Do not be greedy",

into a doctrine where virtue consists in the *process* of determining meaning in a radically destabilized text. Ubax never really gets to the bottom of the story. It appears she is reading it from the beginning to the end of the novel, where still she walks around with the stapled pages, “pretending to read them.” (*Sardines* 219).

Ubax is educated in the meaning of life. It is an education which plots, in all the multiple nuances of the word, the discovery of meaning in her self. She must freely discover her uniqueness, her independence, her originality. It is in the script her mother has written for her. Ubax cannot remember the title of the novel from which Medina drew the story which she calls “He”:

“At your age you should have a better memory,” Medina commented.

“You want me to be just like you, remember the titles of all the books I see, remember every story anybody tells me, remember who said what to whom. Leave me alone. I’m only eight years old.”

...

“Of course I want you to be like me. But I want you to grow up healthy and independent. I want you to do what you please.”

“Why don’t you let me go and play with Abucar, Omar and Sofia?”

“When you come home, your language suffers from lack of originality. You keep repeating yourself, saying the same thing. I want you to speak like an enlightened child.”

“Why don’t you let me go to school like the other children then?”

“Because schools teach you nothing but sycophancy and praise names of the General. And because I can teach you better than they. ...” (*Sardines* 13).

These are some of the paradoxes of *Bildung*: Achieving Medina’s personality ideal will allow Ubax to be “independent”. Ubax is trained to be “independent.” This reveals pre-existent “autonomy.” Ubax will be taught to be original, to reveal the uniqueness which is

latent. She will be able to lay claim to an originality unfettered by repetition. Like others with free and full personality, she will be the same in her uniqueness. Through presenting Ubx's resistance to development, the text may be acknowledging an awareness of these reservations. Ultimately, however, in declaring Medina's closing resolution triumphant, polyphony is subsumed in monologia.

Criticism and resistance to injustice, independence and freedom do not appear possible in the text for the "*subiectum*" beneath the heel of repression who are not yet subjects. Apparently, they all sing the praise names of the General. But the text allows a little slip. One of the other reasons Medina does not allow Ubx to play in the streets is because the other children call the General "deprecatory anatomical nicknames" (*Sardines* 11). The General's control of an essentially passive and docile Somali society which the text otherwise presents as absolute thus is revealed to be a product of a political vision in which there is no space for anything but individual resistance. Collective social resistance, a resistance grounded in what Tönnies refers to as *Gemeinschaft* rather than *Gesellschaft*, or what Said interprets as "filiation" rather than "affiliation" is occluded in the novel, revealed only in this one elusive glimpse.

Since the novel cannot represent collective resistance, the focus instead is on the group of ten who oppose the General. While the story of one of the ten, Loyaan, is narrated in the first novel of the trilogy, *Sweet and Sour Milk*, it is only Medina's story which is foregrounded in this book. Of the ten, she is the only one who remains free, independent and, most importantly, uncompromised:

... Medina ... was counting to herself the names of *the ten* who began with her this arduous journey which they all hoped in their different ways would enable them to give political expression to their lives, their education, their dreams. Some had

survived this terrible journey of self-discovery through sheer manoeuvring and tact; some failed the test and ended up unhappy and compromised; others encountered the naked violence of power and died ... (*Sardines* 44).

Medina is not one of those who has been incarcerated and killed. Neither is she one of those who has compromised.

If Medina from the start represents the fulfillment of the *Humanitätsideal*, in what then does her *Bildung* consist? Medina's development is expressed through the metaphors of belonging and unbelonging, being at home or being a guest, being domiciled or being in exile. When the narrative opens, Medina experiences herself in various social and geographical contexts as a guest. She is a guest in all of the traditions at whose confluence she comes into being. She is a guest in the Arab-Islamic tradition of her mother, a guest in the Somali-Islamic tradition of her mother-in-law, a guest in the tribal dictatorship. When in Europe, she is the African guest not qualified by her origin to comment on the Marxist-Leninist inspired ideology of the '68 student rebellion. But Marxist-Leninists, represented by the Italian journalist, Sandra, are eminently qualified to interfere in Somali politics. As an African, she is also a guest in the Western technology of the twentieth-century. So even though Medina has a room of her own in the house which belongs to her, in fundamental ways she is a guest. (She does, not however, perceive the modern identity into which she has been inducted as alienating, since it "tautologically-teleologically" presents itself as simply releasing the true self from the bondage of tradition or totality.)

Her quest in the novel is to find a space where she is at home. The stage by stage development she passes through is one which allows her to negotiate a position from which she is able to resist authority without herself becoming authoritarian. In other words, alternately refracted, she needs to construct a code of conduct, a morality, an ethics

constituted absolutely out of individual freedom which does not impose individual obligation. Paradoxically, Medina needs to *form* Uba, Sagal, Amina and Samater, according to a strategy where “form” as a noun masks “form” as a transitive verb, “to give form.” The individuality constructed must appear simply to be a realization of inherent potential. Expressed as a political ideology, Medina’s view is one which privileges individual resistance to an individualistic understanding of political oppression. Medina’s understanding of Somali politics is an almost megalomaniac perception of individual will which has the potential to bring down authority: “The General’s power and I are like two lizards engaged in a varanian dance of death; we are two duelists dancing a tarantella in which they challenge their own destiny” (*Sardines* 45).

Ebla in *From a Crooked Rib* also in fundamental ways is a “guest” in the tradition into which she is born. However, while Ebla’s individual freedom is reined in at closure by traditional plot, Medina seeks to evade the central contradiction of individualism through constructing, building, not only herself, but also the world around her. If finally Ebla is trapped by society, Medina will escape the trap through constructing society also in her own image. The novel cannot avoid the circle of life built into the *Bildungsroman* form. What it does instead is to project both the individual life and the meaning of life as both up for construction by the autonomous artificer.

The novel ends where it begins, with one significant difference: Medina’s development starts and ends in the same place – in the Mogadiscio home which she owns. At the beginning of the narrative she is a guest in her own home, since the mutually implicating authority of her mother-in-law and the Dictator infiltrate her space. She thus dreams the existence of a space which is her own, “She reconstructed the story from the beginning. She

worked it into a set of pyramids which served as foundations for one another. [...] She then built mansions on top of it all, mansions as large as her imagination and with lots of chambers [...]” (*Sardines* 2). Medina’s dream may allude to Keats’s “metaphor of a many-chambered mansion” (Buckley 1) to represent the development from childhood to maturity. Ultimately, it is the room which she allots to her core self which becomes the central symbol of the novel.

It is fascinating how the architectural metaphor reflects the ambiguity of modern selfhood. The “room of one’s own” is the architectural expression of the “audience-oriented” (Habermas 49) privacy constituted in the eighteenth century bourgeois home. Habermas refers to Riehl’s observations on the process of privatization which, “made the house more of a home for each individual, but left less room for the family as a whole” (45). This ideal is realized in the development in the nineteenth century of the “suburb.” Ian Watt cites Lewis Mumford’s *The Culture of Cities* (1945) which suggests that “the suburb is a ‘collective attempt to live a private life’; it is dedicated to an essentially feminine ideal of quiet domesticity and selective personal relationships which could only be portrayed in the novel” (194). A “room of her own” is also the feminist individualist expression of the artistic freedom which privacy allows. Ironically “a room of one’s own” is also the bequest of Bentham’s Panopticon, the symbol for Michel Foucault of modern methods of individual disciplinary surveillance and reform.

While at the beginning of the novel, the room is only a dream, at the end it becomes reality. What allows this development? It is allowed by Medina’s self-constituting proof that she has resisted without herself becoming an oppressive authority, like the authority of Somali traditional society and the postcolonial dictatorship. How is Medina’s resistance

without relinquishing freedom measured? Her journey which takes her from her own home to that of her brother has repercussions. It provokes her husband, Samater, to throw his mother, Idil, out. This outrage against tradition is met with the ire of the Dictator. Samater, who compromised with the regime, now loses his job. Once again he becomes autonomous. To prove his independence, he also moves out of Medina's house, has an affair and opens his own bank account. In other words, Medina has successfully resisted various authorities, she has challenged Idil and the General, without herself becoming authoritarian. She has constituted her idea of a higher order without imposing any moral obligation on anyone. Samater was simply responding to the "truth" deep within him, the "truth" which Medina's literary education of her husband helped to constitute. Medina is able at the end of the novel to return to her own home and complete the ring of life since Idil has left and Samater's formation is complete. She is able to return since the imaginary room, symbol of her untrammelled self, through literary transfiguration, has become more real than Somali reality:

A guest, was she still a guest? She asked herself. No, she was definitely no longer a guest in her own country. [...] Medina a hostess? Why, when she altered the position of the chair the house fell in on her and the ground shook with seismic determination. No, she wasn't a guest any more. She was a full and active participant in the history of her country (*Sardines* 250).

The structure which Medina autonomously builds in her own imagination has the marvelous and megalomaniac potential to shake Somalia "with seismic determination." But, of course, nothing much has changed. The General remains in power, a power bodily endured by Samater who is tortured. And Medina remains alienated from the respective traditions represented by her mother and mother-in-law. The idyll is complete when Medina, the hostess, leads Samater by the hand and gestures to Ubax to join a reconstituted nuclear

family with Medina again at the head. If Woolf needed to kill the “Angel in the House” in order to express herself (“Professions for Women” 79), Medina similarly has to “kill” the “Angel” in her home – in this case in the form of a man, Samater – who must be tortured by the regime for Medina’s self-fulfillment to be accomplished. *Bildung* thus occurs at the expense of the literally broken man, the unusually acquiescent child and the numerous country and *purdah*-covered cousins whose alternative individualities cannot be accommodated in *Sardines*. Neither can their individualities be accommodated in the *Bildungsroman* nor in the novel, since these selfhoods orient themselves against an external horizon.

Thus *Sardines*, far from resisting the assumptions of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, instead, takes *Bildungsroman* assumptions about the representation of the person apparently a step closer towards reconciliation of contradiction.

III The Subject and Economies of Exchange in *Gifts*

Ebla represents the principle of individual freedom trapped in the social circle of life. Medina’s triumph, by contrast, is the successful reduction of the circle to a pure self-generating point of her own construction. Duniya, the protagonist of *Gifts*, projects the contradiction which lies at the heart of the moral philosophy of individual freedom onto narrative itself. The only pure gift in *Gifts* is the truth of non-truth which constitutes the art of the novel.

There is a clear *Bildungsroman* element in *Gifts* which again goes unrecognized in criticism of this particular novel. There are textual clues which clearly allude to the genre of the novel of formation. One of the characters in the novel is a medical doctor who translates

into Somali “great European classics” (*Gifts* 96), including the works of Goethe, the apotheosis of the classical genre. There is reference at the end also to the “journeys” various characters have to take to the “destination” of self-fulfillment. Like *Sardines*, *Gifts* superficially appears to follow the pattern of the gynocentric *Bildungsroman*. The heroine, a senior nurse at a Mogadiscio maternity hospital, begins her journey to self-discovery not in youth, but in maturity as the once widowed, once divorced mother of three children. Unlike Medina, she is not a fully empowered, materially independent woman. While Medina’s story is set at the height of the Dictator’s power, Duniya’s story is set towards the tail end of Barre’s power, against the backdrop of a Mogadiscio with rampant crime and commodity shortages. Duniya and family are able to enjoy a middle class lifestyle thanks to the dollar remittances of Duniya’s brother, Abshir.

Duniya’s journey towards self-realization is crucially tied to an understanding of what constitutes a gift. Duniya’s development is from a state where she literally is a gift, property to be gratuitously passed on, to a state where she possesses the autonomy to make a gift. But gifts in the novel bear a significance wider than Duniya’s personal progression. Gifts in various forms appear to subtend virtually all relationships in the narrative. The text, furthermore, is a collage of different genres whose full significance depends on juxtaposition. The narrative is interspersed with dream sequences, folk tales and newspaper articles. The newspaper articles, in particular, widen the angle of focus. As with *From a Crooked Rib*, the woman’s story appears to bear the burden of a national allegory. In the same way that gifts operate to keep Duniya dependent, the self-interested motives and manipulation of foreign aid in Somalia appear both to entrench corrupt leadership and keep the country underdeveloped.

Farah acknowledges the novel's central theoretical inspiration to lie in Marcel Mauss's *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, an anthropological study of the gift economies of Polynesian and Melanesian peoples. "Pure" gift economies operate before the use of money, "minted and inscribed" (Mauss 4). Mauss describes the gift economy, the "potlatch", as a total system of reciprocity whereby the clan head passes on "everything – food, women, children, property, talismans, land, labour services, priestly functions and ranks" (14) in an agonistic exchange with other chiefs. The gift economy involves three themes, namely, to give, to receive and to reciprocate. Lack of reciprocation results in a loss of honour, a suggestion which is the burden of the etymology of "gift" as both "prestation" and, from the Dutch, "poison" (O.E.D. Online). As with Mauss's speculations on the development of individualism, an evolutionary paradigm is suggested which leads from barter, to sales for cash, leading finally to credit in the most evolved societies. What is interesting about the "primitive" system of prestation is that it has credit built into it in the expectation of return. Counter-donation incorporates credit. The simple evolutionary pattern is thus complicated. Mauss's understanding of individualism as a teleological, utopian progression is contradicted by his analysis of gift economies, since, for Mauss, commodity exchange loses a constitutive element present in gift economies. The effect of the gift economy is to set up, as Mary Douglas suggests in the Foreword to Mauss's *The Gift*, "a perpetual cycle of exchanges within and between generations" (viii). In the practice of the endless cycle of donation and counter-donation, social bonds are forged which constitute the society. As Mary Douglas suggests, "The whole society can be described by the catalogue of transfers that map all the obligations between its members. The cycling system is the society" (viii). In other words, the social bonds of the society are

constituted out of the “gift-obligations” of its members. Mauss appears aware of the paradox of the gift which is not one: “If one so wishes, one may term these transfers acts of exchange or even trade and sale. Yet such trade is noble, replete with etiquette and generosity” (37). Thus even though the gift economy resembles commodity exchange, its logic is profoundly different. Patterns of exchange thus are an index of social relations and the nature of the subjects party to those social relations.

Jacques Derrida in *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, some decades later, enters into a debate with Mauss in which the gift comes to suggest something also about the ineffability of time itself – and art. Derrida’s point of departure is that “a work as monumental as Marcel Mauss’s *The Gift* speaks of everything but the gift” (24). Derrida’s challenge arises from the semantic requirement of “gift” that there should be no “expectation or receipt of an equivalent” (O.E.D. Online 3.a), which sets off a cycle of exchange. If Mauss reads the cycle, the ring of life, totality as enabling, Derrida interprets the circle as that boundary from which one needs to escape. The gift in order to be a gift must break free of the circle:

If there is gift, the *given* of the gift [...] must not come back to the giving [...]. It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure [...] (7).

The circle is that which “encircles” and “besieges” both the gift and the subjects party to the social relations created by the gift. The idea of the gift for Derrida is a paradox which only the pure gift escapes. What constitutes pure gift? The gift which escapes the ligatures of the cycle of obligation is the gift which has no return at either points of donation or reception – reciprocation is completely ruled out on this scheme. The donor must not be aware of giving

since consciousness of generosity brings its own return in the form of self-satisfaction. The donee must not be aware of the gift since receipt generates obligation to return. For the gift to be a gift, it must not even be recognized as one: “For there to be gift, it is necessary that the gift not even appear, that it not even be perceived or received as gift” (16). The gift must “forget” itself. This fundamental effacement “should accord with a certain experience of the trace as cinder or ashes [...]” (17). The true gift thus is a virtual impossibility, existing for Derrida possibly in a situation described in a short story by Baudelaire, “Counterfeit Money”, where one of two friends, leaving a tobacconists, gives a *counterfeit* coin as charity to a beggar.

Published at roughly the same time as the Derrida essay, Farah’s novel, *Gifts*, appears to enter into a similar debate to the one Derrida initiates with Mauss. Gifts, in the form of presents, donations and aid, appear to be imbricated in both subject formation and subject relations. The central character, Duniya, assumes self-identity and becomes an individual only when she is “self-possessed.” In other words, Duniya becomes a subject only when she, on the model of C.A.B. MacPherson’s “possessive individualism”, referred to in relation also to Ebla’s subjectivity, owns herself on the principle of the ownership of property. A related observation is that Duniya can only become the subject of a novel when she becomes proprietor of herself. Her pre-history, which is the matrix out of which the novel defines itself, is a pre-history where Duniya herself is owned. She literally is property. She is the gift given in marriage by her father on his deathbed to his blind, elderly friend. A fortnight after her elderly husband’s death, Duniya is on a plane in the familiar journey from country to the city of Mogadiscio. In the city, with the financial aid of her full brother, Abshir, Duniya no longer is property. She owns herself but must be constantly vigilant against the dependency

creating gifts which threaten autonomy. She warns her children not to bring home the luxuries given by “well-intended” uncles and aunts – she refers to these offerings as “corpse food.” As a woman, it is virtually impossible for her, however, to avoid debts of gratitude. She marries her second husband, the journalist Tariq, whose newspaper articles on foreign aid form one voice in the apparent polyphony of the novel, since she is grateful to him for renting her a home. Similarly, she “gives” Yarey, her child from Tariq, to her childless in-laws in exchange for living virtually rent free in a house in a Mogadiscio suburb. In this novel also as in *Sardines*, homes and homelessness carry a huge symbolic burden.

The catalyst which hastens Duniya’s self-realization in the novel is the character Bosaaso who, in another example of the network of gifts which constitute relationships, makes a gift to his country of his professional expertise acquired in the U.S.A. Unlike the female *Bildungsroman* which eschews the “happy ending” of the heterosexual romance plot, *Gifts* is a love story which moves towards Duniya and Bosaaso’s union. The challenge for Duniya is to move from a conception of the gift which creates mutual return and obligation to the pure gift, the prestation which is epiphanic, which is completely unexpected and which creates no ties which bind, no ligatures. It is when she reaches this stage, which is both climax and conclusion of her development that Duniya and Bosaaso’s love may be consummated and closure is enabled. The challenge presented by the narrative then is to move from Mauss’s understanding of the gift as embodiment of social bonds to Derrida’s understanding of the gift as trace, reminiscent of cinder, ash or smoke.

The closest the text comes to the pure gift is embodied in an anecdote told by Tariq, Duniya’s alcoholic ex-husband. He returns home one night in a drunken stupor and collapses beneath a tree a short distance from his home. An elderly neighbour covers him with a

blanket and keeps vigil to make sure that stray dogs do not harass him. When subsequently he meets the old woman at Duniya's home, he enquires whether she was his benefactor. She responds: "why devalue the significance of the act by mentioning it in public?" (*Gifts* 124). All Tariq has to remember the gift of kindness is a drunken memory and a blanket which he cannot return since the identity of the donor is unknown. The gift here exists only as a Derridean trace and the donee is free of obligation. But it is still not the pure gift required in Derrida's analysis since the donor, the old woman, may enjoy the "return" of self-satisfaction of having done a good deed.

Ironically, another potentially pure gift is the gift Duniya's father makes of her to his elderly friend. Duniya's father expresses his desire on his deathbed in earshot only of his wife who is hard of hearing. It is the wife, Duniya's mother, who insists that the marriage take place, even though the brothers insist she may have misheard. In this case, at the point of donation the gift is inscribed in uncertainty and since the donor has died, the donee owes a debt of gratitude to no one. The difficulty here is that the gift itself is not merely a trace – it is the corporal existence of Duniya, the woman.

With the terminus of classical *Bildung* inscribed in the happy marriage, the text is impelled towards a pre-scribed end. The challenge for Medina in *Sardines* was to resist without sacrificing the ideal of freedom. The challenge for Duniya, on the other hand, is to love without sacrificing independence. Duniya's self-realization is also catalyzed by the gift of the "abandoned" baby brought home by her elder daughter, Nasiiba. The foundling is the first of a series of mythical children in Farah's novels, the mystery of whose origins, suggests autotelic conception. There are overtones of both Moses and Christ in the circumstances of the child's discovery. Nasiiba finds him in a basket; the women who

surround him appear to be in awe of the baby; the old neighbour who generously helps in the baby's care is called "Maryam", Arabic for "Mary." The text also refers to the Sunjata and Mwindo epics (*Gifts* 122). The infant inexplicably dies before there has been significant narrative progression, but not without changes wrought upon the heroine. Duniya appears finally to be able to break the bonds of dependence, signaled in the text by a number of transformations. For the first time through her actions she admits a romantic attachment to Bosaaso without fear of entrapment. She goes on a date where she allows her daughter – in a reversal of the Enlightenment motif where the child is the father of the man – to dress her, the daughter becoming the mother of the woman. For the first time, Duniya's accoutrement does not include a headscarf, symbolically marking the abandonment of the sartorial style of repression for the sartorial style of universal personal freedom. Duniya also, not insignificantly, wears a pair of earrings since she is not wearing a headscarf which would cover them. Each earring is a blue, five-pointed star encircled in a silver band. The blue, five-pointed star is the emblem at the centre of the Somali flag, each point of the star representing one of the Somali territories. (Three of these territories were excluded from independent Somalia in the formalization of colonial boundaries.) In this national allegory, it appears, the woman achieves the development which the country does not. In an incident replete with significance, Medina loses an earring on her date with Bosaaso at the moment when Duniya sees "comets flying earthwards" (*Gifts* 139). After the death of the foundling, Duniya also goes for driving and swimming lessons. But most significantly, it is after the death of the foundling that Duniya is able to give herself physically to Bosaaso in what the text presents as a triumph of mutuality, of a gift freely given and accepted.

As at the end of *From a Crooked Rib*, when freedom reconciles with socialization, when *sjuzhet* comes up against *fabula*, when the individual life is subsumed within plot, closure is overlaid with irony. Duniya, it appears, is able to flourish in the epiphanic gift of mutually enhancing autonomy and freedom since she enjoys material independence from Bosaaso, a material independence ironically created out of material dependence upon her dollar wealthy brother, Abshir. Abshir flies into Mogadiscio at the end of the novel to reveal how he, like Meister's Tower Society, has benevolently been directing Duniya's life, allowing her to claim as hers the subjectivity which she always already had. There is an element of excess in the gifts showered on his sister by Abshir that is hard to ignore. Of course, he brings suitcases of clothes for the family. But he also promises to buy Mataan, Duniya's son, a scooter. He is willing to fund any of the childrens' university studies anywhere in the world. He wants to buy Duniya a city centre apartment when he hears she has moved out of his brother's home. Again the national allegory is suggested in the fact that they meet him at the airport in a convoy like a visiting head of state, for whom the youngest daughter, Yarey, wants to wear a virginal white dress and to whom she would like to present a bouquet of flowers.

Contradiction is the inevitable conclusion of individualism constituted in and through the *Bildungsroman*. In *From a Crooked Rib* the resolution of contradiction occurs through irony. In *Sardines* contradiction is willed away through imagining a whole new world. But closure in *Sardines* is a little too studiously emphatic to be convincing. By contrast then, resolution in *Gifts* seems infinitely successful. In terms of the debate with which the novel engages, pure gift is the ideal social relationship of wholly free, autonomous individuals who do not sacrifice independence in social exchange. These are subjects constituted seemingly

by contract rather than status. But the contradiction the novel seems to face is that pure mutuality is an impossible ideal. What *Gifts* does at the end, is to project this contradiction and the paradisiacal ideal it seems to embody onto novelistic form itself. The pure gift is an epiphanic gift, a gift which is “given” when least expected, which fulfills a deepest need which is not even realized. Finally, the only pure gift in *Gifts* is the story itself. In this sense, the culmination of Duniya’s *Bildung* occurs not in her happy marriage but in the *story* of her happy marriage. These are Duniya’s musings in the closing scene in the restaurant where Duniya is the centre of the attention of her lover, brother and children:

As the others engaged in polite talk, Duniya thought to herself that little is revealed to one directly. Revelations are received from out of a mist of doubts, in caves, in the dark, out of a child’s mouth, or via the wise utterances of an elderly or mad person. She decided that her own epiphanic instant had occurred at a moment, on a morning, when a story chose to tell itself to her, through her, a story whose clarity was contained in the creative utterance, *Let there be a man*, and there was a story (*Gifts* 240-1).

This passage reverberates in various ways. It constitutes one dimension of the metafictional twist of the ending which self-reflexively transforms the entire novel into a purely fictional tale a woman tells herself one morning on the way to work, lonely for love. In other words, the entire novel is simply the story Duniya tells herself while walking to work. But it suggests also the fact that finally in *Gifts* the only pure gift is art itself since only art guarantees radical freedom of autonomy. The story is the only “epiphanic” gift in the novel.

The profundity of this move is allusively suggested. The epiphany of art is the revelation of the pure, untrammelled moral freedom of the creative individual which creates no ties which bind, no ligatures, no obligatory exchanges, no circles or cycles. This is implicitly contrasted with, specifically in this instance, morality transcendentally defined.

Revelation received in a cave refers to the divine message received by the prophet Muhammad in a cave on Mount Hira. Duniya's creative utterance, "*Let there be a man*, and there was a story" echoes the Qur'anic formulation in which God's creative power is conveyed. This utterance is repeated five times in the Qur'an: "We but say the Word, "Be", and it is" (2:117, 16:40, 36:82, 40:68, 54:50). The prerogative to create here passes to the artist, whose work of art morally validates itself. In *Gifts*, the novel itself is the only pure gift which is liberatory. This strategy for resolution of contradiction is discussed in more detail in the analysis of modernism in the next chapter.

But the gift may not present a paradox. The gift is only virtually impossible to conceive *on an individualist conception of the person and the person's social relations*. On a rather different view, the gift may not create the circle from which the individual must break free. The social exchange represented by the gift may be the prior enabling condition for the constitution of the person. The circle inscribed by prestation and counter-prestation may be precisely that which allows rather than precludes freedom – but that is a story which the novel constitutively is unable to tell.

To conclude this chapter, one might make the following observations: After *From a Crooked Rib*, Farah appears to abandon the classical *Bildungsroman* form. Subsequent novels with central female protagonists appear to challenge some of the assumptions of the genre in its classical form. On the face of it, *Sardines* and *Gifts* appear to be dissensual novels of development. However, these novels, which bear all the features of the gynocentric *Bildungsroman*, in fact, do not critique, but appear to *resolve the contradiction* of the classical form. Thus, rather than challenging the fundamental assumption of disengaged,

autonomous subjectivity, these novels negotiate two different strategies for resolving the contradiction encountered by the novel of formation. The novel of autonomous development is structurally bound to submit to socialization, a submission it yields to – ironically.

Sardines attempts to escape this dilemma *idealistically* and *Gifts* presents a *formal* solution to the contradiction. If society represents the brake to potentially unlimited individual freedom, then the protagonist of *Sardines*, who does not compromise, must construct society itself anew. We encounter the idealism of this solution again in Farah's most recent novel, *Knots*, to be analyzed in the final chapter. *Gifts* follows the path of lesser resistance. If it proves impossible to extricate its protagonist from social gift-giving exchanges, then the novel allows the irony of this realization to reflect upon itself. The solution is purely formal. Contradiction is resolved through textuality. The novel is only a story the heroine solipsistically tells to herself. This strategy for the evasion of the contradiction contained in individualism is explored in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Modernism in *A Naked Needle* and *Sweet and Sour Milk*: Morality and the Aesthetic

The analysis of *Gifts* in the previous chapter suggested resolution of the contradiction of individualist subject formation through the principle of textuality. Aesthetic resolution of the inherent contradiction of individualism, in fact, achieves its clearest expression in a much earlier novel, namely, *A Naked Needle*. The techniques of modernism employed in this novel ultimately allow form, the aesthetic, to represent the higher order which realism could not, without tension, allow to emerge from the autonomous self.

Literary modernism is probably the most significant influence on the novels of Nuruddin Farah. With the exception of *From a Crooked Rib* which shares realism's preoccupation with presenting a convincing character who constructs a moral order from reason and personal experience, the subsequent novels draw on the techniques of the "postindividualist" order scripted by modernism. Modernism informs Farah's novels in various ways. Farah's composition of his novels as trilogies, which as a series fully explore particular themes, is influenced by Samuel Beckett's trilogy. Many of the epigraphs which introduce the novels and sections of novels are drawn from the works of modernist writers like Yeats and Conrad. Often in their structure, the novels allude to other modernist novels. A case in point is the similarity of the structure of *Sardines* to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, referred to in more detail in the earlier discussion of the transformation of the idealist *Bildungsroman* in some of the novels.

A broad fascination with literary modernism is articulated most clearly through its Irish manifestation. The allusion to Richard Burton's reference in *First Footsteps in East Africa* to the Somali as the "Irish of Africa" (98) is more than just incidental intertextuality. The Irish colonial experience, in particular the aesthetic modes it generates, appears for Farah to hold considerable value in the constitution of an ideal Somali polity. In the most recent novels, *Links* and *Knots*, the Celtic experience is physically embodied in the hirsute, Dedalian craftsman-figure, Seamus. In *Knots*, furthermore, modernism, expressed through the medium of theatre, where the stage and the props are quite literally constructed by the Irish character, appears to hold the utopian potential to build an alternative Somali community. So, although this chapter focuses on modernism in *A Naked Needle* and to a lesser extent on *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the observations made here are relevant to all of the novels after *From a Crooked Rib*. In other words, *A Naked Needle* hones the modernist techniques which inform the novels which follow.

I Individualism and Textuality in *A Naked Needle*

A Naked Needle is the novel in which Farah is at his most experimental. It is also the novel which precluded Farah's return from England to Somalia since it offended the military regime even though the dictator, Siyad Barre, is the single figure who escapes the novel's savage iconoclasm, a premature endorsement not to be repeated in any of the other novels. Barre is referred by the avuncular moniker, "the Old Man": "The Old Man is decent, honest, wishes to leave behind a name, wishes to do something for the country – [...]" (80). In a case of the real world imitating fiction, *A Naked Needle* is the novel which results in Farah's exile, enabling him to assume the *Heimatlosen* central to modernist aesthetic philosophy.

Interestingly, *A Naked Needle*, Farah's most modernist novel is also the novel which he has not permitted to be reprinted, perhaps for its premature endorsement of a ruthless regime; or perhaps for its *parody* of misogyny which Farah suspects may escape his readership and jar with his reputation as "the leading writer in Africa in feminist consciousness [sic]" (Ngugi 716).

On the face of it, a wide gulf separates Farah's first novel from his second. *From a Crooked Rib* traced through its unlettered heroine the journey from country to city which simultaneously constitutes individual and nation. *A Naked Needle*, by contrast, focalized through a cynical young man, is a hyperurban novel which challenges both autonomous self and nation. Farah's novels condense within the space of roughly three years, an apparently radical transformation in consciousness which in Europe had to await three centuries. In these two novels, within a truncated period, the transition is made from the proto-realism of *Moll Flanders* to the modernism of *Ulysses*.

Although Farah categorically denies the influence of Joyce's *Ulysses* on *A Naked Needle* (Ewan 198), however, whether intended or not, the similarities are too striking to go unnoticed and indeed have been noticed in criticism of the novel (Adam "Nuruddin Farah and James Joyce: Some Issues of Intertextuality"). We discover that Koschin, the protagonist of the novel, has done a thesis on Joyce and that a woman he bumps into on the street reads *Finnegans Wake* as her "nightcap" (52). The onomatopoeia of the sound made by Leopold Bloom's cat which, in its strange phonic configuration, draws attention to itself through its signal lack of mimesis is echoed in the sound of the sloshing of water in a pail which Koschin finally does not use to clean himself despite his landlady's disgust that he stinks: "Corrrrrrrrof goes the noise the water can makes. [...] Corrrrrrrrof the can's noise" (10).

Like *Ulysses*, *A Naked Needle* alludes to and parodies Aristotelean unity of time. Both novels cover the events of around twenty four hours in a postcolonial city, but while the unity of time in the Aristotelean universe imitates the integrity, the order which exists in the world, in these postcolonial novels, the meaning of life is elusive. In various ways in Koschin, the central character of *A Naked Needle*, Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus merge. Koschin is a disillusioned, cosmopolitan schoolteacher who, at the opening of the narrative, awaits the arrival from England of his wife to be, Nancy Stonegrave. In a moment of thoughtlessness, he had promised Nancy in a bar in London that if neither of them had met their partners within two years, they would marry each other. Nancy comes to Somalia to see this promise fulfilled. In the retrospective first person “Prelude” to the novel, Koschin remarks: “My marital status. I mean, am I married? The frank, honest-to-God answer to this is: I don’t know.” Koschin then muses on the legally binding nature of promises made “when one is skyriding.” One thus reads the novel’s parody of marital fidelity through *Ulysses*’s parody of the marital fidelity of Odysseus and Penelope. Bloom, of course, is no larger than life hero and Molly is far from faithful. The first part of the narrative, like Stephen’s perambulations in Dublin, describes Koschin’s wanderings through Mogadiscio. If Bloomsday is Joyce’s immortalization of his walk with Nora Barnacle to Sandymount Strand on 16 June 1904 (Norris vii), then Bloomsday is repeated in the walking tour Koschin takes Nancy on when she finally arrives. Joyce’s Dublin is re-configured in Farah’s Mogadiscio as the respective heroes of the two novels wander around the streets of the city.

Franco Moretti suggests that the mode of consciousness represented by Bloom embodies the ethos of capitalism in its consumerist phase:

Words words words words. It is a bombardment that no one expects, and that nineteenth century grammar is incapable of withstanding. Attention, clarity,

concentration: the old virtues are worse than useless. Instead of harmonizing with advertising, they perceive it as an irritating noise. A different style is required, in order to find one's way in the city of words; a weaker grammar than that of consciousness; an edgy discontinuous syntax: a cubism of language, as it were. And the stream of consciousness offers precisely that: simple fragmented sentences, where the subject withdraws to make room for the invasion of things; paratactical paragraphs with the doors flung wide, and always enough room for one more sentence, and one more stimulus. (*Modern Epic* 135).

Although *A Naked Needle* does not adopt full stream of consciousness, nevertheless, parodic references to Bloom's enchanted consumerist metropolis abound, for example: "Candy cans, all sorts of cans. Cans of Italian manufacture, fish bones crushed into tins, and human skins worked into wrappers" (22). A new note which enters *A Naked Needle*, however, is the sense that, in the specific context of postcolonial Mogadiscio, one is being led on a walking tour which is an uncomfortable parody of history as a kind of cultural tourism.

Lennard Davis remarks upon the "ugliness" of modernist heroes, a repulsiveness he suggests might be intended to disallow realist identification with character, enabling full focus on form (Davis 124). Koschin obliges in this respect. Although a member of the Mogadiscio elite, as we realize through the description of the party he takes Nancy to in the closing section of the novel, Koschin nevertheless lives in squalid conditions in a brothel and never washes his underwear since "it is more economical this way" (4). The walk Koschin takes Nancy on is motivated by his reluctance to take her to his squalid home. In order to avoid taking her to his home, he also calls on friends. When he does take her to his room, it is in total darkness since there has been a power failure.

At his most experimental, Farah is not quite as experimental as Joyce. *Ulysses* calls into question realism's constitution of the consciousness of the individual, autonomous hero through presenting three subjects not one, namely, Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom and Molly Bloom. *A Naked Needle*, by contrast, presents only the consciousness of its single hero, Koschin Qowdhan. Similarly, Farah draws back from the full exploration of fragmentation witnessed in Joyce. Where epiphany in *Portrait of the Artist* is developed through interior monologue into full stream of consciousness, *A Naked Needle*, as was mentioned above, moves from first person to third person narration with focalization through Koschin sometimes approaching interior monologue.

But modernism in *A Naked Needle* is reflected also through African modernism. Modernism in the African novel may be widely or narrowly defined. David I. Ker in *The African Novel and the Modernist Tradition* adopts the viewpoint that modernist despair allows the African novelist the critical lens through which to challenge both the precolonial and postcolonial worlds. The concept of modernism with which Ker operates is wide enough to include writers like Soyinka, Armah, Awoonor and Okara, on the one hand, but also (and somewhat surprisingly) Achebe and Ngugi, on the other. Simon Gikandi in *Reading the African Novel* (72-110) interprets modernism in the African novel rather more narrowly. For Gikandi, the critical stance towards pre- and post-colonial social conditions is insufficient in itself to constitute modernism. Novelistic modernism involves, crucially, the use of the formal techniques of modernism with the necessary philosophical underpinnings of these techniques. Gikandi does however find, primarily through a reading of Soyinka and Armah, that modernism in the African novel does not leave the author as expressed by Joyce, "... invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails." For Gikandi, African

modernists are not formalists. In *A Naked Needle*, self-conscious scatological imagery associates the novel with Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born*. There are also references to Christopher Okigbo and we are informed that Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is Koschin's "favourite novel of the year" (46). In some ways Koschin models himself on Soyinka's hero, Sekoni, whom we come most significantly to know in the space of twenty four hours in the first part of *The Interpreters*.

What liberatory potential does Farah identify in modernism? Simon Gikandi suggests that modernism allows Farah to go "beyond the discourse of cultural nationalism and identity" ("Postcolonial Textuality" 753). How do the techniques of modernism permit a projection beyond identitarian politics? Gikandi proposes that "modernist style [...] privileges an interiorized private narrative over the collective myths of the Somali people ..." (754). The wholly subjective perspective of Farah's novel is suggested by the gestures it makes towards the stream of consciousness ultimately engendered in *Ulysses*. *A Naked Needle* moves from first person narration to third person with a focalization so intense that the boundary between third person narration and interior monologue is blurred.

The interiorized, individualized, private style of narrative does not only, however, make critique of all community based on identity a structural possibility. The implicit consequence also is the alienation of the hero from community in any sense. The epic hero, Odysseus, is exiled from his wife, Penelope, and from his kingdom, Ithaca. But there is an order in the universe dictated by the Gods. Odysseus is not exiled from this order and through this order is bound in community with his crew. The hero of the realist novel is exiled from the meaning of life, which he then has to locate for himself, within himself. But as we saw in the analysis of *From a Crooked Rib*, ultimately the realist hero compromises

with the social code. But the compromise is “tautologically and teleologically” revealed to be the product of individual free choice. Thus, while the hero of the realist novel is exiled from an external order, the hero of the modernist novel, by contrast, is exiled from other people.

The modernist novel hero is in this sense more fundamentally alienated than the realist hero. Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom and Koschinn Qowdhan are exiled from society through the apparent liberation of a radically individuated horizon embodied in the interior, subjective narrative. In Lukács’s terms, the modernist novel finally installs as truth the “distortion” of the realist novel which locates a social idea of virtue internally (*Realism in Our Time* 33). Modernism realizes the epiphanic, not by working through the compromise realism is obliged to accept, but by projecting the higher order onto form itself. If the individualist ethos is forced in the realist novel to justify the social code, the modernist ethos denies the existence of ethics altogether. On this paradigm, the aesthetic comes to embody morality. Inherent in modernism thus is not only critique of the epic world of tradition, or the individualist world of the nation-state, but critique of any higher order which is not the higher order of art. Modernism in Farah thus allows not only the critique of tradition and the manipulation of tradition by nationalism, but constitutively critiques every position which does not order itself around the infinite irony of modernist art.

This leads one to Gikandi’s second significant point. For Gikandi, in its interiority and subjectivity, Farah’s politics of writing resemble the practice of Soyinka and Armah. But, for Gikandi, Farah proceeds beyond the other African modernists in assuming the strategies of what he terms the “avant-garde”, namely: “...promotion of the innovative and revolutionary power of art against the culture of the state; the privileging of form over

content; and the use of art to dissolve and hence pluralize the postcolonial experience” (756). Gikandi’s description of the techniques of the avant-garde draws the avant-garde pretty close to postmodern textuality and hybridity. But Gikandi here is tapping into the almost indistinguishable distinction between the modern and the postmodern. The fuzzy boundary between modernity and postmodernity is clearly evident in *Ulysses* and, through *Ulysses*, *A Naked Needle*. This instability is reflected also in the fact that what, for Gikandi, quite unquestionably is modernist technique in *A Naked Needle*, for Derek Wright, quite unquestionably constitutes *postmodern* strategy (“The Postmodern Landscapes”).

What is suggested in this chapter, thus, is that there is no sharp distinction between the modern and the postmodern, particularly in Joyce’s novels, which appear the strongest influence on *A Naked Needle*. What distinguishes the “postmodern” novel is perhaps only a “banalization” or “routinization” of the transformation instantiated by the modernist novel. The materiality of the signifier embodied in *Finnegans Wake*, the novel which takes the techniques explored in *Ulysses* to their conclusion, is only gestured towards by subsequent “postmodern” novels like John Barth’s *Chimera* or Italo Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler...*, with their multiple beginnings, multiple endings, characters who reveal themselves to be writing themselves into existence and so on.

One must recapitulate again the compromise necessitated by *From a Crooked Rib’s* experiment with realism in order to appreciate the release permitted by modernism in *A Naked Needle*. The protagonist, Ebla, as fully explored in an earlier chapter, comes to accept all of the individual constraints of marriage, the escape from which has been the substance of the entire novel. One of the men she marries is as old and fat and rich as the husband chosen for her by the grandfather whose dying farewell to her is a curse. What makes the marriages

at closure different from the marriage at narrative opening is the fact that these marriages are all unions of Ebla's own "free" will. She submits to the social contract, not through obligation, but through her own self-constituting freedom. The realist novel formally compensates for this compromise with sociality through irony. Critical difficulty in determining whether *From a Crooked Rib* has a "happy" or "sad" ending is balanced on a knife edge by irony in the tone and structure of the conclusion. Irony operates to critique the compromise in closure, but it constitutes a critique which suggests no alternative higher order as Hayden White suggests in *Metahistory*:

... the trope of Irony ... provides a linguistic paradigm of a mode of thought which is radically self-critical with respect not only to a given characterization of the world of experience but also to the very effort to capture adequately the truth of things in language. It is, in short, a model of the linguistic protocol in which skepticism in thought and relativism in ethics are conventionally expressed. (37-8)

Farah's first novel exemplifies Lukács's observation in *The Theory of the Novel* that irony is "the normative mentality of the [realist] novel" (84). Since the person can only be constituted in orientation to a moral order and since the moral order, like language, can only be social, the project of the realist novel, to constitute the ethical out of the autonomous self, necessarily must encounter contradiction. Irony is the realist novel's necessary response to this contradiction. Lukács suggests furthermore that irony is "the objectivity of the novel" (90). Since "objective" virtue no longer exists in an external horizon but is constituted independently within, irony comes to embody the ontic or transcendental component:

For the novel, irony consists in this freedom of the writer in his relationship to God, the transcendental condition of the objectivity of form-giving. Irony, with intuitive double vision, can see where God is to be found in a world abandoned by

God; irony sees the lost, utopian home of the idea that has become an ideal, and yet at the same time it understands that the ideal is subjectively and psychologically conditioned, because that is its only form of existence; irony, itself demonic, apprehends the demon that is within the subject as a metasubjective essentiality, and therefore, when it speaks of the adventures of errant souls in an inessential, empty reality, it intuitively speaks of past gods and gods that are yet to come; irony has to seek the only world that is adequate to it along the *via dolorosa* of interiority, but is doomed never to find it there; ... (Lukács 93).

Lukács suggests in this highly lyrical passage the compensation irony makes for the loss of a higher order which is in some way still present. Irony thus is a constitutive element of the novel form.

When modernism liberates the novel to reflect on its own form, irony becomes infinite. In Ihab Hassan's terms, irony severs the bond with the metaphysical (592). Alan Wilde distinguishes modernist "disjunctive" with postmodern "suspensive" irony, but this distinction is hard to maintain in Joyce and in *A Naked Needle*. Thus the transition from realist to modernist novel is the transition from irony to infinite irony. Infinite irony is epic totality uncontradictorily reconstituted in an endlessly self-reflexive aesthetic.

A Naked Needle gestures towards this release in various ways one of which is the predominance of the musical motif in the novel. Walter Pater in *The Renaissance* suggests that "all art constantly aspires to the condition of music" (135). In a gloss on this observation, Perry Meisel notes that art's inherent desire to the state of music is the desire for pure form, absolutely perfect since it exists without semantic content (54). This ideal is reflected also in Schopenhauer. Since music (without words) represents "the *will* itself" (emphasis in original), and not the will's "objectification" in ideas, music appears to approach the transparency required of art (448). When the work of art paradoxically

embodies the disembodiment of music, it achieves an ideal unity, making it both whole and transparent. In other words, the aspiration to the condition of music is an aspiration for a totality which is so complete that totality effaces itself. The incarnation of art as music renders the ideology of the aesthetic “unideological”.

The drift towards the condition of music is evident in both *Ulysses* and through *Ulysses* is apparent in *A Naked Needle*. References to music abound in *Ulysses* and “Sirens” is commonly regarded as the section which, in its structure and use of language, seeks to imitate music. In its division into “Prelude” and six “Movements”, *A Naked Needle* appears to be conceived as a musical score. The attempt of language in onomatopoeia to embody sound noted in the parody of the sound of water sloshing in a pail, is highlighted by Koschin’s reference to feeling better: “... in spite of the pain in the *out-of-tune chord* of his unmusical age” (10). When finally he meets Nancy, Koschin significantly offers the walking tour of Mogadiscio as a gesture of appreciation for her gift to him of music:

- And did you know that I’ve brought you Beethoven tapes?
- What?
- Beethoven and Bach tapes ... and the difficulty that I had to go through to get them taped, from BBC and other sources!
- You are ...
- No I am not. It’s true. Just open that case.
- How marvelous! A miracle! Beethoven! (86).

While other forms of music are referred to in the text, including the Somali performer, Mariam Mursal, who eclectically mixes various traditions, and contemporary popular music like James Brown and Simon and Garfunkel, it is only wordless orchestral music, itself possessed of a very specific history, which appears to hold the symbolic potential in this modernist text of a liberation from the compromise of realism.

A Naked Needle similarly aestheticizes both time and space. The epic constructs time through space as an endless cycle symbolized by Odysseus's exile from home and return to home. Epic time and space are transcendently shaped by the gods who observe the drama of life from on high. The realist novel constructs time through space as teleology, where the novel hero constitutes both world and identity in self-validating progressive development. Perhaps the spirit of the Ulysses of this moment of modernity is best captured in a poem. Alfred Tennyson's persona "Ulysses" no longer is Homer's Ulysses. Tennyson's hero embodies the fascination with the energy and dynamism of youth commented on by Moretti in an earlier chapter. Tennyson's hero returns home; but the meaning of life is not complete. The circle is not completed since meaning is contained within the hero himself. He must journey on, moved by the restless instability of the obsessional pursuit of individual ideal, despite the faithful wife, Penelope, the son, Telemachus, and the subjects who would have him home. The contradiction of Tennyson's Ulysses between individual freedom and socialization is dissolved in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Modernism transforms and flattens time and space through the aestheticizing experience of the alienated hero. For Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, the meaning of life is no longer divinely guaranteed; nor are they possessed of the singular drive of the hero as individual. Meaning for the modernist hero is contained in infinite ironic reflection of meaning itself. Dedalus and Bloom are ironic incarnations of Odysseus in a text which casts a self-reflexive ironic glance at its own heroes.

In *A Naked Needle*, the break with epic time and space, and the apparent break with teleological time and space is formalized through a symbolic event at narrative opening.

Koschin's clock stops:

Koschin now gets out of bed, and barefooted he walks over to the door, turns backwards, goes to the table, against which he leans. He picks up the timepiece,

holds it near his ear: it has stopped. He winds the clock and sets it down without altering the position of the arms. He snickers at the idea of being either on time or late because of a timepiece, man-made, a convenience. What a farce! The continuum, the continuity of one's efficacy, if you like, he thinks. And he looks the clock in the face. She responds to him: the tongue ticks, the tongue talks, in terms of identifying time in space. But what does McLuhan call clocks? An extension of the mind? Or the eye? The latter certainly sound more logical (3).

Despite the clock's expiring ticks in this sequence, it, in fact, has stopped as we are informed three pages later in an exchange of insults between Koschin and his landlady when he asks her the time. The clock has stopped. The cycles inscribed by the hand of time in space are terminated. The circle of life which inspires with meaning the existence of the hero, Odysseus, in *A Naked Needle*, which reflects Ulysses's reflection of Homer's epic, no longer revolves. The ring of life ceases to define the bounds of human existence. There is something in Farah's conjunction of time, space and individuality suggestive of what Charles Taylor refers to as D.H. Lawrence's "Dionysiac" conception of life" conveyed in the idea that: "Our ready-made individuality, our identity is no more than an accidental cohesion in the flux of time" (*Sources of the Self* 463).

Time and space, of course, are experienced through the human being, as the quote from Lawrence suggests. How does modernism represent the person? Koschin in *A Naked Needle*, quite clearly is an ironic reflection of himself as textual creation. The novel opens with the disclaimer which alludes to Beckett's "No symbols where none intended": "*No real characters where none is intended. / No true incidents where none is mentioned.*" (emphasis in original). One reads the character of Koschin, not as one did the character of Ebla as a textual representation of a real person. One reads Koschin mimetically, but a mimesis of other literary constructs. Koschin imitates Dedalus and Bloom, imitating Odysseus. But

Koschin also imitates Soyinka's Sekoni. Through the allusions in *Ulysses* to the *Divine Comedy* Koschin also imitates Dante's pilgrim who journeys through the circles of hell to reach heaven on the other side. Parodically, the woman who cooks for Koschin, in a kind of hell agony sweating over her fire, reminds him of the "Angel in the Fourth Circle of the Heavens" (8). There are numerous references in the text to Dante's *Inferno* which will provide the central intertextual allusion in the later novel, *Links*, including a misquotation of the first stanza of the *Divine Comedy*, when Koschin's female friend, Meyran, invites him into her apartment (48). Similarly, when invited to the apartment of the American woman married to a Somali, Koschin browses through the books on a shelf in the living room, which include the African Writers Series of which *A Naked Needle*, featuring protagonist Koschin, is a part (56). Mimesis here is not the attempt to represent world or subject, but the attempt to expose world and subject as reflections of other reflections.

Despite the apparent liberation of the "metaphysical" truth of textuality, that world and subject are only ever constructs, *A Naked Needle*, like its precursor text *Ulysses*, bases its transformation of identity on the Enlightenment model of the disengaged subject. In other words, it is the "distortion" of a "distortion". Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* is the resolution of the problematic *Bildung* of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. If epiphany in the most well-known *Kunstlerroman* is an uneasy compromise with the Catholic traditionalism Joyce seeks to escape, then in the pure aestheticism of *Ulysses*, in particular, the stream of consciousness which replaces epiphany, Joyce finds the escape from the bind. The developmental *Bildung's* process of *Portrait* is retrospectively parodied through Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*. Stephen's life history can only be known through the earlier book and his self-realization is achieved through the triumph of pure textuality.

Koschin Qowdhan, by contrast, carries his autobiography, the story of his *Bildung* in his pocket, along with two letters (41) and his cigarettes (27). Unlike Stephen Dedalus's biography to which we have access, *A Naked Needle* does not give any clues to the contents of Koschin's autobiography. Koschin's reference to Goethe (5) suggests a familiarity with the *Humanitätsideal* encompassed by German Romanticism. We know also that Koschin's "autobiographical sketch" (41) is the "longest piece he has ever written" (24), so presumably it is longer than his thesis on Joyce. We also know that it is addressed "*TO WHOSOEVER HAPPENS TO BE THE READER* [sic]" (emphasis in original) (24). In a significantly self-reflexive move, it is Koschin himself who repeatedly in the novel reflects on his own development. It is Koschin, the character constructed out of fragments of other literary characters, who repeatedly reads his own *Bildungsroman*. In the course of the novel, we know that he reads his autobiography three times. The reading seems never to be completed.

If the narrative of *A Naked Needle* represents the self-realization of the *Bildung* begun in the autobiography, then it is a self-fulfillment which gets rid of the contradiction of the idealist *Bildungsroman* through allowing form to carry the burden of morality which constitutively cannot be constructed out of an individualist philosophy. Koschin, in the modernist novel, solves the recalcitrant problem of individual development which must accede to social morality in the realist novel, by projecting morality itself onto form. Since Koschin never really lives life, only reads it indefinitely in an infinitely spinning circle, closure, resolution, the contradiction of the encounter with a social morality need never occur.

The protagonist of *A Naked Needle* is closer in age, gender and social status to the author. Like Farah at around the time of writing the novel, Koschin is a schoolteacher with a

higher education, cosmopolitan experience and a member of the Mogadiscio elite, close to political power. The protagonist of this novel thus appears fundamentally different from the protagonist of Farah's first published novel, the non-literate nomadic girl, Ebla. But in other ways, the two characters are similar. Koschin and Ebla are both radical individualists, finding meaning within, in a society which, in general, locates value in social and transcendental higher orders. They both share in the paradoxical social disadvantage and freedom of being orphans. As Stephen Kellman suggests, in the modernist "self-begetting" novel, the hero is either a "bastard or an orphan" who "inherits nothing, not even a father and must alone create his identity" (1251). The modernist hero quite literally *conceives* himself, another motif which will recur in Farah's later novels. No mention is made of Koschin's father and his mother we discover died while he was still young (45). He is located neither in space nor time. He suggests in an imagined dialogue with Nancy that: "...I know neither the date nor the day of my birth. A man of no 'precise' past, ..." (2).

If Koschin quite literally is a self-begetting hero who avidly shares the fantasy of many other modernist heroes of creating or giving birth to himself, he also symbolically disengages from transcendental and social horizons. In one of the opening tableaux which, juxtaposed, construct the collage of the narrative, Koschin in an ineffective flutter attempts to quell his fear and anxiety at Nancy's imminent arrival. He searches for an old leather bound amulet given to him by his mother before he died which "had been tied round his arm to protect him from the molestations of the bad eye" (5). His mother wanted him to keep it on his person always. He finds the amulet in the drawer of a table littered with "half-read" books. He tears the amulet open with his teeth, believing the scripture within to contain a prophecy revealing what course he should take with Nancy. The scripture is unfolded and

Koschin tries “to read, to decipher the handwriting of the Sheikh, mysterious, quite unyielding [...]” (6). While Koschin is a reader, while he is able to read all of the texts which construct both himself and his solipsistic world, the transcendental signifier for him holds no revelation. He cannot read the sacred signs – except for the first letter, “Aleph!”, which in form imitates the number “one”, the symbol of the transcendental unity. Upon “reading” this letter, Koschin “throws the ‘mini-scripture’ aside, and walks away”, believing it to be one of the “Leftovers from superstition” (6). (In relinquishing this amulet, Koschin also, of course, frees himself from his ties to the mother. He dissociates himself from his biological origin. Now, he has *no mother* and no father. He can be seen to give birth to himself. He is more than just a self-fashioner, he is a self-engenderer.)

Koschin similarly symbolically disengages from social origin. Again in a highly symbolic set-piece, Koschin turns away a clan elder who approaches him for a contribution towards blood compensation on behalf of a member of the *diya* paying group of which Koschin forms a part:

- Do you want me to leave empty-handed?
- I want you to go as you came ...
- Empty-handed?
- ... with your walking stick in your hand. Just as you came ...
- Not a cent?
- And to tell the other members of your tribe that I owe no loyalty to any tribe,
and never have (14-15).

Thus, in both *Ebla* and *Koschin*, Farah constructs characters who are fundamentally free to narrate their own existences.

But structurally also there are similarities in the two novels which are hard to miss. The point of departure of both novels is the interior musings of the two protagonists in the

early hours of morning in their respective homes. Their life journey takes them out of their homes. Ebla's self-realization is apparently teleological. Her trajectory, along which she is propelled by the individual drive to find meaning in life through experience, catapults her from tradition to modernity. In order for the novel to end, she has to find another home. Her home at the end is seemingly different from her home at the beginning of the narrative, since at the end she makes her own home. But the "home" which she finds for herself in the social contract of marriage is uncannily similar to the traditional marriage arranged in the home she has escaped. The return of the social order at closure is formally registered as irony in the novel. In *A Naked Needle*, the teleology of realist *Bildung* is replaced by the circle, the serpent with its tail in its own mouth. The novel self-consciously ends where it begins – with the social contract of marriage.

With the resolution of *A Naked Needle*, Koschin, at the end of his odyssey, returns home. Koschin's return home is a parody read through *Ulysses* of the return of Odysseus to Ithaca. Odysseus's return is the closing of the circle of life. He returns home to the faithful Penelope after his perilous twenty year exile and the defeat of the greedy suitors. The sealing of the ring of life is exalted in the triumph of the closing bedroom scene. The rootedness of Odysseus in a set of relations out of which he finds his orientation is symbolized by the marital bed which is not a bed – it is the base of a huge tree which Odysseus himself had carved, a fact known only to Penelope, proving to her that the "stranger" is her husband. By contrast, Koschin drags his Penelope (Nancy) around with him on his odyssey all over Mogadiscio and makes her pay for the taxi fare to boot. The return home is a farcical reenactment of the hero's return from exile. Nancy and Koschin return home to Koschin's hovel in the brothel, stumbling in the dark since there has been a power failure. The sublime

is sent up through the ridiculous as Koschin and Nancy exchange inane conversation about shifting the mess off the bed and finding pyjamas in the dark. The circle of life for Koschin quite literally begins and ends, much like it does for Goncharov's character Oblomov, in the bed of sloth. There is no consummation in the sense both of achieving satisfying resolution or in the legal marital sense since Nancy is "not much of a woman tonight" (180). The pair drop off to sleep with the saccharine closing exchange, "Sleep well, Nancy, he says. Sleep well, Koschin dear, she says" (181). But closure circles one back to Koschin's protestations in the "Prelude":

My marital status. I mean, am I married? The frank honest-to-God answer to this is: I don't know. There has been a promise, yes, a promise I made to some woman, yes. A word I committed myself to, yes, there is. But whether such a promise, a word uttered on the spur of an emotional moment, when one is skyriding, whether such a word is legally binding, I have no idea.

Thus, while Ebla is obliged to limit individual freedom through entering the social contract of marriage, Koschin's individual freedom remains unfettered since the ring of life just keeps on spinning. He is "married" but he is also not married, the end of the story returns to the beginning and the beginning presupposes the end. The irony with which closure in the realist novel is charged, in the modernist text, is transformed into an ironic reflection on irony itself. What comes to matter in the modernist permutation of the contradiction presented to the realist novel, is not so much making social morality appear to emanate from the autonomous individual. What matters is literariness itself. The aesthetic comes to bear the burden of morality. But in bearing the burden of morality, morality is a burden no longer. When morality is aestheticized, morality becomes light.

This is the source of the unease with modernism in both Georg Lukács and Raymond Williams. Modernism, through deflecting the higher order onto the aesthetic, effectively cuts the anchor on a sociality to which realism was tied, even though the bond was occluded by contradiction. Lukács suggests vis a vis modernist fragmentation: “Attenuation of reality and dissolution of personality are thus interdependent: the stronger the one, the stronger the other. Underlying both is the consistent lack of a consistent view of human nature. Man is reduced to a sequence of unrelated experiential fragments; he is as inexplicable to others as to himself” (*Realism in Our Time* 26). Raymond Williams’s criticism of modernism which emerges most strongly in *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, similarly rests upon the necessary *social* horizon of realism. Williams suggests that “... there is a kind of moral analysis in which society is a background” for the development of the hero or where society “is the creator of virtues and vices” (*The English Novel* 44). The moral analysis Williams refers to is the negotiation of ethical horizons in the realist novel. In “finding a place and making a settlement” (*The Long Revolution* 313), the realist hero inhabits, but also crucially denies, in affirmation of the inward ethics of individual identity, a social moral horizon.

This is a point which both Lukács and Williams fail to perceive. Individualism occupies the paradoxical position in the thought of both analysts of being the triumphal product of middle class hegemony, but which can only fully be realized in a classless society. In other words individualism is the culmination of human development which emerges under capitalism but which may only uncontradictorily be realized in a socialist order. This is the impact of the statement by Lenin quoted by Lukács: “Lenin once remarked that socialism had to be built by people who were moulded by capitalism” (*Realism in Our*

Time 105). Lenin, of course, draws on the ambiguity in Marx clearly observed by Marshall Berman: "... the humanistic ideal of self-development grows out of the emerging reality of bourgeois economic development. Thus, for all Marx's invective against the bourgeois economy, he embraces enthusiastically the personality structure that this economy has produced" (96). What is not recognized by either Lukács or Williams but which emerges from Charles Taylor's analysis is that the *social value* prized by both authors is the product not of capitalist individualism, but of pre-individualist social orders in which the person was oriented against a socio-transcendental horizon. *Social value* is the product of engaged, embedded beings in an enchanted world.

II The Existential Question in *Sweet and Sour Milk*

A Naked Needle represents Farah at his most experimental. In his subsequent novel, *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Farah integrates the central transformations enabled by modernist technique to structure a modernist take on the detective novel. *A Naked Needle* responds to the central question posed by individualism – Who am I? – with the suggestion that the person is the refracted reflection of other textual representations. *Sweet and Sour Milk* indirectly asks the question in the context of a mystery. Soyaan has died. He has died in mysterious circumstances which lead his twin brother, Loyaan, to suspect foul play. The central question which drives the novel concerns who has killed Soyaan. Attempting to solve the mystery posed by this question, leads the twin brother to ask another question – Who was Soyaan? Loyaan discovers that despite the congruence of their birth, he does not know his twin at all. Soyaan, an economist in the service of the dictatorial regime, appears to have been involved in clandestine activity with other members of a secret cell to which a diary, a mysterious

“Memorandum” and a short essay which begins “Clowns. Cowards. And (tribal) upstarts” (33), provide the clues. In the unfolding of the narrative, the Memorandum is never located and the question, “Who killed Soyaan?”, is never satisfactorily answered.

In his investigation of all the circumstances of his brother’s life and death, Loyaan comes face to face with another question. This time the question is “Who am I?” Like Koschin before him, who is socially alienated, Loyaan is disengaged from all social origins, in this case symbolized by the authoritarian patriarch, Keynaan. As a consequence, the question is not easily answered. The question, “Who am I?”, appears to open a vortex into which closure is absorbed. The novel ends with a mysterious knock at the door, presumably the knock of agents of the security services who will lead the brother away to death, the repetition of the murder of his twin. Loyaan’s death also will be shrouded in mystery. The cycle will begin again – “Who killed Loyaan?”

If the central modernist influence in *A Naked Needle* was Joyce, the central influence in *Sweet and Sour Milk* is Samuel Beckett, although it would be dangerously dogmatic to insist on exclusive influence. The main influence in the earlier novel appears to be Joyce, however, the epigram “*No real characters where none is intended. / No true incidents where none is mentioned*” appears to be inspired by the final line from Beckett’s *Watt*, “no symbols where none intended” (255). Similarly, the music motif discussed earlier may well come from Beckett. Music is so central an element in Beckett’s work that musical scores have been written based on his plays. As Kellman suggests, while the modernist *hero* may stake a claim for spontaneous generation, the modernist *text* forms part of a tradition, a literary tradition, for the most part patrilinear. Joyce, whose forebears include all representatives of culture from Athens to Albion with a Dublin detour was mentor to Beckett. And Beckett and

Joyce are key influences on Farah. The detective novel element in *Sweet and Sour Milk* may be inspired by Jacques Moran in Beckett's *Molloy*. So too the extended and highly poetic bicycle allegory which forms the epigraph to the first part of the novel might allude to the recurring bicycle motif in *Molloy*. In Farah, the wheels of the bicycle seem to be allegories of the self which has no independence but for the "system", the "code of behaviour" represented by the bicycle frame which enables it. But more significant in *Sweet and Sour Milk* is a Beckett inspired focus on language, which is, in a sense, a progression on Joyce's literary construction of the self. If in Joyce, the self is nothing but other characters recycled, then in Beckett the self is the construct, at the bare minimum, of language. This might be the motivation in a drama like "Play", Beckett's play in one act, which seems to do away with character altogether. What is presented are only disembodied voices in urns. In Beckett, Woolf's "room of one's own" is parodied. Each "character" in its disengaged interiority enjoys the privilege of an urn or trash can of his own.

What distinguishes *Sweet and Sour Milk* from the other novels, is the Beckett-like insistence on the materiality of language. This is forcefully impressed on the reader in one of the earliest sequences where Loyaan engages in conversation with the mortally ill Soyaan. Their lengthy exchange is interrupted by Soyaan's unstoppable hiccupping, the obtrusiveness of which is suggested by this fragment: "The demystifica-*hic*-tion of in-*hic*-formation. Tell the *hic* masses in the simplest *hic* of terms what is happening. Demystify *hic* politics. [...] Uncover whether hiding behind letters such as KGB, CIA, or other *hic* wicked alphabet of mysteries *hic*. Do you *hic* understand now *hic*?" (15). Through the hiccupping, we, as readers, are forced to confront the materiality of the signifier. The signifier, figuratively, causes Soyaan's demise since he succumbs to death in a spasm of hiccups. Farah seems here

to allude to and expand on the use made of the hiccup by the “voice” called only “m” in Beckett’s one-act play, titled “*Play*”. The letter “m” furthermore seems to be the secret code inscribed in Soyaan’s diary to crack the mystery of his death: “ ‘M to the power of 2.’ What does this mean?” (21).

Farah similarly in *Sweet and Sour Milk* draws on the trope of silence in Beckett. In Beckett, language in its materiality constructs mundane reality. Its opposite, silence, may thus embody transcendent nothingness; or silence may encompass a range of possibilities as Ihab Hassan suggests in his reading of the dismemberment of Orpheus in the book of the same title. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the trope of silence appears to be a form of resistance against power construed as a textual construct. As John Williams observes, in *Sweet and Sour Milk* the regime is presented as having the monopoly on the power exerted by the word. Thus those who resist must resist with silence. A key scene is one where Loyaan is summoned before a government minister to determine how much Loyaan has, in fact, figured out about his brother’s death . He strategically uses his own silence, as Williams shows, first to agitate the minister, then to foreground silence as a mode of resistance. When the minister cannot break Loyaan, the minister frustratedly falls into a silence which wrinkles “the Minister’s face into inhuman and voiceless forms” (Williams 170).

Most significant, however, in Farah’s experiment with modernism in both *A Naked Needle* and *Sweet and Sour Milk*, is the revelation, in and through the procedures of modernism, that the subject is an unstable, literary or linguistic construct. In explorations of modernism, Virginia Woolf’s much-endorsed statement that “on or about December, 1910 human character changed” (*Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* 4) needs to be evaluated. It is salutary to recall that the revolution apparently brought about by modernism, which

simultaneously liberated the fragmented self from both the autonomous, rational, Enlightenment subject, and the sentimentalism of Romantic subjectivity, itself proceeds upon the basis of a disengaged identity. Charles Taylor suggests:

And so a turn inward [referring to modernist interiority], to experience or subjectivity, didn't mean a turn to a *self* to be articulated, where this is understood as an alignment of nature and reason, or instinct and creative power. On the contrary, the turn inward may take us beyond the self as usually understood, to a fragmentation of experience which calls our ordinary notions of identity into question, [...] or beyond that to a new kind of unity, a new way of inhabiting time, ... Indeed, we can see how the notion could arise that an escape from the traditional idea of the unitary self was a condition of a true retrieval of lived experience (*Sources* 462).

What Taylor thus stresses is that modernist fragmentation is not the alternative to autonomy, "it is its complement" (*Sources* 465).

The fragmented self constructed out of a collage of other fragments purports to represent a more authentic identity since it renders contradiction uncontradictory. The disengaged self no longer has uneasily to acquiesce to a social morality which it must pretend emerges from autonomy. The self recognized by modernism is an identity constructed in orientation to a higher order. But now the higher order is art itself. The fragmented self is oriented by and constructed out of other representations and itself will in turn become the axis and fragment for the autotelic generation of other identities. If the realist text seeks to escape the ligature of epic totality through presenting totality as freely produced in each individual soul, then the modernist text claims to efface totality in and through the aesthetic. The claim is made through modernism in Farah's novels that in the invisible totality of art lies ultimate individual freedom. This is the principle which appears

to drive many of the later novels. What this conception occludes, is the origin of this resolution in the disengaged identity it purports to challenge. Art, in coming to represent the higher order, becomes the ultimate invisible totality.

The following chapter which considers *Close Sesame*, the final novel of the “Dictatorship” trilogy, is tangential to the argument which is left off here and is developed further in Chapter 6. The next chapter explores the difficulty encountered when the novel attempts to represent a *heteronomous* subject, rather than autonomous identity and the consequent fragmented self which develops out of autonomy.

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Chapter 5

Close Sesame and the Representation of Heteronomy

Close Sesame, the final book of the “Dictatorship” trilogy, is unique in Farah’s corpus. To capture what makes this novel exceptional it is necessary to be reminded of the constitutive presupposition of the classic realist novel, which modernism and postmodernism, through the specific terms of abrogation, ironically reaffirm. The realist novel may better be distinguished against the genre of the epic which it replaced. The epic is the story of how the hero is lost but finally returns “home” to a transcendent truth. The realist novel, by contrast, tells the story of how the hero apparently returns “home” to the “transcendent truth” within a disengaged self. Character and plot merge to become indistinguishable. The novel, in its defining articulation as *Bildungsroman*, is the modern cultural form which naturalizes and normalizes the subject as individual (Slaughter “Enabling Fictions” 1409-1411). To be an individual, is to possess the constitutively defined potential to generate an autonomous ethics. As Thomas Pavel, referred to in an earlier chapter, suggests, the novel charts the “interiorization of the ideal” or the “enchantment of interiority” (14-15). The structure of the novel itself tends to preclude representation of subjectivities where this normative assumption is not prevalent. Any conception of selfhood which does not proceed out of the internalization of moral sources can only be represented with difficulty in the novel. Individualism is so fundamental to the novel that attempts to represent personhood, that is, the subject constituted in orientation to a social or transcendental ideal, appear fundamentally compromised.

This problem first emerges clearly with the dissemination of the realist novel to Russia. Aleksandr Veselovskii neatly summarizes the Russian perception of the Enlightenment novel. He suggests that the novel is the “endpoint of a lengthy process of narrative individualization. A fixed shared “we” was gradually replaced [...] with an uncertain, self-orienting “I”, a process that represented in miniature the victory of the ‘unity of content’ (the ego of the storyteller) over the ancient unity of performance” (Emerson 271). Enlightenment rationalism embodied in the novel comes up against the strongly anti-procedurally rational tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church in which the effects of the Protestant Revolution had no impact. This translates into the paradox of the Russian realism of Tolstoy who re-introduces epic elements into the novel by the back door, as it were, and Dostoevsky’s oeuvre in which the awkward hero finds his path in life through a profoundly spiritual orientation.

Similarly, the “revolutionary” novel which finds in collective action the motor for social change, comes up against the individualist premise of the novel which ultimately dictates compromise. The paradox of the proletarian novel is the contradiction Hayden White observes of Marxism as a theory. Marxism shares in the immanentism of the Enlightenment but transcendently holds out the possibility of a utopian future (*Content of the Form* 142-143). This translates in the discourse of the novel into the struggle between realism and romanticism. In other words, the challenge for the novel is how to present a *social* truth through the autonomous, morally self-generating hero. Denning encapsulates the contradiction of the revolutionary novel in the following way:

Several challenges immediately presented themselves: the attempt to represent working class life in a genre that had developed as the quintessential narrator of bourgeois or middle class manners, kin structures

and social circles; the attempt to represent a collective subject in a form built around the interior life of the individual; the attempt to create a public agitational work in a form that, unlike drama, depended upon private, often domestic consumption; and the attempt to create a vision of revolutionary social change in a form almost inherently committed to the solidity of society and history. The early [proletarian] novels are often awkward and unnovelistic.(70)

To reinforce the point, David Trotter observes that working class novels of the period 1895 – 1920 are almost always *Bildungsromane* about writers who benefit from educational opportunities and move out of the working class: “Work creates the allegiance of these writers, and of their protagonists; books create identity. Identity emerges through the rejection of allegiance ...” (34).

In the Asian colonial context, where the understanding of self as individual has no autochthonous base, Meenakshi Mukerjee finds that the negotiation with modernity of the early Indian novels, produces a similar compromise to that identified in the early Russian novel, namely, realism, but with a strong “epic overlay.”

In African literature, Eileen Julien observes that the image of the continent is determined by the pessimistic tones of what she terms the “extroverted African novel”. This type of novel engages in a European or global discourse. In other words, these novels are written for the metropolitan centre rather than for an audience on the periphery. A consequence of this orientation is that these novels almost always represent African life, language, culture and ethos as “ornament” within an essentially Eurocentric frame. The African elements are simply decorative features in a form that is fundamentally European. The form itself cannot represent alternative worldviews. When alternative worldviews are presented, such “novels” are inescapably “unnovelistic.” They are instances of what Julien

refers to as “exuberant” novels, microcosmically popular, but insufficiently “literary” to be included in the category of world literature.

The problems outlined above are all specific expressions of a fundamental consequence of the form of the novel. The Russian, revolutionary, African or Asian novel is not novelistic enough. This is an outcome, however, not of the writers’ failed artistry, but a consequence of the ideology of a genre inhospitable to the alternative worldviews of these authors. In order to be “literary”, long prose narratives are formally obliged to enter into the “individual freedom – socialization” dichotomy which is constitutive both of modernity and the novel. This dichotomy generates contradiction out of the imperative that the disengaged, free individual submit to the social code. These novels often unsuccessfully negotiate the demand of the form that morality appear immanent in the autonomous individual, within a social context where the moral sources remain indisputably exterior. Modernism and postmodernism deflect morality onto form (the aesthetic), suggesting a “post-moral” world, or a world which races on in Alasdair MacIntyre’s formulation, referred to in an earlier chapter - “After Virtue.” Novels which do not conform to these pre-requisites are seen as artistic failures.

Close Sesame has to be read in relief against the various examples of “failed” novels mentioned above. But, it is very important to stress that while *Close Sesame* purports to represent heteronomous subjectivity, ultimately, the ethos which dominates Farah’s other novels prevails. Thus, crucially, this chapter is an attempt to understand why *Close Sesame*, finally, is *not* a “failed” novel.

I Transcendental Moral Sources and the Novelistic Hero

Without exception, critical accounts of *Close Sesame* read the novel as singular in Farah's oeuvre. The novel's egregiousness rests squarely on the uniqueness of the protagonist, Deeriye, through whom the entire novel is focalized. Reed Way Dasenbrock, for example, suggests that while the other "protagonists of the first trilogy are all young, oriented toward European culture and languages, and generally European-educated"(747), Deeriye, by contrast, represents tradition and religion. Derek Wright similarly reinforces the exceptionality of the hero of *Close Sesame* through the observation that Deeriye is "a unique specimen in [Farah's] writing" since he is a "patriarch who is not a tyrant." This is achieved despite his being a "devout Muslim and traditional Somali." For which reason, Deeriye is Farah's "most endearing hero" (*Nuruddin Farah* 85). Alden and Tremaine see in Deeriye the artistic challenge for Farah of once again, following the female centred novels, creating "a character quite unlike himself: elderly, asthmatic, devoutly Muslim, centrally involved in an organized movement of resistance, and deeply embroiled in clan politics" (57). What is highly significant also, but a fact unnoted by the critics, is the observation that of all Farah's protagonists, Deeriye is the only hero who dies at the end of the novel.

To recapitulate, Deeriye is the exception among Farah's protagonists since Deeriye represents tradition and religion. In other words, *Close Sesame*, constructs a central character who apparently draws his moral sources from the *external* social and transcendental frameworks of Somali tradition and Islamic religion, but within a genre which privileges the internal, individual moral source. The real challenge of *Close Sesame*, like the challenge of the Russian, proletarian or Indian novel, is to represent *heteronomy* employing a form which is constitutive of *individual autonomy*.

The themes of religion and tradition are embodied in Deeriye through the suggestion in the novel of a patterned history. Through the character of Deeriye, history in the novel is shown to be caught in inescapable cycles. Deeriye is “not so much a physical person so much as an abstraction ... *He* was an idea; he was a national *notion* ... an image ... a kaleidoscope” (*Close Sesame* 12). Through the “kaleidoscope” which is Deeriye, Prophetic, caliphate, anti-colonial and postcolonial dictatorship histories are superimposed in order to be hermeneutically interrogated to reveal underlying patterns.

The novel variously dramatizes Prophetic biography in its portrayal of the central character, Deeriye. As a very elderly asthmatic, Deeriye seems to exist at different levels of consciousness at once. The narrative presents him passing seamlessly from waking to sleep, from reality to dreamworld which prophetically foreshadows future events. Outside of the procedurally rational order, Deeriye also accesses other zones of existence in which he communes with his late wife, Nadiifa. He also realizes the goal of the mystical quest for “*fana*’ ” or annihilation in God. In these ways, Deeriye imitates, but more than imitates, embodies the Prophetic experience of the founder of Islam. In Islamic tradition, there is a strong connection between dreams and revelation, supported by Hadith or the recorded utterances of the Prophet (Graham 37). Other characters in the novel, like Deeriye’s brother-in-law, Elmi-Tiir, recognize his stature achieved both through piety and through principled opposition to injustice. Elmi-Tiir refers to the experience of being in Deeriye’s presence as “standing in Deeriye’s revealed light” (*Close Sesame* 12). The group of young men involved in shadowy resistance to the Dictator, including Deeriye’s law professor son, Mursal, all have names symbolically suggestive of the sacred time of Prophecy and revelation: They are Mursal, Mahad, Mukhtaar and Jibreel. The first three are names associated with the Prophet.

The last is the Arabic version of Gabriel, the angel of revelation. This resistance group regard Deeriye as their symbolic centre. Furthermore, when Deeriye dies at the end, on his body is found a copy of “Ya-Sin”, the thirty sixth chapter, regarded as the “heart” of the Qur’an. In this surah, the central fact of the prophecy of Muhammad and the key elements of the revelation he brought are expressed. The mystical letters, “Ya-Sin”, are also “assumed to be the title of the Prophet” (A. Yusuf Ali 1168).

Twisting also in the gyres of history suggested by Deeriye’s representation are the succession battles which raged upon the death of the Prophet in 632. Direct reference is made on a number of occasions to Mucaawiya and Yazid (*Close Sesame* 9, 44). Both Mucaawiya, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, and especially his son, Yazid, are symbols of tyranny violently challenged. The father, Mucaawiya was challenged by the Prophet’s son-in-law, Ali. And the authority of the son, Yazid, was challenged by the Prophet’s grandson, Hussain, who was killed by Yazid at the Battle of Karbala. The *lex talionis* apparently inscribed in this history is what may have justified Deeriye’s possible assassination attempt on the Dictator.

The figure of Deeriye also strongly alludes to the Somali historical figure Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, dubbed the “Mad Mullah” by the British, leader of the sufi inspired resistance whose members were called “Dervishes”. In popular tradition, however, Mohamed Abdulle Hassan is regarded as “Sayyid”, an honorific title used for descendants in the line of the Prophet, and sharing in the “*barakah*” or blessing of the Prophet’s household. In revisionist histories, the anti-colonialist Sayyid is also hailed as the father of Somali nationalism and through his poetic prowess is regarded as the Somali “Shakespeare.” For many Somalis, the Sayyid is the greatest oral poet of all time. The Sayyid is a figure whom

Deeriye was “reared to revere” and whose poems he recalls by heart. Deeriye’s personal history coincides with key historical events in the life of the Sayyid. 1912 is the year Deeriye’s gives for his birth and the year that the Dervishes kill the British military commander, Richard Corfield, in battle. (Corfield was actually killed in 1913, but 1912 is privileged by the text since it is also the year of the formation of the African National Congress with which Deeriye identifies among other persons, events and institutions in an expression of pan-African allegiance. Deeriye is also associated with other global political and anti-colonial figures like Ataturk and Gandhi.)

Like the Sayyid before him who resisted British colonialism, Deeriye challenges Italian colonialism and then later the postcolonial dictatorship. In the same way that the Sayyid was betrayed by a fellow Somali, being accused to the British of the theft of a rifle, Deeriye is betrayed in a circumstance which leads to his incarceration in an Italian jail for twelve years. For his resistance to the dictator, he is later imprisoned for four years. History repeats itself when, just as the Sayyid was summoned to a meeting of the leaders of the Qadiriyy Brotherhood in the coastal town of Berbera to discuss the religious validation of the resistance methods used by the Dervishes, so too, Deeriye is called to a meeting of clan elders convened by the Dictator.

Somalis frequently point to similarities in the life history of the Sayyid with the Prophetic life. Like the Prophet, the Sayyid was also “given to dreams and midnight revelations” (Samatar, S.S. *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism* 196).

History is thus seen to repeat itself with Deeriye embodying the Sayyid and the Sayyid in some ways embodying the Prophet. Religion and tradition are more than just an

aspect of the characterization of Deeriye. Indeed, the character is a construct of religion and tradition – as the text itself suggests, Deeriye is an “idea”, a “notion.”

II *Close Sesame* and the Representation of Socially Constituted Selfhood

The challenge for Farah in the final book of the “Dictatorship” trilogy is to construct a hero who, like the epic hero, locates moral sources outside of the self. But, paradoxically, the heteronomous hero must be constructed out of the building blocks of the genre which, in dynamic mutual interaction with philosophical and material contexts, constitutes the disengaged, autonomous self. Tradition locates virtue in a social code whose origins are located in time immemorial. Religion locates the higher order in a transcendental code, which, in the case of Islam, is also inescapably social.

One might argue that both tradition and religion have already achieved representation in the earlier novel, *Sardines*, through the characters of the Somali traditional, Idil, and the Yemeni religious, Fatima bint Thabit. The counter to this suggestion is the fact that both these characters in the earlier novel are represented as “types”, or in Forster’s definition, as “flat characters.” The challenge in *Close Sesame* is to represent tradition and religion in and through the character of Deeriye. Deeriye must show *development* in the novel. Deeriye must be a “round” character in order for novelistic representation to be successful. Tradition and religion must not be simply aspects of the character portrayed in the novel, they must inform the structure of the narrative.

The irony of the attempted representation of heteronomy in this novel is that, right from the outset, the form appears to preclude the possibility of a social self. Ironically, the vehicle through which tradition and religion achieve representation is through an ailing, frail,

very elderly man. What are the implications of the expression of religion and tradition through the old man, Deeriye, rather than, for example, through the young man, Koschin, from *A Naked Needle* or through Medina, a mature woman in the prime of life? One implication is that consequent upon his age, Deeriye must live a radically circumscribed life. In the novel we are informed that the aged father is moved from a room in his daughter's house which is being renovated, to the home of his son where he has "a room of [his] own". Deeriye's door, unlike the door of Virginia Woolf's feminist individualist heroine, referred to in an earlier chapter, is not under lock and key. Deeriye's door is kept ajar to allow the family's benevolent vigilance over the old man. Deeriye, of course, also has a room of his own in his twelve years of incarceration in colonial jails and four years in independence jails. Almost without exception the "action" of the novel occurs in this one room in his son's home, "and is very static," as Bardolph suggests (400). But the room is one with a view. Through his window, Deeriye may gaze upon but not participate in the activities of the street, which frequently involve the mad revelations of the mysterious character, Khaliif. Consistent with the other novels, "action" in *Close Sesame* consists largely in the deliberation of ideas. Deeriye's interior monologues are the dominant speech form of the novel.

The sense that Deeriye is radically cut off from the society around himself is exaggerated by the fact also that when in his room, he listens with headphones to "isolated Koranic litanies" (*Close Sesame* 20) and to recordings of the Sayyid's poetry. So often, when other people enter his room, he is not even aware of their presence. The poetry, of course, is also supposed to entrench the conviction that Deeriye embodies tradition. But the novel's specific construction of character transforms these symbols of heteronomy into something

radically different. Somali oral poetry, as has been shown in an earlier chapter, is highly “individual” in composition, but highly social in performance. Deeriye’s enfeebled physical condition makes the fact of his possible performance, or his participation in a living tradition impossible. In the nomadic pastoral setting, the oral poet was central to social deliberation. While that tradition continued in altered ways in urban public fora, the oral poet similarly remained central to social life. Deeriye’s mode of appreciation of the poetry of the Sayyid wholly transforms it into one dimension of individual self-realization.

What is interesting also, is that the text reproduces eleven lines of “The Death of Corfield”, Deeriye’s favourite poem composed by the Sayyid, in untranslated Somali. Refusal to translate creates a number of effects. It may enhance a sense of estrangement, that the culture represented cannot or should not be assimilated into the dominant language of discourse, in which case it creates a sense of exoticism. Or it may, rather more disingenuously, be used to suggest a profound “otherness” which, paradoxically, is entirely domesticated by the ideology of the form. While in this instance both of these considerations may hold, more to the point, is the fact that the Sayyid’s poem may compromise the novel’s sleight of hand in presenting the Sayyid’s subjectivity and Deeriye’s subjectivity as being essentially the same.

The poem “The Death of Richard Corfield” was composed by the Sayyid after the leader of the camel constabulary was killed in a battle with the Dervishes, which he was on order to avoid (Andrzejewski and Lewis 70). The poem is particularly fierce in tone, perhaps since the Sayyid saw in Corfield the image of his own crazy recklessness. The poem is addressed to Corfield in the next world and is very strategically composed to exalt and encourage Dervish unity and bravery, and confirm that the Dervishes have justice on their

side. The poem is a call to action which would *expose* the fundamentally opposed invocation of the novel to potentially endless interpretation.

Close Sesame, despite the title which suggests finality and despite the expectation that it might share in the relative certainties of tradition and religion which it is supposed to represent, is one of Farah's most radically indeterminate novels. Derek Wright suggests: "... the ambiguous and paradoxical, the unexplained and indeterminate, occupy so much space in [the] narrative that it is uncertain whether the final effect is a polyvalency of meaning or a massive aporia at the core of the book" (*Novels of Nuruddin Farah* 88). Deeriye's death at the end is shrouded in uncertainty. His action – the final self-realization of his development in the novel – may have been suicide or a failed assassination attempt. If an assassination attempt, it fails since his revolver gets caught in his prayer beads. Whether this suggests the inadequacy of religion in the face of political oppression or the triumph of religion which resists becoming the mirror image of evil is a moot point. Closure is structured to suggest the higher order in the act of literary interpretation itself.

In its mode of construction of parallels between the Sayyid and its central character, Deeriye, the text masks another fundamental difference between the two figures. While the Sayyid reflects an identity oriented against the Somali social code in significant ways structured around kinship relations, Deeriye, reflecting the sensibility of virtually all Farah's positively represented characters, completely rejects the idea of clan. While kinship relations to a certain extent may be a construct, often disastrously manipulated (Kapteijns, Besteman), they also are a significant aspect of Somali identity, so fundamental that they are noticed only by default, when there are tensions in the system. For example, the economy of the Somaliland Republic is virtually completely a remittance economy which depends precisely

on kinship obligations. In other words, in this case, kinship obligations, “clan”, is not only what keeps the Somaliland economy afloat, but traditional conflict resolution techniques are precisely what allowed the fragile and regionally threatened stability of the Somaliland Republic to emerge (Bradbury 77-108).

The Sayyid only retrospectively comes to be constituted as the father of Somali nationalism. The Sayyid’s primary orientation was religious, a religious understanding which did not outright reject kinship structures. The effect of the Sayyid’s religiously inspired anti-colonial activities was to a certain extent to disembed the subject from narrowly defined clan associations and re-embed the subject in a wider religious identity. This did not prevent him, however, from on occasion opportunistically manipulating clan identities (Samatar, A.I. 32-33). In Deeriye, by contrast, one witnesses an entirely transmuted conception of the self. Deeriye regards his time in prison as the closed space which opens up his eyes to the fictionality of clan (*Closed Sesame* 103). Clan exists only as “trivial [...] politicking” (*Close Sesame* 7). Deeriye’s reality is constituted around the “autonomy” of his subjectivity whose precondition is “a losing-control of the clan ideology or the narrow-minded ‘family first’ ideology” (*Close Sesame* 123).

In the time frame depicted in the novel, Deeriye ventures out of his room on only three occasions; the first when he is struck by a stone thrown through the window and is taken to the hospital, the second when he is dropped off by his daughter-in-law at a neighbourhood tea shop and the third when he attends the meeting of clan elders organized by the Dictator. Curiously, on each of these occasions, when Deeriye does venture out into the world, he is not fully in the world. He is taken to the hospital unconscious. His visit to the Baar Novecento and his subsequent walk to the house of his friend is marked by

confused bewilderment. And Deeriye's participation in the clan assembly is punctuated by unavoidable catnaps. Strictures of form appear to compel Farah to conceive of what should be a fully social and integrated self in terms of the alienation attendant upon the debilities of advanced age and ill health. In other words, since the novelistic novel struggles to represent community, privileging association instead, a protagonist profoundly out of keeping with what is purportedly represented in the novels is "pre-selected" in terms of the exigencies of the form.

Deeriye is taken in criticism of the novel to represent the very pious Muslim. And indeed superficially, that is what he is. He is extremely conscientious about the five daily prayers, reads the Qur'an in the colonial prison, has the professions of faith constantly on his lips and has a profoundly spiritual consciousness. But, what once again is curious about this selection of central character is that he is physically unable to participate in the collective dimension of the expression of the Islamic faith. In the course of the entire novel, Deeriye is only on one occasion able to perform prayers in a mosque, even though Islam highly encourages congregational prayers five times a day every day. Deeriye visits the mosque as an incidental detour on his walk from the Baar Novecento to the house of his friend, Rooble. What is interesting is that the mosque, as forum of prayer, education and socialization, in a sense constitutes the religious equivalent of the eighteenth century coffee shops of the bourgeois public sphere. Despite this potential, the mosque does not come into the focus of the novel in any specific way.

There are also powerful allusions to the sufi tradition in Somali Islam expressed through the portrayal of the character of Deeriye. Until recently, since Somalia has come under the partial influence of what is termed "Wahhabi" or "Salafi" interpretations of Islam,

part of a broader response to modernity, virtually all Somalis were associated with one of the sufi orders, which trace their origins to the Qadiriyy brotherhood, founded by the twelfth century holy man, Abdul-Qader Jilani. The Sayyid was the founder of the northern splinter group called the Saalihiyy order, while the Uwaisiyya order dominated in the south. What is common to all sufi movements, however, are the concepts of interiority and development. These come together in the sufi concept of “*tariqa*” or path. Like the self-development traced in the 18th century European *Bildungsroman*, the path negotiates various stages of development or, in the discourse of Islam, “stations” or “*maqamat*” (Schimmel *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* 100). A fundamental difference between the two models of self-development, however, is that Islamic development is always a *spiritual* development as opposed to a secular development which witnesses the isolated individual inwardly at odds with society, finally reaching some associational compromise. The spiritual journey is in some ways similarly a lonely, individual, hermetic journey, but also, paradoxically, a journey of confraternity in which the “*murid*” or initiate is induced into a brotherhood and where the most significant social bond is the allegiance to “*sheikh*” or spiritual guide. The sufi brotherhood, unlike modern forms of association is not the coming together for mutual benefit of equal, independent actors. It is a spiritual hierarchy that comes into existence for a spiritual purpose whose social codes are both external and transcendental.

The sufi represented in Farah’s novel, dictated by the form, necessarily must be a sufi minus his “*sheikh*” or “*pir*” and without his brotherhood. The fact that Deeriye is an elderly, incapacitated man naturalizes what otherwise would be a very peculiar identity formation, especially in the context of Somali religious expression through the brotherhoods. The marked divergence of novelistic representation of Somali Muslim piety from its historical

expression in the brotherhoods is suggested by a cursory glance at Ahmed Samatar's analysis of the "basic characteristics" of the Somali sufi orders. These include belief "in the living spirit of the great Prophet", "the degree of control and power given to the leader of the order", "a collective and organized spirit", frequent " 'congregational' activities" called "Dhikris", vertical and horizontal integration of "inchoate groups", the revival of the broadly social concepts of *hegira* (emigration) and *jihad* to resist British colonial penetration (A.I. Samatar 25-6).

Deeriye as "the pious Muslim" masks another contradiction. Through the superficial elements of clothing, ritual and otherworldly spirituality, criticism interprets Deeriye as representative of Islamic consciousness. But this reading is flawed since Deeriye in essential ways orients himself against the self-generating morality of an individualist ethics rather than against an Islamic conception of revelation. For the pious Muslim, the Qur'an is the Word of God and the Prophet is the Perfect Man. The fundamentals of the faith thus established prescribe a wholly social practice. While various grades of obligation exist from mandatory to recommended, what are termed the "five pillars", are the *sine qua non* of faith. Each of these fundamentals is constitutively social: The *shahada*, or statement of belief, namely, that there is only one God and that Muhammad is His final messenger, is not an interior belief but a declaration, a "performative"; the call to the five daily prayers is a call (ideally) to congregational worship; the injunction to give *zakah*, or almsgiving, is a call to social responsibility, the requirement that one perform the *hadj*, or pilgrimage at least once in one's lifetime is an invocation to participation in a social ritual and the injunction to fast in Ramadaan is necessarily a public call since the lunar month of Ramadaan begins and ends

only with a collective sighting of the moon. *Close Sesame* represents religious devotion through the hero, Deeriye, as the private pastime of the private individual.

A further consequence of this representation is to undermine the force of external ethical orientation, the axis of the heteronomous self. For the pious Muslim, the Qur'an is the Word of God and the Hadith or Tradition of the Prophet represents a living interpretation of the revealed text. These sources, it is believed, embody the perfect blueprint for self and social realization for all people at all times. Prophetic time thus constitutes what Graham, quoting Mircea Eliade, refers to as "sacred" time, "a time out of time":

While Muhammad still lived and prophecy and revelation in Islam continued, an order of existence prevailed that was unattainable in subsequent times. Human affairs stood under the special "judgment" of the prophetic revelatory event, which illumined not just appearances, but realities in human life (9).

While Deeriye listens to the Qur'an on cassette with headphones and dies with a copy of Surah Ya-Sin in his pocket, the Qur'an and its revelatory message are not really what orient the subjectivity of this character. The insignificance of the Qur'an as moral code in the novel is suggested by the fact that its teachings are never contemplated. Like the Sayyid's poem, verses of the Qur'an are neither translated nor engaged. The pivotal surah Ya-Sin, if examined, suggests that "Both Revelation and Nature are eloquent / in instructing man for his own good" (A. Yusuf Ali 1181). Even, more forcefully, verse 69 declares: "This is no less than / A Message and a Qur-an [in the dual suggestion of the word as both "recitation" and "reading"] / Making things clear." For the devout Muslim, thus, the meaning of life is clear, contained in revelation through Prophetic example.

Deeriye, in sharp contrast, is a doubter: “It is the prerogative of God alone to be sure of anything. [...] I am only human. And therefore I am in doubt” (*Close Sesame* 231). What Deeriye expresses is not the occasional uncertainty to which one is from time to time prone, but rather doubt as ethical source. This is, however, a philosophy which cannot easily be construed as Islamic as the Prophetic tradition, more than likely known to a character like Deeriye, emphasises: “Leave that which makes you doubt for that which does not make you doubt” (An-Nawawi 52).

For Deeriye, as sufi, furthermore, what often is referred to as the “*imitatio Muhammadi*” ought to become even more persuasive than in the practice of the average Muslim. Numerous verses in the Qur’an refer to the obligation to follow the example of the Prophet sent as a “mercy” to all human beings. For example a verse in the surah, “The House of Imran”, invokes the Muslim: “If ye do love God, / Follow me: God will love you / And forgive you your sins” (3: 31) In the sufi brotherhoods, this injunction is even greater. The *sheikh* is the gateway to the Prophet and the Prophet is the gateway to God. The imitation of the “beautiful model” represented by the Prophet is expressed in the sufi orders with manifestly greater enthusiasm. Annemarie Schimmel suggests:

But it was through this imitation of Muhammad’s actions as transmitted through the *hadith* that Islamic life assumed a unique uniformity in social behaviour, a fact that has always impressed visitors to all parts of the Muslim world. It is also visible, for instance, in the hagiography of Muslim saints. For, as Frithjof Schuon says: “This ‘Muhammadan’ character of the virtues ... explains the relatively impersonal style of the saints; there are no other virtues than those of Muhammad, so they can only be repeated in those who follow his example; it is through them that the Prophet lives in his community (“Muhammad the Beautiful Model” 32).

What is perplexing about the character of Deeriye, is the virtually complete absence of this dimension of Muslim practice. While for the Muslim, the code is external, both transcendental and social, embodied in the Prophet, exegete incarnate of the Qur'an, Deeriye appears to draw his moral source, like the protagonists in Farah's other novels, from within himself. While in private Deeriye listens to and reads the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet, the ethical code thereby constituted does not inform his moral orientation which draws its source from elsewhere.

In a highly charged symbolic moment, Deeriye's grandson, Samawade, stands at Deeriye's bedroom window, ready to hurl his grandfather's volume of a selection of Prophetic traditions and the Corfield cassette at the mysterious madman, Khaliif, who in the street publicly denounces their family as traitors. The irony envisioned by the novel through this incident and reinforced by other such symbolic events is the contradiction that through resisting evil, one often paradoxically becomes the mirror image of evil. Samawade is the mirror image of Yassin, the grandson of the "unneighbourly" neighbours, who had hurled a stone at Deeriye. But an irony not envisioned by the novel when Samawade attempts to discard the recording of the Sayyid's poem and the Prophet's traditions, is that such repudiation reveals the novel's central contradiction, namely, the paradoxical attempt to represent heteronomy through a genre which constitutively denies heteronomy.

The text's representation of the meeting of the clan elders called by the Dictator creates the illusion of the representation of community constituted by a social-transcendental code. But this representation is self-negating:

No major upsets were to come out of the inquisition. This became obvious as a number of the elders took the floor in turn and each painted it with slogans and symbols of brotherhood, as each opened his speech with a *Faatixa*, as each

rambled on and quoted proverbs and the Prophet's tradition. [...] Deeriye was so bored with these protracted speeches that he fell asleep twice, [...] (*Close Sesame* 167).

Thus, while ritual often does become formulaic, what is revealing to note is that in the public sphere, through Deeriye as focalizer, the novel cannot portray a vibrant, living religious tradition. A religion which informs actual social codes can only be shown as a desiccated husk.

For a devout Muslim, which is how the character of Deeriye is read, God, and His Prophet are the spiritual, social and psychological axis. Life is negotiated through the external ethical code which thus comes into being. Deeriye's *Bildung* in the novel revolves around the question of retaliation. Self-realization in a Somalia under dictatorship involves resisting tyranny. Self-realization consists in resisting the tyrant without in turn becoming a tyrant. For Deeriye as "tragic hero", the choice is whether to adopt violence in opposing the Dictator. But Deeriye is no tragic hero in the sense that the novel has no external moral code against which one can judge his action. *Hamartia* as a concept is negated if the ethical code is self-validating. Deeriye and his law professor son, Mursal, engage in extended debates on the *lex talionis* in Islamic law and history. In terms of this law, the family of a murder victim has the right of retaliation against a murderer. This provision provides the putative rationale for Deeriye's attempted assassination of the Dictator. Since Deeriye's son, Mursal, has been murdered by the regime, in terms of the novel's version of Islamic law, Deeriye has the right of retaliation against the person of the Dictator.

In coming to his decision, Deeriye does not engage in the "*imitatio Muhammadi*" as one might expect a devout Muslim to do. A devout Muslim might interrogate his action against the tradition in which the Prophet states: "O My servants, I have forbidden

oppression for Myself and have made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another” (An-Nawawi 80). Or a pious Muslim might consider the tradition: “Whosoever of you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart – and that is the weakest of faith” (An-Nawawi 110). But Deeriye does not draw his source from a religious code, in which case, some form of action against oppression is highly recommended.

Even in the form of “action” eventually “taken” by Deeriye, his course is not informed by religion or the even the history of Islamdom. The Prophetic example prescribes action against oppression but not the action almost automatically assumed by Deeriye and the Somali “priviligentzia” represented in the novel. The Prophetic example is not that of the lone “kamikaze” (*Close Sesame* 155) assassin. The Prophetic example enjoins the resistance first passive and, when persuasion fails, active of the group against injustice. If the resistance envisaged by the novel is that of a shadowy, rootless organization of middle class individuals, it is not the resistance of the Prophetic “time out of time”, which encompassed the Meccan marginalized - the poor, women and slaves. Similarly, the *lex talionis* upon which Deeriye justifies his “assassination attempt” is not the right of revenge of the lone gunman. It is a public process where the first recourse is for the perpetrator to pay compensation to the family of the murdered man, failing which the family has the right of retaliation. But the noblest act enjoined by the Qur’an is in the face of sincere penitence of the perpetrator is for the family to grant mercy. This dimension of *Shari’a* is frequently misrecognized as the basis of individual human rights in Islam (Osanloo).

Deeriye’s self-realization thus, is not the self-realization of the man of faith whose *paidea* is determined by a social-spiritual code. Deeriye’s moral source, by contrast, lies

within himself. Deeriye, like Farah's other protagonists, constitutes his own moral source. His time in the enclosed space of prison affords him the opportunity to construct a personal history and life philosophy which appear to owe nothing to any social frameworks and everything to his own self-inventiveness. Like Ataturk, he invents the date of his own birth (*Close Sesame* 163). He allows the proliferation of the myth that he was born in 1912, a key year in the histories of Somali nationalism and Pan-Africanism. The time spent in prison makes him, in the consciousness of both his family and the Somali nation, an "absent presence." In this way Deeriye is a symbol also of post-representational accounts of language itself where meaning is absent from itself. Personal and national history on this account exist only as "illuminated prints – not truths" (*Close Sesame* 95). Deeriye rhetorically asks his daughter: "Did I ever tell you why I conjure up interlocutors, why I have visions, why it is that I invent histories, why I try to create symbolic links between unrelated historical events, why it is that I speak to your mother in my sleep ... did I ever bother to explain myself?" (*Close Sesame* 229). Deeriye implies that it is precisely the private, isolated, space of prison which allows him the imaginativeness to create new forms of allegiance, forms of allegiance which on the face of it owe nothing either to filiation or the social bonds created by religion. Deeriye rates the affiliational bonds of friendship more highly than traditional or religious bonds. He is suspicious of the clan members he meets at the Baar Novecento since "Their principles and his seemed at variance with one another" (*Close Sesame* 102). The bonds Deeriye privileges are the bonds of friendship. What allows family to be rejected for friendship, is that for Deeriye, friendship appears to be constructed out of the free, rational choice of the individual, rather than through biological determinism:

Friendship is an organizational concept of self-definition; family an organizational concept of being defined by blood. One is (mentally?) more like

one's friends than one's family. You define your activities by the associations and relationships you make of your own accord, whereas you never choose your family (*Close Sesame* 121).

What this view denies is any sense of an external natural order and the complete naturalization of the internal "natural order" of procedural reason, which on investigation of the positive characters across the range of novels, proves not to be so natural after all. Friendships, as especially *Knots* makes clear, appear not to extend beyond the bounds of the middle class, western educated, cosmopolitan elite. Alden and Tremaine are thus accurate in their understanding of the character of Deeriye as "a model for how individuals can select from the materials of their social world those elements that they require for autonomous acts of self-definition" (89). In other words, one constructs oneself and enters into associational bonds with similarly self-constructed others. What this view promotes is the idea that "an absolutely empty unencumbered and improvisational self" (Bellah et al 80), can construct an ideal identity which enters into relationships of perfect mutuality with other ideal identities. In other words, there is a prior self which somehow stands apart from material, social and ideological contexts with the Promethean power eclectically to select from a range of identity options. As Charles Taylor reminds us, to conceive of a self without an orientation is also to conceive of a subject who is not human. These views in various ways reflect the Aristotelean dictum that outside of the *polis*, only a beast or angel may live.

What this view is blind to in the context of the novel, is that as "pious Muslim" Deeriye cannot reject family. Firm obligations are placed on the Muslim to care for and show respect to both nuclear and extended family. The hierarchical order of love proceeds from God to the Prophet to one's mother and then father and other relations. These obligations are so strong that one is enjoined to respect parents even if they themselves are

not Muslim. Proceeding out of care of the family is care of one's neighbours, whom one is required to respect as if they were family. As "devout Muslim", Deeriye ought not to privilege friends over family, but ought to extend the recognition owed to family to friends. In other words, kinship obligations constitute the model for relations with non-kin.

In keeping with Deeriye's portrayal as sufi, he apparently achieves the ultimate self-realization through *fana'* or annihilation in God: "Then he dropped on his knees, held his open palms out and fell into a solemn prayer: *peace!* And it was! He saw, as would a sufi, the retreating mysterious formlessness of the divine and he contemplated this image of exceptional handsomeness, an image peace-producing as the soul's reunion with God" (*Close Sesame* 179). But curiously, this is not the experience which constitutes his real epiphany. It is not what allows his development in the novel. Ultimate revelation for Deeriye lies not in divine revelation; it lies in self-revelation. Deeriye's true epiphany comes just before his final act of radical hermeneutic indeterminacy:

"The a sudden thought came to him as he walked [...] 'All our lives, mortals that we are, we misname things and objects, we misdefine, we misdescribe illnesses and misuse metaphors. Why, it is not my lungs: my face! Why this suggests the loss of face, the loss of reputation and nothing more than that! Why, this doesn't suggest the loss of faith, the spiritual loss, the spiritual famine that envelopes one – right from the moment hundreds of heads of cattle rolled. I didn't lose face: I lost faith, yes, faith in my own capability, faith in my people" (*Close Sesame* 235).

Deeriye's epiphany is not a religious revelation but the realization that he has misread the signs, it is a linguistic revelation. He has misread himself. He has lost faith in his own ability to act, to take a positive step. In his life to this point, he has suffered the consequences of not acting, of inaction. In the incident referred to, he simply, in an act of passive resistance,

refused to name the Somali who killed an Italian soldier in self-defence. As a consequence he was personally punished with imprisonment and his clan was collectively punished by the slaughter of their herds. For the first time in his life, he is going to take a positive action. To concur with Alden and Tremaine, this “final and triumphant piece of self-narration” represents “the true narrative climax of the novel” (171). The irony in the context of closure, however, is that Deeriye’s ultimate “action” is shrouded in the radical indeterminacy of hermeneutic instability.

The novel equivocates to the extent that it purports to represent heteronomy, but a heteronomy which masks autonomy. Despite his representation as man of tradition and faith, Deeriye’s moral source remains his disengaged self. In his religious practice thus, Deeriye more closely resembles a type of New Age spiritualist who, with a fundamental prior and unexplained faith in brotherhood and harmony, eclectically chooses from a range of spiritual options. As Bellah et al suggest, for “radically individualistic religion ... God is simply the self magnified” (235).

In the genres which embody heteronomy, the “lost” hero returns “home”. The meaning of life is apparent. It is apparent in a higher order external to the hero himself. In *Close Sesame*, despite the finality suggested in the title, closure opens a cave of infinite possibility. Deeriye’s *Bildung* allows him to “act” but the significance of his action polysemically proliferates. Is his “act” a suicide which allows him to join his wife, Nadiifa, his “*hour*” in an exoticized heaven? Is his “act” a failed assassination attempt? If it is, what makes it fail? The answers, like the questions which may be asked are endless. The *moral source* revealed by closure in *Close Sesame* is the *virtue represented by the act of interpretation itself*. In ultimately deflecting morality onto form, *Close Sesame*, resurrects

itself from the ranks of failed novels. It cannot, however, resurrect its hero. To reiterate, Deeriye is the only Farah protagonist who dies. Even this compromised attempt to represent heteronomous identity, cannot but fail in the context of the *form* of the novel, the most significant cultural expression of the autonomous subject.

This chapter thus is an interlude to the main argument which suggests that the novel is the most significant cultural form which embodies individualism or the internalization of the moral sources. The autonomous subject is the subject who, through procedural rationalism locates the higher order within the disengaged self. This chapter explores some of the resistances encountered when the novel attempts to represent heteronomous identity. The heteronomous subject is the subject who orients himself against an external higher order, usually constituted by tradition and/or religion. In most cases, as the history of the novel in various cultural contexts shows, the representation of heteronomy results in novels which are considered slightly “unnovelistic.” *Close Sesame* is not, however, a “failed” novel. It is not a “failed” novel since the ethical axis against which the central character constitutes and orients himself is located within a disengaged identity.

Chapter 6

From Dissolution to Reconstruction: *Maps and Secrets, Links and Knots*

This chapter picks up the thread from Chapter 4 where modernist resolution of the contradiction of individualism was explored. The previous chapter, Chapter 5, was tangential to the argument. It considered the one exception in Farah's oeuvre, namely, *Close Sesame*, which attempts to represent a heteronomous subject through the narrative mode of the novel which privileges autonomy. Earlier the central compromise of realism was explored. Realism compromises with the contradiction that individual autonomy finally submits to socialization through irony. What was suggested in Chapter 4, is that the techniques of modernism allow irony to reflect on itself. Self-reflexive irony takes the form of textuality. The contradiction encountered by realism disappears in the idea that both the self and society are literary constructs. Postmodernism, this chapter argues, *assumes* what modernism *shows* through various formal techniques. Modernism shows that the subject is a collage of literary fragments. Postmodernism proceeds from the idea of the divided subject. This chapter proposes, through a reading primarily of *Maps*, that postmodern "schizophrenic" identity is not a radical critique of the autonomous subject. Instead, through an analysis of schizophrenia, which draws on the discourses of psychology and psychoanalysis, it will be shown that dominant interpretations of schizoid identity efface the disengaged, autonomous subjectivity upon which celebration of the schizophrenic is premised.

The second half of the chapter, which considers the most recent novels, *Links* and *Knots*, suggests that radically fragmented identity is at odds with Farah's commitment to Somali reconstruction. These novels trace a return to some form of centred subjectivity,

which they negotiate through the idea of “performativity”. The subject no longer is schizophrenically split. Now the relatively coherent subject, in a model drawn from theatre, assumes different *personae* (masks) responding to the exigencies of various contexts.

I Dissolving Boundaries: *Maps and Secrets*

The “Blood in the Sun” trilogy is framed by the coming of age narratives of two young men, namely, Askar of *Maps* and Kalaman of *Secrets*. The middle novel, *Gifts*, is the development story, in some ways dissensual, of a mature, previously married mother of three, discussed at some length in an earlier chapter. What links these novels thematically is the figure of the orphan at the heart of each of the texts, who symbolically represents the subject free of what Edward Said refers to as “filiation.” These novels are also connected by the contrasting way in which they use allegory, in particular, national allegory encountered in the earlier novels. *From a Crooked Rib* and *Gifts*, in particular, may be read as national allegories. In other words, the fate of the protagonist is fundamentally linked to the fate of the nation. What one witnesses in *Maps* and *Secrets*, is that the hero’s story no longer is an *index* of the narrative of the nation. Instead, the two developmental stories are conflated and both stories come to be somatically represented. Obstructions to the development of subject and nation are read as pathological symptoms which manifest themselves in and on the body of the protagonist.

From a Crooked Rib, guided by the principles of realist representation, constructs the formation story of its heroine, Ebla, as an allegory of the formation of the nation. The second trilogy ironically reflects on allegory itself through collapsing surface and deep narratives. In other words, while in some of the earlier novels, deeper, fuller meaning in the subtext was gestured towards by the surface text, in the novels under consideration, the idea of surface

and depth itself is critiqued. The surface story no longer suggests hidden depths.

Henceforward, there is only the surface narrative. The heroine in the earlier representational mode was a “signifier” whose development signified the development of the nation. In the second trilogy signifier and signified collapse on each other. *Maps* does not lead one to read national development through the story of Askar’s personal development. Neither does *Secrets* lead the reader to deduce the story of clan strife from the story of its hero, Kalamán. Instead, nation and clan “inscribe” themselves on the bodies of the protagonists. National and clan crises are experienced as the illness of the protagonists. This trend is observed more starkly in the framing novels to be considered here than in the middle novel, *Gifts*. In the narrative mode of these novels, metaphor is understood literally. The “body politic” is not simply an organicist metaphor for civil society. It is the literal inscription of politics on the body of the subject. In this operation, the sign is revealed as fully material in itself. Metaphor does not gesture to meaning beyond itself. Tenor and vehicle collapse. The metaphor, in its materiality, is the meaning.

The self-conscious postmodern textuality of both *Maps* and *Secrets* is not so much a development on the modernism of *A Naked Needle* and *Sweet and Sour Milk*, as it is a *making explicit* of what was implicit in the effects of modernist technique on the representation of both self and world. Modernism *shows* the truth of fragmented, textually refracted subjectivity. Postmodernism *tells* the truth of the fractured subject. The narrative of *A Naked Needle* was structured to reveal that Koschin’s subjectivity is a collage, generated out of the juxtaposition of literary fragments. In Askar and Kalamán, the heroes of *Maps* and *Secrets* respectively, the textually destabilized self is simply assumed on the basis of the insights of modernism.

The question of identity, which often is only partially exposed in the other novels, is made explicit in *Maps*. “Who am I?” is a question Askar (a possible homophone for “Asker”) asks himself and others obsessively from the time that he is able to speak. But the question of personal identity in this novel, set in the period of the 1977 Ogaden war, cannot be disentangled from national identity. In terms of the rhetoric of Somali nationalism, the question “Who am I?” cannot be disengaged from the question “Where am I?” According to the assumptions of nationalism, defined in a particular way, Askar cannot know himself until he knows whether he is Somali or Ethiopian. Askar’s interrogation leads his foster mother, Misra, to question whether he wouldn’t “in the end go mad questioning things” (44). Askar’s dilemma is Belacqua’s. Belacqua is the contemplative character Dante encounters in purgatory, and the subject of frequent allusion in Beckett, a strong influence in almost all Farah’s novels. The way in which Askar’s existential doubt alludes to Belacqua’s is made clear in the following fragment: “Alone, melancholic, he sat on a boulder, his head between his hands, his expression mournful. He was saddest that there was no one else to whom he could put questions about his own identity; there was no one to answer his nagging, ‘Who am I?’ or ‘Where am I?’ ” (45). The pain inflicted on his body by the social rite of passage to adulthood marked by circumcision, provokes the interrogation of identity with a renewed intensity: “I don’t know what curses I shouted or uttered. All I can tell you is that I woke up, my body wet with sweat, my throat aching from crying and saying again and again and again, ‘Who am I? Where am I? Where am I? Who am I?’ ” (97). This is a question Askar apparently is unable to answer right until the end of the narrative when he is arrested on suspicion of involvement in the murder of his foster mother and ritual mutilation of the corpse. Misra becomes the object of paranoid suspicion to Askar since it is rumoured she

betrayed the Somali community among whom she was raised for the Ethiopian man with whom she is ethnically linked. Misra is the product of the union of an Amhara nobleman and an Oromo woman, but who, from a young age, was brought up in a Somali household. Closure does not yield any answers to the mysteries of the novel. Askar till the end cannot answer the existential question, neither do we as readers solve the mystery of the crime committed. There are no solutions since at the end, the narrative circles back to the beginning. This effect is created since at the end it appears that the novel, in fact, is just the story Askar tells to himself or is a dramatization of the trial where he, Askar, is the accused, judge and jury (Cobham 88-90). The questions, “Who am I?”, “Where am I?”, are ultimately sucked into a self-destructive vortex. As Lukács suggests of the identity constituted by modernism, when “Man is reduced to a sequence of unrelated experiential fragments he is as inexplicable to others as to himself” (*Realism in Our Time* 26).

The existential-cum-national question posed in *Maps* remains a secret as does the identity of Misra’s murderer. But, the concept of the “secret” itself is destabilized in the closing novel of the trilogy, *Secrets*. The secret at the heart of *Secrets*, as a number of critics note, is that there are no secrets, since every secret seems to be available to those from whom the secret must remain most hidden. The novel, *Secrets*, is set in the period just prior to Siyad Barre’s flight from Mogadiscio in 1991. Thereafter, Somalia was plunged into a bloody civil war, which, in the context, assumed the form of clan warfare. Thus, while *Maps* interprets the dissolution of personal identity in conjunction with the dissolution of national identity, *Secrets* aligns fragmented personal identity with a critique of clan identity. Like Askar, Kalaman is plagued by existential uncertainty: “I was a self-questioner, my head teeming with the drone of unpacified anxieties buzzing inside it, like angry bees” (12). The

question of identity in this novel is linked with the notion of the secret. Nonno, Kalamán's putative grandfather, suggests: "Secrets define us, they mark us, they set us apart from all the others. The secrets which we preserve provide a key to who we are, deep down" (144). But, as has been noted, in *Secrets* there are no secrets. So identity loses its ontological foundation. The question implicitly asked by Kalamán, "Who am I?", interrogates the idea of patrilinear descent. Traditionally, every Somali child carries the name of his father and grandfather. But Kalamán is neither his father nor his grandfather's descendant. He is the product of a gang-rape whose leader is known only by the initials Y.M.I. ("Why am I?"). Kalamán thus constitutes a conundrum to clan identity but his subjectivity is not quite as radically fractured as Askar's, already pointing to the direction taken in the two novels which probably will form part of the third trilogy.

While realism marks the historical moment of the production of the individual, the disengaged, morally autonomous Enlightenment subject, postmodern dissolution marks the historical moment of a seemingly liberatory postindividualism. In both *Maps* and *Secrets*, fragmentation occurs in the constitution of self, nation and clan, reflected in narrative form itself. What is fascinating about these two novels, is that dissolution is presented, perhaps as the *postmodern* symptom of the contradiction identified earlier in the realist *Bildungsroman*, as both pathological and emancipatory.

The consequence of excessive cerebration on questions of identity for Askar is the progression to insanity, but as the madman Khaliif in *Close Sesame* reminded us, the discourse of the mad is the discourse of truth. Lukács, identifies psychopathology as the "problem" which is "central to all modernist literature", but which is also "the goal, the *terminus ad quem*, of their artistic intention" (*Realism in Our Time* 28-9). The fragmented

self, the schizophrenic identity in Farah's *Maps* embodies the ambiguity pointed out by Lukács. Schizophrenia figures both as Askar's debility, but also as "an emblem of creative insurrection" (Sass 2) against authoritarian power.

But on what basis can the claim be made that Askar is schizophrenic? One can assess Askar's characterization against some of the symptoms of schizophrenia identified by Louis A. Sass in an analysis of the interpretations of schizophrenia in psychology, psychiatry and art. According to Sass, the schizophrenic frequently is identified as "the patient whose very essence is 'incomprehensibility itself'" (4). Schizophrenics evoke in others the "praecox feeling" – they have an "aura of strangeness and otherworldliness" (4). The schizophrenic fears a loss of mastery of his own thoughts (4), therefore he is constantly vigilant, self-monitoring (9). The schizophrenic experiences the sensation that his body is inhabited by others: "Gradually I am no longer able to distinguish how much of myself is in me and how much is already in others. I am a conglomeration, a monstrosity, modeled anew each day. ... It talks out of me." (quoted in Sass 3). The schizophrenic has the sense that his body is inhabited by others. "A distinction between self and world is lacking" (5) in the schizoid identity. The schizophrenic enjoys a feeling of "primitive grandiosity", an "egocentricity" which leads him to believe himself the "centre of the universe" (21).

Askar's psychology appears to be sketched, point for point, on the clinical symptoms of schizophrenia. As has been noted above, Askar remains incomprehensible to himself and to others throughout the novel. Askar elicits the "praecox feeling" in those who encounter him. He has a disconcerting "stare" which his uncle interprets as "wicked and satanic" (11). As a newborn, Askar is described as "self-conscious." This self-consciousness, develops into self-vigilance. These are just a few of the ways in which the older Askar reflects on his

attempted mastery of self: “You began debating with the egos of which you were compounded, and, detaching itself from the other selves, there stood before you , substantial as a shadow, the self (in you) which did not at all approve of your talking with or touching Misra, lest you were lost in the intensity of her embrace” (60). Hyper-vigilance is manifested even more clearly in an episode where Askar is ill: “Indeed, you were too shocked to allow one of your selves to stand out from the others, with a view to studying the activities, thoughts of your primary self” (70). The consequence of self-reflexivity is splitting of the subject. The infant Askar is perceived in his recollection of other’s views to be adult – the adult in the child. He is able to access different zones of reality in both the natural and supernatural worlds: “Perhaps his stars have conferred upon him the fortune of holding simultaneously multiple citizenships of different kingdoms: that of the living and that of the dead; not to mention that of being an infant and an adult at the same time” (11-2). The result of potentially infinite splitting is that the boundary of the self becomes unclear. The subject loses the ability to distinguish between self and other, self and world. Askar, for example, perceives himself to be an extension of his foster mother, Misra. He imagines himself either as her third breast, thus feminizing his own sex; or as her third leg, in this way identifying himself with the phallus.

More significantly, however, Askar regards himself as the objective correlative of the nation. When the Somali forces are vanquished by the Ethiopians, Askar falls gravely ill. Like the case discussed by Sass of a woman who experiences her own sensations as mere “epiphenomena” of actions performed upon an imagined machine, Askar’s pain is the pain suffered by the nation. Frequently the schizophrenic entertains notions of megalomania. This symptom is displayed in Askar in his belief in his power to have given birth to himself.

Askar is the self-made man residing in the autotelic or self-made text – the text is the retrospective narration of the individual who has developed to the point where he could construct his own story. Askar believes himself to have been present at his own birth (14), he believes that he “made himself”, he was “his own creation” (23 and 33), and he dreams a dream where he is inside a woman trying to give birth to himself (191). These delusions are encouraged by the circumstances of his birth. Paternity, remains a mystery to the end. Is Askar the son of Cali Xamari, the warrior who died for the Somali cause, or the rather less heroic Aw-Adan? Did Askar’s mother die just before or just after giving birth? Did she or did she not suckle him? Since both paternity and maternity are in some ways uncertain, Askar is confirmed in the conviction that he is autogamous. The unejected egg which Misra finds in a hen she slaughters also holds great symbolic value for the young self-generating man, Askar. If Askar believes he can create himself, Askar also imagines he has the power to “re-create” himself. Askar’s delusions are to a certain extent encouraged by his Uncle Hilaal, who is a psychology lecturer. In a letter to his nephew, Hilaal suggests that Askar may be like the epic heroes Sunjata and Mwendo, Sunjata, “an adult when he was three,” and Mwendo, “born through a middle finger” (22). “Primitive grandiosity” also manifests in his suggestion that Misra may not be real. She may just be a figment of his over-fertile imagination.

All these aspects of the characterization of Askar are present also in the characterization of Kalaman in *Secrets*. Paternity is uncertain since Damac falls pregnant after a gang-rape. (The brutal image of the gang-rape is foreshadowed earlier in *Maps* when Misra is violated by a group of Somali men who claim she was raped by baboons.) The identity of Kalaman’s mother similarly is uncertain since Kalaman, as a child, drinks his

friend Sholoongo's menstrual blood from a thimble. Similar to the constitution of community through the Eucharist, the drinking of Sholoongo's blood symbolically establishes descent from her in the female line as opposed to the privileging of the male line in Somali kinship structures. With many fathers and mothers, Kalaman may entertain the idea that he creates himself and so may rationally choose parents. Similarly, parents may choose Kalaman as a child, as his felicitous "adoption" by Yaqut and Nonno attest.

The child one assumes will be born to Sholoongo after the reverse rape of the old man, Nonno, takes the idea of uncertain parentage into an abyss. The child born to Sholoongo would be autonomous of all conceivable notions of kinship. Sholoongo is impregnated by Nonno in Kalaman's bed. Thus, biologically the father is Nonno. But since Sholoongo is impregnated in a "reverse-rape", paternity seems doubtful. In terms of Islamic law, in cases of doubtful paternity, "the child belongs to the bed". So Kalaman would be the father. But Kalaman, being of one blood with Sholoongo, would also be the child's sibling. Since parentage is so hard to fathom, it might be more appropriate to consider the child self-generating. The novels go to extreme lengths to create the wholly autonomous man, who has the power to create and narrate himself. Kalaman, like Askar, is compared with epic heroes and prophets. Since he can create himself, he also has the power to re-create and re-invent himself. The boundaries of identity thus defined are fluid and unstable. Since the boundaries of the subject are pregnable, the object world impinges on the self. Similar to Askar, clan strife is experienced in the body of the hero as Kalaman's fevers and deliriums.

The decentred or fragmented identities suggested by the schizophrenic in various ways come to be celebrated in the novels. The narratives suggest that both Askar and Kalaman's psychic strife is a consequence of the relentless pursuit of unified, ontological

identity. Until Askar realizes the entirely arbitrary nature of the grounding of national identity on Somali ethnicity and Somali language, his development is stymied. Until Kalaman understands that the obsession with biological origins is an obsession with self-destructive, authoritarian clan rhetoric, his development is hampered. Self-realization entails recognition of the apparently more authentic divided nature of the self. While the anti-hero, Oskar, in Gunter Grass's *Tin Drum* (one of the intertextual points of reference of *Maps*) is a parodic allegory of German nationalism, Askar's take on the intersection of personal and national identity is a little more anguished. In order to heal himself, Askar needs to view his fractured self differently. He needs to be happy in his schizophrenia. Kalaman's quest will be fulfilled upon the realization that biological fatherhood, the basis of clan identity, is not as meaningful as the relationships one "freely chooses." Kalaman must internalize Nonno's maxim: "I am a person, a clan is a mob. [...] I am reasonable. Clans are not" (297). Identity is not given by birth or by any other ontological fundament. Identity is protean, shape-shifting. The subject may construct himself however he desires. Development is not contained. Development is infinite. This is the wisdom in the name Nonno gives to the newborn child, suggested to him by the pre-Islamic Somali totem, the crow. The child is named "Kalaman", a "cul-de-sac of a name", since it is a pure signifier. It refers to nothing beyond itself. It has no meaning. As Derek Wright suggests apropos of the name, "Kalaman": "It ... encourages him [Kalaman] to achieve, existentially, the autonomy exemplified by his name; to stand independently as a self-determining, self-invented being (like Nonno himself), supplying his own identity instead of relying on prior connections of family and lineage" (16).

Farah's novels point to the discourse of exclusivist identity of nation and clan as the basis of the complete rejection of both these forms of community. What this approach overlooks, is the fact that the rhetoric of nationhood often is the symbolic form which articulates more complex issues which impact materially on ways of life. The dispute over the Ogaden, for example, was only superficially about the national integrity of an essentialist idea of Somaliness. More significantly, it was a dispute about colonially imposed borders which strongly impacted upon Somali forms of life: "... the international borders between Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya and Somalia cut through the pastoralists' rangelands, leaving Somali clans living in more than one state." (Bradbury 24). Furthermore, the self-destruction of the Somali nation is often attributed simplistically in the media, and ironically in Farah's novels which challenge this view, to the destructive propensities of "clannism", ignoring the fact that what one was witnessing was not the dynamic of traditional kinship, but the dynamic of traditional kinship in articulation with a modern state-formation and modern economy. Farah's novels, superficially at least, attempt to present worldviews in conflict with the ideology of the novels. Most critics concur, however, that traditional Somali kinship is the one worldview to which the novels are closed. The often observed "democratic openness" of Farah's novels is closed only to the idea of clan. (Ironically, the fragile stability which holds in the Somaliland Republic was established precisely on the basis of indigenous clan conflict resolution procedures.)

The fluid nature of identity endorsed by the novels is attested in many ways. One way of showing that identity is shifting is to construct characters who defy conventional gender stereotypes. Farah's novels frequently are inhabited by "masculine" women and "feminine" men. The glimpse of an unusually hirsute woman, sporting facial hair is not

uncommon in Farah's world. The reversal of traditional gender roles encountered in *Sardines* continues in the later novels with men who are comfortable in conventional female roles and financially independent, car-driving, gun-wielding women. Yaqut in *Secrets* goes so far as "breastfeeding" Kalamán. The borders between zones of reality are also not firmly fixed. Nonno in *Secrets*, for example, appears able to access other dimensions of existence. Species borders also are fluid, with the shape-shifting Sholoongo embodied sometimes as a human being and at other times as an animal. Sex and sexuality as markers of identity are also imploded. Sex becomes a marker of identity in the context of the laws of incest. There is an intimate link between one's own identity and the identity of others since carnal knowledge of these others might be prohibited. Who one is determines with whom one might have sexual relations. Similarly, homo- or hetero-sexuality, which as Foucault points out is defined only in the context of the nineteenth-century European science of sexuality, also is an index of identity. All of these markers of identity are imploded in *Secrets* with the transgression of all conventional taboos, certainly taboos which are operative in Somali society (Samatar, S "Are there Secrets in *Secrets*"). Both *Maps* and *Secrets* take a prurient interest in bestiality, paedophilia, homo- and bi-sexuality, onanism and incest, proving beyond any reasonable doubt the conviction of Askar's Uncle Hilaal – "sooner or later, sex" (234). What Hilaal suggests by this maxim is that the sex drive, rather than rationality or spirituality, appears to lie at the core of all social relations. The inescapability of sex restores the body to a position of centrality in debate. What is interesting about the restoration of the body in both *Maps* and *Secrets* is that the significance of the body is recovered almost completely through the mind, through rationality.

But to return to the question of schizophrenia, Sass observes that frequently in psychology schizophrenia is interpreted as a more vital mode of being associated with infantile regression. This is taken up in the celebration of schizoid identity in the arts where the hybrid self is identified with more “primitive”, but more authentic pre-Enlightenment modes of being (6-7). A similar evolutionary identification is made in the novels under consideration. The fluid identities constructed in the novels are shown implicitly to connect with and reinvent non-modern enchanted states of being. The ritual exorcism of the “cuudis” and “mingis” ceremonies, where “jinn” inhabit the bodies of the afflicted, and people speak in the voices of others, is symbolically crucial in *Maps*. But the social frame within which spirit possession occurs is profoundly different from fluid identity which is the paradoxical product of *self*-possession.

But perhaps the most significant association in this regard is the link between Askar’s schizophrenic identity and Misra’s identity. In a lucid glimmering, Askar recognizes that Misra is the true heroine of the story. She is the heroine since she appears not to be incapacitated by issues of identity as Askar is. She is the product of a “*damoz*” union between an Amhara nobleman and an Oromo slave woman, brought up as a Somali, speaking an accented Somali and who unknowingly enters an incestuous relationship with her younger Ethiopian brother. Misra quite literally is the “bastard”, “mongrel”, “hybrid” identity frequently presented as a utopian ideal in postmodern art. But the text elides a very significant difference between Askar’s identity and Misra’s identity which superficially appear similar. These subjectivities are the product of two very different worldviews. While Askar’s subjectivity is the ultimate construct of a self disengaged from the social and material worlds, Misra’s subjectivity is embedded in an enchanted world.

It might be useful to adopt the terminology used by Charles Taylor to demonstrate the difference between the identities of Askar and Misra. Taylor uses the term “porous” (Taylor *Sources of the Self* 187-193, *Secular Age* 37-41) to describe the pre-individualist self who orients herself in relation to an external ethical horizon. Since this self is constituted in relation to a code outside of itself, it necessarily views itself as fundamentally connected with both other subjects and with the world of objects. Subject-object is not a dichotomy or a divide. Reason exists, but it is substantive, not procedural. Misra may, like Askar, ask the question, “Who am I?”. But for Misra, this would not be a question of identity as an existential category. It may be an enquiry as to whose daughter or whose sister she is. But it certainly is not a question about how Misra should create or construct herself out of her own resources. In fact, Askar suggests in his meditations that Misra “knew who she was”(26). If it were the case that Misra asked the ontological question, “Who am I?”, the story would be Misra’s. But it is not Misra’s story and in the novel cannot be. It is Askar’s story. Misra’s acceptance of the diversity of her background is not the acceptance of “hybrid”, “fluid”, “schizophrenic” identity as a permanent condition. It’s the acceptance instead of alternate embedding. The narrative never presents Misra in the first person, neither is it ever focalized through Misra. Misra’s representation is filtered through Askar’s consciousness. Misra’s history is presented in about a page and a half. Like the grandfather in *From a Crooked Rib*, Misra’s story it appears is not a story the novel can tell. Misra, like the grandfather, must die at the end.

Askar’s self, by contrast, constitutes what Taylor refers to as a “buffered” self (*Sources of the Self* 187-193, *A Secular Age* 37-41). This is the self which is ontologically closed off to other similarly conceived selves and to the world since, with self-generated

ethical horizons, each man is a world unto himself. This is the model of subjectivity constructed by the Cartesian revolution. The postmodern, decentred self is not so much a challenge to autonomous identity as it is the product of too intense a focus on the disengaged self. In other words, to quote a psychiatrist quoted by Christopher Lasch in *The Culture of Narcissism*, “schizophrenia is above all a narcissistic disorder” (172), an observation verified by the symbolic importance of mirrors in virtually all Farah’s novels. Indeed, Lasch claims an even broader significance for narcissism, holding the self-centred, self-adoring subject as the model citizen of the post-industrial world:

Economic man himself has given way to the psychological man of our times – the final product of bourgeois individualism. The new narcissist is not haunted by guilt but by anxiety. He seeks not to inflict his own certainties on others but to find a meaning in life. Liberated from the superstitions of the past, he doubts even the reality of his own existence. Superficially relaxed and tolerant, he finds little use for dogmas of racial and ethnic purity but at the same time forfeits the security of group loyalties ... (xvi).

Lasch’s observations find a correlative in any of Farah’s heroes.

Louis Sass expands on the narcissistic element in schizophrenia. Sass suggests that the schizophrenic is the product not so much of the symbolic rejection of rationalist repression, as the product of too intense a focus on the autonomous Enlightenment self: “the fragmented self [is] no less a product of what one might call illusions of the *cogito*, than its opposite” (3). Sass identifies the schizophrenic world of “intense introspection” as “a depersonalized, divided world pervaded by what, following Michel Foucault, we might call an inner ‘panopticism’ ” (22). As if to confirm symbolically the centrality of cogitation to the schizoid identity, Askar experiences the inability to think as an illness: “*I cannot think*,” he said. “It’s that kind of sickness!” (emphasis in original)(106). Schizophrenic dissociation is

the effect of the “hypertrophy of attentive self-reflexive awareness” (10). In other words, the disengaged self, trying to pin down its own essence, paradoxically yields the fragmentation of that prior self. Thus, as Sass stresses, the subject effaces itself “while simultaneously obscuring its own role in this effacement” (8). Sass employs the analogy of the man trying to see the dark by very quickly turning on the light to explain the paradoxical effect of intense, self-reflexive introspection. The analogue of this effect in literature is the *mise-en-abyme*, the stock in trade of modernist and postmodernist art. Since the disengaged subject occludes its own totalizing role in this procedure, totality stealthily and transparently re-enters Eden. The absolute interiority and solipsism of this procedure is captured in Askar’s dream of a golden age where Askar’s *angst* is replaced by existential certainty. His question which echoes through the novel, “Who am I?”, is answered in the dream – “I am I” (96). The “I-am-Thou” motif of the spiritual quester, the heteronomous self who defines himself in relation to the transcendental other, for example, is replaced by the infinite mirror image reflexivity of the self-defining subject.

One might describe this effect identified by Sass on the model proposed by Taylor. The subject, unmoored from an external ethics, relies upon procedural reason to construct an internal moral horizon. But the figurative cord which bound the subject to a social/transcendental higher order is also the cord which keeps the subject himself bounded. Internal moral horizons result in infinite self-reflexivity. Untethered from a stable external order, the subject is first loosened from the world, then loosened from other subjects. Ultimately the subject himself falls apart. Schizophrenic fragmentation is the ultimate consequence of the initial delinking, the moment when the subject disengages from an external social code.

That dissolution is encoded in the moment of the installation of the subject as individual, is eloquently captured by Marshall Berman's analysis of a central tension in Marxism. Berman *makes clear* what is implied in Marx. Where Taylor uses the metaphors of "embedding" and "disembedding" drawn from Giddens, Berman expands on the "clothed" and "naked" metaphors for the subject in Marx. The subject in pre-capitalist societies, born into "status," where "status" also suggests for Marx a kind of "stasis," is the "clothed" self. The subject released by capitalism, by contrast, is "naked", suggesting both the radical possibility and vulnerability of bourgeois individualism:

Marx believes that the shocks and upheavals and catastrophes of life in bourgeois society enable moderns, by going through them, as Lear does, to discover who they "really are". But if bourgeois society is as volatile as Marx thinks it is, how can its people ever settle on any real selves? With all the possibilities and necessities that bombard the self and all the desperate drives that propel it, how can anyone define definitively which ones are essential and which ones merely incidental? The nature of the newly naked modern man may turn out to be as elusive and mysterious as that of the old, clothed one, maybe even more elusive, because there will no longer be any illusion of a real self underneath the masks. Thus, along with community and society, individuality itself may be melting into the modern air (110).

But, of course, the individual has not melted "into the modern air." The individual, wearing the many masks of the divided, hybrid self is with us yet. Ironically, as Barry Adam notes, "... the postmodern romance with locality, hybridity, and mobility is entirely consistent with global trends in capital" (105). Adams refers to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to suggest further that "... Empire too is bent on doing away with modern forms of sovereignty and on setting difference to play across boundaries" (105). "Outline maps" of

both the self and the nation, while utopian in their ambition, leave untouched the more significant inequalities. This occurs since the fluid self embodies no agency and therefore represents no real threat to the system. And the provisional map is in practice no map at all, leaving the terrain to its prior distorted charting. The schizophrenic identity represented by Askar is only ever, as Lukács suggests, "... a gesture ... that is destined to lead nowhere, it is an escape into nothingness" (*Realism in Our Time* 29). Adam draws on Zygmunt Bauman and Nancy Fraser to propose that postmodernism is "a site clearing operation, but the risk run by deconstruction is that its intellectual efforts fall back into a world which marches on and once the 'site' has been 'cleared' of Western, Enlightenment modernist narratives, what curiously still remains by default is the neoliberal individual" (104).

II *Links*: Towards Reconstruction

Some form of centred subjectivity is both that which is most hidden and an absolute requirement of the system. Above all else, Farah remains a highly political, socially concerned writer, and it is virtually impossible to construct a politics based on pathologically fragmented identity. This realization stops Farah from allowing Kalamán to slide into Askar's existential abyss. Kalamán is an altogether more banal character compared to Askar. Kalamán, as a character, reminds one finally of Ebla, the heroine of Farah's first published proto-realist novel. Like Ebla, Kalamán is radically disembedded. His formation shares with Ebla's development trajectory the potential boundlessness of youth, ultimately contained by the social contract of marriage. Kalamán will marry the rather more constrained and contained Talaado in preference over the shape-shifting Sholoongo. This marriage again is a recognition of a social horizon, which "tautologically and teleologically" is presented as the

outcome of the “free choice” of the rational subject, liberated from tradition, but now, crucially, masking a “unity” in fragmentation. The image of the mask and subjectivity theatrically adopted as a *persona* (the Latin word for “mask”) is significant in *Maps* and *Secrets* and crucial in the later novel, *Knots*.

Since it is impossible to base a politics on pathologically fragmented identity, the tentative coherence of the subject suggested in *Secrets* is more fully realized in the next novel, *Links*. Clearly in *Links*, “innovative self-destruction”, to quote Marshall Berman, quoting a 1978 Mobil oil advertisement, no longer is an option. As Christopher Lasch suggests, “Escape through irony and critical self-awareness is ... itself an illusion”, providing “only momentary relief.” “Distancing soon becomes a routine in its own right,” and ultimately “inhibits spontaneity” becoming “as constraining as the social roles from which they are meant to provide ironic detachment” (96).

Links tells the story of the exile, Jeebleh, who returns to Mogadiscio after almost twenty years in New York where he has established a family and a career. Jeebleh returns to Mogadiscio ostensibly to locate his mother’s grave. His mother has died nine years prior. As in many Farah novels where motives are never uncomplicated, it would appear that Jeebleh returns also to Mogadiscio, the city of death, in the hope of disorienting death. He has had a close brush with mortality in an accident involving a taxi driven by a Somali immigrant to New York. But these may just be rational justifications for Jeebleh’s “true” motive. He may have been drawn to Mogadiscio to settle scores with his “step-brother” and lifetime enemy, Caloosha, the perpetrator of numerous criminal and cruel deeds and responsible for the detention of both Jeebleh and his best friend, Bile, who is also Caloosha’s brother. Jeebleh also “coincidentally” returns to Mogadiscio at the same time as the mysterious disappearance

of two young girls, Raasta and Makka, who may have been kidnapped by Caloosha and whom Jeebleh hopes heroically to rescue in the process of exacting revenge upon his enemy.

In Jeebleh's return, a number of motifs come together symbolized by the title of the novel, *Links*. In coming to Mogadiscio, Jeebleh re-establishes a "link" with the homeland, which simultaneously is a voyage of self-discovery, allowing him to connect with himself and with other like-minded characters, who attempt to reconstitute the body politic. Here, dissolution is read only pathologically, a symptom of the collective insanity of the nation. Schizophrenia and madness are read as psychological responses to a society self-destructing, no longer as a liberatory release from a repressive autonomous self. On witnessing social fragmentation in the city, Jeebleh repeatedly refers to the "borderline schizophrenia" (125, 137) of its inhabitants. The father of one of the missing girls appears to be a schizoid personality (226-7), identified with the guilty conscience of a Lady Macbeth, at being a passive witness of the slide into anarchy. In an Islamic take on Lady Macbeth's obsessional hand washing, Faahiye compulsively performs the ritual ablution in an attempt to purify himself of guilt. Jeebleh's best friend, Bile, appears to suffer from a "mental imbalance" (282) for which he requires "chloral anti-depressants" (296). In the next novel, *Knots*, it is clear that medication is insufficient to compose Bile's dissociating self.

If allusion served in earlier novels to suggest the literary "constructedness" of a self which had no stabilizing core, in *Links* allusion serves to give depth and authenticity to a centred protagonist. The texts alluded to are Dante's *Inferno*, the Faust myth, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Interestingly, Ian Watt in *Myths of Modern Individualism*, identifies Faust and Crusoe as two of four "grand" mythical figures of individualism, central to the constitution of the European sense of self. (The other two are

Don Quixote and Don Juan.) Dante, whose Thomistic conception of man's relationship to God, is shot through by a hitherto unknown focus on the self, makes him the subject of the claims of both Medievalists and Renaissance scholars. Dante locates the source of his subjectivity in a pre-Renaissance conception of the centrality of God but Dante, unlike any other author of the Middle Ages, makes the self the focus of sustained attention. For Jacob Burckhardt in *The Civilization of the Renaissance* Dante is "the most national herald of the time" as a result of "the wealth of individuality which he set forth" (82). Or as another Dante scholar asserts: "At the same time, Dante is the supreme example in literary history of the writer who, at every important turn, is seeking himself (humanly, morally, psychologically, imaginatively), finding himself, defining himself – in effect, telling his life story" (Lewis, R.W.B. 100) Similarly, *Heart of Darkness* is frequently read as *the* paradigmatic text of modernist subjectivity.

Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, the first canticle of *The Divine Comedy*, is a strong literary antecedent in *Links*. In an interesting, ironic twist, Dante the Pilgrim descends into Hell and discovers that it looks remarkably much like his native Florence. Jeebleh, by contrast, returns to his native Mogadiscio and discovers that it looks remarkably much like Hell. Even if it were not for this superficial similarity, there are a number of other reasons why Farah might identify with Dante. Dante like Farah was an exile whose writing obliges him to revisit again and again the soil of his birth. Dante, through his political activities and his association with a Florentine faction called the White Guelphs, was forced into exile from his beloved Florence for over 19 years until his death. The clan politics of Dante's Florence, strike one as remarkably similar to the politics of Mogadiscio. Allusions to Dante's *The Divine Comedy* occur not only in *Links*, but also, as discussed in an earlier chapter on *A Naked Needle*, Dante

is alluded to in a network of intertextuality encompassing Joyce, Beckett and also Soyinka. *The Divine Comedy* appears to inform *Links* at numerous levels. It appears to be part of the mental universe of a number of the characters. When he arrives in Mogadiscio, Jeebleh is met at the airport by a character variously called Af-Laawe or Marabou. Interestingly, Jeebleh assumes that Af-Laawe has given himself this nickname, which means “No-Mouth” in Somali, as a conscious reference to the character “No-Mouth” in *The Divine Comedy*. Jeebleh himself, we are informed in the text, while studying in Italy, did a Somali translation of the *Inferno* as a dissertation. Jeebleh’s Irish friend, Seamus, who also studied with him in Italy, is quite unproblematically able to quote a Dantean verse apropos to the Somali civil war.

But the *Inferno* is more deeply constitutive of *Links* also. In the structure of its plot, *Links* parallels the movement of Dante the Pilgrim on his spiritual journey from being lost in the forests of despair, through the gates and all the circles of Hell to Lucifer’s inner sanctum and out on the other side. Where Dante the Pilgrim is guided in his descent through the Inferno by the reliable, trustworthy pagan poet, Virgil, who represents Wisdom, Jeebleh is guided through the hell that is Mogadiscio by the deceptive, corrupt, thieving Af-Laawe. In *The Divine Comedy* when Dante first sees Virgil, he is described as a “shade”. The first thing Jeebleh sees of Af-Laawe, is his shadow: “Turning, he saw the stranger’s late afternoon shadow” (11). Part of the inscription above Hell’s gate in *The Divine Comedy* forms the epigraph to the first part of the novel in the later Duckworth edition. It reads: “Through me the way into the suffering city / Through me the way to the eternal pain, / Through me the way that runs among the lost.”

Hell's gate itself is represented in *Links* by the gates of the hotel where Jeebleh stays on first arriving in the city. Like Dante the Pilgrim, who is so overcome by what he witnesses in the vestibule of hell, that he swoons on the banks of the river Acheron while waiting for the ferryman to take them to the other side, Jeebleh also, once inside the Mogadiscio hotel "[takes] leave of his senses for a few exhausted seconds, during which he may or may not have known who he was, where he was or what on earth he was doing there." (L 41) The epilepsy or "falling sickness" which was supposed to have afflicted Dante the Poet and certainly repeatedly affects Dante the Pilgrim in his journey through the netherworld, is reflected in Jeebleh's occasional passing out and is made to resonate very strongly in an episode at the end of the novel involving an epileptic who has a seizure on a Mogadiscio street. With an economy and simplicity strikingly similar to the exit of Dante the Pilgrim from the Inferno, Jeebleh emerges from the hell that is Mogadiscio. Where Dante emerges from the crepuscular gloom to see the stars, Jeebleh emerges from the mist to see the sun. Dante's Hell "is shaped in concentric circles that spiral downward ever tighter, until you reach Betrayal" (Menocal xiv). Traitors are the sinners who keep the devil company. And, for a number of reasons, Jeebleh regards himself as a traitor and betrayal similarly seems to occupy the very heart of the architecture of Mogadiscio as Hell. *Links* suggests that the civil war in Somalia needs to be understood as the betrayal of one Somali by another. Af-Laawe, Jeebleh's treacherous guide, observes: "In a civil war, death is an intimate ... You're killed by a person with whom you've shared intimacies, and who may benefit from your death" (128). Af-Laawe undercores his point by referring to the Somali expression for civil war, "dagaalka sokeeye", which translates as "killing an intimate". Of all the explanations which have been offered for the Somali collapse, the text seems to suggest that at the heart of

it all, lies the betrayal of one individual by another. At a personal level, Jeebleh suspects, agonizingly, that through his “brother” Caloosha’s offices, his mother may have died thinking her son was a traitor: “Jeeble[h] [sic] imagined Caloosha calling on his mother, sitting by her bedside day in and day out, and describing him as the epitome of betrayal. Could she, in truth, have seen him as a traitor, someone who belonged outside of the precincts of human community?” (219). If Lucifer is the arch-traitor in the inner circle of Dante’s Hell, Caloosha is the Devil in Farah’s *Links*. The text quite explicitly identifies Caloosha as the source of whatever disharmony, violence, corruption, cruelty and brutality exist in the novel. Caloosha, the brother of Bile, who, it appears, murdered his own father and had a hand in his incarceration under the Dictator, is represented as pure, unadulterated evil, a supporter of inter-clan strife, an oppressor of women and the head of a cartel dealing in body parts.

There is, however, a highly significant difference between the *Divine Comedy* and its use in *Links*. Political analysis in Farah’s novel, distills down to the inherent evil in certain individuals, challenged, as we shall see, by the good in others, symbolized by the miracle child, Raasta. Evil and good exist as metaphysical categories, however, in an individualist philosophy which structurally cannot produce such ontologies. The “architectural” structure of the *Divine Comedy* sustains a focus on the unique person, but each person is offset against a transcendental moral horizon. In the afterlife, each sinner is punished according to the nature and degree of his sin which is judged against an ontologically fixed moral code. The culture of individualism, the crucible which forms Farah’s novels, exists, in Alasdair MacIntyre’s terms, “After Virtue”, since the autonomous disengaged self cannot construct a social moral code. *Links* thus is structured around a clear moral axis, which comes from

outside of the individualist worldview of the novels. But in the process of the individualist “reinvention” of sacred eschatology, the *social* practices in which good and evil were constituted is lost. Good and evil exist in the novel simply as sensational elements in a world without complexity.

The way in which the myth of Faust is used in the novel suggests another inherent problem in the manner in which the novel resurrects and elides the origins of ethics. If Jeebleh’s unacknowledged motive for returning to Mogadiscio is to kill the cruel and villainous Caloosha, then, like Faust, he has entered into a pact with the Devil. The novel progressively exposes how Jeebleh’s story is drawn into the corrupt and corrupting influence of the civil war story. This is represented in a number of ways, one of which is Jeebleh’s fascination with guns, culminating in his finally carrying one and not being incapacitated by conscience in using it to settle a minor dispute between a food vendor and a petty thief. Jeebleh’s unholy desire to kill Caloosha draws him into spheres of influence and activity, the unacceptable nature of which dictate that he for the first time tells half-truths and bleached versions of the truth to his wife and two daughters back home in New York. The text suggests that, “he wouldn’t hesitate to lie if he believed that by doing so he might serve a higher purpose: that of justice.” Paradoxically for Jeebleh the quest for justice draws him closer and closer to the Devil, much like Caloosha’s quest for power makes him Evil incarnate. The Irishman, Seamus, friend to Jeebleh and Bile, who has made Mogadiscio his second home, remarks that: “Hell is a warlord who has ransomed his soul to Satan in exchange for elusive power” (57). Caloosha himself is cynically aware of the price he has paid for his position of immoral authority and privilege. In response to Jeebleh’s suggestion

that he “reactivate his conscience”, he states: “I’m afraid I cannot as I sold it [my conscience] to the Devil to pay for a mortgage on the house of my self-promotion” (133).

What makes problematic the text’s analysis of the character of Caloosha, who presumably is the type for many of the warlords operating in Mogadiscio, is that his psychopathic behaviour appears not to be the consequence of a self-interest unchecked by societal control since Somali society is non-functional. It appears rather to be the consequence of the fact that he is innately evil. In a sense, he is presented as a detestable Devil whose inauspicious beginnings – he was born in the breech position – very nearly kills his mother and fatefully determines his character. The Evil that is Caloosha is epitomized by the anxiety of his own mother, who before her death, had remarked: “It’s very difficult to rid yourself of the monster whom you’ve given birth to yourself, fed raised and looked after, and then let loose on the world” (156). She is brought to this point since he had been a “difficult child to raise.” He is cruel, throws knives at living targets, and displays a penchant for setting things alight. Caloosha, the warlord, who represents other warlords, is marked by the text as a congenitally evil monster: “Caloosha’s distended belly was filled with the sentiments of war and wickedness, which was why he looked so ugly and so unhealthy. Attrition retarded his brain, evil dulled his imagination, not sharpened it” (97). Since *Links*, dedicated as it is to autonomous individuality, cannot construct a moral horizon since morality is necessarily social, it resorts in sensationalistic terms to the moral vocabulary of other social codes, but without the complex social network of obligations out of which this moral vocabulary arises.

Numerous explanations for the Somali collapse have been proposed sometimes as single factors and sometimes as a combination of factors. Many of these analyses are presented in the collection *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?*, edited by

Ahmed Samatar. Among these explanations are included: the destabilizing effect of colonial manipulation of tradition and the imposition of colonial national boundaries, the breakdown of civil society as a consequence of more than three decades of dictatorship, Cold War proxy rivalries and tensions, the sometimes deliberate and sometimes unforeseen effects of international aid; urbanization and unequal distribution of resources between the middle class and the unemployed and a host of other factors. Yet in *Links*, all this complexity is distilled down to the individual and issues forth in statements like: "... in civil wars, both those violated and the violators suffer from a huge lack – the inability to remain in touch with their inner selves" (69). "... when a society has lost its general sense of direction and along with it, its self-respect, then every individual is on his or her own, miserably alone" (104). "Neither the city nor the nation had a unifying theme. We were headless as individuals..." (108). "Let's blame it on the civil war, ... Let's blame it on our sick minds, on the tantrums that belong in our heads. Let's blame it on the endemic violence, the cruelty that's been let loose on the weak. Let's blame it on our damaged sense of self" (153). "I believe that it is time that we squared up to our demons as individuals, time that we owned up, time we let go and had a good, clean grief" (154). "He wished ... [that] instead of insisting that the self is not to blame, [everyone] would admit their part in the collapse, to the culpability of every individual in the failure" (163). While not denying the factor of the agency of each person, it is misleading to locate all Somalia's ills only in the autonomous individual disengaged from its social circumstance.

It is precisely this limited and limiting view of the crisis which leads Jeebleh to his simplistic "individual" and, to a certain extent, megalomaniac solution. His singular intervention will save Somalia. *Links* thus goes well beyond resuscitating agency from the

Hamlet-like indecision which hangs over *Maps*, to an exaggerated sense of the significance of the individual intervention. To serve the greater cause of justice which consists in the liberation of the child of peace, Raasta, he feels justified in killing her captors, which in the actual outcome of the story proves unnecessary:

So which would I rather be, someone who kills for justice, or someone helplessly unable to do a thing? I would rather I killed instead of twiddling my thumbs, waiting for others to do the job. To hell with the opinion of others, especially my clansmen, who haven't the right to sit in judgement on my actions! I am all for justice by any means possible (300).

Links shares a number of structural similarities also with Joseph Conrad's modernist *Bildungsroman*, *Heart of Darkness*. Early on in the narrative, reference is made to self-recuperation as forging "a link to the darkness at the centre of [one's] life" (55). This summary of *Heart of Darkness* (in part indebted to Michael Levenson) makes clear its similarity with the plot structure of *Links*: A man leaves his home to travel to another country where he hopes to conclude unsettled matters. The country itself and the people he meets there disturb his moral certainties. As a consequence of his experiences, he finds himself adopting the distorted morality of the alien country. Despite his transformation, he is unable to remain in the alien country. He returns to the normality of his home, but will feel forever estranged among his acquaintances.

However, while the subjectivity Marlow discovers is "hollow" to the core, subjectivity in *Links* is centred, but within a moral horizon structurally outside of its own possibility. The character, Jeebleh, marks a return once again to the relatively coherent self of literary realism. Jeebleh's development involves finding ways to connect with others without the ties which bind the autonomous self. In the novel this involves affirming again

the individualist truth of the disengaged, independent self; whereafter forms of association which leave the individual fundamentally free may be negotiated. Affirming autonomy takes the form of a parable, based upon Defoe's tale of *Robinson Crusoe*, one of Watt's "grand" myths of modern individualist subject formation. This allusion reverberates in the text, not through the central character, Jeebleh, but through his best friend, Bile, whose importance is suggested by the fact that, apart from Jeebleh, Bile is the only other narrative focalizer.

Significantly, Bile's general factotum who "rescues" Jeebleh from the suspicious Af-Laawe is referred to as Bile's "Man Friday". This reference to Crusoe's colonial subject, Man Friday, alerts us to the ways in which Bile's story is modeled on that of Robinson Crusoe. Bile has been incarcerated under the Dictatorship. When the Dictator flees Mogadiscio in January 1991, the gates of all the prisons, zoos and madhouses are flung open, delivering their inmates into the streets. Bile experiences his release from captivity not as an exhilarating freedom, but as an experience as terrifying as Crusoe's shipwreck. Much like Crusoe who shuns social ties to pursue his agenda as *homo economicus*, Bile prefers remaining in his cell alone. Bile claims he cannot leave this "room of his own" since he has trouble walking as a consequence of muscle atrophy through lack of exercise in prison. Later he is forced to leave his cell. Like Crusoe, shipwrecked on the island, who fears attack from wild beasts and cannibalistic natives, Bile fears the people on the outside. He encounters, what he describes as a gang of marauding youths whom, surprisingly, contradicting his earlier claim about his incapacitated condition, he manages to outrun. He fortuitously comes upon a house evacuated as he is fleeing from the youths by its obviously well-to-do owners. Bile finds that he is alone in the house except for a dog, the analogue of Crusoe's parrot, which the owners have abandoned. This house is to Bile what the deserted island is to

Crusoe. If Crusoe needs the deserted island in order to stage himself as the hero in a narrative about the virtues of economic individualism, Bile needs the empty house to compose himself as a hero of a slightly different sort. Bile composes himself, both in the sense of recovering after his frightening ordeal, but also in the sense of constituting himself as a kind of benevolent, philanthropic actor in the cause of goodness on the model of Plotinus, the third century Greek philosopher, whom Bile mentions by name. In the house, Bile discovers a duffel bag filled with almost a million US Dollars. Having figuratively “pulled himself together”, he ventures forth to construct the world anew. He uses the money to fund his experiment in imaginative social construction, called “The Refuge”, for those dispossessed by war. He also constructs a hospital and a home for himself and his like-minded friends. These, to continue the insular motif, are islands of hope in a war-torn land.

What often goes unnoticed in the myths of self-made men is the occluded extent to which they rely on the products of social endeavour. Crusoe, of course, is not wholly independent in the construction of his sovereign domain. As Christopher Hill observes, he relies on the products of a more social world, brought from the shipwreck: “It is thanks to the tools and commodities which Crusoe salvages from the wreck that he is able not only to survive but to prosper, drawing on the heritage of centuries of civilisation” (12). What Hill refers to as Crusoe’s “mental furniture”, comes from a world in which the subject is embedded in social relations, not isolated on an island. Similarly, to construct his “islands of hope”, Bile uses the money which is not the product of his independent labour. More importantly, however, he fosters in The Refuge positive social practices which have their source in precisely the traditional worldview Farah’s novels critique. For example, Bile encourages the use of the *mayida* or tray out of which a number of people share food, on the

belief that people who eat together will not kill each other. Garuba notes that Bile's experiment "in creating a new kind of public" is anchored "on a traditional practice from the past" (193). What is also interesting in Bile's experiment in a new form of sociality which borrows from but tends to elide the past, is Bile's position as "benevolent sovereign" – he constructs a society which, curiously, he is not a part of. What is striking in descriptions of Bile's participation in the social and sociable world he constructs is that he seems to be alienated within it. That Bile's projects will fail is suggested by the decomposition of his self which we observe at the end of the novel and which is corroborated in the subsequent novel.

Social engineering which proceeds on the basis of the autonomous self comes to be embodied in the miracle child, Raasta, whose given name, "Rajo", means "hope." Raasta has a preternatural facility for languages and draws people around herself in peace. Garuba suggests that Raasta's body "becomes the site around which the conventional heterogeneity of city life can be performed" ("No-man's Land" 193) and her polyglossia is symbolic as "the abode of linguistic diversity" ("No-man's Land 194). Raasta is the wonder child conceived and delivered as opposed to the stillborn miracle children of the earlier novels. Unlike these other children who usher in a golden age, Raasta has " 'secular' beginnings, and had nothing to do with the religious fevers that were part of the millennial hysteria presaging the disastrous end of the corrupt world" (276).

Raasta's Down's syndrome companion, Makka, by contrast for Garuba "represent[s] the arrested development of the country and the city and the potential locked away in its inarticulacy" (194). At a more primary level, at the level of the subject who constitutes the public sphere, Makka may be read as an example of failed *Bildung*, analogous to Askar of *Maps*, but with a significant difference. If perfect self-fulfilment for Askar is embodied in

the solipsistic ideal of perfect existential certainty, “I am I”, in the later text, the hermetically contained self becomes a problem. When Bile finds the orphaned Makka, she utters over and over to herself the Somali phrase, “aniga, aniga ah!” translated in the text as “Me, myself I!” (149), or in alternate translation, “I am it!”. Towards the end of the novel, furthermore, when Jeebleh is having his hair cut in a Mogdiscio barber shop, he catches sight of Makka, who in a moment of circular specularly like Narcissus, is enamoured of her own reflection in the barber’s mirror: “Yes, Makka was there in the mirror, all right; and she was grinning with self-recognition. He watched her watching herself with fascination” (259). Thus, while in the earlier novels, the self-generating, perfectly self-sufficient subject is presented as a utopian ideal, in *Links*, through the contrast between the prodigy Raasta and the abnormal Makka, a shift in the nature of subjectivity is signaled. Complete independence and self-reliance now are projected as pathological. The individual now needs to connect.

The transformed subject is the individual who can connect with other individuals, who breaks the bonds of isolation, who can make “links” without losing the freedom essential to the autonomous self. *Links* is a novel about entering sociality, but a sociality quite unlike earlier forms of community, since sociality must not create obligation. Raasta again is a symbol of the new public envisioned by the novel. Towards the end of the novel, after the girls have been found, Raasta’s mother, Shanta, is distraught at the impending psychological collapse of her brother, Bile. The mother is in tears in Bile’s clinic. Expanding on the allegory of individual and collective contained in the use of pronouns which has been a sustained concern of the novel, Raasta overcomes her fear “of plurals”, to draw those around her into a kind of mutuality: “Raasta now gave her mother a sweeter hug ... And

Raasta talked to her mother , then to Makka, then to the little sick girl in an inclusive way, making them all think that there was fun in plurals” (284).

Raasta, in miniature, thus represents the protagonist, Jeebleh’s development. Jeebleh’s self-realization involves much more than just the renewed link with the motherland. It involves, more fundamentally, finding ways to link with others which do not compromise the independent self. Jeebleh, seeing his reflection in the mirrored sunglasses of Qasiir, the type of the new Somali urban youth, concludes “that he had changed a lot in the short time he had spent in the city of his birth” (292). The nature of this change involves the capacity of the autonomous, self-narrating subject to form associational bonds with other autonomous, self-narrating subjects: “My friends and I are forever linked through the chains of the stories which we share” (302). If, in closure of the classic realist novel, individual freedom is contained by the social bond of marriage, at the end of *Links*, a broader sociality is imagined which is lyrically and triumphantly articulated through the closing words: “And we!” (303), which may allude to Leopold Bloom’s musings on the relationship of the individual to the national in Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

Curiously, what is absent in closure is the irony requisite of the novel as a genre. Irony was generated out of the “tautological-teleological” compromise of individual autonomy with traditional morality. Irony is absent in *Links*. The “neo-realism” of the relatively coherent, improvisational self seems to transform the novel more and more into romance, one of the sources out of which the novel emerged, as referred to in an earlier chapter. Jeebleh, on this interpretation represents a kind of knight who rescues both the maiden, Raasta, and the common weal. The romance dimension of Farah’s neo-realism, becomes apparent in the most recently published novel, *Knots*.

III Knots and the Postcolonial Romance of the Public Sphere

An incipient focus on alternative forms of community in *Links* is continued and enlarged in the next novel, *Knots*. *Knots* tells the story of the diasporic Somali who returns from Canada to her native land. In this novel also, the personal developmental tale is inextricably connected with a broader story of development, but this time not of national development, but the development of a form of *postnational* community. Cambara, the protagonist, returns to Mogadiscio for a host of overlapping reasons; but chief among them is her secret and outrageous intention of taking possession of a property owned by her family, now occupied by a minor Mogadiscio warlord. Repossessing the mansion which her family let out to diplomats and dignitaries appears to be part of a greater ambition to construct a “counterlife” of peace to war-decimated Mogadiscio. The family property acts in the novel as the symbolic locale for the reconstruction of Somali civil society. She knows that “as a woman alone she stands no chance of survival” (71), so she aligns herself with a women’s mutual help network, which appears to operate throughout Mogadiscio. Cambara’s ambition as Farah presents it is nothing less than to construct, single-handedly and at an oblique angle to Somalia’s historical trajectory, a version of the Habermasian public sphere.

In this vision of the reconstruction of Somali society, stateless since the flight of the dictator, Siyad Barre, in 1991, *Knots* may again be contrasted with the earlier novel, *Links*. While *Links* seems to locate the potential for regeneration of Somali society in benevolent men, *Knots* locates the potential for reconstruction specifically in women. We encounter again in *Knots* the character, Bile, from the earlier novel. But Bile is completely war-

traumatized, overdosing himself on Prozac equivalents to keep himself quite literally from coming undone. Jettisoned also in *Knots* is the idea of the transformation of Somali society by a miracle child of peace. In *Knots* the task of Somali reconstruction is left squarely to women and is given shape through the formation of Somali civil society. For this monumental mission, the almost superwoman status with which her author imbues Cambara is vital. Cambara jets in from Canada, a knife-wielding martial arts expert who is also a make-up artist, actress, feted journalist and soon to be playwright and theatre director.

While public spheres have existed wherever there have been communities, the public sphere envisioned by *Knots* is a variation of the public sphere which emerges at the end of the eighteenth century in Europe, analyzed most notably by Jürgen Habermas. For Habermas, this public sphere embodies a utopian ideal, which in the course of history has not been realized. The bourgeois public sphere is a sphere of “private people [who] come together as a public” and engages in rational-critical debate which challenges public authority (Habermas 27-28). By implication, the participants in the potentially utopian public sphere are the subjects of a “disenchanted” world, where the participants view the world in the light of reason procedurally rather than substantively defined. Charles Taylor makes clear the unprecedented nature of this public sphere in a qualification of Habermas’s definition. The eighteenth century public sphere is “an instance of a new kind: a metatopical common space and common agency without an action transcendent constitution, an agency grounded purely in its own common actions” (Taylor *Modern Social Imaginaries* 86). In other words, in the Somali context, while a public sphere has always existed for public debate, radically democratic in its (gendered) inclusiveness, symbolized by the tree beneath which participants came together, this Somali public sphere deferred to an “action-transcendent”

code of virtue, embodied in Islam and tradition, the law of God and the law going back to time immemorial. The actors in the Enlightenment public sphere, by contrast, are autonomous, morally self-constituting individuals. The public sphere thus constituted is purely horizontal, constituting exclusively in its activity its own higher order or morality.

What is the nature of the Somali public sphere envisioned by *Knots*? If, as critics suggest, the reference to “private people” in the formulation of the bourgeois public sphere is a euphemism for propertied men, then by contrast, the private individuals of the public sphere in *Knots* quite explicitly is a sphere of propertied women. Somali civil war atrocities are symbolized by dirt, filth, ordure, graphically represented in virtually all of the male characters. Cambara, for example, finds Bile, the Robinson Crusoe figure in *Links*, physically unable to raise himself from his own excrement since he has fallen apart psychically. In the same way that Cambara cleans up both Bile and his apartment, the text suggests that women need to “clean up” what is rotten in the “state” of Somalia. The task of Somali reconstruction in this novel is presented as the task of women since even men with the will to challenge the civil war lack the capacity to effect any change.

Knots thus constructs *ab initio* a female public sphere. This female public sphere is not a *counter*-public sphere. In the civil war Somalia of the novel, there is no male public sphere. Neither is there any public authority since there is no state. The female public sphere is created as if in a vacuum. There is, furthermore, no sharp division as with the bourgeois public sphere, between public *activity* and private *deliberation*. The Somali female public sphere takes on what in Habermas’s formulation would constitute the function of public authority, implicitly weakening the public sphere’s capacity for political critique. The

Women's Network takes the initiative for the provision of healthcare and acts as police, judge and jury in cases of the abuse of women.

Habermas's conceptualization of the bourgeois public sphere constructs the division between public and private so that traditional women's work and women's concerns fall into the realm of the private and thus are not open to political deliberation and transformation. The Somali female public sphere as presented in *Knots*, gestures towards opening up the sphere of women's work to public deliberation. But it does so in a way which seems to limit concerns to middle class worlds. This novel indulges in studiedly "throwaway" references to female attire, day and night creams, make-up and shoes. Cambara also invests an inordinate amount of effort cooking. In a variation of the adage that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, Cambara cooks for the various child soldiers and battlewagon security guards to win them over. All of the principle female characters are professionals, but also mothers. Yet the novel's projection of a Somali female public sphere does not in any fundamental way challenge the division between female reproduction and male social subject production. The women of the Somali female public sphere bear and raise children, cook and keep house, but these are not the activities around which their public sphere is developed. Traditional women's work remains excluded from real debate even though it is brought out from what Habermas describes as the "shadowy realms" of the intimate sphere of the bourgeois household. The Somali female public sphere maintains the masculine division between public and private activity through locating the real work of a public sphere elsewhere, as we shall see. As such, the female public sphere presented by *Knots* appears merely to be a feminized version of the male public sphere.

It would appear that part of Cambara's mission all along has been to stage a play in the family property, repossessed from the minor warlord. Like Habermas's bourgeois public sphere, the Somali public sphere envisioned by *Knots* seems to consolidate itself through cultural expression. But there are also marked differences between the two public spheres. For Habermas, the private individuals of the bourgeois public sphere at the outset are a reading public. This appears not to be the case in the Mogadiscio constructed by *Knots*. A few of the male characters in the novel, through their dispositions and social conscience, act as token women. Bile is one such character. When she first meets him, Bile "is holding a book gingerly and using his index finger as a bookmark; ..." (169). Unfortunately, "no matter how hard she tries, [Cambara] is unable to make out the title of the book he has on his lap." (169) Thus, while the bourgeois public sphere developed organically out of economic and cultural transformations of which letter writing, an improved postal service, burgeoning newspaper and periodical circulation, the development of the scholarly journal, the activity of the literary critic and widespread reading of novels were hallmarks, the private individuals of the Somali public sphere are not conceived by the novel as a reading public. No matter how hard Cambara tries, the book on Bile's lap cannot be identified and cannot come to occupy even a symbolic role. Similarly, when later in the novel Cambara tries to read Flannery O'Connor's short story, "Good Country People", she finds she is "unable to concentrate, turning the pages without retaining any of what she has read" (351). Somalis, particularly Somalis who have remained in the Somali territories, constitute an oral rather than literate public. Paradoxically, although the public envisioned by *Knots* is not a reading public, the individuality displayed by its full members is an individuality derived originally primarily from books, particularly the novel in its fundamental embodiment as

Bildungsroman. Cambara intends “to construct a counterlife dependent on a few individuals, namely Kiin, maybe Bile and Dajaal, whom she has cast in the likeness of reliable allies” (201). The characters whom Cambara is able to enter into association with, rather than those whose purpose consists in being functionaries, are all products of the formation ideal which is the project of all Farah’s novels. But the focus in this novel falls on identity formation through theatre and the electronic media since Somalis remain predominantly oral.

Ironically, although the public to be incorporated by *Knots* is largely not a reading public, nevertheless, full entry into this sphere depends upon “full” individuality. As has been suggested earlier, the construction of such individuality relies in no small part upon the technology of the *Bildungsroman*. What makes *Knots* slightly different from the earlier *Bildungsromane* in Farah’s oeuvre, is that, here, construction of “re-inventing” individuals for an imagined community is so deliberate. The centrality of the individual is foregrounded in ways characteristic of the novels of Farah. Farah’s protagonists without exception reflect a consuming preoccupation with the self. Cambara is no exception. Cambara’s mission in Mogadiscio depends only secondarily on securing the right allies and procuring the appropriate means of defence. More than anything else, realizing her ambitions depends upon the realization of a particular sense of self. It is an abstracted sense of self, wholly disengaged from its context, which exists as a defined object manipulated and structured at will by the radically reflexive mind. In order to consolidate and develop this “audience-oriented” self, Cambara displays the tendency to isolate herself. Like the individuals of the bourgeois home Habermas describes, Cambara repeatedly needs to withdraw into the private spaces of her bedroom or bathroom either at her cousin’s house or at Kiin’s hotel. Her need for privacy is so urgent that she hastens to occupy the family property even before all threat

of the return of the warlord is excluded. The public space of Kiin's hotel must be replaced by the privacy of the family property. Privacy figures in the novel not as the occasional need to be by oneself. Privacy appears to constitute a fundamental feature of the individuality represented. The new individuality which comes to light is the performative identity which rehearses its roles before the mirror.

The language used to describe Cambara's private, inner world is revealing. When Cambara first meets Kiin, a leading personality in the Women's Network, the text presents Cambara as feeling "invigorated" since "her awareness of selfhood [is] boosted". (197) Before one of her meetings with Zaak, her repulsive, qaat-chewing cousin, the free indirect speech of the text suggests her possible response if Zaak should harangue her for wanting to improve his style of dress: "If he takes this line with her, then she will remind him that she has ceased to be the woman he used to know from the instant she unloaded him and that in her reinvented self, she cares less about what he wears, more about her own problems." (208-9) Cambara believes also that Bile, the character with whom she most strongly identifies, will "supplement", "complete" and "enrich" her "new self". She considers "whether admitting SilkHair [the child she might adopt] into the parameters of her newly reconstructed self will have given it a firmer format." (218-9) After one of her "sorties" into the city, Cambara almost invariably has to "regroup" her self. She needs to collect and compose her chosen vision of her self.

For this task, mirrors play as significant a role in this text as they do in Farah's other novels. The references are numerous, but consider this example: After a shopping expedition into Mogadiscio, Cambara removes her scarf and we are told, "The mirror reflects an old self with which she is happy to get reacquainted." (142) And when there is no mirror available in

which Cambara can measure her self, she very ingeniously sees a reflection of herself within herself. Cambara becomes her own mirror. She is in the back seat of a chauffeur driven car provided by Kiin: “Her veil removed, she is, *in her mind’s eye*, wearing a chemise, bought from a Pakistani outlet in Toronto, with a custom-made pair of baggy linen trousers”(emphasis added) (197). So great is the symbolic value of mirrors in the text, that the mirror gets internalized. This idea of the self dissociated from society with its concomitant potential for self-development, a unique, internal “object” with unplumbed interior depths is taken in this novel a stage further. But it is a progression structurally contained in the autonomous self from which it proceeds. In *Knots*, the disengaged self appears free to be whomsoever it wants to be.

Not everyone in the novel, it would appear, is equipped with the appropriate individuality for its version of the Somali public sphere. Cambara seeks in Mogadiscio to replace the son she lost in Canada with other children. Two possibilities present themselves. The first is a child soldier that her cousin, Zaak, employs to protect his home and himself. The second is an apparently orphaned child whom Cambara finds hanging about outside the hotel where she stays. Although the first child is a product of the patrilinear, pastoralist Somali clan system which values kinship to the extent that most Somali children are supposed to be able to give one not only their own names but also the names of their forefathers right up to the higher reaches of the family tree, the child who appears to fulfill Cambara’s maternal instincts is known only by a physical attribute. Because of his soft, wavy hair, this child is called SilkHair. Virtually without exception, those characters immersed in ways which could be described as traditional, appear to lack as individuals the uniqueness and interiority which would warrant their being given a name. All of these

characters who, through the nature of their subjectivity, must remain incidental, are identified only by external attributes. In the course of the novel, we come across characters like “SnubNose”, “TinyFeet”, “Red-Eyed Randy” and “Armed Companion”, to name just a few. Although some of these pastoralist “types” (both in loose definition and in Forster’s use) are essential to Cambara’s project of the construction of a public sphere, they are fated through their signal lack of the requisite individuality to the roles of mere functionaries.

The orphan whom Cambara meets at the hotel, on the other hand, is not simply anointed according to some outstanding external feature. He is asked his name. It is Gacal. Gacal is a child born to expatriate Somalis who, though they have no Somali friends in the United States where they live, wish for their son to come to Mogadiscio to learn Somali culture. Gacal’s father is killed and his mother’s whereabouts are unknown. The cultivated Gacal, unlike SilkHair, displays a full individuality. Cambara studies Gacal:

She finds the observation most becoming, out of the ordinary: a boy, not quite ten by her reckoning, who displays a developed-enough personality and qualifies as no one’s son ... Gacal has the sort of flair you associate with the well-born. He carries himself with élan. It does not require much imagination to sense that he is of a different class, physically aware of where he is in relation to where others are. Not only does he surround himself with much space, but he is mindful not to encroach on yours. Does his behaviour point to a middle-class upbringing in his past? (229)

As if Gacal’s development were not complete, Cambara gives him a video version of Carlo Collodi’s *Pinocchio* to watch with Kiin’s daughters. The novel foregrounds an interpretation of the children’s story which highlights how, despite their circumstance, Good Bad Boys, as opposed to Bad Bad Boys can become well-adjusted. But *Pinocchio* is also a children’s tale which, as many children’s stories do, lays bare the mechanics often masked in adult fiction. *Pinocchio* is, of course, a *Bildungsroman* which reveals the developmental path by which a

boy made of wood, a mere puppet on a string, subject to dictates which are not his own, can become a real flesh and blood, thinking, feeling, reflecting, rational being determining his own course. The class specificity of the individuality required for the novel's version of a Somali public sphere is apparent.

Through a noticeable attention to consumerism and life as "style", evident in the focus on clothing, shoes, make-up, table settings, food and the common leisure activities of a select group, the public sphere envisioned in *Knots* bears a remarkable similarity to the *lifestyle enclave* which is:

... linked most closely to leisure and consumption and is usually unrelated to the world of work. It brings together those who are socially, economically, or culturally similar, and one of its chief aims is the enjoyment of being with those who 'share one's lifestyle'. ... Whereas a community attempts to be an inclusive whole, celebrating the interdependence of public and private life ... lifestyle is fundamentally segmental and celebrates the narcissism of similarity... (Bellah et al 72).

The focus no longer is, as it was in *Maps*, on the illusion of an autonomous self revealed to be an aesthetic construct. Rather, at this moment in Farah's career which reflects a global trend, the focus is on how a relatively coherent, constructively self-reflexive subject "styles" itself. The concept of self-styling draws upon, but also misreads *gnothi seaton*, the Greek invocation to "care of the self", taken up by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (Smart, B. Rajchman, J.). The life of the individual here is presented as an "aesthetic or cultural project". In other words, where earlier the subject was projected as nothing but a literary construct, now the subject constructs itself as a work of art. Where earlier, morality was projected onto the aesthetic, now to aestheticize one's life becomes the new morality.

An associated move is identified in the focus on performance - on theatre, masks and costumes. “Performativity” has been presented as a liberatory project particularly in the context of “gender construction” (Butler). “Performance” of hybrid identity in the context of “nomadism” on an international scale is interrogated by May Joseph. She suggests:

... this new cosmopolitanism [is] often neither stable, easily penetrated, legal nor necessarily progressive in their internationalizing imperatives. On the contrary, the enticing logic of consumption as the great leveler of nations, national identities, and competing modes of citizenship conceals the exclusionary and nondemocratic tendencies embedded in this logic that contradict the hard-fought battles for alternative venues of public citizenship waged by various political identities (8).

The focus on performance is not a wholly new concern in Farah’s novels. Acting, playing out a role, dramatizing the self is alluded to in the childhood games of the young Askar in *Maps*, and is the subject of more obvious attention in *Secrets*. The transnational, transsexual, “transspecies” characters, Sholoongo and her brother, Timir, represent the fantastic ideal of performative identity. Timir introduces himself to Kalamani in the following way: “I am an all-around theatre person , ... I teach the theory of theatre, I act semiprofessionally in plays whenever I have the time or opportunity” (56). The sister Sholoongo “assumes the different personae an actor assumes” (200). By the end of *Knots*, it appears that staging a play in the ballroom of the repossessed family home is the true purpose of Cambara’s return to Mogadiscio. In this context, she is able to construct an ideal non-authoritarian, liberatory community out of “like-minded” performative selves.

What the focus on performativity elides, however, is the prior, ideologically fixed self which scripts its roles for itself. The self-inventing, self-narrating subject is always already inserted in a broader ideological context. The broader context is a product and effect

of the modern disengaged conception of identity. The paradox inherent in this idea of performativity is pointedly elicited in the “folk wit” cited by Kellman in an overview of the self-generating artwork, to the effect that “Abraham Lincoln was born in a log cabin which he helped his father to build” (1251). Attention to “styling” of the self, effaces the prior self which is always already “styled”.

Knots glowingly constructs a liberatory postnational Somali community out of a diasporic cast. In this respect, the narrative moves closer to the genre of romance. Michael McKeon, referred to in an earlier chapter, identifies as “romance” those elements in eighteenth century novels which defy the formal realism attendant upon the individualism Ian Watt suggests is constitutive of the novel genre. Included under the rubric “romance”, McKeon includes spirituality, stock situations and conventions, and traditional plot, among other elements. What McKeon identifies as “romance” is a version of what Taylor might identify as the “external morality” constitutive of the individual. In other words, included under the rubric “romance” are those elements of sociality which novelistic individualism relies upon but must efface in order to come into existence as a genre. “Romance”, the external higher order of sociality is what Farah’s latter novels tend towards. But while the recognition of an external *eudaimonia* in realism generated irony, romance in Farah’s neo-realism negotiates subject constitution in such a way that irony is dissipated.

Fredric Jameson, in an essay on the importance of attention to the analysis of “the history of the forms” (Jameson “Romance as Genre” 136), suggests that the fullest account of “romance as a *mode* has been given by Northrop Frye” (Jameson “Romance as Genre” 138) (emphasis in original). Frye defines the romance, the “mythos of summer”, thus:

The romance is nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfilment dream, and for that reason it has a socially paradoxical role. In every age the ruling social or

intellectual class tends to project its ideals in some form of romance, where the virtuous heroes and beautiful heroines represent the ideals and the villains the threats to their ascendancy. [...] The perennially child-like quality of romance is marked by its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of golden age in time or space (186).

The postcolonial romance imperative which drives *Knots* need not be rehearsed. What needs to be clarified, however, is the fact that romance, unlike fantasy, desires “a fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality *but will still contain that reality* (Frye 193). In other words, the concern of romance is paradise, but the paradise it constructs is mundane. The hero of the romance according to Frye is a “mythical Messiah or deliverer”, but on a human scale. In the earlier “Blood in the Sun” trilogy and the possible trilogy in progress, strong gestures are made towards prophetic deliverance through a golden child, but in *Knots*, this tendency is restrained. The new world envisaged is a secular one, constructed by a woman in profane time. Absent in *Knots* also, is the irony constitutive of the novel as genre, confirming a circling back to the historical origins of the novel.

The brave new world created by *Knots* is constructed by metropolitan Somali intellectuals. The diaspora the novel has its eye on is not the members of the Somali diaspora in Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa, Saudi Arabia or the Gulf States. It is the intellectual, professional and business class diaspora in Canada, Europe and the United States. So, while one can choose to be whatever one wants to be, the range of subjects to whom this choice is open is radically limited. Some sense of the closed boundaries of a text which in other ways is nomadic on an international scale, is apparent from the extensive, detailed and coldly efficient description of the security which surrounds Cambara’s theatrical debut:

To ensure that there are no lapses in security, which Dajaal has planned very tightly, Seamus has run the cables all the way to the checkpoints. There are

several inner and outer circles and a minimum of three checkpoints, ... All manner of communication gadgets are in use: walkie-talkies, a landline telephone at the property, and several handheld mobiles. At each checkpoint, there are men with machine guns hidden from view, the second security ring having only the “technical” as part of a show of force, if it comes to that (415).

What is curious about the ending in *Knots*, is that concern with keeping others out does not register as ironic undercutting of closure. It is instead, merely a practical concern. The novel does not address the question of what to do with the barbarians at the gate. But the implication is that they must be permanently excluded. Or some intervention is required; perhaps *Bildung* on a global scale.

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Conclusion

The novels of Nuruddin Farah engage a wide range of critical concerns. Thematic explorations of the novels include the focus on social and political issues like feminism, colonization, nationalism and postcolonial dictatorship, as well as civil war. The representation of Somali culture, orality and religion have also drawn critical attention. Generic engagements include analysis of the affinity the novels share with the genre of the detective story, for example. Questions of form have been addressed, focusing on the use in the novels of the techniques of modernism and postmodernism. The common thread running through all these varied approaches, however, is Farah's concern with the individual both as object of the operation of power and subject of transformation.

This thesis has argued that the conception of the subject as individual is not universal and not neutral in its political effect. While the novels expose traditional gender identities, kinship structures and nationalism as representing ideologically charged constructs, the novels assume the notion of the subject as individual as completely natural.

Relying on the work of philosopher, Charles Taylor, this thesis has shown that the dominant contemporary model of the subject is the product of the historical, social, religious and cultural development of modernity. The disengaged, autonomous subject is a product of societies of the North-Atlantic in the period of historical modernity. Based on philosophical argument, Charles Taylor shows that questions of the human person cannot be entertained without addressing moral questions. The higher order throughout human history in all parts of the world has been identified external to the self. For Taylor this includes Buddhism which, as a *non-theistic* religion, sometimes is identified as being supported by the same

philosophy as the procedurally rational philosophy of modernity. According to Taylor, only modernity is marked by the internalization of the moral sources.

This thesis has shown that the novel is the most significant cultural form which, in part, constitutes modern identity. The novel responds to social, cultural, philosophical and economic changes, but also formally consolidates the internalization of moral sources which identifies the modern subject as individual. More than merely a representation of individualism, the novel, in part, constitutes the individual.

In Farah's novels, various articulations of individualism may be identified. In the early work, most significantly informed by formal realism, the moral sources are shown to inhabit the novel heroine, who thereby possesses limitless freedom. In order to achieve closure, however, individual freedom must submit to socialization. The individual here submits to a socially constituted morality, but that submission is presented as the outcome of individual desire – the “tautological-teleological” premise of the *Bildungsroman*, that sub-genre of the novel which comes to define the novel itself. Social compromise in the novel registers formally as irony. The techniques of modernism in Farah's later novels, through the reflection of irony on itself, allow the displacement of morality onto form or the aesthetic. As this move becomes routine in postmodernism, infinite self-reflexivity fragments the self. This fragmentation of the self is ambiguously represented as both pathological and liberatory.

Since, however, some form of centred subject remains requisite to Farah's political commitment, grounded as it is upon individual agency, the later works return to a model of a relatively coherent subject inhabiting a type of “neo-realism.” This is a version of realism which allows a strategically centred subject the capacity for inventing both itself and its

moral orientation. In the later novels, this capacity of the individual for invention of both the self and the self's moral horizon is framed in the discourse of performativity and styling. What the idea of the self-fashioning subject ignores is the effacement of the prior disengaged, autonomous subject upon which it is premised.

Farah's political commitment cannot, however, in terms of Taylor's argument, originate from the individualist philosophy the novels support. Commitment to justice, equality and freedom can only originate socially and, Taylor argues further, transcendently. Ignoring this dimension of the constitution of the higher order has the paradoxical effect in the novels of excluding precisely those subjects for whom Farah desires a utopian future.

Farah's achievement, as yet incomplete since the likely third trilogy awaits closure, represents a strategy which transforms the novel from Lukács's genre of "transcendental homelessness" to a genre which finds a home. In terms of Farah's project, the novel negotiates a mode whereby it can be, in Novalis's formulation of the drive of philosophy to which Lukacs alludes, "at home everywhere." Farah's novels chart the journey of the novel as the genre of transcendental homelessness to a genre which is at home everywhere. In order to discover the meaning of life purely immanently, "everywhere", the novel has to return to its origins in more social forms, in particular, romance. But the sociality represented by the genre of romance is masked by the illusion of performative identity which effaces its coming into being out of the disengaged, autonomous self – the individual. In this way the novels ultimately occlude attachment to the form of totality embodied in the contradictory idea of the unlimited freedom of the disengaged, autonomous self. The novels simultaneously exclude those forms of totality which make manifest their origins in the social.

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