

## **The Violation of Style: Englishness in Edward St Aubyn's Patrick Melrose novels**

Jean-Michel Rabaté has coined the term 'philosophemes' to describe those quotable and not quite translatable philosophical statements which are, as he puts it, arresting without being sententious. He refers to the Comte de Buffon's aphorism copied out twice by Wittgenstein, first as 'Le style, c'est l'homme' and second, correctly, as 'Le style, c'est l'homme même'. To Wittgenstein, the first expression had 'a cheap epigrammatic brevity' whereas the second implied that 'that a man's style is a *picture* of him'. In the first incorrect version, the concision of the language and the sweeping truth-claim of the thought seem to be complicit and mutually admiring – thus, 'cheap'. To Rabaté, Buffon's statement should be understood as admitting self-reflexivity and doubt: style is 'the redoubling of a self-same self that finds a corroboration, a proof, or a clue in an *x* that confirms it is indeed 'himself' or 'herself''.<sup>1</sup> This suggests more broadly that if style is to be rescued from archaism as a theoretical or literary concept, its expression in language must turn back or 'redouble' on itself.

One way of summarising the downward trajectory of style in twentieth-century fiction, narrated most stylishly by Hugh Kenner, begins with Flaubert, in whose ideal book about nothing style aims to become its own object. The modernist impersonality of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* turns styles into parodic objects. Beckett, vitriolic on the question of Style (pointedly capitalised) in his famous 'German letter', aims to write in another language (that of Flaubert), *sans style*. By the mid-1950s, Barthes' first book, *Writing Degree Zero*, a manifesto of stylelessness, supplements Beckettian diminution. From the onset of structuralism and

through post-structuralism, style, at zero, seems to disappear from view. Put most bluntly, if style is the man, style is the inadmissible signature of the author. The books on literary style that were still being produced in the English academy well into the 1970s appear, in this light, as a last ditch attempt to keep an obsolete literary concept alive.<sup>2</sup> Once the practice of stylistics had hived off the analysis of literary discourse as a discipline, style in itself had nowhere to go. It remains as a journalistic epithet of nebulous praise which in *English* studies, at least, seemed enjoined to class and nationality. Wodehouse, Waugh, Orwell: alert to cliché; fine stylists. Joyce, Beckett, Flann O'Brien: alert to cliché; executioners of the 'fine stylist'.

Yet style has always been divided against itself. In the era of Romanticism, for example, style was introduced as an individualising quality (authors had their signature styles) at the same time as it was deemed a formal expression of philosophical truth.<sup>3</sup> Goethe could write of style [*Stile*] in 1789 that it 'rest[ed] on the most fundamental principle of cognition, on the essence of things – to the extent that it is granted to us to perceive this essence in visible and tangible form'.<sup>4</sup> Since at least the mid-nineteenth century the term decadence has accompanied style as its dark familiar, threatening at all times to expose style to its own unbearable particularity. It was Nietzsche, most prominently, who plumbed this phenomenon for its historical current: for him, all of the major artistic achievements of modern European culture had been complicit with the literary crime of decadence in which the whole meaning of the work was sacrificed to the grandiosity of the part. This was a crime, however, which could not be expiated:

It is a self-deception on the part of philosophers and moralists to imagine that by making war on *décadence* they therewith elude *décadence* themselves. This is beyond their powers: what they select as an expedient,

as a deliverance, is itself only another expression of *décadence* – they alter its expression, they do not abolish the thing itself.<sup>5</sup>

As an extraordinary aphorist, Nietzsche could hardly disavow the particular traits of his style any more than modern artists of fracture and synthetic composition could convincingly dissociate themselves from a culture of decadent fragmentation. The only remaining difference, and therefore the only meaningful one for Nietzsche, was that of interpretation. Style as a specifically ‘active’ quality was the process through which the acknowledged historical symptom of decadence could yet be re-interpreted and potentially reshaped, or ‘overcome’;<sup>6</sup> it indicated a position with respect to itself and thereby recognised the contingent deed of its own writing, which, according to Nietzsche, philosophers, moralists and systemisers of all stripes had long been fastidious in denying.

‘Style is a distance, a difference; but in relation to what?’ asks Barthes in his essay ‘Style and its Image’.<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche’s answer, in advance of the question, reverberates within the study of literature today as it confronts both the questionable legitimacy of style and the preponderance of certain legitimised ‘literary’ styles: ‘style is a distance, a difference’, but only in relation *to itself*. Recent work has suggested that style was hiding in plain sight during the ‘high’ years of theory. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Blanchot, and Derrida, amongst others, have been shown to consider style in its philosophical and theoretical form. Style has also been re-attached to modernism in such very recent works as Ben Hutchinson’s *Modernism and its Styles* and Sam Slote’s *Joyce’s Nietzschean Ethics*. What Hutchinson has recently termed the ‘double movement’ of modernist ‘style’ returns to the familiar prerogative: that style be at once a particular ornament of language and the universal condition of utterance. On the

one hand, modernism embraces ‘pure’ style, in the sense that, freeing itself from the mimetic injunctions of realism, the play of the material signifier foregrounds style as subject matter. On the other, the modernist response to secular modernity is actuated by its suspicion of the attraction to what is ‘purely’ or merely style, and leads to the anarchic de-creation of previous styles and indeed of the notion of univocal style.<sup>8</sup> Such work reads style back into philosophy, modernism and post-structuralism, and leaves open the question of how this rehabilitation of style may be regarded in relation to contemporary fiction, particularly that which is consistently praised, in the old journalistic way, for its ‘style’.

Considering the disciplinary constitution of ‘English’ in which so often the part has been misleadingly taken for the whole – England for the UK, English English for the Englishes of the world, and the author for the text – it can hardly be a surprise that style has become, once more, conspicuous as a term of cultural and literary investigation. And in a devolutionary age when the cultural image of Englishness can remain mystifyingly bound up with certain aestheticised norms of class and region – this in the face of a global English literature – the question of English style has not yet been divorced from the historical question of England. Accordingly, our reading of one recently admired exercise in English novel writing, Edward St Aubyn’s Patrick Melrose sequence published between 1992 and 2011, reflects on the paradox of style as it emerges within the literary and historical context of ‘Englishness’. Since at least the publication of the Booker prize nominated fourth volume of the Melrose sequence, *Mother’s Milk* in 2006, the reviewers have left us in no doubt that author St. Aubyn is a *stylist*. His novels have been praised for their wit and waspish charm, for being well-written, and even for carrying an unexpected philosophical weight. Perhaps inevitably, there

have been some critical reservations; yet, neither James Wood's association of St Aubyn's style to 'a bastard's [...] contempt for the world', nor Theo Tait's appraisal of the vicissitudes of the literary marketplace – 'St Aubyn has gone from being unfairly neglected to being perhaps slightly overpraised' – have gone to any great lengths in relating the specific qualities of his prose to his primary subject matter: the remnant-aristocratic class of England.<sup>9</sup>

In current critical debates about the novel, style has emerged in a problematic relation to form, if an overt preoccupation with form is considered as the modernist legacy of self-reflexivity and textual difficulty. This might, we suggest, be attributable to the connection between English style and cultural Englishness, hinting at the complicity of style and control. The linguistic facility of a certain inherited and class-based version of Englishness continues to lay claim to style – to give style a home – but this is a parochial process which excludes assessments of those lauded non-English novelists, like J.M. Coetzee, who continue to extrapolate transnational modernist strategies. Derek Attridge has suggested that Coetzee's 'handling of formal properties is bound up with the capacity of his work to engage with - to stage, confront, apprehend, explore - otherness'.<sup>10</sup> This typically (late) modernist retreat from moral absolutes and narrative authority, in favour of contingency, uncertainty and partiality of voice, may bear some relation to the performance of styles. Yet it is seldom said that Coetzee is a *stylist* – Attridge certainly does not – as this would admit the stigma of narcissism, rather than emphasise that formal disruption is ethically necessary to the novels' encounters with alterity.

The Melrose sequence is one in which Englishness is both an exclusive set of historical co-ordinates and a damaging, narcissistic pathology. Not only do

these novels allow us to connect the trans-historical question of style to the more specifically historical question of England, but they demonstrate how the authority and decadence attached to modern English subjectivity might be explored best as a literary phenomenon. This article argues that the most productive way of reading the Patrick Melrose novels is through identifying style as an inheritance which has bequeathed a pointed and painful subject position in narrative and in language. St Aubyn seems to tell us that style is indeed the very man – *more is the pity*. Style has indeed been passed down from Buffon's eighteenth century; but infiltrated by the legacy of literary and philosophical modernism and shorn of its humanist confidence it now appears by turns coercive and vulnerably self-conflicted.

### **The Inheritance of Style**

It is not difficult to say that Patrick Melrose's struggle throughout the five novels to escape his own overly-articulate and often contemptuous mode of expression is oedipal in nature: it is his struggle to escape his father's voice. It is more exacting, however, to consider how Patrick's reflection plays out against the background of his rape at the hands of his father; since it is, in the end, the identity of the perpetrator that Patrick seems so hopelessly to adopt as his own. In *Never Mind*, the first volume of the sequence, David Melrose's sharp tongue is undoubtedly accomplice, if not formally twinned, to his sexual ruthlessness against his son: his wit is his legacy and Patrick his legatee. We do not have to rely on the biographical correspondences here – St Aubyn's elliptic interview confessions that yes, he is Patrick Melrose – to see how the narrative style, too, is a legacy of David Melrose's articulacy and cruelty.

The satiric mode, seldom bereft of knowingness, is the Melrose cultural heritage, and it is shockingly inseparable from the depiction of the rape and its implied consequences in the whole sequence. Patrick was raped, and also believes he was conceived after the rape of his mother on a staircase: ‘born of rape as well as born to be raped’, as he articulates it in a chillingly deferred summary in the final volume of the sequence (*AL* 174).<sup>11</sup> Most fundamentally, his struggle is with the idea that his rape has been a kind of vile empowerment – in effect, an initiation into the perpetrating class – which possesses a mythic hold he can never disinherit himself from, no matter how he desires it.

It is David, not Patrick, Melrose who stands as the dominant presence in the opening novel *Never Mind*. Although aristocratic in bearing and heritage, David is a ‘Doctor’, a title which becomes more significant later in the volume when Eleanor remembers how he had carelessly insisted on circumcising Patrick by himself when drunk. The monstrosity of this act is clear and the parallels with Doctor Frankenstein unavoidable if we understand Patrick’s creaturely abjection in subsequent volumes to indicate his attempts at expiating this ‘unnatural’ abduction into life. And yet, though his malice is starkly depicted— from his drowning of a single ant, to operating on Patrick, to forcing his wife to eat figs off the ground— David never ceases to be an object of fascination. If we are horrified by his actions we are also strangely unsettled by how the novel manages to normalise them. He does not become the exaggerated gothic figure we might expect; rather, the prose preserves him within his milieu as a recognisable ogre and the player of a game, which, though unsavoury, has its consenting partners:

When [Eleanor] had first met David twelve years ago, she had been fascinated by his looks. The expression that men feel entitled to wear when they stare out of a cold English drawing room onto their own land had grown stubborn over five centuries and perfected itself in David's face. It was never quite clear to Eleanor why the English thought it was so distinguished to have done nothing for a long time in the same place, but David left her in no doubt that they did. He was also descended from Charles II through a prostitute. 'I'd keep quiet about that, if I were you,' she had joked when he first told her. Instead of smiling, he had turned his profile towards her in a way she had grown to loathe, thrusting out his underlip and looking as if he were exercising great tolerance by not saying something crushing. (NM7-8).

David Melrose's coldness and stubbornness have ossified into a physiognomy, where tolerance and contempt combine in the form of a national character: he looks and he *is* 'English', something emphasised by his seclusion in the south of France. Significantly, Eleanor's (American) fascination is not aberrant; the narrative voice itself shares her abjection. If the cigar-smoking, hosepipe-wielding David Melrose is introduced as a ridiculously phallic power, the ennobling description of 'the brown and grey curls that covered the jutting bones of his forehead' reminding us that the narrator –and by extension the reader – is also trapped in a masochistic admiration for this 'astonishingly handsome' man (NM 4, 15).

The Melrose line, spun out of Charles II's libidinous energy, shares its provenance with the historical question of English style, or the style of Englishness as it emerged, especially in class terms, after the interregnum. One of

David's mottoes, that 'things were better in the eighteenth century' (BN 69) may be a form of genealogical self-regard but it also signals a significant affinity. His satire, wit, ridicule, and even his contempt are not without historical justification in the canon of Restoration-era Englishness where they are defended as modes of social representation and, ultimately, of solidarity. This case is made most definitively by the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, whose epistles, 'Sensus Communis, an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour,' (1709) and 'A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm...' (1708), argue for such qualities of 'English' conversation as can protect polite society against the radical naiveté of Enlightenment philosophy. Wit works against the 'imposture of gravity' – or what Shaftesbury also calls 'philosophical formalism' – by entering 'belief' into the register of style and sociability. For Shaftesbury a 'transport of ridicule' describes the ideal dynamic of reasonable, 'common sense' social life, for it is through ridicule that new ideas are tolerated even as they are disdained, religious and philosophical beliefs circulated even as their claim to represent a superior reality is disparaged.<sup>12</sup>

The schism between this view of conversational excellence allied to the English national character and the new realism of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), with its catalogue of useful jobs, earnest accountancy and spirit of capitalist adventure, points up the diverging interests of the aristocratic and middle classes around this time, but also prompts the question of whether the style of the English gentleman for all its aesthetic virtue can ever be said to be truly novelistic. The English distinction of having 'done nothing for a long time in the same place' is embodied by David Melrose but later echoed in the 'Do nothing!' resolution of Patrick and all his family in *Mother's Milk*. As well as reiterating a sense of class entitlement, it alerts us to this uneasy relation between the abbreviated, theatrical world of the stylist and the

factors of capital accumulation and education which came to define the middle class 'British' novel (*MM* 279).

The talk at Shaftesbury's high table is registered throughout the Melrose sequence in several different ways: in David Melrose's Restoration-era 'look' of 'exercising tolerance' in just those moments when he is not expressing his great contempt; in the figure of the philosopher who appears at the margins of the sequence – Victor in *Never Mind*, Erasmus in *At Last* – a reminder of Enlightenment ideas which might challenge the high society genius of the novel's theatricality; and in the rhetorical strategies and witty antagonisms which define many of the novels' conversations, especially those among its male characters. Despite the self-consciousness of presentations of 'wit', such as the dialogues between David and his friendly antagonist Nicholas Pratt, St Aubyn is also establishing the scene of Patrick Melrose's, and his own, entrapment. How can Patrick hope to invert his father's behaviour – be his father's moral opposite – if his father's favourite weapon of ridicule is satiric inversion? And how can the author, Edward St Aubyn, hope to supplant the gentlemanly mode of satire if he is constantly heralded for the precision of his putdowns and the wit-economy of his style?

These questions arise from the central scene of David's rape of Patrick. David's own reflections on it instruct us that far from being the scene of an unspeakable trauma, it should be considered a slightly *outré* initiation ceremony.

During lunch David felt he had perhaps pushed his disdain for middle-class prudery a little too far. Even at the bar of the Calvary and Guards Club one couldn't boast about homosexual, paedophilic incest with any confidence of a favourable reception. Who could he tell that he had raped

his five-year-old son? He could not think of a single person who would not prefer to change the subject – and some would behave far worse than that. The experience itself had been short and brutish, but not altogether nasty (*NM* 105).

The imagined *mise-en-scène* of the London club coupled with facile adaptation of philosophical thought (this time Hobbes's) make for the perfect caricature of Shaftesbury's English gentleman. If the fact of his rape of his son is not quite permitted in polite conversation, David's contempt for prudery ensures that it is incorporated into his imagined speech (his soliloquy) as a point of class principle. Later he considers it again as the act of 'a sensualist': 'If he had committed any crime, it was to set about his son's education too assiduously' (*NM* 106). The education of an aesthete means passing on certain privileged sensations. In other words, the rape was not fundamentally a question of morality but of upper-class inheritance. One of David's mottoes is 'Nothing but the best, or go without' (*NM* 106). There is no going without, as he acknowledges: the motto narcissistically applies to the connoisseurship of his son.

That David handles surgical instruments is part of the exhibitionism of his style. Flaubert wrote of 'conceiving of a style which would thrust into the idea like a stiletto/stylet'; Sainte Beuve that in *Madame Bovary* the pen is wielded like a scalpel.<sup>13</sup> This is what interested Derrida about Nietzsche's 'spurring' style (as Laurent Milesi has put it). To Derrida, style is 'the pointed tip with which one writes'. To write without incision is to write without style.<sup>14</sup> Style is an old academic or phallogocentric category – again, *le style, c'est l'homme* – which implies its executive power over the prone female form. Yet the St Aubyn sequence is

inaugurated by our knowledge that the father has violated, cut into, operated on, the son, consummating and perpetuating their pointed styles. It is perfectly consequential that, as a young adult, Patrick will go on to inject heroin – that is, to administer upon his own form multiple piercings of the ‘stiletto’. This is an unwanted legacy of the Melrose name: his very own ‘pointed’ style.

Perhaps the obvious critical response would be to attempt to retrieve from beneath David’s unfeeling monstrosity Patrick’s proper victimhood – and to read the subsequent novels in the sequence as St Aubyn’s sympathetic attempt to do just that. Though clearly directing anger at the characters of David and Eleanor Melrose, St Aubyn does not labour the pathos of ‘abuse’ narratology. This suggests both that he is suspicious of the sacralising of the traumatic event, the way in which the event gains protection from direct representation, and that he at least partially shares David Melrose’s view that the rape enacts a pre-ethical, mythical bond, even if it is a bond of antagonism. This is borne out in Patrick’s character, which vacillates throughout the sequence between myths of ravishment and power and traumatic melancholy. At the end of *Some Hope*, weary from a night of decadent revelry, Patrick witnesses a pair of swans rise out of the fog, ‘the clamour of their wings muffled by the falling snow’: ‘[v]icious creatures’ he thinks, and yet, possibly worse, ‘indifferent to his thoughts’ (*SH* 207-208). The swans constitute a heraldic apparition, but also an adroit literary reference to W.B. Yeats’s ‘Leda and the Swan’, a poem which ends, famously, with a question concerning rape: ‘Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?’<sup>15</sup> The echo of the word ‘indifferent’ consolidates the relevance of this question to Patrick’s predicament. Can he relinquish the event of his rape at his father’s hands? And to what extent does

this viciousness define, or even ennoble him? The enduring interpretative problem for us, and for Patrick, is that Patrick is initiated into David's world through this violation – and as someone who inherits the privileges of this world his right to the status of victim can never go unchallenged.

### **The 'tragic limitations of comparison': style and simile**

For all the poise and nuance of its drawing-room set pieces – its satirical 'pointedness' – St Aubyn's style is not as smoothed-out and elegant as we might imagine. Rather, it is characterised by boldness and risk; in particular by the conspicuousness of simile. In simile the explicit setting side-by-side of images and ideas which would otherwise be superimposed in metaphor draws attention to what has been defined as indeed 'a *pointedly* rationalized perception' (our italics). Simile is discursive, temporary, provisional, appealing to what we already know about things; it 'titillates' our perception of reality.<sup>16</sup> St Aubyn pushes this titillating potentiality to excess, sharpening the conceit until it becomes a weapon: a *stiletto*. The cruel wit of the conversation, and the wit by which such dialogue is satirised by the narrator, has its counterpart in the disorienting *bizarrerie* of the similes, so that the reader begins to acquaint the conceit of the stylist with the conceitedness of the characters.

The supposedly detached narrator is careful to show that simile is not an external adornment but rather a parental inheritance of linguistic disturbance. Thus, 'to *Eleanor* her car was like a consulate in a strange city, and she moved towards it with the urgency of a robbed tourist' (*NM7*, our italics). Likewise, David reaches for appropriate medical terms of comparison: thinking about how his sadism to Eleanor

no longer brings him satisfaction is ‘like trying to palpate a patient’s swollen liver when one had already proved that it hurt’ (*NM* 11). He has indeed seen brains and palpated livers. The mountains ‘looked *to David* like models of human brains dumped on the dark green mountainside, or at other times, like a single brain, bursting from dozens of incisions’ (*NM*19, our italics). The metaphysical conceit, which yokes together disparate ideas and images, requires a kind of violence done through language, making minced brains out of mountains.

When Bridget comments that a fig skin is purple and white at the same time, David’s simile is the diagnosis of surgeon and stylist: ‘Like a drunk with emphysema,’ he says, smiling at his dipsomaniac wife (*NM* 117). The doctor’s operation on the female and male body (of his wife and son) is analogous to the stylist’s wielding of conceit as a scalpel, of style as the site of crime: as Rabaté has put it, ‘Le style, c’est le crime même’.<sup>17</sup> The medical precision of David’s similes suggests the pathology of its user. As Bridget eats the fig, she ‘suddenly felt what she later described to Barry as a ‘very heavy vibe’ from David, “as if he was pushing his fist into my womb”’ (*NM*118), prompting Bridget to disclose, again through simile, the threat of sexual violence. The rapist is a stylist, a perpetrator of the obscene and absurd; he violates through style. Eliot’s by now familiar opening simile in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, of an ‘evening spread out under the sky/ Like a patient etherised upon a table’, was perceived at the time as an avant-garde act of aggression or violation upon the conventional lyric image. The early modernist poem announces the anaesthetising of the old aesthetic ‘style’: it will re-accommodate the violence of metaphysical conceit but without its devotional consolations.

Just as Patrick's crushing of snails has been bequeathed by David's hosing of the ants, so the son has inherited from his father the violence of simile. The wind exploded the sea 'like smashing bottles against rocks' (NM26); looking at a wine press, Patrick feels that 'his eyes were like the grapes, made of the same soft translucent jelly and that they might fall out of his head and get crushed between the two rollers' (NM31). The son is already performing stylishly in his father's sado-masochistic theatre. Growing experience will ominously extend the storehouse of available, comparable ideas, making him a greater and greater stylist. This process is addictive as well as additive: narcotised revelation opens the imagination to more surreally diverse likenesses. David is a connoisseur of abuse and Patrick of heroin. Pain and pleasure find a sometimes grotesque equilibrium in the explicit, 'pointedly rationalized', figure of the simile. 'Trauma' is anaesthetised, or thrillingly inverted, by the juxtapositions of style: like the pit of razor blades and tank of honey which Patrick imagines on either side of a rock (NM27).

During and after the rape, Patrick imagines being outside of his body, or in that of a gecko, looking down at himself: 'It was not quite personal, *like the accident* they saw on the road last year and his mother said not to look' (NM 104, our italics). Simile – by extension, style – is a reflection on Perseus's shield. It is also a way of *not looking*, a technical displacement into literary similitude. We may remember that in *Bad News* Patrick thinks of his father's motto 'Never apologize, never explain' (BN139). It is no coincidence that Barthes' text of pleasure involves a Melrose-like simulation: 'The Pleasure of the Text: like Bacon's simulator, it can say: never apologize, never explain. It never denies anything: "I shall look away, that will henceforth be my sole negation"'.<sup>18</sup> The stylist too denies himself nothing but looks away so that brute experience is made 'not quite personal'. The reference to Barthes

reminds us that, as voyeurs of the Melrose family romance, the reader too is a seeker of textual *jouissance* and thus complicit in the enterprise of style. However, we ‘cruise’ the text, in Barthes’ phrase, looking at their looking away.

The characteristic knowingness of the Melrose novels must incorporate reflections about the inheritance of style, and more particularly, of simile. Patrick, when drunk, cannot complete a simile:

Perhaps similes just shunted the same idea back and forth, lightly disguised, to give the impression of fruitful trade. Sir Sampson Legend was the only honest suitor who ever sang the praises of a woman. ‘Give me your hand, Odd, let me kiss it; ‘tis as warm and as soft – as what? Odd, as t’other hand.’ Now there was an accurate simile. The tragic limitations of comparison.(BN64).

And later, before taking a bath: ‘A bath without a drink was like – was like a bath without a drink. Was there any need to elaborate or compare?’ (BN141). If the narrator’s continual resorting to simile is a marker of inherited pathology, of violation represented within language, that process is occasionally qualified by the acknowledgement that the exercising of conceit can be deprived of its relish.

Such an admission of the ‘tragic limitations of comparison’, a kind of meta-textual anxiety, can signify the fatigue of the style addict. Patrick’s weekend in New York City, moving from a drug den on Sixth Street to a gentleman’s club and a penthouse suite, is seemingly designed to present the most disparate of social experiences being yoked together in his consciousness. The vehicle of choice must be simile, but wearily so for both the stylist and the cruising reader. The anxiety is also connected to the stylist’s fear that he is taking refuge in style so as not to tackle those philosophical problems that are succinctly mentioned but not analysed. Style

may just be an intellectually inert process of shunting the same idea back and forth. Taking drugs, or the prospect of doing so, may offer to lift Patrick out of this endless materialism, promising revelations in the realm of the ideal. Instead, it appears to extend his range of similes, and remains associated with the inability to stop the conceit, to resist endless comparisons. The urge for exact similitude can never be satisfied, leading to increasingly baroque figures of speech:

The terror was the price he had to pay for the first heartbreaking wave of pleasure when consciousness seemed to burst out, *likewhite* blossoms, along the branches of each nerve. And all his scattered thoughts came rushing together, *like* loose iron filings as a magnet is held over them and draws them into the shape of a rose. Or – he must stop thinking about it – *or like* a solution of saturated copper sulphate under the microscope, when it suddenly transforms and crystals break out everywhere on its surface (*BN53*, our italics).

The slow, elaborated sensuality of the simile gives way to its unstoppable pathological use. The stylist and the heroin user can compare anything to anything: in *At Last* Patrick acknowledges that ‘at the molten heart of things’ lies the ‘horror’ of metaphor – he does not specify simile – and its inescapable fashioning of continuous resemblances (*AL* 201).

The drugs high also involves ‘compulsive mimicry’ (*BN103*), the state of always ‘doing the voices’. Although those voices are many, and may range from Congreve to Captain Kirk, Patrick’s quoting of modernism has a more knowing complicity, because he is quoting parodists of style. For example, looking over at the East River at dawn, Patrick thinks: ‘The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. That was another first sentence. Other people’s words drifted through

his mind' (BN123). Beckett's words are a rearrangement of others' words (Ecclesiastes: 'There is nothing new under the sun'); Patrick's style may be constituted by the style of anti-stylists like Beckett.

By the final novel of the series, *At Last*, Patrick is in a position to simultaneously reflect on his history as a 'user' of others' style and as an exponent of simile. Threatened as ever by his thoughts, Patrick reaches first for simile, 'Memories and phrases loomed and flitted like fog banks on a night road', and then for *Krapp's Last Tape*, 'Drowned in dreams and burning to be gone' (AL46). As for Krapp, memories and phrases can be memories *of* phrases and memories *as* phrases, and as one who compulsively quotes and relishes language (again, like Krapp, with his 'spool' and 'viduity'), Patrick wonders whether other people's words were thoughts before they became, in quotation marks, 'other people's words' (AL46).<sup>19</sup>

In his account Patrick's voices had taken the form of a Joycean 'surreal chorus' (AL49) – most notably, the pastiche of the 'Circe' episode in *Bad News* – but over the years have been reduced to a Beckettian 'grim monologue' (AL 49). He obsessively erases and rewrites the terms of the simile: 'Was it like fog, or was it more like hot sand?', and attempts to hold the contraries: 'How could it be both? How could it be other than both?' (AL46). So involuted has the relationship between thought and language become that it is by now unclear what 'it' might be, and the simile itself requires another to elaborate it: 'Similes of dissimilarities – another phrase that seemed to chase itself like a miniature train around a tight circuit' (AL46). If simile is not to be tragically limited to material accuracy (a hand is like ... 't'other hand'), its potential limitlessness indeed goes round in circles. A thing can

both be like something (fog) but equally like something quite other (hot sand): the simile requires maximal difference rather than sameness.

It is not surprising, then, that in the final volume Patrick views his mother's corpse, a 'transitional object', as having the 'prestige of a metonym' (AL37), standing both for his mother and her absence. The tenuous linking of part to whole, even if the whole may be either one signified or its opposite, seems by dint of its contiguity and conceptual neighbourliness (one thing as property or fragment of another) to have earned a higher standing than that of his exhausted and exhausting use of simile. In light of Nietzsche's instruction that the decadent reflect on his own historical contingency, the metonymic supplanting of the metaphoric suggests for Patrick a mode of abandoning the false promise of integration: his attachment to baroque comparison – which is also the play of his transferential desire for recuperation and unity – is loosening. Eventually, the stylist's achievement is to reveal the undoing of his linguistic staple, simile, within his 'grim' inner monologues. His willingness to explore the aporias of style, at the same time as wishing to 'make [phrases] stop' (AL46), represents a philosophical resistance to the conceitedness of the conceit. However, such self-deconstructing monologues hint at their complicity with Beckettian asociality without sounding particularly Beckettian: this suggests that the narrator, as well as Patrick, has not and will not surrender his social and satirical pointedness.

### **Impossible figures: Children and Philosophers**

Nietzsche's biographical injunction to become 'what one is' promotes style as the ethical obligation to individuation. Yet Nietzsche's own commitments to style as

self-emulation – a redoubling of a self-same self – are persistently shadowed by the problem of decadence, of resolving into cheap and epigrammatic forms. Nietzsche declares decadent style to be both the sickness of his age – an age in which anything could be compared with anything – and the condition of his self-becoming. For Nietzsche, ‘Nietzsche’ himself is to be considered decadent – ‘no less than [Richard] Wagner’ who is despicable in the fact of his ‘lacking a capacity for style’.<sup>20</sup> In the picture of himself as he is, Nietzsche finds the character of his unwanted ancestor. The stylistic ‘point’ and the decadent fragment resist categorical differentiation and come to resemble one another.

That self-fashioning is shadowed by decadence is given expression in Patrick’s familial dilemma, where living up to his father and failing to live up to him signpost equally wretched fates. They are *l’homme même* – the very man, the same man. Accordingly, the trauma of rape and incest in *Never Mind*, Patrick’s florid dissociations and forced re-associations of drug addiction in *Bad News*, and his recuperative double-act with child-psychiatrist Johnny Hall in *Some Hope*, pave the way to the manifestly psychoanalytic opening to the fourth novel, *Mother’s Milk*, the first eighty pages of which are written from the perspective of Patrick’s first son, Robert. Style as ethic and style as inheritance; individuation and fragmentation; becoming oneself and copying a multitude of others: such conflicted couplings find their ideal vehicle in a son’s voice – Patrick as a son, and Patrick’s son – which is, and is not, his own.

The opening of *Mother’s Milk* is an arch and problematic twisting of the aporetic enunciation of a subject position in the early stages of *Bildungsroman*: St Aubyn’s version of *David Copperfield*’s chapter title ‘*I am born*’ or of Georges

Perec's *Je Suis Né*. In the first section of *Mother's Milk*, the governing consciousness is handed from the protagonist father to the son – emphasising a Joycean sense of the subject who is already inducted into the prohibitive adult world. A five-year-old Robert Melrose remembers when he was born, accounting for his sense-experience with cleverness and elegance. As with all the other narrative beginnings, we attribute this to an unspecified adult narrator. How many five-year-olds can both identify cumulonimbus clouds and reach for 'depth charge' as a simile (*MM* 14, 18)? We might expect that supervising narrative presence to be an adult like Patrick himself, and are thus aware that the father's exclusion from the birth scene is far from a contingent narrative detail: a primal scene is being replayed and Patrick's own fatherhood will be under scrutiny.

The problem is Robert's 'precocious maturity', to borrow a phrase which Sándor Ferenczi used to describe a generational transference whereby the child becomes the parent's psychiatrist. In order to 'defend himself against the dangers coming from people without self-control, [the traumatised child] must know how to identify himself completely with them'.<sup>21</sup> Patrick's brief, now historical, detachment as he was raped by his father, watching 'the punishment inflicted by a strange man on a small boy' (*NM* 101), and then the notional freedom of the gecko he saw beyond the curtain rail able to change his identity and disappear, collapses enduringly into the figure of his son, Robert, who traps the strange man and small boy inside one authorial perspective. Most obviously this provides an account of Robert's character: through psychical introjection, he has become his father's mimic. But Robert is also an elaboration of the question of style since the child born into language signals for Patrick both a renewed attempt at being oneself – through excising his own stylistic pathology – and the addictive cliché of rebirth.

The second chapter of *Mother's Milk* is signalled (fairly crudely, in fact) as a playing out of a Lacanian scene: the infant Thomas, Robert's younger brother, is taken over to a mirror and Patrick sarcastically mentions Lacan's essay to the nurse (*MM* 21). Patrick is now the excluded and failed wit, while the narrator enters Robert's mind as it yearns for a state of wordless innocence, a point of original experiential purity. The problem is how to conceive of a period of pre-verbal innocence – 'before thoughts got mixed up with words', as Robert thinks; before he was 'locked into language' (*MM*24). He wonders whether his brother could understand his mother pointing at a pool and saying 'fish': she could mean 'the pond, the water, the weeds, the clouds, reflected on the water, or the fish'; indeed she may not mean a thing at all. 'Fish', in this account, is an arbitrary sign in the Symbolic realm; the naming process of language is exposed, unacknowledged by the infant. For Robert, language represents something of a fall: 'Once you got words you thought the world was everything that could be described, but it was also what couldn't be described. In a way things were more perfect when they couldn't be described' (*MM*24). In the context of the variety of 'bastards' we hear speaking in all five novels, it is quite consistent that Robert should wish that he and his brother avoid what Lacan calls the 'socially elaborated situations' to which the *I* will be attached after the mirror-phase.<sup>22</sup>

That the Symbolic order of language is governed by the Law or Name of the Father (*nom du père*) is something that Melrose, *père et fils*, is never ignorant of. In *Bad News*, Patrick had trippily imagined the appearance of his father as Old Hamlet's ghost in a pastiche of the 'Circe' episode in *Ulysses*: 'Omlet! Ichbin thine Popospook!' (*BN*118). Not only is this spectral Papa (a violator) as anal Pop (Italian: *popó* = poo), but also an address to Lacan's broken little man, the *hommelette*. The

trauma is characteristically sublimated into the witty mimicry of the high modernist text. Despite its title *Mother's Milk* protractedly confirms that the Symbolic Father, whom Patrick wanted dead and has long been dead, is perpetually present as a signifying force. When Patrick arrives on the scene as the new father, it is to induct the son into the linguistic order (he 'couldn't stop talking') but now in bathetic rather than monstrous form as he complains about London property prices (*MM* 6).

Although Patrick is obsessed 'with stopping the flow of poison from one generation to the next' (*AL*88-9), the consequences of his own genealogical induction are already determined: Robert, the 'insomniac', the 'observation-freak' (*AL*87), has already inherited his father's 'midnight angst' (*AL*89). Patrick frets that there is no outside: the possibilities of nature or culture are both entirely forbidden by the knowing scriptures of family, class and national character. This becomes the problem of the 'real' in the final volume of the sequence as the figure of the child and the philosopher both prove revenant, receiving their second incarnations in the figures of Thomas and Erasmus. As Patrick concludes the five volume narrative – allowing himself to cry *at last* – with the desire to 'see his children, *real* children, not the ghosts of their ancestors' childhoods', he echoes his second son's exclamation upon meeting Erasmus: 'Dada! said Thomas, too excited not to interrupt. 'Erasmus is a *real* philosopher!' (*AL*264, 210, our italics).

A 'real' child meets a 'real' philosopher, but both figures of the real are yet ghosted by unreal spectres, Thomas by Robert and Erasmus by Victor. Victor, we recall, is the philosopher in *Never Mind* who 'always returned to his careful impersonation of a gentleman' in order to win his place at David Melrose's high table – who forsook, in other words, his intellectual naivety in order to be English.

His wife Anne notes his efforts as a Jewish intellectual ‘to blend into the landscape of conventional English life’ (*NM*39). The table is the proving ground of Englishness from which children are summarily excluded.<sup>23</sup>For David Melrose, to abandon the table in order to see to a child was sentimental and indulgent, and he outfaces Eleanor’s attempt to check on Patrick on exactly these grounds, forcing her back to her chair where ‘she would be pinned down by a conversation that would defeat her, but not persuade her’ (*NM*176).

The suspicion that the precocious Robert might well have been a boon companion at his grandfather’s dinner table suggests that we had better turn to his brother Thomas for our image of ‘real’ childhood; likewise, Victor’s implicit endorsement of David’s coercive sociability, suggests we turn to the next in the series, Erasmus, for the dignity of philosophical principle. When these promising figures of ‘outside’ reality meet they speak, predictably enough, of God, the author:

‘I mean,’ said Thomas, looking very philosophical, ‘I always think the trouble with God is: who created God? And,’ he added getting into the swing of it, ‘who created whoever created God?’

‘Ah, an infinite regress,’ said Erasmus sadly. (*AL* 210)

This note of melancholy is in keeping with the sense of anticlimax: how can the real resolve itself into conversation, after all? The blunt evasion of ‘an infinite regress’ is the imagined opposite of the stylistic point, dislocated from any particular mooring or subject position and moving ineluctably into diffuseness: if, in ‘the real’, style is vanquished, then the father becomes ‘Dada’, and God is only his stupid failure to know how to begin. Though figures of the outside, beyond Patrick’s ‘consolatory system’ in which ‘substitutes [are always] substituting for substitutes’ (*AL* 97), the

philosopher and child are equally stumped by the question of origin. By embodying the promise of transcendence, they also encapsulate the delusion of a true and moral life that does not have to be written from the particulars of experience. A life free from the dilemmas of style, so figured, is a life which cannot get underway.

### **Conclusion**

That the incestuous violation of a son by his father is the quilting point of English style should warn us not to sample St Aubyn's prose style as might a connoisseur. It is just this process of connoisseurship which the Melrose series has shown to be an unwanted moral inheritance. The aphoristic surface of St Aubyn's prose must be plumbed for historical currents, and rather than celebrating the sharp confidence of the words, the reader is advised to seek out their vulnerability. Likewise, the narrator's continued probing of inner states, be it through the philosophical disquisitions of Victor, Erasmus and Robert, or Patrick's own racing thoughts about thought, must be examined at its linguistic surfaces, where words turn, regress and slide into and out of other voices. Taken as a sequence, St Aubyn's novels eventually disclose the limitations of stylistic pointedness. Narrative style becomes more of an aperture, the space between corroboration and doubt, where one thing may be 'tragically' similar or dissimilar to another.

Although he undoes the neatness of the addictive simile, St. Aubyn cannot quite leave behind elements of 'cheapness' in his own style. As it often does, the satirical writing confirms the esteem of the class it satirises, and provides the opportunity for the reactionary habits of social caricature: of fat Americans, the mystical and charlatan Irish, and the uncultured working class. St Aubyn knows he

represents the Englishness – its political constitution, its global position and ethnic and class make-up – that he is trying to unravel, but he cannot escape the traumatic precondition of his own knowingness. The stylist cannot ‘overcome’ himself, in Nietzschean terms; although the need to replace the mask of an English gentleman is painfully registered, it is not always acted upon. A process of philosophical investigation is clearly underway in the novels, in which the relationship between thought and language is obsessively whittled at. The aristocratic motto to ‘never explain’ is patently not accepted since the sequence is a protracted attempt to analyse and to understand. Nevertheless, the stylist has inherited the arch mode of his caste, and must also aestheticise philosophy, as well as sardonically pinion the evasiveness of philosophical authoritarians – those who always explain.

St Aubyn’s novels bear out the same dialectical oscillation within style between the ethical and aesthetic found in the art essays of Goethe and between the lines of high modernist texts. However, they also bear the historical weight of their own peculiar Englishness. The narrative voice is trapped in a reactive pathology of other voices and yet must attempt to style itself *as literature* independently of them. One of those voices, the most dominant, is Patrick’s – in the reductive but unavoidable sense, the author’s ‘own’. This too the narrator must reify, stylise and leave behind by wearing his previous masks as a child, a young and then middle-aged man. The narrator mimics Patrick in order, through the travestied tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, to become himself. An English aristocrat desirous of devolving his historical privilege is doubly removed from this tradition: careless of ambition, sincerity and work, Patrick lacks the dynamism essential for such a middle class form of writing; and by interrogating his own decadent condition he contradicts its

progressive spirit. Indeed he lingers upon the circumstances of his own disinheritance with a wilful abjection. In *At Last* the prolonged exposition of the journey made by his mother's money over the last two hundred years amplifies this narrative of ancestral dispossession. In his partial rendering of Yeats' 'aristocratic ideal', Nicholas Pratt remembers the lines '*And maybe the great-grandson of that house/ For all its bronze and marble, 's but a mouse*' (AL 131): by quoting such a couplet, the narrator implicitly redirects a barb against Patrick himself.

Recently, Andrzej Gasiorek and David James have argued that contemporary critical debates about 'postmillennial' fiction have unconsciously tended to resurrect Iris Murdoch's hoary old distinction between the journalistic and the crystalline novel.<sup>24</sup> In that essay, Murdoch observes in passing that prose is in decline as an artistic medium, that 'eloquence is out of fashion, and that even "style", except in a very austere sense of this term, is out of fashion'.<sup>25</sup> That 'even', with its intimations of *noblesse oblige* in the man and courtesy in the artist, greets the beginning of Patrick's (and St Aubyn's) life. If 'style' had to be held by a philosopher (and a novelist) in inverted commas when the *nouveau roman* held sway, then St Aubyn's fiction and Patrick's philosophising are well beyond perpetuating style as an unproblematic inheritance. Yet the tenor of the Melrose novels' reception seems to indicate a greater admiration for the abbreviated cleverness of their wit – what is 'crystalline' about them, we might say – than for the extent of their historical self-reflection. Style, already anachronistic to Murdoch's diagnosis of the state of the novel, nevertheless remains in vogue as an un-self-conscious term of 'journalistic' approbation in the marketplace. This points both to an ironic dissolution of

Murdoch's either/or structure and to the perennial problem of trying to get the state of the contemporary English novel *right*.

Martin Amis, a writer whose English style is indissociable from his repeated address to cultural Englishness, serves as the most instructive precedent here. Amis's repeated conviction that 'style is morality: morality detailed, configured, intensified [...] in every sentence' coheres with a defence of the singularity of literature against the totalising narratives of moral universalism.<sup>26</sup> Yet his way of practising this style sometimes raises critical suspicion. Neologistic, pornographic and plausibly modernist, his authorial voice continues to depend on the inherited mode of English satire - although that voice is also transatlantic, pointing to Amis's assimilation of an American alternative to 'English' prose. David James puts it neatly when he writes of *Money* that it offers a 'rapprochement between newness and literary heritage' and points to 'the critical rhetoric of pathways'.<sup>27</sup> If Amis's style is deemed at its worst as an exhibitionistic stringing together of those endless 'comic recitatives' which for James Wood constitute his 'English imprisonment', then James offers us an alternative view in which Amis's potential strength as a writer depends on how he stages the 'intersections and divisions' between his authorial voice and the exigencies of a truly modern form.<sup>28</sup>

We might riskily suggest that Amis is yet another parent to determine and trouble St Aubyn's style: the problem for St Aubyn is that style is *immorality*. Unlike that of Amis, St Aubyn's style is resistant to the unfettered American or demotic 'working class' voice. It is thus more hedged in by an enjoyable but dubious crispness which knowingly marks his characters' snobbery and his own violation. Amis also writes that 'Style judges'.<sup>29</sup> The style St Aubyn has inherited does indeed

judge, though not from the position of a would-be everyman, and still tinged with self-parodic *hauteur*. Isabelle Zahar conceives of John Self's over-populated internal voice in *Money* not only as held in dialogical tension between profanity and post-Romantic lyricism, but also as implying an ethical style, a 'moral unease', hovering above.<sup>30</sup> The voice of the job narrator is also that of the stylist *in excelsis*. St Aubyn's 'English imprisonment' is to be trapped in a style which must be wittily parcelled out and, unless narcotised, cannot give itself over to the anarchic diegetic flow of Amis's 'Selfhood'. Thus, although the Amis simile and the St Aubyn simile may often share the same type of unsettling or amusingly subversive energy, the latter appears more oddly conspicuous, as if let off the leash of the rebarbative mode, and, in the end, more likely to present the form of its self-annulment.

Admittedly, for all of his knowing allusions to modernist texts, St Aubyn's novelistic strategy can often be one of predictable containment or even, at times, of unmodified lyricism. And there continues to be something significantly troubling and belated about the Melrose sequence. At one level this is due to its subject matter: it is difficult for a fallen English aristocrat to bid for a contemporary reader's sympathy. Claims that, for example, the novels are a modern-day rendering of Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* suggest a particularly dated type of upper-crust English lineage, and hardly help the critic to connect St Aubyn's books to generalisations about the state of 'post-millennial' fiction. And yet, recalling how pervasive 'the rhetoric of pathways' is in discussions of the contemporary novel – Murdoch's is only one of the more prominent examples –, we can equally conclude that through their reflection on the 'intersections and divisions' of voice and form, the Melrose novels succeed in staging the critical distinctions that will come to

enshrine their literary value. In this light, it is preferable to fold questions of class politics back into an ongoing consideration of the confidence and vulnerability of St Aubyn's language, the perceived literary virtues of which are inextricable from a historical crime. This may initially confirm the genealogical bind in which character and author are caught, but it also enables the reader to return to style as a re-emerging force for critical reflection.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Crimes against Fecundity: Style and Crime from Joyce to Poe and Back', in *Style in Theory*, eds Ivan Callus, James Corby, Gloria Lauri-Lucente (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 111-12.

<sup>2</sup> Take, for example, Seymour Chatman (ed.). *Literary Style: A Symposium*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Stephen Ullmann (ed.), *Meaning and Style: Collected Papers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> See M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 230.

<sup>4</sup> Johann Wolfgang Goethe, 'Simple Imitation, Manner, Style', in *Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Essays on Art and Literature*, Vol. 3., ed. John Geary, trans. Ellen Von Nardoff and Ernest H. Von Nardoff (New York: Suhrkamp Publishers, New York Inc., 1986), pp. 71-74 (72).

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson (London: Athlone Press, 1983), especially, pp. 52-72.

<sup>7</sup> Roland Barthes: 'Style and its Image' (1969), quoted in Ben Hutchinson, *Modernism and Style* (Palgrave, 2011), p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> See Hutchinson, *Modernism and Style*.

<sup>9</sup> James Wood, 'Bastards', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 28.21 (2 November 2006), pp. 15-16; Theo Tait, 'Eagle vs Jellyfish', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 33.1 (2 June 2011), pp. 18-19.

<sup>10</sup> Derek Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp.6, 30-31.

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<sup>11</sup> When quoting from the Melrose sequence different volumes will be identified by their abbreviations: Edward St. Aubyn, *Never Mind* (London: Picador, 2012) (NM); *Bad News* (London: Picador, 2012) (BN); *Some Hope* (London: Picador, 2012) (SH); *Mother's Milk* (London: Picador, 2012) (MM); *At Last* (London: Picador, 2012) (AL).

<sup>12</sup>The Earl of Shaftesbury, 'A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm to my Lord \*\*\*\*' in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 4-28 (12, 15).

<sup>13</sup> See Laurent Milesi, 'St!le-in-Deconstruction', in *Style in Theory*, eds Callus, Corby and Gloria Lauri-Lucente, p. 222.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida quoted in Milesi, p. 233.

<sup>15</sup> W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. P. Allt (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 441.

<sup>16</sup> Roger Fowler, ed., *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 173.

<sup>17</sup>Rabaté, *Style in Theory*, p. 127.

<sup>18</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 2.

<sup>19</sup>Samuel Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape and Embers*, (London: Faber and Faber,1965) pp. 10, 14, 18.

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, Random House, 2000), pp. 655-800 (733); *The Case of Wagner*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, pp. 601-654 (627). Nietzsche admits in *The Case of Wagner* that he too, 'no less than Wagner' must be considered 'a child of his time; that is, a decadent' (611).

<sup>21</sup>Sándor Ferenczi, 'Confusion of the Tongues Between the Adults and the child – (The Language of Tenderness and of Passion)', *International Journal of Psycho-analysis*, 30 (1949), pp. 225-230 (229). 'The fear of the uninhibited, almost mad adult changes the child so to speak, into a psychiatrist and, in order to become one and to defend himself against dangers coming from people without self-control, he must know how to identify himself completely with them. Indeed, it is unbelievable how much we can still learn from our wise children, the neurotics' (229).

<sup>22</sup>Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>See Earl of Shaftesbury, 'Sensus Communis, an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour' in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 29-69 (35, 36).

<sup>24</sup>Andrzej Gasiorek and David James, 'Introduction: Fiction since 2000: Postmillennial Commitments', *Contemporary Literature* 53.4 (2011), pp. 608-625.

<sup>25</sup> Iris Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', in *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (London: Fontana, 1990), pp. 15-24 (21).

<sup>26</sup>Martin Amis, 'The American Eagle', *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews 1971-2000* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), p.467.

<sup>27</sup>David James, 'Style is Morality', *Textual Practice* 26.1 (2012), 11-25 (16).

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<sup>28</sup>James Wood, 'Martin Amis: The English Imprisonment', *The Broken Estate: Essays on Literature and Belief* (London: Jonathan Cape, 199), pp.186-99, p.194. Quoted in Cathryn Setz, 'Money Men', *Textual Practice* 26.1 (2012), 63-77 (66).

<sup>29</sup>Amis, 'The American Eagle', p.467.

<sup>30</sup>Isabelle Zahar, 'The Artist as Critic, Style as Ethics: Amis's American Stylists and Self's Stylistation', in *Textual Practice*, 26:1 (2012), 27-42 (36).