Narrating Demons, Transformative Texts
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Rereading Genius in Mid-Century Modern Fictional Memoir

DANIEL T. O’HARA
To Jonathan Arac, Paul Bove, and Donald Pease:

Brothers!
The separable meanings of each word . . . are here brought into one. And as they come together, as the reader’s mind finds cross-connection after cross-connection between them, he seems, in becoming more aware of them, to be discovering not only Shakespeare’s meaning [in Venus and Adonis], but something which he, the reader, is himself making. His understanding of Shakespeare is sanctioned by his own activity in it. As Coleridge says: “You feel him to be a poet, inasmuch as for a time he has made you one—an active creative being.”

—I. A. Richards,

*Coleridge on the Imagination* (1934, 1960)
Brand X

I have always been in love with Brand X. As a kid I'd see those commercials with the brand name TV set right beside Brand X: The crystal clear picture next to the snowy one—which to me was really more starry—the way it looks in your head after hitting your elbow. Who'd ever want to buy a product like that? Which is partially why I've loved Brand X.

But my father may have expressed the better reason best: "Brand X lets you tinker with it"—to repair, to improve—as though endlessly customizing.

But Zenith (the best set then) once it went it went all at once—as with a model atomic flash—nothing like Brand X: Trying out both, we made the perverse choice.
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I BEGAN WORKING on this book project some thirty years ago after noticing how the tropes and techniques intimately associated with modernism—irony, parody, unreliable point of view—while still present and active in certain “big” or important novels of the post-war period no longer determined the way to read them. The three “classics” or canonical novels of this kind, all fictional memoirs—not just as it turns out—are *Doctor Faustus* (1947), *Lolita* (1955), and *Naked Lunch* (1959), the subjects of my readings here. Two of these became iconic for post-war American culture, and the third definitively identified Nazism with the Devil. An old cultural icon resuscitated then, and two newly minted ones. Teaching and researching these novels, transformative of the idea of genius, of culture, of the literary, over this long period finally let me feel comfortable writing about them.

Because I grew up during the time now-dubbed mid-century modern, my first idea, many offshoots of which still remain, was to focus on what the epigraphic poem of mine calls “Brand X culture.” Kitsch and classic merge to become all one incredibly vulgar pop culture that we like, perversely enough, because we can play with it and customize it to our liking. Certainly, the “progress” in this direction can be read in my selection of iconic texts, *Naked Lunch* being a collective product if ever there was one.
But there were those nagging questions of point of view, of irony, of parody, of pastiche, of modernism and postmodernism. And then it hit me: these three influential novels, the first a perfected model for how to do the great novel as a fictional memoir, the other two presenting new models of what counts as “normally” human as narrated by the excluded themselves, always sounded in their key moments entirely sincere. This is not to claim that there are no previous examples of such things. Frankenstein and The Confessions of an Opium Eater come immediately to mind. But the latter, neither in its time nor in ours, became a widespread permanent cultural icon, and the former did so in our time only because of its film adaptations.

The more I thought about my select group of novels, the more I focused on the culture of genius they instantiated and sought to revise. The other side of Brand X culture is the worship of genius, of the Zenith TV set over the Dumont. During the first half of the Cold War, for all the obvious historical reasons, U.S. culture aimed to produce geniuses in all fields. As the Nobel Prizes piled up for America, especially in literature—Buck (1936), O’Neill (1938), Eliot (1948), Faulkner (1950), Hemmingway (1954), Steinbeck (1962)—writers competed to be recognized as a genius even as the idea lost its remaining intellectual substance in Brand X culture. So why, then, did the writers of the time choose to narrate the fictional lives of such characters as a somewhat reluctant Satan worshipper (Adrian Leverkuhn) who deliberately contracts syphilis to force his diseased brain into the state of genius; a psychopathic pedophilic kidnapper (Humbert Humbert), who claims that Lolita is a demonic nymphet and he himself is a hapless genius seduced by her; and a homicidal/suicidal-gay-drug-addict-part-time detective (William Lee)? They did so because the international culture of genius they were hardwired by was turbocharged—to mix metaphors appropriately—by America (Mann lived in LA while composing Doctor Faustus) which celebrated and catered to genius, and they were driven to try to blow up that culture from within by including in their fictional memoirs the very kinds of characters America defined as aberrant and dangerous. Genius itself was aberrant and dangerous, not to mention the tendencies and experiences they themselves may have known all too well. The cost of genius, if it exists, they knew by their rueful pursuit of it, was high.

The theory of the great writer and the masterpiece, of the imagina-
tive genius, that dominated the period is best summarized by Lionel Trilling, as I present it in the introductory first chapter. Essentially, it is that the great writer both in himself and in his masterpiece—yes, it is an all-male affair, I’m afraid—contain a greater portion, a more intense concentrate, of the culture’s oppositions and conflicts and represent them as such: the great Yes and the great No, of the writer’s historical moment. How the great writer or genius resolves or reconciles these conflicts and oppositions is in an imaginative dialectical synthesis, a kind of *noblesse oblige* on the part of the genius. In his masterpiece, he gives to us a perfected expression of usually tragic insight into the human condition via his identification with his less-than-adequate modern hero. Joyce is the model for this action, as Trilling sees it, but we certainly can think of many other examples. What better way for Mann, Nabokov, and Burroughs to explode this culture of genius from within than to make their eloquently self-destructive “heroes” the criminally insane?

But what about a positive view of genius to replace Trilling’s and the culture’s? For that, I have turned to Spinoza. Yes, I know: Spinoza? Really? I had read Spinoza first nearly fifty years ago in college, then again during the late 1980s and early 1990s when there was a Spinoza boomlet largely due to Deleuze’s influence, and recently in a reading group setting with colleagues and graduate students. I remembered this time around the great book by Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheistic Tradition* (1969), which I read in graduate school. What struck me this time around with Spinoza was how much the *Ethics*, despite its geometrical method and rationalist goals, read like a romantic heterocosm, that would-be textual whole that is really a fragment of the literary system or absolute analyzed so well by Lacouthe-Labarthes and Nancy. It was Spinoza’s cosmology of the literary universe, as it were, except that Spinoza thought it was less a cosmology than an instance of the cosmos and its God at work that the *Ethics* proposes. But to me, a confirmed Nietzschean, every text is a would-be heterocosm, an other-world with its own “god” or genius permeated throughout it and the expression of the highest power-state known to the writer in question. Such being the case, then, every word of that textual world is meant as part of that world, especially as the idea of transcendence fades and that of immanence grows. Horizontal relations of all kinds replace vertical hierarchies with a vengeance, globally. Rather than each text, certainly each masterpiece, composing differences into
hierarchical structures of binary oppositions atop which sits the author-figure projected by the text like a vision of the traditional creator-god over his world, we now have, as Spinoza puts apropos his metaphysics their identification, *Deus sive Natura*. All the distinctions existing in previous hierarchies reappear as versions of activity (*Natura naturans*) and passivity (*Natura naturata*) within an ever-spreading field of power, pleasure, and potential blessedness via greater knowledge of the field. However bizarre it may sound, I saw that the last two novels here especially instantiate such a vision, and the first novel, while closing down the last modernist vision of hierarchy, also opens up the new vista. The reason why I only begin putting Spinoza explicitly to work with *Lolita* and *Naked Lunch*, and not with *Doctor Faustus*, lies here. Whether we think of these texts as new stars in the firmament or as new black holes, there they are: to be read as best we can.
TO ALAN SINGER for his continued support and critical powers of reading and to the other members of the Spinoza reading group, especially Phillip Mahoney and Michelle Martin, I express my profound gratitude. To my friends and boundary 2 colleagues to whom this book is dedicated I owe the best that is in me or my work: endless shared imagination.

A different version of the second chapter has appeared in Soundings 93, 1–2 (Spring/Summer 2010), 601–24.
DeRRiD a’S ReCeNT deconstructive version of genius is so much like his paradoxical theory of the gift (to be a gift it dare not seem to give) that it does not generally help illuminate any specific understanding of genius. His stress on its event character, however, does serve. In its long history, the idea of genius takes on many forms, but all of them testify to the sudden, unexpected manifestation of genius. This is so whether one means by the term the guardian spirit or daemon (daimon in Greek) attached to a person at birth and symbolized by one’s guiding star in astrology; or if one means a power or ability, a capacity beyond the ordinary identified as one’s own and found in what we have produced or done. Sometimes, of course, one’s daemon or genius is not good but evil, not a special creation of God or the gods (like guardian angels or geni loci) but the soul of an illustrious dead man (usually) bent imperiously on working off his guilt or fulfilling unfulfilled designs via the person with whom the ghost shares a psyche—Hamlet’s father’s “Remember me” with a vengeance. Whatever the case may be, when genius bursts forth it realizes virtue in the old Renaissance sense, a power of invention and act that is swift and decisive whether in art or politics.¹

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DERRIDA’S RECENT deconstructive version of genius is so much like his paradoxical theory of the gift (to be a gift it dare not seem to give) that it does not generally help illuminate any specific understanding of genius. His stress on its event character, however, does serve. In its long history, the idea of genius takes on many forms, but all of them testify to the sudden, unexpected manifestation of genius. This is so whether one means by the term the guardian spirit or daemon (daimon in Greek) attached to a person at birth and symbolized by one’s guiding star in astrology; or if one means a power or ability, a capacity beyond the ordinary identified as one’s own and found in what we have produced or done. Sometimes, of course, one’s daemon or genius is not good but evil, not a special creation of God or the gods (like guardian angels or geni loci) but the soul of an illustrious dead man (usually) bent imperiously on working off his guilt or fulfilling unfulfilled designs via the person with whom the ghost shares a psyche—Hamlet’s father’s “Remember me” with a vengeance. Whatever the case may be, when genius bursts forth it realizes virtue in the old Renaissance sense, a power of invention and act that is swift and decisive whether in art or politics.¹
A key to understanding the secular culture of genius at mid-century is to recognize that there is a consensus about what in art, in literature especially, the imagination of the great writer does. Modernist and New Critical adaptations of Coleridge on the imagination and the action of the poet, ideally considered; or dialectical models derived from Marx or Hegel; or Freudian conceptions of creative daydreaming and sublimation—all demonstrate how mid-century intellectuals, particularly in the U.S., conceive of great writers as powerful or “first-rate minds” containing, so as to incorporate in their works, the binary oppositions splitting and conflicting the culture. Lionel Trilling in “Reality in America” (an essay originally in two parts published in 1940 and 1946 and then revised for inclusion in The Liberal Imagination in 1950) lays out the consensus view of what the great writer, the genius, accomplishes via his work for a culture.²

A culture is not a flow, nor even a confluence; the form of its existence is struggle, or at least debate—it is nothing if not a dialectic. And in any culture there are likely to be certain artists who contain a large part of the dialectic within themselves, their meaning and power lying in their contradictions; they contain within themselves, it may be said, the very essence of the culture, and the sign of this is that they do not submit to serve the ends of any one ideological group or tendency. It is a significant circumstance of American culture, and one which is susceptible of explanation, that an unusually large proportion of its notable writers in the nineteenth century were such repositories of the dialectic of their times—they contained both the yes and the no of their culture, and by that token they were prophetic of the future. (76)

Whether this containment policy model of genius echoes prophetically what becomes the geo-politics of the U.S. vis-à-vis the Soviet Union after 1947 is an interesting question to explore on another occasion. But what it does mean is that whether at the level of literary texture or structure, or in terms of psycho-biographical reading of the literary work, the great writer or genius internalizes in imaginative terms, pregnant with a future, the conflicts of the cultural moment. One-time fellow traveling social critics, New Critics, and psychoanalytic critics can all agree on this containment of conflict formulation of the culture of genius.

One word missing from Trilling’s brilliant formulation, of course, is
“resolution.” How does—if he does—the great writer resolve or reconcile the conflicting oppositions marking the works of genius? The resolution that Trilling assumes in his readings for most of his representative critical career is not fully articulated until his 1967 commentary on Joyce’s “The Dead.”

Trilling agrees with commentators who read Gabriel Conroy as a prototype for that particularly modern creature, the person with considerable imagination but little of the power of execution required to produce a work of genius, perhaps not even for mediocre work. Trilling, like Hugh Kenner, reads Joyce as filleting his protagonist with irony after irony, not the least of ironies being the final revelation that his wife, Greta, after whom he now lusts as they are bedding down for the night in a Dublin hotel room, is all the time thinking of young tubercular Michael Furey, her first lover, whom she still believes died for his love of her by standing outside her room and serenading her on a rainy night before she is to go away to convent school, now so many years ago.

The conflict within the international class of modern intellectuals between the admiration and emulation of genius and its imaginative power of achievement is represented for Conroy by this crushing failure of his power to love Greta enough to overcome this ghost of the past. Yet, Trilling goes on to argue, against any finally ironic reading of “The Dead” and more in line with Richard Ellmann’s more positive biographical reading, that Joyce, in the last paragraphs of the story, particularly in the last paragraph, grants to Gabriel such a greater power of vision and poetic expression that it can only be a gift of his creator’s own genius.

This sudden identification of the author with his character is one of the most striking and effective elements of the story. Joyce feels exactly what Conroy feels about the sadness of human life, its terrible nearness to death, and the waste that every life is; he directs no irony upon Conroy’s grief, but makes Conroy’s suffering his own, with no reservations whatever. At several points in the story he has clearly regarded Conroy’s language, or the tone of his thoughts, as banal, or vulgar, or sentimental. But as the story approaches its conclusion, it becomes impossible for us to know whose language we are hearing, Conroy’s or the author’s, or to know to whose tone of desperate sorrow we are responding. It is as if Joyce, secure in his genius and identity, were saying that under the aspect of the imagination of death and death-in-life there is no difference
between him and the mediocre, sentimental man of whom he has been writing. (117)

The liberal culture of genius entails for its maintenance that its great writers take upon themselves, contain within themselves, its strident conflicts, and in their works resolve them imaginatively, for a moment, by magnanimously granting to that culture's most ironically representative men—mediocre, sentimental all—some measure of their creative power of language, as in such visions of the snow being “general all over Ireland,” which famously concludes “The Dead.”

Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes. He had never felt like that himself towards any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love. The tears gathered more thickly in his eyes and in the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself, which these dead had one time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling.

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.5

Coleridge's vision of the imagination and of the poet's ideal activity are evoked for the mid-century modern critic by Trilling's reading of this vision, as is Saint Paul's vision of Jesus reconciling the conflicts of life via his sacrificial act of salvation. And the demand that the great writer put
his genius to work in just this fashion, incorporating and containing all conflicts—between the ideal and the real, the general and the particular, the universal and the individual, passion and reason, the creative elite and those leading lives of quiet desperation, and so on—means that the genius is also a saint, suffering these conflicts by containing and resolving them as here envisioned.

This vision of the creative imagination working at full tilt always reminds me of the scene in *Rebel without a Cause* (1955) when James Dean, in response to his parents’ bickering in the police station over his latest infraction of the law, screams at them, “You are tearing me apart!” Trilling’s severe demand, placed upon the would-be great writer or artist, can only lead in the final analysis to forms of crack-up all too familiar to us from post-Romantic literary history generally and American literary history in particular. Whether we think of the long tradition of the *poète maudit* or its more recent “lost generation” or “Jazz Age” versions, or look forward to prime examples from the Beat or Countercultural generations, we see the evident consequences of aspiring to genius within this cultural moment. The best minds of generation after generation are lost to their “madness.”

Moreover, when the conflicts that the genius is to represent and imaginatively express in an ideal form of reconciliation or resolution, predictive of the future, are totally intractable, so that the culture itself can fairly be judged to be “mad,” it is expected that its supposedly more-than-human, or daemonically imaginative, artists may not just expire in the attempt to write but turn positively daemonic themselves, not only increasingly against the culture but against themselves in their failures to measure up. Loathing of their culture and of themselves becomes the double-bind legacy of this mid-century modern vision of the imaginative genius.

The most important unintended consequence of this consensus vision of magnanimously ironic containments of conflict for the culture of genius is that despite the warnings, perhaps because of them, of such novels as *Doctor Faustus* about the dubious ideal of genius and its mad breakthroughs at all cost, whether on the individual or national level, the bitterly self-loathing would-be geniuses emerging at this time could readily identify with those aspects of themselves that made them, from the established point of view, unfit to be representative of so-called normal society. The supposedly psychopathic pedophile, the gay and apparently homicidal dope-fiend, like the musical genius making a deal
with the devil himself, can become the new sublime figures of imaginative power regardless of whether they serve any discernible prophetically representative or creatively expressive cultural purposes or not. Of course, such purposes can always be discovered if the critic works hard enough. *Lolita* and *Naked Lunch* most readily lent themselves to liberal campaigns at the time to expand the range of acceptable representations of sexual matters. My readings of them, however, focus on the theory of the imagination that is not a version of that dominating the period. Nor is it one that I have seen discussed subsequently. What follows is a theory elaborated out of these works and consolidated by my reading of Spinoza.

Why Spinoza? His is the most radical theory of immanence ever. There is no principle of transcendence anywhere in the system of his *Ethics*.\(^6\) Spinoza’s conatus provides the key: only that which enhances our powers and capacities to persist in existence is good; all else is evil. Such spontaneous expression is a singular act. It is, I would argue, genius; all else is external determination alien to our natures. Conatus, the striving for existence and its singular persistence in any instance, is perfected in the self-work appropriate to each form of being. Just as every being is the actualization of Nature or God, so too every self-work as a text is the actualization of a singular conatus in its creation of a world.

God is our model here. He is absolutely free as the perfect expression of all his attributes in all their modes in the world or Nature: he is pure act and is not really—only analytically—distinguishable from his power in action. Our intellectual love of God, the highest form of creativity, is our emulation of such freedom in our lives, seeking to express what arises spontaneously from within ourselves and to defend against what would limit us from doing so. This democratic sense of genius as absolute expression available potentially to all replaces the Trilling sense of representative man and his self-sacrificing noblesse oblige.

Spinoza’s *Ethics* is an instance of what it enunciates. It isn’t a representation but an expression. It is what it performs, an instance of its vision. The immanence of God in Nature so that *Deus sive Natura* is its motto is itself performed by the author’s immanence in the text. The self-work is what this book or this world is for the respective agencies that are their acts of expression. The name of author or of God is the name of the state of creation in these cases. It is the fullest, highest, most blessed state of joy or pleasure in power in action.

We can have sensuous knowledge of a text that is impressionistic at
worst, incomplete at best; we can understand its context and compositional elements, which is better; but we intuit the principles of its formation into the whole that it is. Genre and convention, like reference, remain at the level of imagination and understanding but do not reach into the region where the existence, the conatus of the self-work, forms itself and acts.

The self-work is God in miniature, an infinite of a scope different from that of God or Nature as a whole but still an infinite. We can know it only finitely, even when we intuit its principle of formation, because we cannot know or execute all its modes of actualization. If God is the Genius of his self-work named Nature (or World), then the author is the genius of the self-work of the text. In fact, the composite neologism “self-world-work” would best express what is at stake. The self-work is the repeated creation of the world.

Of course, the history of contemporary criticism and theory since mid-century is one in which the author is said to die into the text. But my theory assumes that this recent development has been the case from the beginning—there never was transcendence, only immanence. The author is each word in its place in the text. Like God—or Nature—with infinite attributes and modes, the author is the text and all that it summons forth.

What this would mean for the ending of “The Dead” is that Trilling unnecessarily manufactures distinctions. The imaginative power of language extended throughout the body of the text condenses itself into what is comparatively a visionary focal point to conclude, bringing beautifully together the story’s major themes in ever-softenling crescendo, like the perversely sublime conclusion of “A Day in the Life.” We can name this power of expression Joyce or Joyce via Gabriel or the genius of the text—or simply God:

_The mind’s intellectual love toward God is the love of God wherewith God loves himself not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explicited through the essence of the human mind considered under a form of eternity. That is, the mind’s intellectual love toward God is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself._ (157, original italics)

Unlike the Lacanian Big Other of the Symbolic Order, Spinoza’s God is more like that of some schizophrenics, a power of inflowing energies
apparently without cessation. Acts of power. There is no internal screen. Such a God (or Nature) is more like Freud’s Id than like Trilling’s heroically self-sacrificing, magnanimously noble genius. These two models of sublime imagination define the parameters of mid-century modern culture, whether we think of Jackson Pollock or Leonard Bernstein.

Spinoza in the *Ethics* produces a modern philosophical heterocosm that purports to be a model of the cosmos and God’s workings in (and as) it. Spinoza replaces the distinction between God and Nature with their equivalence, *Deus sive Natura*. The geometrical method of argument in the *Ethics* is an instance and demonstration of how the causal necessity works in the universe. The one substance that is *Deus sive Natura* possesses the attributes of both thought and extension in infinite and finite modes, or ways of being. The intellectual love of God is blessedness because it leads to the fullest and highest kind of knowledge and so the greatest mode of power possible for humans. With such knowledge of the laws of Nature and of God (they are of course the same) we can create the conditions that can give us the maximum opportunity to determine our actions solely from internal causes, rather than suffer via our passions from external causes.

There are several major questions debated by commentators: Is Spinoza’s position tantamount to pantheism or atheism? What are the specific relationships among the attributes, and possibly other attributes unknowable by us, modes (infinite and finite), and individual beings? Does the immanence of Spinoza’s position make for a night in which all cows are black, as Hegel charges, repeating his satire of Schelling against Spinoza? Why is immanence a good thing, transcendence not? My concern is not for any of these questions. The theory of genius, of the creative imagination, which I am advocating sees Spinoza’s philosophical system as a template for the kind of heterocosmic imagination that operates in the works of mid-century fictional memoir read here. I will argue in a subsequent book for such a theory as being the best guide to reading the central Romantic and post-Romantic texts from Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Freud and Mann, to the present moment.

What I am claiming and hopefully demonstrating here is that the modern works that achieve canonical status do so because they are new models of literature productive of more literature to come. The analogy would be with new cosmologies, except that to fit my meaning more precisely the latter would have to be new cosmoses too. The closer to being
sui generis, the greater the work. What we read as allusion, irony, parody, pastiche, and so on, is part of our horizon of critical understanding, but the works themselves are entirely sincere and univocal in their construction of their models of literature, making use of whatever is lying around the cultural yard. We do best to read such works literally. Of course, the burden of the book to follow is to make good on these admittedly provocative claims.

A few words in conclusion about the selection of works: *Doctor Faustus* captures the late modernist turn as it emerges into a postmodernism we are now very familiar with. The final twist in the novel occurs when the reader realizes that the humanist narrator, Serenus Zeitblum, may be as much of a devil’s disciple as Adrian Luverkuhn, the sublime musical genius, and yet Mann is entirely sincere about his vision of a hope beyond hopelessness for Germany, for Europe, and for the modern world as a whole. For the reader treads on new ground different from that of the ironic, self-defeating allegories of modern fiction that repeat in a finer, albeit self-reflexive, tone, the models of literature derived from myth and traditional culture à la *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*. Although producing no new model of literature, *Doctor Faustus* does close down the old modernist one, and prepares the opening for what is to come.

Both *Lolita* and *Naked Lunch* achieve iconic cultural status generally and are best read in light of what the theory of genius out of Spinoza that I propose can illuminate. Or so it is what the rest of the book would hope to show.
Chapter 1


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**Chapter 2**

1. All citations from the English version will be to Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkuhn As Told by a Friend*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Vintage, 1997) and hereafter given in the text.

2. I am, of course, referring to Fredric Jameson, but also to Alan Wilde and William V. Spanos, among others. For an interesting but opposing view on the oppositions in the novel, see Jameson, “Allegory and History: Rereading Doctor Faustus,” *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 91–123.


8. For the German edition, see Thomas Mann, Doktor Faustus (Frankford am Main, Germany: S. Fischer Verlag, 2007). All citations to the German edition will be from this text. For the industrious, there is a supplementary volume of over 1,000 pages of critical annotations.

9. For Death in Venice, see Thomas Mann, Stories of Three Decades, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Knopf, 1936). Citations are from this text. There are other, new translations, but none yet by John E. Woods, the preferred English translator by far. Here is one of the most recent ones: Thomas Mann, Death in Venice, trans Michael Henry Heim, introduction by Michael Cunningham (New York: Harper/Collins, 2004).


11. Thomas Mann, “Freud and the Future,” in his Essays of Three Decades, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Knopf, 1947), pp. 411–28. All citations are from this translation. For an excellent contemporary development of the utopian hopes for psychoanalysis in a more tragic humanistic vein, see Abraham Drassinower, Freud’s Theory of Culture: Eros, Loss, and Politics (Lanham and New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003. Of course, Freud’s theory of the death-instinct or drive is that an individual and a society can develop via the formation of a conscience as a pure culture of the death-instinct. What explanatory power such


13. See Bove, “Misprisions.”


16. See Lee’s and Fetzer’s books cited above.


18. I want to thank Gina MacKenzie, Michelle Martin, and Alan Singer for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter. I have been especially helped by Ms. Martin’s comments and by her work on the modern novel and Georges Bataille’s theory of “the accursed share.”

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**Chapter 3**


2. The Nabokov industry contributes mightily to this perception of their author, but it has also been wonderfully helpful. What follows are the list of books and articles most helpful to me:


(epecially useful in these books are the essays by Brian Boyd, John Burt Foster, Jr., Ellen Pifer, and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney); Julian W. Connolly, ed., *A Reader’s Guide to Lolita* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009); Jane Grayson, *Arnold


a new world, so that the first thing we should do is to study that new world as closely as possible, approaching it as something brand new, having no obvious connection with the worlds we already know.” The other texts by Nabokov cited in this essay are _Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited_ (New York: Vintage, 1967); and _Strong Opinions_ (New York: Vintage, 1990).


6. For a discussion of this topic, see my _The Romance of Interpretation: Visionary Criticism from Pater to De Man_ (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).


8. Michael L. Morgan, ed., _The Essential Spinoza: Ethics and Related Writings_ , trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2006). All citations to this edition will be given hereafter in my text. For a clarifying if at points problematic essay on intuition in Spinoza, see Syliane Malinowski-Charles, “The Circle of Adequate Knowledge,” _Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy_ , Vol. 1, ed. Daniel Garber and Steven Nadler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 139–63. This commentator argues that traditional views of intuition in Spinoza, especially in Anglo-American and French contexts, have only recently been properly corrected. Malinowski-Charles claims that intuition, the third kind of knowledge like God’s, is based in reason, and the second kind, even as it and reason are separated from the first kind, knowledge of the senses is determined by the imagination. I agree that intuition is knowledge of the essence of a particular thing, but it is also knowledge of the whole in the light of eternity, that is, of the processes of being in all their phases in an instant of time: God’s knowledge. This intellectual intuition is like neither the sensuous imagination nor the calculating reason, but instead it is indeed a distinctly third kind of knowledge, that of being in all its phases, like the summary-histories of sub-atomic particulars that the mathematical formulas of quantum physics make possible to envision. This is why Spinoza sometimes speaks of intuition as being knowledge of the mind of God. Given that this mind is infinite, for a finite being to have such potent knowledge, even for an instant, is surely a risky proposition, as well as what Spinoza stressed, that accession to power that a divine joy.

9. See explained Nabokov’s similar idea, “the springboard of parody,” in the article by that title by Appel listed in note 2. For my discussion of Nietzsche on this topic, see my _The Art of Reading as a Way of Life: On Nietzsche’s Truth_ (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009).

10. See my _The Art of Reading as a Way of Life: On Nietzsche’s Truth_.

11. For a discussion of this topic, see my _Visions of Global America and the_
Future of Critical Reading (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2009).

12. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see my Lionel Trilling: The Work of Liberation cited previously.

Chapter 4


4. For Spinoza, see Rebecca Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity* (New York: Schocken, 2006); John Leslie, *Infinite Minds: A Philosophical Cosmology* (New York: Oxford, 2003); Michael L. Morgan, ed., *The Essential Spinoza: Ethics and Related Writings*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006). Leslie’s vision is remarkably akin to Gilles Deleuze’s in his works on Spinoza, but simply clearer for an English-speaking audience. My assumption here is that Burroughs, despite sounding like a latter-day Gnostic, especially in his later work, is an immanentist and that his God is split but one, and one with Nature, rather than two, an evil and incompetent Demiurge and an Alien God beyond existence whose Son must somehow mediate between him and us. In short, like Spinoza, Burroughs’s God is the name for that highest state of energy that one may knowingly enjoy without dying or going mad for good. The coincidence via intuition between the finite human mind and the infinite mind of God is thus ever a risky but seductively dangerous proposition: knowledge thus is power and *jouissance*. 


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