

An Owl, a Syzygy and Three Syntheses.

*Connections between Sadeq Hedayat's
The Blind Owl and Deleuze and Guattari.*



Master thesis

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1. Introduction: A Collection of Worlds in Sadeq Hedayat's *The Blind Owl*.

In 1936 the Iranian writer Sadeq Hedayat (1903-1951) distributed his novel *Būf-i Kūr* (*The Blind Owl*) in a very limited edition among his friends. Published in Bombay he marked them as 'not for sale in Iran', since he feared the powerful arm of the censors. Taking advantage of the political vacuum created by Reza Shah Pahlavi's abdication, Hedayat published his novel in the journal *Iran* between 1941 and 1942. It had a direct and powerful impact on the reading public.¹ After reading Lescot's translation in French, *La Chouette Aveugle* (1953), André Breton praised the novel as a genuine masterpiece and compared it to Nerval's *Aurelia*, Jensen's *Gradiva* and Hamsun's *Mysteries*.² In 1958 D.P. Costello translated the work in English. The British press took a more critical stance in comparison to its French admirers. The *Sunday Times* deemed it 'a rambling, inchoate mass, a sort of verbal bouillabaisse. A western nightmare is a small marvel of lucidity beside this eastern fable. Mescaline before reading might help, but don't try.'³ Despite this critique, the novel quickly attained the status of the most controversial and renowned piece of modern fiction in Iran. The Iranian writer Al-e Ahmad described *The Blind Owl* as 'a miscellany and composite of ancient Aryan scepticism, of Buddha's nirvana, of Iranian Gnosticism, of the Yogi-like seclusion of the oriental person, the scope of which an Iranian, an oriental with all his/her mental background, tries to achieve within his or her self.'⁴

Not just the continuation of the reflection on seemingly timeless existential questions sets this novel apart as an outstanding work of art, but most of all, in my view, it is the confrontation between these timeless questions and the condition of modernity, which renders *The Blind Owl* a unique work open to debate. Since its appearance in the West scholars have visited and revisited it to venture new routes into it. An extensive study of the life of Hedayat in relation to both Iranian and European literature has been delivered by Katouzian (1991). For a lengthy research on the role of intertextuality in *The Blind Owl* one can take recourse to Hillmann et al. (1978) and Beard (1990), while a structural analysis of the novel has been the subject of study in Bashiri (1974), Flower (1977), and Sharif (2009). To further introduce the novel I will first present a synopsis, after which I will discuss relevant research in order to propose a new approach towards this outstanding work of Iranian fiction.

With *The Blind Owl* Hedayat has masterfully sketched the psychological portrait of a morbid and deranged pen-case decorator, who, in his room on the outskirts of a city, decides to write his story

¹ Marta Simidchieva. "Sadeq Hedayat and the classics. The case of *The Blind Owl*." In: *Sadeq Hedayat. His work and his wondrous world*. Homa Katouzian (ed.); London & New York: Routledge, 2008: p. 20.

² Khamshad, H. (1966) *Modern Persian Prose Literature*. Cambridge University Press: p. 178.

³ Michael Crampton, 16 Feb. 1958 (no. 7031).

⁴ Jalāl Al-e Ahmad. "*The Hedāyat of The Blind Owl*." In: *Middle East Monographs, No. 4. Hedāyat's 'The Blind Owl' Forty Years After*. Michael C. Hillmann (ed.); Austin: University of Texas, 1978: p. 29.

for his shadow on a wall. This he does in order to disentangle the various threads of his life, his story.⁵ After the first pages we shift back in time as we enter an undefined past under the guidance of the first-person narrator in the second chapter. He recalls how he has seen a nameless ‘passing gleam’, ‘in the form of a woman – or an angel’, but he has lost her from sight and now he spends his days painting the same motif over and again: an Indian fakir with a turban wrapped around his head at the foot of a cypress tree, before him a girl in a long black dress, who offers him a flower of morning glory over a little stream between them. He remarks: ‘I was certain that she wished to leap across the stream which separated her from the old man but that she was unable to do so.’⁶ Suddenly a man steps into his room who claims to be his uncle, ‘a bent old man with an Indian turban on his head’.⁷ No opium or wine left, he searches the shelf for a bottle of wine, which contains some cobra-venom, to offer as a drink to his uncle. There, glancing through a ventilation hole, a Persian miniature pierces itself in his eyes, a motif identical to the one he paints by day in an almond-shaped panel. With her pale, moon-shaped face and her harmonious grace of movement she reminds him of a ‘vision seen in an opium sleep’, while the bent old man bursts into ‘a hollow, grating laugh’, without moving his face.⁸



‘an almond-shaped panel’: a *mandorla* in the Byzantine Church of Panagia Kanakaria, Cyprus.

Bewildered by this vision he searches the motif on the exterior of his room; he walks around ‘like a decapitated fowl’ and eventually discovers ‘a female form clad in black’ on his porch.⁹ Unaware of her surroundings she moves serenely into his room and lies down on his bed. Astonished by her presence he opens the bottle on the shelf and pours a glassful into her mouth; he undresses her and tries to fuse his ‘spirit into her dead body’.¹⁰ In his excitement he believes for a single moment she has returned to life, but no, all there is, is the smell of death. Her eyes fetched on paper, he comes to the conclusion that there is no need to preserve her body; he takes out her eyes, swiftly cuts off the head, amputates

⁵ Hedayat, Sadegh (2010 [1957]) *The Blind Owl*. D.P. Costello (tr.); New York: Grove Press: p. 22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30 & 33.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 37 & 41.

her limbs and puts the parts in a suitcase. As he walks on the outskirts of the city he meets an old man, 'a bent old man sitting at the foot of a cypress tree', who spontaneously bursts into laughter and offers him his services.¹¹ In an old hearse drawn by two thin horses the protagonist and this odds-and-ends man drive to a field lush with morning glory where they bury the suitcase under a 'dead tree which stood beside a dry riverbed'. He receives an excavated jar from the city of Rey as a gift from the odds-and-ends man, which contains, as by coincidence, 'her portrait'.¹²

We now enter the intermediary part, spanning two pages, where the narrator moves about in a new world and deems his previous experiences only a 'reflection of [his] real life'. His hands are covered in blood, but he still behaves utterly excited and feels the urge to write it all down.¹³ After this short, meta-fictional intervention, accompanied by an ellipsis on the level of the story, we enter the second part of the novel. This second part mirrors the first part of the novel. While the first part is dominated by a focus on the ethereal and the timeless, we shift to social, everyday reality in the second part. A degree of continuance is maintained between the two parts on the basis of what Sharif calls 'ressassement': a repetition and a progress. This implies every repetition functions in a new context, the context of social reality, without undoing its ties to the previously mentioned ethereal image.¹⁴

As we enter this second part, the physical appearance of our hapless narrator has gone through a metamorphosis; yesterday he was a 'wasted, sickly young man', today he appears as a 'bent old man with white hair, burnt-out eyes and a harelip'.¹⁵ He imagines his room, filled with an obnoxious odour, as a coffin connected by the window to the centre of the city, where one finds a butcher shop and an old man with his wares: 'a long-bladed knife, a rat trap, a rusty pair of tongs, part of a writing set, a gap toothed comb, a spade, and a glazed jar'.¹⁶ All there is left to him are Nanny and his 'bitch of a wife'. Nanny, the woman who suckled both him and his wife, reveals to him his uncle and his father were twins.¹⁷ Both settled in Benares, where they set up a business in Rey wares while his father fell in love with Bugam Dasi, a dancer in a lingam temple.¹⁸ His uncle befell the same fate and, after the birth of our protagonist, Bugam Dasi decides to marry the one who survives a 'trial by cobra'. She marries his uncle, who has now turned into a 'white haired old man' out of shock. 'The trial had deranged his mind and he had completely lost his memory. He did not recognise the infant (...)'.¹⁹

Utterly paranoid he is convinced that all the characters in his story are mere shadows of him and that he has turned into a screech owl: '(...) my shadow on the wall had become exactly like an owl

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 48 & 54.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 61.

¹⁴ Sharif, Negin (2009) *Structure et Enjeux de la Répétition dans La Chouette Aveugle de Sadegh Hedayat : une Poétique du Ressassement*. Université de Cergy-Pontoise : p. 35.

¹⁵ *The Blind Owl.*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

and, leaning forward, read intently every word I wrote.’²⁰ As his wife, ‘the bitch’, whom he imagines as in the possession of a promiscuous character, still refuses to sleep with him, he decides to force her. In his fear that he figures as her prey he imagines her as a snake coiling around him, while involuntarily the knife in his hands disappears into her flesh. Concluding she must be dead, he bursts into a ‘hollow grating laugh’ only to discover he has taken the shape of the odds-and-ends-man.²¹ In the final pages we learn how the narrator awakes from a deep sleep, a bent old man runs away with the jar in his hands and the weight of a dead body presses itself on his chest.²²

‘Peri (Persian Myth) An imaginary being, male or female, like an elf or fairy, represented as a descendant of fallen angels, excluded from paradise till penance is accomplished.’

Source: *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*.

In the Persian literary context the appearance of an owl, a recluse, suggests that something terrible has taken place.²³



Haunting, disturbing yet humorous, these words come to mind if one wants to describe the atmosphere of *The Blind Owl*. The story offers no solution for the narrator’s deep and all-encompassing crisis, which Coulter (2000) reads as his failure to solve the question of metaphysics. Caught in a protracted ‘malaise’, he does not seek any solution, salvation or rationalization through the construction or invocation of a transcendent agency.²⁴ Here I agree with Coulter that the abyss between tradition and modernity is tied to the crisis of a metaphysical framework, a framework central to classic Persian literature. But I disagree with her depiction of the narrator as someone whose psychological crisis

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-44.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 145-46.

²³ Michael Craig Hillmann. “The Title of Hedāyat’s *Buf-e Kur*.” In: *The Necklace of the Pleiades. 24 Essays on Persian Literature, Culture and Religion*. F.D. Lewis & S. Sharma (eds.); Leiden University Press, 2010: p. 314.

²⁴ Coulter, Yasamine C. “A Comparative Post-Colonial Approach to Hedayat’s *The Blind Owl*.” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2.3 (2000): p. 2.

derives from his disillusion with a traditional lifestyle. As she perceives the narrator as unable to fully identify either with Western or Iranian lifestyle, her reading of the on-going psychological crisis of the protagonist is one wherein the narrator is caught in a 'double-consciousness'. For her *The Blind Owl* represents this crisis, the gap between tradition and modernity.²⁵ I tend to agree more with Jahanbegloo, who, in his article 'Hedayat and the experience of modernity', argues Hedayat's work functions merely as a mediator in the transition from traditional to modern modes of thought.²⁶

It is my aim to read the novel not so much as a mediator in a transitional process, but merely as an operator that forges assemblages between different elements. Through the application of theory from Deleuze and Guattari I want to pose the question differently and focus instead on the effects of this crisis. From this perspective I want to ask the question how *The Blind Owl* installs a specific configuration of forces that allows for a departure from tradition, a departure which culminates in the construction of the surreal image. The influential allegory *The Conference of the Birds* of the twelfth century Iranian poet and Islamic mystic Farid ud-Din Attar (1145-1221) will serve here as comparative material. This influential mystical allegory of a group of birds that departs on a long and devastating journey in desire for their king, the Simurgh, hinges, just as *The Blind Owl*, on an ancient religious and folkloristic Iranian theme. According to this ancient belief birds may be regarded as messengers of the divine, a theme recurring in Zoroastrian as well as Islamic sources (Surah An-Naml in the Qur'an).²⁷ The mythic content of both the Attar's work and Hedayat's novel will be compared in order to envision the way *The Blind Owl* deconstructs a traditional and transcendent, predominantly Islamic, worldview. Through the deployment of the theoretical framework, based on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, I want to arrive at an understanding of the cyclic, binary and linear constructs that underlie the assemblage of different textual elements in *The Blind Owl*. Both the content of *The Blind Owl* and the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari tend to clarify each other, for both select knowledge and visions from mythology to dig through the comfort and counsel that myth may offer.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Ramin Jahanbegloo. 'Hedayat and the experience of modernity.'. In: *Sadeq Hedayat. His work and his wondrous world*. Homa Katouzian (ed.); London & New York: Routledge, 2008: p. 136.

²⁷ <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/k/karshipta.html>, 11-04-2014.

2. *The Anti-Oedipus* and a Debased Owl: Towards the Ruins of Unity.

2.1. Bi-univocal, Polyvocal Relations and the Conjunction of Opposites in Classical Persian Literature and Religion.

In the aftermath of the events of Mai '68 the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Pierre-Félix Guattari (1930-1992), a militant and leading figure in the anti-psychiatry movement, undertook what was about to become a very fruitful collaboration, wherein they created new territories of abstract theory in an attempt to steer Western thought away from the paths of the least resistance, the reaffirmation of known patterns and concepts. Original and thought provoking, Deleuze and Guattari, in their aim to deconstruct deadlocked notions of structure and origin, write their way into a radical innovation of Western philosophy.

To make a start they deploy the term 'machine' to describe a process of assemblage, a process wherein disparate elements get assembled through the workings of an all-pervading force: desire. The immanent force of *desiring-production*, which implies the production of desire as well as the desiring nature of this production, will get coupled and cut through the working of machines. Organs are such machines. As an example of a coupling and cutting of the flow of desiring production Deleuze and Guattari use the breast and the mouth in the case of breast-feeding.²⁸ As they imagine the unconscious as an already working machine, they deem its contents not static but mobile and always in a state of becoming through the assemblages forged by desiring production.²⁹ Based on this new model they offer a critique on the Freudian theory of Oedipus and the Oedipus-complex.

The Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) elaborated on the myth to develop his theory of the Oedipus-complex, a stage during childhood wherein the child rivals with the parent of the same sex while cherishing hidden desires for the parent of the opposite sex.³⁰ There has been much debate whether this complex should be perceived as a universal one, and why so.³¹ In general Deleuze and Guattari approach the Oedipus-complex from a broader sociological, anthropological and mythological perspective. This is to say that they frame the figure of Oedipus in a libidinal economy, an economy that surpasses the symbolic and limited role ascribed to the mythical figure of Oedipus as a psychological factor in childhood. In their theory on the despotic and prophetic character of Oedipus they involve other mythological perspectives, an aspect which indicates they place Oedipus within a bigger frame of the *hieros gamos* or the sacred marriage between the "divine" masculine and the "divine" feminine.

In the downright polyamorous character of the myth of Oedipus the male takes the position of

²⁸ *AO.*, p. 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁰ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/425451/Oedipus-complex>, 05-03-2014.

³¹ There has been an extensive debate between the Hungarian psychoanalyst and anthropologist Géza Roheim (1891-1953) and the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) on the occurrence of the Oedipus-complex in matrilineal societies., *AO.*, p. 202.

father, husband, brother and son while the woman takes the place of the mother, wife, sister and daughter.³² In a structuralist reading of the *hieros gamos*, the divine in the holy marriage gets interpreted as the product of a conjunctive synthesis, a *coincidentia oppositorum* or a coincidence of opposites. Within this model the universality of the divine judgement (including the prohibition on incest) is taken for granted. In their attack on the family-bound interpretation of the figure of Oedipus, Deleuze and Guattari attempt to detach the process itself from (institutionalised) religion (they draw a radical distinction between the prophet and the priest).

To expand their critical inquiry, Deleuze and Guattari seem to align schizophrenia indirectly with nomadic and hunter-gatherer societies, which is not far-fetched in itself. Contemporary research has shown how schizophrenia in hunter-gatherer societies poses an evolutionary advantage as it generates shamans, who foster group cohesion around enigmatic events (an adaptive survival strategy).³³ Deleuze and Guattari come up with the *Nommo*-figure ('twins') of the (animist and sedentary) Dogon-tribe from Mali to counter the myth of Oedipus. They typify the *Nommo* as a polyvocal model, wherein terms coexist, couple and disentangle. In the myth of Oedipus they discern on the contrary a bi-univocal filiation.³⁴ The last type of filiation is governed by a one-on-one and exclusionary relation between two terms, wherein one term is deemed superior to the other. To deconstruct this bi-univocal model they introduce the theory of the Danish linguist Hjelmslev (1899-1965), who proposed a linguistic model based on reciprocal presupposition and isomorphism between terms.³⁵ This polyvocal co-existentiality of terms can be linked to the *Nommo* figure of the Dogon:

³² Eliade, Mircea (2009 [1958]) *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. Princeton University Press: p. 260.

³³ Joseph Polimeni & Jeffrey P. Reiss. "Evolution and Schizophrenia". In: *Progress in Schizophrenia Research*. Janet E. Pletson (ed.); New York, Nova Science Publishers, 2005: p. 15.

³⁴ *AO.*, p. 181.

³⁵ *ATP.*, p. 50.



‘Piloted by two heavenly Nommos [twins] (...) the Ark of the World finally came to rest in the present location of the earth, where it instantly became a complete new earth. Until then the universe had been in total darkness.’

Chukwuma Azuonye, *Dogon*.



Rebis from the *Theoria Philosophiae Hermeticae* (1617) by Heinrich Nollius.

‘Incest, you will be a zombie and a hermaphrodite.’

Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.

Deleuze and Guattari typify the metaphysical paradigm as the foundation of bi-univocal relations, wherein each element has its own voice as it enters into relation with another voice. This model proliferates a one-on-one, arborescent and exclusionary, linear relation of signification (a rigid and static division between two terms). Whereas the androgynous figure of the *rebis* in Western Hermeticism, which I take as a model for the bi-univocal filiation, displays one body that splits itself in two (*bi-uni*) as the twigs of a tree, the *Nommo*-figure on the contrary positions the male and female (twins) as instantaneously beside each other (so parallel to each other). The image of the *Nommo* leaves no doubt these twins are ‘yoked together’, which corresponds to the Greek term *syzygy* (σύζυγία).³⁶

As the twins operate in parallel connection through series, the difference between the two is maintained. This implies the division between them allows an on-going differentiation, or a *polyvocal extension* which, according to Deleuze and Guattari, has its ground in a nomadic society where ‘the same being is everywhere, on all sides, on all levels.’ A nomadic society, in active communication with the (super)natural world, is thought of by them as a society with marvelled connections of production.³⁷ In contrast the *rebis* obliterates or impedes the development of difference as the two

³⁶ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/syzygy>, 01-04-2014.

³⁷ AO., p. 181.

ultimately derive from the same origin: they share one and the same body. In the picture of the *rebis* the number three represents the chthonic (earthy) triad between the masculine subject, the feminine subject and the spirit. This unconscious feminine/masculine aspect of the counterpart, which the psychoanalyst C.G. Jung (1875-1961) deems the *anima* and the *animus*, gets projected onto the (social) environment.³⁸ The completion of this triad through association with the ‘Wise Old Man’ (the devouring father Kronos) and the ‘All-Mother’ in a transcendent *quaternio*, is represented by the number four. This *quaternio* which follows out of the triad, gives way to a circle as can be seen in the image of the *rebis*.³⁹ According to Deleuze and Guattari the formula 3+1 applies to Oedipus: a polyvocal writing is constantly brought back to a transcendent, so-called “higher” unity (the invisible One).⁴⁰ Through this constant impediment of the polyvocal extension, the writing or revelation is cast into a bi-univocal format.⁴¹ In the story of Oedipus the character Antigone conveys this slippage into a circular familial re-productivity (the familial body of father, mother, son/daughter). Anti-gone, meaning ‘in place of a womb (mother)’, figures as the daughter and sister of Oedipus.⁴² The moment she slips from her position as sister back to the position of the mother, she closes the familial and circular in a reproductive conjunction (‘demented father; abusive mother; neurotic son’). As Deleuze and Guattari’s state in their later work *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, polyvocal schizo-incest with the sister gets substituted for reproductive neurotic-incest with the mother, which culminates in a bi-univocal format:

‘Schizo-incest with a maximum of connection, a polyvocal extension, that uses as an intermediary maids and whores and the place that they occupy in the social series – in opposition to neurotic incest, defined by its suppression of connection, its single signifier, its holding of everything within the limits of the family.’⁴³

Within the neurotic paradigm the ‘maximum of connection, a polyvocal extension (...)’, is shut down through its development into neurotic incest with the mother, which produces instead a ‘paranoiac transcendental law that prohibits it [incest], and (...) works to transgress this law [on the part of its subjects].’⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari argue that, since desire works beneath the prohibitive framework,

³⁸ Walker, Steven F. (2002) *Jung and the Jungians on Myth: An Introduction*. Routledge: London: p. 45.

³⁹ Jung, C.G. (1979 [1959]) *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 9 (Part 2): Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*. Gerhard Adler & R.F.C. Hull (eds. & tr.); Princeton University Press: p. 22.

⁴⁰ *AO.*, pp. 86-87.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁴² <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/anti+gone>, 07-03-2014.

⁴³ Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix (1986 [1975]) *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*. Dana Polan (tr.); Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press: p. 67.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

incestuous desires are in fact produced by the prohibition on incest.⁴⁵ At this point I should like to make two remarks:

1) I should like to stress the distinction between a biologically motivated incest-taboo and a culturally motivated incest-prohibition; and:

2) I should like to stress the (rather experimental) distinction between a *syzygy*, a being 'yoked-together' (parallel), and a *coniunctio*, an overlap or mixture (circular). Herein the *syzygy* = 3, or the brother-sister-*anima/animus* triad, and the *coniunctio* corresponds to the slippage which expresses itself in a *quaternio* and a circle, that is 3+1.

In regard to the first point I agree with Deleuze and Guattari that there is no such thing as a universal incest-taboo or a prohibition. The psychoanalytic theory of the Freudian school, based on universal incest desires, has been put to doubt by empirical evidence for a total lack of any such desires. This empirical and Darwinist theory describes the incest-taboo as based on the voluntary avoidance of incestuous contact, a psychological mechanism known as the Westermarck-effect.⁴⁶ I involve this theory solely to make clear a culturally, mostly religious, motivated prohibition has nothing to do with the experience of the average person. Rather, the assumption of the existence of so-called "incestuous desires" has, in my view, its roots in a confusion between the desires (and repulsions) that exist between two random persons in a specific process known as the *hieros gamos*, or a sacred marriage, and the (schizoid) associations these persons latch onto their counterpart (father, sister etc.). Instead of recklessly extrapolating this process to the rest of the population, I want to make clear that I will limit myself here to such a *hieros gamos* in Hedayat's novel, a sacred marriage as a process. For the sake of clarity I will stick to the Deleuze and Guattari's reading of the desires in this process as incestuous desires.

Within the experience of the *hieros gamos* the transcendent law is not applicable to the couple, rather they invent this prohibition. The associations between incestuous desires and a taboo or a prohibition are derived from a limit that is experienced; they desire for each other, but they cannot approach each other or "consume" their bond, as stated in *The Blind Owl*.⁴⁷ The stream between the old man and the girl in black dress signifies this limit, a flow of water that I will discuss on numerous occasions in this analysis. The Iranian prophet Mani (216-274?) is one of the religious figures who involved the image of the stream in his teachings.

⁴⁵ AO., p. 320.

⁴⁶ Cartwright, John (2000) *Evolution and Human Behavior: Darwinian Perspectives on Human Nature*. USA: MIT Press: p. 83.

⁴⁷ *The Blind Owl*., p. 27.

The concept of a *syzygy*, the term I used in relation to the *Nommo*, occurs in the teachings of the Iranian prophet Mani (216-274?), the founder of a rather malleable gnostic religion, that mixed itself with Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism, and that rivalled Christianity at some point in history (and so it became the ultimate heresy).⁴⁸ In the context of the Manichaean doctrine *syzygy* stands as well for a ‘heavenly twin’, but a twin with a slightly different makeup.⁴⁹ Possibly drawn from the Coptic Gnostic text known as the *Pistis Sophia*, wherein a heavenly double (*animus*) asks *Mary* where his *brother*, Jesus, is, Mani claimed to have met his counterpart, an illumined soul or self in the form of an angel (for me an *anima*-projection, which turns it into a brother-sister-*anima* triad).⁵⁰ This conceptualization of the *syzygy* thus articulates a heavenly double of the counterpart, Jesus in the *Pistis Sophia*, which signals a movement through three parallel ‘objects’. So within a *syzygy*, if we look at the Coptic context, what appears is a twin as an alliance between a heavenly double or a third and her brother (for Mani the masculine heavenly double shares in the transformational potential of the ethereal ‘Maiden of Light’, but I will not pay further attention to this confusing and complicating aspect).⁵¹

With his preaching of the Twin or the *syzygy* Mani radicalized the dualistic aspects introduced by his predecessor Zoroaster (+/- 660-583 B.C.), whose inversion of the Vedic system of *asuras* (‘the rivals of god’) and *daevas* (‘beings of light’) resulted in the god Ahura Mazda, or Wise Lord, joining the ranks of the *ahuras*, ‘the forces of life’, in their war on the *daevas*, ‘the forces of evil’. In the Zoroastrian scriptures, the *Avesta*, these ethereal beings of light and darkness are lined up among men in an all-encompassing battle between light and darkness, good and bad thoughts, truth and falsehood.⁵² Yet we should not mistake this radical division between dark and light for a straightforward bi-univocal, so exclusionary, relation between terms, as is often assumed. I will try to elucidate this by showing how these terms are embedded within a perspective of polyvocal parallelism (the *syzygy*) and cyclic repetition (not to be confused with circular reproduction).

The Manichean Gnostic church, which defended the paradoxical universal immanence of the symbolic suffering of the “higher” Christ (thereby synthesizing Hindu beliefs on reincarnation and immanence with Christian, transcendent, doctrine), fell prey to ridicule from more philosophical oriented schools or persons, such as St. Augustine (354-430).⁵³ From a Deleuzian point of view, which

⁴⁸ Gardener, Iain & Lieu, Samuel N.C. (2004) *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire*. Cambridge University Press : p. 2.

⁴⁹ Ries, Julien (2011) *Homo Religiosus Série II: L’Église Gnostique de Mani*. Turnhout : Brepols Publishers: p. 123.

⁵⁰ “And the Spirit said to me [Mary]: ‘Where is Jesus, my brother, that I meet him?’”, MacDermot, Violet (2001 [1978]) *The Fall of Sophia. A Gnostic Text on the Redemption of Universal Consciousness*. Lindisfarne Books: p. 44.

⁵¹ Hans-Joachim Klimkeit. “The Fair Form, the Hideous Form and the Transformed Form: On the Form Principle in Manichaeism.” In: *Studies in Manichaean Literature and Art*. Manfred Heuser & Hans-Joachim Klimkeit (eds.); Leiden: Brill, 1998: p. 169.

⁵² Varenne, Jean (2006) *Zoroaster, le prophète de l’Iran*. Paris : Éditions Dervy : pp. 17-21.

⁵³ Samellas, Antigone (2002) *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean (50-600 A.D)*. *Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck: p. 38.

values the paradox as a device to bring limits to the surface, the position of Mani tends to be more thought-provoking, for he combines the *molar* with the *molecular*. Manichean thought drags the binary segmentation, which consists of fixed or *molar* segments of essences (out of a hierarchical model) into a *molecular* or floating progress wherein disparate elements connect (a non-hierarchical process). Mani used the image of the stream of water to communicate this floating, *molecular*, becoming through reincarnation.⁵⁴ For Manicheans the symbolic washing and drinking of water means to set oneself apart from or to overcome the human condition.⁵⁵

For me this indicates a radical division between the molar and the molecular, which is echoed in Mani's distinction between the *electi*, the chosen ones, and the *auditores*, the accountants. Mani claimed to be and has often been presented as the reincarnation of the Paraclete, the reincarnation of the prophetic soul or the Holy Spirit that resided in Jesus, Buddha, Zoroaster and other prophets. So reincarnation in this doctrine doesn't concern a genealogical, linear and patriarchal, becoming, the embodiment of the prophetic as a chronological succession (the Biblical Heavenly Father and His Son). Rather it proposes an elitist, gnostic understanding of reincarnation on the level of the molecular, an embodiment of the prophetic soul on different segments of time, a conceptualization that deviates from the Biblical genealogical succession. The coming into being of the prophetic reincarnation, the Paraclete, means to become one with the stream of water that connects everything (it equals the realization of the unity of Being).⁵⁶

Based on this interpretation I will argue the heavenly third of the *syzygy* radically differs from a fixed conjunctive synthesis between dichotomies, unlike the transcendent fusion, or rather fixation, in the *coniunctio*. Instead, the heavenly third, an incandescent angelic entity, comes forth as a schizoid split-off (the 'Maiden of Light'), a projection of an ethereal and sterile character interfered with on the part of the sister.⁵⁷ The sister connects elements in a volatile way *in-between* the two essentials of dark (earth) and light (heaven). With Deleuze and Guattari we could envision the conjunctions forged between the dichotomies as of a transient and pliable nature, for the male counterpart frames the sister as an expansive 'element' whose mediating position connects the male counterpart and the transcendent third with the immanent (the earth, the sister).

⁵⁴ Greenlees, Duncan (2007 [1956]) *The Gospel of the Prophet Mani*. Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House: p. 85.

⁵⁵ Luigi Cirillo. "The Mani Logion: 'The purification that was spoken about is that which comes through gnosis.'" In: *New Lights on Manichaeism: Papers from the Sixth International Congress on Manichaeism*. Jason BeDuhn (ed.); Leiden: Brill N.V., 2009: p. 57.

⁵⁶ Davidson, John (2004) *The Prodigal Soul: The Wisdom of the Ancient Parables*. Bath: Clear Press Limited: p. 90.

⁵⁷ Hans-Joachim Klimkeit. "The Fair Form, the Hideous Form and the Transformed Form: On the Form Principle in Manichaeism." In: *Studies in Manichaean Literature and Art*. Manfred Heuser & Hans-Joachim Klimkeit (eds.); Leiden: Brill, 1998: p. 169.

'For the Manichean, the light is scattered everywhere, and thus the essence of nature, of goats and melons and mountains, is co-substantial with our own. Even the mud is complex, base matter flecked with gold.'⁵⁸

Hence the cyclic repetition of the Paraclete remains open to a molecular progression out of an intervention on the part of the earth. As I will explain later on in greater detail, *The Blind Owl* incorporates the *topos* of 'Mani the Painter' (to convey his message) in classical Iranian literature as what I see as a vehicle to formulate a progressive reinterpretation of classical Iranian mystical literature on the basis of cyclic repetition.⁵⁹ The novel profits from this molecular progression from one cyclic segment to the next to include myth within a fictitious and modern work of art. To examine in greater detail how the forces within these cyclic segments get redirected in *The Blind Owl*, I will first introduce the three syntheses Deleuze and Guattari distinguish in their theory.

⁵⁸ Davis, Eric (2010) *Nomad Codes: Adventures in Modern Esoterica*. Portland: Verse Chorus Press: p. 163.

⁵⁹ Seddon, Richard (1998) *Mani: His Life and His Work: Transforming Evil*. Forest Row: Temple Lodge Publishing: p. 51.

2.2. The Transcendent and Immanent Organization of the Three Syntheses.

Deleuze and Guattari distinguish first of all between an immanent and a transcendent application of the three syntheses in their conceptualization of the unconscious as a fabric. From these three syntheses, namely the connective, the disjunctive and the conjunctive synthesis, the last has already been mentioned in the form of a transcendent conjunction between binary opposites. Within the immanent application of the syntheses one does not or cannot refer to any point on the outside of a relational field. No external point (the One) from where the syntheses emerge, exists in such a framework.⁶⁰ Here I will shortly explain what these syntheses entail, after which I will elaborate on their transcendent and immanent use.

- 1) The *connective synthesis* corresponds to the sequence “and...and then...and then...”. Here the connective synthesis cuts into the flow of desiring-production and so connects heterogeneous elements (or part-objects) in a continuous or discontinuous way. A chronological succession of events between past, present and future can be regarded as a basic form of the *connective synthesis*.⁶¹ In relation to this Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between linear, ‘fixed’ or ‘recorded’ time (*chronos*) which shapes stable or *molar* outlines, and cyclic or discontinuous time (*aion*). The last, *aion*, disrupts the first, *chronos*, since it is an unregulated and volatile, so *molecular*, form of time that obscures *chronos*.⁶²
- 2) The *disjunctive synthesis*, in case of the transcendent, bi-univocal, usage, is best expressed in the terms ‘either this...or that’. While a disjunction, or a state of being disjoined, excludes one term from the other, it simultaneously generates the tension to forge possible connections that lie immanent within the field. This way the disjunction prepares heterogeneous series and flows in case of the application of the synthesis to a field of immanence (a connection between disparate elements).⁶³
- 3) The *conjunctive synthesis* corresponds to a concluding form, by which the many (disjunction) become one (conjunction). As we have seen the binary pairs converge in a “higher” union in the transcendent application of the conjunctive synthesis. In this case light and dark, male and

⁶⁰ Parr, Adrian (2010 [2005]) *The Deleuze Dictionary*. Edinburgh University Press: p. 80.

⁶¹ Holland, Eugene W. (2001 [1999]) *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis*. London: Routledge: p. 26.

⁶² Bogue, Ronald (2003) *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts*. New York & Oxon: Routledge: p. 34.

⁶³ Abou-Rihan, Fadi (2008) *Deleuze and Guattari: A Psychoanalytic Itinerary*. London & New York: Continuum: p. 77.

female etc. fuse in the transcendent One.⁶⁴ With the immanent use of this synthesis a multiplicity of relatively stationary and transitory states is produced, states that subsequently may be disrupted by a disjunction.⁶⁵

These three syntheses never function on their own, and any synthesis presupposes the others. The connective synthesis accumulates elements in a process of condensation (production), while the disjunctive synthesis disperses or subdivides the accumulation in a wide variety of catalogues (registration). The disjunctive synthesis can thus be imagined as a process that ascribes each element its proper place in a field by providing each element with a proper code. So before the elements enter into the stage of the conjunctive synthesis wherein they get consumed (consummation), the elements have been disseminated as a consequence of a disjunction.

‘Simply put, they [the elements that enter the conjunctive synthesis] come from prior sources of repulsion and attraction along with the opposition between these.’⁶⁶

For Deleuze and Guattari the Oedipus-complex articulates the illegitimate and transcendent application of the disjunctive synthesis: either you identify with your father, i.e. you close the familial and transcendent circle, and become “normal” or you remain “abnormal” in a desire for your mother. My reading here is one of a biologically felt incest-taboo which gets metaphysically consumed in an overarching, transcendent marriage. In a retrospective repudiation of the dissociated incest-desires experienced before the transcendent union or consummation, the biological taboo turns into a culturally motivated prohibition (an interpretation of the taboo) which in turn produces incest. We read in the *Anti-Oedipus*:

‘Incest is only the retroactive effect of the repressing representation *on* the repressed representative...it projects onto the representative, categories, rendered discernible, that it has itself established.’⁶⁷

The repressing representation here stands for incest: a ‘faked image’, or a displaced model. This model is, for example, caught in the transcendent and incestuous marriage between the Son of God and the

⁶⁴ Tim Clark. “A Whiteheadian Chaosmos? Process Philosophy from a Deleuzian Perspective.” In: *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernism*. Catherine Keller & Anne Daniell (eds.); Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002: p. 196.

⁶⁵ Parr, Adrian (2008) *Deleuze and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory and the Politics of Trauma*. Edinburgh University Press: p. 175.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁶⁷ Quote from the *Anti-Oedipus* (165-6/195) in: Holland, Eugene W. (2001 [1999]) *Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis*. London: Routledge: p. 73.

Mother of God/The spouse of the Holy Spirit, or Jesus and Mary, which may be regarded as the most wide-spread repressing representation.⁶⁸ This displaced projection is caught in a representation, for example in the *mandorla* on page two of this essay. This representation shows us the “consummation” of the supposedly incestuous desires in a metaphysical realm. This a culturally specific interpretation of the incest-taboo in my view, works on the repressed representative, that is desiring-production, in the form of an extrapolated divine law of prohibition (so it represses desire). This divine judgement projects categories *retroactively* (good and wrong, high and low) on desiring-production, for the divine judgement itself comes forth from the “consummation” of incestuous desires in a transcendent sphere (a transgression of the very same divine law that prohibits the consummation of such desires).⁶⁹ While the *hieros gamos* as a process follows the anarchic flow of desiring-production, this same flow gets diverted and blocked by the divine judgement after the transcendent marriage.

The anarchic distribution of desiring-production has been brought about by a disjunction, the stream, a symbol wherein the opposing forces seem to meet or to disperse: the pair desires for each other but cannot unite in reality. This taboo finds its way in *The Blind Owl* the moment the narrator describes what he perceives in the miniature he hallucinates:

‘I was certain that she wished to leap across the stream which separated her from the old man but that she was unable to do so.’⁷⁰

The “solution” to these paradoxical forces, in for example the Biblical or Quranic interpretation, lies in a transcendent conjugation, a “higher” metaphysical marriage. Here hierarchical categories repress and divert the free flow of desiring-production, for you are deemed either “high” or “low”, “good” or “bad”. The immanent use of the disjunctive synthesis would prevent such a normative impediment as it operates in the non-exclusionary form of “*and this and that and this*”. In this new configuration different becomings and composites are not to be subjugated to each other.⁷¹ In my view the stream in *The Blind Owl* leads us to an understanding of the taboo which corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari’s description in their *Anti-Oedipus*:

‘In short: the limit is neither a below nor a beyond: it is a limit between the two, *Shallow stream slandered with incest*, always already crossed or not yet crossed. For incest is like a movement, it is impossible.’⁷²

⁶⁸ Tynan, Aidan (2012) *Deleuze’s Literary Clinic: Criticism and the Politics of Symptoms*. Edinburgh University Press: p. 139.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *The Blind Owl.*, pp. 23.

⁷¹ *ATP.*, pp. 22-23.

⁷² My translation, *AO.*, p. 190.

For Deleuze and Guattari the limit, the border-line in the stream, signals neither an origin nor a structuralising mechanism, no transcendent synthesising subject, for the links forged between desire, the limit, the transgression of this limit and the divine law imply paralogical jumps and extrapolations.⁷³ These interrelations can only be inveigled out of a made-up (dissociated) image: the metaphysical conjunction of the opposites. In the realm of incest as a symbol, all there is, they contend, is a field of immanence made about by forces of attraction and repulsion in connection with material reality. These forces constitute instead the subject.⁷⁴ Since it is my aim to formulate how *The Blind Owl* redirects forces in its departure from the traditional, predominantly transcendent Iranian philosophy, I will apply these three syntheses to specific images that find their way into Hedayat's novel. An understanding of these images, incorporated in *The Blind Owl*, will bring us closer to an understanding of the texts' ingenious and complex reordering of traditional mystical literature. In the next chapter I will focus on a description of the content of these puzzling images and on the question how we should perceive them from a Deleuzian point of view. I focus on these cryptic images because they make up, I think, what Deleuze calls a 'spiritual repetition', what I take for a cyclic repetition, the return of difference, in his work *Difference and Repetition*:

"Consider what we call repetition within a life – more precisely, within a spiritual life.

Presents succeed, encroaching upon one another. Nevertheless, however strong the incoherence or possible opposition between successive presents, we have the impression that each of them plays out 'the same life' at different levels."⁷⁵

As the cryptic images recur on different segments of time, during different lives, they play a pivotal role in deconstructing the way a transcendent paradigm gets constructed out of them. The *Nommo*-figure and the *rebis* in Western alchemy could be perceived as such a repeated image, each with a different configuration or interpretation drawn from a puzzling process. *The Blind Owl* frames some of these repeated images or events, based on spiritual experiences, in such a way that they allow for a reconsideration of the Islamic transcendent tradition in Persian literature. To be more precise: the novel digs deep into the ancient gnostic knowledge of the Persian civilization to rework the traditional framework of the coincidence of the opposites into a modern piece of horror. I will shortly elaborate on the interrelation between the three syntheses and these images and psychic events in *The Conference of the Birds* to envision the overall framework of traditional Persian literature in the

⁷³ Parr, Adrian (2005) *The Deleuze Dictionary*. Edinburgh University Press: p. 78.

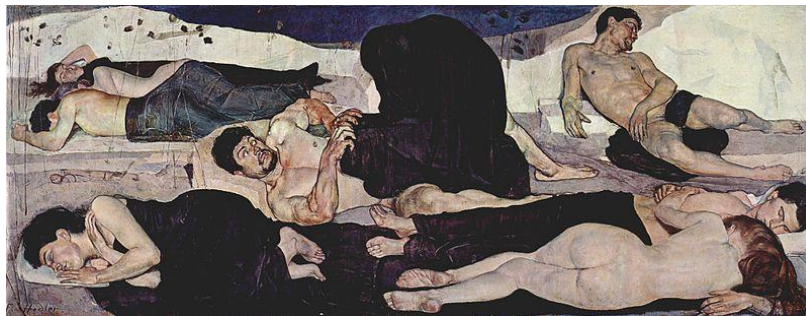
⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Deleuze, Gilles (1994 [1968]) *Difference and Repetition*. Paul Patton (tr.); New York: Columbia University Press: p. 83.

Islamic era. Based on this description I will examine in greater details how *The Blind Owl* rearranges the three syntheses and how the repeated images change as a consequence thereof.

2.3. Mental Images: Paradoxes, Psychic Death and the Surreal.

In total I will draw attention to three of those images or experiences to venture a way into *The Blind Owl*'s complex reordering of the three syntheses in comparison to traditional literature, here exemplified by *The Conference of the Birds*. The first example of such an experience, which becomes a constant presence in *The Blind Owl*, is the old-hag syndrome or sleep paralysis. A specific dream known to practically all cultures and one that has inspired numerous artists: a dream wherein one feels paralysed while being aware of his/her physical surroundings. A frightening presence slips into the room and presses itself on the chest of the dreamer, which causes a reaction of panic.⁷⁶



Ferdinand Hodler (1853–1918), *Die Nacht*, 1889–1890, oil on canvas, Bern.

A more variegated psychic image resides in a dramatic infanticide, performed by the divine couple. In Greek mythology the sun-god Apollo and the moon-goddess Artemis, twins, slay Niobe's children to avenge her *hubris*.⁷⁷ In the Bible we read about the Massacre of the Innocents by Herod: "A sound is heard in Ramah, a sound of crying in bitter grief. It is the sound of Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are gone."⁷⁸ The Biblical story may be derived from a Hindu text on a king named Kamsa, who sends a demoness, Putana, to kill all children in the hope Krishna won't survive this calamity.⁷⁹ In *The Conference of the Birds* a Ganymedian boy is executed in a chapter called 'The king who ordered his beloved to be killed.':

⁷⁶ Hufford, David J. (1982) *The Terror that Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centred Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: p. 116.

⁷⁷ Morford, Mark P.O. & Lenardon, Robert J. (1999) *Classical Mythology*. Oxford University Press: p. 143.

⁷⁸ <http://biblehub.com/jeremiah/31-15.htm>, 05-01-2014.

⁷⁹ Padmanabhan, M. & Shankar, Meera Ravi (2006) *Tales of Krishna from Mahabharatha*. Chennai: Sura Books: p. 6.

“‘Let him hang there’, he cried, ‘till late tonight–
There is a lesson in this shameful sight!’”

‘You loved me and you died for me; what fool
Would smash, as I did, his most precious jewel?
Oh, I killed my only love, and I
Deserve to suffer torture and to die!
Wherever you are now, my child, do not
Let all our vows of friendship be forgot;
It was myself I killed!’⁸⁰

The third and last psychic experience is one of blind sight. In this enigmatic image a blinded man follows his feminine counterpart on the basis of intuitive hearing and/or sight:

⁸⁰ Attar, Farid (2011 [1984]) *The Conference of the Birds*. Afkham Darbandi & Dick David (tr.); London: Penguin Books: pp. 241 & 243.

In Chymicis verfanti Natura, Ratio, Experientia & lectio, sint Dux, scipio, perspicilia & lampas.



EPIGRAMMA XLII.

Dux Natura tibi, tuque arte pedisequus illi
 Esto lubens, erras, ni comes ipsa viæ est.
 Det ratio scipionis opem, Experientia firmet
 Lumina, quo possit cernere postea procul.
 Lectio sit lampas tenebris dilucida, rerum
 Verborumque strues providus ut carveas.

Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1617, Emblem XLII.

'MOTTO

May Nature, Reason, Exercise and Literature be the guide, staff, spectacles and lamp for him who participates in chemistry.'

'EPIGRAM

Nature be your guide; follow her with your art willingly, closely. You err, if she is not your companion on your way. Reason be your staff, Exercise may strengthen your sight On account of which the things that are far away can be discerned. Literature be your lamp, shining in the darkness. In order to guard you against an accumulation of things and words.'

'(...) The experiments with mineral matters equal them either by means of sense of hearing, or by means of eyesight.'

H.M.E. De Jong, *Maier's Atalanta Fugiens. Sources of an Alchemical Book of Emblems* (1969).



Oedipus and Antigone (1828), Antoni Stanislaw Brodowski (1784–1832), National Museum of Warsaw.

Antigone, meaning "in place of a mother", figures as the daughter and sister of Oedipus.

'Else to walk, I would not need to lean on the strength of this frail girl. Nor, to see, need her eyes.'

Sophocles, *The Oedipus Trilogy. King Oedipus. Oedipus at Colonos. Antigone* (1985). Stephen Spender (tr.).

These experiences, that repeat themselves on different segments of time, strike the experiencers as unsolvable paradoxes. Dumbfounded by them, they lead the experiencers towards a psychic death. Attar writes in *The Conference of the Birds*:

“A fool suggested: ‘It’s some dream you had;
Some sleepy fantasy has sent you mad.’
He asked: ‘Was it a dream, or was it true?’
Was I drunk or sober? I wish I knew –
The world has never known a state like this,
This paradox beyond analysis,
Which haunts my soul with what I cannot find,
Which makes me speechless speak and seeing blind.’”⁸¹

In Deleuzian terms this is the transcendent application of the disjunctive synthesis (either blind or seeing) that claims a transconscious character for the divine king as he embodies the transcendent conjunction of disjunctive elements, i.e. he is ‘seeing blind’, a state unknown to the world. In *The Conference of the Birds* the paradoxical character of the divine king overarches a stream of water which separates one part of the land from the other (one term from the other). If we get along with Attar, only a conjugal fusion of paradoxical elements in the divine soul, here embodied by Jesus, can retroactively give meaning to each term:

“Jesus and the stream

(...) One with him filled a jug, and on they went.
When Jesus drank, to his astonishment,
The jug seemed filled with bitterness. ‘How strange,’
He said, ‘that water can so quickly change –
They were the same; what can this difference mean?
What tasted sweet is brackish and unclean!’
The jug spoke: ‘Lord, once I too had a soul

⁸¹ Attar, Farid (2011 [1984]) *The Conference of the Birds*. Afkham Darbandi & Dick David (tr.); London: Penguin Books: p. 216.

And was a man – but I have been a bowl,
A cruse, a pitcher of crude earthenware,
Remade a thousand times; and all forms share
The bitterness of death – which would remain
Though I were baked a thousand times again
No water could be which I contain.”⁸²

The conjunctive synthesis of what has been scattered by the stream (a disjunctive distribution, or the inscription of each element with a different code), enshrouds the paradox (the water that is sweet and brackish) in the soul, an aspect that cannot be contained by the water itself. Since this paradox has been fixed in a transcendent, overarching, realm, it no longer participates in the stream itself. The transcendent conceptualization of the paradox therefore inhibits any recombination of elements or part-objects through a molecular progression. Every time one tries to depart from the fixed representation, one floats back towards it; an overall tendency toward repetition compulsion is the effect (the neurotic). The gnostic *syzygy* on the contrary ascribes to the paradox a position wherein it remains free to operate. In this guise the paradox connects the outer limit of one aspect to the outer limit of another aspect. It causes two surfaces to temporarily fuse in a conjunction, after which the conjunction will be disrupted on the basis of another contradiction. Such a temporary fusion of terms plays a pivotal role in the construction of the surreal image, a type of image that depends on this free flow of elements (or the *clinamen*, the molecular discordance) for its existence. The surreal expresses itself as:

‘A momentary bringing together of two more or less distant realities.’⁸³

‘Together, the *clinamen* and *syzygy* ensure that our universe (...) is shattered and constructed by means of simultaneous agency of declensional and conjunctive oppositional forces.’⁸⁴

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁸³ Quote from Pierre Reverdy (1889-1960) in: McCaffery, Steve (2012) *Darkness of the Present: Poetics, Anachronism, and the Anomaly*. Alabama: The University of Alabama Press: p. 171.

⁸⁴ This specific conceptualization of *syzygy* and *clinamen* is derived from the ‘pataphysical (“to go beyond metaphysics”) writings of the French symbolist Alfred Jarry (1873-1907)., *Ibid.*

The construction of the surreal image has as its objective to rejoin what has been previously dissociated from each other: life and death, sense and nonsense, the reasonable and the unspeakable. The assemblage of disjointed facets of life unfolds not in a closed-off space, but instead develops as a passage, a constant movement.⁸⁵ Along with the focus on the versatile and the transient mode of the surreal image, one finds a true obsession with (psychic) automatism, automata and sacred machines in surrealist writing and in *The Blind Owl*. The automaton, a precursor of the robot, moves on the threshold of matter and spirit, human and machine, the sacred and the profane, while being ruled by determinism.⁸⁶ Thereby the automaton, in principal a product of the investigation of the relationships between engines and bodies during the Enlightenment, 'is a contraption devoted to immanence, meant to fulfil earthly loves and hates.'⁸⁷

'Breton made automatism central to surrealism, and contra the French school he recoded it. far from a dissociation of personality, automatism was seen to reassociate such diverse dichotomies as perception and representation, madness and reason.'⁸⁸

To arrive at the point where it becomes possible to involve the surrealist imagery of *The Blind Owl* in the analysis, I will try to get a grip on the source of the automatism depicted in Hedayat's novel. To arrive at a better understanding of this automatism I will draw on the distinction between a spiritual repetition and a bare repetition and their associated time-frames of *aion* and *chronos* in the next chapter.

⁸⁵ Caws, Mary Ann (1978) *Théorie, symbole, texte, de Jarry à Artaud*. Paris : Minard : p. 6.

⁸⁶ Wilson, Eric G. (2006) *The Melancholy Android. On the Psychology of Sacred Machines*. State University of New York Press: pp. 95-97.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁸⁸ Foster, Hal (1993) *Compulsive Beauty*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: MIT Press: p. 4.

3. Space and Time, Spiritual and Bare Repetition.

3.1. Chronos and Aion, Linear and Cyclic Time.

On the first pages of *The Blind Owl* we come to follow the narrator, who, in his sole aim of making himself known to his shadow, will takes us along the threads of the story of his life, that is: his memory. As we move into the second chapter the narrator declares that his wretched soul has been impressed by ‘a passing gleam, a falling star, which flashed upon me, in the form of a woman – or of an angel.’ He writes:

‘No, I shall never utter her name. For now, with her slender, ethereal, misty form, her great, shining, wondering eyes (...). No, I must not defile her name by contact with earthly things. After she had gone I withdrew from the company of man, from the company of the stupid and the successful and, in order to forget, took refuge in wine and opium.’⁸⁹

The narrator, a deranged pen-case decorator, turns himself into the embodiment of a *qalandar* attitude, as he has found himself an abandoned room on the outskirts of the city, where he can live the life of an outcast.⁹⁰ The medieval *qalandar*, a wandering ascetic Sufi (Islamic mystic), was an outcast who resided in the *kharābāt*, a ruin, with the connotation of a ‘tavern’ or a ‘brothel’.⁹¹ The ruin simultaneously symbolizes a ruination in regard to morality, or rather a re-invention of morality. Attar, who wrote *qalandar* poetry during a period in his life, makes it clear: ‘Be dead to all the crowd considers just / Once past the veil you understand the Way / From which the crowd’s glib courtiers blindly stray.’⁹²

The narrator passes his days in a house ‘one finds only depicted on the covers of ancient pen cases’, where he paints the same miniature over and again, basically in order to stupefy himself or simply ‘to kill time’.⁹³ The miniature attains thereby the status of a *mise-en-abyme*, the topographical space of the story itself lies embedded in the space of the miniature (space as a concept).⁹⁴ Simultaneously this depiction links the linear temporality on the level of the story (chronological time) to time on the level of cyclic repetition, i.e. the mythical time of the *aion*, for he daily paints the very same scenery a precursor lived in.⁹⁵ The dimension of *aion* is given greater depth when he mentions

⁸⁹ *The Blind Owl.*, pp. 21-22.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁹¹ de Bruijn, J.T.P. (1997) *Persian Sufi Poetry. An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Poems*. Surrey: Curzon Press: pp. 75-76.

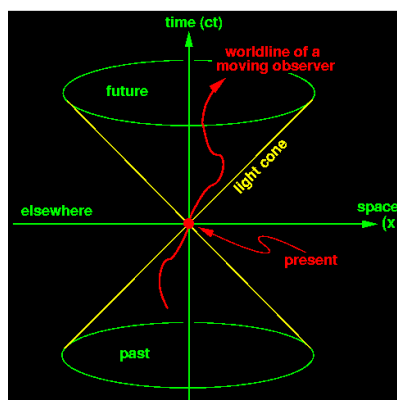
⁹² *The Conference of the Birds*, p. 94.

⁹³ *The Blind Owl.*, p. 22.

⁹⁴ Sharif, Negin (2009) *Structure et Enjeux de la Répétition dans La Chouette Aveugle de Sadegh Hedayat : une Poétique du Ressassement*. Université de Cergy-Pontoise: p. 80.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

how he paints the pictures independently of any will of his own, indicating his movements are the very same as the movements this ancient painter made.⁹⁶ Later on in the novel, after he has received the jar with *her* portrait from odds-and-ends man, he becomes ultimately convinced he leads a life identical to ‘that ancient painter who, hundreds, perhaps thousands of years ago, had decorated the surface of this jar (...)’, he ‘who had been a man like me, exactly like me.’ Furthermore he is sure him befell exactly the same spiritual experiences as this cursed precursor.⁹⁷ What appears is a fictitious and frenzied embodiment or reincarnation of the Mani-like painter.⁹⁸ The narrator’s embodies the vertical, diachronous dimension [of the incorporeal mental images] on his own segment of time. He renders *aion* indistinguishable from the horizontal dimension, the material development of *chronos*.⁹⁹



To visualize the horizontal and the vertical dimension.

the Einstein-Minkowski light cone of space-time.

The principle of reincarnation is met with an incestuous framework wherein the ethereal nature of the angelic being, who seems merely a projection or a hallucination of the narrator’s mind, takes the position of his foster-sister and wife. Together with this vision a dichotomous atmosphere is evoked by the narrator, as her luminous presence gets contrasted with the darkness of his wretched soul. At the beginning of the second chapter he mentions how her eyes ‘were slanting, Turkoman eyes of supernatural, intoxicating radiance which at once frightened and attracted.’; only to state a few sentences later that ‘no one but a Hindu temple dancer could have possessed her harmonious grace of movement.’¹⁰⁰ In the second part of the novel (from chapter 4 on) the narrator describes how his father

⁹⁶ *The Blind Owl.*, p. 23.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56-57.

⁹⁸ Babayan, Kathryn (2002) *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran*. Harvard University Press: p. 49.

⁹⁹ ‘He measures the activity of the cosmic period where everything happens simultaneously: Zeus is just as well Dia, across or he who mixes himself, the Embodiment.’, Deleuze, Gilles (1969) *Logique du Sens*. Paris: Éditions du Minuit: p. 190.

¹⁰⁰ *The Blind Owl.*, pp. 26-27.

(or uncle) met his mother in a Hindu temple where she danced to the hypnotic music of the sitar.¹⁰¹ His foster-sister and wife (the ‘bitch’) on the other hand has the same ‘slanting Turkoman eyes’ as her little brother (the brother-in-law of the narrator).¹⁰² And as if it isn’t incestuous enough yet, the pattern of doubling is extended towards the father, the uncle and the narrator himself. The confusion between the identity of the father and the uncle is transposed on the narrator who comes to inhabit the miniature himself as a ‘bent old man like an Indian fakir.’¹⁰³ His uncle, whose identity is mixed up with his father’s due to the trial by cobra, pops up as a ‘bent old man with an Indian turban (...). His eyelids were red and sore and he had a harelip’, while the narrator, who has undergone a transformation as we enter the second part of the novel, turns out to be a ‘bent old man with white hair, burnt-out eyes and a harelip.’¹⁰⁴

Heavily Oedipal in outlook, for the narrator takes the place of his father and the angelic entity takes the place of his mother and sister, the story is caught in a circular repetition wherein everything seems to float back to his imagined family. Nevertheless, where traditional Persian poetry follows a linear progression towards oblivion (in God) such as in *The Conference of the Birds*, *The Blind Owl* starts off with a narrator in such a demented state. Actively trying to undo this demented state through the act of writing, he experiences this amnesia as a disease (the novel opens with ‘There are sores which slowly erode the mind in solitude like a kind of canker’).¹⁰⁵

By drawing on the distinction between a *syzygy* and a *coniunctio* we may find a way into the novel to describe how *The Blind Owl* leads us into a new era, an era wherein the chronological progression towards oblivion in God is no longer self-evident. The impression the hallucinated miniature leaves on the narrator is crucial in this regard:

‘Was it possible that anyone other than she should make any impression upon my heart? But the hollow grating laughter, the sinister laughter of the old man had broken the bond which united us.’¹⁰⁶

The representation of this paradox, the stream as a symbol, doesn’t imply automatically a negative determination as in the case of the stream in *The Conference of the Birds*. The negative determination of the stream, the negation of its floating multiplicity, in Attar’s allegory ‘leads us to conceive of difference on the basis of a supposed prior resemblance and identity’. Here the negation of the polyvocality of the stream itself results in or is the product of the transcendent containment of the paradox (i.e. the stream effectuates a fixed differentiation out of a primordial structure).¹⁰⁷ In *The*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25 & 64-65.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-29.

¹⁰⁷ *Difference and Repetition.*, p. 121.

Blind Owl the symbol of the stream remains itself polyvocal as it operates through both a schizoid *syzygy* of spiritual or clothed repetition and a *coniunctio* of bare repetition (repetition on the surface, i.e. automatism, what I view as the neuroticism of immanence), without giving way to a transcendent containment of the stream.¹⁰⁸ In *Difference and Repetition* this distinction between clothed, spiritual, repetition (*aion*), so a disguised repetition, and a material bare repetition (*chronos*) at the surface, is given greater depth:

‘A bare, material repetition (repetition of the Same) appears only in the sense that another repetition is disguised within it, constituting it and constituting itself in disguising itself. Even in nature, isochronic rotations are only the outward appearance of a more profound movement, the revolving cycles are only abstractions [spiritual repetitions]: placed together, they reveal evolutionary cycles or spirals whose principle is a variable curve, and the trajectory of which has two dissymmetrical aspects, as though it had a right and a left. It is always in this gap, which should not be confused with the negative, that creatures weave their repetition and receive at the same time the gift of living and dying.’¹⁰⁹

The textual elements that compose *The Blind Owl* stay in continuous flux, as can be deduced from the fact that the novel opens with a purely ethereal third, or an *anima*-projection. The Manichaeic outlook in the first part of the novel, with the angelic entity and the dichotomies functioning in interaction with this intermediary transcendent third, has its ground in an alliance with his foster-sister (and wife). Here the stream frames the paradoxes of what is ‘remote’ yet ‘familiar’, by which one is ‘frightened’ yet ‘attracted’ as tensions that generate unstable categories.¹¹⁰ The abstractions, the mental images of spiritual or clothed repetition move on or are conjure up in the middle, *in-between* the dissymmetrical sides of a wretched soul and a luminous presence. I will contend that in the case of the *coniunctio* in *The Blind Owl*, the moment the foster-sister regresses to the position of mother and wife, the paradoxes affirm a circular movement which characterizes the neurotic side of immanence, a neuroticism divulging itself as a bare repetition of the same (automatism). In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze remarks about this aspect of materialist repetition (linked to *chronos*, a drawing together of Chronos, the personification of time, and Kronos, the devouring father):

¹⁰⁸ Somers-Hall, Henry (2013) *Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide*. Edinburgh University Press: p. 56.

¹⁰⁹ *Difference and Repetition*., p. 21.

¹¹⁰ *The Blind Owl*., pp. 24 & 26.

“...bare and brute repetition, understood as the repetition of the same: the idea of an ‘automatism’ in this context expresses the modality of a fixated drive, or rather, of repetition conditioned by fixation or regression.”¹¹¹

In the next chapter I will focus on the consumption of part-objects of clothed and bare repetition, brought about by the dissymmetry in the stream, in the surreal image. This is to say I will try to show how the novel befuddles a chronological progression towards amnesia or oblivion, first of all by opening with a narrator in a demented state, and by the subsequent undermining of a linear, logical and chronological progression from one textual element through the obscuring force of clothed repetition that is subsequently unleashed on all textual elements.

3.2. The Three Syntheses: The Becoming-Mad of Depth.

The text of *The Blind Owl* should be conceived as the outcome of a process of rewriting, as the narrator declares he feels forced to write the story of his life, the remembering of a sequence of events. In the fourth chapter we read: ‘I am obliged to set all this down on paper in order to disentangle the various threads of my story.’¹¹² This implies his memory, that resides somewhere, is multi-layered and stored as a discontinuous mass. The writing-process itself as the active reordering of an inchoate mass, equals the creation of ‘a channel between my thoughts and my unsubstantial self, my shadow.’¹¹³ With the channel tethered to his shadow, which slowly takes on the shape of a blind owl stretched across his wall, the incorporeal gets bit by bit devoured by the owl while it substantializes in him. His writing can therefore be perceived as a mediation between the incorporeal and the corporeal, between *aion* and *chronos*. Yet the narrator fully identifies himself with the obscure time of *aion*, the immediate conjunction between a mythical past and a mythical future.

The connective synthesis between associations in thought (the channel) constructs a linear progression. The narrator remains aloof from a side-track where he runs completely aberrant. The chain of thought is well-communicated so that everyone is able to follow his writing. Under the influence of opium or wine he articulates his flight into this dream-world in a comprehensive and coherent way. Yet this chain of thought is disrupted on numerous occasions, most notably when we jump from one chapter to the other. After the first chapter we jump back in time and enter an undefined past. This *analepsis* constructs a *mise-en-abyme* for the narrator enters his own memory in this chapter, the chapter wherein he recalls ‘the memory of those magic eyes’.¹¹⁴ This scenery of a memory in a memory is given further depth by the narrator’s description of his environment as an

¹¹¹ *Difference and Repetition*, p. 103.

¹¹² *The Blind Owl*, p. 22.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

environment one finds in the miniatures depicted on pen-cases along with his conviction that he is identical to an ancient pen-case decorator.¹¹⁵ The segmentation and the subsequent confusion between different layers of time is yet further enhanced by the narrator's use of various sorts of currency to pay the odds-and-ends man. On one occasion he offers him 'two *kran*s and one *abbasi*', while on another occasion he offers him 'two *dirhems* and four *peshiz*'.¹¹⁶ These currencies from respectively the Sassanid (*peshiz*), the Safavid (*kran*s and *abbasi*) and the early Arab (*dirhem*) era, indicate the mixture between historical, linear, segments of time with the spiritual repetition across these planes.¹¹⁷ The linear progressions on the different planes of historical time are blocked by caesurae between the chapters. When we enter the first intermediary pages, that is chapter three, we read:

'When I awoke in a new world everything that I found there was perfectly familiar and near to me, so much so that I felt more at home in it than in my previous surroundings and manner of life, which, so it seemed to me, had been only the reflection of my real life.'¹¹⁸

And in chapter five, the final pages, we read:

'The violence of my agitation seemed to have awakened me from a long, deep sleep. I rubbed my eyes. I was back in my own room.'¹¹⁹

In relation to these caesurae between the chapters we find a circular movement towards a willed amnesia on the level of content. The novel opens with a narrator who actively tries to undo his state of diseased egolessness, but when we move along with his dream-like memory we find a wretched soul who constantly tries to wreak havoc on this very same memory:

'From this time on I increased my doses of wine and opium, but alas, those remedies of despair failed to numb and paralyse my mind. I was unable to forget.'¹²⁰

The *post rem* opening of the novel resembles the first page of the first intermediary pages (chapter 3) and the state of confusion in the final pages.¹²¹ These three instances, opening, first intermediary pages and final pages, open after the murder has taken place. His state is one of a demented pen-case decorator who sits in his room with a mind that is 'poisoned' and 'hollow and ashy'.¹²² In the first

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48 & 124.

¹¹⁷ Elton Daniel. "History as a Theme of *The Blind Owl*." In: *Hedayat's 'The Blind Owl'. Forty Years After*. Michael C. Hillmann (ed.); Austin : University of Texas: p. 80.

¹¹⁸ *The Blind Owl*., p. 61.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹²¹ Sharif, Negin (2009) *Structure et Enjeux de la Répétition dans La Chouette Aveugle de Sadegh Hedayat : une Poétique du Ressassement*. Université de Cergy-Pontoise: p. 32.

¹²² *The Blind Owl*., pp. 18 & 146.

chapter he announces he will try to ‘set down what I can remember, what has remained in my mind of the sequence of events.’, while in the second chapter he finds himself covered in blood and defines the sources of his excitement as ‘the need to write, which I felt as a kind of obligation imposed upon me.’¹²³ In the final pages an old man slips out through the doorway with something that resembles a jar under his arm.

‘My clothes were torn and soiled from top to bottom with congealed blood. Two blister-flies were circling about me, and tiny white maggots were wriggling on my coat. And on my chest I felt the weight of a woman’s dead body...’¹²⁴

The narrator creates blocks of space-time by way of introducing caesurae between the chapters and total amnesia on the level of content. Each cycle departs from amnesia, only to enter into oblivion after its fulfillment. The vertical, diachronous, dimension is sliced through with the distinctions invoked between the historical segments, while the coherent chain of thought, jumping from one spatial element to the other in a chronological order, so horizontally, finds itself suddenly cut off. Hence the text is forced to reconnect to another block of space-time in order to proceed to the next instant. This process is fully dependent on the interpretation of the reader, although the text provides the reader with some clues. When the narrator moves around on Mohammediyye square, you might be aware of the fact that this historical site was built in 20th century.¹²⁵ In the second part on the novel, the narrator observes his wife and foster-sister:

‘She was unconsciously holding the index finger of her left hand to her lips. Was this the same graceful creature, was this the slim, ethereal girl who, in a black pleated dress, had played hide and seek with me on the bank of the Suran, the unconstrained, childlike, frail girl whose ankles, appearing form under her skirt, had so excited me? (...) this woman whose face still bore the tooth-marks of the old odds-and-ends man in the square – no, this was not the same person as I had known.’¹²⁶

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 18 & 62.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹²⁵ Sharif, Negin (2009) *Structure et Enjeux de la Répétition dans La Chouette Aveugle de Sadegh Hedayat : une Poétique du Ressassement*. Université de Cergy-Pontoise : p. 57.

¹²⁶ *The Blind Owl.*, pp. 127-128.

The symbolic stream in the miniature turn out to be a physical stream, the river Suran, and the incestuous forces of attraction and repulsion take on the form of a game of hide and seek. Is this Mohammadiyye square or another square and is this the odd-and-ends man paid with an *abbasi*, a *peshiz* or a *dirham*? Is this the Suran of the Savafid, the Sassanid or the Islamic era? You might think of the narrator as a feverish, modern painter from the modern, Islamic era, while you frame the square as a site from the Sassanid era and the odd-and-ends man as paid with an *abbasi* in the first part of the novel, so as character from the Savafid era: the choice is yours. The disjunction of the stream in the miniature or the river Suran ensures there is no straightforward path. Literally all textual elements, the yellow dog, the cypress tree or the castle, can be rearranged in random connections at the choice of the reader. What emerges are blocks of space-time that whirl around and interrelate, and thereby form a trail, on the basis of what Deleuze calls ‘non-localisable connections, actions at a distance, systems of replay, resonance and echoes.’¹²⁷

A first impression of the contraction of the past in the present is caught in the following quote:

‘All the thoughts which are bubbling in my brain at this moment belong to this passing instant and know nothing of hours, minutes and dates. An incident of yesterday may for me be less significant, less recent, than something that happened a thousand years ago.’¹²⁸

His writing, the channel he creates, draws in the incorporeal or virtual layers of sameness, the unsubstantial self, from a variety of diachronous surfaces and connects them to the linear chain of associations, that is his thought in the present, so on his own segment of time. A crucial point which couples the diachronous dimension to the chronological procedure of time, is *her* portrait, the portrait he finds on the excavated jar given to him by the odd-and-ends man:

‘Now I understood for a space that on those hills, in the houses of that ruined city of massive brick, had once lived men whose bones had long since rotted away and the atoms of whose bodies might now perhaps be living another life in the blue flowers of morning glory; and that among those men there had been one, an unlucky painter, an accursed painter, perhaps an unsuccessful decorator of pen-case covers, who had been a man like me, exactly like me.’¹²⁹

¹²⁷ What Deleuze introduces here is a kind of mystification of terms borrowed from theories on quantum entanglement., *Difference and Repetition.*, p.83.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹²⁹ *The Blind Owl.*, pp. 56.

This coincidence, wherein the portrait he has just painted resembles exactly this portrait on the ancient jar, couples a synchronous dimension, the coexistence of two identical portraits at the same time, a resonance, with the diachronic levels brought about by repetition of sameness through time, an echo. Both dimensions, the synchronic and diachronic, derive from what appears to be an a-causal “imprint” that bypasses any form of chronology. Hence his destiny supersedes and cannot be reduced to a whole set of deterministic relations.¹³⁰ In a *syzygy*, the parallel (coexistent) configuration of a triad, destiny is directly conferred on each element in the triad from previous “levels” of sameness. This is the product of the interrelationship between *syzygy* and gnostic participation, the implication of the Greek word *gnostikos*: “knowing, able to discern”.¹³¹ The direct participation in previous levels of the repeated is grounded in dissymmetry, inequality and the incommensurable, from which discernment can be derived.¹³² Spiritual repetition in a *syzygy* gives way to a purely vertical participation that initially shuns the intermingling of spiritual repetition with the apparent, material, form of *chronos*, which renders spiritual repetition in itself as of the quality of difference in regard to the material world. The two, spiritual and bare repetition, remain incommensurable but simultaneously depend upon each other.

In *The Blind Owl* the gap between a-causal repetition and causal chronology is fully exploited to obscure time up till the point where time becomes completely indefinite. Since a-causal non-localisable action cannot be understood without a reliance on its disguise, a disguise that takes on the form of a material and causal relation, the spiritual repetition remains open to change and intervention on the part of an ever-changing environment. The narrator embodies the past as a past in the present. This is, I think, what is implied in these words of *Difference and Repetition*:

‘Spiritual repetition unfolds in the being in itself of the past, whereas representation concerns and reaches only those presents which result from active synthesis [to unite all the passive contemplating egos; the construction of a fixed self], thereby subordinating all repetition, to the identity of the present present in reflection, or to the resemblance of the former present in reproduction.’¹³³

Syzygy, based on a direct presence in ‘the being in itself of the past’, aligns vertical separateness of repetition along a horizontal separateness (a schizoid split-off from the ego that impresses the narrator’s mind), while the surrounding environment, its disguise, puts motion into the elements of

¹³⁰ *Difference and Repetition.*, p. 83.

¹³¹ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=gnostic>, 28-03-2014.

¹³² Clayton Crockett. “St Gilles between the Divine and the Demonic.” In: *The Postmodern Saints of France: Refiguring ‘the Holy’ in Contemporary French Philosophy*. Colby Dickinson (ed.); London & New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013: p. 87.

¹³³ *Difference and Repetition.*, p. 84.

spiritual repetition, the lines caught in ‘the being in itself’. Through the anticipation of a new repetition on a new cycle of time, the ‘being in itself’ of spiritual repetition continually transforms itself. This stands in contrast with a neurotic repetition embedded in transcendence. Within the last configuration the repeated image stays static for it is only secondary to a presupposed origin, a transcendent representation it is directly drawn back to. Here the repetition can only reflect on and affirm the previous supposedly “superior” transcendent representation that it cannot surpass. With schizo-incest the spiritual repetition, founded on open paradox and incommensurability, pertains to difference for it allows an on-going mediation between the immanent and the transcendent. This dissymmetry and incommensurability between terms nevertheless comes at a risk when the paradox operates in the context of immanence. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) Deleuze and Guattari warn for a reckless and hasty move towards immanence:

‘(...) if in dismantling the organism there are times one courts death, in slipping away from significance and subjection one courts falsehood, illusion and hallucination and psychic death.’¹³⁴

To understand how the construction of meaning evolves in *The Blind Owl* I will first examine how meaning disappears from the stage the moment the narrator enters into a state of psychic death. This zombie like state gets stressed throughout the novel, as he designates his disease as ‘a state of coma like that between death and resurrection’.¹³⁵ Despite the narrator’s desperate efforts to escape from this utterly chaotic and eerie world, he locks himself forever into an utmost uncomfortable paradoxical environment by physically murdering his feminine counterpart.

The moment the Turkoman girl in her black dress has come to life and steps as an automated doll onto the patio of the obsessed narrator, she enters the spatiotemporal world of the narrator. Gazing into the vast emptiness ‘unaware of her surroundings’, she will mediate between the ‘transcendental things which it was given to no one but her to see’ and the dark and eerie world of the narrator.¹³⁶ He slays this doll-like ‘angel from hell’ by pouring some of the cobra-poison in her mouth, and only now he is able to numb his mind. Although he has forfeited any refuge in stable categories, a feeling of relief and deep understanding arrives:

‘I was in intimate, inviolable communion with the outside world and with all created things, and a complex system of invisible conductors transmitted a restless flow of impulses between me and all the elements of nature. There was no conception, no notion

¹³⁴ Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix (2012 [1987]) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Brian Massumi (tr.); Bloomsbury: p. 186.

¹³⁵ *The Blind Owl*, p. 18.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

which I felt to be foreign to me. I was capable of penetrating with ease the secrets of the painters of the past, the mysteries of abstruse philosophies, the ancient folly of ideas and species.’¹³⁷

And:

‘Then I felt as though a heavy weight had been removed from my chest, as though the laws of gravity had ceased to exist for me and I soared freely in pursuit of my thoughts, which had grown ample, ingenious and infinitely precise.’¹³⁸

This short-lived positive understanding of a participation in nature (metempsychosis), the result of the disintegration and dissolution/dismemberment, cannot stay, for the unleashed connective synthesis will not condense in what Deleuze calls metastable states, a temporary stability of meaning. Since he has physically killed her, their dissolution is unstoppable, and the connective synthesis of desiring-production (“and then...and then...and then”) thrives on and on. Later on in the novel the image of blind sight occurs to convey the loss of destiny and the loss of meaning that results from this murder and the subsequent removal of the eyes:

‘When night came on I lost the tracks but continued to walk on in the profound darkness, slowly, and aimlessly, with no conscious thought in my mind, like a man in a dream. I had no idea in what direction I was going (...) Those eyes which had been a lantern lighting my way had been extinguished forever and now I did not care whether or not I ever arrived at any place.’¹³⁹

By taking out her eyes he has blinded himself for the rest of his life while he stumbles into a profound darkness, a sleazy and chaotic world. As a result any attempt to retroactively categorize elements into a stable order is futile, while the narrator gets swamped deeper and deeper in a world that remains meaningless in itself. The mental image of blind sight has been set loose from its teleological objective, namely the metaphysical conjunction. Both blindness and sight are ascribed a place and meaning by the disjunction, but they will not come to function as a transconscious fixation, namely the conjugal figuration of ‘blind sight’. Instead ‘sight’ might be placed in the environment, as if his own sight is only an impression, a being viewed by a surrounding that is alive, while the narrator himself resides in darkness and immobility, i.e. is blind and paralysed. Two pages after the image wherein he follows his Turkoman guide, he lies down in the hearse with the suitcase on his chest while he reports his impressions:

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

‘In the gaps between the clouds the stars gazed down at the earth like gleaming eyes emerging from a mass of coagulated blood. A wonderful sense of tranquillity pervaded my whole being. All that I could feel was the jar pressing against my chest with the weight of a dead body. The interlocking trees with their wry, twisted branches seemed in the darkness to be gripping one another by the hand for fear they should slip and crash to the ground (...) It seemed to me that I had always been saturated with the smell of death and had slept all my life in a black coffin while a bent old man whose face I could not see transported me through the mist and the passing shadows.’¹⁴⁰

Here the spiritual repetitions of ‘blind sight’ or rather ‘blindness and sight’ and sleep paralysis, the dream with the weight on the chest, intermingle. His immobility (‘had slept all my life’) is aligned with the darkness of the forest and the ‘black coffin’, while a unidirectional movement on the part of his environment permeates his being as it acts and gazes down on him. The incommensurability between respectively immobility and blindness on one side and mobility and sight on the other hand is for a brief moment overcome in what comes forth as a surreal landscape wherein blindness and sight, mobility and immobility fuse.

We have seen how the novel splits and blocks the linear procedures of the connective synthesis when it paves the way for a linear progression (remembering a sequence of events that will perchance give the narrator the opportunity to gain a better knowledge of himself) and then blocks, hinders and disrupts this fundament through the introduction of caesurae and unexpected jumps into undefined layers of time. I view the disjunction installed in the story, the stream of water, as the principle source for the narrator’s confusion regarding time and space. This disjunction of attraction and repulsion make that time and space whirl around in meaningless order.¹⁴¹ Nonetheless this disjunction prepares the meaningful connection between disparate elements out of the disruption of the connective flow, which will first of all result in a total loss of meaning and sanity. For Attar this perplexity and confusion is brought about by the ‘paradox beyond analysis’, in *The Blind Owl*:

‘I have seen so many contradictory things and have heard so many words of different sort (...)

the thin, though rind behind which the spirit is hidden – that now I believe nothing. (...)

At this very moment I doubt the existence of tangible, solid things; I doubt clear, manifest truths.’¹⁴²

Later on:

¹⁴⁰ *The Blind Owl*, p. 53.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

‘My heart had always been at odds not only with my body but with my mind, and there was absolutely no compatibility between them. I had always been in a state of decomposition and gradual disintegration.’¹⁴³

And:

‘I saw that pain and disease existed and at the same time that they were void of sense and meaning. (...) I was not really alive or wholly dead.’¹⁴⁴

So halfway the novel the narrator has turned utterly mad, he finds himself in a state of psychic death, and rational argument has lost all credibility for him. The line between sense and nonsense has been shattered. Now in the second chapter of the novel a *syzygy* has been erected between the old man in the miniature (the narrator), the Turkoman girl in the black dress (his foster-sister) and the ethereal entity (an *anima*-projection). Since he has killed the physical and automated “maid of the vines” or the “Maiden of Light” he does not care whether or not he arrives at any place (a place of sanity and stability).

With the layer of transcendence destroyed for all time to come the paradox and incommensurability cannot be covered up in an overarching conjunction. Instead everything floats around and reaches the surface. The murky and ugly content becomes visible in a direct and horrific manner. There is no lesson to be drawn from this avalanche of mythic obsession, murder, rape, psychic death and child-murder. All there is, is just plain existential dread, frightening madness, hopelessness and meaninglessness. Based on this existential emptiness, one could argue *The Blind Owl*, in its departure from transcendence, articulates the difficulty in gaining a positive and lasting understanding of a fugacious field of immanence.

Incongruous combinations and transpositions take the place of the fixed transcendent order, and a seemingly random recombination of textual elements unleashes a flow of textual elements that temporarily fuse in the surreal image. The border-line between the two has dispersed the textual elements and a whirlpool of part-objects is the result. As a consequence the boundaries between real and unreal, inner and outer, high and low are smashed. Now the whirlpool of meaningless part-objects, brought about by a field of forces, the forces of attraction and repulsion, connect in a non-hierarchical, a-centered and immanent way. The molecular discordance, the *clinamen*, has conquered and abandoned any fixed notion of reality and a haphazard binding and unbinding, an immanent application of the conjunctive synthesis, takes the place of a layer of transcendence that claims to go beyond the dissimilar sides. Due to a disregard for the risk of taking a short-cut into immanence (his drug-addiction and the resulting hallucinations, but most of all the murder) the narrator plunges

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

himself in a web of illusions, as there is a disrupted connective synthesis that leads to a conjunction of disparate elements in a seemingly random way. After the visit of his uncle, at the start of the second chapter, the narrator remarks:

‘My uncle had gone and had left the room door agape like the mouth of a dead man.

The sound of the old man’s laughter was still echoing in my ears.’¹⁴⁵

The implicit metafictional framework of the story, a *mise-en-abyme* wherein the narrator enters his own memory, is here mirrored on the level of the content. Since the autodiegetic narrator at the beginning of the novel enters his own memory as a first person narrator (an embedded memory), he turns into a so-called *intra-intra-diegetic narrator*.¹⁴⁶ The echoing on the vertical dimension of time is transposed on the senses: he hears the laughing of that ancient painter, his precursor, echoing in his ears (*aion*). Simultaneously the echo is a resonance on the horizontal dimension of space, where it takes the shape of a bare repetition. He has heard the laughter earlier on when he saw the miniature in a hallucination (*chronos*) and at times he himself bursts into such a terrifying laughter. On the two final pages we read about a bent old man with a jar under his arms:

‘He burst into a hollow, grating laugh, of a quality to make the hairs on one’s body stand on end. The moment I made a move, he slipped out through the doorway.’¹⁴⁷

An anomaly appears in the surreal image the moment mouth and door fuse. Images of respectively the mouth and the door aggrandize and meet. The temporary displacement of these part-objects, signals how molecular and volatile the diegetic world of the narrator has become. With time and space out of (fixed) shape, the space surrounding the narrator seems to take on a life on its own, as it moves to and fro, contracts and dilates, while impressing his mind. This is especially noticeable after the murder and the dismemberment of his beloved. Displacements of parts of the spiritual repetition onto the environment occur. The murder removes the pressing weight on his chest, but overcome by a melancholic and masochistic need to torture himself, he keeps the jar, which contains the weight, constantly with him. This results in the transposition of the weight on his chest onto his environment.

‘At night my room seemed to contract and to press against my body.’¹⁴⁸

In the wake of the rather short-lived and passionate animation of his soul a more eerie world comes to bedevil his mind. Here he lies down in the coffin space of the hearse with the suit on his chest, while he observes his surroundings:

¹⁴⁵ *The Blind Owl*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁶ Herman, Luc & Vervaeck, Bart (2001) *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*. Antwerpen: Vantilt & VUBPRESS: p. 83.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57 & 114.

‘The walls of the houses, like glowworms, gave forth a dim, sickly radiance.’¹⁴⁹

The dismemberment of her body paves the path for a new kind of coating of his surroundings, an anthropomorphing of the environment wherein an aureole, now a ‘sickly radiance’, surrounds the walls. The coincidence between the animated radiance and the immobility of the wall implies the destruction and subsequent incidental rearrangement of his beloved in the physical world. It echoes the Manichean conceptualization of the divine light as scattered throughout the world, but with a specific, surrealist, twist. *The Blind Owl* ventilates not the co-substantiality of the light and the world, but a confusing temporary conjunction between the two, a passing fusion.

During the narrator’s search for a one on one relation between the disassembled doll and the fleeting world, the inanimate seems to come to life in his delusional world. Hence it becomes hard to clearly distinguish between spiritual repetition, for example sleep paralysis, and its disguise, the bare repetition, for example the old man who laughs without moving his face. The dead surface could as well be the spiritual repetition, while the bare repetition impresses or pulls on this surface, or animates what is locked inside. Nevertheless it would be wrong to conclude *The Blind Owl* halts at a transient, molecular, configuration of the conjunctive synthesis in the surreal image out of an intervention of the expansive drift of his Turkoman foster-sister (schizo-incest) in a *syzygy*. The Turkoman sister does get substituted for the Hindu temple-dancer, his mother. The spiritual repetition of mental images does give way to a neurotic obsession with rehearsal over the same material time and again, yet this repetition hasn’t been caught in a transcendent image reflected upon. The automatism in *The Blind Owl* is direct and uncontained, non-reflective, and thereby stresses becoming and difference, let’s say for the sake of clarity its disguise, bare repetition.¹⁵⁰

3.3. The Spiritual Automaton in *The Blind Owl*.

In *The Blind Owl* the inclination towards automated movement and compulsion seems to be embodied in the automated doll, who, in a state of somnambulism, enters his room. She figures as a ‘mechanical copy of the dark lady of courtly romance’, ‘a terrifying, inhuman partner’ comparable to the character Olympia in Hoffmann’s story “The Sandman”. The narrator is convinced she has come to surrender her body to him. Free from decay, the narrator gazes upon a pure and luminous state of immortality.¹⁵¹ With the traditional feminine counterpart effectively transformed into a soulless automaton, driven by unknown, non-divine forces, her movements come forth as ‘involuntary’ and spooky.¹⁵² As a fusion

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55.

¹⁵¹ Botting, Fred (2008) *Limits of horror. Technology, bodies, Gothic*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press: p. 125.

¹⁵² *The Blind Owl.*, p. 26.

between spirit and machine, her psychic automatism is bound up with both divine immortality and material determinism. The make-up of this automaton characterizes the divine as being fully embedded in material immanence, while material determinism is presented as dependent upon a gap, which constitutes a dissymmetry, and the forces unleashed by it. Due to the absence of a transcendent order, the automated movement is direct and not reflected upon, for it cannot be represented in a fixed category. The bare-repetition, the product of the neurotic-incest with the Hindu mother, is the disguise of the repetition of the spiritual images along the vertical, diachronous, dimension. Here the 'same life' the narrator leads, gives way to the experience of an immediate and unpredictable form of automation out of an absolute ego-loss, a form of automation that interacts with the accidental:

'When I stood up I began automatically to walk. The whole countryside was silent and peaceful. I walked on, completely unaware of my surroundings. Some force beyond my control compelled me to keep moving. I (...) glided along as the girl in black had done.'¹⁵³

And:

'I felt however that if once I were to leave my hand to its own resources it would begin to function spontaneously, impelled by some mysterious motive force of its own, without my being able to influence or master its movements, and that if I had not constantly kept careful watch of my body and automatically controlled it, it would have been capable of doing things which I did not in the least expect.'¹⁵⁴

The distance between inner content and outer expression, which marks the estrangement from himself, gives him the impression of a world that remains 'infinitely remote'.¹⁵⁵ Spiritual repetition of the mental images, mixed with a field of immanence, here causes the narrator to get stuck inside as he resides under a rash, automated and dead surface. As an automated being his automated thought attaches itself time and again to what the narrator calls at some point in the novel 'a limited stock of spiritual resources inherited from previous generations.'¹⁵⁶ The repetition of this limited stock of images here takes on a life of its own. Thought attaches itself to the surface, but once attached to it the narrator stays unable to create meaning out of it. Without the reciprocity between thought and its image, a repetition perceived but not reflected upon, the narrator remains deprived of any existential purpose.¹⁵⁷ The mythic child-murder is such an image or resource which turns into a worn-out cliché

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.84.

¹⁵⁷ Lambert, Gregg (2012) *In Search of a New Image of Thought: Gilles Deleuze and Philosophical Expressionism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: p. 156.

by being projected onto a dead screen, where every movement is forced into the mould of a psycho-mechanical framework.

The narrator seems to kiss himself the moment he sensuously kisses the lips of ‘the bitch’s little brother’ with his ‘soulless Turkoman face’, a face that resembles the ‘image of the bitch’.¹⁵⁸ Before he has had the experience that he has become a child:

‘On this occasion I was convinced that I had become a child again and that I was lying in the cradle.’

And:

‘Then I would have the sensation that I was still a child and that inside me there was a second self which felt sorry for this child who was about to die.’¹⁵⁹

Out of this complex web of repetition, doubles and metamorphosis I conclude that by murdering his wife, he has killed the child and thereby he has committed suicide, which fulfils his desire for numbness, for amnesia. He transforms into his uncle who does not recognize the child, which implies he does not recognize himself (as he transforms both into his uncle and into the child). Yet this repetition of the image of the child-murder does not match with the division between a segment of adulthood and a segment of childhood drawn in *The Conference of the Birds*. With Attar the divide between innocence and terror, which corresponds to the divide between childhood and adulthood, is bound up with a chronological becoming. One enters adulthood after childhood, and only the memory of one’s own childhood, an earlier point in life, may give rise to a bond of ‘friendship’. In *The Blind Owl* the divisional lines between these stages are instead completely scrambled:

‘My morbid condition had created within me a new world, a strange indistinct world of shapes and colours and desires of which a healthy person could have no conception. (...) I felt that I had become a child again. At this very moment as I write I experience those sensations. They belong, all of them, to the present. They are not an element of the past.’¹⁶⁰

Becoming slips between past and future, and in this presence the distinction between adulthood and childhood is absent and the narrator enters into a mode of a polymorphous becoming in ‘a zone of proximity and indiscernibility, a no-man’s land’.¹⁶¹ In *The Blind Owl* the whole process unfolds under the surface of a molar and despotic mechanical movement which causes it to come forth as a division that occurs purely within himself. This division in himself cannot break through the motive force on

¹⁵⁸ *The Blind Owl*, pp. 137-138.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84 & 100.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁶¹ *ATP.*, p. 342.

the surface, instead it is ruled by it. Divorced from the world, the narrator perceives himself and the senses that run through 'a strange compound of incompatible elements' while these compounds commit a heedless act of murder.¹⁶² It is as if a film unfolds before his eyes while he watches himself going through the process of committing a child-murder, without any ability to interfere with the process itself.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

4. Conclusion.

Through the comparative application of the three syntheses in Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* I have tried to elucidate the way *The Blind Owl* lays bare and profits from what lies beneath the metaphysical cloud of representation in traditional Persian literature. By travelling to the source of what comes before the casting of enigmatic images into a bi-univocal or a polyvocal model, namely the gap in the stream, I argued how, in this constellation, paradoxical forces enter and constitute the three syntheses. Produced by the dissymmetrical gap in-between the two antagonistic characters, both spiritual and its disguised form, the bare repetition, enter the scene as a-causal abstractions and their causal exposition. Just as the force of attraction, the proliferation of a flow of desiring-production, and the force of repulsion, the inhibition of this flow, linear time, *chronos* and the obscure form of cyclic time, *aion*, battle for supremacy.

Within the *Conference of the Birds* the linear progression towards oblivion unfolds relatively unhindered, for the paradoxical, and thereby disrupting, forces become caught in a transcendent realm where an unworldly transconscious awareness perceives. Nonetheless the conjunction between incompatible elements is deemed of a "higher" nature and thereby categorizes textual elements retroactively. Within *The Blind Owl* a continuous oscillation between different rebirths disrupts the linear chain of thought of the narrator. We come to know what lies behind this cyclic movement through rebirths, namely the paradoxical forces unleashed by the stream. The linear chain of thought is confronted with a disruption of two sorts: the paradoxical forces of the stream themselves and their outflow, the gap or oblivion between rebirths and their characterizing spiritual repetitions. Though the narrators realization of former cycles of rebirth causes uplifting experiences, each cycle participates in and stands in a reciprocal relation with the polyvocal becoming on the cycle of the narrator in the present, which causes a psychic dissolution. In combination with the paradoxical forces of attraction and repulsion it causes the narrator to drown in a complex web of rotating and interacting blocks of space-time. In this meaningless world different blocks contract and dilate, entangle, untangle and reconnect. What appears is a surreal landscape wherein distant realities temporarily fuse. With the construction of the surreal image and its underlying focus on repetition, the novel drags a pre-Islamic culture, through the era of Islamic mysticism (the *qalandar* attitude) into the present, where repetition results in a process of automation.

In regard to my research I wonder if it would be possible to arrive at a more detailed analysis on the reciprocity of immanence and transcendence on the basis of a more technical (narratological) analysis of time and space in the novel. At the same time I have the impression there lies more behind the construction of a surreal image than a field of forces made about by attraction and repulsion. Can we point at specific forces that make that the unexpected and bewildering surreal image differs from, for example, a more regulated interaction of elements in a Manichean or Buddhist field of

immanence? The complex interaction between cultures, which is reflected in *The Blind Owl*, guarantees there will be no straightforward answer to the problem of meaning in Hedayat's novel.

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