

Crowd Theory in Some Modern Fiction: Dickens, Zola and Canetti, 1841-1960

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines some perceptions of collective behaviour and psychology in some nineteenth and twentieth century literature. Focusing on selected works by three novelists, Charles Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), Emile Zola's *Germinal* (1885) and Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé* (1935), it is an attempt to analyse the cultural representations of the nature, psychology and behaviour of crowds from 1841-1960.

We attempt to contextualize the models of the crowd present in each novel and the interpenetration of the development of crowd theory and political experience. We also evaluate the novelists' attitudes towards the crowd and the implications of their approaches for public policy. We argue that Dickens, failing to distinguish between individual and collective psychology, has a pre-modern perception of the crowd. Zola, placing collective behaviour in a positivist framework presents a modern view of the crowd psychology that prefigures in essentials the classical crowd theory of Le Bon. Canetti, questioning the approach of received crowd theory, and the traditional presumption that the crowd is necessarily unconscious, instinctual and anti-social, presents a post-modern interpretation of the crowd which corresponds to the highly original insights of his crowd monograph, *Crowds and Power*.

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for certain works that are often referred to:

ADF	<i>Auto-da-Fé</i>	Canetti
BR	<i>Barnaby Rudge</i>	Dickens
CP	<i>Crowds and Power</i>	Dickens
CW	<i>The Conscience of Words</i>	Canetti
GE	<i>Germinal</i>	Zola
TTC	<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	Dickens

General Introduction

The specific purpose of this thesis is to study how collective behaviour and social psychology are perceived and treated in some nineteenth and twentieth century literature. It is an attempt to examine how cultural visions of the crowd derived from psychological theory and political experience are manifested in fiction.

In spite of the fact that "crowds" have always existed, the explicit, self-conscious, theoretical preoccupation with the "psychology of the crowd" is relatively recent, dating from the 1870's. The study of the crowd has been frequently undertaken in an academic perspective. However, the attempt to explore the visions of the crowd articulated through other cultural productions remains incomplete. Literature constitutes in this sense a neglected but fruitful area for the study of the representation of the crowd. There have been a few attempts to examine the crowd theme in separate novels, but these efforts remain isolated and limited in scope. Particularly lacking is a comparative study of the crowd in literature, covering a larger historical period. The current work focusing on selected works of three novelists, Charles Dickens, Emile Zola and Elias Canetti is an attempt to cover this gap.

A critical assessment of the crowd model in Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), Zola's *Germinal* (1885) and Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé* (1935), done from a comparative stand-point, will reveal different approaches to collective behaviour and social psychology in different political contexts and their relationship with the development of the crowd theory from the early nineteenth century up to the first half of this century. Our investigation has been organized around three major topics: i) the Enlightenment and Anti-Enlightenment theoretical framework in which the debate about the crowd can be placed; ii) the imagery,

models and patterns of the crowd which emerge from each novel against what is arguably the current view of the crowd in each epoch; iii) and the internal theme of crowd theory leadership implied by each writer and its implications for political structures and processes.

The Enlightenment and Anti-Enlightenment Argument

Crowd theory had its origin in the intellectual response to Enlightenment and rationalist thought as well as to the French Revolution. English libertarian and later utilitarians thinkers and particularly French philosophers and Encyclopedists of the eighteenth century advanced the notion of the individual as rational, free, autonomous and self-conscious - in opposition to which the conception of the crowd was set. To the philosophers of the Enlightenment themselves, the crowd seemed not to constitute a separate theoretical problem, since it was believed that the crowd mind was not essentially different from that of the individual. The crowd was uneducated, having a kind of credulous and superstitious mind. It was exactly this irrational condition, of ignorance and prejudice, that would need to be surpassed, in order that the crowd would stop being a crowd and integrate itself into civilization or take its formal place in the democratic republic. The philosophers of the Enlightenment, regardless of the differences between them, shared the essential belief that, at least theoretically, all men could be eventually led to rationality and that therefore a peaceful and harmonious society could be achieved in the long run.

In the nineteenth century, the Enlightenment project and its endorsement of rational values for all men was tested and challenged in many different ways. The "mind of the crowd" figured as one of these challenges, since it became increasingly evident that the mind of the crowd could not be accommodated within the rational, schematic framework of the mind proposed by Locke. The increasing awareness that the mind of the crowd operated differently from the laws governing individual minds moves towards the perception that improvement in human individuals would not help with the crowd problem. The argument, systematized by Le Bon in 1895, implied that, no matter how enlightened and educated an individual could be, under

certain circumstances he could become part of what Le Bon called the "group mind", acting in ways contrary to his usual conduct, character and beliefs. It was argued that in the crowd man's unconscious atavistic substratum finds release, promoting a shattering of individual consciousness and personality. Freud's topology of the unconscious offered further weight to the "irrational" aspect of the crowd mind, which, being unconscious, could be understood as the opposite of all that was civilized, advanced and progressive. Crowd theory constituted in this sense a decisive criticism of the optimistic suppositions of the Enlightenment about rational citizens and undermined the confidence in a democratic future that would be orderly and peaceful.

Crowd theory was also a reaction against the social, cultural and political changes brought about by the French Revolution: the increasing industrialization, individualism and the breakdown of old ties of community and the vertical integration of society. Thus it was also a reaction to the growing strength of previously unenfranchised social and economic groups that assumed an increasing political role, at times even a revolutionary one. A case can be made that conservative and liberal crowd theorists, and all those who had an interest in the maintenance of the *status quo*, have taken the study of the crowd seriously to discover the source of its strength in order to battle with it more successfully. The possibility of the masses gaining social, economic and political ascendancy demanded not only a new theoretical response but also a new practical politics too. Crowd theory provided a body of psychological laws that confirmed the elites' deepest fears of the masses but it also gave them the possibility of a method for controlling them without the politically and socially expensive use of force. The leader imposed from outside was seen as the solution for putting discipline into the crowd, whose violent energy was not to be dammed but channelled into socially acceptable activities, rituals and established festivals. Whether the charismatic crowd leader was seen to hold the crowd under command by a process of contagion or hypnosis, as maintained by Le Bon, or by a kind of libidinal attraction, as maintained by Freud, the essential belief was that the crowd was the leader's creature.

Crowd theory has its origins primarily on the right and has been successfully integrated into elitist and anti-democratic arguments. However, the perception of crowd phenomena varies, of course, according to different schools of thought in specific historical periods. Alongside the degenerative view of the crowd lies a counter claim for the crowd as a source of creative revolutionary energy. In this perspective, the violence of the crowd is not necessarily despised and it can even be viewed with sympathy, since it may be recognized as a means of radical change. Obviously, what was seen as destructive class revolt, was for others the hope for the future. In the theoretical form given by Marx, crowds are seen as the striking signs of a new form of politics which is specially revealed by the dislocated and pauperized masses mobilized against oppression by capital and bureaucracy. Though the Marxists perspectives have their own view on the crowd¹, they seem to share a common belief with the conservative and liberal doctrines that the crowd is easily manipulable. However, the left doctrines explain the crowd's incoherent behaviour not as an atavistic regression but as a lack of a strong and well-defined class consciousness. The crowd may act in contradiction to its own interests not because it is primitive or "naturally" barbarous, but as a result of the diffuse class consciousness that comes from a class still in the process of formation and which does not have a fully developed consciousness of itself. In the social-democratic perspective, the crowd came also to be seen as a potentially constructive force for reforming social institutions to meet unsatisfied human needs. In this perspective, crowd behaviour tended to be seen as the first step in response to human needs, to the rise of social movements and the establishment of new institutions.

Throughout our work, we will examine how each author perceives crowd phenomena and how he places himself in the general political debate about the crowd. First, we attempt to identity the models of the crowd which emerge from

1. The marxist models, or more generally the theories based on the view that deep-seated conflicts of interest are built into stratified societies, adopt the premise that society is not constituted by isolated individuals, but formed by classes. Rationality was not to be found in autonomous and isolated individuals but in collectivities through their movements in history (class struggle). Therefore, the individual consciousness would then be historically determined.

each novel. We ask how Dickens, Zola and Canetti picture the crowd: the types of crowd represented, who its members are, how it is formed, how it behaves and why it is raised. Secondly, we analyse the value-theories underlining the representation of the crowd in each author. We ask how the psychology of the crowd is understood, the arguments used to explain the transformation of personality in the crowd, the limits and advances of each author in comparison to what is arguably the current view/theory of the crowd. Finally, we explain what each model of the crowd has to do with political experience and its implications for the social structure and political processes.

Crowd Models, Patterns and Symbolisms in Literature and Their Correlation with Crowd Theory

As we will examine in this work, the representation of the crowd in literature derived from psychological theory and political experience was put forth in progressively sophisticated perspectives. In Dickens's time, the first half of the nineteenth century, crowds appear as a sign that society is changing. Either as the working masses swarming into the cities, engaging in class war, taking part in social uprisings or as the people pressing to participate in the ballot, the crowd was showing itself capable of influencing the course of history. The crowd was quickly pushing itself into the centre of the political stage and claiming special attention from the authorities and socially-concerned observers. As we will see in Chapter Two, Dickens becomes more and more aware of the changing political role of the crowd. From *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) to *A Tale of Two Cities* (1856), Dickens moves to the perception that crowds were no longer simply oddities, a string of feverish outbursts and historical accidents but a basic aspect of society. However, the crowd represents for Dickens a very mysterious phenomenon, which escapes any kind of scientific explanation. Up to 1870, the crowd had not yet brought about a science with the exclusive purpose of investigating collective psychology. Not aware that the crowd has a kind of mind of its own, which operates differently from the mechanisms of the individual mind, Dickens is inclined to see the crowd as an aberration, or a mistake, or a distortion of human nature. We will examine how

Dickens, operating within a tradition inherited from Enlightenment, tends to equate the members of the crowd with those who already display a tendency to delinquency or an inclination to evil. The lack of a more precise explanation of the crowd in Dickens in part reflects the lack of a crowd theory at the beginning of last century.

This perspective changes in Zola. From about 1870 onwards the crowd is no longer conceived as something abnormal and random, but becomes a subject of scientific study in its own right. If the threat of the crowd was to be overcome, there had to be some explanation for what was happening. Hippolyte Taine brought forward a theory of political psychopathology of crowds and Scipio Sighele and Gabriel Tarde formulated crowd doctrines from criminal anthropology. The result of scientific investigation was intended not only to understand the crowd but also to find a method of control consonant with the crowd's own nature. Operating in a context in which competing doctrines about the crowd were emerging, Zola shows an awareness that the crowd has a kind of autonomous mind and seeks to understand it as a phenomenon that could be explained scientifically. Motivated by the positivistic method of "naturalism", whose aim was to apply the scientific method of observation and experimentation to the creation of literature, Zola uses various scientific doctrines current in the second half of nineteenth century to validate his representation of the crowd, notably the pessimistic segment of the theory of evolution which suggested the possibility of men's regression to an ancient animal past, the presumption being that physiology has a priority in determining human behaviour, and that vices and other degenerations could be inherited along a breeding line. Zola presents a multifaced outlook on the crowd phenomenon and points to more than one direction that the theory of collective behaviour could follow. Nonetheless, Zola's perspective anticipates in essentials the direction in which crowd theory of the Le Bon kind will go. As we will examine, the devices and structure employed in *Germinal* to represent the crowd correspond to a large extent to key ideas and psychological concepts brought together by Le Bon in *The Crowd* (1895) to constitute the basis for a general theory of the crowd.

The third author, Elias Canetti, represents a peculiar perspective in many ways. Canetti was writing *Auto-da-Fé* in the 1930's, a time by which crowd theory was

already complete and when there was a largely accepted framework for understanding crowd phenomena. This enables Canetti to survey and re-work the entire tradition of crowd theory. Unlike Dickens and Zola, who drew on received ideas to picture collective experience, Canetti sets out to challenge the traditional beliefs on which the crowd theory has been built. Unlike Dickens and Zola who used the realist, historical novel to portray crowd phenomena as observers, Canetti has written a highly introspective novel. In the most developed stages of crowd theory, European theorists moved from regarding the mass as a temporary physical agglomeration to viewing it as a "mental state". Canetti is ultimately concerned with the philosophical, cultural and political implications of that shift. He does work with the traditional concept of crowd as a physical aggregate of people but he also extends the category to include any experience involving real or imaginary crowds, of people, objects, animals or particles. Canetti's era also saw coming true some of the predictions formulated by earlier crowd theory, such as the rise of increasingly powerful leaders and large mass events and wars on a world scale. Not relying on the conventional propositions of received crowd theory to understand political experience, Canetti attempts to furnish the premisses for an innovative way of comprehending crowds, including new crowd concepts, an original typology of crowds and new mechanisms for explaining the psychological patterns of crowd behaviour.

As Canetti is the only novelist selected in this work who made original contributions to the theoretical study of the crowd in his multi-disciplinary monograph, *Crowds and Power* (1960), a different methodology will be applied to the examination of his novel *Auto-da-Fé*. It will be analysed in parallel to received crowd theory and also in the light of the very different insights provided by *Crowds and Power*. Our main argument is that Canetti has changed the style of the crowd novel by changing the nature of the crowd theory. *Auto-da-Fé* can be read as a criticism of the Enlightenment project and all the rationalist tradition in political theory that crowd theory has reacted against. However, Canetti's post-enlightenment critique diverges from the path taken by earlier crowd thinkers by calling into

question their usually deeply felt *a priori* suspicion of most spontaneous collective behaviour.

The concepts of "people", "crowd" "mob" are complex and controversial, and it is difficult to arrive at a precise definition. These terms often have been used interchangeably and without discrimination to refer to an extremely wide variety of phenomena. The "people" was the common eighteenth century term for characterizing the lower classes in opposition to those who were noble, rich and educated. "In terms of social grace the people represented the essence of vulgarity. In terms of mental development the people represented the lowest accomplishments. In terms of economic standing the people represented a social class defined by its dependency on others to give them work" (Payne, 1976:13-14). The "crowd" might designate the people when in a passive state, and so requiring leadership if any common enterprise is to be undertaken, that is, the population manipulated by and directed by an elite. "Crowd" (and later the "masses") may also be used to represent a condition of powerlessness and aimlessness, a deterioration of the individual and a mindless uniformity of behaviour, beliefs and expectations, or a condition in which cultural values and the quality of social life have deteriorated. The "mob", "a highly excited form of crowd" (*Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, X:522), refers to the crowd when it creates disorder and acquires a taste for destructive behaviour. In my work, I have avoided formal definitions, preferring to let the sense of these terms emerge from the writing of a particular novelist or thinker.

Chapter 1

The Crowd and the Enlightenment Project

1.1 Introduction

"In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972:3).

The Enlightenment tradition is complex and internally varied, but essentially it can be characterized as "an attitude of mind" which considered human reason, intellectual self-reliance, science and education as the best means of building a stable society of free men on earth (Anchor, 1967:x). The Enlightenment attitude of mind, which gradually gained ascendancy amongst European intellectuals during the eighteenth century, advocated essentially the demystification of the world, the dissolution of superstition and the substitution of knowledge for magic. The search for knowledge no longer arises from divine revelation, faith or tradition but it is one "which proves itself by its own nature" (Cassirer, 1951:242).

The Enlightenment program appeared first as a critical spirit tearing down everything merely existential, everything believed on the evidence of divine revelation, convention, tradition, authority and, in doing so, it constituted a direct challenge to the ecclesiastical, feudal, and medieval world-view. In brief, the

Enlightenment project claimed the omnipotence of man's mind in the rejection of original sin; freedom of science against dogmatism and obscurantism; the rule of reason and spontaneity against the rule of tradition and authority; technology against the inherited processes of production. The Enlightenment project can hardly be analysed in all its dimensions, doctrines and specific historical manifestations. Enlightenment does, however, present a conceptual unity and principles of a similar nature. In this chapter, we will review first the broad elements and values underlying the Enlightenment as a whole. Secondly, we will attempt to establish a linkage between these earlier ideas and their ideological manifestation in Dickens's, Zola's and Canetti's time. Our intention is not to submit the philosophy of the Enlightenment to a theoretical analysis, nor to pursue in detail the philosophers' paradoxes and contradictions regarding the notions of "individual" and "crowd". Our concern is to provide a general theoretical framework, to illuminate the development of the debate about the crowd, which will be analysed under the literary perspective in the subsequent chapters.

1.2 General Lines of the Enlightenment Program

The Enlightenment program, as it is commonly observed, had offered a fresh start for men. First of all, the way of thinking promoted by the Enlightenment does not take its ideal from the religious doctrines of the past but, on the contrary, it constructs its ideal according to the pattern of contemporary natural science (Cassirer, 1951:13). Newton's conception of the universe as uniform, governed by purely immanent laws, implied that natural phenomena are the data of experience and that there is no arbitrary *a priori* starting point. The Natural world (self-contained, rationally-ordered phenomena) was to be known through observation and experience, according to men's own worked out methodology. Newton's empirical methodology and his analytical spirit could be generalized to all fields of science and the humanities, inspiring, for instance, Voltaire, D'Alembert and Kant. In psychology, and in epistemological matters, Locke was the architect of the new view of the mind, upon which all later theories of mind were built. Aware that a

genuinely new philosophy should start with epistemology, Locke was the pioneer philosopher in regarding the problem of Knowing as a *primary* problem. He thought that a study of human understanding would enable us to find out the sort of inquiries for which our minds are naturally fitted. To Locke, our mental apparatus represents nothing really new and therefore mysterious: "all our ideas originate in the senses ... nothing is in the mind which is not first in the senses; thoughts are indeed merely transformed sensations" (cited in O'Connor, 1967:11). Locke's argument is committed to proving that there are no innate ideas, and therefore that there are no propositions of morality innate in our souls. That is, if all the *materials* of knowledge are derived from *experience*, and if, at birth, we all have certain *powers* of acquiring knowledge, our minds are then "white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas" (O'Connor, 1967:11-22). Man was not sinful from birth and could be remade by changes in his environment and education. However, Locke was quite cautious. He had implied that man's knowledge can never be more than partial, fragmentary and uncertain. Our minds are tools which are efficient for certain limited purposes, but if we use them for a purpose that they are not designed for, we are bound to fail.

The slogan "dare to know" which Kant called the motto of Enlightenment, seems to fit all thinkers of this age. The philosophers of the Enlightenment, regardless of the particular school of thought to which they adhered, were concerned to discover the fundamental form of all reality, the true form of all natural and spiritual being. The Newtonian perception of the universe, which seemed to have established, apparently for all time, the essential order, harmony and self-regulating quality of the physical world, implied that there was nothing unknowable for man to fear. "The structure of the cosmos was no longer to be looked at but to be penetrated" (Cassirer, 1951:3). Man was to be freed from the myths, superstition and fears that had imprisoned him in past times; and such a liberation was to come about through man's gradual acquisition of rational knowledge and *pure insight* (Goldmann, 1973:6).

In general, all the Enlightenment thinkers were specifically concerned to analyse the nature and potentialities of thought. There occurred a gradual shift in emphasis from

the aim to "know" about things to the aim of understanding the thought process itself. There was growing a conviction that in order to "know" the "laws of nature" of the physical world with certainty, it was essential to understand the mind itself and the laws according to which it functions. Human reason, based on sense perception, was the new light to discover the fundamental form of reality in all fields of human enquiry. As Kant wrote, "intelligence is an active force in the world ... Reason, with its principle in one hand and experiment in the other, approaches nature to learn from it, but not in the passive attitude of the pupil. Rather, it acts like a judge who compels the witness to answer questions which he has formulated himself" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, quoted in Gay, 1970:6). The scholars were of course well aware that the human mind has its limitations but they set out to recognize individual reason as the supreme arbiter and subject to no higher authority. The essence of all things was now accessible to all men by virtue of universal reason and experience. The objects of sight were there to be seen as they were, and what was seen was really what was there because reason, as proclaimed by Voltaire, "always consists in seeing things as they are" (*Philosophical Dictionary* quoted in Anchor, 1967:7). So, for the first time in history, there was no longer a need to rely upon a special category of persons (e.g. priests) or institutions, who claimed privileged access to "higher" or "hidden" knowledge which was provided by God's revelations or by a special intensity of faith. The individual was to be seen as the point of departure. Man, if liberated from religion, superstition and metaphysics, would become a supremely free subject, able to act on the world rather than to be acted upon. In this sense, what was offered to mankind was a program to start from the beginning for the "construction of a human community out of natural materials alone" (Goldmann, 1973:3). The human mind ought then only to encounter the world with fresh joy and the courage of discovery, the audacity to know.

Underlining the Enlightenment program there is a generalized belief in reason as "the original intellectual force which guides the discovery and determination of truth" (Cassirer, 1951:13). Accordingly, there was a widespread conviction in the unity and immutability of reason. Reason is seen as the same in all thinking

subjects, all nations, all epochs and all cultures. From the diversity of religious creeds, moral precepts, theoretical opinions and judgments, reason was the last, firm and permanent element that could be extracted. It is true that rationality could manifest itself in very different ways. Rationality might simply be, as asserted by Kant, the opposite of the irrationality of brute ignorance and superstition. Rationality could be natural science, or mathematics or a better understanding of the nature of law, or an improved social science or even a correct geography or an improved agriculture (McClelland, 1989:12). In the midst of such an apparent diversity, reason was the "force" able to bring about the unity and uniformity, which was supposed to be inherent in the universe.

It should be stressed that Reason was seen by the philosophers not only as the faculty which enables man to understand the world but also to change it in accordance with the general needs and aspirations of humanity. A world that could be properly understood was a world that could be improved. Locke had shown what the basis of a science of society would be. Reform and revision now become possible of any tradition that prevented men from fully exercising their natural rights. The founders of the main current of the Enlightenment, represented by classical liberal thought, ardently believed in human progress or at least in the possibility of it. Their rational ideal society would be responsible to the immediate needs and desires of every individual and would guarantee the right to life, liberty and property to all. Similarly, the positivist version of the Enlightenment, following the advances made by science and technology, believed in the ability of technocrats to promote progress. Generally, it is possible to say that the idea of the ascendancy of man towards development and progress was equated with the capacity of man for promoting reason. In part, such a confidence in the future was the companion of realism. As remarked by the historian Peter Gay, men in the eighteenth century had good reason to believe in a better, safer, easier, healthier life in the future. Spectacular progress in natural science, advances in medicine, revolutionary changes in the production of food and the organization of industry were witnessed. Although technology and rational public administration were in their infancy and the quality of living was crude (compared to our own), the advance acquired pointed

in the direction of a better society in the future (Gay, 1970:6-12). The eighteenth century was also the time in which new sciences were created: sociology, psychology, political economy and modern education. These "moral sciences" as David Hume called them, were all in the service of man's power to control his world. This is the point to be stressed: the progress to be achieved was planned and self-aware.

Roughly speaking, this zeal to improve society and make men responsible for their own destiny, was underlined by the belief that right action derived exclusively from right thinking. If the existence and extent of knowledge was supposed to depend on the practical experience of the individual, man's mission therefore was to acquire the widest possible range of knowledge in order to apply it technologically to nature and, through moral and political action, to society (Goldmann, 1973:3). From this follows the overriding intellectualism of the Enlightenment and the importance attached to intellectual cultivation. The most obvious expression of this aim is Diderot's *Encyclopedia* conceived in 1745, which has come to symbolize the mature years of the European Enlightenment and its, by then, predominantly French character. The *Encyclopedia*, which became an enterprise in itself, enlisted the talents of major philosophers like Voltaire and Holbach; nearly two hundred important thinkers of the day as well as scientists, artisans and innumerable hack writers undertook the task of making "a complete collection of knowledge and to make it available to the society at large" (Jacob, 1981:256). In his article "Encyclopedia", Diderot wrote:

"The aim of an encyclopedia is to assemble the Knowledge scattered over the face of the earth, to expound its general system to the men with whom we live, and transmit it to the men who will come after us, in order that labours of past centuries will not have been in vain for centuries to come; that our children, better instructed than we, may at the same time become more virtuous and happy, and that we may not die without having deserved well of mankind" (quoted in Anchor, 1967:70).

At the core of the program there was the belief that the growth and extension of knowledge would transform morality and give it a firmer foundation. "Conscious,

rational institutions were to replace what had accidentally survived, been inherited or been fostered upon man by force or fraud" (McClelland, 1989:13). However, the best way to bring about these improvements was a matter of highly controversial debate amongst the philosophers. Revolutionary views about rapid or violent changes in the political and social system were counter-attacked by the conservatives' parsimonious reliance upon gradual and safe changes. To be sure, in the conservatives' eyes, many of the Encyclopedists were utopian doctrinaires, who proclaimed dogmatically without regard to concrete historical reality. Holbach, in his *Social System*, rejects all revolutionary solutions of political problems, declaring that such cures are always worse than the disease. "The voice of reason is neither mutinous nor bloodthirsty; the reforms it proposes are gradual and thereby all the more effective" (quoted in Cassirer, 1951:267). Despite these conflicting views, it is possible to say, that all the thinkers of the eighteenth century were convinced that reason must bear the torch on the way to political and social betterment. The ability to overcome the evils of state and of society could only arise from a real "enlightenment", from clear insight into the grounds and origins of abuse.

1.3 The Place of the Crowd in The Enlightenment Project

The people as crowd stood in the way of the Enlightenment project in the nineteenth century. Although the philosophers were considerably optimistic, the crowd constituted a pervasive threat to their full confidence in the prospect of a better, safer, more educated and more harmonious future. In general, the question of the crowd is largely unexamined as a separate problem by the thinkers of the Enlightenment. It is not that the philosophers preserved silence on the issue. In their writings and mainly in their private correspondence there are frequent references to the "common people", peasants and labourers of the eighteenth century, the *canaille*, "the vulgar". However, the crowd did not, or at least it appeared not to constitute a theoretical problem. The crowd was simply accepted as ignorant, deceived by prejudices and morally corrupt. It is true that the new way of understanding human psychology, advocated since Locke, gave rise to a crucial

question: If consciousness is found on the higher levels of the ascending scale of being, it cannot be altogether absent on the lower levels. Since all men have an identical mental apparatus with the same basic characteristics and if under the auspices of reason rational man could become universal, how was the mind of the crowd to be accommodated within this programme?. The answer of the thinkers of the Enlightenment was simple: the mind of the common people was governed by fanaticism, passion, religious superstitions, which prevented the populace from being as enlightened as it could be. The philosophers of the Enlightenment did not take into account the hypothesis that people coming together in the aggregate could act on a different mental plane and the crowd could display a different psychology from that of the individual. We cannot see in the writings of the philosophers of the Enlightenment any attempt to examine matters that, in the nineteenth century, come to occupy thinkers like Le Bon and come to be called "the psychology of the crowd". Whether the philosophers were hesitant, condescending or cynical about the people, their perceptions seem not to go further than a sense of frustration at the general wretchedness, illiteracy and brutality of the poor, which appeared by and large incurable in the foreseeable future.

One can easily perceive an extraordinary snobbery and a claim for superiority implied in the remarks that most of the philosophers addressed to their less fortunate fellows beings. The author of the article "*Philosophe*" in the *Encyclopedia* compares this ideal to the people:

"The *philosophe* guides himself through the world by reflecting on his experience and foreseeing the results of possible actions. Other men, are driven by their passions, without reflection preceding their actions. These are men who walk in shadows. On the other hand, even in passionate moments, the *philosophe* acts only after reflection; he walks at night, but a torch precedes him. The *philosophe* forms his principles on the basis of an infinite number of individual observations. The people adopts the principle without thinking about the observations which produced it: it believes that the maxim exists, as it were, by itself; but the *philosophe* takes the maxim right to its source; he examines its origin, he recognizes its value, and uses it as it suits him" (quoted in Payne, 1976:20).

We should keep in mind that eighteenth century society was an extremely stratified society. Hierarchical differentiations amongst orders (and accordingly distinctions within them) were strictly marked and widely acknowledged; the gap between the noble and the peasant, the rich and the poor, was a vast and almost an unbridgeable gap. Despite the fact that eighteenth-century society was stepping towards liberalization, this was a society that still preserved everywhere its mechanisms of social ascendancy. It was a society that still condemned the majority of the population to hopeless indigence and permanent exclusion from political life. Education was a privilege not open to the "populace". It was not a device used to promote equality of opportunities, but quite the contrary, to ensure recognition of social stratification and respect for the *status quo*. In general, men and women in the eighteenth century remained in the same situation that they had been in for centuries before: as beasts of burden, as Voltaire remarked without compassion, as "two-footed animals who live in a horrible condition of approximation to the state of nature"(quoted in Gay,1970:518).

Evidently, there is in the project of thinkers of the Enlightenment a prospect that anyone might catch a drop of civilization in the long run, but there was not much hope there. That the people had little time to think because of the demands of labour all the philosophers agreed. "The labourer's share", John Locke wrote, "being seldom more than a bare subsistence, never allows that body of men time or opportunity to raise their thoughts above that, or struggle with the richer for theirs" (quoted in Payne, 1976:26). However, most of the philosophers tended to present the ignorance of the people as a gloomy fact of life. As early as 1681, Locke had explained that "the three things that govern mankind are reason, passion and superstition. The first governs a few, the two last share the bulk of mankind and posses them in their turns, but superstition most powerfully, and produces the greatest mischiefs" (quoted in Gay,1970:518). Despite the fact that later philosophers moved away from Locke's opinion in several respects, the belief that the common man is dominated by passion and superstition remained. Hume claimed that "the bulk of mankind" is "governed by authority, not reason" and he doubted that most men could discard superstition. "When will the people be

reasonable?", he asked; "not in the foreseeable future" he was sure. Kant crudely wrote: "the *Volk* consists of idiots" (Gay, 1970:520).

No one portrayed the brutality of the people more consistently than the great enlightened Voltaire. In his earlier literary work, Voltaire denounced the "people" as vacillating, emotionally unreliable, unjust, cruel and fanatical (Payne, 1976:18). Like Hume, Voltaire saw no improvement likely. In his histories, he took the generalized position that "the populace is the same nearly everywhere". As for the *canaille*, he wrote, "I have no concern with it; it will always remain *canaille*" (quoted in Gay, 1970:521). The elitism present in the writings of the philosophers is revealing. Voltaire, for example, was inclined to argue that efforts at Enlightenment must be restricted to those who can profit from it. Those who live from manual labour alone probably will never have the time and the capacity to instruct themselves; they will die of hunger before they become philosophers. Similarly, in his essay on Seneca, Diderot denounces the masses for their perversity, their crudity and their stupidity. The *peuple* is "too idiotic - *bête* - too miserable, and too busy" to enlighten itself. (*Cédipe* and *La Mort de César*, quoted in Gay, 1970:521). In matters of religion, while "the national superstition was declining", that welcome development will stop short of embracing the populace: "the multitude needs a religion filled with ritual and with ridiculous fables, and always will. Reason is too cool; it presents none of the surprises, none of the wonderment that the populace wants" (Diderot to Sophie Volland. *Correspondance*, quoted in Gay, 1970:519). "The general mass of the species is made neither to follow, nor to know, the march of the human spirit". Enlightenment is confined to a small troop capable of looking intelligently at works of art and literature, capable of reflecting, of speaking calmly; that little flock, rather than the *canaille* will prevail in the long run (Diderot to Falconet, *Correspondance*, quoted in Gay, 1970:520).

In the midst of this declared pessimism concerning the condition of the masses, there was still a slight feeling that the ignorance of the populace was not an inescapable condition. The views of the philosophers were ambiguous in this point. Voltaire, less disdainful in his later writing, recognizes that some people, those who did nothing but work, were doubtless beyond the pale of light. "But the more

skilled artisans (specially those in England, the Dutch Republic and Geneva), who are forced by their very position to think a great deal, are beginning to read and to think reasonably" (quoted in Gay, 1970:522). Voltaire started to recognize that the state of ignorance of the common people might not be an inevitable fact but a result produced by the holders of power and privilege. In 1767, he wrote: "all is not lost when one gives the people the chance to see that it has intelligence. On the contrary, all is lost when one treats it like a herd of cattle, for sooner or later it will gore you with its horns" (*Correspondance*, quoted in Payne, 1976:39). In a similar way, Diderot claimed that the objection of aristocrats that education made peasants litigious and the objection of men of letters that it made the lower orders discontented with their station was typical: "It has always been in the interest of the privileged orders to keep the lower orders illiterate in order - to make the oppression so much easier" (Diderot to Falconet, *Correspondance*, quoted in Gay, 1970:522). Diderot remained an optimist in education and grasped that education could serve the practical needs of the poor. He, like Voltaire, realized that those who were illiterate now could become literate later, and exercise criticism on the self-interest of the ruling orders who kept the *canaille* in its place not because that place was natural but because it was convenient for the ruling classes. However, the thinkers of the Enlightenment went only half way. They did not see clearly the danger and opportunities that the rise of the masses implied for a radical transformation of the social and political order. In all, the philosophers' perceptions on these questions remained underdeveloped. Their dispersed observations could not fit together to compose a proper theory of the mass mind.

1.3.1 "Natural religion for the magistrates, damned stuff for the mob"

The most elaborate, explicit concern of the thinkers of the eighteenth century with the crowd appear in their writings about religion. To the classical assumption that the masses want only *panem et circenses*, it was added that the crowd needed not merely tangible rewards and distracting amusements, but the whip of fear as much as the attraction of reward. Religion, as Goldmann has remarked, a superfluity in addressing an educated audience, could still be useful, perhaps even necessary, if

the uneducated masses were to be kept in check (Goldmann,1973:32). The masses, dominated by passion and inaccessible to reason, must be frightened out of anti-social behaviour with threats of supernatural punishment, and tempted into docility by promises of supernatural rewards. If the masses were really helpless given their passions and their superstitions; if any attempts to make them reasonable could not be achieved straightaway, religion could serve as a cheap mechanism of social control even more effective than any mere temporal restraining force. Underlying this argument there was the belief that ordinary man freed from the check of religion would simply run riot and give their antisocial impulses full play. Voltaire claimed that the "mass", unable to distinguish between true and false, if deprived of religion, would abandon itself to crime.

Evidently, this cynical, calculated religiosity used to keep the lower orders in check caused hesitations and uneasiness amongst the philosophers. D'Alembert for instance, thought that, in view of the irrationality of the multitude, a religion of social control seemed to be a logical policy. However, he doubted whether it would be effective: "In general the multitude is vividly moved only by the fear of an evil or the experience of a present good" (Goldmann,1973:33). For Voltaire, social religion embraces also members of the respectable classes. Suspicious of atheism (both from a king or a servant), Voltaire called for a relatively rational religion that reduced nonsense, observances, manipulation and priestly power to a minimum. Natural religion for the magistrates and theism for the mob. Voltaire believed that "the true social religion" could be purified of the superstition, terror (those incredible fables that usually had had so much appeal to the ordinary man), which had for so long filled traditional religion. He believed that religion could be "refined" by thinking men and others would follow, but it must include no compulsion (Goldmann,1973:34). Holbach objected even to the most reasonable religion as nothing better than a trick imposed on the subject by the ruler for his own selfish purposes; further, to him, religion never prevented crime but often caused it. Diderot was convinced that a nation relying on any religion to keep men from stealing and murdering was backward indeed.

Evidently, the philosophers feared the masses' violent passion and impermeability to reason. Their concern in the face of ignorance, violence and superstition became a problem "begging" for reform, even if it did not become a problem for the more elitist spirits of the eighteenth century. However, the fear of the philosophers should not be exaggerated. Though urban and rural violence existed, it was usually sporadic, narrow in its aims and easily controllable. The philosophers did not have to stand in fear and astonishment of a growing urban, organized, politically powerful working class such as nineteenth century intellectuals and observers, including Dickens and Zola, had to face. No one predicted, as many in the nineteenth century would, that society and culture seemed to be in complete jeopardy in face of the rising masses. The people was no more and no less threatening than it had been for centuries.

1.4 Breaks in Enlightenment: Paradoxes Involving the Individual and the Crowd

1.4.1 General Criticisms

As the Enlightenment is a very broad program, the reaction against it is equally broad and varied. Of course, the values and beliefs of the Enlightenment itself were shaped by historical developments. From the Enlightenment's inner structure various ideological tendencies emerged and gained or lost in importance. For instance, by the nineteenth century, many of the Enlightenment ideals (e.g. freedom, equality, toleration) were appropriately revised, qualified and especially reconstructed under the Liberal and Utilitarian doctrines. On the other hand, the assaults on the Enlightenment tradition increased in scope and intensity throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The line of attack runs from Romanticism and Restoration through the failure of the liberal uprisings of 1848 and the spread of autocratic, illiberal rule (in the time of Napoleon III and Bismarck, for instance) to the age of imperialism and the totalitarianism in the first half of the twentieth century to the challenge of mass society and technological culture on a world scale

of our own time. It is in the context of the critical response to the Enlightenment project that the crowd theory has developed.

Evidently, the world-view of the Enlightenment is connected with the concrete and historical context in which it came into being. In this perspective, a great part of the criticisms addressed to the Enlightenment project begins from an analysis of its social and historical basis. It is argued that the general program of the Enlightenment merely served to support many of the materialistic values and principles advocated by the bourgeoisie - such as the rule of law, the equality of all before the law, basic human rights, freedom of thought and expression and liberty for all men to pursue happiness. However, once the bourgeoisie came into power, it is claimed that this class lost faith in the very ideals in the name of which it had claimed that power. In the nineteenth century, reactionaries and radicals alike, became increasingly aware that the values and principles of the Enlightenment, though universal in scope, represented the ideological expression of a particular social class, albeit the most progressive class of the time, the bourgeoisie. The triumph of "reason", in concrete historical situations, was equated with the triumph of the bourgeoisie in establishing a bourgeois social order - based on the increase of material wealth, progress in technology, improvement of industry, division of labour, competitive markets, social relations regulated by free contract, economic *laissez-faire*, accumulation of the means of production and capital in private hands, etc.

The increasing discordance between the Enlightenment's humanist ideals and the interests defended by the bourgeois social order gave rise to a crucial paradox faced by the Enlightenment project in the nineteenth century. While the Enlightenment thought had become progressively more radical and universal, the bourgeoisie itself had become more narrowly materialistic in its aspirations and more attached to limited interests of class and nation (Anchor, 1967:xix). Robert Mauzi has seen this paradox as the chief problem facing the thinkers of the Enlightenment in their sincere effort to realize the "good life on earth":

"The eighteenth century fluctuated between two poles, one bourgeois, the other heroic (whether it was the heroism of reason,

the imagination, or of feeling). It seems that the great problem was to arrive at an absolute at no matter what price (whence the heroism); then to ensconce and maintain it in its most steadfast and reassuring form, to change it into a dictate which no longer could be eluded (whence the bourgeois degradation). A more amazing mixture of temerity and wariness, of lucidity and illusion cannot be conceived" (Robert Mauzi, quoted in Anchor, 1967:10).

According to this author, the "heroic side" of the Enlightenment was developed in the humanistic ideal of the citizen living in self-fulfilling harmony with himself and with society. This ideal is argued to be present in the political theories of Montesquieu and Rousseau, Voltaire's promotion of the belief in reason, Diderot's approach to nature and society, Kant's philosophy of practical reason (Anchor:1967:11). The bourgeois side of Enlightenment took the form of a version of the "hidden hand" or a generalized belief in a basic harmony amongst men, *in the long run*, and that it was only necessary to release everyone to pursue freely their own self-interest in order to realize a harmonious social order, similar to that which reigned in nature. This assumption was underlined by a conviction that harmony was the "natural" product of competition, that "unity" resulted "naturally" from diversity. (Anchor, 1967:10).

Given the purpose of this work, we cannot attempt to pursue here the historical and social basis of the Enlightenment. Our interest is to outline the development of the crowd thematic as a part of a more general rebellion against the conceptions of man and of nature which characterized the Enlightenment.

1.4.2 Critique of the Natural Goodness of Man

As already remarked, the Enlightenment appears first as a critical spirit tearing down everything which stood merely on the grounds of tradition, convention, revelation or simple force alone. In the battle against the church, feudal privilege, and religious intolerance, the thinkers of the Enlightenment first grounded their claim for freedom on the authority of natural law. The combination of Newton's conception of the universe as uniformly governed by purely immanent laws and Locke's conception of the human mind as a clean slate in rejection of the innate

ideas, suggested that only a natural law coming out of observation of nature itself could sustain a moral order. The supposition was that, if men are shaped by an infinite nature which functions in accordance with universal and rational laws, men are capable of bringing their thoughts, actions and institutions into harmony with it in the long run. As remarked by Cassirer, "all of the thinkers of the Enlightenment regarded nature as the embodiment of all truths which are capable of a purely immanent justification and which require no transcendent revelation but are certain in themselves" (Cassirer:1951:9). All political and social systems which departed from this supposed pattern were to be considered corrupt.

For our concerns, Rousseau's critique of human beings in society is particularly revealing. Rousseau diagnosed a total degeneration, a complete fall of humanity from "nature" in the society of the eighteenth century. The *ancien régime* was becoming more absurd every day. To demonstrate that all spontaneity had been denaturalized through convention, all sincerity had been glossed over by façades of aristocratic artful deceptiveness, Rousseau uses the image of the two human beings, the noble savage and the child, who lived before civilization, and therefore, before corruption. Rousseau, whose theories marked a shift from the central values of the Enlightenment, was one of the pioneers in showing the inadequacy of basing morality on an abstract, imagined view of nature. He claimed that if man wanted a better life he could not depend on any transhistorical agency to provide it for him. He would have to build it himself, in pain and suffering, by "real and active will". Undoubtedly, Rousseau's critique met the bourgeoisie's world-view with increasing approval as it could be used in the name of voluntary association against systems of compulsion, in the name of the free social contract against the old coercive feudal relations. As already remarked, the new society wanted to be an order in which all agreed, to their mutual advantage, on a peaceful and diligent life together, according to a model based on mutual sympathy and an spontaneously arising social harmony.

As harmonious and progressive as that sounded, some representatives of the *ancien régime* were still sensitive enough to hear the insurrection of hell in this program. As we have already remarked, crowds, right from the start, served to pose doubts about the enlightened belief in the natural reasonableness of man. Crowds served to

demonstrate that what was natural in human beings was "lost" or become "distorted" and "misshapen" through civilization. However, it is after the French Revolution that the crowd thematic acquires an explosive power as part of the moral counter-attack on Enlightenment. The supposed doctrines of Rousseau could lead to a position of profound pessimism about the political future.

With horrified satisfaction, conservatives saw the French Revolution degenerate into terror and war. Rousseau's propositions of freedom for man, it was believed, had opened up the path to subversion and tyranny; the idea of the sovereignty of the "general will" had led directly to the Jacobin practice of revolutionary terror. Nothing since then has nourished the conservative image of humanity more strongly. The Revolution's horrors in the conservatives' eyes showed that the individual, far from being innocent, rational and good by nature was indeed cruel, fickle, unwise and anti-social. Enlightenment had failed because it had misunderstood the "real" nature of man. Conservative thinking could maintain that all too often human beings behave egoistically, destructively and greedily and, if liberated from the chains of civilization, would run riot and begin the return to barbarism. The "illusions" of popular sovereignty and the revolutionary principles (universal rights of man, defence of popular participation in the exercise of government) which encouraged crowd politics were, in reality, leading the "natural" man to destroy the "historical" man. In this sense, the *criminality* of the masses came to be so important for conservative thinking because it could tautologically find in it a "final proof" for a pessimistic view of humanity, which in turn, justifies the grounds for an authoritarian, strictly disciplining politics. The first attempt into the crowd psychology, as formulated by Taine in the 1870's, was indeed a development of this anti-enlightenment critique, constituting a direct attack on Rousseauist optimism.

As we will see, Dickens's treatment of the crowd is caught among the many controversies within Enlightenment, regarding history, man and reason, that came to pervade a great deal of nineteenth century thought (Mandelbaum, 1971:ix). With respect to human motivation and the process of social change, Dickens seems to display the enlightened belief in the goodness (or at least innocence) of human

nature and tries to get around political pessimism by demonstrating how human beings *become* what they are socially. Motivated by humanistic values, Dickens, on the one hand, expresses his compassion for the poor against the abuses of the new industrialism and condemns the ruling elites for their neglect and failures of responsibility. However, this was a society that still contained witnesses to what the crowd had done once in the French Revolution and felt shaken by the possibility - considered real enough at the time - of the masses again gaining social, economic and political ascendancy. Dickens, on the other hand, fears that any collective rupture would make violence absolute and lead to the destruction of civilized society. Given the chance, the crowd could bring back the terror.

Very much like the philosophers of the eighteenth century, Dickens agrees that diffusion of knowledge and enlightened morality and philanthropic activity on the part of the governing classes were essential for banishing ignorance and oppression from the world in the long run. In practice, however, the action of the crowd seemed quicker in threatening the perceived fragile structures of society and shattering any hope for progress to prosper. In this sense, Dickens reacted towards the people differently from the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Dickens shows an awareness that crowds were pushing themselves into the centre of the political stage and becoming a basic aspect of society. No matter whether the people were forced into the mob situation through poverty, coercion, and ignorance or through inner malevolence, a immediate solution had to be found to stop the violent action of the crowd. As we will see, Dickens's account of the French Revolution in his *A Tale of Two Cities*, urges a kind of catalyst for the elites to commit themselves totally to the programme of change. Dickens's treatment of the crowd is constructed essentially through a political and social perspective, but not a psychological one. Dickens dwells on the criminal and plebeian nature of the crowd, but does not grasp that the individual and the crowd have different psychologies. In this sense, many of Dickens's inferences about the crowd are pre-modern and are therefore very different from the classic crowd theory of the late nineteenth century.

1.4.3 Critique of the Illusions of Naturalism

Towards the second half of nineteenth century, the understanding of nature and the attempt to provide a rational vindication of morality fundamentally changed its direction, though it remained in contact with many of the basic ideas of the Enlightenment tradition. Rousseau's optimistic naturalism became increasingly discredited. Even for non-conservatives it began to be clear that the image of the benign origin of man could no longer be accepted because, on closer investigation, one finds that war, inequality and harsh conditions are so widespread; there are exceptions but they can hardly be interpreted as evidence for the original innocence of human nature (Sloterdijk, 1988:56). It became more and more clear that the idea of origins has not a *temporal* but an *utopian* reference. The theories of "social evolutionism" and "biological evolutionism" (Nisbet, 1980:175) come to show that social theory would have now to take account of a past which was almost unimaginably longer than men had hitherto been prepared to believe. Pre-historical, anthropological, zoological, biological and geological time-scales now overshadowed the recorded histories of human societies. The eighteenth century deductive rationalism was then inadequate to understand the evolution of men and the societies which they find themselves living in.

The positivist thinkers renewed the faith in the promise of rational progress, claiming that the development of social sciences within an evolutionary approach would pave the way for a planned society. The positivists were committed, broadly speaking, to exposing those earlier philosophers' "illusions", who envisaged the perfection of society, a perfection which was merely the product of their own imagination. Social structures were no longer to be attributed to "original" compacts or contracts concluded in the spirit of self-interest as calculation of profit or loss, but were to be adapted to the natural motivation of human behaviour and evolving

conditions of social life¹. Against those who believed that the underlying conditions of life could be transformed at will or by the conviction of their utility for man, the positivist thinkers proposed that the natural and necessary characteristics of social life would have to be understood in a genuinely evolutionary perspective for a practical reform of society (Kolakowski, 1972:65).

Comte's "positive philosophy" set the epistemological basis for the movement later known as positivism. As early as 1830, Comte applied the scientific method to philosophy, defending the belief that the empirical method is the unique means of obtaining genuine knowledge. He envisaged human thought as progressing through three stages - the stage theological; the stage metaphysical or abstract; the stage scientific, or positive. In the third stage, which Comte believed had already begun, men would no longer investigate areas of thought that transcended the boundaries of their empirically-based knowledge, and only empirically verifiable truths would be of any consequence. Though many of Comte's doctrines were abandoned, revised or especially reconstructed, what might be called its "scientistic" features became a lasting part of subsequent positivist thought: the idea of progressive development in the Law of the Three States, the rejection of metaphysics, faith in the essential unity of the sciences, the ideal of reducing all knowledge to universal formulae (an ideal actually unattainable, as Comte himself admitted, but which should function as a normative guide-line rather than a programme), and the interpretation of knowledge as ultimately practical value.

1. Whereas the thinkers of the Enlightenment assumed, for example, that human solidarity and cooperation existed only because they were useful to the individuals, Comte asserted the existence of a social instinct at least as strong as selfish aspirations and completely independent of them. The co-existence of human beings is possible only thanks to this instinct, not to any alleged reconciling of private interests via a "social contract". The eighteenth century deductive rationalism tended in that way to be displaced by evolutionary-biological arguments.

Positivism, or "scientism"², as a European movement, was the synthesis of the insights of other thinkers besides Comte, such as John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer. Besides the obvious importance of Comte and his disciples, the "new scientism" was formed by the combination of two different roots. That is, from a generalized experimental methodology formulated by working scientists specially in the areas of biology and physiology and from a new group of philosophers such as Hippolyte Taine, who in pursuing the study of the mind felt that the emphasis on "metaphysics" professed in the French University system was improper and tried to place the study of psychology on a more scientific, that is physiological, basis (Nye, 1974:13). The future of psychology lay with "brain", not "mind".

Reinforcing the tendency proclaimed by the philosophers of the eighteenth century, positivist thinkers tended to seek and present a coherent picture of nature. In the natural sciences, a number of recent discoveries suggested that a new synthesis was becoming possible, that there was a basis for unifying the ever proliferating, ever more tightly specialized sciences. The principle of conservation of energy, indestructibility of matter and constancy of force supplied one of such formula, grasping, as it seemed to do, the unity of all natural phenomena. The theory of evolution was another, for it encompassed the totality of organic phenomena, including human life. The apparently irreducible multifariousness of the world appeared to be different manifestations of one and the same cause.

Biology exercised a great influence on positivism. The theory of evolution contributed crucially to consolidating the image of a world in which all conditions of human life could be explained in biological categories, and all human institutions

2. The term "scientism", as Nye has argued, either defined as a theory of knowledge, "all that we know of reality is what we can observe or legitimately deduce from what we observe" or simply as an "attitude of admiration for the natural sciences and the wish to extend their virtues to other disciplines" would be perhaps a more accurate word for describing the general European belief in science and infallibility of the scientific method from the 1850's. However, as Nye remarks, contemporaries in practice preferred the word positivism and most often used it in a way that would make it interchangeable with the more generalized and modern word, scientism (Nye, 1975:9).

explained as instruments for biological survival³. Under the influence of Spencer in the late 1850's, the history of morality and customs was studied in the spirit of biological evolutionism and analogies between social life and the behaviour of living organism were pursued in great detail. Human thought tended to be seen as just another biological fact for the scientist: the brain is an organ like the other organs, and thinking is an organic function, not a product of some mysterious subjectivity.

Positive sociology would show, in contrast to earlier philosophers who ascribed reality to separate individuals, that "society" is the primordial reality and social life is as "natural" as the functions of the human organisms and requires no fictitious social contract to account for it. Mankind lives in society; that is the nature of the species. Like organisms, mankind has its own structures and structural properties which historical progress cannot ever completely efface (Bowler, 1989:194). The accumulation of huge amounts of concrete detail, it was believed, would provide an objective explanation of human behaviour and of the influence of the environment on human beings. From then on, not all of the original claims of Enlightenment would be satisfied, but it would be better armed to defend its own claims in the future.

However, if the elements present in the evolutionary-progressive framework promoted optimism and confidence in the future, they could underscore just as consistently a pessimistic outlook. Following the theories of inheritance, evolution and degeneration, an emerging gloomy side of Social Darwinism was predicting decay and extinction. The lower classes came to be treated as a separate race, as the historical product of natural selection. Racism appears in its full light. Those groups seen as less fit and adaptable than others were regarded as inferior as a result of organic defect, poor heredity and environment or an inherited evil disposition. It is in this evolutionary-atavist framework that the theory of the crowd developed, as we

3. To be sure, it was not Darwin himself who was the founder of the new evolutionary sociology, but Maine, McLennan, Spencer and Pitt Rivers. Although Darwinian biology provided the evolutionary framework, it was these later thinkers who provided a Darwinian evolutionary world-view. See J.D.Y. Peel, 1971:141,243; J. Burrow, 1966:21, and R.Nisbet, 1980:174.

will discuss in the chapter on Zola. The perceived primitivism of the crowd came to be explained as a mental regression to man's early anthropological stages. When men come together in the crowd, it was argued, the lower layers of the mind take over the higher ones and the instincts associated with the nature of the species take over individual consciousness. From this follows the belief that men in the crowd feel protected and safe and have courage to endure the brutality necessary for violence, producing what Le Bon has called "illusions of invincibility" (Le Bon [1895], 1952:50).

As we shall see, this desire for naturalness - a return to a naturalistic view of the world, which the positivist felt had for centuries been obscured by uncritical acceptance of preconceived, mainly religious, ideas - is fully present in Zola (Baguley, 1990:54). For picturing his characters, Zola has followed Taine's stress on the physiological basis of psychology and the deterministic impact of milieu. In his naturalistic aesthetics, Zola accommodates the experimental method and attempts to imitate surgical procedures in literature: to cut open the social and psychological problem by the critical scalpel in front of everybody until the malady is laid bare.

Zola's work in general gives expression to many of the tendencies of naturalistic doctrines, in all their ambiguity and complexity. As we hope to show, the scientific rigour toward which the thinkers of the positivism aimed, and their dedication to what they fancied to be objective investigation, guided Zola's assessment of the crowd. Drawing upon a rich source of thematics provided by science, usually medical science and anthropology, Zola brings together the themes of heredity, criminality, atavism and pathology for explaining the crowd behaviour and mentality. "Social Darwinism" and Taine's pessimistic view of human nature and the notion of evolutionary degeneration are dramatically represented. As we will examine, Zola's view of the crowd is part of the fundamental cultural framework in which the classic crowd theory was constructed.

Unlike Dickens, Zola had a sharp eye for the distinction between the individual mind and the collective mind. Zola's awareness that people acting collectively might display a psychology completely different from the ordinary individual psychology

enabled him to produce a dual view of human nature. The individual mind is associated with the intellect and sense of personality. When the individual acts in isolation, independently of the group influence, Zola grants the individual with finer sentiments and nobler attitudes. However, when man is seen in the aggregate, as one in the group or one in the species, the environmental or hereditary effects overwhelm him. He is ruled by a mass consciousness associated with instinct and atavism. In this sense, the crowd phenomenon becomes in Zola a genuinely psychological problem, in an evolutionary-biological perspective.

Seen from another angle, the crowd in Zola's time continued to pose agonizing uncertainty about the possibility of an orderly society in the future. Like Dickens, Zola sees crowds as a malady of the existing social order, showing pathological symptoms or signs of deviation from normal collective life. However, in Zola, the scientific examination heralds a possibility of finding a cure for the social malady. Very much in tune with the spirit of the age, the scientific understanding of the crowd's nature, psychology and behaviour was designed not only to desmystify the crowd but also to provide the theoretical/practical means for dealing with the crowd problem⁴. It is true that socially concerned observers had to wait until 1895 for Le Bon's *The Crowd* to provide a coherent, self-conscious theory of crowd leadership, as a possible solution for the crowd problem. In this perspective, Zola's enquiry into the role of crowd leadership goes only half way: he does not see clearly the alleged opportunities and threats that the leader offered towards the control of the masses.

Broadly speaking, the kind of criticism of the Enlightenment developed throughout the major part of the nineteenth century was in many ways carried out within the main tradition of the Enlightenment itself. Probing the problem of human motivation and the structure of society, many thinkers of the last century, particularly the positivist thinkers, sought to restate the Enlightenment tradition in

4. Serge Moscovici has shown the practicality of the crowd theory, in addressing itself as much, and perhaps even more, to leaders as to men of science to give them a body of rules for the manipulation and control of the violent potential of the crowd (Moscovici, 1985:40).

terms that would carry conviction to an increasingly sceptical generation (Hughes, 1959:29). In other words, the advance of science, in spite of all hardships and setbacks to its development, was to be "loyal" to the promise of Enlightenment, that final goal of progress and emancipation. However, in this process of doubting and seeking, tearing down and building up, an uneasiness about the possibility of the realization of the Enlightenment project at all seemed to grow. The bourgeois order, having become more elitist and imperialistic, tended to drop the equalitarian implications of Enlightenment. Nature was used as a justification by those who needed to legitimate acts of state violence, not by those who spoke for peace (Sloterdijk, 1988:56).

1.4.4 The Reversal of Enlightenment

Around the turn of the twentieth century, many attempts to delegitimize the claims of science as objective knowledge were made (Hughes, 1952:39). The notion of "fact", the fetish that positivist thinkers took for granted as self-evident, began to be unpicked together with the conception of science as one-directional activity passing from the gathering of facts to the laws that give them a theoretical expression. The excessive enthusiasm for "order" was cut down and the picture of the world as made up of neatly labelled, indexed, filled contents was rejected. The positivist attempt to replace the image of man as a self-consciously rational being, freely selecting among properly weighed alternatives, by the image of "organic" man, capable of clearly (scientifically) recognizing his own invariable needs and limitations was also being dismissed as an illusion. This construction was recognized as being "over-deterministic in character, although it renounces metaphysically conceived causality in favour of phenomenalistically interpreted laws" (Kolakowski, 1972:86). On closer scrutiny the boundaries of individuality become just as blurred as are the boundaries between physically-interacting things. A definite, lasting construction of the autonomous human individual seemed unachievable. Therefore, the harmonization of individual human needs with rational prediction seemed to be impossible.

To the extent that scientism was abandoned or weakened, so was the possibility of controlled social change. The realization that a systematic and comprehensive social knowledge may not be possible came to undermine the belief that the organization of society could be founded on instrumental rationality (Bailey, 1988:160). The increasing perception of the changing, subjective and often incomprehensible character of reality led to an indecisive view of the future. "Society has not a fixed order: the only perceptible order is that of change. But change cannot be reduced to progress toward a predetermined end nor to an even evolution whose laws and results are known. Neither in science nor in technology can the future be reckoned as a mere extension of the present, but rather it must be seen as a kaleidoscope of new creations and mutations, to a large degree unpredictable (Aron, 1968:xvi).

The project of providing a rational, objective, vindication of a human value system remains unfulfilled up to our own time. The fundamental aim of the philosophers of the Enlightenment to furnish, in a world of secular rationality, what religion could no longer provide - a shared context and foundation for moral discourse and action - has failed. As MacIntyre has put it, the eighteenth century moral philosophers, and subsequently all those who attempted to establish a rational justification for an objective morality, were engaged in "an inevitably unsuccessful project" (MacIntyre, 1981:19). MacIntyre notes that, since the eighteenth century the philosophers' task to find a new basis for their moral beliefs in a particular understanding of the moral nature of man faced an inescapable dilemma. The philosophers were trying to find justification for a new conception of human nature based on a style of moral discourse that had been inherited from the past. However, this discrepancy could not be removed by changing beliefs about human nature⁵. As MacIntyre explains, although the philosophers of the Enlightenment attempted in their positive arguments to base morality on human nature, their arguments move in the opposite direction towards a more and more unrestricted version of the claim that no valid moral argument can move from entirely factual premises to any moral

5. In MacIntyre's words: "they [the philosophers] inherited incoherent fragments of thought and action and, since they did not recognise their own peculiar historical and cultural situation, they could not recognise the impossibly quixotic character of their self appointed task" (MacIntyre, 1981:53).

conclusion (MacIntyre, 1981:54). Certain principles that the thinkers of the Enlightenment advocated as a premiss constituted an epitaph to their entire project. Subsequently, the inevitable failure of every attempt to vindicate a basis for moral beliefs finally binding on all rational men, turned out to be the failure of the whole project: no rational morality, no rational polity, no rational society.

As a consequence, the morality of the Western, modern society lacks any public, shared rationality or justification. As MacIntyre remarks, twentieth century moral debate is interminable, since a process of reasoning must always terminate with the assertion of some rule or principle for which no further reason can be given. Because judgments are in the end criterionless, all evaluative moral judgments are nothing but the expression of preferences, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral and evaluative in character at all (MacIntyre, 1981:11). These arguments move to the conclusion that the contemporary self cannot simply or unconditionally be identified with any particular attitude or point of view. The essentially modern self, what MacIntyre calls the "emotivist self", finds no limit set to establish its boundaries (MacIntyre, 1981:32). In this sense, the view that the "contemporary self" lacks any unified criteria for evaluation of its limits contributes to reinforce the illusoriness of the autonomy and reasonableness of the individual, as seen, for instance, in the writings of Pareto, Nietzsche and Freud.

It can easily be seen that as a consequence the major break with nineteenth-century thought has been the loss of the belief in rational progress (Mandelbaum, 1971:379). Though a number of doctrines constituted a direct attack on progressive assumptions⁶, it was, however, the devastating experiences of this century which were of vital importance for undermining the belief in necessary progress. In the two world wars, the technological skill that had once been used to exploit the world or construct empires, was now used to destroy rivals and promote a holocaust of

6. In so far as scientists and philosophers had given up the idea that laws *govern* events rather than describe them, there was no longer reason to suppose that human history necessarily followed a definite, determined course. It has been argued, however, that these doctrines have had little impact outside intellectual circles to explain the disappearance of the pervasive belief in progress. "To account for this disappearance, one must take cognizance of the calamitous experiences of this century" (Mandelbaum, 1971:379).

"civilized" men; with the advent of the nuclear bomb, the threat of extermination on a global scale was realized in an unexpected but horrifying way; with the widespread social and political upheavals using increasingly sophisticated weapons, technology came now to raise as many fears as hopes for the future (Bailey, 1988:50). These experiences have left little room for the earlier forms of optimism which, on the whole, dominated Western thought since the Enlightenment.

In the first half of this century, disillusionment with enlightened modernity and dismay at the failure of the political application of reason has led to a new critique of Enlightenment alleging a totalitarian tendency in Enlightenment itself, the reversal of its humanistic values. The first generation of the Frankfurt School has particularly re-evaluated the oppressive functioning of scientific and technological reason, not least in its application to the social domain. Adorno and Horkheimer, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, formulated during the early 1940's in an attempt to trace the roots of facism, argue that the model of mind's relationship to the world established by enlightened thought is implicitly totalitarian. It is argued that Enlightenment, in asserting the primacy of the autonomous and therefore autocratic subject, has given rise to a mythological belief in man's god-like power to control his environment and dominate nature and other men. The fear of whatever might challenge the omnipotence of the rational subject, according to these authors, has led to the reversal of reason into myth⁷. In the will of the Enlightenment to impose the rational order of the mind upon all existence, they find the source of the reversal of the humanist ideology of the Enlightenment in modern totalitarianism.

Canetti's writings can be seen as a segment of this post-enlightenment critique of the Enlightenment. Canetti's earlier intention to name the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé* as

7. Adorno and Horkheimer claim that Enlightenment attempted to impose a set of constant, unchanging laws in conformity with human reason over all existence and, intending to secure itself against the return of the mythic, could not escape from a tendency to eliminate all that is strange, unusual or miraculous. "In the anticipatory identification of the wholly conceived and mathematized world with truth", they argue "nature is in fact disqualified and became a matter of mere classification according to the order imposed by the mind of the subject: thinking objectifies itself to become an automatic, self-activating process" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972:25).

Kant, reveals that Kant's philosophy is obviously the philosophy under attack. The case for the totalitarian tendencies implicit in Kant's thought derives particularly from the fact that practical reason, in Kant's system, employs no criterion which is external to itself. It appeals to no content derived from experience of nature. Kant, despite being one of the heroes of Enlightenment, seems to have been one of the philosophers of the Enlightenment closest to recognizing the breakdown of the entire Enlightenment project. Aware of the impossibility of taking nature as the ultimate authority in moral matters, Kant tacitly grounds morality precisely in man's capacity to resist natural impulses. Kant's concept of consciousness includes *will* in addition to reason. Instead of setting an idealized conception of nature against which a corrupt society is to be judged (as maintained by other eighteenth century philosophers), Kant postulates an *a priori* conflict of the *natural* and the *moral species* and insists on man's capacity for moral self-direction (Anchor, 1967:115-6).

Kant defends the view that the individual is partly natural and thus determined, but also, and much more important, partly free - independent of God, of nature and of society. Man may be conditioned by the phenomenal world, but he must be free and self determining in the noumenal world. From this follows Kant's advice that man can and *should* act "as if" his act was to become through his will a universal law of nature. Morality is man's duty and man's duty lies in obeying the rational law that he himself creates. If man does not obey this law of his own making, it is not because the law of nature holds domination but because man's will is weak and his disposition evil.

Canetti interprets the severe individualism present in Kant's philosophy and shows the absurdity it can lead to if pushed to its ultimate consequences. As we will examine in Chapter Four, the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé*, who can be seen as a caricature of the last surviving rational Kantian individual, appears as the victim of the Enlightenment. Kien inexhaustibly attempts to transcend the determination of the surrounding world in order to fulfil his will to become a free and autonomous individual. However, Kien's faithfulness to his "duty" to both keep himself apart from the crowd and overcome the irrational impulses of his own nature guides him to a suicide in an "auto-da-fé". The severity of his repression turns out to be an

endless struggle against the crowd, a perpetual anxiety. The excess of denial makes the eruption of the desire even more compelling and leads upward towards the extreme: Kien plunges into fire to join the crowd outside himself. Kien dies, Kant dies, therefore Enlightenment dies.

From another perspective, Canetti works out Kant's abstract propositions between "what nature has made of man" and "what his will could make of him" to show the cunning despotism it can lead to. Kant's theoretical conviction was that a rational will could construct a rational law. The progress of reason would bring an increase in self-government. Morality in society, as with the individual, is the rational expression of an autonomous, self determining will. Canetti shows an awareness that Kantian ethics remain an abstract solution to the moral dilemma of civil society. As many recent critics have pointed out, Kant's philosophy does not prescribe a particular social and political programme. Kant determines the necessary conditions that have to be met for a moral injunction, but, to avoid the determinism of the previous philosophers, he does not in any detail point to the social ends that men should ultimately pursue (Guyer, 1987). He makes clear the necessary conditions for the law but leaves its content open (Hawthorn, 1976:35). There is, therefore, the possibility of reversal of its humanistic values. As MacIntyre remarks, despite Kant's restrictions against founding morality on human nature, his analysis of the nature of human reason is the basis for his own account of morality. If we detach morality from that framework, we will no longer have morality, or at the very least, we have modified its character completely (MacIntyre, 1981:50-57). Canetti's protagonist shows how that possibility can happen. As we will examine in Chapter Five, Kien can be seen as the prototype of the paranoid ruler: his totalitarian frame of mind and the way that he behaves towards the representations of the crowd in the novel can be compared to the way in which autocratic rulers behave towards men.

Writing from the vantage point of the twentieth century, from which the whole development of the crowd theory can be viewed, Canetti sets out to re-work the entire tradition of crowd theory back to the Enlightenment project. Canetti's theory of the crowd - concept, typology, patterns of behaviour and psychology - only becomes theoretically explicit in his monograph *Crowds and Power*. However,

many of these elements, as we will examine, are already present in *Auto-da-Fé*. As we will argue, *Auto-da-Fé* represents a new style of crowd novel. The traditional antithesis between "individuality" and "crowd" is the centre of attack in the novel. Taking into account the supposed perpetual tension between these poles, Canetti demonstrates the unexpected ways these opposite notions individual/crowd can slide into one another. The protagonist, in order to forge his stable individuality and preserve his "pure self-identity", has to armour himself and erect impassable barriers between himself and the rest of the world. Canetti remarks on the pain of the process of individuation, derived from an identity which tries to represent itself as an *a priori* structure of human reason. Kien pays the price of instinctual renunciation in order to survive in his struggle against powers both outside and inside himself. The very act of self-preservation implies the sacrifice of a huge part of the self. Identity appears as self-denial.

The rationalization of the drives, represented by the transformation of the instincts into reflections, Canetti implies, does indeed result in a kind of Kantian mastery by the rational will. But this mastery is brought at the price of a terrible isolation. Throughout *Auto-da-Fé*, Canetti emphasises repeatedly the pathos of a self helplessly confined within the circle of its own universe, unable to make contact with anything external which does not turn out to be simply its own reflection. This way of viewing things has allowed Canetti to develop an argument in which the crowd, by shattering the individual consciousness, comes to constitute a potential liberation for the individual, a temporary release from the pain of preserving individual identity.

Canetti calls into question the deeply felt *a priori* fear of crowds that crowd theorists have always encouraged. Instead, he offers an argument not against crowds so much as power. As we hope to show, the dynamics of the crowd in Canetti's approach comes to constitute the opposite of the dynamics of power. Social life is formulated in terms of distances and the exercise of power in all situations presupposes distinctions, hierarchy and inequality. Aware of the uncertain character of contemporary moral experience, Canetti recognizes the individual's need to defend the ego structure, which gives him a sense of autonomy and supports his

illusions of power. On the other hand, Canetti notes that the affirmation of oneself in the social power struggle becomes the denial of others, and, if this scheme is pushed as far as it can go, it becomes a quest for total domination. Canetti's post-Enlightenment critique of power is implacable: both options of commanding or obeying, leave a profound irritation in the self, which isolates the individual or annuls his autonomy.

The visions of the crowd engendered by Canetti suggest a new collective experience. In the crowd, the distances of social life - distinctions of class, race, rank, status, therefore patterns of authority, are annihilated. All individuals *feel equal*, and there is the possibility of unity without domination. It is for the sake of this joyous sensation of de-individuation, in Canetti's view, that the individuals merge into the crowd. On these grounds Canetti rejects the belief that the crowd submits to the authority of the leader and discards the importance of the leader for the formation and maintenance of crowds. In Canetti's perspective, unlike Dickens's and Zola's, the crowd no longer appears necessarily as malign nor as a threat to civilized forms of living, but as a kind of "sanity" against the "madness of power". Consequently, Canetti suggests, the crowd should not be seen as a reason for dismay but as a reason for hope, however faint, for civilized repressed mankind.

Chapter 2

The Crowd in Dickens

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter we intend to argue first that Dickens's depiction of the crowd was fuelled and informed by contemporary crowd events and specially the memory and myths of the French Revolution. That is, in one sense Dickens was responding to real history and in another he was influenced by and contributing to a highly imaginative interpretation of that history. The first half of the nineteenth century was shaken by a series of popular movements, rebellions and revolutions; crowds and their violent behaviour were increasingly entering into the centre of the political arena, claiming the attention of politicians and social observers. Arguably the crowd, whether understood as people rioting, or the union of workers, or the people pressing to participate in the ballot, was seen as the potentially principal actor in transforming the organization of society at economic, social and political levels, as well as producing a new relationship between labour and capital. In this "changing world", Dickens presents several ambiguities towards the crowd; he has mixed and conflicting feelings towards it. As we will discuss in the first part of this chapter, there is in Dickens a kind of fascination with the "spectacle" of people in the mass and an admiration for its energy. Dickens shows as well the traditional abomination of the mob's violence and warns against its macabre consequences. Dickens seems

deeply concerned with the miserable condition of the poor and condemns the neglect of the ruling elites. Especially in *A Tale of Two Cities*, he attempts to draw faces in the crowd, reporting their state of poverty and oppression with a great sense of sympathy for the individual. However, Dickens does not hesitate in demonstrating that, if the mob rose up, it had to be crushed for the sake of social order.

In the Section 2.4 of this chapter, I hope to show that the lack of more precise explanations about the crowd in Dickens in part reflects the lack of a psychology of the crowd at the beginning of the last century. Despite the concern that the crowd was arousing amongst the politicians and social observers in general, it had not yet become the subject of specialized scientific study. Crowds were not seen as a new phenomenon which needed a new kind of explanation or required a new science, a different kind of psychology from individual psychology. Not aware that the crowd has a kind of mind of its own, which operates differently from the mechanisms of the individual mind, Dickens tends to conceive the crowd as something deviant, pathological or abnormal. As we will see, Dickens tends to equate the crowd with the kinds of people who display an inclination to delinquency or an inclination to do bad.

We will also pay attention to Dickens's political values and attitudes towards popular movements as well as to his reaction to particular contemporary events - specially Chartism. An examination of the historical context in which Dickens was writing besides an investigation of the social phenomena he purposes to represent, from sources other than the novel itself, seems to uncover certain "messages" that *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities* may have addressed to their audiences.

2.1.1 Crowds in the Context of the Early Nineteenth Century

Dickens's fascination with crowds extends to a large part of his career. *Barnaby Rudge - A Tale of the Riots of Eighty* (1841), originally planned to be Dickens's

first published novel instead of his fifth¹, appeared in print in February of 1841. Almost 20 years later, Dickens again depicts the crowd thematic in *A Tale of Two Cities*, whose final number appeared in *All the Year Round* in November 1859. Although Dickens claims to have created no more than works of historical fiction, he doubtless was attempting to explore an increasingly serious and troublesome theme in British society.

Crowds were a central theme in the Victorian times to an extent that we may now have to recover by efforts of historical imagination². In 1812, the year of Dickens's birth, Luddism - the rising of glovers, stockingers, and other textile craftsmen against powered machines which were cheapening goods and undermining their livelihoods - reached its peak. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, landowners all over Britain, to increase profit, had enclosed common pasture and expropriated smallholdings eliminating the means of self-sufficient farming. Low-paid and unemployed countrymen promoted riots and burning throughout the countryside. The majority of those without land flocked to cities to seek work at factories and mills. The industrial cities expanded rapidly and were ill-equipped to receive the new residents, lacking housing and sanitation. The deplorable working conditions in the factories - overworking time, low wages, periodic unemployment and high prices - all came together to oppress the city-dweller. Strikes and riots were frequent; in August and September of 1842, the so-called Plug Rioters sabotaged heavy industry.

A source for alarm was also seen in the increasing gulf between the rich and the poor. In the early nineteenth century, the sense of progress was gaining ground as never before and the economy was booming. Not only was material improvement achieved with the implementation of new production techniques and innovative

1. *Barnaby Rudge* should have appeared in three compact individual volumes at the end of 1836, according to an agreement made with the publisher Macrone. However, it only appeared weekly in *Master Humphrey's Clock* from 13 February to 27 November, 1841. For an account of Dickens's publishing troubles for the four years 1836-40, see Butt and Tillotson (1982:76-77).

2. See George Rudé, 1964; J.A.S Grenville, 1976:19-67, Eric Hobsbawn, 1962:203-16 and David Lodge, 1989:123-140.

technology, but also a moral and intellectual improvement was seen to be accomplished³. However, the poor were not enjoying the benefits of progress and the lower classes were excluded from the general improvement. The extent of such a disparity between the destitution of the poor and the affluence of the rich prompted Disraeli to talk about "Two Nations".

Within the new industrial society, the labouring classes were being brought together in factories and mills at an accelerating rate. The number of trade unions and co-operative societies was increasing quickly, showing a sense of solidarity amongst the workers and their willingness to act together. The unity of the working class increased the fear in the mind of the ruling elites. Of course, they were in panic not about the individual workman but about the mob he was supposed to belong to. "The working class will, unless they be wisely and timely dealt with, some day, act in masses" (Charles Kingsley, quoted in Williams, 1987:101). The most powerful expression of this nationwide co-operation was the Chartist Movement, which lasted from 1836 to 1848. The general discontent led in 1838 to the drawing up of a People's Charter, which called for universal male suffrage, equal electoral districts, removal of the property qualifications for members of Parliament, payment of the members of Parliament, a secret ballot and annual general elections (many of these demands were being made simultaneously on the Continent). The movement combined workers throughout the country and generated large meetings and demonstrations. Popular discontent reached a crucial height in 1848, thus coinciding with the breaking out of the revolution on the Continent in February. In March, there were riots in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Liverpool and other larger towns. In April, the Chartists went in procession to Parliament to present a petition and for the third time it was refused⁴. At each time, the fear of a greater turmoil was increased.

3. For the idea of progress amongst the Victorians see Peter Bowler, 1989:1-14 and Mandelbaum, 1971: 77-92.

4. The Charter was three times presented to Parliament (1839, 1842, 1848), and repeatedly rejected. The third time marked the end of the Chartist era.

The general alarm against the crowd action was also fed by the success of recent revolutionary movements on the Continent. The fall of the Bastille in 1789 was still just within living memory. In 1848, a series of political explosions in the name of popular democracy swept Europe (Grenville, 1976:19-26). Rebellion broke out in Sicily, where the Sicilians succeeded in imposing a constitution on their King, as did the people of Piedmont. In Milan, patriots manned the barricades, Marshal Radetzky laid seige to the city, and popular upheavals drove Metternich from Austria. There were revolts in Germany and Poland, and revolution spread quickly to Paris which became once again "the city of insurrections", where the monarchy of Louis Philippe was overthrown. In Ireland, agitations for home rule were apparently gathering revolutionary force.

In this climate of apprehension, the possibility of revolution and another Reign of Terror, this time on British soil, was an ever-present fear⁵. It seemed for a time "as if Revolution on the European model might enter England through the back door of Ireland or erupt in the ranks of the Chartist movement" (Goldberg, 1983:224-7). In the words of the historian George Rudé, Chartism signified for Britain "what the year of the revolution, 1848, signified for France"⁶. To many observers of the time, it was seen as a movement that could end up with "the people forcing the lock of power and entering into the throne room". The newspaper *Poor Man's Guardian* (1835) commenting about the contemporary distress, acknowledges that "we are forced to believe that nothing short of a miracle can avert a revolution in this country" (quoted in Williams, 1987:100). Carlyle emphatically predicted "sore times" ahead. England would resist, he said, the introduction of crowd rule "in the form of street barricades and insurrectionist pikes but ... the sound of its bewildered thousandfold voice is in all writings and speakings, in all thinkings and activities of

5. For a general account of the influence of the French Revolution in British culture, see, Ceri Crossley and Ian Small, 1989; cf. especially Clive Emesley's article "The Impact of the French Revolution in British Politics and Society", pp. 31-62.

6. George Rudé accounts Chartism as a "movement of the greatest possible significance": "it was the first independent movement of the British working class, and it dominated all political thinking and government domestic policies in the first ten years of Queen Victoria's reign". Rudé, 1964:179.

men" (Carlyle, "The Present Time (1850) 1898:9). *L'Ami du Peuple*, recognized that "neither barricades nor bombardments brought the horrors of civil strife into our streets in 1848-9. It is true nevertheless that a war of classes is going on in this country, a war that is daily extending" (quoted in Williams, 1987:103). Dickens, noting a parallel between "the general mind of France before the breaking out of the first revolution", declared that anything could precipitate "such a devil of a conflagration as never has been beheld since" (*Letters*, I:391-2).

The significant point to be noted for the development of our argument is that after 1789, the crowd impressed a different image on the mind of the ruling elites⁷. Of course, crowds had always existed since the most remote past. However, the historical image of the crowd - the "common folk", the religious crowds, the volatile medieval crowds at great festivals and fairs, people's crusades, crowds at public executions or sporadic peasant riots - was being replaced by the image of the "revolutionary crowd", the "crowd storming the Bastille", the mob of industrial discontent. In those days, when the mob took to the streets it was no longer to celebrate religious events or to take part in a carnival. The people fought their masters, shouted down their employers and claimed what was justly theirs. Eric Hobsbawn has pointed out the permanent nature of their claim:

"The classical mob did not merely riot as a protest, but because it expected to achieve something by its riot. It assumed that the authorities would be sensitive to its movements, and probably also that they would make some sort of immediate concession; for the 'mob' was not simply a casual collection of people united for some *ad hoc* purpose, but in a recognized sense, a permanent entity, even though rarely permanently organized as such" (Hobsbawn, 1971:111).

What was new was a crowd claiming to be the embodiment of the "will of people"; a crowd that was asking, in its own name, for rights such as those drawn up in the "People's Charter" - popular democracy, popular participation in the government

7. See David Lodge, especially chapter "The French Revolution and the Condition of England: Crowds and Power in the Early Victorian Novel" in Ceri Crosseley and Ian Small, 1989, pp. 128-9.

organization, social betterment, etc. In other words, the crowd, after the events of 1789 and definitively after 1848, began to establish itself as a political force and a legitimatizing source of aspirations to political power:

"New, democratic political doctrines appeared to speak directly to and for 'the people' ... If the mob had once been the expression of the will of the people, it could again and again be the expression of that will, and there was no denying that, looking from this highly charged perspective, the revolutionary mob had caused a new, hostile world to be born" (McClelland, 1989:6).

If the crowd had become a permanent part of the world of politics and political calculation, the threat of anarchy and violence would also be permanent. No one at any time could be confident of avoiding crowds. When the starving man believed that he had rights to be conceded and if not conceded they could be wrenched from those above him, no one could feel safe from occasionally becoming the target of the crowd. Bread and circus mechanisms appeared no longer enough to tame the crowd, nor was the mob held back by the mere arrest of its leaders.

The action of the crowd was so constant that it became increasingly difficult to regard "the crowd" as a series of incidents which erupted occasionally in "bad times": high bread prices, unemployment, the loss of nerve by local authority, and so forth. There was a growing feeling that the crowd - whether called "hunger-driven", "destitute army" "mob of discontented workers" or "irrepressibly missionary" - if not stopped in time, could begin the revolution again. For this "army of devils" was bound to destroy not only particular social institutions, through "street barricades and pike-rioting", but the very structure of the society itself. As any mid-nineteenth century observer could see, kings everywhere felt less secure on their thrones as the populace tried to take government into their own hands.

Class war was the most obvious form that the activity of the mob was appearing to take. The year of 1848 seemed to many observers the "great decisive struggle", consolidating the image of "crowd politics". As remarked by Goldberg, Engels, after the set-backs of 1848 believed that "vulgar democracy expected a renewed

outbreak from day to day". He and Marx assumed that the "first chapter of the revolutionary period was closed and that the next phase could only begin with a new world crisis". Parodying the ritual formula of the monarchist succession, Marx said "The revolution is dead! - Long live the revolution!" (quoted in Michael Goldberg, 1983:227). Carlyle also acknowledged that "new street-barricades, and new anarchies, still more scandalous if still less sanguinary, must return, till governing persons everywhere know and admit" that "universal *Democracy*" had declared itself as an inevitable fact" (Carlyle, 1898:8-9). Thinking that the revolutionary crowd could return again and again, Carlyle remarks:

"Kings will be admitted back under conditions, under 'Constitutions', with national Parliaments, or like fashionable adjuncts; and everywhere the old daily life will try to begin again. But there is no hope that such arrangements can be permanent; that they can be other than poor temporary makeshifts, which, if they try to fancy and make themselves permanent, will be displaced by new explosions, recurring more speedily than last time" (Carlyle, 1898:8).

For us in the twentieth century, whose perceptions of the past are largely influenced by hindsight, it is perhaps hard to take seriously the fear of this period that revolution would break out in Britain - for it did not happen. But for those caught up in the events of the time, who witnessed the massive disaffection of the poor and the successful revolts on the other side of the Channel, the prospect of irrevocable upheaval must have been convincingly real.

It is in this changing world that Dickens's novels came onto the scene. Although in the preface to *Barnaby*, Dickens claims to have created no more than a work of historical fiction, he doubtless was attempting to explore a central theme in the lives of the British people. In focusing on the Gordon Riots of 1780 he had chosen an episode in modern English history which, more than any other, seemed easy to associate with the Chartist upheaval and the possibility of domestic revolutionary terror paralleling that of France. Thomas J. Rice, analysing the political context of the novel, argues that it reflects contemporary issues and comments directly on the condition of England. Believing that Dickens had come progressively to see the political conditions leading to the Gordon Riots as analogous to the political

situation in England in 1839-1841, Rice claims that the "message" of the novel is a warning that political extremism of the left or right leads to social instability⁸.

In his second historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens makes a connection between the present discontent in England and "the general mind of France before the breaking out of the first revolution" (*Letters*, I:391-2) even more explicitly. As several critics have noted, Dickens creates in this novel a number of similarities between France and Britain, to suggest that potential conditions for revolution existed in Britain. In Goldberg's view, "English society offers a clear parallel to the repressive system of the Marquis, and the latent violence sanctioned by legislation and respectability is linked by extension to the politics of the Ancient Regime" (Goldberg, 1972:127). Dickens himself issues an overt warning of this: "It was too much the way of Monseigneur under his reverses as a refugee, and it was too much the same way of Native British orthodoxy, to talk of this terrible Revolution as if it were the only harvest ever known under the skies that had not been sown - as if nothing had ever been done, or omitted to be done, that had led to it" (TTC, quoted in Goldberg, 1972:128). Dickens's distress with the resistance to change of English institutions appears expressed in several analogies with the French institutions of the old regime⁹. According to David Marcus, the similarities pointed out by Dickens

8. According to Thomas Rice, the message of the novel is of "enduring validity" as it points to "the worst fears of liberal politicians", the alliance between the two political extremes, radical (the militant Chartist) and reactionary (the anti-Catholic Ultra Tories), which was gaining ground during the second Melbourne ministry (Whig, 1835-41). Thomas Rice, 1983:53. On Dickens's political intentions in *Barnaby* see also Peter Scheckner, 1987:93-112 and Tom Middlebro 1980:87-95.

9 Dickens' irony regarding British institutions is expressed, for example, in the following passage: "The Old Bailey was famous as a kind if deadly inn-yard. It was famous, too, for its pillory, a wise old institution, that inflicted a punishment of which no one could foresee the extent; also for the whipping-post, another dear old institution, very humanizing and softening to behold in action; also, for extensive transactions in blood money, another fragment of ancestral wisdom, systematically leading to the most frightful mercenary crimes that could be committed under heaven. Although the Old Bailey, at that date, was a choice illustration of the precept, that "Whatever is, is right" an aphorism that would be as final as it is lazy, did it not include the troublesome consequence, that nothing that ever was, was wrong"(TTC:90-91).

were intended to "undermine any self-satisfied confidence in the inherent superiority of British institutions and attitudes" (Marcus, 1987:30).

As we will argue in the following section, Dickens's perceptions of the crowd change as his career progresses. He becomes increasingly aware that crowds could no longer be seen as simply oddities and an excuse for breathtaking and colourful tales, but as a new force changing the course of history. The causes that prompt the crowd action in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) are much simpler than in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). In his first crowd novel, Dickens deals with the mob in the Gordon Riots of 1780 in London and there still remains the view of the crowd as a string of feverish outbursts and sporadic historical accidents. Eighteen years later in *A Tale*, after the experience of Chartism, the upheavals of 1848 and the expansion of the workers' trade-unions and cooperative societies, Dickens tends to see the Parisian insurgents of 1789 as the reflection of the forces of history and the crowd as the vehicle for the explosive force of the oppressed people.

2.2 The Characterization of the Crowd

2.2.1 The Crowd in *Barnaby Rudge*

In *Barnaby Rudge*, the crowd still has a very incomprehensible nature for Dickens. "A mob is usually a creature of very mysterious existence, particularly in a large city. Where it comes from or where it goes, few men can tell. Assembling and dispersing with equal suddenness, it is difficult to follow to its various sources as the sea itself" (BR:475). When the crowd makes its appearance in *Barnaby*, it comes almost out of the blue, without provenance, and fully armed. "Each tumult took shape and form from the circumstances of the moment" (BR:484). Suggesting an analogy with a contagious disease¹⁰ that "comes from nowhere and vanishes back there", Dickens says that for those few days in June 1780, Londoners were in a

10. Though the idea of contagion is very ancient, the several surges of epidemics that swept Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century might have reinforced Dickens's depiction of crowd as an infectious disease. See Hobsbawn, 1962:203 and Williams, 1987:20.

state of "mania". Since the rioting had started, a "moral plague ran through the city"(BR:484).

The crowd has still a very anonymous character in *Barnaby Rudge* and only four of its members are named consistently. They are: Hugh, "an illiterate savage"; Barnaby Rudge, a fool and innocent boy; Ned Dennis, a public hangman and the apprentice, Simon Tappertit¹¹. Hesitant to account for the other members of the crowd, Dickens observes that "sober workmen going home from their day's labour were seen to cast down their basket of tools and become rioters in a instant; mere boys on errands did the like" (BR:484). However, we are told shortly afterwards that those who were really "honest and sincere" never rejoined the rioters after the first few days. The crowd in *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens concludes, was largely composed of the "very scum and refuse of London" (BR:453), of "idle and profligate persons" whose behaviour was "terrible and fickle as the ocean"(BR:475).

In part, the mysterious character of the crowd for Dickens might have been derived from the fact that urban crowds were relatively a recent phenomenon. The census in the middle of nineteenth century had reported that the urban population had surpassed the rural, but there was not much qualitative data about this new urban life (Hobsbawn, 1962:207). Furthermore, there was not a specific theory about the nature of crowds nor a social psychology available at that time to explain collective behaviour and the changes that might happen in "sober" individuals when they become part of the crowd, as we will discuss in the second part of this chapter.

Nonetheless, Dickens is particularly comprehensive in describing the bizarre behaviour of the crowd and the excesses committed by it. Assisted by his talent as a journalist, Dickens describes the mob action with vivid details, providing the most imaginative and powerful scenes in the novel. The crowd is the central theme between chapters 49-70, and the narrative is full of crowd occasions, incessant

11. As we will discuss later, Dickens's choice of these characters makes an ironic social point. Dickens implies that the upper classes are responsible for the degeneration of these characters and therefore for the production of social discontent (see below, Section 2.2).

movements, masses of people looting, burning, injuring and killing. Using the very words of contemporary observers¹², there is much of the classic language of abhorrence towards the crowd. The imagery of the mob as "evil", "savages", "animals" or as a "sea" of irrational, insane, diseased and feverish creatures, is recurrent. In its seize of the Houses of Parliament, "the mob raged and roared, like a mad monster", "wild and savage, like beasts at the sight of a prey"(BR:465). When they smashed up and looted a Catholic chapel, they were like a "hideous madman's dream of demon heads and savages eyes" (BR:465).

The most impressive element in the crowd scenes is the sheer violence¹³. Dickens carefully depicts the crowd's destruction of everything it finds confronting it and the threat it constitutes to civilized forms of living. The Maypole is presented as the genuine place of snugness, tradition and security and appropriately it was selected for one of Dickens's wildest home-wrecking scenes by the mob. Of the Maypole Inn, Dickens writes: "All bars are snug places, but the Maypole's was the very snugest, cosiest and completest bar, that even the wit of no man devised" (BR:497). A cheerful description of its neat rows of bottles in oaken pigeonholes, and its snowy loaves of sugar follows. That was the private bar "that the boldest never entered without invitation - the sanctuary, the mystery, the hallowed ground" and when the mob arrive at it, equipped with the usual flaring torches:

"Here it was, crammed with men, clubs, sticks, torches, pistols; filled with a deafening noise, oaths, shouts, screams, hootings; changed all at once into a bear-garden, a mad-house, an infernal temple: men darting in and out, by door and window, smashing the glass, turning the taps, drinking the liquor out of China punch-bowls, sitting astride of casks, smoking private and personal pipes, cutting down the sacred grove of lemons, hacking and hewing at the celebrated cheese" (BR:497).

12. An Account of the references of the Gordon Riots consulted by Dickens can be found in Butt and Tillotson (1982:76-88), Collins (1965:50) and Carey (1973:117).

13. The theme of violence in Dickens' works is a controversial issue that has received attention from several scholars. For a broad approach see P. Collins (1965) J. Carey (1973). For more recent studies on the psychological instance of violence in individual characters, internalized aggression as well as in the social context, see John Kucich 1980:119-138 and 1983:62-77.

Dickens shows that there is no place where the crowd cannot go. The crowd invades all that is private and violates all rules, private and public. Respecting no limits, no privacy, no property, no human rights, Dickens implies that nothing can be safe from the mob:

"Nothing quiet, nothing private: men everywhere - above, below, overhead, in the bedrooms, in the kitchen, in the yard, in the stables - clambering at windows when there were doors wide open; dropping out of windows when the stairs were handy; leaping over bannisters into chasms of passages: new faces and figures presenting themselves every instant - some yelling, some singing, some fighting, some breaking glass and crockery, some laying the dust with the liquor they couldn't drink, some ringing the bells till they pulled them down, others beating them with pokers till they beat them into fragments: more men still - more, more, more - swarming on like insects: noise, smoke, light, darkness, frolic, anger, laughter, groans, plunder, fear and ruin!" (BR:497).

"... the crowd was breaking open the inviolable drawers, putting things into their pockets which didn't belong to them, dividing his [John Willet's] own money before his own eyes, wantonly wasting, breaking, pulling down and tearing up" (BR:497).

In the Harendale's house "...some searched the drawers, the chests, the boxes, writing desks and closets, for jewels, plate and money" (BR:506).

"They swarmed over the house, plundering and breaking, according to their custom, and carrying off such articles of values as happened to please their fancy" (BR:574)

The invasion of privacy is particularly remarked by Dickens's emphasis on the mob's fixation with destroying fences, gates, doors and windows¹⁴. No matter how

14. Elias Canetti has paid particular attention on the crowd's attack on doors and windows. As we will discuss later, Canetti explains the destructiveness of the crowd as a latent desire to transcend limits and barriers that imprison the individual. "Windows and doors belong to houses; they are the most vulnerable part of their exterior, and once they are smashed, the house has lost its individuality; anyone may enter and nothing and no-one is protected any more. In these houses live the supposed enemies of the crowd, those people who try to keep away from it. What separated them has now been destroyed and nothing stands between them and the crowd. They can come out and join it; or they can be fetched" (Canetti, 1962:19-20).

secure and solid are the locks, they cannot resist the violent attack of the crowd. In the Warren, at the Harendale's house, the rioters

"... found the garden doors fast closed, the windows made secure ... some climbed the gates, or dropped into the shallow trench and scaled the garden wall, while others pulled down the solid iron fence, and while they made a breach to enter by, made deadly weapons of the bars. The house being completely encircled, a small number of men were despatched to break open a tool-shed in the garden; and during their absence on this errand, the remainder contented themselves with knocking violently at the doors, and calling to those within, to come down and on peril of their lives" (BR:505).

"It was a strong old oaken door, guarded by good bolts and a heavy bar, but it soon went crashing in upon narrow stairs behind, and made, as it were, a platform to facilitate their tearing up into the rooms above ... The besiegers being now in complete possession of the house, spread themselves over it from garret to cellar, and plied their demon labours fiercely" (BR:506).

" ... with an accession of pick-axes, spades and hoes, they [some members of the crowd] ... struggled into the foremost rank, ready to beset doors and windows" (BR:505).

"Whirling these [torches] about their heads they raised a loud shout and fell to work upon the doors and windows" (BR:505).

The crowd's relentless effort to force doors and tear down barriers reaches its climax at Newgate. After the locksmith's courageous refusal to pick the lock of the prison's gate, the furious crowd began to attack the prison:

"Strokes began to fall like hail upon the gate, and on the strong building; for those who could not reach the door, spent their fierce rage on anything - even on the great blocks of stone, which shivered their weapons into fragments, and made their hands and arms to tingle as if the walls were active in their stout resistance, and dealt them back their blows... The great sledge-hammers rattled on the nailed and plated door: the sparks flew off in showers ... but there stood the portal still, as dark and strong as ever, and, saving for the dints upon its battered surface, quite unchanged" (BR:580).

"The men who were not near the walls and active in the siege, rather than doing nothing, tore up the pavement of the street, and

did so with a haste and fury they could not have surpassed if that had been the jail" (BR:583).

The anarchic violence of the mob constitutes obviously a challenge to authority and resistance to the established institutions. The prison, which customarily is presented as a guarantor of order and the *status quo*, and a protector against violent social strife, cannot stop the mob. The gates of Newgate were finally burned and demolished, the jail entered by the furious multitude.

The mob constitutes also a disrespect for tradition and a threat of dissolution of the values of solidity and slow evolution. After describing the mob's wreckage of Lord Mansfield's house "with great fury", "...the costly furniture, plate, jewels, a beautiful gallery of pictures and rarest manuscripts ever possessed by any one private man in the world", Dickens says "... worse than all because nothing could replace this loss, the great Law Library, on almost every page of it were notes in the judge's own hand, of inestimable value - being the result and the experience of his whole life" (BR:595). Significantly, the "Law Library", as an expressive symbol of the repository of the highest values gradually accumulated by society and the social wisdom held to be embodied in laws, is readily destroyed by the mob¹⁵. Dickens makes the particular point that the attack on churches, prisons, hallowed ground, gives an ardent pleasure to the rioters' evil disposition for destruction (BR:497 - see below, p. 102). Showing an awareness that the rioters are moved mainly against the symbols of authority and repression, Dickens anticipates a topic developed by later crowd theorists¹⁶.

In the domestic perspective, the mob violates "the values of hearth and home", as it rioted in the Harendale's country house: "the exposure to the coarse, common gaze

15. As we will discuss later, the burning of Kien in his library in *Auto-da-Fé* can be seen as an expression of the vulnerability of the notions of culture and civilization to fire and to the attack of the crowd. See below, p.218.

16. Elias Canetti recognized the crowd's destruction of representational images as an attack on hierarchy that is no longer recognized. "It is the violation of generally established and universally visible distances. The solidity of the images was the expression of their permanence. They seem to have existed for ever, never before had it been possible to approach them with hostile intent. Now they are hunted down and broken to pieces" (Canetti, 1962:19).

of every little nook which usages of home had made a sacred place, and the destruction by rude hands of every little household favourite which old occasions made a dear and precious thing" (BR:507). The revengeful and sadistic action of the mob on innocent people is illustrated by the episode in which the mob smashing houses finds some caged canaries and throws them alive into the fire: "the poor creatures screamed like infants" (BR:600)¹⁷. Similarly, the savagery of the mob against fragile targets is symbolically pictured in the scene in which the mob dances and tramples on beds of flowers "as though they trod down human enemies" and "wrenched them from the stalks, like savages who twisted human necks" (BR:508).

Based on these pieces of evidence, we are compelled to say that Dickens regarded the crowd as essentially negative and invariably destructive, constituting an attack on all that was good and peaceful in society as well as what was evil and oppressive. What counts for most in the mob passages is the awareness of devastation:

"A dull smoke hung upon the ruin, as though to hide it from the eyes of Heaven; and the wind forbore to move it" (BR:508).

"Nothing left but a dull and dreary blank - a smouldering heap of dust and ashes - the silence and solitude of utter desolation" (BR:509).

Dickens is particularly sensitive to the problem of controlling the crowd's criminal behaviour and imposing punishment for lawless collective acts¹⁸. Dickens makes clear that "the crowd has gone too far to be forgiven" (BR:53:483) but remarks on

17. This seems to correspond to an authentic occurrence, which Dickens quoted from the accounts of Gordon Riots he consulted. See Carey, 1973:117.

18. One can make the case that crowds became an object of study as a result of their criminality. It was by the end of 19th century that the expression "criminal mobs" began to be heard, designating criminal assemblies threatening the security of the state and the peace of the citizens. The Italian Lombroso, whose theory of the born criminal has become notorious, was one of the first to attempt to describe and understand the violence of the crowd in order to produce a body of law for penalising illegal collective acts. Sighele extended the theory put forward by his compatriot, and was the first to attempt to give a technical legal meaning to the term "criminal crowds", an expression he applied to any social movement and political group from anarchists to the socialists, striking workers, street assemblies and so on. See Serge Moscovici, 1985: 73-4.

the difficulty of attributing responsibility for what they have done to any particular individuals, who can then be punished according to law:

"The leaders of the riot ... only thought of implicating the masses of their followers so deeply that no hope of pardon or reward might tempt them to betray their more notorious confederates into the hands of justice ... Many who would readily have pointed out the foremost rioters and given evidence against them, felt that escape by that means was hopeless, when their act had been observed by scores of people who had taken no part in the disturbances ... They all hoped and believed, in a greater or lesser degree, that the government they had paralysed, would, in its terror, come to terms with them in the end, and suffer them to make their own conditions ... The least sanguine amongst them reasoned with himself that, at worst, *they were too many to be all punished*, and that he had as good a chance of escape as any other man" (BR:483 italics added)

In the macabre scenes of the riots, we can see how the mob behaves. Why the mob acted in such a way is another question. In *Barnaby Rennie* Dickens can hardly see any purposive or rational motive¹⁹ impelling the action of the crowd. "They [the members of the crowd] ... had no definite purpose or design, and indeed, for anything they knew, were scattered beyond the hope of future union" (BR:475). So Dickens resorts to the empty, ready-made notion that "it is the manner of the crowd" to behave "in a very disorderly and irregular way" (BR:405). The forces behind the Gordon riots²⁰ appear as accidental and personal. The anti-Catholic rioters, Dickens says, were stirred up by "the worst passions of the worst men" (BR:415). Lord George, the prototype of the mad political visionary and Gashford, the cunning mercenary, provided the spark which ignited the incendiary mob to a "hate-campaign":

19. Dickens shows, for example, that the crowd's decision to set fire to Newgate in order to release the prisoners ends up by endangering the lives of those who were to be saved. The outcry of the men within the prison (even those who were expecting to be hanged in less than 48 hours), Dickens remarks, "was loudly heard even above the shouting of the mob and roaring of the flames, and was so full of agony and despair, that it made the boldest tremble" (BR:582).

20. For a history of the Gordon Riots see, J. P de Castro, 1926; Christopher Hibbert, 1958 and George Rudé, 1970:268-293.

"Terrors and alarms which no man understood were perpetually broached, both in and out of the Parliament, by one enthusiast who did not understand himself, by bygone bugbears which had lain quietly in their graves for centuries, were raised again to haunt the ignorant and incredulous. When all this was done, as it were, in the dark, and secret invitations to join the Great Protestant Association in defence of religion, life, and liberty, were dropped in the public ways, thrust under the house-doors, tossed in at windows, and pressed into the hands of those who trod the streets by night; when they glared from every wall, and shone on every post and pillar, so that stocks and stones appeared infected with the common fear, urging all men to join together blindfold in resistance of they knew not what, they knew not why; - then the mania spread indeed and the body, still increasing every day, grew forty thousand strong" (BR:348).

Of the riots and outrages pictured in *Barnaby*, Dickens suggests that everything was futile because the grounds for it were so flimsy. We are encouraged to believe that people tend to become more excited and destructive the less valid the grounds they have for hating a particular scapegoat. Such a conclusion follows unavoidably from Dickens's view of the crowd. Since the crowd is conceived as imbecile, credulous and fickle, its acts, by definition, cannot be seen as the result of any kind of reason or calculation²¹.

"The great mass never reasoned or thought at all, but were stimulated by their own headlong passions, by poverty, by ignorance, by the love of mischief and the hope of plunder" (BR:483-4).

Since "the throng is incapable of seeing beyond the moment", it can be easily excited by demagogues or outsiders for ends that it can hardly know. Viewing things in this way, Dickens points towards the assumption that the crowd needs a

21. For a general argument that some kinds of crowds might be purposive, impelled by rational motives, concentrated on economic and political goals and might behave in its own ordered way, see George Rudé, 1964:268-291, Eric Hobsbawm, 1971:126-149, Sandor Halebsky, 1976:124-148 and Mark Harrison, 1988:3-31.

leader by definition, as classic crowd theory would later argue²². However, the most emphatic notion that comes from *Barnaby Rudge* is a kind of leaderless crowd. The crowd without any apparent motive comes together in its crazy frenzy. The few characters Dickens allows us to see in the crowd (Barnaby, Hugh and Dennis) are not meant to be leaders in the sense emphasised by later crowd leadership theory. These individuals are not expected to exercise any special influence on the crowd formation nor in commanding its behaviour. They are part of the crowd, sharing the crowd's characteristics and in no way distanced from it, as we will examine later (see below, pp. 68-72). In fact, since crowds in Dickens are seen to have a spontaneous formation and a volatile existence, they hardly need a proper leader: "Their leaders spring up as they are needed and disappear when the movement is over and reappear in the next crisis"(BR:484). Furthermore, in placing Barnaby, the imbecile boy, always in the forefront of the riots, Dickens seems to convey the craziness of the movement itself, as if it was an explosion of madness and nothing more. His early intention to picture the Gordon rioters as led by three lunatics escaped from the Bedlam in his former sketch of the novel (Goldberg, 1972:103), reinforces the point: the Bedlam throng needs no leader, it is simply itself.

Dickens's account of the Gordon Riots in great part misrepresents the historical record. According to several historians, the Gordon rioters were not "idle scum" but shopkeepers, pedlars and independent craftsmen. George Rudé, after a detailed study of the composition of the participants in the riots, concludes: "They do not appear, in the main, to have belonged to the very poorest sector of the working

22. In later crowd theory, this notion turns into a vicious circle: the irrationality of the mob, asserted as a self-sustaining truth, becomes tautologically a "proof" of their irrationality. See, Mark Harrison, 1988:3-31. In Dickens's writings, however, there is no explicit, self-conscious treatment supporting the crowd leadership theory. There is no reference to the importance of the leader for forming and holding the crowd together, which later crowd theorists would regard as the crucial element for understanding crowd behaviour.

population, ... and the majority were wage-earners"²³. In addition, what promoted these "sober workers" and others to resort to the destructive violence in the Gordon Riots was not fickle and purposeless. In Christopher Hibbert's words: "... the poor were in real revolt against authority. For as long as any of them could remember they had been insulted, frustrated and ignored; the victims of laws specifically directed against them; the lower orders in a society which shamefully abused them" (Hibbert, 1959:92). George Rudé concludes that the mob's deeper purpose was "to settle accounts with the rich, if only for a day, and so to achieve some rough kind of social justice" (Rudé, 1970:289).

Dickens was not a social scientist, but a novelist, and as such he was not obliged to be accurate about historical facts. *Barnaby Rudge* does represent, however, the image of the crowd current in the mid-nineteenth century. The general pattern of the crowd derived from Dickens's novel has great affinity to Carlyle's view of the crowd. Carlyle's monumental book *The French Revolution*²⁴ (1837) is one of the most influential views of the crowd in the early Victorian period. In this book, the crowd appears as abstract, anonymous and inscrutable, a view that fits Carlyle's apocalyptic and metaphysical perception of the revolution²⁵. As is well known, the *French Revolution* furnished Dickens with the form, content and literary techniques for portraying the events of 1789²⁶. It may seem an irony that, although

23. See George Rudé, 1970, especially chapter "The Gordon Riots: A Study of the Rioters and Their Victims", pp.268-293.

24. Carlyle's *French Revolution*, first published in 1837, is in fact very much like a novel, what we would call today a "non-fictional novel". The narrative claims to be historically true, but uses techniques developed in prose fiction to tell its story in a vivid and exciting way: scenic construction, shifting points of view, free indirect speech, tense narration, interactive symbolism and so on. See David Lodge, 1989, pp.129-130.

25. See John McClelland (1989), especially section "A Pre-psychological Account of the Leaderless Crowd: Carlyle on the French Revolution", pp.114-121.

26. The influence of Carlyle on Dickens is well documented. For an extensive analysis of Carlyle's influence on Dickens as well as their personal relationship, see William Oddie (1972) and Michael Goldberg, (1972). For comparative studies between *The French Revolution* and *A Tale of Two Cities* regarding the description of the events and details of the episodes, the construction of the characters, the treatment of the narrative and the use of literary and stylistic devices, see: Michael Timko, 1983:177-195; Carol MacKay, 1983:197-207; Chris Bossche, 1983:209-221.

Carlyle's influence on Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* is recognized as greater than in *Barnaby Rudge*²⁷, Dickens unintentionally distorts Carlyle's view of the crowd by letting us into the crowd mind. Dickens tells us far too much about the individuals who compose the crowd in *A Tale* for it to be a truly Carlylean crowd. As soon as the crowd stops being abstract, anonymous and inscrutable, the less true to Carlyle's pattern it becomes.

2.2.2 The Crowd in *A Tale of Two Cities*

A Tale of Two Cities appeared in print in 1859, eighteen years after *Barnaby Rudge*. Dickens, then a mature writer, shows himself more aware of the complexity of social interconnections and of the intricate causes of collective action. He offers a deeper account of how the crowd arises, who their components are and how they behave. Yet, Dickens still seems no less self-righteous in his conception of the destructive tendencies of the crowd.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the crowd is not a formless mass but a class, working men and women from the artisan district of the Faubourg St. Antoine. As Taylor Stoehr has pointed out, in "the Paris tale" there is not an individual hero but a whole class (Stoehr, 1966:200). In *A Tale*, the mob is the focus of the line of action and gathers its interest from its structure and movement. The crowd no longer comes from nowhere, but from Saint Antoine, which functions as a metaphor reflecting and representing the crowd. In the Revolution scenes, all Saint Antoine comes alive, shouts, dances, kills and sleeps. The leaders of the crowd no longer merely "spring

27. According to Butt and Tillotson, the influence of Carlyle on *Barnaby Rudge* is uncertain. Carlyle's *Chartism* (1839) appeared in print two years before *Barnaby* and it is possible that it may have offered the general inspiration for Dickens's account of mob violence (Butt and Tillotson, 1982:76-88). The most evident influence of Carlyle's *The French Revolution* appears in *A Tale of Two Cities*, as several commentators have exhaustively examined. Dickens jokingly claims that his preparation for writing the novel included reading Carlyle's *History* nine times and his debt to him is referred to the preface of the first edition: "It has been one of my hopes to add something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding of this terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to the philosophy of Mr. Carlyle's wonderful book". Carlyle, more than furnishing Dickens with his own history of the Revolution, contributed directly and personally to the production of *A Tale of Two Cities*. For Carlyle's letters with comments and suggestions for Dickens's novel, see Goldberg, 1972:61-85 and Oddie, 1972:101-104.

up" and "disappear" and "reappear" in the next crisis as we read in *Barnaby*, but are the product of a much more complex historical process. The leaders are variously represented by the Jacquerie - Jacques One, Jacques Two, and so on²⁸.

Another crucial difference between *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Barnaby Rudge* is Dickens's emphasis on the causes underpinning the demoniac eruption of the mob. While in *Barnaby* the Gordon rioters are moved by random fever, gullibility and strictly personal motives, in *A Tale* poverty and injustice are the causes of degenerate social behaviour. At the beginning of chapter 23, Dickens denounces the poverty of the countryside: "far and wide lay a ruined country, yielding nothing but desolation. Every green leaf, every blade of grass and blade of grain, was as shrivelled and poor as the miserable people. Everything was bowed down, dejected, oppressed, and broken. Habitations, fences, domesticated animals, men, women, children, and the soil that bore them - all worn out" (TTC:257). The injustice, indifference and cruelty of the privileged classes are also seen to sow the seeds of revolt. The French Revolution, as suggested by John Gross, "compels Dickens to take a view of history, however primitive" (Gross, 1962:192). The guillotine is shown as the final product of that intolerable situation. Then, the outbreak of the crowd could no longer be seen merely as "an explosion of madness in the spontaneous suggestion of the moment" as we are told in the first novel (BR:484) but is to be seen as growing gradually during a long process of oppression. The reasons why people run wild could now be explained through more complex and more human motives than was suggested in *Barnaby*.

28. As suggested by Craig, the Jacquerie can be symbolically regarded as the incarnation of the figure of all men, "the common man". The variations of this name in different languages (Jacques Bonhomme in France, John Common in England, Iohne the Commonweill in Scotland) from Renaissance times had stood for the mass of the people, peasantry and town workfolk (Craig, 1983:79).

Significantly, Dickens attempts to draw faces in the crowd. There is a description, perhaps a superficial one²⁹, of the people of Saint Antoine at the moment before the Revolution (the novel opens in 1775 and runs on to the events of 1789 and after). We see, through Dickens's eyes, who these people are, what they do, how they live, work and entertain themselves. Dickens does not portray them as mere "scum" and bandits, but as shopkeepers and craftsmen, wine merchants and their clerks (a view which is endorsed by the historical records)³⁰. Dickens demonstrates as well a sympathetic identification with the oppressed people. Occasionally, he depicts the mob's achievement of "human fellowship", through their uprising, as Monod has remarked (1971:180):

"Not before dark night did the men and women come back to the children, wailing and breadless. Then, the miserable bakers' shops were beset by long files of them, patiently waiting to buy bad bread; and while they waited with stomachs faint and empty, they beguiled the time by embracing one another on the triumphs of the day, and achieving them again in gossip. Gradually, these strings of ragged people shortened and frayed away; and then poor lights began to shine in high windows, and slender fires were made in the streets, at which neighbours cooked in common, afterwards supping at their doors. Scanty and insufficient suppers those, and innocent of meat, as of most other sauce to wretched bread. Yet, human fellowship infused some nourishment into the flinty viands, and struck some sparks of cheerfulness out of them. Fathers and mothers who had had their full share in the worst of the day, played gently with their meagre children; and lovers, with such a world around them and before them, loved and hoped"(TTC:254).

29. Craig has been critical of the fact that Dickens offers a very superficial account of the poverty and misery afflicting the Parisians at the time of French Revolution, and a simplistic view of the people and their values: "We are rarely close to, let alone inside, any suffering workman or peasant Consider how different *A Tale* would have been if he had put amongst the families crying and dying for want of bread and flour at a price they could afford - if we had seen at a close quarters the mother, say, who killed two of her three children for fear of famine, the people who killed themselves for the same reason, or dropped dead in the Paris streets" (Craig, 1983:79-80).

30. George Rudé analysing the social composition of the Parisian insurgents, remarks that they were not professional beggars or vagrants, but victims of the recent unemployment in certain Paris trades, who had been thrown out of work by the economic crisis that broke out on the eve of the Revolution. Most of them were wage-earners, shopkeepers and craftsmen, wine merchants and their clerks, masters and artisans (Rudé, 1970:96-129).

However, once the mob is aroused, its cruel and fickle behaviour is comparable to that described in *Barnaby Rudge*. Dickens evokes again the imagery of the elemental, the bestial, the pathological in similar terms to those in his first crowd novel. The crowd which storms the Bastille is once more "a sea of black and threatening waters", "a vast dusky mass of scarecrows heaving to and fro" every person at "a high-fever heat", "the women thirsting shrilly for blood" (TTC:244). The members of the revolutionary crowd's popular tribunal in the last part of the novel are again "the lowest, cruellest, and worst populace of the city, never without its quantity of low, cruel and bad"(TTC:311). The crowd that gathers around the Grindstone to murder the prisoners perform the most barbarous acts of butchery:

"... their hideous countenances were all bloody and sweaty, and all awry with howling ... some women held wine to their mouths that they might drink; and what with dropping blood, and what with dropping wine, and what with the stream of sparks struck out of the stone, all their wicked atmosphere seemed gore and fire" (TTC:291)

"Some of the hacked swords were tied to the wrists of those who carried them with strips of linen and fragment of dress: ligatures various in kind but all deep of the one colour. And as the frantic wielders of these weapons snatched them from the stream of sparks and tore away into the streets, the same red hue was red in their frenzied eyes"(TTC:292).

2.3 The Crowd in the Social Context in the Novel

Like all historical novels, *Barnaby Rudge* or *A Tale of Two Cities*, presents itself as a record of events that have an existence outside the novel. And like all realistic novels, they accommodate a great deal of fiction without abandoning their claim to participate in a kind of truth. The novel, like any literary work, is part of social practice and serves to address certain "messages" to its readers³¹. In this sense, it is

31. In this process of "portraying" a social phenomenon, as Catherine Callagher has remarked, the novel tends to focus on what it is about rather than on "how" it produces its representational effects. Thus the final product tends to conceal the fictionness of its fiction (Callagher, 1982:124-145).

essential to relate the meanings coming out of the novel to the historical period and social context it was inserted into³².

In the framework of general unrest of mid-nineteenth century Britain, with the crowd threatening to rebound upon the rich in an imminent nightmare, it is possible to argue that Dickens and other contemporary social critics might have hoped that they themselves, with their own testimony on the dangers of the revolutionary upheaval, could contribute to diverting the course of the revolution. In their writings, they might have sought to foster, in their own light, a widespread understanding of the causes of social discontent and articulate possible means to prevent the people's transformation into the mob, and so help to avoid the possibility of the catastrophe they were predicting.

It became something of a cliché in the early nineteenth century that the same causes would anywhere generate the same results as in France. The most forcible expression of this belief came from Carlyle, who warns everywhere in his writings against the danger of a second revolution, this time on British soil. "Good Heavens, will not one French Revolution and Reign of Terror suffice us, but there must be two? (*Past and Present*, quoted in Williams, 1987:106). There seemed to exist also a consensus that the people were turning themselves into a revolutionary crowd because of the massive disaffection of the poor coupled with a breakdown of community caused by the new industrialism. "The humour of revolt against the upper classes", wrote Carlyle in *Chartism*, "unless changed would be fatal". Sharing this view, Kingsley alerts his contemporaries to the exploitation of the masses: "the boiler will be strained to bursting pitch, till some jar, some slight crisis, suddenly directs the imprisoned forces to one point, and then - What then? Look at France and see" (quoted in Williams, 1987:113).

32. Of course, various competing "meanings" (and sometimes contradictory meanings) can be drawn from the novel; and there is not an objective way, in any circumstance, to establish whether one interpretation is more "objectively" valid than another and even the shared assumptions of the historians about the past cannot remove such difficulties. However, an analysis of the historical social context serves to elucidate the various plausible meanings coming out of the novel.

The conclusion drawn by socially concerned, liberal-minded Victorians was that the revolution in England must be avoided by removing the conditions that might provoke it. A demand for improvement in the conditions of the poor was articulated in two basic ways. First, by appealing to the upper classes' sense of altruism, asking the rich to be kind and charitable towards the poor. Such a claim for a "change of heart in the governing classes", as Oddie calls it (1972:116), seemed ineffective. Within the emergent industrial system, with new methods of production and social relations with increasing emphasis on profit, besides the breakdown of the old ties of community³³, there appeared to exist no immediate financial advantage to be gained from helping the lower classes. The second strategy, alerting the affluent classes to the dangers of their neglect, and appealing to their sense of survival, seemed to be more effective. A popular rebellion might not only threaten the ruling class but also, as Carlyle predicted, destroy the very structure of society and bring an end to civilization. "These twenty-four million labouring men, if their affairs remain unregulated, chaotic, will burn ricks and mills; *reduce us, themselves and the world into ashes and ruin* (Carlyle, (1839) 1974:194, emphasis added). In this sense, the French Revolution remained a frightful warning and, if heeded, a valuable lesson. Every popular movement, riot, demonstration, even workers' trade unions and co-operative societies, tended to be seen as a threat to established society. Riots were just the tip of the iceberg, and if the authorities would not tame them quickly they could get out of hand and lead again to a revolution as they had in 1789:

"The things they will do, if so left, are too frightful to think of! It has been done once in the sight of the whole earth, and in these generations: can it need to be done a second time?" (Carlyle, (1839) 1974:160).

Operating in this context, Dickens is aware of many of these ideas, though he also resists some of their implications. As we will discuss in the following section, in both of his novels Dickens is deeply concerned with the consequences of a

33. I am referring here to the remnants of the old feudal code of conduct and the claim for brotherhood, which did not imply, of course, equality but expected communal aid and assistance.

simultaneously oppressive and neglectful social and political system in creating revolutionary discontent. He sees the upper classes' failure of responsibility and selfishness contributing to the brutalization of the poor. He also suggests that if the upper classes would not deal with the problem of providing for the needs of the people, they would fall victims to the brutal mob.

Dickens's attitude towards the crowd is highly ambivalent; there are mixed and conflicting feelings towards it. Sharing the public opinion of the time, Dickens's abominates the mob's violence and warns against its potentially disastrous consequences. Interestingly, however, as Phillip Collins has noted, Dickens seems to "follow" the mob in *Barnaby Rudge*, and not their victims or opponents (despite having obviously established a general framework in which "the good people" are threatened by a vicious mob). Dickens's much-quoted letters to Forster, about his progress in writing the novel, show at least an imaginative sympathy with the mob (Collins, 1965:45).

"I have just burst into Newgate and I am going in the next number to tear the prisoners out by the hair of their heads (11 September, 1841). I have let all the prisoners out of Newgate, burn down the Lord Mansfield's, and played the very devil. Another number will finish the 'fires'. I feel quite smoky when I am at work" (quoted in Collins, 1965:45).

In *A Tale*, Dickens's sympathy with the poor and concern with the neglect in which they live may suggest that he was prepared to use these factors, at least to a certain degree, as an extenuation of the mob's violence. Yet, Dickens does not hesitate to demonstrate that, if the mob rose up, it had to be crushed for the sake of society. Dickens exhibited little doubt in both novels about the necessity of having the rioters and the revolutionaries hanged or shot.

A further controversy about Dickens's attitude towards the crowd is brought about by the imaginative force of his scenes of mob violence. To Edmund Wilson, they are an expression of Dickens's dissatisfaction with society at an unconscious level, revealed by "a hidden identification with the criminal" (1941:20). For Humphry House, the violence in the mob scenes is the "rationalization of a political sense of

impotence" in face of his fear of the mob, which stemmed from a "knowledge of the hidden depths of bestiality in every man" (House, quoted in Smith, 1968:89-90). Grahame Smith further remarks that the vitality of the wrecking scenes is suspicious since so much of its force seems to stem from a morbid, even hysterical interest in the mob (1968:90). The exact nature of Dickens's feelings in his crowd scenes is problematic, and much should remain a matter of discussion. Several aspects of this controversy are certainly outside the scope of our work.

However, it is worthwhile examining Dickens's perception of the complex nature and reasons for social change, as it reveals new aspects in this debate. Comparing the domestic and the historical conflicts which run alongside each other in both novels, it is possible to see in a new light Dickens's contradictory attitude towards the crowd. The motives which make the named characters join the mob seem to disclose a hidden psychological conflict, based on class conflict, that recurs throughout the novels. For example, the place occupied by Hugh, as well as his role in the social context of the novel, seems to justify a personal desire for social upheaval and an indifference to the restoration of the social order (Lucas, 1970:97).

2.3.1 Two Characters in the Mob in *Barnaby Rudge*

2.3.1.1 Hugh

Hugh, "the uncontrollable savage", can be metaphorically seen as the prototype of the crowd. To start with, he is not socially identifiable. He does not even have a proper name, he is merely "Maypole Hugh". Our attention is constantly drawn by his appearance scarcely human: "loosely attired, in the coarsest and roughest garb, with scraps of straw and hay - his usual bed - clinging to him here and there, and mingling with his uncombed locks, he had fallen asleep in a posture as careless as his dress". (BR:138). Besides "the negligence and disorder of the whole man", his savage nature is reinforced by the fact that he is illiterate and ragged - and he himself agrees to being "more brute than man" (BR:596). In the words of John Willet:

"... that chap that can't read nor write, and has never had much to do with anything but animals, and has never lived in any way but like the animals he has lived among, is an animal" [and] "is to be treated accordingly"(BR:140).

Hugh is described almost as a giant (Stuart, 1991:29-37): "the light that fell upon this slumbering form showed it in all its muscular and handsome proportions. It was that of a young man, of a hale athletic figure, and a giant's strength, whose sunburnt face and swarthy throat, overgrown with jet black hair, might have served a painter for a model"(BR:138). Hugh has a big body but a tiny mind and in spite of his gigantic potential, he is always "sleeping": "in his fits of laziness, he sleeps so desperate hard ... that if you were to fire off cannon-balls into his ears, it wouldn't awake him" (BR:127). His sleep is emphasized during the somnolent days of the Maypole and again after the riots, when he sleeps even in prison. However, Hugh is "brisk enough when he is awake" (BR:127). The other characters, as pointed out by MacMaster, show an understandable fear of "rousing" him: Dolly conceals his identity as the man who molested her because of her "conviction that his ferocious nature, once roused would stop at nothing"(BR:221). Hugh invades other characters' dreams like the crowd hunting, the bourgeois's nightmare: to Dolly Varden, he is "a handsome satyr, half-man and half-brute" (BR:138); to Chester he is "a centaur" (BR:234), the incarnation of the beast in man - a figure that fits into his almost super-human role in the riots. Hugh's ferocious nature is definitively aroused during the riots. Always at the centre of the action, Hugh, "brisk as ever"(BR:487), comes to stand for the irresistible force of the crowd, invulnerable and immortal:

"The rioters, headed by one man [Hugh] who wielded an axe in his right hand, and bestrode a brewer's horse of great size and strength, caparisoned with fetters taken out of Newgate, which clanked as he went, made an attempt to force a passage at this point, and fire the vintners's house... And though the fellow at their head [Hugh] was marked and singled out by all, and was a conspicuous object as the only rioter on horseback, not a man could hit him... so surely there was he; calling hoarsely to his companions, brandishing his axe above his head, and dashing on as though he bore a charmed life, and was proof against ball and powder"(BR:607).

Alternating between inertia and galvanic action, Hugh resembles the crowd's lethargy in times of social tranquillity and violent arousal in times of social turbulence. The complex symbolism in the figure of Hugh has invited several interpretations. In a psychological approach, Steven Marcus has suggested that Hugh may represent the Id, "the unrestrained violent energy of the unconscious" (Marcus, 1965:211). Juliet MacMaster, regarding the animal quality of Hugh's apathy to society, argues that he is a reminder of different orders of consciousness: "The fact that he is unlettered, untutored, undirected by any of the civilizing forces that are meant to discipline and channel his energy, is suggested by his generally unawakened condition" (MacMaster, 1984:7). This analogy between Hugh's nature and the release of the untamable forces of the unconscious in the crowd is plausible and we will return to it later (see below, pp.101-6).

What interests us is to note, for the time being, Hugh's paradoxical role in the social context of the novel. If Hugh is to be seen as the very antithesis of the civilized man, the fact that he is the son of a gentleman may complicate the picture. Hugh may be seen as barbarous and morally degraded, but he is the natural son of Chester, who is the very representative of "civilized society". Critics have actually identified Hugh as the reversed image of his father³⁴. As Brian Rosenberg has noted, Chester is a gentleman, well educated, refined and frequents the most privileged circles of society. Hugh is ruddy, unschooled, raggedly dressed and has been denied any proper social status. Yet, the one is the creation of the other. If, as suggested by Rosenberg, Hugh is the mirror-image of Chester, the difference between them may not be so absolute as it appears to be at the first impression (Rosenberg, 1985:22).

In terms of social concern, Hugh and Chester play a similar role, interacting in a relationship which Oddie has called "Nature" and "Nurture" (Oddie, 1972:104).

34. Brian Rosenberg in his article "Physical Opposition in *Barnaby Rudge*" has analysed a series of simultaneous identifications and oppositions between the characters Hugh and John Chester. He remarks on the episode in which Hugh confronts John Chester in his Temple apartments. By gazing into a mirror, a single image is multiplied into two images confronting and, inevitably, staring directly at each other (Rosenberg, 1985:21-22).

Like the crowd that is manipulated by Gashford for his own ends, Hugh is put in the hands of Chester, to lead the destruction of the Maypole and Warren, those symbols of old and ordered society. To Hugh, the destruction does not matter since he has been denied any social status or identity. To Chester, despite his insistence on the role of the gentleman and of the importance of breeding, it does not mean so much to him that he is unwilling to destroy it. As remarked by John Lucas, Chester, in conniving at the burning of the Warren, makes clear "how self-destructively irresponsible is his attitude to his own heritage" (Lucas,1970:97).

In this perspective, the idea of Hugh as a metaphor for the crowd can be extended a step further. Hugh, who is allowed to live as an animal (like those, for Dickens, who composed the crowd), is shown as willing to destroy the society by which he was created and which rejects him. Such a profound neglect of society and lack of any collective feeling is specially demonstrated when Hugh and Dennis are in prison awaiting execution. There Hugh sleeps soundly as usual. He only awakes at the noise of the building of the scaffold and just rolls over and goes to sleep again: "If there was but a little more sun to bask in than can find its way into this cursed place, I'd lie in it all day, and not trouble myself to sit or to stand up once. That's all the care I have for myself. Why should I care for you?" (BR:669).

As John Lucas has argued, Dickens has organized the plot of this novel in such a way as to make the upper class responsible for Hugh's degeneration (Lucas,1970:98-99). Hugh's disregard for all other individuals as well as for society is derived from the circumstances of his creation. He is the bastard son to be seen as the "final product of a way of life that has fallen into its dotage". In other words, in the same way that Hugh is the "ripe fruit ... of that black tree", the crowd may represent the final product generated by the simultaneously oppressing and neglecting system, which could rebound in subversion and upheaval against the ruling elite. In general, Dickens seems to imply that the upper class is destroying itself through its own failures of responsibility, and further neglect of the lower classes may cause the destruction of the class which has things to lose by those who have nothing to lose.

2.3.1.2 Dennis

In the figure of Dennis, the sadistic hangman, is displayed again the suggestion of a retarded social structure in creating the stress from which come crime and derangement. Dennis, "who had been bred and matured in the good old school" (BR:590), divides his loyalties between the law and the mob and represents the decadent and ambiguous nature of authority in Victorian times (Middlebro, 1980:94). Dennis had been amongst the leaders of the riots, but contradictorily, when the gates of Newgate had been burned down, he tried to prevent the mob from finding and rescuing four inhabitants of the death cells who were to be hanged. He, who "had administered the good old laws on the good old plan" (BR:590), deals with the plea of these men to be freed from the blazing prison cynically: - "Don't you respect the law, the constitootion, nothing?" (BR:592). In spite of his unlawful actions during the riots, he enjoys his lawful profession as a hangman.

In the figure of the hangman, the problem of authority is brought to the surface. Dennis is representative of the ineffective law and the gallows, "the symbol of [British institutions'] dignity" (BR:682). If Dickens was distressed by the unlawful actions of the crowd, he was also aware of the role of the contemporary system of law in creating violent social discontent³⁵. Dickens remarks that the growth of anarchic violence was fostered by "bad criminal laws, bad prison regulations and the worst conceivable police" (BR:453). The activities of the hangman, Dickens suggests, only contributes to the disorder and violence that can easily turn against the state. In this sense, Dickens sets the ground to start recognizing that the causes which impelled the explosion of the mob were, at least in part, rooted in the evils of society itself.

35. Dickens's attitudes towards the Victorian institutions and their the capacity for promoting change is a complex question, beyond the limits of our investigation. However, it is illustrative of the way in which Dickens claims that he was just as convinced of "the extraordinary ignorance on the part of those who make the law" as he was fearful of "what is behind us, and what is ever ready to break in if it is too long despised" (Nelson, 1981:201). For a discussion of Dickens's attitudes to Victorian society see, Walter Crotch, 1913, *passim*; Phillip Collins, 196:527-51; Steven Marcus, 1965:300-313.

Given a radical hostility towards Victorian society and an increasing scepticism about practical means of reforming it, Goldberg seems right to argue that "Dickens's descriptions of the demoniac eruptions of the mob served to work off something of his own neurotic impatience and anger" (1972: 103). In this particular sense, Dickens may have approved of the destruction of an "order that no longer contained value" (Goldberg, 1972:103). Yet, Dickens is unwilling to recognize that the crowd may represent a bid for an alternative kind of society. As it becomes clearer in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens was prepared to see social revolt as a process growing out of the "irresponsibility" and neglect of the ruling elites in more explicit terms, but this does not mean that he endorses revolution as an instrument of change, as we will discuss in the following section.

2.3.2 The Deterministic View of History in *A Tale of Two Cities*

In *A Tale*, Dickens describes the causes which make the people rise and turn themselves into a barbarous mob. These causes are shown to be partially rooted in the unjust state of poverty and oppression. In locating the origins of the French Revolution, he points to the indifference, incomprehension and the brutality of the ruling classes. But only in part, since underpinning the overall organization of *A Tale* there is a tendency to see the revolution arising from a blood-curse process working itself out. The cruelties of the ruling class and their devices to maintain order and power are also the origin of reprisal. The very repressions of the aristocracy - the secret prisoners, the trampled child, the tortured father - are preparing an earthquake, as Mme Defarge puts it, which must lead to the catastrophe when the oppressed people rise up, when Saint Antoine marches on the Bastille and the Jaquerie seize from the hands of Monsieur the bloody prerogatives of power.

In *A Tale* we begin to find signs that class motives are more pressing and more human motives than the fevered gullibility of the Gordon rioters. In describing the state of misery of the "ill-used townsfolk" and the starving peasantry in France under the *ancien régime*, Dickens shows that the privileged classes are importantly responsible for the brutish state of the poor. Certainly following Carlyle and some

of Carlyle's own sources³⁶, Dickens also sees that the revolution was in part a consequence of aristocratic privilege; of a taxation system which exempted the richest and of an exclusive exercise of influence in the state by a noble elite. In a *Tale of Two Cities*, the aristocratic cruelty, compounded by disdain and class superiority, is dramatized in the opening pages in the episode in which the carriage of the Monsieur le Marquis carelessly runs down and kills a poor child³⁷. The Marquis, Dickens's typical representative of the privileged aristocracy, can respond to others only in terms of his class and recognizes no common bond of humanity. His carriage kills a child and he can only see the incident in terms of his contempt for the poor: "I would ride over any of you very willingly, and exterminate you from the earth"(TTC:142).

As Dickens's perception of the episodes of 1789 is framed by Carlyle's fatalistic conception of history, the revolution is seen as the result of "inexorable forces"³⁸. In the opening paragraph of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens through the famous series of antitheses³⁹ points to the difficulty of understanding public events for those immersed in them, the inability of men to influence the course of history as

36. See William Oddie 1972:61-85; Michael Goldberg, 1972:108-109 and 1983:223-232; Elliot Gilbert 1983:247-265.

37. Reckless driving was, according to Andrew Sanders, a common hazard in eighteenth-century Paris. "The carriages of the rich posed a daily threat to the pedestrians, and even solitary walkers in the suburbs were prone to accidents". According to Sanders, the fatal accident related in the novel derives almost certainly from the letters of Hermann Ludwig Heinrich, that appeared in an English translation in 1832 as *A Tour in England, by a German Prince*. The letter describes an accident in which the Prince's carriage passes over a poor child's body (Sanders, 1985 :148-156).

38. Michael Timko, 1983:177-195; Carol MacKay, 1983:197-207; Chris Bossche, 1983:209-221.

39. Elliot Gilbert examining the perception of history in Dickens, argues that Dickens in using a series of contradictory adjectives which serves to characterize simultaneously the present period and the previous century, amalgamates two periods into one. According to Gilbert, Dickens adapts Carlylian anachronism to his own study of the confluence of past and present, London and Paris being just two more of the many contrasting but interdependent entities, about which the tale is to be written (Gilbert, 1983:259).

well as the authorities' unawareness of the significance of the historical forces that are shaping the future:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us. We were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way" (TTC:35).

On the surface things in general seemed "settled for ever", but behind these appearances, the "Woodman Fate" and the "Farmer Death" were at work preparing their guillotine and their tumbrils (TTC:36). Critics have noted that Dickens's narration of these historical events reveals a deterministic and prophetic quality, since what is foreshadowed is invariably fulfilled⁴⁰. Many points in the story - the echoing footsteps, the evocation of the trees already growing in the forest that will be cut and fashioned into the guillotine - in recalling the past and suggesting the future, serve to emphasize the inevitability of the revolution (Rignall, 1984:575). The opening French scene with its broken wine cask flooding the streets suggests already in sacramental overtones the blood that will one day flow in the streets⁴¹. But Dickens does not leave matters at the level of mere suggestion: "The time was to come, when that wine too would be spilled on the streets-stones, and when the stain of it would be red upon many there"(TTC:61). As Dickens orders the historical incidents themselves in a way that every significant scene presented includes within it the hint of later development, we come to know later in the novel that the man who wrote "blood" on the wall was Gaspar, the father of the trampled

40. See for instance, J. Rignall 1984: 576; David Marcus 1987:22-35; Robert Alter 1987:13-22 and Elliot Gilbert, 1983:258-264.

41. All of the French action appears first as a foreshadowing and later as a realization of the Revolution, but only in retrospect do events assume a clear order, as it is possible to note in the following passage: "The wine was red wine, and had stained the grounds of the narrow street... It had stained many hands too... and the forehead of a woman who nursed her baby, was stained with the stain of the old rag she wound about her head again. Those who had been greedy with the staves of the cask, had acquired a tigerish smear about the mouth; and one tall joker ... scrawled upon a wall with his finger dipped in muddy wine-lees - BLOOD" (TTC:61).

child. Taking on an almost barbarian aspect, Gaspar murders the Marquis in revenge and is himself captured and tortured to death. This mechanism of murder and retribution confirms on the other hand Dickens's perception of the chain reaction of violence generating violence, evil provoking evil.

The prophecy of blood has been fulfilled, but there seems to be a paradox here: Gaspar's act of murder does not merely work out his own fate, but also the fate of the Marquis, thereby implying that the power and the will of the oppressed people as a whole might also "work out" the fate of the classes in power. In the chapter called "Fire Rises", the real power of the crowd to promote revolution and put an end to the aristocracy, whose lives are to be "burned away", is vividly enacted. There, Dickens offers a dramatic image of the mob rising up, an action not merely incidental but also guided by will. At night, one of the inhabitants of Saint Antoine, the mender of roads, exchanges his blue cap for a red one and joins hands with those many who share his suffering for the purpose of burning the Marquis's chateau, a symbol which clearly stands for aristocratic oppression in general. Each Jacques calls the other "Jacques": "from East, West, North and South, through the woods, four heartrending, unkempt figures crushed the high grass and cracked the branches, striding on cautiously to come together in the courtyard' of the Marquis' chateau, and as it goes up in flames every villager sets a lighted candle in his window" (TTC:262). The burning of the Marquis's chateau was not simply an act of blind rage; it was also a purposive act requiring forethought and planning. Dickens shows that the evil actions of the mob are consequences of a formerly oppressive aristocracy, but they were no less evil because of this: "The terror is the work of the devil and the flames which destroy the chateau blow from the infernal regions"(TTC:261). This episode corroborates Dickens's awareness that the mob learns its lessons of violence from its own ruling class.

Nonetheless, Dickens still does not offer a consistent account of the causes of the insurrection of the French revolutionaries. When we move back into history in Dickens's eyes, revengeful sadism is unambiguously the force propelling the outburst of the crowd: "The remorseless sea of turbulently swaying shapes, voices of vengeance, and faces hardened in the furnace of suffering until the touch of pity

could make no mark on them" (TTC:249). When the cruel abduction of a tenant's wife, whom the Evrémondes claimed under the feudal privilege of the *droit de seigneur*, is disclosed in the middle of the novel, we come to know that the abused peasant is the sister of Mme Defarge. It becomes clear then that all class hate and mercilessness infused in Mme Defarge is rooted in this incident. In symbolical terms, as Albert Hutter has noted, this rape may dramatize the exploitation of personal "wealth" and Mme Defarge's revenge is all the more awful because it reverses the sister's helplessness - or more generally, it reverses the assumed passivity of Victorian women and of the lower classes (Hutter, 1978:457). The notion that the cruelties and abductions committed in one generation determine the fate of other generations is reinforced. The innocent Darnay (nephew of Evrémonde), is condemned by the rape committed by his uncle and, more generally, by the sins of the aristocratic class to which he belongs.

In this sense, *A Tale of Two Cities* dramatizes how social upheaval comes about as the inevitable result of oppression and exploitation. "Crush humanity out of shape once more, and under similar hammers, it will twist itself into the same tortured forms" (TTC:399). Dickens's logic is simple: the more violently you exploit and distort in one direction, the more violent will be the reaction. The same moral of procreation and violation we have examined in *Barnaby* is present in *A Tale*: "Sow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind" (TTC:399). The rich who had planted the seed of the revolt by being cruel to the poor, was receiving the retribution.

However, in Dickens's account, the revolution brings no substantial change, as the revolutionaries merely invert the violence of their former oppressors. The revolution is seen as the result of the "distortions of humanity", but it is also paradoxically a continuation of it; the new order simply perpetuates the dehumanization of the old system. The revolutionaries' hatred and craving for revenge remains long after the old exploiters have been destroyed, taking the form of cruelty and pure sadism towards others. The revolutionaries of *A Tale* recognize

no humanitarian bounds and are unconcerned with the plight of individuals⁴². The logical conclusion that follows is that the revolution inevitably produces a tyranny worse than the one it overthrows. At least that is one of the morals that can be drawn from Dickens's portrayal of the September Massacres of 1792. Through Dr Manette and Mr Lorry, who were at the window witnessing the horror of the Grindstone scene, Dickens invites us to see an appalling spectacle of bestial violence, that we don't know even in our dreams. The terror is let loose and the violence has passed beyond human control. This is a spectacle no longer performed by human beings:

" The frantic wielders of these weapons snatched them from the stream of sparks and tore away into the streets, the same red hue was red in their frenzied eyes; - eyes which any unbrutalised beholder would have given twenty years of life, to petrify with a well-directed gun. All this was seen in a moment, as the vision of a drowning man, or of any creature at any very great pass, could see a world if it were there. They drew back from the window, and the Doctor looked for explanation in his friend's ashy face (TTC:291-2)".

Interestingly, in this episode the heroes and vicariously the reader are placed in the besieged building, and thus inevitably made to identify with the occupants and owners threatened by the mob (Lodge,1989:137)⁴³. Dickens sees this scene as the vision of a drowning man. This scene is the product of an imagination *in extremis*. In Rignall's words, "it is a bourgeois nightmare of anarchy unleashed by the rebellion of the oppressed" (Rignall, 1984:579). Rignall has identified in this scene a complex suggestion of the crowd as something that has fled beyond the process of

42. The revolutionaries show no appreciation of Dr Manette's intervention in favour of Darnay and the personal drama of Lucie Manette.

43. The technique of assuming the eye-witness formula is a recurrent device adopted by the writers in describing crowd scenes, and some examples are also to be found in Zola, as we will examine later. The distinction between "us" and "them" is clearly represented: the writer who remains remarkably sober speaks of "them", who have gone mad in the feverish tumult of the crowd: "A dark mass, looming through a cloud of dust, soon become visible; shouting and whooping like savages, they come rushing on pell-mell"(BR:495)". Dickens himself recognizes that the crowd's atrocities "combined to form a scene never to be forgotten by those who saw it and were not actors in the work, so long as life endured" (BR:507).

history. Even if the revolutionaries' violence is the logical culmination of the system of oppression to which they were subject, the violence is out of all proportion. Rignall notes that Dickens in this event suddenly changes the focus from the dramatic scene to a judgmental reaction, and "reaches for his gun" to terminate the nightmare. The curious insistence on the eyes of the frenzied crowd emphasizes that vision as the vital element, and the urge to "petrify" those eyes, Rignall argues, can be read as the expression of a desire to put an end to that vision. The action is transposed from subject to object: it is not their eyes that Dickens, the narrator, wants to close, but his own. For a moment, Dickens desires "to break the historical process and retreat from his own vision of history as a pernicious continuous process" (Rignall, 1984:580).

In a political perspective, Dickens sees the crowd as a new force pressing the authorities for attention, challenging the old order of things and urging change. However, Dickens is reluctant to accept that the crowd may represent a bid for an alternative kind of social order. Dickens obviously despises crowd action. There is no need for emphasizing that his perception of the crowd action in *Barnaby Rudge* is essentially negative as is the way in which the revolutionaries' struggle for justice is negated by their brutal reversal of violence in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Caught between the desire for a healthy process of social change and a fear that any collective rupture would lead to complete chaos, making violence absolute and uncontrollable, Dickens campaigns instead for reform. As Dickens makes clear in both his novels, the upper classes in being neglectful, indifferent and cruel to the poor, were sowing the seeds of revolt and contributing to violent social uprisings. Playing on the bourgeoisie's own fear of anarchy and revolution, Dickens may have portrayed the crowd scenes to frighten the English bourgeoisie into doing something about the condition of England.

However, Dickens's position implies a contradiction. He urged his readers to see misery and oppression as the causes of degenerate behaviour, and emphasized the

need to treat the poor with sympathy and respect, so as to prevent their degeneration into a mob. However, at the same time, in portraying the mob's ghastly violence he may also have advanced a justification for the brutal treatment of the crowd by the authorities.

From another angle, Dickens's suspicions about the crowd might have been fostered by his own pre-modern view of crowd psychology. As we will discuss in the following section, Dickens is writing at a time when there was not a fully structured theory about the unconscious mind available. Therefore, to explain the crowd's puzzling behaviour, Dickens tends to equate the crowd with individuals who are morally degraded already, with "malicious inclinations" towards delinquency. Unintentionally, Dickens might have contributed then in preparing the grounds for introducing repressive measures against collective movements. The view of the members of the crowd as savage and dehumanized already obviously undermines his claim to brotherhood with and kind treatment for the people.

2.4 Dickens and the Pre-modern Psychology of the Crowd

2.4.1 Early Nineteenth Century Psychology

We come finally to the question of what Dickens thought about crowd psychology. Did he in some way anticipate, explicitly or implicitly, a more innovative view of collective psychology? There is little evidence that he did.

In portraying the mob, Dickens appears to grasp intuitively that the crowd has a kind of mind of its own. He talks about the crowd as an entity that appears to have a distinct nature from that of its single components. At moments, Dickens seems to come close to recognizing that the mind of the crowd might act differently from the individual one.

However, there is only an impression that in Dickens thought there might be an autonomous crowd mind. The psychology of Dickens's era did not acknowledge

that the unconscious mind had a particular structure with its own constituents and processes (Whyte, 1960:131-152). The established nineteenth-century psychology was committed to focusing on and explaining the "phenomena of consciousness", which was held to be its only and proper subject matter. "Consciousness" was itself regarded as the most important mental state because, it was believed, only the "conscious" mind could contain anything which was capable of rational explanation. Of course, no one doubted that many mental operations took place outside of an individual's awareness which, in principle, could grant the possibility of the "unconscious mind" as an entity separated from conscious mind. However, these operations which took place outside awareness were held to be of the same kind as those of which the individual was conscious. So, the unconscious realm was envisaged as a realm which could be known through and by the instruments provided by the conscious mind. Therefore, Dickens could not comprehend that the individual when immersed in the crowd acts on a different mental plane. To explain the puzzling behaviour of the crowd, Dickens bases his arguments on the grounds of deviant individual psychology and other types of aberration (minds distorted by alcohol, perversions or degenerations like madness).

It should be remarked nonetheless that Dickens was highly interested in "the mysteries of the mind", but only the individual mind. Several scholars⁴⁴ who have examined Dickens's attitudes in relation to his era's psychology have emphasized that anything which approached the abnormal through the macabre and the unusual (hypnotism, dreams and hallucinations) simply fascinated him⁴⁵. In the pre-Freudian context, Dickens's insistence on the power of forces beyond rational analysis is remarkable. Everywhere in his novels, Dickens insinuates that the unconscious mind has its own dark side of knowledge, its own fierce energy, as men have in their dreams, as lunatics have in their inspired visions

44. Dickens's interest in psychopathology has been treated by Leonard Manheim (1972:67-97) and Dickens's interest in dreams and hypnotism by Catherine Bernard (1981:197-216).

45. In his personal library it is possible to find more than 40 volumes containing topics related to abnormal psychology: hypnotism, dreams and hallucinations. It should be kept in mind, as Leonard Manheim has warned, that most of these books were presentation copies which Dickens may have not read. See Manheim, 1972:71-72.

(MacMaster, 1984:2)⁴⁶. Some critics have recognized that in several aspects, Dickens "went far beyond many of his contemporaries" (Kearns, 1986:112). But obviously, Dickens's position on the unconscious mind is ambiguous and equivocal. As Leonard Manheim has argued, Dickens tended to put phenomena of different kinds - supernatural events, mental deficiency, psychopathology - under the same all-embracing umbrella: "all types of nineteenth-century psychopathology: with its wages of sin, heredity, situation psychosis, febrility, delirium, melancholia, and raving lunacy were all bound into one compact mass" (Manheim, 1972:77). What interests us to emphasize here is that Dickens, despite recognizing that there is a shadowy land between the conscious and unconscious regions of the mind, could not see the full implications of this for crowd psychology. He stopped short of understanding crucial propositions about the instinctual nature and atavistic mental life of crowds, which crowd theorists would later call the "group mind" (Le Bon [1895], 1952:66).

2.4.2 The Distorted View of the Crowd

Not surprisingly, Dickens's attempt to understand the nature of the crowd and its behaviour is imprecise and sometimes contradictory. However, if we examine the notions underlying Dickens's picture of the crowd from different angles, it is possible to arrive at three general patterns: the crowd tends to be equated with the populace; the crowd is perceived as something pathological and abnormal; the crowd is criminal.

i) In *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens is hesitant about saying who were the components of the crowd. Though Dickens observes that a worker leaving his workshop or office to go home might escape from the normal social framework for an hour or two and become a member of the crowd, he is reluctant to admit that "sober workmen", by

46. The use of foreshadowing and hinting, mixed with semi-mystical, metaphysical concepts like thought transference, souls out of bodies, and "influences" from afar, as well as his tendency to refer human feeling to inanimate objects and animals can be regarded as evidence of Dickens's preoccupation with the unusual phenomena of the mind. See Manheim, 1972:77 and Fawcner, 1977:11-28.

an instantaneous transformation, could become wild brutes. Not aware that when individuals become part of the crowd their separated consciousness is suppressed by the forces of the unconscious mind, Dickens says that those who were "really honest and sincere" never rejoined the rioters (BR:484). Dickens tends to see the people who adhere to the crowd as morally degraded already with a pernicious disposition to do evil.

In this sense, the crowd especially in *Barnaby Rudge*, is somehow equated with the "populace", the "poor", "the ignorant", in short with what had always been thought of as the dregs of society, men and women with no specific identity, on the fringes of society, pushed into ghettos or suburbs, with no jobs and no aims and living outside laws and customs, or at least thought to be living in that way. The crowd seems anti-social and composed of anti-social individuals, the result of temporary or permanent dissolution of groups or classes. As we have seen, the named individuals that compose the crowd in *Barnaby* are all social outcasts: Hugh is the bastard son of a gentleman and a gypsy woman hanged for passing false notes; Barnaby is the imbecile son of a murderer and Dennis is the public hangman. Reading from *Barnaby*, we could say therefore that the crowd is an accumulation of disintegrated social elements, human waste kept or swept out of society and then hostile to it. As Dickens himself has emphasized, the crowd was composed in its major part by the "very scum and refuse of London" (BR:484), of "idle and profligate persons" whose behaviour was "terrible and fickle" (BR:475).

ii) Secondly, the crowd is conceived as something pathological or abnormal. Especially in *Barnaby Rudge*, the crowd without any apparent motive, comes together in its crazy frenzy. The crowd itself is described in terms of a "disease", a "high heat fever" that "comes from nowhere and vanishes back there". "The contagion spread like a dread fever: an infectious madness, as yet not near its height, seized on new victims every hour, and society began to tremble at their ravings"(BR:484). In remarking on the crowd's unexpected formation "on the spontaneous suggestion of the moment" (BR:403) and its periodic recurrence, Dickens seems to make an analogy with the theory of spontaneous generation, still

very influential in the first half of nineteenth century⁴⁷. In the same way that vermin were supposed to be generated spontaneously in filth thereby producing pestilences and epidemics, so the crowd was supposed to come "naturally" from filthy houses and streets, a view that supports the early assumption that the crowd was composed essentially of beggars or vagrants.

"It is in these wretched dens, in these neglected districts, that there live from birth a population out of which come pickpockets and thieves, degradation and profligacy, and our most atrocious criminals." (*Unhealthiness of London* (1847), quoted in Williams, 1987:77)

"The poorest of the poor are necessarily either the most ignorant, or the most improvident, or the most intemperate, or the class of criminals" (*Westminster Review*, 1836-7, quoted in Morris, 1991:8)

However, the crowd was also seen as a "moral disease". Dickens says that when the rioting had started a "moral plague ran through the city" (BR:484) and the Londoners were in state of "mania". There is here a complex equation of the crowd with disease, moral failure and the poor, that is obviously part of a much larger social view in Victorian times⁴⁸. It was common in that epoch to regard the

47. The theory of spontaneous generation still exercised enormous influence in the first half of the nineteenth century until Pasteur in 1862 showed that micro-organisms came only from other micro-organisms.

48. Pam Morris argues that the discourses of religion and reason in Victorian times constituted and maintained the myth of worldly success as a consequence of individual moral virtue. Prosperity and respectability were held to be the inevitable outward signs and consequences of inner moral worth. It followed that those who failed in the competitive struggle to make a living and succeed were morally unfit, improvident or lazy. To the implications of liberal social and economic doctrines, according to Morris, the evangelicals would add a pervasive sense of sin. Poverty could be seen as ordained by God, as a punishment for moral degeneracy, indolence and laziness. However, only the myth of the "free" and "absolute" subject, Morris notes, could appeal to everybody regardless of class. The poor were not merely "guilty", but had only themselves to "blame" for their own inferiority and worthlessness. Pam Morris, 1991:6-9.

working classes and the poor⁴⁹ as essentially morally lax. In various records of the nineteenth century, immorality and deviant behaviour were seen as unnatural and treated as diseases⁵⁰, afflictions understood to be derived from the poor conditions of life. Furthermore, it was also alleged that the licentious habits of the lower classes⁵¹ depressed their spirits and thus weakened their resistance to vice. As Grahame Smith has put it, "the Victorians tended to connect the sense of universal sin with their lower classes" (Smith, 1968)⁵²:

49. It is essential to bear in mind that for the whole of the 19th century, owing to the precarious conditions of working class life, the terms "poor" and "working class" are interchangeable. "Any misfortune, illness, trade depression, market fluctuation - would plunge even the most respectable working class families into extreme poverty, and all faced destitution in old age" (Pam Morris, 1991:9).

50. Susan Williams, treating the view of the diseased poor in Victorian times, has transcribed records in which moral degradation tended to be equated to poverty. In *Suggested Legislation with a View to the Improvement of the Dwellings of the Poor* (1849) Poulet Scrope asserted: "All authorities now attribute the local prevalence of typhoid fevers, cholera, and other epidemics, in a great degree to over crowded dwellings, to too many people sleeping in one room. The moral contagion thus occasioned is, perhaps even more injurious to society". Also addressing the problem of many members of one family sleeping in one bed, Gore contended that "The physical ills... are themselves appalling; but much more detrimental, much more injurious, both to individuals and the state, are the entire loss of all decency, the want of all proper self-regard, the moral degradation produced by it". Quotations from Susan Williams, 1987:77-79.

51. Susan Williams also provides evidence on this point. The title of John Liddle's lectures is in itself indicative - *On the Moral and Physical Evils resulting from the Neglect of Sanitary Measures* (1847). Edwin Chadwick in his *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* (1842) stated that "noxious physical agencies create a population that has a perpetual tendency to physical as well moral deterioration". Likewise, William Greg addressing himself to the licentious habits of the industrial workers, referred to "the insinuating virus, the putrefaction, the contagion of this moral depravation that reigns amongst them" (*An Enquiry into the State of the Manufacturing Population and the Causes and Cures of the Evils Therein Existing* (1881). Quotations from Susan Williams, 1987: 79-81.

52. Pam Morris has argued that the Victorian middle class constructed its identity upon an absolute opposition between its respectability and the total unfitness of the working class. "Despite public approval for the respectable poor, it was in fact upon vociferous reiterations of the uncouth behaviour and moral degeneracy of the "vulgar poor" that the middle class depended to construct their sense of identity and worth. Rough hands, uneducated speech, unpolished manners became reliable signifiers of inner spiritual coarseness, and absolutely necessary as such to define and justify bourgeois hegemony" (Pam Morris, 1991:8).

"An infinite state of demoralization is produced. None of the decencies common even to the lowest stage of civilization can be maintained; and the dwellers in such scenes naturally become regardless of the feelings and happiness of the others, and intensely sensual and selfish. (*Unhealthiness of London* (1847), quoted in Williams, 1987:77)

Writing in this context, Dickens shares some of these perceptions, though not all. In a speech delivered in 1851 he claimed that:

"No one can estimate the amount of mischief which is grown in dirt; that no one can say, where it starts, or where it stops, either in its *physical or moral results*, when both begin in the cradle and are not at rest in the obscene [because it is overcrowded] grave (*The Speeches* 1960:128).

"An enormous black cloud of poverty in every town is spreading and deepening every hour, and not one man in two thousand knowing anything about, or even believing in, its existence" (*Letters*, II:665 - quoted in Philpotts, 1990:270)

In a formal sense, Dickens differentiates between the mob and the poor. In writing to Forster of his hatred for Malthusian doctrines, he remarks "there is a sense and humanity in the masses, in the long run, that will not bear them". And in another letter: "I have great faith in the poor" (quoted in Smith, 1968:89). However, it should be remarked that by "the poor" Dickens means the humble, decent working classes who strove hard to stay on the side of respectability (Morris, 1991:9). Dickens seemed not to hold the lower classes directly responsible for their alleged moral failure. The common people appeared good by nature (or at least innocent), but most of them were crushed out of shape by the miserable conditions of living, hunger, and lack of education. In this sense, Dickens blamed the perpetrators of this neglect - the governing classes. Dickens's position is quite remarkable: while for many Victorians poverty was the result of lack of providence and industry or a necessity that had to be accepted in humility and resignation, for Dickens, poverty

never ceased to be something evil in itself⁵³. The vices of the poor - drunkenness for instance, that made the maddened rioters of *Barnaby* share the burning spirit and kill themselves, were bound to be extinguished when the evils of society would be extinguished.

However, Dickens was representative of his age in regarding the crowd as a distortion of the human being and the mob as a forewarning of an unspecified social chaos. He could not escape from the general tendency to identify the mob with those who were destitute, morally weaker, emotionally unstable and lacking self-control, therefore more vulnerable to the "poison" of the vices and the outrages of the crowd, that "infectious madness seizing the victims who had no firmness to resist"(BR:484). In one way or another, the lower classes were stigmatized as a potentially politically destabilizing social group, as it was "they" who would fall victim to the crowd as to other diseases when the time was opportune. As we read in a *Tale of Two Cities*, destructiveness was supposed to belong clearly to the poor, "who held life as of no account, and were demented with passionate readiness to sacrifice it"(TTC:244).

From another perspective, Dickens's tendency to perceive the crowd as something pathological or abnormal is indicated by his recurrent analogy between the crowd with madness and its members with lunatics. "If Bedlam gates had been flung wide open, there would not have issued forth such maniacs as the frenzy of that night had made" (BR:508). Labelling the bizarre behaviour of the crowd and its excesses as collective madness does not allow much further investigation. There seems to exist no way of further explaining the behaviour of a Bedlam throng; it simply exists, a fundamental fact of nature. Nonetheless, this seems a kind of stereotype that allows Dickens to escape from what he does not understand and consequently may really have frightened him.

53. Dickens's attitudes to social problems has prompted Edmund Wilson to claim that "of all the great Victorian writers, Dickens was probably the most antagonistic to the Victorian age itself" (quoted in Smith, 1968:38). For Dickens' attitude towards the poor, see Walter Crotch, 1913:121-44 and for a more recent study on Dickens's view of working men and class relations, see Trey Philpotts, 1990: 262-275.

However, if we take seriously the suggestion of extreme cases of overt illness in the members of the crowd, such as the case of the hero, Barnaby, some further consideration seems necessary. Dickens in picturing the mental anomaly in Barnaby suggests some schizophrenic tendencies⁵⁴. However, there seems to be no indication that Dickens was proposing a correlation between the symptoms of this form of insanity and the crowd state, as Elias Canetti was later to do. As we will discuss in chapter four, Canetti implies that the schizophrenic character of *Auto-da-Fé*, in not subjugating experience to an analytical system of rational thought and allowing himself to undergo endless metamorphoses, resembles the psychic state of a crowd member. It is worth noting as well that the abnormality of the characters, whom Dickens consciously portrayed as being beyond the borderline of normal human behaviour, is not, as modern psychologists insist, merely a difference in degree; it is for Dickens a difference in kind⁵⁵. For instance, Dickens describes Barnaby as a mental defective rather than a character of schizoid qualities, reproducing a confusion between mental aberration and mental deficiency characteristic of his time. In his attempt to establish a causation for Barnaby's condition, Dickens falls back upon the old concept of hereditary curse and prenatal "marking". The father of Barnaby had approached his wife just after having committed a violent murder, she seized him by the bloody wrist - and the result was that Barnaby is born foolish, with the bloody-looking mark upon his wrist, and with a congenital phobia against the sight of blood (MacMaster, 1984:4).

54. Schizophrenia is itself derived from the Greek term for a "splitting of the mind" and the expression was first introduced into psychiatry by Eugen Bleuer in 1911. The personality of the schizophrenic is often disintegrated from the very outset; the patient is often slovenly, plagued by hallucinations or delusions of a fantastic character. See Leonard Manheim, 1972:82; Lilian Hatfield, 1935:24-30 and Thelma Grove, 1987:139-148.

55 According to Manheim, the standard pattern for the fool and madman in literature - at least in pre-Freudian literature - seemed to follow two directions. Firstly, mental abnormality tended to be considered as a sign of superhuman ecstasy, such as the divine frenzy of classical literature or the identification of mental distortion with the purity of the "innocent man". Secondly, madness could be seen as a supernatural manifestation in the form of punishment or diabolic persecution, being connected with the Christian and medieval belief that demons and devils manifest themselves in madness or its imitators - dreams, sleep and delirium (Manheim, 1972:69-97).

In general, we cannot see in *Barnaby Rudge* much effort by Dickens to explain the crowd behaviour in a new psychological perspective. In a *Tale of Two Cities*, the perception of the crowd mind becomes more complex, but also more paradoxical. As we have analysed in Section 2.2, Dickens is committed in this second crowd novel to drawing faces in the crowd. He gives an identity to the inhabitants of Saint Antoine, recognises their social class and reports their daily life with a sense of humanity in the moments preceding the revolution. As the characters have an individual face, their transformation into the revolutionary mob becomes more obvious but also more puzzling. Paradoxically, the same people who were the victims of terrible oppression and were sympathetic to each other in their common suffering and therefore gained our sympathy at the beginning of the novel become the "mob of howling ruffians, which any brutalised beholder would have given twenty years of life to petrify with a well-directed gun" (TTC:292). In the course of the events, during the storming of the Bastille for instance, we witness the transformation of rational human figures like the Defarge couple into maddened beasts. It is worth noting that Dickens's generalized concern with poverty and misery as the causes of the revolution seems not to provide a satisfactory explanation for the actions of the principal named revolutionaries. The Defarges are not poverty-stricken. Dickens now seems more willing to think that respected citizens, by an instantaneous transformation, could somehow become wild brutes. However, his perplexity about the crowd violence remains and he still emphasizes the crowd as aberration, composed of errors or distortions of human nature.

This way of viewing things is perhaps the result of Dickens's perception of the crowd as essentially criminal. Once the mob is formed, every symptom of order vanishes, and the mob is guided by the principles of tyranny and unrestrained violence. The mob in *A Tale of Two Cities* is similar to that in *Barnaby Rudge*. They are both made up of angry men and women attacking, injuring and destroying anything. They are the incarnation of violence unleashed, the uncontrolled sweep of

unlawful assemblies, threatening the security of society and the peace of its members. They resist the authorities and act in total disregard of the law.

Crowds are inhuman, brutal and merciless. In both novels, Dickens, to characterize the mob at the most basic level, resorts to the metaphor of savage and wild animals, devilish beasts and demons. As already discussed in the Section 2.2 of this chapter, the members of Dickens's mob are animalized and grotesque figures, presented as mad, sub-human, demoniac creatures in their crazy frenzy. And these distortions, as David Craig has noted, quite frequently come out in the human face⁵⁶. In describing the worst excesses committed during the Terror, Dickens suggests an analogy with cannibalism: "They howled like wolves", "they thirsted like wild animals for blood", "their savages' faces glared upon their victims"(TTC:345). As Gross has noted, the entire atmosphere becomes "positively cannibalistic" (Gross, 1962:212): Jacques Three was a "life thirsting, cannibal looking, bloody-minded juryman". Madame Defarge "feasts" on the prisoner, while the whole jury becomes "a jury of dogs empanelled to try the deer" (TTC:345). Using this imagery, Dickens insinuates that the crowd annihilates the human nature of its members. To be sure, Dickens is not specifically referring to evolutionary theory and the possibility of man's regression to a primordial animal past that later crowd theorists and observers, including Zola, would develop to explain the regressive mental life of

56. In early nineteenth novels, the crowd normally is a faceless mass, being individually indistinguishable. But when they do acquire individual faces, they are deformed by violent passions, bad breeding or disease. David Craig, commenting on the illustrations of nineteenth century anti-Radical caricaturists such as Gillray, Cruikshank, and "Phiz" (Hablot Browne) who was Dickens's most frequent illustrator, notes that "the mouths of the mob gape or turn sharply down at the corners, their lower jaws sag, their noses are beaks, their eyebrows dip sharply to meet just above the nose, their lips protrude, their nostrils flare or spread, their chins stick out... The emotions we seem meant to read into these physical details include ferocity, sadistic glee, unseeing wild-eyed 'sent' states of various kinds, jeering, cackling, stupefaction" (Craig, 1983:87). For physiognomy in *Barnaby Rudge* see also Michael Hollington, 1991:9-10.

crowds and their barbaric behaviour⁵⁷. Dickens seems rather to be implying that the components of the crowd are like animals in moral terms: they are irrational and savage; they have no principles to distinguish between right and wrong; they have no sentiment and softening of sorrow.

There is, also, in a less obvious way, a multiform sense of "unnaturalness" underlying Dickens's portrait of the people who compose the crowd. A closer examination of Dickens's representation of the people of Saint Antoine reveals a kind of "moral failure" or weakness of character according to Victorian moral standards. First of all, to emphasize the sense of "abnormality" and "distortions" underlying the mob, Dickens has chosen a woman to be the spokesperson of the revolutionaries. In the mob, women are stronger, more cruel, more savage and more implacable than men. "The men were terrible, in the bloody-minded anger... but the women were a sight to chill the boldest" (TTC:252). Dickens emphasizes the ferocious participation of the women in the episode of the execution of the wretched old extortionist, Foulon, who had once recommended the hungry people to eat grass:

"They ran out with streaming hair, urging one another, and themselves, to madness with the wildest cries and actions... A score of others ran into the midst of these, beating their breasts, tearing their hair, and screaming... Give us the blood of Foulon, Give us the head of Foulon, Give us the body and the soul of Foulon, Rend Foulon to pieces, and dig him into the ground, that grass may grow from him" (TTC:252).

"With these cries, numbers of women, lashed into blind frenzy, whirled about, striking and tearing at their own friends until they dropped into a passionate swoon, and were only saved by the men belonging to them from being trampled under foot" (TTC:252).

57. In the second half of the nineteenth century, crowd theorists grounded their explanation for the savagery and primitiveness of the crowd on the theories of inheritance, evolution and degeneration. Taine, one of the first writers to give an expression to that view, has argued that, when the crowd is raised, the individual mind is launched back towards man's anthropological and biological origins. See Robert A. Nye, 1975:73-92 and Susanna Barrows, 1981:59-82.

This distortion of the female characteristics both in physical and moral terms represents in Dickens's world an aberration against "human nature" and a shocking disruption of the normal expectations about the female. Such a caricature of the revolutionary women as muscular, ugly, lacking tenderness, it has been suggested, reflects the Victorian repudiation of sensual and powerful women⁵⁸. Madame Defarge⁵⁹, a frightening woman of animal-like beauty sets a sharp contrast with Lucie Manette, a perfect Victorian female, "the ideal home companion and a loving stereotype". Madame Defarge's knitting in the service of the violence again contrasts with Lucie's "golden thread" of pacification and harmony, as well as to her dedication to the domestic arts (Kucich, 1980:127). Albert Hutter, examining the contrast between these women in the novel, similarly remarks that "Dickens gives the Frenchwomen vitality conveyed negatively as animalism ... [they] infused their vitality into the "fallen sport" of the Carmagnole, until they appear like fallen women, inhabiting a world of violence and overt sexuality" (Hutler, 1978:448-450).

What needs to be emphasized here is that the revolutionary women in *A Tale* seem to consist of a variety of rather negative meanings: the passionate and irrational frenzy of Parisian female insurgents; the revengeful and merciless bias imbued in the figure of Mme Defarge and the terror and cruelty in the most frightening "figure of the sharp female called La Guillotine" (TTC:302). In portraying such a female model, Dickens prefigures one of the central ideas of crowd psychology: the link

58. For a general discussion of women's deviation from their expected role in early Victorian culture and themes related to the "female malady", see Elaine Schowalter, 1985, *passim*.

59. According to Michael Goldberg, the figure of Madame Defarge was based on the real-life Demoiselle Théroigne, described by Carlyle. Carlyle seemed particularly convinced of women's irrationality as a factor fermenting the revolution. To portray the most intense scenes of the revolutionary emotion he mixes sexuality and violence: "Will Guards named National thrust their bayonets into the bosom of the women? Such a thought, or rather such a dim unshaped raw material of thought, ferments universally under the female nightcap; and, by earliest daybreak, on slight hint, will explode". "The Insurrection of Women" in *The French Revolution*, quoted in Goldberg, 1972:118-119.

between the female nature and crowds⁶⁰. As we will discuss later, such a link is definitively present in Zola, who drew a connection between the supposedly emotional, capricious, temperamental and fighty nature of women and the fickleness, credulity and shifting moods of crowds.

Dickens seems also to have perceived certain connections between the crowd and instinctual drives. In a very general way, Dickens appears to identify a kind of pernicious energy in the Saint Antoine people's habit of heavy drinking and overt sexuality. The rebellious vigour of revolutionaries is dramatized for example in the bursting wine cask episode, which left people dead by the dozen. Despite showing an apparent sympathy for this sort of well-deserved holiday, Dickens warns against the morbid effects of drunkenness and the dangers that might be caused by the ultimate form of the excessive "holiday energy". The anarchic energy deriving from the instincts is above all expressed in the Carmagnole dance, which combines excessive violence with a polymorphous, erotic fellow-feeling:

"Men and women danced together, women danced together, men danced together. At first, they were a mere storm of coarse red caps and coarse woollen rags; but as they filled the place... some ghastly apparition of a dance-figure gone raving mad arose among them. They advanced, retreated, struck at one another's hands, clutched at one another's heads, spun round alone, caught one another and spun round in pairs, until many of them dropped (TTC:307).

"No fight could have been half so terrible as this dance. It was so emphatically a fallen sport - a something, once innocent, delivered over to all devilry - a healthy pastime changed into a means of angering the blood, bewildering the senses, and steeling the heart. Such grace as was visible in it, made it the uglier, showing how

60. The usage of the women as a metaphor of the crowd is a constant element in the later nineteenth century crowd theory. In Le Bon's summarizing words: "Crowds are everywhere distinguished by feminine characteristics" (Le Bon [1895], 1952:39). "The simplicity and exaggeration of the sentiments of crowds have for result that a throng knows neither doubt nor certainty. Like women, it goes at once to extremes. A suspicion transforms itself as soon as announced into incontrovertible evidence. A commencement of antipathy or disapprobation ... becomes at once furious hatred" (1952:50). For the role of women in the crowd literature see Suzanna Barrows, 1981, cf. especially chapter "Metaphors of fear: Women and Alcoholics", pp. 43-72; and Serge Moscovi, 1985, chp. "Crowd, Women and Madness" pp. 107-114.

warped and perverted all things good by nature were become"(TTC:307).

As David Lodge has suggested, this wild chanting and dancing of the revolutionaries is heavily suggestive of pagan myth and ritual, especially the cult of Dionysus, whose priestesses, the Bacchae or Menaeds, would work themselves up to a similar kind of frenzy (Lodge, 1989:134). The revolutionaries, "like five thousand demons", dancing this "fallen sport"⁶¹ recalls the episode of religious defamation in *Barnaby Rudge*, in which the chapel-looters enact a kind of inverted parody of Christ's Passion, "with their hands and faces jagged and bleeding with the wounds of rusty nails ... some with great wooden fragments" (BR:465). The key to both passages is the idea of the revolutionaries' transgression of traditional gender roles and codes of social behaviour, including of course, a transgression of traditional power relations between the classes. As Lodge has remarked: "It is as if the revolution was a kind of return of the repressed. The orgiastic energy of pagan ritual, partially repressed by Christianity, but allowed in a licensed expression in the tradition of the Carnival, further repressed by Protestantism, capitalism and the Enlightenment, seem to erupt in a new and deadly serious form in the revolutionary mob" (Lodge, 1989:135).

All of the crowd action, especially in the revolution, seems indeed a demoniac carnival in Dickens's writings. The crowd's transgression of rules and codes of conduct⁶² is beyond the limits of the social order and therefore appears to be linked to images of phantoms, dreams and nightmares (Hollington, 1991:13):

"Thus a vision of coarse faces, with here and there a blot of flaring, smoky light, a dream of demon heads and savage eyes, and sticks and iron bars uplifted in the air, and whirled about; a bewildering

61. Carlyle's view of the Carmagnole as a religious depravity might have influenced Dickens's perceptions of this dance. Carlyle associates the Carmagnole with despoiling of churches: "sacristies ... altar-rails are pulled down; the Mass-Books torn into cartridge-papers! Men dance the Carmagnole all night about the bonfire. It is a ritual of the 'new religion'". Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, quoted in Michael Goldberg, 1972:113.

62. For an analysis of transgression in violence and in orgy see Georges Bataille, 1984:109-133; 186-196.

horror, in which so much was seen, and yet so little, which seemed so long, yet so short, in which there were so many phantoms, not to be forgotten all through life, and yet so many things that could not be observed in one distracting glimpse - it flitted onward, and was gone (BR:465).

"In an instant they were riding away, at full gallop, in a dense cloud of dust, and speeding on, like hunters in a dream" (BR:511).

"If the ghastliest shape of the human mind has ever pictured in its wildest dreams had risen up before him, he could not have staggered backward from its touch" (BR:504).

The riots, as MacMaster has pointed out, seem dreams made horribly real. The rioters, unloosed from all restraint as in a dream, lose contact with reality and act as if on some other plane, where fire will not burn and death will not last (MacMaster, 1984:7-8). In one of the much-quoted scenes of the burning of the Warren in *Barnaby Rudge*, we read "There were men who rushed up to the fire, and paddled in it with their hands as if in water ... and others who were restrained by force from plunging in" (BR:508). The suggestion of child's play in "paddled", MacMaster notes, appears as a reminder of the riots being a kind of game not expected to have consequences in real life. "On the skull of one drunken lad", we read in the same passage, "not twenty by his looks - who lay upon the ground with a bottle in his mouth, the lead from the roof came streaming down in a shower of liquid fire, white hot; melting his head like wax". Blending dream with reality, this passage suggests an image of a child's doll made of wax rather than flesh.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the revolutionaries' violence in the scenes of terror is pictured as something that has passed beyond human confines. The impression of unreality about the mob action is specially revealed in the scene of the Grindstone, in which the crowd is carrying out a mass murder of the revolution's prisoners. The sense of unreality is reinforced by the fact that the men in this passage appear in the most "barbarous disguises, which made them more horrible and cruel than the wildest savages" (TTC:291):

"False eyebrows and false moustaches were stuck upon them, and their hideous countenances were all awry with howling, all bloody and sweaty, and all staring and glaring with beastly excitement and

want of sleep ... men stripped to the waist, with the stain all over their limbs and bodies; men in all sort of rags, with the stain upon these rags; men devilishly set off with spoils of women's lace and silk and ribbon, with the stain dyeing those trifles through and through. Hatchets, knives, bayonets, swords, all brought to be sharpened, were all red with it" (TTC:291).

This scene effectively combines emotion and images that the Victorians normally separated (Hutter, 1978:456-7). Dickens confuses the sexual roles by connecting delicate and deadly images: "lace and silk ribbon, hatchets, knives bayonets, swords". He juxtaposes opposites: murder and celebration, ritual and anarchy, violence and delicacy. Dickens, by subverting the conventional meanings and removing the barrier between right and wrong, good and bad, reinforces the notion that the revolutionaries are beyond all acceptable or even imaginable behaviour. The view of the revolutionaries as wild animals without morality, without softening of feeling is reinforced. As in a nightmare, they are let loose to commit the most cruel atrocities of which any "human creature", with a drop of civilization in him, would be incapable.

A provoking point in Dickens's treatment of the crowd is the suggestion that the feverish energy of the crowd presses inevitably to a self-destructive end. Despite the dreamlike quality of the rioters' actions, their consequences are real enough and exert a real effect on life. Several crowd scenes show that the ultimate result of the mob storm is the destruction of the rioters themselves.

"Men who had been into the cellars, and had staved the casks, rushed to and fro stark mad, setting fire to all they saw - often to the dresses of their own friends - and kindling the building in so many parts that some had no time for escape, and were seen, with dropping hands and blackened faces, hanging senseless on the window-sills to which they had crawled, until they were sucked and drawn into the burning gulf" (BR:506).

After five days of rioting and wreckage in *Barnaby*, the violence of the mob is only surpassed by the final orgiastic scene of the mob frenzy in the fire at the vintner's house. Presented as the climax to the riots, it was "as though the last day had come and the whole universe was burning ... it seemed as if the face of Heaven were

blotted out"(BR:618). In that last night of the horrible illusion, the pain of physical destruction and agony of death are very concrete:

"The gutters of the street, and every crack and fissure in the stones, ran with scorching spirit, which being dammed up by busy hands, overflowed the road and the pavement, and formed a great pool, into which the people dropped down by dozens. They lay in heaps all round this fearful pond ... while some stopped with their lips to the brink and never raised their heads again, others sprang up from their fiery draught, and danced, half in a mad triumph, and half in the agony of suffocation, until they fell, and steeped their corpses in the liquor that had killed them. Nor was this the worst and the most appalling kind of death that happened on this fatal night. From the burning cellars, where they drank out of hats, pails, buckets, tubs and shoes, some men were drawn, alive, but all alight from head to foot; who in their unbearable anguish and suffering, making for anything that had the look of water, rolled, hissing, in this hideous lake, and splashed up liquid fire which lapped in all it met with as it ran along the surface, and neither spared the living or the dead"(BR:618).

This passage reveals Dickens's treatment of the anarchy of the mob as something self-destructive and marks its connection with the morbid consequences of drunkenness. It may also be implied here that the self-destruction of the members of the crowd is the natural and divinely ordered punishment for disrupting the "normal" course of things. "On this last night of the riots - for the last night it was - the wretched victims of a senseless outcry, became themselves the dust and the flames they had kindled, and strewed the public streets of London"(BR:618).

2.4.3 The Individual Versus the Crowd

The moral premisses through which Dickens analyses the crowd phenomena expresses the belief that the crowd can somehow be avoided and resisted by those who have "firmness" and wish to do so. The best example occurs in the scene in which Gabriel Varden finds himself defenceless in the midst of a furious crowd and emphatically refuses to pick the lock of the prison-gate. Despite being urged "by promises, by blows, by offers of reward and threats of instant death" (BR:579),

Gabriel Varden, being "a worthy man... an honest tradesman" (BR:577) is inflexible: he "could never reconcile his conscience" (BR:572):

"Nothing could move ...the sturdy locksmith. The savage faces that glared upon him; the cries of those who thirsted, like wild animals, for his blood; the sight of men pressing forward, and trampling down their fellows, as they strove to reach him, and struck at him above the heads of other men, with axes and with iron bars; all failed to daunt him. He looked from man to man, and face to face, and still, with quickened breath and lessening colour, cried firmly "I will not" (BR:579).

The logic underscoring this view is that the worthy individual, the honest man, no matter what his class, is better able to resist collective influence provided he has and knows his place in society. At this point the question of how Dickens has treated the conception of "individuality" and the notions of rationality (self-conscious thought, will, volition, etc) connected to it in opposition to the notion of the crowd has to be raised.

Confined by their moral concerns, Victorian writers too often denied or ignored the instinctive, violent, sexual, and irrational impulses in their novels' heroes and heroines. Dickens, writing within this tradition, presents his good characters as innocent and lovable creatures with self-sacrificing natures, by which they establish a sharp contrast with the violent, irrational and wicked characters. Such a manichean model has led to a general view of these "heroes" as unidirectional, lacking psychological complexity. However, for several years past critics have been discovering that Victorian novels can be as self-reflective as any novels and currently this has been the focus of increasingly sophisticated theoretical approaches⁶³. The antithetical models of "individuality" and "crowd" in Dickens's writings expresses such a complexity.

63. Q. D. Leavis' work (1970) and John Lucas, (1970) marked the beginning of increased respect for Dickens's seriousness as a social critic. Also influential in insisting upon Dickens's ever-increasing awareness of the oppressive influence of social structures is Pam Morris, (1991).

The atmosphere of repression in Dickens's good characters as they are made to suppress their own violence and egotistical rivalry, is well-known. However, Dickens does not present the classic model of psychological coherence and transparency. There is a certain potential for violence implicit in Dickens's good characters, which is not translatable into the self-denying terms of their selves. Such "hidden" and "latent" violence leads ultimately to the isolation of the individual within the narrow limits of personal identity, as Dickens complains at the beginning of *A Tale*:

"A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to each other. ... something of the awfulness, even of death itself, is referable to this"(TTC:44).

One of the ironies in Dickens is that, by representing the repression of self-transcending violence of his good characters, he ultimately emphasises the gap between emotional experience and public life and the inability of the individuals to put themselves in an active relation to some shared social order. According to John Kucich, much of the self-constraint found in the heroes of Dickens's novels - and in Victorian fiction generally - is not an attempt to deny human needs for emotional extension (Kucich, 1980 and 1983). Instead, it is designed as a representational strategy for convincing us about what such fulfilment might be like. Both violent and repressed characters, as Kucich has remarked, despite their apparent differences, are similarly based on subject-centred conceptions of the psyche. Conventionally, the only alternative to self-repression is the expression of violence itself, but this in Dickens's writings brings no release from the agony of personal boundaries. Kucich claims that at the same time as Dickens was at pains to show that there was no way out of this psychic economy, he also tended to push it toward an apparent impossibility.

"Dickens recognizes that within the system of psychic representation conventionally available to him any pursuit of a liberating self-negation ... is inevitably reabsorbed in an economy of self-coherence" (Kucich,1983:66).

As Kucich explains, Dickens's bad characters, murderers for instance, are always restrained by their guilty self-recognition. However, if Dickens was sensitive to the dilemma of restricted psychic economies, he also feared that any successful disruption of these psychic economies by force alone could make violence absolute and uncontrollable. Faced with this grim double-bind, Dickens tends to incorporate violence, according to Kucich, within a complex configuration of themes that are loosely associated with repression: self-sacrifice, self-control and disinterest. Dickens's novels, as Kucich remarks "... try to conciliate whatever rupture of psychic coherence might lie beyond repression with a stable representation of identity, which ought logically to be destroyed by such rupture" (Kucich, 1983:67).

But there is a larger problem. The retreat of the characters at the end of the novel into the tranquillity of a secluded domestic circle can be understood, in a sense, as their inability to translate private virtue into public action. In the end of a *A Tale of Two Cities*, Darnay and Dr Manette retreat into private life but only after both have tried to influence the course of public events and failed. In this perspective, David Marcus has argued that the hero's retreat into domesticity marks the disparity between public and private life while stressing the meaninglessness of public institutions (impenetrable to human effort) and the futility of public activism. In David Marcus's words: "their [the heroes'] quasi-religious redemption through love and self-sacrifice are actually strategies for coping with the characters' need to find a sense of fruitful relatedness in the face of the impossibility of solving social problems" (Marcus, 1987:24). Recalling Kucich's point, we can say that the final victory of the "good characters" over an illegitimate society is derived not so much from the virtue of the heroes' self-sacrifice as from a certain precise connection between repression and radically liberating passion. That is, on an affirmation of the transcending freedom implicit in the refusal of the self (Kucich, 1983:77). Sharing this view, Juliet MacMaster has argued that the uneasy triumph of the good characters over society can only be temporary as they repress the threatening forces within them rather than give them authentic expression (MacMaster, 1984:15).

In general, Dickens is aware of the gap between individual quest and public society, but the attempt to fill this gap in his novels takes place on the level of an abstract

wish, not in the realm of an actual or achievable social order. The general economy of violence and repression within a relationship centred on the emotional range of the self - not representing it as an image of public action - prevents any perception of the collective experience of social rupture. These arguments make an important link with the role of the crowd in Dickens's novels. As we have insisted throughout this chapter, there is no place in Dickens's general context for the crowd to represent an instance for legitimate collective action. Nor could he envisage the crowd as an instance of potential liberation of the restrictive structures of the ego, as recognized by some twentieth century crowd theorists⁶⁴, such as Canetti (see below, Section 5.5.2). Nonetheless, we may suggest that Dickens, in catching a glimpse of the behaviour of those who felt themselves released from personal responsibility by merging into the mob, comes close to perceiving, in some passages, that the crowd might eventually be an entity which serves to transcend the boundaries of the individual personality. Men in the crowd seem so far from their ordinary selves that they even stop feeling pain.

"There were men who cast their lighted torches in the air, and suffered them to fall upon their heads and faces, blistering the skin with deep unseemly burns" (BR:509)

"Some in a drunken state, unconscious of the hurts they had received from falling bricks, and stones, and beams; one borne upon a shutter, in the very midst, covered with a dingy cloth, a senseless, ghastly heap" (BR:465).

Such an impression that the characters "lose themselves", physically and psychologically, to the frenzy that is generated by collective actions is above all derived from the symbolic imagery used by Dickens. Fire, for example, which has

64. The priority of human desires for release from all forms of authority existent in social life as well as from individual mechanisms of self-repression, is the cornerstone of the philosophy of Georges Bataille. For him, Man's fundamental sense of isolation - in his individual body, mind and personality - induces a desire to shatter these limits and to expand the self into a seemingly limitless situation. The ultimate model, of course, for such a commitment is death - hence, the rationale for the death-wish (Bataille, 1984:94-108).

been noted as the most important symbol of the crowd in eruption⁶⁵, is a recurrent and powerful symbol of the mob in both of Dickens's novels. Both in *Barnaby Rudge* and a *Tale of Two Cities*, fire appears specially connected with the violence, destructiveness and passion of the masses. In the most obvious sense, fire is connected to crowds because crowds often set fire to things. There are innumerable accounts of burning in both novels. Even when a mob cannot actually burn things, Dickens provides it with "bits of fire" to signify its range and frenzy, such as torches illuminating faces at night in political meetings, or providing light for man-hunts and insurrections. As noted by Carey, objects in the crowd scenes also acquire fiery qualities, such as "skies on fire" and "fiery red eyes"⁶⁶.

Important to stress for the development of our argument is Dickens's description of the crowd itself as fire, alluding perhaps to the crowd's desire to consume, to annihilate, to make a bonfire of every thing including itself. Dickens dwells on the joy the rioters find in burning and destroying:

".. every fresh addition to the blazing masses was received with shouts, and howls, and yells, which added new and dismal terrors to the conflagration" (BR:506).

"Admist the clattering of heavy blows, the rattling of broken glass, the cries and execrations of the mob" (BR:505).

"The noise, and hurry and excitement had for hundreds an attraction they had no firmness to resist" (BR:484).

".. with loud yells, and shouts, and clamour, such as happily is seldom heard, bestirred themselves to feed the fire, and keep it as its height" (BR:581).

65. "The fire bounded up as if each separated flame had had a tiger's life, and roared as though, in every one, there were a hungry voice" (BR:586). Elias Canetti has compared the attributes of fire with those of the crowd: "fire spreads rapidly, it is contagious and insatiable; it can break out anywhere, and with great suddenness; it is multiple; it is destructive; it has an enemy; it acts as though it was alive, and so it is treated. All this is true of the crowd" (CP:77). The association between crowd, fire and tiger appear consistently in *Auto-da-Fé*, as we will discuss below, pp. 215-218.

66. The significance of fire as a symbolic element in other Dickens's novels is noted by John Carey, 1973:11-16. See also Steven Marcus, 1965:9.

"All this taking place - not among pitying looks and friendly murmurs of compassion, but brutal shouts of exaltation, which seemed to make the very rats who stood by the old house too long, creatures with some pity and regard for those its roots had sheltered" (BR:507).

This mad pleasure felt by the crowd members is stressed as gratuitous and purposeless, and never subordinated to rational ends. Both the fire and the ruin seem to the mob as some kind of hideously inverted religious symbols:

"It seemed to goad and urge the angry fire, and lash it into madness; everything was steeped in one prevailing red; the glow was everywhere; nature was drenched in blood" (BR:504).

"The more the fire crackled and raged, the wilder and more cruel the men grew; as though moving in that element they became fiends, and changed their earthly nature for the qualities that give delight to hell" (BR:507).

Interestingly, water, on the other hand, is also a persistent symbol in the descriptions of the turbulence, anger and the irresistible energy of the mob in Dickens.

"The sea of black and threatening waters, and of destructive upheaval of wave against wave, whose depths were yet unfathomed and whose forces were yet unknown" (TTC:249)

"... the living sea rose, wave on wave, depth on depth, and overflowed the city ... the raging sea, and the furious sounding of the living sea... So resistless was the force of the ocean ... Struggling in the surf in the South Sea, ... the sea that rushes in... the noise of the living ocean... in the raging flood once more. They found it surging and tossing" (TTC:245-6).

"But, in the ocean of faces where every fierce and furious expression was in vivid life ..." (TTC:249).

The water imagery seems to make a close analogy with the transformation of the crowd into the mob. The calm crowd, in repose at times of social tranquillity, represents always a potential for arousal at times of social turbulence, transforming itself into the barbarous and violent mob. The crowd seems as unstable and dangerous as the sea itself: "... for the ocean is not more fickle and uncertain, more

terrible when roused, more unreasonable or more cruel" (BR:475). Furthermore, the rising and overflowing of the ocean evokes the elemental force and violence of the crowd. When the crowd breaks loose, just as in natural catastrophes, it is beyond men's power of control. In a psychological interpretation, this suggests an analogy with the release of the untamed forces of the unconscious, letting loose chaos (MacMaster, 1984:7). The recurrent metaphor of inundation could convey, in this sense, the overturning of culture in the crowd as well as the mob's natural compulsion to break down all barriers and boundaries that normally create distances between human beings⁶⁷.

The metaphors of fire and water are commonly used as an analogy to the mob and we will also find them in Zola and Canetti. In his monograph, *Crowds and Power*, Canetti analyses the range of symbols associated with crowds and their most diverse meanings. Quite unusual, however, is Dickens's use of the elements fire and water together to characterize the mob, since at the literal level they would seem to cancel each other out. These symbols in Dickens evoke a series of complex and ambivalent meanings, which may be contradictory amongst themselves. Both fire and water are basic elements of nature, both are used in rituals of purification and both are associated with the apocalypse. In the context of *A Tale of Two Cities*, fire and water may also be seen as images to emphasize the doctrine of inevitability, suggesting Dickens's deterministic idea of the unfolding of the historical process⁶⁸. However, the water/fire images intersect with each other, thus putting more emphasis on the irresistible force of the crowd, on the inevitability of its course and destiny. In Dickens' words:

67. This argument is developed by Elias Canetti, as we will examine in Chapter Four.

68. According to Goldberg, Dickens may have found inspiration in Carlyle's usage of the sea metaphor for expressing the dogma of inevitability of the revolution (Goldberg: 1972:121). Similarly, Edward Mengel, analysing the meanings of the fountains in the novel, suggests that the water running from the fountain points to the inevitability of the things to come, on the impossibility of impeding the revolution as "things running their course" (Mengel, 1984:28). Carret Steward points to the several biblical allusions and highly figurative meanings of the water symbol in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

"In such risings of fire and risings of sea - the firm earth shaken by the rushes of an angry ocean which had now no ebb, but always on the flow, higher and higher, to the wonder and terror of the beholders on the shore" (TTC:263)

Despite the fact that Dickens seems to grasp intuitively that individuals lose themselves in the frenzy generated by collective action, he was surely unaware of the sort of implications his imagery suggests to a modern audience. As we have seen, Dickens's symbolism points strikingly to some of the essential aspects of the crowd, suggesting as well the release of underground emotional forces. Yet, it should be kept in mind that Dickens's imagery constitutes only metaphors that later crowd theorists would take as objects of scientific scrutiny and fill with scientific explanations. Many of Dickens's conclusions about the crowd are pre-modern. The fact that Dickens did not understand that the individual and the crowd have different psychologies drags him into a chain of reasoning that diverges in many points from the classic crowd theory of the later nineteenth century.

As it has been stressed throughout this chapter, Dickens did not understand the unconscious realm as we understand it in the post-Freudian world. He could not conceive that the unconscious life influences us greatly and dominates us without our knowing of it, because it comes from our ancestors with an inherited accretion of instincts and desires. Dickens insists that individual consciousness, acquired over a life-time and cultivated socially, could control the underground emotions or irrational forces. As a corollary, he could maintain that the educated or the upper classes are better able to resist the crowd influence than the uneducated or the inferior ones. Secondly, he could pass severe judgments on those who lacked the "firmness" to avoid the ecstasy of the crowd.

Crowd theory would later maintain that there is nothing mad or pathological in the so-called madness of the crowd. If, that is, one accepts the hypothesis that crowds can be composed of normal individuals like Dickens himself or most of his readers. Of course, the way that the member of the crowd thinks and reacts in the crowd is

far from being the way in which an isolated individual would think and react, but the contrast does not imply a stark contradiction. Crowd theory maintains that whatever the wealth or culture of the individual members of the crowd, their own characters will disappear and their personalities fuse in the group to a "group mind". The identical transformation to which all the individuals are subject means that the crowd is not synonymous with the plebs, the populace, the poor, the ignorant, the proletariat, "them" as opposed to "us", the elite, the educated, the rich. All men when they come together become a mass, and there is no distinction between individuals or classes in this matter. Dickens instead, placing the problem in a framework essentially moral, emphatically condemns this "release from responsibilities" as the crucial reason why men and women turn themselves into devils, the beasts of history and the barbarous murderers. He never for a moment considers the hypothesis that the negation of individual consciousness may be a conscious and even desirable option; nor does he ever consider that the abandonment of individual personality does not always necessarily result in barbarism.

2.5 Crowds: the Frankenstein Monster of the Nineteenth Century

Dickens was not a social scientist, but a novelist, and as such he was not concerned to articulate a coherent theoretical approach to the crowd. As we have seen throughout this chapter, many topics regarding the crowd in Dickens are contradictory, conflicting and remain open to discussion. Notwithstanding, *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities* are remarkable in presenting a view of the crowd in the mid-nineteenth-century and exploring, in Dickens own light, a series of fears, insecurities and uncertainties that the crowd could provoke in an acute contemporary social observer.

As has been argued throughout this chapter, crowds in the mid-nineteenth century were appearing as "a grand, alarming, imminent and indisputable reality" (Carlyle, 1898:9). Crowds were seen very much like a Frankenstein monster: an aberration, amoral and savage but at the same time with power and strength enough to destroy

their creator⁶⁹. In large part, such a monstrous picture of the crowd was given not so much from actual history as from "a syndrome of fears, worries, insecurity" on the part of the privileged class, as Craig has put it (Craig, 1983:88). As has been noted, a combination of several factors contributed to exaggerate this fear of revolution in the mind of the ruling classes. The fall of the Bastille in 1789 was still just within living memory and the success of the contemporary revolutions on the continent reinforced the alarm - "Revolts were sweeping Europe, agitating Ireland and threatening to engulf England" (Goldberg, 1983:224-9). To those prepared to see it, there seemed to be a parallel between the causes of rebellion abroad and similar conditions at home. Dickens himself urged his readers to see that the appalling conditions of the poor were the cause bolstering the spirit of revolt. Further neglect by the elites of the destitute could lead to another Reign of Terror, this time in England. This worry was compounded by each moment when the crowd re-appeared to challenge existing society.

It was perhaps inevitable that revolution would be perceived by the ruling classes as the precursor of anarchism and barbarism. First because, for them, such an event would most likely involve an unfavourable redistribution of wealth, meaning an end of their "civilized" and exclusive society. Second, since for many conservative spirits the social hierarchy was perceived as "natural" and "god-given", it would require perpetual violence and stress to go against it. The revolutionary principles, (universal rights of man, collective popular wisdom, any defence of popular participation in the exercise of government) were evil as they went against the god-given state of the world, especially inherited national traditions, held to be the real and the only legitimate determinants of the human condition.

69. The representation of the crowd as a Frankenstein monster can be found in several nineteenth-century novels. According to Williams, Elizabeth Gaskell, in *Mary Barton*, recognises that the people of the mass are "a powerful monster yet without the inner means of peace and happiness... the action of the uneducated seem to me to typify in those of Frankenstein, that monster of many human qualities, ungifted with a soul, a knowledge of difference between good and evil". Williams also notes that Charles Kingsley in *Alton Locke*, refers to "the dangerous classes which society creates, and then shrinks from in horror, like the monster his own clumsy ambition has created" (quoted in Williams, 1987:90). See also, Oddie, 1972:108.

However, much of the fear of the crowd in conservative minds was rooted in their own traditional imagery of the crowd. Because of their deep-seated belief in the people as *canaille*, "irrational", "simple-minded" folk guided solely by passions, they had necessarily to believe that any kind of popular politics was mob politics. It was perhaps inevitable that for those who believed that "the mob storming the Bastille" was the same crowd behind all forms of popular action since 1789 and who could not distinguish between mob and people, had reasons to feel really afraid. In this context, Dickens's expressed political values and attitudes towards contemporary popular movements deserves more scrutiny.

2.5.1 Dickens's Political Values and Attitudes

Literary critics have been divided over Dickens's allegiances and have identified him either as a "radical" or as a "reactionary"⁷⁰. When the 1848 revolution broke out in Paris, he enthusiastically wrote to Forster "Vive la République! Vive le Peuple! Plus de Royauté! ... Mon ami, I find that I am so much in love with the Republic that I must renounce my language and write solely in the language of the French Republic", which he temporarily did by signing himself "Citoyen Charles Dickens" (*Letters*, quoted Goldberg, 1983:225). However, scholars such as David Craig, Susan Williams and Peter Scheckner, analysing Dickens's attitudes towards the working class, have argued that he has offered little support for the workers' cause. David Craig has remarked that the leaders of the working class in Dickens's novels are pictured as "inept, corrupt and self-serving"⁷¹.

It has been argued that Dickens's ambivalence may derive from his ambiguous class identity. As Scheckner has put it, "On the one hand, Dickens was motivated by genuinely felt humanist and moral principles, and his compassion for the poor against the abuses of the new industrialism is unambiguously expressed. On the

70. As noted by Peter Scheckner, Dickens has been called Radical, at heart, by critics such as G.B. Shaw, G. K Chesterton and T. A Jackson (Scheckner, 1987:93-4). See also Pam Morris, 1991:1-21.

71. For an assessment of Dickens's representation of the working class, see Craig, 1983:86-87; Scheckner, 1987:104-110; Williams, 1987:116-17; Trey Philpotts, 1991:262-275.

other hand, as a person who was ideologically far closer to the petty-bourgeoisie than to political radicals of any stripe - he immediately recoiled from any threat to the political *status quo*" (Scheckner, 1987:96). Yet this by no means signifies that Dickens merely reproduced and reassured the dominant world view of Victorian society. As Pam Morris has argued, Dickens's rapid movement from social margin to centre⁷² imbued him with an intense desire for identification with social images of success and respectability fused with a deep fear of personal failure:

"The fusion of desire with hate, identification with alienation, invests every aspect of Dickens's text with a dialogic tension. In his fiction, the various characters' discourses construct ... materializations of ideological points of view or ways of seeing the world. Frequently, these voices ... articulate class perspectives, as Dickens himself acknowledged when he suggested readers should substitute classes for his individual fictitious characters. The contending voices, materializing hegemonic and non-hegemonic marginalized viewpoints, are brought into dialogic relation in Dickens's texts and thus articulate those oppositional voices and ideological antagonisms of the era, silenced within the dominant discourse" (Morris, 1991:10).

In this perspective, Dickens's ambiguities, as we have remarked throughout this chapter, can be understood as "contending voices" that challenge the *status quo*, and the dominant falsely imposed order. The desire of the illegitimate son of a gentleman to destroy the bourgeois society that neglects him or the ambiguous authority of the sadistic public hangman in *Barnaby Rudge*, or the aristocratic cruelty and selfishness of the Marquis's abduction of Madame Defarge's sister, as we have seen in *A Tale of Two Cities* - cause internal conflicts through the subtext. These themes bring about complex polemics reflecting the contradictions of Victorian society and revealing underlying levels of shame and guilt about the brutal exploitative relations of labour and sexuality imposed on the poor.

72. According to Pam Morris, this is derived from the fact that Dickens has moved quickly from the position of marginality experienced in his early years, when he lived close to the working-class culture and experienced the shame of poverty, unskilled labour and the stigma of social failure, to a position of esteem at the centre. This endowed him with psychological effects that had shaped his imagination throughout the rest of his life (Morris, 1991:10-13).

Dickens criticized the existing political and social order, but it is clear that he did not wish a revolutionary breakdown of that order. He accepted the inevitability and the desirability of change, and after 1848 he perceived the need for change more urgently than ever⁷³. However, the change Dickens desired was distinctly a controlled one. Trey Philpotts, analysing Dickens's view of class relations, has emphasized that working men according to Dickens are "to take their place within the system which should bind us all together", relations between the middle class and working classes should be "gently corrected" and achieved at no man's cost, with no violence or injustice" (Philpotts, 1990:266).

Dickens' s reaction to the three major popular disturbances at home or related to the empire at his time - Chartism, the Indian Mutiny and the Jamaican Affair, also reveals anti-democratic bias. On both the occasions of the Indian Mutiny (1857-58) and the Jamaican affair (1865), Dickens vehemently stood with the Crown and the Empire. In a letter to his long-time friend, the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, Dickens urges "exterminate the brutes":

"I wish I were the Commander-in-Chief in India. The first thing I would do to strike that oriental race with amazement (not least regarding them as if they lived in the Strand, London, or at Camden Town), should be to proclaim to them in their language, that I considered my holding that appointment by the leave of God, to mean that I should do my utmost to exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested; and that I was there for that purpose and no other, and was now proceeding, with all convenient dispatch and merciful swiftness of execution, to blot it out of mankind and raze it off the face of the earth (*Letters II*, quoted in Oddie, 1972:104).

Certainly, these two episodes significantly provoked all of Dickens's fear of a similar violent reaction among the British workers. But undeniably, it was Chartism that challenged Dickens most directly over an entire range of social issues. The Chartists addressed a wide range of social ills with which Dickens was concerned:

73. According to Michael Goldberg, the 1848 revolutions probably compelled Dickens to adopt a more radical position towards popular movements: "the revolution broke Dickens's faith in the adequacy of reform and alerted him to the process of revolutionary change and the constant possibility of fire next time" (Goldberg, 1983:224).

poverty, working and living conditions, crime, hunger, the New Poor Law, and basic human rights. Because of Dickens's reformist temperament, Thomas Rice believes, he would probably have been largely sympathetic to many of the demands of the People's Charter⁷⁴. However, he could only support conditionally the widening of the electorate to include all classes and the removal of property qualifications to allow anyone to enter Parliament. Dickens clearly believed that the people had to be educated first to appreciate their responsibilities as self-governors. Needless to say, Dickens's reservations were shared by many liberals who distrusted the "modern" assumption that the people would govern themselves wisely.

Historians have argued that the course of the Chartist agitation might have reinforced the widespread doubt about the viability of popular democracy (Rice, 1897:93-110). Following the failure of the National Chartist Convention in 1839, a more radical faction of the movement diverged from the "moral force" ideology of the People's Charter and advocated the use of physical force, "aggravating class animosities and defeating themselves in the service of the Ultra-Tories"⁷⁵. In his article, "Chartism, Class and Social Struggle", Scheckner remarks that, despite the fact that Chartism struggled against problems which agitated Dickens, "the

74. Thomas Rice has argued that Dickens would probably support particular demands of Chartism such as the ballot, payments of M.P.'s, equal constituencies and annual elections as they were bound to alleviate specific abuses - would provide privacy for free electoral choice, salaried members would be less tempted by bribery, reapportionment would have provided equal representation and regular elections would have made members more responsive to popular opinion (Rice, 1983:61). For Dickens's attitudes towards Chartism and social struggle, see also Peter Scheckener, 1987:93-112 and William Oddie, 1972, cf. especially chapter "The People: Revolution and Radicalism" pp.99-116.

75. Following the failure of the National Chartist Convention in 1839, a small group of rabid revolutionaries, the so-called "physical force" faction succeeded in diverting the Chartist agitation away from the People's charter. According to Rice, "their hold on the popular imagination, despite being disproportionate to the real power at their command, was an important influence on mob scenes". However, the most serious of the revolutionary Chartist outbreaks occurred at Newport in November 1839, when special measures limiting the right of free assembly served to provoke further Luddite agitation. The riots were repressed harshly, twenty four Chartists were killed and fourteen were tried for high treason. Before that the ministry had reacted with the same severity to the Birmingham Riots in mid-August 1839 (Rice, 1983:62-3).

movement served in the end to increase Dickens's distress with the poor and made him recoil with great suspicion" (Sckeckner, 1987:102). Perhaps, because of such a mistrust, Dickens ends up by insinuating in *A Tale of Two Cities* that the insurgents were even more demoniac than the world of oppression and misery they were acting against. In this context, Dickens's scenes of the revolutionaries' violence might have reinforced the belief that a "reign of terror" would necessarily follow the mindless crowd's successful revolt. The crowd scenes might have been intended as an apt illustration of the dangers of widening the electorate to include the lower classes, the ignorant masses.

Within the nineteenth-century debate about "crowd politics", Dickens was not bound to accept the radical idea that the poorer classes had a positive political consciousness of their own. The poor were to be pitied and treated kindly by their masters. They were not, however, to decide about social matters themselves. This tendency to patronize the lower classes and see the affluent classes as being responsible for them, reflects a standard usage in Dickens's era to attribute to the lower classes a childish nature, when they were not immediately stigmatized with a natural or hereditary tendency for delinquency. Using this logic, the governing classes could easily justify the anti-democratic need to keep out of the crowd's hands any responsibility they were unworthy of, or incapable of using⁷⁶.

However, while Dickens was suspicious about popular movements and trade-unions, he could not rely on traditional politics either. Caught between his detestation of the economic and social oppression of the poor and his fear that the poor as a class might destroy the entire social structure, Dickens sees himself in the role of peace-maker. In a letter he wrote: ".. I want to interpose something between them (the people) and their wrath. For this reason, solely, I am a reformist at soul. I have nothing to gain - and everything to lose (for public quiet is my bread)" (*Letters*, II: 661). Entangled in such a paradox, Dickens tended to adhere to the

76. For a discussion of how crowd theory provided arguments against democratic ideals and practices see, Sandor Halebsky, 1976:36-66, Robert A. Nye, 1975:155-173 and Mark Harrison, 1988:3-31.

belief that patience on the part of the poorer classes and enlightened morality and philanthropy on the part of the governing classes might put the world to rights - or at least assure a precarious balance of forces and a temporary social peace. Yet, when social problems are not solved, the poor are asked to have patience with the wrongs of their mentors and faith in better days (Scheckner, 1987:107). Dickens's conviction of the inevitability of the mob's barbarity guided his treatment of political and social issues. From this perspective, Dickens's concern for the poor might have been an attempt to prevent actions by the poor.

2.6 Conclusion

The general claim for reform advanced in mid-nineteenth century Britain as a possible remedy against the perceived danger posed by the "revolutionary crowd", implies a hope that the ruling classes, if they so wished, were still able to hold back the crowd. It seemed as if the ruling classes still had a choice to make - in committing themselves to reform (using their power properly, providing for the needs of the lower classes, being kind and generous to them) - and thereby banishing the possibility of the much feared "mob rule". There was yet some hope and confidence that gradual and peaceful reform for alleviating the sufferings of the poor would eventually lead the poor to support the existing order of society.

However, this apparent optimism was certainly shadowed by many doubts. At the most obvious level, the warning against the imminent possibility of revolution alone was not sufficient to guarantee that political authorities and industrial masters would effectively improve the conditions of the poor. Or if so, would it be enough to remove the evils afflicting society? Secondly, as Marxist doctrines were proclaiming, there was an irreconcilable conflict of interests between the working class and their employers. Even if social reform could alleviate social distress, there was still the prediction of an inevitable end to the very structure that the proposed reforms were designed to maintain. Only radical changes would abolish the disparity between the conditions of the "Two Nations" and narrow the gap between the rich, the enlightened, the educated, and the poor, the ignorant and the brutish. If

the revolution could be prevented though, it was inevitable that the crowd would have to be accepted into the political arena and political calculations seemed to require that concessions would have to be made to meet its demands. This meant mass democracy.

From another perspective, the insistence on the irrationality of the crowd, and on its incapacity to rule, could not calm the apprehension. Even if Dickens and many of his contemporaries claimed that the lower classes had a child-like nature, or portrayed them as morally decayed and ultimately weak, this could not minimise the threat of revolution. The popular movements were showing that the lower classes were not simple-minded, as they had no difficulty in articulating their demands for the Charter. Nor were the people powerless, as the authorities themselves implicitly acknowledged when they found it necessary to imprison the Chartist leaders in 1848. In general, the very insistence on the incapacity of the poor can be understood more as an expression of the ruling classes' own feelings of weakness and vulnerability. The sense of panic would not have been so insistent if they had been confident in their ability and right to maintain the established order.

The persistent nightmare of crowds and the alarm that the crowd posed to traditional elites continued throughout the nineteenth century, as we will see in the next chapter. The crowd phenomenon would be taken as an object of serious scientific study and the ruling class would still be very worried. And as we can see in Zola, anti-crowd arguments continue after democracy became a fact.

Chapter 3

The Crowd in Zola

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we intend basically to argue two things. First, that Zola presents a genuine understanding of the crowd phenomenon and introduces a new psychological framework to outline crowd behaviour. Zola seems to display an awareness that the crowd has a mind of its own, which operates differently from the principles governing individual minds. Almost all the crowd scenes illustrate his belief that people in the aggregate are more ferocious, and also more primitive, than each individual in the group. Zola's workers are as decent as their circumstances and experience allow them to be, but once they are packed together in a crowd, a catastrophic qualitative change takes place. Zola seems to recognize that in the crowd an irresistible force drives the individuals out of their ordinary selves and directs them to behave in ways that they would normally reject.

Second, we intend to argue that the emphasis and patterns that emerge from Zola's treatment of the crowd cannot be reduced to metaphors of fear as some critics, such as Susanna Barrows, have claimed but, and perhaps more importantly, it expresses a new attempt to understand the crowd scientifically. The structuring devices employed by Zola, it will be argued in the second section of this chapter,

correspond to a large extent with key ideas and concepts that late-nineteenth-century theorists would develop scientifically to constitute the pillars of crowd theory.

In considering Zola's approach to the crowd, a difficulty should be taken into account. Although Zola believed that models and analogies were something that science should come to do without¹, he had to face a paradox: as the theoretical concern with crowd phenomena at his time was something emergent and still very new, there was not an established framework for analysis nor a system of classifications, so the use of analogies could not always be avoided. The vocabulary and the definitions available were not enough for him to be able to say everything he wanted to say about the crowd. This partially explains why the theoretical framework supporting his vision of the crowd is so broad and fluid. Zola's treatment of the crowd, in other words, invites more than one interpretation and points to more than one direction that crowd theory could follow.

3.1.1 Zola's Scientism

"Zola cherished an invincible belief in the power of reason and in the need to consolidate the achievements of Enlightenment. In many respects indeed, he was a true heir of the *Encyclopédistes* of the eighteenth century" (Hemmings, 1977:11).

The age in which Zola grew up was dominated by the belief in social and material progress, in human perfectibility and scientific positivism. The paths by which thinkers arrived at these conclusions were various, but the outcome was much the same. Zola's faith in the power of science to banish not just ignorance and poverty, but also cruelty and human degradation, is variously expressed throughout his literary career. By the age of 28, Zola announced in the preface of one of his early novels, *Thérèse Raquin* (1868), that his work was to be based not on personal expression of feeling but on objective observation and analysis. Zola declares his

1. For Zola's scientific attitudes see, David Baguley, 1990:184-203; Anne McGovern's 1984 doctoral thesis and subsequent article 1985:191-207 and J. Emmett Jr., 1981:5-9.

work to be scientific² and links his role with that of a "painter", a "surgeon", or a "scientist" of human nature:

Il [le romancier] est, avant tout, un savant de l'ordre moral. J'aime à me le représenter comme l'anatomiste de l'âme et la chair. Il dissèque l'homme, étudie le jeu des passions, interroge chaque fibre, fait l'analyse de l'organisme entier. Il procède comme nos chimistes et nos mathématiciens; il décompose les actions, en détermine les causes, en explique les résultants; il opère selon des équations fixes, ramenant les faits à l'étude de l'influence des milieux sur les individualités. Le nom qui lui convient est celui du docteur ès sciences morales³.

In 1880, Zola published his essay, "Le Roman expérimental", where he gives the definitive outlines of naturalism, a new literary approach constructed almost single-handedly by him. This was an attempt to apply the scientific method of observation and experimentation to the creation of literature with the aim of reproducing reality objectively. The view of naturalism as part of contemporary scientific evolution is the key note of Zola's theory. At the very beginning of "Le Roman expérimental" he announces "le retour à la nature, l'évolution naturaliste qui emporte le siècle, pousse peu à peu toutes les manifestations de l'intelligence humaine dans une même voie scientifique" (Zola, "Le Roman expérimental, 1909:1).

A growing enthusiasm for the scientific method characterized that era. New data and discoveries both in biological and physical sciences appeared to be reshaping western man's knowledge of natural processes and constituents, all apparently leading to a steady increase of the understanding of the workings of the universe

2. Reinforcing the belief that science was the tool for shaping the future and ought to be used in all fields (biology, sociology or literature), Zola wrote: "... nous voyons également que le romancier est fait d'un observateur et d'un expérimentateur. L'observateur chez lui donne les faits tels qu'il les a observés, pose le point de départ, établit le terrain solide sur lequel vont marcher les personnages et se développer les phénomènes. Puis, l'expérimentateur paraît et institue l'expérience, je veux dire fait mouvoir les personnages dans une histoire particulière, pour y montrer que la succession des faits y sera telle que l'exige le déterminisme des phénomènes mis à l'étude". Zola, "Le Roman expérimental", 1909:7.

3. Zola, "Deux définitions du roman" quoted in McGovern, 1985:193,197.

(Finer, 1966:3). And, as the conclusions of the scientists proliferated, they had the effect of reinforcing the tradition in French thought, so celebrated in the eighteenth century, the desire to apply the method and terminology of the natural sciences in the social sciences (Kolakowski, 1972:90). A new "scientism" either implying a mode of thought or just a simple and unified language for exposition of scientific progress commanded the scientific elite and the climate of opinion since the 1850's (Nye, 1975:9). The philosophical basis of Comte's "positive philosophy" was only one of the many strands of this movement (see above, pp. 27-30).

Claude Bernard's *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* (1865), where he prescribes the experimental method for orderly and inductive scientific investigation, was received with enthusiasm by scientists in all fields, exercising an influence far beyond its original intent. For Bernard, it was the presumption of determinism, of a necessary and invariable chain of cause and effect that sustained the experimenter in the complex region beyond the physical sciences:

"The problem for experimenting physicians consists, therefore, in finding the simple determinism of an organic disorder, that is to say, in grasping the initial phenomenon that brings all the others in its train through a complex determinism as necessary in character as the initial determinism. This initial determinism is like Ariadne's thread guiding the experimenter in the dark labyrinth of physiological and pathological phenomena, and enabling him to understand how their varied mechanisms are still bound together by absolute determinism" (Claude Bernard, cited in Nye, 1975:10-11).

An additional factor that encouraged the scientists to seek and present a coherent picture of nature was the apparent unity and comprehensiveness of the basic discoveries in diverse areas of science. The view of the past was held as a continuum of scientific progress reconstructed from the gradual accumulation of objective data. The French materialist anthropologist, Charles LeTourneau, expresses such a notion through his confident predictions:

"Everywhere humanity, obeying a great law of intellectual evolution, has dreamed before thinking, written a novel before writing history. Infancy necessarily precedes adulthood ... But today science has slowly grown. The gland has become enzyme, and humanity, tranquil in its virility, waiting for the future

explanation of that it still does not know, contemplates coldly the world as it is. It does not react childishly any longer to the laws of the universe; but formulates them slowly, after having numbered and classed the phenomena"⁴.

"Scientism" received a further boost from a materialistic reorientation within philosophy itself. By 1870 Hippolyte Taine, for example, in reaction against the old-fashioned metaphysical psychology, revived the clinical tradition and the ancient union between it and the philosophical study of mind. Sceptical of introspection as the only method for understanding the mind and praising the goals and methods of the physical sciences, Taine sought to transfer the British empirical method of observation to France (Nye, 1975:13). Psychology, sociology and the study of literature were brought under the aegis of scientific method by Taine, in an approach rigourously deterministic:

"Ici comme ailleurs, la recherche des causes doit venir après la collection de faits. Que les fait soient physiques ou moraux, il n'importe, ils ont toujours des causes; il y en a pour l'ambition, pour le courage, pour la veracité, comme pour la digestion, pour le mouvement musculaire, pour la chaleur animale. Le vice et la vertue sont des produits comme le vitriol et le sucre"⁵

Stressing the physiological basis of psychology and the deterministic impact of the milieu, it was Taine who set the stage for the emergence of Naturalism. Predicting that the future of literature and literary criticism lay in the direction of the experimental method, Taine brought them into direct correlation with science: "Par leur sérieux, par leur méthode, par leur exactitude rigoureuse, par leurs avenues et leurs espérances, tous deux s'approchent de la science"⁶.

4. Charles LeTourneau, *Science et materialisme*, quoted in Nye, 1975:12.

5. Hippolyte Taine, *Histoire de la littérature Anglaise* [1873], quoted in Smith, 1985:6.

6. Hippolyte Taine, "L' esprit des femmes dans notre temps" [1872] quoted in Smith, 1985:7.

Zola was deeply indebted to Taine in his formulation of the naturalist aesthetic⁷. Zola's formula for the experimental or naturalist novel closely echoes Taine's ideas:

"C'est là qui constitue le roman expérimental: posséder le mécanisme des phénomènes chez l'homme, monter les rouages des manifestations intellectuelles et sensuelles telles que la physiologie nous les expliquera, sous les influences de l'hérédité et des circonstances ambiantes, puis qu'il a produit lui-même, qu'il modifie tous les jours, et au sein duquel il éprouve à son tour une transformation continue" (Zola, "Le Roman expérimental" (1880), 1909:19).

Concomitant with the influence of Taine, was the impact of Claude Bernard's *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, which Zola cites as his authority in "Le Roman expérimental". Zola extended Bernard's analogy and claimed that the experimental method also had a place in literature. Zola believed that literature, and the novel in particular, could be as fully scientific as any of the natural sciences⁸. His central claim was that the novelist should rely more on observation than imagination to create an "experimental novel". However, beyond such observation, Zola emphasized the crucial role of the writer as an "active experimenter". What enabled the writer to engage in "experimentation" was his ability to place and involve his characters in situations of his own choice and, thereby, explore and illustrate their behaviour under a variety of conceivable social and psychological circumstances. More important still, by "testing" his characters in this way, Zola believed a writer would be able to anticipate and predict social

7. In 1866, Zola expresses his desire to become a disciple of Taine: "Je me reconnais comme l' humble disciple de M. Taine, s'il veut bien accepter pour disciple un garçon aussi peu discipliné que moi. Je crois qu'il a formulé la seule méthode possible en critique. Il y a introduit l'exactitude de la science, avec toute la liberté de l'artiste personnel et vivant". Zola, "Livres d'aujourd'hui et de demain" (1866), quoted in McGovern, 1984:100.

8. "Claude Bernard démontre que cette méthode appliquée dans l'étude des corps bruts, dans la chimie et dans la physique, doit l'être également dans le l'étude des corps vivants, en physiologie et en médecine. Je vais tâcher de prouver à mon tour que, si la méthode expérimentale conduit à la connaissance de la vie physique, elle doit conduire aussi à la connaissance de la vie passionnelle et intellectuelle. Ce n'est là qu'une question de degrés dans la même voie, de la chimie à la physiologie, puis de la physiologie à la l'anthropologie et à la sociologie. Le roman expérimental est au bout". Zola, "Le Roman expérimental" (1880), 1909:2.

phenomena, and, consequently, acquire the requisite knowledge in order to offer solutions to social problems. In other words, Zola was convinced that the experimental novelists should model themselves after scientists and make similar contributions to knowledge. Legislators, armed with this knowledge, would then be able to regulate and improve society:

"C'est ainsi que nous faisons de la sociologie pratique et que notre besogne aide aux sciences politiques et économiques... Etre maître du bien et du mal, régler la vie, régler la société, résoudre à la longue tous les problèmes du socialisme, apporter surtout des bases solides à la justice en résolvant par l'expérience les questions de criminalité, n'est-ce pas là être les ouvriers les plus utiles et les plus moraux du travail humain? ... nous devons nous contenter de chercher le déterminisme des phénomènes sociaux, en laissant aux législateurs, aux hommes d'application, le soin de diriger tôt ou tard ces phénomènes, de façon à développer les bons et à réduire les mauvais, au point de vue de l'utilité humaine" (Zola, "Le Roman expérimental, 1909:29).

The idea of an aim and methodology common to both science and literature, was a controversial issue that has divided the critics right from the outset⁹. The compatibility of the experimental method with the nature of the arts, a field where subjectivity was seen as essential, has been severely criticized. It has been argued that Zola's theory invokes other criteria that go beyond the strictly experimental method of the scientist. Zola's claim that the experimental novelist must produce phenomena direct and also function as an experimental moralist, gives the writer greater freedom in controlling the experiment and also a moral role, both going beyond the proper domain of science (McGovern, 1984:109)¹⁰.

From the vantage point of the twentieth century, when the failure of the Enlightenment project in ethics has been clear, it is easy to understand why Zola's experimental method could not succeed. Though it was believed that science could

9. For criticisms of Zola's experimental method by recent scholars see, D. Baguley, 1990:53-69 and E. Grant, 1962:120-33.

10. For a discussion of the moral role of Zola as a writer see: Ian Gregor & Brian Nicholas, 1962, especially chapter "The novel as a Social Document: *L'Assommoir*", pp.63-97.

provide a rational justification for an objective morality, it becomes evident that no valid argument can move from entirely factual premisses to any moral conclusion (MacIntyre, 1981:54). Therefore, the aim to establish a set of abiding rules of conduct, free from illegitimate additions and based solely on scientific study and discoveries, could not succeed. However, the area in which the naturalists as a group were most innovative, was in their choice of subject matter.

In the effort to give a more accurate account of contemporary social life, the naturalists gave the working classes a new prominence in fiction¹¹. The worker and his world have won entry onto the centre stage of the naturalist literature originally through Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877) and later, *Germinal* (1885). As Zola himself had claimed in the preface to *L'Assommoir*, "it is the first novel about the common people, which does not tell lies but has the authentic smell of the people. And it must not be concluded that the masses as a whole are bad, for my characters are not bad, but only ignorant and spoiled by the environment of grinding toil and poverty in which they live" (Zola, 1970:21). Critics have endorsed Zola's claim to originality by recognizing *L'Assommoir* as marking the beginning of a new realism and frankness in the fictional representation of the lower classes¹². It is not that past novelists had ignored the working classes as their central subject matter. In England, for example, there is a well-established tradition of literature dealing with the world of the working class. But as P. J. Keating remarks, the working class characters of Dickens, Gaskell and Kingsley were presented with a maximum of sympathetic interest. Their treatment of working class characters and environment, Keating argues, had been so handled as to inspire the greatest possible amount of

11. For a study of Zola's assessment of the working classes, see Collete Becker, 1982; and for the working condition in *L'Assommoir* and *Germinal*, Collete Becker, 1978:5-57.

12. Angus Wilson has remarked that "no nineteenth century novelist, perhaps, succeeded so well in depicting the courage and honesty of the individual, aspiring working man of the century", quoted in Nelson, 1983:1. Brian Nelson has claimed that "Zola's unsentimental but sympathetic portrayal of the working class in *L'Assommoir* and *Germinal* largely constitutes his literary status", Nelson, 1983:1. See also Keating, 1979:130 and Smith, 1985:39.

sympathy and in order to achieve this it was necessary that only certain aspects of the working class life should be shown (Keating, 1979:125-138).

Zola is bold enough to go further than any of his predecessors in providing an uninhibited view of the effects of poverty, alcoholism, overcrowding and unemployment on working class life (Smith, 1985:39). A major innovation introduced in Zola's approach to the working class has been recognized in what Keating has called "horizontal cuts into society": "The rise and the fall of Gervaise in *L'Assommoir* ... is presented entirely within a working class framework" (Keating, 1979:129). This horizontal approach, according to Keating, departs from both literary and sociological models of the time, in giving the reader an extended view of working class life and a conveyed sense of the lower classes as a closed circle that few can escape. Zola's new uninhibited approach has provoked a strong reaction amongst critics¹³.

Zola had planned *Germinal* to constitute a sequel to his first working class novel. If in *L'Assommoir* Zola traced the rise and fall of one isolated working class protagonist, Gervaise, in *Germinal*, the thirteenth novel in the *Rougon-Macquart* series, he intended to focus on "public meetings, what is meant by the social question, the aspirations and the utopias of the proletariat"¹⁴. *Germinal*¹⁵ was immediately recognized by contemporaries like the academic Jules Lemaître, as an "epic poem" of all workers, all strikes, all crowds (Lemaître (1886), 1986:59). The power of Zola's description of the people in the mass, in crowd scenes, has led both conservatives and socialists to praise him, towards the end of his life, as the champion of crowds (Hemmings, 1966:196).

13. For general reaction against naturalism, see Baguley, 1990, specially chapter 7, "The 'Scandal' of Naturalism" pp. 164-183; for reaction against Zola's portrait of the labouring life and the moral order, see Jeanne Gaillard, 1978:41 and 1980:25-32. For responses to Zola's realism, see Jacqueline Chambron, 1952:122-34.

14. Zola, *Ebauche*, quoted in Grant, 1962:3.

15. The title of the novel refers to the third year of the Republican era (1st April 1795). Zola has in fact described his novel as representative of the "avril révolutionnaire" in a letter to Van S. Kolff in 1888. Quoted in Smethurst, 1974:60.

In *Germinal*, Zola was determined to explore "the most painful and burning subject" of the eighties: "the revolt of the working class, the conflict between capital and labour, the society that cracks open, the question that will become the most important question of the XX century" (Zola, cited in Matthews, 1957:268). To fulfil this task, he planned a realistic work, a documentary novel that would limit itself to the facts. He grasped the dramatic potential of a strike as a contemporary expression of workers' unrest and a growing symbol of the proletariat's militancy¹⁶. The Third Republic was convulsed by a series of strikes in 1872, 1878 and 1880 and many industrial and mining centres showed the same frequency of recurrent revolts (Petrey, 1969:56). By 1884, Zola had decided that his novel would examine the miners, one of the worst paid and most radical fragments of the French working class. As *Les Rougon-Macquart* series was chronologically situated in the Second Empire, Zola was indeed making of his strike a comprehensive résumé of the strikes that preceded the fall of the II Empire, while addressing a message to the society of the mid-1880's. "J'ai pris et résumé toutes les grèves qui ont ensanglanté la fin de l'Empire"¹⁷.

To make his account solid and accurate, Zola consistently studied the miners' strikes that occurred in the mid-1860's. He examined parliamentary reports on the coal mining industry, read several documentary novels on miners and researched

16. Zola's intention to portray the class struggle through a strike is remarked in the *Ebauche*: "Sans doute la grève est vaincue, mais les mineurs se sont comptés, ont senti la poudre et sont acquis à la révolution sociale fatale avant la fin du siècle ... Mais finir par la sensation farouche de cette défaite, bien indiquer qu'ils plient devant la force des choses, mais qu'ils rêvent de vengeance. Les menaces de l'avenir, dernière page du livre. La secousse donnée à la société qui a craqué, et faire prévoir d'autres secousses, jusqu' à l'effondrement final". Zola, *Ebauche*, quoted in Matthews, 1957:268. As J. H Matthews has noted, Zola's words might have been inspired by the *Communist Manifesto*, where we read: "The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into air". Matthews, 1957:267.

17. In this letter Zola is interested in defending himself against the charge of anachronism. Zola, *Correspondance*, quoted in Petrey, 1969:56.

current socialist and anarchist criticism of the mining industry¹⁸. While documenting *Germinal*, the uprising of Azin in February of 1884, which ended when miners were shot, offered Zola the opportunity personally to witness a strike¹⁹. Zola went to the miners' village and spent a week there interviewing their inhabitants, drinking in their cafés, sketching their surroundings and exploring some places in the mine. This "anthropological" visit provided him with an influx of small, fresh, precise observations, regional terms and geographical details that were recorded in *Mes notes sur Azin*, and later articulated artistically into *Germinal*.

It has been argued that Zola's portrayal of the reality in his literary work is largely anthropological (Hemmings, 1966:189). While anthropologists in the nineteenth century, following evolutionary assumptions and a racially-oriented view of human beings and their civilizations, were basically concerned in investigating the non-European races, the heathen, the barbarians and niggers (Curtin, 1971:xvii), Zola centres his investigation on the lower classes of his own France. In *Germinal*, Zola is concerned to expose the dehumanisation and degradation of the miners to an animal-like condition through society's disregard for their welfare. Through the scientific aim based on objective investigation, Zola depicts the mining community as a whole; action, characters, settings are analysed, dissected and set in bold relief. As we will examine in the second part of this chapter, Zola claims that a "lower race" with black faces was developing in the pits, not only challenging the

18. *Germinal* is a heavily documented novel, owing much to a multiplicity of sources. Zola had examined Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *La Question ouvrière au XIX siècle*; Louis-Laurent Simonin, *La Vie souterraine*; Laveleye, *Le Socialisme contemporain*; Tetut, *L'Internationale*; Bormans, *Vocabulaire des houilleurs liégeois* and Jules Guesde's articles on socialism. He also examined the following novels: Hector Malot, *Sans Famille*; Maurice Talmeyr, *Le Grisou*; Yves Guyot, *Scènes de l'enfer social*. On Zola's sources, research and composition of *Germinal* see Elliot Grant, 1962:25-39 and Henri Marel, 1989:3-127.

19. The most immediate model for the strike portrayed in *Germinal* was the strike of the miners at Azin that began in February 1884 and lasted 56 days. In his preliminary notes for the novel, Zola focuses on working conditions in the mine and the everyday life of the miners and gives only a few details of the strike itself. For a specific comparison between the strike at Azin in 1884 and *Germinal*, see Marcel Gillet, 1976:59-60; and for a more general study on Zola's perception of strikes and society for the creation of *Germinal*, see Peter Hambly, 1971:96-112.

amour propre and cultural arrogance of white European man, but also threatening the very basis of his civilization.

Through the Maheu family, Zola introduces us to a typical family of a mining community and their typical working day. A family waking up at four in the morning, dressing hastily and breakfasting meagrely, tramping to work, eating the miners'sandwich ("le briquet"), returning home exhausted in the silence of the evening, bathing in a zinc bath in front of the fire, having its moments of sexual pleasure. Like them, in the other cottages, men and women lead a similar life. Everywhere in the novel we find evidence of Zola's determination to make his fiction as far as possible out of compilation of facts - not "fictional facts" but real and observed facts. It is in the first part of the novel that Zola introduces most systematically the sheer mass of details got during his visit to Azin, to describe the Maheu family and their house²⁰ (I,ch.1); the family group as a unifying element and the work group (I,ch.2): the mine, the pithead area and the journey to work underground (I,ch.3). Zola's preoccupation with exact data, statistics, measures and weights testifies to his belief that concrete detail and documented facts would not just guarantee authenticity, but also provide an objective explanation of the influence of work and environment on human beings (Smethurst, 1974:55). Having employed the scientific basis in his work, Zola seems to satisfy his claim that naturalist literature was to be seen as a description of "nature" independent of the predilections of the observer/writer. Again, such an attitude is part of a much broader positivist view that society and human behaviour can be made readily comprehensible by the accumulation of data and the description of myriads of social facts²¹.

20. Zola's association of larger themes with an infinitude of small and precise details is particularly noted in the description of Maheus's establishment: the single bedroom on the second floor where most of the children sleep, the apple-green walls of the combined kitchen, living and dining-room, the cast-iron stove, the cuckoo clock, the varnished pine cupboard, the garishly coloured portraits of Napoleon III, the soldiers and saints much decorated with gold. Walker, 1984:2.

21. See J.W Burrow, 1966, especially chapter "A knowledge of human nature", pp.24-64.

Motivated by the desire to tell the truth, the narrative of *Germinal* is impassive and always in the tone of the third person. Everything is shown as seen and felt by one character or another; dozens are introduced, though it is mainly through Etienne's observations that the mosaic is built up. Zola tends to avoid personal comments and sticks as closely as possible to the journalistic wording, or to insert words of real people into the mouths of fictional characters. These devices are obviously meant to produce scientific objectivity and lead the reader to draw conclusions for himself²². It is as if we were witnessing the events directly at the moment at which they occur, without the intervention of an active intermediary, through whom reality is filtered, interpreted, selectively reconstructed. Even if Zola made a definitive effort to subordinate his imagination to his realism, his imagination seems at least on occasion to gain the upper hand; even if he, as a narrator, uses the same lower class idiom as the characters, he is still filling the traditional role of interpreter and commentator on events. Furthermore, this distinction between "documentation" and "creation" finally, is an unreal one because they are both parts of the same cognitive, selective but ordering process.

3.2 The Characterization of the Crowd

Perhaps because of Zola's preoccupation with accurately reporting reality, providing the maximum of possible detail, he arrives at a much more sophisticated typology of the crowd, as well as crowd leaders, than Dickens. In *Germinal*, it is possible to find several types of crowd, in diverse circumstances, responding to different events: crowds engaged in amusements (the description of the *ducasse*, the miners' holiday, a scene of open-air jollity); crowds changeable by oratory (the strikers' forest meeting); crowds furious and out of control (the march to Jean-Bart, Deneulin's colliery, with its sequel, the clash between the miners and the troops); crowds in panic (the escape of the blackleg workers after the strikers cut the cables) (Hemmings, 1966:196). Despite offering a more sophisticated typology of crowds

22. J. H. Matthews discusses Zola's descriptive technique in *Germinal* by analogy to that of the cinema, regarding the physical décor and atmosphere and their necessary importance for avoiding intrusion into the narrative (Matthews, 1962:267-74). For the authorial/directorial art of characterization in *Germinal*, see also Philip Walker, 1964:66.

than Dickens, Zola, finally tends to reduce the variety of crowds to a single category. Once the crowd is formed, its behaviour can be reduced to a single pattern - irrational, savage, violent. Or in Zola's words, "an enormous... blind mass" (GE:389). Yet, the structuring devices employed by Zola point to a new complex of ideas that can be related to the emergent principles of modern crowd psychology, as will be discussed in the Section 3.4 of this chapter.

It should be admitted that the general conclusion about the crowd as barbarous and violent, which the novel invites us to draw, is partly a consequence of Zola's tendency to place the most striking emphasis upon the politically excited and politically violent mob. The scenes of the crowd engaged in amusements, the miners on holiday or dancing the *ducasse*, are gradually over-shadowed by the scenes of the politically agitated crowd as the novel progresses. Four of the most dramatic scenes of the novel are centred on the miners on strike. Two of these are political meetings: the meeting addressed by the organizer Pluchart to encourage the workers to join the International and the subsequent mass meeting of three thousand people in the Plan-des-Dames. Two other scenes describe the mob rising to its climax: the starving mob that spreads disorder over the countryside, smashes machinery and takes murderous vengeance on blacklegs and enemies like the grocer who had refused them credit, and the final and bloody clash with the troops when the strikers try to prevent a Belgian labour force from going down the pits, when fourteen workers are killed.

3.2.1 The Individual and the Crowd

Zola draws different faces for the workers when they are regarded as individuals, as a members of a group and as components of the crowd. This distinction in Zola's writings is certainly marked by difficulties, ambiguities and contradictory meanings, but it serves to indicate the author's recognition of the different roles that the individual plays in the complexity of groups, their intra- and inter-group relationships. Such a distinction between individual/group, which would become the core of the crowd theory with Le Bon, is particularly important here because it allows us to explore the crowd scenes through characters we already know from the

previous narrative, making evident the radical changes that happen when an individual becomes part of the mob.

The characters are individuals; all have defects and good qualities. There is in the general view of the people in *Germinal* certain admirable attributes such as family loyalty, loyalty to one's mates, the ability to get along peacefully with others. The characters are on the whole reasonable, human and generous²³. Such qualities are specially evidenced in small circles of personal relationships where the people act as themselves, for the most part independently of wider group influences. Maheu, being scarcely able to read and write, is presented as a typical miner, "a brave man who hates injustice". The novel shows him as the sober, hard-working head of his mining squad; his anger is roused only by the poverty and hunger they experience. La Maheude is presented as "reasonable", "a bit fierce", above all "practical", but still made hard by the environment. She, who usually is calm and dedicated to her family responsibilities, becomes in the crowd the most aggressive and compulsive character.

When the miners are seen as a group, in close relation to their surroundings and their conditions of living, they are controlled, mentally dormant and passive. Even their rigid persistence, which might be called courageous adjustment to environment, is a form of passivity (Eoff, 1962:100). They are primarily guided by basic physical needs, instincts and appetites, a level of living which is reinforced by poor heredity and an evil environment (see below, Section 3.4.2). Victims of ignorance, the workers' whole existence has been reduced to the most primary struggle for survival, a battle against hunger and cold.

Zola emphasizes the brutality of the miners' life and their submission to it by particularly characterizing them as a herd of animals - cattle, oxen, sheep, beasts of

23. Maheu, for instance, on a rare occasion when his wife has been able to afford a piece of meat, censures her for not giving a bit to the younger children, and sits them on his knees and feeds them; Chaval, brutal and tyrannical though he is, comes to Catherine's rescue when she faints in a overheated gallery, and finds words of encouragement when she recovers; Zacarie, never greatly attached to his sister, works desperately to save her from the flooded pit, putting his own life at risk and is finally killed by an explosion of fire-damp.

burden. Many of the miners' physical and psychological traits, as many critics have remarked, are comparisons with animals²⁴. At work below the ground, they become ants or moles. Maheu, wedged between two rocks, is compared to a crushed brute. Old Bonnemort, Maheu's father, becomes the main example of the mute, animal-like existence of the miners.

In the first part of the novel, the domesticated aspect of their condition is specially stressed. Zola constantly says that the miners are "beasts of burden", mere brutes endlessly repeating their activity with obsessive obedience and regularity. Despite being sacrificed, the miners are incapable of reacting; they are resigned to their lot and dedicate all their effort, though unwilling, to serve their master. Advancing a criticism of the impersonal nature of the capitalist system and of the implications of alienated labour, Zola insistently drives our attention to the fact that the workers do not have any understanding at all of the forces of capital which is "consuming their flesh" (see below, p.172). The workers²⁵ are "mere dumb brutes", "blinded and crushed" (GE:76:151).

However, as will be discussed throughout this chapter, Zola struggles against such a pessimistic vision and finds loopholes through which he can escape into a more humanistic universe. Despite having used the animal comparison to characterize several aspects of the workers' existence, Zola has continuously recognized (and pictured) a potential for organization and rebellion amongst them, which in the last instance distinguishes them from the animals. The mine-horses share the misery of

24. For a study of the animality in Zola's novels, see Philip Bonnefis, 1968:97-109. For an analysis of animal comparison especially in *Germinal*, see Jean-Pierre Davoine, 1968:383-92 and Geoff Woolen, 1976:97-106.

25. It should be admitted that even before the industrial revolution there was already a predominant view that the manual workers (peasants and artisans) were dumb and simple-minded, either because they had no time to enlighten themselves, so busy were they in earning their living, or, more pessimistically, because their mental apparatus was deformed like their bodies and therefore not fit for higher intellectual matters. However, the direct contact of the peasants with the land, amongst other implications, had allowed a romantic myth of the simple, ingenuous and good-natured people. This seems to change with the urban proletariat mainly during the intense and violent working class movements throughout the 19th century. Payne, 1976:32-41.

men: they may even represent a gloomy foreshadowing of what men may yet accept sinking to, but without the potential for rebellion (Howe, 1986:116).

Alongside the adverse and brutal circumstances so thoroughly portrayed in *Germinal*, the characters' individualities do survive. Even down in the pit, the workers's identity is not quite cancelled by the coal dust and darkness of the place. It is only in the mob that the characters lose their individualities: their personalities undergo a dramatic transformation and their individuality is completely annihilated. The more Zola has striven to maintain individual faces and personal distinctions, the more extraordinary is the way in which he made them all disappear in the mob. Zola is therefore trapped by the view that workers, in joining the mob, merely pass from one kind of animality to another. Their liberation only leads to a new captivity, the captivity of their own instincts.

3.2.2 The Mob

Zola recognizes above all that the crowd is a powerful, strong and energetic force, "moving like a force of nature, sweeping away everything, outside rules and theories" (GE:357). Perceiving that the crowd is imbued with a dynamic of its own, Zola seems to grasp that the aspects observed in the crowd phenomenon could not be readily accommodated in any particular theory and far exceeded the explanations given by the best known doctrines, such as Marxism and other forms of socialism. In this sense, it is possible to say that Zola shows an awareness that the crowd phenomenon was demanding a theory in its own right, which could become a rival theory to that of class consciousness in a class society²⁶.

The aberrant power of the striking miners is particularly emphasized in the dramatic description of the march of the strikers from mine to mine:

26. Serge Moscovici has discussed the way in which the emerging crowd theory could in fact be taken as an alternative theory to that of class society. In the later stages of the crowd theory, the notion of "mass", unrelated to the social structure and independent of class content, came to constitute a rival notion to the concept of "class". Moscovici, 1985:23-25.

"In the hurricane of gesture and cries ... The women had appeared, nearly a thousand of them, with outspread hair dishevelled by running, the naked skin appearing through their rags, the nakedness of the females weary with giving birth to starvelings. A few had their little ones in their arms, raising them and shaking them like banners of mourning and vengeance. Others, who were younger, with the swollen breasts of the amazons, brandished sticks; while frightful old women were yelling so loud that the cords of their fleshless necks seemed to be breaking. And then the men came up, two thousand mad men - trammers, pikemen, menders - a compact mass which rolled along like a single block in confused serried ranks so that it was impossible to distinguish their faded trousers or ragged woollen jackets, all effaced in the same uniformity. Their eyes were burning, and one only distinguished the holes of black mouths singing the *Marseillaise*; the stanzas were lost in a confused roar, accompanied by the clang of sabots over the hard earth. Above their heads, amid the bristling iron bars, an axe passed by, carried erect; and this single axe, which seemed to be the standard of the band, showed in the clear air the sharp profile of a guillotine-blade" (GE:278)

In almost all crowd scenes, Zola implies that the crowd has an autonomous mind, which operates differently from the minds of the individuals. Little by little during the strike, Zola shows that sober and reasonable workers are driven out of their ordinary selves and carried away by their "instincts" and uncontrollable impulses. In the crowd, the individuals become inflamed, agitated and perform the most bestial acts of violence. Zola speaks of an "obscure" and "irresistible force", so powerful that it may even go against one's own will, but cannot be resisted.

"Both of them [the Maheu couple], driven out of their ordinary good sense, and carried away by the slow exasperation which had been working within them for months, approved Levaque who went to extremes by demanding the heads of the engineers" (GE:233).

"Maheude, carried out of herself, was laying about her as vigourously as the Levaque woman" (GE:266).

"So strong the impulse pushed them on that they had no feeling of their terrible fatigue or their bruised and wounded feet" (GE:266).

In describing the crowd, Zola frequently, though not exclusively, uses the animal comparison to accentuate the instinctive, brutish, bestial side of human nature.

However in the mass, the miners cease to be domesticated animals, directed and exploited, who are to be pitied; they have transformed themselves into wild beasts. From the meeting in the forest, when they decide to strike under the influence of Etienne, until the very end of the strike itself, the "trampling herd" of animals such as cattle, oxen, horses of the beginning of the novel, will consistently turn into a rampaging pack of ferocious animals, particularly wolves²⁷. The miners change from one form of animality into another; those who have been defenceless for so long, suddenly find teeth. In the mob, the images of animal traits no longer refer to isolated individuals but are used to expose undistinguished common features of the collectivity: "a flood of heads", "a sea of fury of faces ... of gleaming eyes ... of open mouths" (GE:223;228).

"And in fact anger, hunger, these two months of suffering and this enraged helter-skelter through the pits had lengthened the placid faces of the Montsou colliers into the muzzles of wild beasts" (GE:278).

"Bare heads were dishevelled in the air, only the clank of sabots could be heard, like the movement of released cattle, carried away by Jeanlin's wild trumpeting" (GE:261).

"The sun which approached the horizon, lengthened the shadows of this horde with their furious gestures over the frozen soil" (GE:267).

28. "The women, ... were agitated by murderous fury, with teeth and nails out, barking like bitches" (GE:284).

"The men would have these *wolf-like* jaws open to bite" (Italics added; GE:278)

"The drunkenness of the starved, was inflaming his [Etienne's] eyes and showing his teeth like a *wolf's teeth* between his pallid lips" (Italics added; GE:267).

"The women moved round [the dead body of Maigrat], smelling him like *she-wolves*" (Italics added; GE:293).

After the arrival of the soldiers, "in the miners' passive opposition to guns, there was... a passive obedience of wild beasts in a cage, with their eyes on the tamer, ready to spring on his neck if he turned his back" (GE:297).

"Maheu was alone walking heavily up and down ... with the stupid air of an animal which can no longer see its cage" (GE:307).

Zola seems to suggest that as crowd men and women revert to a primitive state of barbarism and animality. It is in the aggregate that one feels the surging of a wild, a primitive force coming from their nature, and pushing them on and on. It is in the mass that the miners rediscover the courage to act, realizing the strength they possess in their numbers; an energy leading them to rebellion against their masters. Zola does not specify in more precise terms what force this is but, through several analogies and comparisons, he implies that this is above all a natural force. Like Dickens, Zola associates this obscure and powerful force sometimes with the order of natural catastrophes (floods, earthquakes, fires). The raging "torrent of miners", as it thunders by causing the very earth to tremble, arrives at Montsou, attacking and destroying anything that opposes its powers, like a river overflowing:

"They arrived ... more than two thousand five hundred madmen, breaking everything, sweeping away everything, with the force of a torrent which gains strength as it moves"(GE:268).

At other times, Zola connects the force of the crowd with the order of instinctive behaviour (passionate anger, the compulsion to rut, the urge to rape). It is a wild, virile, but blind force that drives the miners on. The mob, this "wild ferocity of the howling", is like the force of an "unleashing of a pack of ferocious beasts", "a troop of ferocious creatures". In two crowd scenes, the meeting at the Plan-des-Dames and the mobs's arrival at Montsou, Zola compares the feverish energy of the crowd with the rut - the bestial cry, flush and the fatigue. The use of the sexual pattern to express the intensity and psychological effects of an orgiastic discharge, in Canetti's sense²⁸, is quite explicit:

"And in the icy air there was a fury of faces, of gleaming eyes, of open mouths, a *rut* of famishing men, women and children let loose on the just pillage of ancient wealth they had been deprived of.

28. In Canetti's perspective, "discharge" refers to the phenomenon of "de-individuation" that occurs in the crowd. That is, the suppression of the individual consciousness by the sense of collectivity and subsequent annihilation of the sense of identity that characterizes the individual in terms of class, rank, property. "Discharge", in Canetti's words, "is the moment when all who belong to the crowd get rid of their differences and feel equal" (CP:17).

They no longer felt the cold, these burning words had warmed them to the bone" (GE:228, italics added).

"Fire would flame, they would not leave standing one stone of the towns; they would return to the savage life of the woods, after the great *rut*" (GE:279, italics added).

The language of natural catastrophes, natural phenomena and sexual explosion comes together to reinforce the observation of the domination of natural forces (GE:268). The march of the miners is unstoppable like a wave of the sea (just as Dickens would have said); powerful like a current at full flood, irresistible and uncontrollable like the compulsion that makes the animals rut. In Zola's words: "Yes, it was the force of these things which were passing along the road, it was the force of nature itself" (GE:279).

* * *

Broadly speaking, from Zola's treatment of the crowd two patterns seem to emerge. First, in the most obvious perspective, one that has been more recognized by critics, the crowd is seen as barbaric, primitive, a throw-back. The crowd is a "blind mass" capable only of the most primitive levels of reasoning. Guided primarily by instincts, emotions and the excitability of the moment, the crowd is prone to violent and destructive behaviour. In this perspective, Zola's crowd looks backwards and resembles largely Taine's depictions of the crowd in *The Origins of Contemporary France* (1875-94). The strikers of Montsou, with axe in hand, singing the *Marseillaise* and under a blood-red light shouting "Bread! Bread!, Bread!", could aptly be seen as the reappearance of the characters of the Reign of Terror, the resurgence of the ancient Jacquerie. Looking from this point of view, the primitivism of the crowd constitutes above all an attack on civilized society and on a received notion of culture²⁹. In this sense, *Germinal* doubtless served to concretize the bourgeois nightmare of the revolution as something recurrent and imminent.

29. "The last red rays of the setting sun bathed the plain in blood, and the road seemed like a river of blood as men and women, bespattered like butchers in the slaughterhouse, galloped on and on"(GE:277).

However, another perspective emerges from Zola's writings, and despite being less explicit and more ambiguous, it should not be neglected as it expresses the complexity of Zola's thought. Zola's view of the crowd may not be wholly negative as he identifies in it strong forces originating in nature, whose vitality and potential for liberation he seems to admire. Zola connects the explosion of the strikers not only with the unleashing of ferocious beasts, but also with the liberation of unconscious forces. In the crowd, he speaks of animals freed from the cages also in the sense that they are liberated from their burden, of "the immense sadness, the misery of generations, of the excess of pain" (GE:281). At least momentarily, the miners are released from the anxieties of the infernal world of Montsou. As remarked above, Zola's usage of the pattern of sexual explosion of a great "rut" is particularly indicative of the psychological potential of discharge present in the crowd. Clearly, Zola's utilisation of this model is more intuitive than self-conscious. In spite of perceiving some of the psychological potentialities of liberation of the crowd, Zola was certainly not fully aware of the implications that his writings would suggest to an audience which has read Canetti.

3.3 The Crowd in the Social Context in the Novel

While right wing historians and crowd psychologists generally adopted the model of the blood-thirsty, deranged and bestial mob, often without acknowledging the economic-social factors that bring about revolt, Zola offers a detailed portrayal of the conditions which lead to mob violence. Zola has set the specific motive of the strike - the company's intention to force the miners to accept a disguised wage cut in the form of a new payment policy for timbering - in a much broader framework of conflict between capital and labour and therefore points to more complex causes behind the struggle. Zola has deliberately attempted to picture in *Germinal* the endless contrasts separating the bourgeois world from the squalor of the miners'

existence³⁰. The misery, hard work and constant hunger of the workers is sharply opposed to the sleek, well-fed and idle condition of the Grégoire and Hennebeau families. While the Maheus have several pale sickly children, the Grégoires have a single pink-faced child. While the whole family of the miners sleeps in narrow, cramped, cold quarters almost destitute of furniture, the Grégoires and Hennebeaus live in large, comfortable and luxuriously furnished homes. The antitheses between the warmth, comfort and self-indulgence of the bourgeois world and the chill, harsh and poverty-stricken environment of the working class, is complete. As the novel progresses this discrepancy is enlarged and the strike is a breaking point³¹. In this sense, Zola gives emphasis to the most complex terms of the struggle. Unlike the view that the mob is seized by a gratuitous desire for destruction, the violence of the miners in *Germinal* is made to make sense in a social context.

Zola has carefully built up a progressive state of agony, the growing hunger and misery amongst the miners, to show that peaceful and reasonable workers are led to mob violence as a last resort. The miners are dramatically destitute, their lives reduced to hard work and constant hunger (Marel, 1985:159-171). The mining depression reported in *Germinal*, mirroring France's economic crisis of the late 1860's, shows, through Zola's eyes, the tyrannical exploitation and extortion to which the workers are subject. Yet, at the beginning of the novel they think it would all be worth it if they had enough to eat. "But if one had bread, only bread", wishes Old Bonnemort, who had worked for fifty years and embodies the

30. In his notes for the book, Zola declared his intention to establish very clear contrasts between the world of the bourgeoisie and the world of the workers: "To get a broad effect I must have my two sides as clearly contrasted as possible and carried to the very extreme of intensity. So I must start with all the woes and fatalities which weigh down the miners. Facts, not pleas. The miner must be shown crushed, starving, a victim of ignorance, suffering with his children in a hell on earth". Zola, quoted in Irving Howe, 1986:118.

31. Henri Mitterand has pointed out the synthetic structure which establishes equivalent relationships between the "superior-tive" and the "inferior-tive": the surface and the pit; bourgeoisie and proletariat; bosses and workers; haves and have-nots; light and night. But throughout the narrative, according to Mitterand, Zola continually indicates the danger of a break in this chain, when the rebels invade the territory of the wealthy: from the depths of the underground world there bursts forth the explosion which would destroy society; the hungry comes out of their holes and would destroy the universe of the rich. Henri Mitterand, 1986 (B):128).

exhaustion of the miners' life. The workers are the prey of their employers who refuse to grant them any concessions at all. They cannot hope for assistance from the Government - official inspections of their living conditions are superficial formalities and a farce (GE:117)³². Neither do the miners receive any aid from other institutions. The priest passes through the famished villages with empty hands being totally embarrassed by the miners' misery. In a state of total abandonment and neglect, the great patience that alone has prevented an earlier uprising is remarkable. Maheu's wife exemplifies this extraordinary patience in the face of relentless oppression. When explaining her wretched plight in the hope of obtaining alms from M. Grégoire, she says "Oh! I don't want to complain. Things are like this, and one has to put up with them ... The best is to try to live honestly in the place in which the good God has put us! (GE:74).

The already growing resentment of the miners, gloomy discontent and rebellious feeling are brought to a climax on pay day, when change in the method of payment is enforced and reductions made. Through the more politicized view of Etienne, the workers are made to realise that these were flimsy pretexts revealing the obvious attempt by the employer to increase his profits by gouging the labourers. "The company was economizing out of the miners' pockets" (GE:143). As a last attempt, a committee of miners headed by Etienne and Maheu appeals to the director Hennebeau for a revision of the wage scale, only to have their demand coldly refused. With the fading of hopes of getting a peaceful agreement, the miners finally decide upon the strike as their only weapon.

By showing that the strike was the culmination of an unbearable situation, Zola implies that the crowd is not the faceless *canaille*; their desperate acts of violence are savage but a comprehensible reaction against a brutal and dehumanizing system. In a tone similar to that of Dickens, Zola warns that the reduction of men to beasts

32. When Madame Hennebeau, wife of the director, personally conducts visitors from Paris who were inspecting homes and investigating living condition, she leads them to the two best, neatest homes. They see only what she intends them to see: the bits of garden, the cheap rent charged by the company, the fuel issued to the miners, and they are told about medical attention and pensions accorded (GE:117).

makes bestial retaliation inevitable. "They ought to act in a revolutionary fashion, like savages, since they were tracked like wolves" (GE:224). In *Germinal*, the violence and the hatred that come from the animal depths of the lower classes is not gratuitous. It is the reflex of the injustice and suffering the miners have endured for many years, the inevitable product of the existing social inequalities. Based on this argument, Zola seems to claim, again like Dickens, that the violence of the crowd is "learned" from their masters and oppressors. The people strained by prolonged suffering, misery and injustice, when aroused, will explode in a clamour of revenge, murder and destruction:

"He [old Bonnemort] seemed drunk from hunger, stupefied by his long misery, suddenly arousing himself from the resignation of half a century, under the influence of no one knew what malicious impulse" (GE:232).

"In this growing ferocity, in this need for revenge which was turning every head with madness, the shocked cries went out, death to the traitors, hatred against the ill-paid work, the roaring of bellies after bread ... The fever was on them for moving onward, for ever onward" (GE:265).

"In their rage at not finding a traitor's face to strike, they attacked things. A rankling abscess was bursting in them; a poisoned boil of slow growth. Years and years of hunger tortured them with a thirst for massacre and destruction" (GE:266).

In the scene of the castration of Maigrat's dead body, Zola, despite being shocked by the most horrific act of violence, extenuates the women's deed by recognizing that they were in fury avenging long years of sexual abuse to which he had subjected them and their daughters: "they were all seeking for some outrage, some savagery that would relieve them" (GE:293).

The violence of the miners was the result of a slowly evolving resentment and maybe it was that need for liberation that pushed men and women forward, breaking and demolishing everything that stood in their way. Men appearing like a wave on a sea of darkness are "... advancing in whirls and eddies to break themselves against superior force" (Lemaître, 1986:59). Using the principle of gas compression, Zola seems to propose that the more the people are restrained and repressed, the more

violent the explosion will be. The greater the force used for repression, the greater will be the reaction, the force of liberation. In short, Zola seems to anticipate arguments that would later be consistently articulated by Canetti in the concept of the "reversal crowd"³³. The defeated army awaiting revenge, "the reversal crowd" germinating underground at the end of the novel portends even greater violence, explosive next time on a national scale, if a redress within the social structure is not found.

"... they went [back to work] with the teeth clenched with rage, the hearts swollen with hatred ... In their tramp to work, they resembled again a herd of beasts, but it was now the forced march of a beaten army, moving on with lowered heads sullenly absorbed in the desire to renew the struggle and achieve revenge" (GE:413-14).

In attempting to unravel the causes of violent uprising, Zola creates an "epic poem of rebellion" (Barrows, 1981:105). The strike, which ultimately precipitates mob violence is seen as a long process "germinating" out of the tyrannical exploitation to which the miners were exposed³⁴. However, Zola's perspective becomes very generalized as he cannot identify clearly the direct causes of the proletariat's dehumanisation. The working people of Montsou were not the victims of unscrupulous individuals nor wicked employers, but of the system, to which employer and worker are alike subject. The bourgeoisie, as several critics have already noted, is not pictured as entirely evil and not totally to blame for the

33. For Canetti, the "reversal crowd" is the revolutionary crowd, which tends to invert the customary hierarchical patterns of authority present in stratified societies. "Together they [men] can turn on those who, till now, have given them orders. A revolutionary situation can be defined as this state of reversal, and a crowd whose discharge consists mainly in its collective deliverance from the stings of command should be called a *reversal crowd*" (CP:58-61).

34. From the first part of *Germinal* onwards there are indications of the revolutionary process generating underneath the structure of the capitalist system: "... a rebellion was germinating in this little corner, nearly six hundred metres beneath the earth. Soon they could not restrain their voices; these men soiled by coal, and frozen by the delay, accused the Company of killing half their workers at the bottom, and starving the other half to death" (GE:47). "An army was springing up from the depths of the pits, a harvest of citizens whose seed would germinate and burst through the earth some sunny day"(GE:231). See Colette Becker, 1984:127.

situation³⁵. In spite of their wealth, they also are shown as victims of the economic situation, also suffering financial difficulties caused by merciless competition. It was the evils of the economic system that had ruined both workers and the small businesses. The result is that no-one in particular is to blame for the disasters recounted in *Germinal*. If Deneulin cannot, upon reflection, hate the Montsou bandits who have ruined him, it is because he recognizes that: "everybody was to blame - the fault was general, centuries old" (GE:264). La Maheude repeats that principle when she confesses to Etienne: "Oh, for a moment I could have killed you, after all that slaughter. But one thinks, doesn't one ? One sees that when all's reckoned up it's nobody's fault after all. ... No, no, it is not your fault; it's the fault of everybody" (GE:417).

Yet, in *Germinal* Zola struggles to make his affluent contemporaries see the wretched life of the workers and to act to improve it: "Look beneath the earth", he appealed, "see those miserable creatures who work and suffer ... but bring justice quickly ... otherwise the danger is that the earth will open up and nations will sink in the most horrifying cataclysm in history"³⁶. Zola plays on the bourgeois fear of revolution, in a similar way as Dickens did. He presents the miners' violence as a foreshadowing of a class war that will one day destroy the entire civilization if steps were not taken to provide a remedy for labour conditions and blunt the rancour produced by social differences. Perhaps, Zola has exaggerated the violence involved in the strike recounted in *Germinal*. What was timely and incisive for the French society of the eighties might not have been a very accurate account of the strikes of

35. As Zola has himself declared in his plans for the novel: "I must make the bosses humane so long as their direct interests are not threatened; no point in foolish tub-thumping. The worker is the victim of the facts of existence - capital, competition, industrial crisis". Zola, quoted in Howe, 1986:119. For a thorough analysis of Zola's assessment of the bourgeoisie in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, see Nelson 1983:1-59; for the bourgeoisie's world and its presentation in *Germinal* see Smethurst, 1974:47-52.

36. Zola, *Correspondance*, cited in Barrows, 1981:110.

the late Empire, but the fact that he makes the strikes more violent than they were makes his message even more effective³⁷.

It should be kept in mind that in the historical circumstances surrounding *Germinal*'s publication, almost any dramatic spectacle of an eruption against the *status quo* would imply revolution. Fear of a universal uprising was steadily acquiring the intensity of a myth of the destruction of humankind in the mind of some Europeans³⁸. The fear of the ruling elites of visions of the "revolutionary crowd" is dramatically expressed in *Gernimal* in a scene that resembles a passage in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. Very much like Dr Manette and Mr Lorry witnessing the revolutionaries' butchery in the September massacres of 1792 (see above, p.78), the bourgeois of Montsou stare in horror at the animal-like savagery of the mob in *Germinal*, unable to avert their eyes:

"It was the red vision of the revolution, which one day would inevitably carry them all away, on some bloody evening at the end of the century. Yes, some evening the people, unbridled at last, would thus gallop along the roads, making the blood of the middle class flow. They would hang up heads and sprinkle about gold from disembowelled coffers. The women would yell, the men would have these wolf-like jaws open to bite. Yes, there would be the same rags, the same thunder of great sabots, the same terrible troop, with dirty skins and tainted breath, sweeping away the old world beneath an overflowing flood of barbarians. Fires would flame; they would not leave standing one stone of the towns; they would return to the

37. To be sure, some strikes in the late Empire had been bloody and those strikes at Aubin and La Ricamarie in 1869 had cost the lives of twenty-seven workers. As Susanna Barrows has remarked, many of these strikes involved demonstrations by women and children. During the miners' strike in Le Creusot on the first of April 1869, about six hundred men and women threw rocks at the military who were guarding the pits and, that afternoon, at least six hundred men and women rushed through the town, insulted blacklegs and soldiers, and threw large rocks into the mines. However, the widespread violence or deaths of the demonstrators were tragic exceptions, even for protests in 1869. According to Barrows, no strike in the late nineteenth century, not even Aubin or Ricamarie, could match the combination of sabotage and killings of *Germinal* and no source had even hinted at castration. Barrows, 1981:101-5. For the theme of violence in *Les Rougon-Macquart* see Niess, 1971:131-139.

38. For *Germinal* in the context of the revolutionary tradition in France, see Petrey, 1969:55 and Schor, 1972:19-41.

savage life of the woods, after the great rut, the great feast day when the poor in one night would reduce women to leanness and rich men's cellars to emptiness. There would be nothing left, not a sou of the great fortunes, not a title-deed of acquired properties; until the dawn dawned and a new earth would perhaps spring up once more" (GE:279).

In scenes like that, as already remarked, the readers are made to identify themselves with the bourgeoisie, the occupants and owners of the besieged buildings threatened by the mob. The focus of attention is placed on "us" staring at "them": us, middle class, educated, clean, wealthy, controlled and sober against them, poor, ignorant, dirty, savages and frenzied (Lodge, 1989:137).

3.3.2 The Transformation of the Crowd

Even if Zola has carefully shown the causes that lead to mob violence and has dramatically represented the transformation of reasonable and lawful characters into wild beasts when the mob is raised, he could not unravel in modern psychological terms how such a transformation was made. Even if he had recognized the powerful and irresistible force propelling the crowd, he could not explain how it affected the individual minds or how the "contagion" throughout the crowd was produced. Zola's description of the crowd scenes as natural catastrophes and instinctive behaviour together with his insistence on the "naturalness" of such forces, lead us to deduce that he believed that the contagion of the crowd occurred spontaneously.

However, it is worth noting that Zola has placed the catastrophic transformation of the miners of Montsou in a symbolic and mythical framework³⁹. In the Plan-des-Dames scene, the dramatic night meeting of three thousand men and women in the nearby forest, Zola combines a set of symbols and mythological elements - the fantastic clarity of the rising full-moon; the forest as a "savage cradle"; the feeling of a "religious meeting" (Heck, 1983:27-39), at the "milieu of phantoms" - to suggest a metamorphosis of the workers, domesticated animals of the first part of

39. Symbols and mythical elements play an important role in *Germinal*. In "Prophetic myths in Zola", Philip Walker provides an extended analysis of Zola's eclectic use of myths in *Germinal*, 1959:444-52. See also Henri Mitterand for the myths related to revolt, 1986(B):124-30 and Rosemberg 1972:349-62.

the book, into wolves, the wild beasts of the mob. The description of this crowd meeting presents complex, ambiguous and contradictory meanings, as any mythical representation does. Merging political and psychological insights and switching from one sphere to another, Zola seems to recognise two processes going on at the same time but in opposite directions: on the one hand, the workers go backwards in the mob, acting irrationally and violently, that is, downwards; on the other hand, Zola sees the start of a gradual formation of the workers' collective consciousness, that is, upwards. Since one of the principal characteristic of symbols is their capacity to condense several ideas, which interact with each other, Zola's narrative has not a single precise message. Not only may symbols mean different things to different people but the same symbol often has diverse, dubious and conflicting meanings to the same individual (Kertzer, 1988:12).

The themes used in the scene of the Plan-Des-Dames meeting make a close link with rites of passage, as understood by anthropological doctrines⁴⁰. Briefly, rites of passage are typically used to mark symbolically a person's transition through stages or changes of status; the passage of a boy into a man, the transformation of a prince into a king, for instance. Generally, the transient person is conducted by an initiator through a ritual process, where the previous status is abandoned and the person is endowed with new powers to cope with his new situation in life (Turner, 1977:102). While rites of passage are usually used to facilitate the progress to higher stages, Zola seems to reverse this order: sober workers change into wild animals. Nevertheless, Zola leaves room for speculation: wolves are certainly much more powerful, energetic and self-assertive than docile and submissive sheep, domesticated cattle, beasts of burden. Zola implies thus that the workers achieve a kind of liberation from their old submissive status:

"Here [in the forest], we are free, we are at home. No one can silence us any more as they can silence birds and beasts" (GE:224).

In this sense, the Plan-des-Dames meeting scene can also be read as a representation of the passage to proletarian consciousness. After the socialist lectures of Etienne

40. For the structure and meaning of Rites of Passage, see Victor Turner, 1977:93-110.

(like the words of a prophet or the initiator of the rites of passage), the proletarian class consciousness breeds and starts growing, like a seed, which is endowed with natural force, which no obstacle can stop.

"... the miner was no longer an ignorant brute, crushed within the bowels of the earth. An army was springing up from the depths of the pits, a harvest of citizens whose seeds would germinate and burst through the earth some sunny day"(GE:231).

Zola may be portraying dramatically here one of the greatest controversies of the nineteenth century, which came well into the twentieth century - the rise of the masses and their capacity for self-representation: the transformation of the *canaille* ("a class in itself") into what Marx has called a "class for itself". In fact, we can see that the conflict between capital and labour enacted in the novel is throughout marked by a progression of the working class to a higher, possibly more fecund stage of revolutionary development. As everywhere in *Germinal*, where historical elements are given mythical dimensions, Etienne's dream of the revolt of the masses and his Utopian theoretical position, which is the central vision of the novel, corresponds closely to the structure of the plot, as remarked by Walker: the awakening of the proletariat (the awakening of the Maheu family in Part I); the growing spirit of revolt (the growing resentment and anger of the miners at the injustices of the Company in Parts II, III and IV); the emergence of the proletariat from the lower regions of society (the emergence of the Montsou strikers from the mines); the destruction of the unjust world (the rampant mob of Part V and the destruction of Le Voreux in part VII); the coming of the new socialist golden age (the symbolic April sunshine in the end of the book); the overall movement from the wintry darkness and cold of the first chapter to the springtime light and warmth of the conclusion (Walker, 1984:68).

Zola's representation of the entry into collective consciousness is specifically linked to the workers's acquisition of a language which really can describe their own lives. This implies a process of change from the mass into a proletariat gaining access to

knowledge of their condition⁴¹. Again at the Plan-Des-Dame meeting, it is Etienne, in an imitation of the Holy Spirit, who unfetters the workers' tongues: "The tempest of these three thousand voices filled up the sky" (GE:233). On the day after their initiation, Maheu, that superbly haggard worker, begins to speak to the manager, "the words are coming out of themselves, and at moments he listened to himself in surprise, as though some stranger within him were speaking" (GE:240). The transfiguration of Maheu can be interpreted as his disengagement from the crowd, his individuation by acquisition of self-knowledge. That "stranger" that speaks within him is the long buried self, which emerges making him a subject and actor of his own destiny. From the "rite of passage" at the Plan-des-Dames meeting, Zola actually seems to prepare his characters for their new roles: Etienne in the pride of leadership (whose rise is a direct result of his mastery over the spoken word); Maheu in the conquest of acquisition of humanity through speech, La Maheude as the voice of ancient grievance.

In other words, all those at the bottom of history, for centuries objects of manipulation and control, begin to transform themselves into active subjects, determined to create their own history. Irving Howe, analysing this emergence and the reaching of working class consciousness in the novel, remarks that *Germinal* releases "one of the central myths of the modern era":

"The myth in *Germinal* - if we agree, however hesitantly, to call it a myth - is one that may have parallels in earlier centuries, but it takes its formative energies from the French Revolution. It is the myth of the people and more particularly, the proletariat. They who have merely suffered and at times erupted into blind rebellion; they who had been prey to but not part of society; they who had found no voice in the cultures of the past - they now emerge from the sleep of history and begin the task of a collective self-formation" (Howe, 1986:115).

What interests us here is to pay attention to the way in which Zola was able to fill out this perspective with evidence. Zola shows, as no other European novelist before him, the emergence of a new historical force and the conflict that must

41. For a specific analysis of the role of speech and writing as a mean of human differentiation in *Germinal*, see Carol A. Mossman, 1985:30-41.

follow. The miners, initially inarticulate, mute brutes, are shown gradually to master the spoken word to such an extent as to impose temporary silence on those in power. When the striking miners appear at Montsou, the bourgeoisie, paralysed in horror, is relegated to an intimidated silence; Mme Hennebeau murmurs while her husband continues to stammer. Zola recognizes in the proletariat a potential force to destroy established order and level social hierarchy, as a hurricane levels houses. But meanwhile he perceives a new paradox being introduced: the workers are shown to rise to a noble solidarity and fall to a brutal mob. Under intolerable stress portrayed in *Germinal*, the nobility and the barbarity of the crowd became all but undistinguishable. After the terrible riot at the end of Part Five, Zola sees the men continuing their strike, digging in in a mute fatalism, "a great sombre peacefulness", which rests less on expectations of victory than on a common resignation to the grief of standing and starving together⁴².

However, the miners' moment of glory is short-lived. Some men and women of Montsou receive the gift of tongues as individuals but their articulation as a group, Zola implies, can go no further than a confused tower of Babel. Zola depicts the sensations of men who have thrown off the discipline of society but who have not yet discovered the discipline of the self. The miners reject their submissive position in society, but cannot acquire at once civic identity and ethical responsibility. Lacking the alleged discipline necessary for reflection, the miners do not foresee the possible results of their attitudes. This is the point when the miners, Zola shows, will be corrupted by the power of violence. As a group, the miners are driven by passion and over-indulge their desire to annihilate the pillars of the old social structure that produced social differences. The women will especially perform that supreme act of symbolic elimination of difference, as Mossman has noted, in the castration of Maigrat, as if the condensation in that name (lean/fat) were calling out for rupture (Mossman, 1985:37). People erode their solidarity by acting barbarously

42. Zola, in recognizing that crowds could be barbarous and heroic at the same time, prefigures an important issue developed by Le Bon. Le Bon claims that crowds were, of course, often criminal, but they were also often heroic. They could easily be led to sacrifice their lives for a belief in an idea, be filled with enthusiasm for glory and honour. Le Bon [1895], 1952:33-4.

and betray themselves by degenerating into an aimless brutal mob. Aware that numbers create anonymity, Zola also recognizes that all feeling of personal responsibility disappears in the crowd⁴³. As a consequence, Zola predicted that the class struggle would come to be seen as a return to a state of pre-civilization.

It is possible to say that Zola's representation of the rise of the collective consciousness displays "a tragic realistic vision". According to John Orr, Zola went "straight to the heart of the dilemma of socialist praxis" by perceiving that the working class revolt led by Etienne is doomed to failure, but Etienne must still be able to persuade the miners that their circumstances will improve through their actions, for only through this type of conviction are long-term gains for the working classes made possible (Orr, 1977:96). That is, the advance of the working-classes only comes about in the long term through actions whose benefit is not reaped by those who committed them but by future generations. Zola's portrayal of the miners' descent into violence, in Orr's view, reveals his concern with the "high standards that authentic socialist values demand of the individual personality", and to the extent that these standards are not met, the novel expresses the tragic pit of that failure (1977:97).

Despite recognizing the lower classes' potential to acquire hegemony, Zola reinforces the conservative belief that the workers were not "ready yet" to undertake leadership and the control of their own lives. It is obvious that the crowd as such was disorganized and irrational. Acting without any co-ordination of means or clear idea of ends, it was incapable of self-rule and thus incapable of ruling, or even of serving as a model for eventual proletarian hegemony. In the changing context of the working world in the second half of the nineteenth century, Zola shows a deep scepticism about working class organization and a doubt whether the labour cause could be achieved at all. The uneasiness brought about by such an impression is especially revealed in Zola's depiction of labour leadership in *Germinal*. The novel,

43. Zola prefigures in this sense Le Bon's argument that solely from the fact of numbers, each individual has a feeling of invincible power that allows him to yield to instincts, which alone he would have kept under restraint. Le Bon [1895], 1952:34.

in this sense, can be read as Zola's attempt both to represent and assess the world of the conflicting ideologies and divergent tactics that convulsed the nineteenth century labour movement. The problem of schisms amongst the leaders and the supporters of the working class movement is also explored.

3.3.3 The Labour Leader: a Biography

Germinal shows the education of a young labour leader in the ideologies and strategies of the labour movement and the growth of his social and political awareness. Originally a railroad worker at Lille, Etienne loses his job because of a fight with the manager and arrives at Montsou looking for work⁴⁴. He joins the ranks of the coal miners but does not share their passive resignation to the harsh living and working conditions, his fiery temperament urging him to rebel (Mitterand, 1971:141). Etienne's correspondence with Pluchart, a mechanic at Lille who recruits new members for the International, and his studies of socialist literature, gradually transform his instinctive rebelliousness into a determination to fight for social change. He succeeds in setting up a provident fund among the miners and later becomes their strike leader.

Critical of Etienne's political naivety, Zola stresses the superficiality of the young leader's socialist education before setting forth the humanitarian utopianism that had resulted from it (III, ch.3). Etienne's conception of justice is portrayed with evident irony as a pastiche of fairy tales, reinforced by Zola's use of magic and religious symbolism⁴⁵. Zola says that Etienne's belief in the "great kiss", or "universal embrace" between the classes, that would soon end all misunderstanding and usher in "a new golden age of fraternity, equality and justice" is no more than the hallucination of an ignorant and credulous mind. Etienne, though more politically sophisticated than the other miners, is never permitted to achieve a political

44. The fact that Zola brings an outsider to act as the strike leader has been criticized. See Smethurst, 1974:40-45 and Mitterand, 1986:129.

45. As Diane Smith has pointed out, Etienne's vision of justice descends from the sky in a blaze of light and is punctuated by "songs", "mirage", "dream", "the impossible". Smith, 1983:114-117.

ideology that consists of more than a random mixture of ideas from Darwin, Marx, Proudhon, and the leading socialists. Zola is careful in underlining the fact that Etienne, through his slow political self-education, has merely exchanged one dream for another, replacing his visionary dream for a few cloudy and poorly assimilated notions gleaned from a random assortment of socialist writers.

In dealing with the controversy over the means by which a new community based on the principles of brotherhood and equality could be attained, Zola makes Etienne the centre of a forum in which conflicting ideologies of the working-class movement are explored⁴⁶. The formation of Etienne's political consciousness and his social and political awareness takes place under the influence of opposing perspectives, represented in the novel by Rasseneur, Ranvier and Souvarine.

Rasseneur, the ex-miner who was dismissed after a strike and became a bar-keeper, represents the viewpoint of a moderate trade-unionist arguing for piecemeal reforms. At the Vandame gathering, he tries to counteract Etienne's inflamed speech, protesting against his tactics and his efforts to encourage the miners to join the International. Claiming that social evolution is a gradual and slow process, he tries to persuade the miners that profit-sharing is a wiser method than the take-over of the mines by the miners themselves. Ineffective, he is soon replaced by Etienne.

Ranvier, represents the vehicle of Zola's criticism of Christian socialism. Ranvier shows a great disregard for mundane facts. He goes through village after village of

46. Zola's depiction of the left-wing ideologies in *Germinal* has been charged with anachronism. According to Colin Smethurst, the background to the ideas exemplified by both Rasseneur and Souvarine is related to the early 1880's and is not an accurate picture of political influences and ideas as they stood in the France of 1860's. Smethurst argues that "Zola's attempts to point to an earlier period, for example Souvarine's prediction that 'Bakounine l'exterminateur' will shortly take over the International, which in fact happened in 1872 and was hardly foreseeable in 1865-6, serve only to confuse further the historical picture". See (Smethurst, 1974:40-47, cf. especially chapter "On and about working-class ideologies"). Similarly, Hemmings points out that "the presence of a Russian anarchist in France under the Second Empire represents ... something of an anachronism. Russian political emigrés during this period congregated in London and Switzerland for preference, and only after the fall of the Empire came to Paris. Hemmings, 1953 and Henri Marel, 1989, cf. especially the chapter "Etienne Lantier et Les Chefs Syndicalistes", pp.140-56.

starving people with empty hands, believing that suffering is a means of salvation. To show Ranvier's inadequacy, Zola stresses the pathetic indifference with which he regards Maheu's family misery's and Alzire's death from hunger.

Souvarine, the Russian emigré who works as an engine operator at Le Voreux, represents the anarchist position, ridiculing attempts of the movement to improve the situation of the worker through legal and non-violent channels. A disciple of Bakunin, he advocates total destruction of the existing structures of society, "no more nations, no more governments, no more property, neither God nor worship" (GE:193). When Etienne asks him what end this will lead to, Souvarine replies: "To the primitive formless community, to a new world, to the renewal of everything" (GE:193). However, Zola shows Souvarine as torn between the essentially optimistic doctrine that destruction of the present social system may result in the creation of a better world and an utterly despairing nihilism, as David Baguley has pointed out (Baguley, 1971a). When later confronted by Etienne with the possibility that a new world rising from the ashes of the old might be no better than the one that has been replaced, Zola makes Souvarine cry in despair⁴⁷ :

"Faced with this vision of eternal wretchedness, the engine-man shouted out fiercely that if justice was not possible with man, then men must disappear. For every rotten society there must be a massacre, until the last creature was exterminated" (GE:360).

Etienne, despite rejecting Souvarine's anarchism, is subtly influenced by his doctrines. However, after the great violence and destruction of the miners on strike, the loss of lives and Souvarine's sabotage of the structures of Le Voreux, Etienne begins to consider legal channels for achieving the workers' goals. By the end of the

47. According to Baguley's article "The function of Zola's Souvarine", Souvarine's true motive for sabotaging Le Voreux was his fundamental hunger for absolute, definitive destruction, his longing to see the whole of creation collapse back into the night from which it came, whose creature it is. As Baguley concludes, this is the most powerful meaning of the images of darkness and silence which Zola associates with Souvarine in the scenes culminating in this final act of violence. Baguley, 1971a:786-97. Philip Walker has also suggested that Souvarine's perspective may represent Zola's attempt to give fictional expression to his own fundamental doubts and fears, his own nihilism and despair, his own pessimistic conception of human nature and the hopeless realisation that the great would always destroy the small. Walker, 1984:20.

novel, Etienne's vague and conflicting theories of social reform converge upon the idea of utilizing legal channels to advance the cause of the worker. He still envisions the day of reckoning, but one that will come only after the workers' gradual acquisition of political power by peaceful means (Smith, 1983:135).

Zola the narrator seems to align himself in support of legal means of change. However, Zola's exact position in the midst of the disputing left-wing ideologies and controversies over the means of attaining the workers' goal is a complex question, which remains open to discussion (see below, pp.193-4). Zola criticizes all the varieties of left wing leaders of the proletarian movement but cannot find a clear solution for the problems of class war. Though unmistakably longing for improvement of the working class condition, Zola could not see how the workers' energies should be coordinated and regulated and put to productive use in the service of a stable social order. The performance of the labour leader portrayed in *Germinal* serves only to reinforce such doubts.

3.3.4 The Crowd Leadership

Zola has identified in *Germinal* several problems that obstructed the labour leadership's role. The worker who tries to educate himself in order to fight for his class, Zola suggests, becomes estranged from his working class origins and adopts certain bourgeois values and attitudes. Not only does Etienne feel physically repelled by his former comrades, but his quest for social justice becomes tainted by ambition for social climbing. When the crowd transforms itself into the mob, the leader not only is completely incapable of controlling it but he himself becomes part of it.

The leaders of the crowd portrayed in *Germinal*, both Rasseneur and Etienne, who individually attempted to direct and control the energies of the crowd, were both frustrated. When Rasseneur, who had been the miners' undisputed leader before Etienne's arrival, tries to calm down the mob at the Plan-des-Dames meeting that has been raised by Etienne's speech, he is shouted down and pelted by handfuls of frozen moss. As he steps down, Rasseneur warns Etienne that he also will one day

experience the ingratitude of the mob. Etienne becomes a hero, his eloquent discourse brings more than three thousand workers to a hallucinating enthusiasm.

Etienne's power is especially established by his intellectual supremacy and his gradual mastery of rhetoric. Zola says that Etienne is able to rule the multitude by appealing to their passions, beliefs and imagination. "These words shocked every heart"(GE:225). Going in the direction of the crowd theory of the end of the century, Zola implies that Etienne is capable of arousing the miners because he offers, in childish terms full of imagery, answers to their questions and gives names to their anxieties. "He came upon familiar images which seized on his audience by their energy" (GE:226). Etienne's offering of a new world or the promise of a new life appeals to the very depths of the emotions of the men and women of Montsou. Without reason or calculation, such "dreams" or "illusions" were grasped, Zola says, as if they were the absolute truth. Zola seems to suggest that this emotional energy drawn from the crowd could be used by Etienne, or perhaps any crowd leader, to lead the multitude. "He held his power, as it were materialized in these three thousand breasts, whose hearts he could move with a word" (GE:228).

"Religious exaltation raised them from the earth, a fever of hope like that of the Christians of the early Church awaiting the near coming of justice. Many obscure phrases had escaped them, they could not properly understand the technical and the abstract reasoning; but the very obscurity still further enlarged the field of promises and lifted them into a dazzling region" (GE:228)

Paradoxically, Etienne's very engagement on behalf of other miners begins to undermine his feeling of solidarity with them. Etienne's new role attracts his vanity and the dream of becoming a popular labour leader progressively creates a rift between him and the other miners. His idealism turns into opportunism. With increase of power and pride, Etienne develops what amounts to a middle-class sensibility, which changes into disdain for his former fellows.⁴⁸ Having become aware of "good manners", Etienne becomes physically repelled by the bestial existence of the poor and is seized by nausea at the thought of their manner of

48. See Smethurst, 1974, particularly chapter "A Study in Psychology: Etienne", pp.27-40.

living, all in a heap as if in a bath of hunger, the air filled with the steamy odour of onions (GE:357).

Etienne's gradual alienation from the workers is interwoven with his inability to control the crowd. Though Etienne is able to arouse the fervour of the miners to the point of delirium, he is as impotent as Rasseneur in commanding the explosion he has ignited. In all scenes throughout the novel in which the crowd is roused, Etienne's attempts to hold it back are totally and repeatedly unsuccessful (Barrows, 1981:100). In the final part of the novel, after the failure of the strike and the death of several miners, the workers turn against Etienne, as Rasseneur had predicted. He is chased by a crowd of miners as he walks through the village and is showered with stones and angry insults.

Zola prefigures some of Le Bon's insights about crowd leadership, but only some of them. Zola implies that when the mass accept a leader, he is exalted and transfigured⁴⁹. Zola proposes that an emotional energy binds leader and the multitude together, and that energy might be used by the leader for certain ends of his own⁵⁰. However, Zola stopped short of comprehending how the bond between leaders and followers was established in precise psychological terms. The theory of hypnosis, as a possible explanation for the relationship established between the leader and each member of the crowd and the control that is exercised by him, would only become general ten years later with Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1895). Freud's theory of libinal attraction exercised by the crowd leader over his followers was still much further in the future, with *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). Zola tends indeed to assert that the leader's sense of mastery over the

49. "It was no longer the secretary of the association who was speaking; it was the chief of a band, the apostle who was bringing truth" (GE:225).

50. Zola's view of the linkage between leader and the crowd seem to come closest to the concept of *charisma*. Le Bon has defined *charisma* as a mysterious power, a kind of spell based on admiration and respect that paralysed the critical faculties. The man who possesses it has an irresistible ascendancy and a natural magnetic hold over others. However, differently from Zola's assumptions, Le Bon stressed that the charismatic leader is able to control and impose obedience on the crowd. "The crowd is mesmerized, at once terrorized and charmed by his presence and magnetised by his gaze, swoons and obeys". Le Bon [1895], 1952:139.

crowd is a mere illusion. The leader can feed the enthusiasm and passions of the crowd, but he cannot impose on them discipline of thought and action. Rasseneur, Etienne, or any other leader can easily excite the passions of the crowd but they can never control or direct the instincts of an aroused crowd.

Zola has shown that the crowd leaders of *Germinal* were ineffective, misguided and could always be overtaken by the mass. Both Rasseneur and Etienne recoiled before the crowd that has got out of hand, and experienced being betrayed by events: each suffered from the crowd's volatility and themselves eventually capitulated to the mass frenzy. Zola makes clear that the leader is important for the formation of the crowd but he is not in essentials different from the mob. In spite of Etienne's sense of superiority over his followers, such a supremacy is no more than superficial. Etienne after becoming drunk on some pilfered gin, ends by joining the mob frenzy for destruction, which he himself at first had struggled to restrain. Etienne fails to control his own instincts and succumbs to his lust for murder. Etienne is helpless against his ineradicable alcoholic compulsion and is powerless against his heredity⁵¹. For these reasons the role of the crowd leader tends to get a secondary value in Zola's framework.

From another perspective, the ephemeral nature of the leader's power in *Germinal* can be explained by the very essence of the axis leader/orator established by Zola. Carol Mossan, analysing the function of speech in *Germinal*, remarks that the power of the crowd leader is inevitably short-lived, because his "word" is by its very nature false and manipulative (Mossan, 1985:39). The spoken word in *Germinal* is condemned because it is not the bearer of the Truth, but a vehicle of power used for corrupting ends:

"In this state of mental tension [during the speech] reason trembled, and only the sectarian's fixed ideas was left. The scruples of sensibility and of good sense were lost; nothing seemed easier than

51. As Smith has claimed, Zola, by portraying his leader as a violent alcoholic was paradoxically contributing to that very myth of the alcoholic revolutionary that he sought to dispel with *L'Assommoir* (Smith, 1983:147).

the realization of this new world. He had foreseen everything ..."(GE:217).

Etienne's success clearly rests on the foundations of a confused set of ideas and his speeches are based on "poorly digested readings". In *Germinal*, Mossan continues, "we are not dealing with a "pure" speech but with a fallen word, one that has been altered, "poisoned". The leader/orator is nothing but a "semi-savant" propped up by ideas which ... will never yield meaningful change" (Mossan, 1985:39). From this viewpoint, it is also not surprising then that Etienne failed to control the mob, seeking in vain to appease them "with ... phrases" (GE:262). Although a sympathetic character, Etienne stands accused of demagoguery, in the end no different from Pluchart, Rasseneur, abbé Ranvier or, for that matter, the bourgeoisie.

Zola has left unexamined many implications of the issues that he raises. Despite the leaders' willingness to support the crowd's sense of grievance, they tried to fashion it into an instrument of political power and learned to their cost how treacherous and unmanageable such an instrument can become. As leaders, they served merely as the catalyst that awakes the workers' latent power. Thus, in Zola, the greatest emphasis remains upon the force that the miners collectively represent, a force that can neither be politically controlled nor socially organized.

This conjecture follows inevitably from the way in which Zola has understood the crowd itself. The miners are pictured as an untutored audience, they have credulous minds and volatile allegiances. Trapped in the world of the senses and passions, they are totally ignorant of the most important forces outside their lives and have little understanding of political reality. They believe in everything they hear and adopt views without knowing the extent of the evidence that produced them. Therefore, the crowd is seen to be moved by ideas that are dogmatic and utopian, similar to religious beliefs. Zola's use of the early Christian comparison throughout *Germinal* to convey the miners' faith in their struggle and their innocence reinforces

the point⁵². The crowd being so naive, ignorant and credulous, can easily exchange one prophet's words for another, and always be prey to demagogues.

* * *

Since *Germinal* is a novel full of contradictions, it is not surprising that its interpretation has been remarkably controversial. One could draw a very pessimistic conclusion from the workers' struggle in *Germinal*. The strike has been crushed, the power of capital has increased and the great companies swallow up the small ones. The workers are driven back to work on the company's terms, strikers have been killed, the embryo of the organization has died and Etienne and Souvarine leave the community. In the last pages of the novel, however, Zola sets up against this gloomy picture a new picture of spring and germination; the working class would one day grow and ripen. This optimism which breaks through the prevailing atmosphere of the novel, according to Smethurst, reveals a deep-seated need of Zola's: "The crushing blackness of the situation, established by observation and analysis, is counterbalanced by a poem of faith in the future" (Smethurst, 1974:45).

"And beneath his feet, the deep blows, those obstinate blows of the pick continued... Again and again, more and more distinctly, as though they were approaching the soil, the mates were hammering. In the heated rays of the sun on this youthful morning the country seemed full of that sound. Men were springing forth, a black avenging army, germinating slowly in the furrows, growing towards the harvests of the next century, and this germination would soon overturn the earth"(GE:422).

Zola saw his epoch as the battlefield of egalitarianism and socialism, and perceived that class war could only end in two ways: either by a general collapse into anarchy

52. According to Smith, Zola's parallel between the beginning of Christianity and the workers' movement is used to comment on the miners naivety: "The miners' understanding of socialism resembles the Christians' expectation of a life after death. They have little cognizance of political realities, only a vision of a promised land somewhere in the future". Smith, 1983:150. Similarly, Francis S. Heck, examining the meeting in the forest in *Germinal*, compares the miners to the first Christians, 1983:27-39. See also Pierre Ouvrard, 1985:427-434.

and barbarism or by a reconciliation of conflicting classes. Allying liberal reformism and utopian socialism, Zola closes *Germinal* by restating the humanitarian dream, "the universal kiss of people, the end of war" as Zola himself put in an article on Victor Hugo (quoted in Walker, 1984:65). The end of *Germinal* also emphasizes another major feature of optimistic social thought, the picture of the passage of society from a hateful past, so hard and painful, to the socialist paradise of the future.

Zola's picture of the working class movement has been particularly criticized. As Holderness has put it, Zola's proletarian fiction involves the reader "in a peculiar dialectic of empathy and alienation ... drawing the engaged consciousness towards an imaginative solidarity with the exploited working class and a liberating fantasy of socialist revolution, and simultaneously thrusting it away from the agents of that revolution as the spectres of a terrifying vengeance" (Holderness, 1984:21). Similarly, Henri Mitterand has claimed that the workers' revolutionary potential "fades in fantasies" in *Germinal* since the miners do not actually achieve anything. He argues that the workers do not attack the real power of the bourgeoisie but "expiatory and propitiatory victims", like the castration of Maigrat, the murder of the little soldier and the strangulation of Cécile Grégoire. Mitterand notes that such attacks are carried out by marginal figures (women, children, old men) on victims of ambiguous status that represent a weak link between the two worlds. Critical of the character of these murders, Mitterand adds that they serve to remove attention from the main confrontation of the collective struggle, lending a false sense that social justice has been established, "a reward that on which the miners secretly, unconsciously, have been counting. But all of this is mere dream, magic, sham" (Mitterand, 1986:128)⁵³.

However, it should be stressed that the notion that Zola employs is not the Marxist notion of an inevitable victory or of a victory-in-defeat ending with noble determination for the future (Howe, 1986:117). Even if Zola hopes for a bright and

53. For a study of the ideology and myth involving Zola's perception of social revolt, see Henri Mitterand, 1986(b):124-130. See also from Mitterand, "The Narrator's Fantasies" 1986(a):147-153.

peaceful future, its outcome remains uncertain, shadowy, ambiguous. Zola's scepticism is not about the recuperative power of the workers, for his theoretical framework suggested that he should see the generations always flourishing, pushing for life space, thrusting their clamour onto the world⁵⁴. Zola's scepticism runs deeper and has a twofold origin. On the one hand, he sees at the very emergence of lower class solidarity there would be formed new rulers and oppressors: the Rasseneurs, the Plucharts, and even the Etiennes of tomorrow, raised to the status of leaders and bureaucrats, who would impose their will over the proletariat and misdirect them. On the other hand, the force which the miners represent as a group is overshadowed by Zola's own perception of the intractability of such a force that could be neither politically controlled nor socially organized. Zola does not insist that this is inevitable. What he does is to show that the experience of Montsou workers reflects such a possibility.

Zola seems trapped by the pessimistic implications of his own theorizing, established by observation and analysis. Once a crowd rises, as Zola has dramatically portrayed, it is ruled by its own emotions, the excitability of the moment, "the sexual blush"(GE:325), "the vertigo of hunger"(GE:228), the "aggregate anger", "the irrationality of emptied heads"(GE:232). Inherited instinct appears as the real master of the mob and its will is never subjected to the control of any external leader. In perceiving the uncontollability and the unstopability of the mob, Zola was surely joining his voice to the bourgeois consensus that proclaimed the danger of the crowd. This may seem an old argument, but as we will discuss in the next section, Zola has underlined his vision of the crowd with specific pieces of scientific theory and struggled to understand the whole crowd phenomenon scientifically. We will in turn investigate how Zola has tried to make his fictional world of *Germinal*, particularly his picture of the crowd phenomena, to conform to

54. Examining the themes of destruction and renewal in Zola's work, Philip Walker has remarked on Zola's obsession with an apocalyptic vision, where the shaking upheavals of his time, the struggle of force of the past and the present, would give birth to a new world. Walker, 1959:444-52. For Zola's "youthful faith based on geology", Walker, 1982:257-272 and 1984, especially chapter 4, "Geological Gospel" pp. 49-62 and chapter 6, "Life Continuing and Recommencing" pp.73-86.

scientific truth (or more precisely, to those scientific assumptions, hypothesis and theories that were in his day regarded as truths), and how he has reflected the inconsistencies and weakness of these theories.

3.4 Theories Underlying Zola's View of the Crowd

As we have remarked in the introduction of this chapter, *Germinal* testifies to Zola's intention to produce a truly scientific novel, based on a plot accurately founded on a scientific research project. The main outline of the characters, setting and central dramatic action, as well as many secondary topics, are directed by an anthropological study of coal mines and coal miners. In a time when the races of man were hierarchically arranged, with European man at the pinnacle, following racist assumptions with evolutionary overtones, Zola sets out to investigate the "inferior" or "weaker forms of life" in his own European society. Zola shows against the background of imperialism that a savage tribe, a different race of people doomed by an evil environment and with their own weird culture, was not far away from the white society, but there within its walls.

Following his concern with objective investigation, Zola draws upon a rich source of evidence provided by science for explaining crowd behaviour and mentality. To understand the irrationality, violence and easy excitability of the crowd, Zola recurs to the most modern doctrines and hypothesis current in his time - particularly the theory of evolution, with its ramifications into transformism and the possibility of regression to an ancient past of animality; the principle of heredity and the belief that moral traits, crime and vice, were hereditary; the physiological conception of man and the assumption that physical needs and instincts were the primary determinants of the human behaviour and, finally, the concept of women and drunkards as "fallen selves", the epitome of unregenerate humanity.

It is possible to say that Zola was committed to filling the traditional imagery of the crowd with a scientific, specifically positivist content, based on real, observable facts. However, like all researchers breaking new ground, he approached new topics using instruments and assumptions that were already familiar. Thus, Zola had to

look at the imagery of the crowd of his time to express his own insights; he used the similes, analogies and metaphors as the starting point to arrive eventually at truly causal explanations and to make implied predictions. For us in the twentieth century, many criticisms, largely influenced by our own contemporary theorizing, can be made of Zola's theoretical models⁵⁵. But for Zola, his findings could no longer be regarded as metaphors since they have been submitted to scientific scrutiny and represented instead, in so far as possible, the most truthful approach to reality. To take the models resulting from Zola's writings as mere metaphors, as Susanna Barrows has claimed in her study (Barrows, 1981), would do so much to impoverish Zola's scientific view of the crowd as to dismiss their key structuring devices.

Writers like Zola were attracted to the thought of Darwin and Spencer and were struggling with serious and urgent problems. Zola's physiological determinism and his theoretical groping towards an exact causality may now seem crude. However, even among the ideas we regard as mistaken, a sharp distinction must be made when trying to judge their literary consequences. The massed detail with which Zola recorded the world of his time and tried to make sense of a complex social reality remains absolutely vital. It is worth trying to understand seriously such writings, not only because they directly inform us how things were regarded in the past, but also because they represent particular insights and world views that have influenced the perception and the theorizing of subsequent generations. We can be more aware of our own insights, implications and purposes better by contrasting them with those of our predecessors.

55. Certainly, the criticism on Zola's theoretical position paralleled with those of naturalism in general imply a larger discussion that cannot be pursued here. However, some essential points can be briefly listed. Naturalism has been usually criticized by several schools of thought for its pretence to impartiality and objectivity; for its static conception of the individual, expressed in the denial of men as social actors capable of changing the environment and the social relations which determined the individual; for its tendency to conceive reality as given, naturalizing history and the actions of men; for its tendency to explain actions, desires and tastes in terms of physiology and pathology. For a general criticism of Naturalism, see Lilian F. Furst & Peter N Skrine, 1971:18-21 and David Baguley, 1990:184-223.

Furthermore, if Zola tried so hard in *Germinal* to be scientific, to present the public with a truly scientific novel based on accurate and exhaustive research, it was not only to satisfy his intellectual need for scientific realism. It was also because he believed that only through the application of the scientific method in all fields of activity, including the writing of literature, could the knowledge necessary to deal with social problems be achieved. Only by understanding the origins and processes of the social maladies could a cure be found and significant social progress accomplished. To explain the principles governing the mind of the crowd - a subject only beginning to be taken seriously by theorists in Zola's time - was a challenge. The crowd constituted not only a threat to the established institutions and orderly society but also an attack on the theory of progress as a whole, a theory that had become characteristic of most European social theory in the post-Enlightenment.

3.4.1 The General Theory of Evolution

Zola's theoretical position, to a great extent, reflects the general theory of evolution, which was increasingly gaining ground in the second half of the nineteenth century. In broad terms, scientific evolutionism proposes that in nature there is a discoverable natural order and universal mechanism, which if it were known, would reveal the only possible path to the future. As conceived ambitiously by Spencer, the theory of evolution was envisaged to cover all types of natural process - the development of species and the evolution of the solar system besides social development (Peel, 1971:131). Central to his view was the notion of development from indefinite, incoherent and homogeneous form to a definitive, coherent and heterogeneous form in a dynamic process that operates in every phenomenon throughout the universe⁵⁶. Society was conceived as a system, like a biological organism, which moves from a simple, primitive, undifferentiated state to a state of differentiation and complexity.

56. "Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion; during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity." H. Spencer, quoted in J.W. Burrow, 1966:94.

The huge technological development and the new discoveries in all fields of science in the nineteenth century seemed to justify the belief in a steady understanding of natural processes and the workings of the universe. However, if the idea of progress and the optimism inherited from the Enlightenment project were reinforced on the one hand, these elements could underscore a pessimistic outlook equally well. As Robert Nye has pointed out, the idea of evolution served two masters in the nineteenth century, the one full of confidence in man and nature, the other predicting degeneration, decay and extinction (Nye, 1975:22). The sense of pessimism much in vogue in French society in the second half of the last century, was, at least in part, derived from the combination of recent events in French history. The crushing military defeat in 1870, followed by the bloody experience of the Commune coupled with a decline of French economy far behind England and Germany, all were seen as symptoms of the French decadence, of cultural degeneration and dissipation of national vitality. In this context, Taine was especially skilful in using the essence of Comte's positivist world view without the optimism and the belief in the perfectibility of the "human spirit".

Developments in the theory of heredity in the anthropological field and the emergence of the notion of evolutionary degeneration, gave an additional incentive to pessimistic social thought in France. The great classics of this school, Charles Lucas's *De l' Hérité naturelle* (1847) and B. H. Morel's *Traité des dégénérescences* (1857), began speculations on the notion of a gradual degeneration of a breeding line. Their studies suggested that once a "degenerate" trait appeared in one generation, it would multiply and exaggerate itself in a process of retrograde evolution and condemn the viability of the entire breed. Zola's literary theme of decadence found a concrete foundation in this theory as did an entire school of criminology later in the century⁵⁷.

57. According to Robert A. Nye, the school of criminology began in France with Charles Féré's *Dégénérescence et criminalité* (1849). The theme of degeneration was carried on, in modified form, in many later works in the French clinical tradition such as LeTourneau's *Psychologie des passions* (1868); Axenfeld's *Des Névrogés* (1879); Féré's *La Famille névropathique* (1884); Déjérine's *L'Hérité dans le maladies du système nerveux* (1886); Boinet's *Les Parents morbides* (1886). Nye, 1975:36.

It is in this pessimistic segment of the evolutionary sociology that the emergent crowd theory could be best accommodated. To start with, the combination of different doctrines of evolutionism provided a theoretical justification for claiming that some societies, groups, social strata or races were more developed and more advanced, and therefore superior to others. The Comtian principle of the "three stages" of mankind's evolution continued to inspire thinkers throughout Europe long after the master's death, serving as the starting point for studies of this sort. Racism appears in its full light and became one of the major threads running through imperialist thought⁵⁸. Social classes came to be treated as the equivalent of races, as the product of a natural selection where some groups had proved to be more fit and more adaptable than others. This hypothesis tended to be used with perfect consistency against the expropriated peasants, the poor of the city, and the emergent working classes (Lindenberg, 1975:16). The lower classes served as a prime example of radical degeneration, both physical and moral, shown by science. Although progressive scholars and anthropologists differed amongst themselves about the criteria to distinguish between the degrees of hierarchy in human society and the ranks between "primitive" and "civilized", all agreed essentially on such a distinction (Burrow, 1966:36-7). This sketch of social evolution readily lent scientific authority to the perceived primitiveness of the crowd and served as a response to labour revolt.

The physiological conception of man, advanced by certain strands of the theory of evolution, is another important assumption that served to underscore the instinctive and irrational behaviour of the crowd with scientific explanation. In the scientific

58. Imperialists in general have agreed in assuming that race was a fundamental determinant of all history and culture. Agreement, however, as Philip Curtin has argued, was limited to a number of key beliefs. Simply stated they were: i) non-Western culture is far inferior to that of the West; ii) non-Western people are racially different from Europeans, and this difference is also hereditary; iii) therefore, cultural inferiority is also hereditary. The range of conclusions that seem to follow was enormous: "At one extreme was the cold-blooded view that non-Europeans were an inferior stock, doomed by an inexorable nature to defeat and extinction in the struggle for survival - this being so, the sooner the better. At the other extreme, some held that racial inferiority was a form of weakness, but the "lower races" deserved the same chivalric protection accorded to women, children and other weaker forms of life". Curtin, 1971:17.

context of evolutionary biology, man was seen rising from inorganic matter to the higher faculties of the intellect. Man's higher nature tended to be conceived as nothing but an extension of man's lower nature. The human being was claimed to be very much like other animals. Even his "higher brain" was constituted of the same substance as that of the lower animals. Although the evolutionary framework provided by Darwinian biology seemed the most significant influence on this evolutionary system, it was other theorists who provided compatible unifying structures for building up the main stream of the evolutionary sociological thinking (Burrow, 1966:21)⁵⁹.

By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the general tendency to combine biology and social philosophy had the particular result of emphasizing the non-rational rather than the rational man. Scientific experiments had proved that the mind's functioning was controlled not by a single centre located in the brain and, from this, the origin of mental activity tended to be extended to the entire body. Such a broadening of the physical base of the mind had the effect of removing men's reflective faculty from a classification of special privilege. According to Eoff, psychology around 1870 was only a chapter in the broader field of physiology and attention was focused on the diversity of the sensory basis of mentality⁶⁰.

59. As Burrow argues, "there were writers in the latter part of last century who took Darwin's specific contribution to evolutionary theory - the concept of natural selection as the central theme of evolutionary sociology, and helped to create the myth that Darwin's theory represented a turning point in social thought. But it was Maine, McLennan, Spencer and Pitt Rivers, who were the founders of the new evolutionary sociology". J.W. Burrow, 1966:21. See also J.D.Y Peel, 1971:141,243.

60. Eoff notes that Hebert Spencer, while granting that there might be a primordial element in consciousness, something akin to the nervous shock, explains mental evolution as a graded compounding of these units of shock, similar to molecules forming higher compounds. Mental integration is progressive (*The Principles of Psychology*, 1885). According to Eoff, Taine offers a similar exposition of the mind, stating it to be a chain of sensations which can be objectively comprehended either as a group of molecular movements or as a bundle of nervous vibrations. Taine tends to reduce all knowledge and ideas to the association of sensations in accord with the physiological doctrine, not as some mysterious entity called "soul" (*De l' Intelligence*, 1870). Théodule Ribot also held that consciousness is merely an accompaniment of nervous activity and that memory itself is primarily biological and only accidentally a psychological fact. See Eoff, 1961:87.

These arguments contributed to an emphasis on the non-rational realm of being and reinforced psychological materialism. As Charles LeTourneau, a leading anthropologist who seems to have exercised strong influence on Zola⁶¹, put it, "man envisaged sanely and not through the tinted glass of metaphysics, was like all other organized beings, nothing but an aggregation of histological elements, fibres, or cells forming a living federal republic directed by the nervous system and constantly renewing itself" (LeTourneau, 1868:219). Highly materialist and reductionist, LeTourneau proposed that the Cartesian *cogito*, "I think, therefore I am" should have been "I feel before I am" (LeTourneau, 1868:57). When all the veils were stripped away, he declared, it would be seen that the sole true motivating force of humanity is to attain pleasure and avoid pain through the satisfaction of organic desires. Our moral and intellectual needs are essentially as organic as our need for food, and among all our needs, that for food is the strongest and the most indispensable and our moral and intellectual need the weakest and least essential. As he succinctly put it, "The stomach often imposes its laws on the brain" (LeTourneau, 1868:219).

The part that Darwinism played in establishing the heavy emphasis on the non-rationality of men, and the accompanying concept of a species or group level of intelligence can hardly be overstated. *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), generally accepted as scientific confirmation of the theory of human evolution from subhuman forms, contributed an element of grimness to the vision of man's place in nature⁶². As Eoff has remarked, central to the notion of lower origins is Darwin's basic idea of natural selection by way of fortuitous variation, in a struggle for existence where almost certain extinction awaits the less improved

61. In planning *Les Rougon-Macquart* series in late 1869, Zola claims that LeTourneau's *Physiologie des passions* (1868) was one of the scientific works that he had most assiduously consulted. For an assessment of the influence of LeTourneau on Zola, see Walker, 1984:5-8.

62. Although Darwin himself took an optimistic view of his subject, the effects of his arguments was in some way virtually a justification of the pessimistic mood. Darwin did maintain that all living beings belong together as regards origins, that self-consciousness, intellect and the moral sense are developments out of simpler attitudes; and that "there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals and their mental faculties" (*The Descent of Man*), quoted in Oeff, 1962:92.

forms of life, and that means most of them. The preponderant intention of nature, in a word, is concentrated upon the continuity and improvement of the whole and not upon the individual, whose essential role is to transmit through the principle of inheritance the characteristics that are profitable to the species (Eoff, 1962:93).

The problem of personality tended to be regarded as essentially a biological question. Instinct came to be seen as one of the most important factors in motivating human behaviour⁶³. This scheme could obviously be used to undermine the notion of the rational autonomy of the individual inherited from the Enlightenment, casting doubts on the idea of progress itself. However, since the irrational factors that prompt human actions were not well understood before the contributions of Pareto or Freud, there were still ways of getting round such a pessimistic perception by establishing a hierarchy of the levels of human beings. Taine's discussion of psychology affords an appropriate example. Taine divides human sensation into two hierarchical levels: the "physical world", the realm of physiological needs and stimuli, which lies below the "moral world", the realm of the rational consciousness.⁶⁴ At the core of Taine's theory lies the belief that the "natural man" is not reasonable and good by nature as implied by Rousseau's theories of the "noble savage", but naturally morbid and brutal. Man, in his view, is primarily ruled by bodily needs, animal instincts, immediate personal interest, heredity and prejudice. Taine does not deny that man can actually progress, but only a few, those who have had the right conditions (proper education, therefore proper development of the mental apparatus) could do so. Consequently, he claimed that in a given civilized society different groups of man live at different stages of evolution. At the bottom of the human scale, were the men steeped in the "physical world", those predominantly ruled by instinct and physiological stimuli identified with the animal instincts of the species. At the top were those participants in the "moral world",

63. It should be kept in mind, that instinct was not defined very precisely as a biologically determined characteristic or drive, a natural tendency to behave in a way without reasoning or training; innate impulse. But in Taine's or Zola's time, it was used very elastically and was held to comprise elements which we are told today are not inherited but are acquired and socially conditioned. S.E. Finer, 1966:83

64. Taine, *De l' Intelligence*, quoted in Oeff, 1962:95.

those who had benefitted from social evolution and could overcome their natural primitiveness by access to culture, refinement of the intellect and delicacy of sentiment.

Within this scheme of things, the traditional view of the bourgeoisie's world and the proletariat's world tended to yield to the view of separated species: one governed by high culture (the elite, the educated, the rich) and the others that remain victims of their instincts, biology and environment, being eternally ruled by nature. From this, it was just one step to arguing that lower men in the aggregate are ruled by the frightful aspects of non-rational life, by the savage urges of the species and finally by the most rudimentary and atavistic kind of consciousness, which could be easily associated with the world of purely biological life.

From this broad theoretical framework, Zola has borrowed a great deal and has dynamically represented it. While showing a respect for this kind of thinking, he also displays an emotional uneasiness at some of the implications. Very early in his writings, Zola tended to stress the physiological aspect of human nature, man as a creature of flesh, bone and instinct. In the preface of one of his first novels, *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), Zola wrote: "My aim has been to study temperaments and not characters ..., I have chosen people completely dominated by their nerves and blood, without free will, drawn into each action of their lives by inexorable laws of their physical nature"(1979:22). Similarly, in "Le Roman expérimental" (1880), Zola was able to proclaim "l'homme métaphysique est mort, tout notre terrain se transforme avec l'homme physiologique" (1909:52). Zola's belief that thought is nothing but "a function of matter"⁶⁵ and that the brain does not occupy a place of privilege over the other organs to get knowledge is variously represented in *Les*

65. Letter to Gustave Geffroy, (XIV, 1443) quoted in Walker, 1984:5. For the "anti-intellectualism" of Zola, see also David Baguley, 1971b:119-129.

Rougon-Macquart series⁶⁶. Zola's thought, as Philip Walker has remarked, is importantly based on the conviction that reality is something which comes to us - and can be explored by us - only through our nerves. *Germinal* bombards us with sensations from its very beginning, and the entire story is largely presented through the senses: the flatness of the plain, the blackness of the March night, the coldness of the wind, the numbness of Etienne's bleeding hands, the redness of the flames burning in the braziers (Walker, 1984:6). Zola's deliberate attempt to downgrade the significance of the rational human will and accentuate the force of environment, following the general pattern of naturalism, expresses the combined effect of Positivism, "Social Darwinism" and the experimental method.

3.4.2 Environment and Heredity: Intersecting Paths

Physiological and psychological anthropology are doubtless the two fields of scientific enquiry most closely related to Zola's work. In the original notes for *Les Rougon-Macquart* series, Zola wrote: "on the one hand, I should show the hidden strings that animate the human puppet; on the other hand, I shall recount the deeds of this puppet. Having bared the heart and the brain, I shall easily demonstrate how and why the heart and the brain have acted in certain ways and could not behave in any other fashion" (Preliminary notes, *Les Rougon-Macquart*). Since Zola believed that man is the product of his environment and heredity, he attempted to unravel in his literary work the influence that social forces (culture, education, social class,

66. Zola's approach to physiology follows Spencer's doctrines closely. Philip Walker has compared, for instance, Spencer's assertion that "the main part of mind is not intelligence but feelings" (*The Principles of Psychology*) with Zola's statement: "I firmly believe that I have given their due to all the organs, the brain along with all the others. My characters think as much as they should think, as much as people think in everyday life" (Letter to Jules Lemaître concerning *Germinal*, 1885, quoted in Walker, 1984:100). Eoff has similarly argued that Zola's perception of the mind can be expressed by the viewpoint of Sandoz, one of the characters in *L'Oeuvre* (1886): "Is it not a farce to make the study of the brain's function exclusively under the pretext that the brain is the noble organ ... Thought is the product of the entire body Furthermore, psychology, physiology mean nothing (as independent terms); the one has penetrated the other, and today both are but one, the mechanism of man comprising the sum total of his functions" (quoted in Eoff, 1962:94).

time and place) exercise upon human beings as well as the influence of biological forces (hereditary traits, innate ability, latent human nature)⁶⁷.

Several pieces of evidence indicate that Zola has adopted a fundamentally non-rational view of life and has laid great emphasis on the "physiological anthropological man" in writing *Germinal*. The characters of the novel, as has been recognized, generally tend to lack self-determination and free-will. They do not so much act as they are acted upon: the first workers whom Etienne glimpses are only "moving shadows" (GE:24) and when he departs from Montsou in the final chapter, the workers are again "mute shadows, all black, without a laugh, without a look aside" (GE:413). The miners are not merely heavily earth-bound, but they work underground⁶⁸. Without any higher aspirations, they act more or less automatically in obedience to forces beyond their control. In this sense, the animal comparison used throughout *Germinal*⁶⁹, serves not just to characterize the brutal condition to which the miners have been reduced but also to emphasize man's animal origin and to highlight the physiological aspect of human nature (Furst, 1971:18). The miners are primarily ruled by appetites, instinct and emotion, intensified by certain atavistic and hereditary predispositions. The people of Montsou struggle to maintain the most primary levels of existence and are totally absorbed in their fulfilment of physical needs. The "demands of the body" have first importance in their world.

Specifically, *Germinal* seems to reflect the fundamental importance that LeTourneau gave to the human's organism biological need for food. The whole drama of the novel could be described as a "drama of hunger" (Girard, 1953:68), where food is seen as the most urgent element for survival. As Old Bonnemort summarizes "As

67. For an analysis of Zola's view of men and nature in *Germinal* see Melvin Zimmerman, 1972:212-218.

68. Darkness plays a powerful part throughout the novel. As Marcel Girard has noted, out of the forty chapters, only ten take place in the daylight. Twenty-four happen at night and six in the shadowed mine, in the depths of the earth. Girard, 1953:59-76.

69. In "Le Bestiaire d' Emile Zola", Philip Bonnefis discusses Zola's use of animal comparison and lists the number of times it appears in each of Zola's novels. *L'Assommoir* contains the most with 340 images. *Germinal* is also high on the list with 245. Bonnefis, 1968:97-107.

long as one has got bread to eat one can keep going on" (GE:7). The miners' resignation is "due solely to the necessity of the belly" (GE:413); the revolutionary cry of the workers represents the "roaring of bellies after bread" (GE:265). Reinforcing the physiological aspect of human nature, the motives of food and eating are recurrently used to set a sharp contrast between the capitalists and the workers. In a series of consistent parallels, the exasperating hunger amongst the miners is set against endless occasions of delicate appetite and waste on the side of the bourgeoisie⁷⁰. The central class struggle enacted in *Germinal* can be reduced, as Nelson has suggested, to the struggle between the fat and the lean, between prosperous over-abundance and the wasted thinness (Nelson, 1983:14). In the same perspective, Smethurst says that in Zola's eyes "the whole history of the 19th century is that of a gross banquet laid out only for the bourgeoisie alone" and that picture is consistently repeated whenever the bourgeoisie is gathered (Smethurst, 1974:61). Or as Walker has noted, humanity's struggle to attain social justice seems indeed to be motivated in *Germinal* by physiological need; as LeTourneau would have said, by its need to satisfy its most fundamental physical necessities (Walker, 1984:6).

Sex is another prominent elemental motif displayed in *Germinal*. The adult miners after a hard day's work respond as quickly to the sexual urge as to hunger and the young unmarried couples have a special place of rendezvous in the open, where, Zola says, they virtually cover the ground. However, there is a multiform sense of appetite displayed in *Germinal*. The mine is repeatedly described as voracious, swallowing its daily ration of miners. The revolution may be brought about by one side devouring the other (GE:360); the conflict of Etienne and Chaval is constantly presented in terms of appetite, the "desire to devour one another" (GE:269), and the former's killing of the latter is "an appetite finally satisfied"; Maheu calls sex with

70. The meagre breakfast of the Maheu's family in Part I contrasts with the Grégoire's majestic breakfast, (including Cecile's famous freshly-baked *brioche*); the Hennebeaus' elaborate luncheon (including delicacies such as crayfish and truffles) on the day in which the strikes breaks, contrasts to the famished mob shouting "Bread! Bread! We want bread!" in Part VI. While the miners are dying of hunger in prolonged scenes of mass starvation which reach their climax in Alzire's death, the Hennebeaus' maid is driving in a two-horse carriage to another town to buy fish for her mistress's table.

his wife "his dessert". This language can be interpreted not only as the manifestation of Zola's notions of the "physiological man", but also as expressions of the way in which he thought that human biology was linked with the mechanism of nature as a whole. Again, the general view of things that emerges from *Germinal* could in part be taken as an illustration of LeTourneau's doctrine: "The human organism is visualized as a physiological machine operating on all levels, from the vegetative to the intellectual, toward the goals of nutritive calm and the avoidance of pain"⁷¹.

As Zola advances towards the exposition of the collective aspect of the mining village, the association of the workers' life with more primitive stages of society or more barbaric levels of existence becomes more evident. In a specific sense, Zola appears to suggest that the conditions of work prevalent in capitalist society are the principal source for the dehumanisation and degradation of the workers to an animal-like condition⁷². The work has deformed their bodies and caused them to degenerate. In the pit, the miners are nothing but a herd of subhuman creatures; the coal's black dust and the darkness of the pit tends to cancel out their human faces, and even their sex is indistinguishable⁷³. They become black, all look the same. Within the imperialist viewpoint of the time, where blackness and animal status were practically synonymous (Curtin, 1971:xv), Zola shows that the European mine workers were really like animals, many of them obliged to work naked (because of the heat) and others on all fours.

71. From Zola's notes on LeTourneau's *Physiologie des passions* see Henri Massis, 1906:28.

72. Comparing capitalism with cannibalism, Zola implies that the workers, reduced to a homogeneous mass, are eaten by the capitalist system. The workers are thrown into Le Voreux, the mine which appears personified as a monster with a voracious maw, routinely and ritually swallowing and digesting human flesh: "Ten thousand starving men gave their flesh without knowing it" (GE:56); "These wretches were thrown as food to the engines and penned up like beasts in the settlements. The great companies slowly absorbed them, regulating their slavery, threatening to enrol all the workers of the nation, millions of hands, to bring fortune to a thousand idlers"(GE:231). For a note on Zola's view of capitalism and the mine as a man-eater, see William Berg, 1972:43-5 and Roland Barthes, 1986:90-93.

73. The employment of females in the mines was made illegal in 1874, but *Germinal* is of course set in the pre-1870 period, when women still worked extensively below ground.

"He [Etienne] vaguely saw in one passage two squatting beasts, a big one and a little one, pushing trams: they were Lydie and Mouquette already at work" (GE:28).

"During the journey, he [Etienne] followed her [Catherine] and watched her proceed with tense back, her fists so low that she seemed trotting on all fours, like one of those dwarf beasts that perform at circuses" (GE:32).

Yet it is not clear whether Zola holds that it is only the work *per se* that brutalizes the worker or the intervening factors, such as the society's disregard for the worker's welfare. He may even be beginning to find a critique of the alienation of industrial work, as developed in Marxist doctrine⁷⁴. Throughout *Germinal*, Zola emphasizes the anonymous and abstract nature of capital⁷⁵ and compares it to a hidden god, unseen by the workers but feeding on them. The exact conclusions that Zola drew from the nature of labour in capitalist society are not particularly important for our purpose. The important thing is that he shows the way in which work contributes to complete the worker's dehumanisation into savages and animals by its unresponsiveness to most physical, intellectual and emotional needs.

3.4.2.1 "Social Darwinism": The Struggle for Survival

The controversy that greeted the implications of Darwinism in the scientific and political communities, in the course of which the debate moved further and further away from any views specifically attributable to Darwin (Burrow, 1966:21), filtered

74. To Marx, alienated labour is a loss of the self, a distortion of man's whole being, "to the point where a man [the worker] no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but animal functions - eating, drinking, perpetuating ... and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal" (quoted in Shor, 1972:41). Under the capitalist system, Marx claimed, "my work is the alienation of my life, because I work in order to live, to furnish myself with the means of living" (quoted in Mathews, 1957:202). On the Zola's attitudes towards Marxists, see Matthews, 1957:262-72; Shor, 1972:19-41 and Becker, 1984:52-54.

75. "Yes! Labour would demand an account from capital: that impersonal god, unknown to the worker, crouching down somewhere in his mysterious sanctuary, where he sucked the life out of the starvelings who nourished him! They would go down there; they would at last succeed in seeing his face by the gleam of incendiary fires, they would drown him in blood, that filthy swine, that monstrous idol, gorged with human flesh!" (GE:231).

down into the literary world. Darwinism, or rather "Social Darwinism", became one of the major shaping influences in naturalistic aesthetics (Furst, 1971:18). It was generally believed that human society, as an organic whole, continued the struggle for existence in the plant and animal worlds, although in a more complex way.

The Darwinian theme⁷⁶ is introduced in *Germinal* to describe the struggle amongst individuals, within and between classes, and economic competition in general. The lower class characters of the novel recognize and accept that force and brutality, which condition the struggle for survival, govern their lives. When Etienne first joins the Montsou miners, he ignores Chaval's violence, agreeing with the "brutal rule of the worker by master worker"(GE:33-4). Similarly, Catherine, when reproved by her mother for deserting the family to live with Chaval, answers: "Oh, if it was only up to me... It is him. What he wants I am obliged to want too, aren't I? Because you see, he's the strongest!" (GE:183). The violence between the individuals in *Germinal* is reproduced on a larger scale by the violence of the mob, which is directly related to the class struggle as species struggle that dominates the novel. The transition from traditional to modern structures during the middle to late nineteenth century, when small business was being replaced by big industries, could also be regarded from a Social Darwinist point of view⁷⁷.

Zola's writings represent many different morals that could be drawn from the heterogeneous body of Social Darwinism⁷⁸. Zola regarded Social Darwinism as a support for unbridled individualism and unregulated competition. Seeing social history as a continuation of natural history, the novel offers us the spectacle of the strong feeding on the weak. Towards the end of the concluding chapter, the

76. As Zola uses the term "Darwinism" to express his evolutionary sociological view, we will also use it.

77. For the theme of Social Darwinism in Zola see Robert Niess, 1980:57-67 and Geoff Woolen, 1980:27-36.

78. In Darwin's own theory of evolution, as Peel argues, "there is no necessary direction to follow, no substantial proposition for any particular criteria for "fitness" to triumph or for a particular form to become dominant, nor an indication of the units of struggle, whether individuals, classes, nations or races". J.D.Y Peel, 1971:141.

possibility of the specific interpretation of society and history is raised: "could Darwin be right?" Etienne wonders as he meditates on all that has happened during his stay in Montsou, "was the world merely a battlefield, with the strong devouring the weak for the sake of the beauty and the perpetuation of the species?" (GE:420). On the other hand, Zola has used Social Darwinism simultaneously as a harbinger of socialism. Etienne implies that the workers who survived the degenerating conditions of the environment are tougher and stronger than the bourgeoisie, and are therefore bound to triumph eventually in the species struggle. Souvarine, convinced of the idea of selection and advantage of the aristocratic class, guaranteed that it is not so because, according to the laws of Darwin, there will always be an aristocracy to rule the masses (GE:360). Seen altogether, Zola's images of Social Darwinism reveal the disparity and uncertainty of the "unit" upon which the evolutionist imperatives were supposed to operate. Since the same arguments could be equally applied to the cell, the individual, classes, institutions, societies or nations, explanations based on Social Darwinist principles multiplied.

3.4.2.2 The Hereditary Principle: a Closed Circle

In portraying the miners, Zola attaches an enormous importance to the role played by heredity. He takes a broad hereditary perspective embracing the whole history of the human race and he focuses on the transmission of traits from one generation to the next. The miserable workers we see in the novel are at least the survivors, the best adapted. Zola makes one wonder what the ones who failed to survive would have been like.

Both physical and moral attributes of characters are shown as a direct product of the degenerating conditions of the environment. Bonnemort, presented throughout the novel as a product of nearly fifty years' labour in the mines, is a vivid portrait of the cruel bodily decay suffered by the miners.⁷⁹ Relying on the description of the "typical bodily traits of an old miner" found in Dr H. Boëns-Boissau's *Traité pratique des maladies, des accidents et des difformités des houilleurs* (1862), Zola

79. See Henri Marel 1985, especially chapter, "Bonnemort: naissance, mort, vie et survie". pp.191-107.

accurately draws old Bonnemort from the text book (Grant, 1962:107). Like Boëns-Boissau, Zola notices the hair, the paleness of the face with flat, livid features blocked with blue, the curvature of the lame legs, the short stature, big head, square hands, simian arms, and finally the dreadful cough and black spittle - all testifying to the unhealthy life Old Bonnemort has led⁸⁰. While showing that the environment induces physical transformations in the body, Zola also implies, defending Lamarck's theory, that the characteristics acquired by adaptation to the demands of the environment could be transmitted from one generation to the next⁸¹. This is equivalent to saying that the race of the miners has inherited an increasingly debilitating physique from many generations of underground workers, because of starvation and disability caused by accidents.

"Was it not fearful? a race of men dying down below, from father to son, so that bribes of wine could be given to ministers, and generations of great lords and bourgeois could give feasts or fatten by their firesides" (GE:230-1).

This view, of course, is a part of the widespread tendency, so in fashion in the nineteenth century, to treat the lower classes as a race apart, as a product of collective degeneration. Zola illustrates this hypothesis by contrasting the image of Cécile, the bourgeois specimen, and Bonnemort, the working class specimen:

"She flourishing, plump and fresh from the long idleness and sated comfort of her race; he swollen with water, with the pitiful ugliness of a foundered beast, destroyed from father to son by a century of work and hunger" (GE:393).

The most socially disturbing aspect of such a physiological anthropology is the belief that depravity and vices could be cumulatively inherited. The effects of

80. Zola's knowledge of the miners' diseases ("anaemia, scrofula, black bronchitis, the asthma which chokes, and rheumatism with paralyses", GE:230-1) according to Grant comes from Dr H. Boëns-Boisseau's *Traité pratique des maladies*, a book which Zola re-entitled as the *Hygiène du mineur*. Grant, 1962:34.

81. Zola's heavy emphasis on environmental influence seems to indicate more leanings toward Lamarck than Darwin. However, we should remember how loose Social Darwinist theory could be, often including items which are more properly associated with Lamarck. Niess, 1980:57-67.

immorality and criminality could then affect and imperil the whole society, promoting a general decadence. Jeanlin, Maheu's youngest son, the evil teenage thief, who commits murder for pleasure, is the best portrait of the child-degenerate⁸². Zola presents him as a product of hereditary degeneracy combined with the shaping action of the mine, which after an accident left him crippled: "the mine, which had formed him, had applied the finishing touch by breaking his legs" (GE:218). Etienne's inheritance of alcoholic dependence is another important example. Etienne is the son of Gervaise and Lantier, the immediate cause of whose undoing in *L'Assommoir* (1877) is alcoholism. The vice of Etienne's family, the maddening effect of alcohol, which brings with it the desire to kill, serves to illustrate Dr Prosper Lucas's doctrine displayed in *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l'hérédité naturelle* (1850) that crime and vice can be handed down by parents to children by the law of heredity. Zola's view of the degrading effects of alcoholism and its link with madness and crowd behaviour will be discussed later.

Zola presents a pessimistic and accelerated view of the process of evolution as degeneration but his position is highly ambiguous as he mixes several notions and ends by trying to bridge categories that for us are completely separate. Zola assumes that the transmission of environmentally induced traits to the next generation happens in the same way as it does in culture. In the same way that Zola uses theories of cultural heredity to explain the miner women's passivity⁸³, he uses racial theories to explain political attitudes and behaviour⁸⁴. Much of Zola's

82. As Zola proposed in the *Ebauche*, Jeanlin was designed to illustrate "le total dégénéré de tous les vices des houeilleurs". Originally, Jeanlin was imagined as drinking himself into insensibility every evening, infecting little girls with syphilis, and dragging the soldier he has stabbed, not killed outright, to the mouth of a disused pit into which he tips him while the wretch is still alive. But his portrait was toned down in the final version. Grant, 1962:60.

83. To justify Catherine's subjection to Chaval, Zola asserts that she is: "overcome in her hereditary notions of subordination and passive obedience" (GE:52). Similarly, at the end of the novel, when the strike is over, Zola states that La Maheude returns to her "everlasting resignation, in that hereditary discipline under which she was again bowing" (GE:417).

84. Etienne's "race", Zola claims, has prevented him from adopting Souvarine's nihilism (GE:193).

confusion in portraying the hereditary theory is derived from his failure, like many social evolution theorists, to distinguish between processes like the development of the embryo, where the outcome is genetically programmed at the beginning, and one like the evolution of the species or the socialization of the infants, where the form of outcome is not at all determined right from the beginning (Peel, 1971:135). For Zola, everything which "comes from the past" tends to be "hereditary" in the same sense.

3.4.3 Transformism in the Mob

Crucially, Zola pays great attention to the hereditary principle not only because it helps to explain certain pathologies or occasional anomalies manifest in a particular individual but, more importantly, because it offers a general linkage of man to his distant past, to the early stages of man's evolutionary history. The probability of having evolved from some inferior form of life or from matter itself seems to have weighted heavily on Zola's imagination, making him speak of man's ancestry in more emotive tones than many evolutionist theorists themselves. In part IV, Chapter vi, Zola's comment on Jeanlin's establishing a grotesque store of food in an abandoned mine during the bitter days of the strike is illustrative of his grim view of man's animal inheritance: Jeanlin, "with his pointed muzzle, greedy eyes, large ears, a degenerate abortion, with an obscure intelligence and savage cunning, was slowly reverting to an ancient animality" (GE:218). This passage clearly points to a regressive view of history, where man could revert to his animal origins.

The possibility of man's transformation and regression to his animal past offered a specific explanation for the savagery and primitiveness of the crowd. It was Taine who gave the most forcible expression to this view by arguing that progress was not a steady, safe and inevitable process, as many thinkers since the Enlightenment had supposed, but was subject to the possibility of regression to an early primordial past. When the crowd is raised it launches itself abruptly back towards man's anthropological and biological origins. Like a wild beast that, incompletely domesticated, goes wild again, people in the crowd, freed from society's control, revert to the savagery and animalism of their primitive ancestors.

Despite Zola's concern for the poor and his awareness of the social causes which lead to mob violence, he seemed convinced that the crowd once aroused was necessarily primitive. Everywhere he illustrates that people in the mass are guided by primal instincts, blinded by frenzy and prone to the most violent acts. Zola, echoing Taine's assumption that the crowd reverts men and women to the brutal state of nature, pictures the malevolent aspects of non-rational life as predominating in the aggregate, where man gives full play to his primal feelings and to the dangerous impulses identified with the urges of the species as a whole⁸⁵.

3.4.3.1 The Prevalence of Instincts

The combined effect of Darwinism and the physiological conception of man, emphasizing the non-rational rather than rational man, offered in turn support to the traditional tendency to equate the crowd with certain types of people: the poor, the uneducated, the working classes, the women. It became possible to claim that those people who were more exposed to the degenerating conditions of the environment, and/or those in whom instincts and appetites were exaggerated or reinforced by certain atavistic or hereditary predispositions, were "naturally" inclined to plunge into mob violence, when the conditions were right. In this sense, besides the poor in general, women and alcoholics could systematically be seen as examples of natural degenerates. Both women and alcoholics⁸⁶ in Zola's time were seen as sharing some common defining characteristics: both were perceived as irrational, impulsive, uncivilized, bloodthirsty and dangerous. Both were inferior to normal men. In his crowd scenes, Zola has dramatically and consistently illustrated this belief.

85. Zola's notes on Charles LeTourneau's *Psychologie des passions*, concentrate especially on the impulsive aspect of human nature. Zola attaches some emphasis to the distinction between "desire" [freely irrational impulse] and "will" [deliberate impulse], but still the most important is the stress on "impressionability". Henri Massis, 1906:28.

86. See Susanna Barrows, 1981, especially chapter 2, "Metaphors of Fear: Women and Alcoholics" pp. 43-72; for the problem of alcoholism after the Commune and the movement for temperance early in the Third Republic, see Barrows, 1979:205-218.

3.4.4.2 The Role of Women

In the crowd scenes of *Germinal*, women always occupy a remarkable position; they fully participate in the strike alongside their husbands, and more often than not, ahead of them. In Zola's crowds as well as in Dickens's, the women keep the spirit of violence at fever heat, they are more cruel and barbarous than men; they are more passionate and the first to incite to bloody vengeance. All their supposedly feminine qualities are swept away by a wild, erotic and uncontrollable frenzy.

In *Germinal* it is the women⁸⁷ who first get "delirious" at the Plan-des-Dames meeting and go to the extremes in demanding the death of the traitors. It is the women who, in the lead as the mob marches from one mine to another, are bent upon destroying everything. They tear the clothes from a woman who has refused to strike, beat her, and hold her up to the scorn of the men. At the Victorie mine, La Brûlé leads women in an attack upon the *lampisterie* where they scatter the lamps on the floor, dashing them to bits. Again the women are in the foremost in maltreating Chaval who has persisted in working in the mine. La Brûlé plunges his head into a pool of muddy, icy water, forcing him to drink filth. One woman pulls his head, another hurls a handful of dung into his face, still another would tear his clothes from his body. It is again the women who were prompt to abuse the bourgeois girl, Cécile Grégoire, by stripping off her clothes (GE: 223-269).

Zola's belief in the easy excitability and impulsiveness of the women in provoking violence and inciting men to criminal behaviour is particularly shown in the scene in which the miners confront the troops. It is la Brûlé who is the first to be armed with bricks, ready to hurl them at the soldiers guarding the mine. She begins throwing; la Levaque rolls up her sleeves and approaches the soldiers so that her target may be better; la Mouquette grows tired of breaking bricks into pieces and hurls them whole. Even Catherine Maheu, who until now has held aloof, is seized with a mad desire to massacre, and throws bricks at the soldiers with blind fury. And La

87. For a broad assessment of the women's eroticism in Zola's novel see Chantal Bernard Jennings, 1977. See especially chapter 2, "Féminité maléfique", for a discussion of the alleged untameable female personality, its hysteria and erotic threat, pp. 37-78.

Maheude fiercely insults her husband, who stands by as an onlooker, until, he, too, joins in the attack (GE:234-7).

Women's capacity for inflicting punishment when aroused is explicitly shown in the horrifying castration of the unscrupulous shop-keeper Maigrat. Like "she-wolves", the women danced around the dead body of the grocer, insulting him and seeking revenge for the decades of sexual abuse he had subjected them to. With their "claws and teeth bared", they maul his body, stuff his mouth with dirt, castrate him and parade about with the "abominable trophy". Zola stresses that this is the most terrifying and abhorrent act, capable of scandalising even the male members of the crowd (GE:293-4).

It is important to stress that at the core of Zola's picture lies the belief that women are "naturally" more susceptible to instinctive and irrational behaviour, an assumption current by the middle of the nineteenth century not only in the popular mind but in intellectual circles as well. French scientists and doctors provided several explanations for women's inferior physical prowess, intellectual capacity and psychological strength⁸⁸. These arguments were later articulated to produce the view that the character of the crowd is similar to the feminine character, as formulated in Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1895). To read Le Bon's classic study is to realise that the crowd-female equivalence is only a fragment of a far longer chain of equivalences which links up crowd - women - children - savages - animals.

3.4.4.3 The Role of Alcoholics

Drunkards also play a prominent role in the crowds of *Germinal*. Like Dickens's, Zola's crowd is stimulated by drink in its wild orgy of violence. Zola has shown that the miners, despite being surrounded by cafés, drink moderately during ordinary circumstances. However, during the strike, their thirst for alcohol

88. The women were seen as frail, unstable creatures, unfitted for cerebral exercises and victims of their biological inferiority. Compared to men, females were less intelligent, more emotional, and more susceptible to violent outbursts and mental illness, especially aggressive hysteria. See S. Barrows, 1981:43-60.

increases and consequently they are driven to irrational acts, to destructive behaviour. On the march on Jean-Bart, the crowd, while pillaging the canteen of la Victoire discovers fifty bottles of gin, "which disappeared like a drop of water drunk up by the sand" (GE:267). Again showing the physiological effects of drunkenness, Zola stresses that the miners fill their empty stomachs with gin and the result is the most appalling orgy of violence and devastation.

However, unlike Dickens, Zola does not leave the effects of alcohol at a level of mere madness, a fever likely to arise at times of social disturbance, or a poison threatening to "infect those who had no moral firmness to resist" (BR:484). Zola underlines his fiction with specific scientific suppositions current in his time, particularly Dr Lucas's theory that drunkenness in a parent can produce a streak of madness in his or her offspring⁸⁹. In Zola's notes on Dr. Lucas's book, he gives particular attention to the corollary of atavism as a threat to both the individual and society (Massis, 1906:28). In *L'Assommoir*, Zola extensively treats the medical effects of alcoholism. Relying on medical reports such as Magnan's treatise on alcoholism published in 1874, Zola depicts both the physical and the emotional effects of heavy drinking with clinical accuracy. His account of Coupeau's final days at St. Anne is considered an excellent piece of naturalistic documentation (Smith, 1983:77). In *Germinal*, Zola extends the threat of alcoholism to the entire working class. The poison of Etienne's inheritance is not simply that of alcoholism, but above all the primitive urge to kill. Zola clearly indicates that drunkenness unleashes the "lust for murder". Sober, men have the possibility of restraining their primal instincts, but inebriated, they give full play to their primitive urge for violence, aggressiveness and savagery. As a result of intoxication, even Etienne and Maheu, who alone have attempted to restrain the striking miners, finally join them on the mad destruction.

"His [Etienne's] fists closed and his eyes were lit up with homicidal fury; his intoxication was turning into the desire to kill" (GE:269).

89. Prosper Lucas, *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l'hérédité naturelle dans les états de santé et de maladie du système nerveux* (1847-50), quoted in Walker, 1984:4.

"A need to kill came over him [Etienne], an irresistible physical need, like the violent fit of coughing that follows the irritation of a bleeding mucous membrane. It rose in him, burst beyond his control under the pressure of his inherited taint" (GE:403).

"It arose from his [Etienne] bowels and was beating in his head like a hammer, a sudden mania of murder, a need to taste blood ... and he struggled against the hereditary disease with the despairing shudder of a man who is mad with lust and struggles on the verge of rape" (GE:325).

Zola's interest in the subject of alcoholism was greatly motivated by his concern with contemporary social issues. As Susanna Barrows documents, alcoholism was becoming an increasingly alarming problem in mid-to-late nineteenth-century French society. Particularly after the events of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, alcoholism was used to connect degenerate behaviour with revolutionary behaviour. "After 1871", she writes "much of the bourgeoisie used alcoholism as a code word for working class irrationality and as an overarching explanation for the French defeat" (Barrows, 1979:208). Medical reports lent credence to such suspicions and the result was the passage of the *Loi Russel* in February 1883, which made public drunkenness a criminal offence. However, Barrows fails to notice that Zola was one of the few voices to be raised in protest against what she calls "the new myth of the alcoholic revolution" (1979:209). In articles published in *La Cloche* and *Le Corsaire*, for which he was a correspondent, Zola claimed to have written *L'Assommoir* to show his disapproval of prevailing opinion concerning working class alcoholism. In a letter to the editor of *Le Bien Public*, he stressed the severity of the problem of heavy drinking amongst the lower classes as primarily an environmental problem, not a hereditary one⁹⁰. Yet Zola left room for speculation in his novels. While trying to show that the pressures of the circumstances led Gervaise and Coupeau and the miners of Montsou to drink, he also introduces other factors, which seemed to obscure his first intention. In *Germinal*, the traditional association of the revolutionary behaviour of the mob with hereditary alcoholism

90. "Je dirais que tout *L'Assommoir* peut se résumer dans cette phrase: Fermez les cabarets, ouvrez les écoles. L'ivrognerie dévore le peuple. Consultez les statistiques, allez dans les hôpitaux, faites une enquête, vous verrez si je mens. L'homme qui tuerait l'ivrognerie ferait plus pour la France que Charlemagne et Napoléon". Zola, *Correspondance*, t.2, p.467.

was reissued and underlined with scientific evidence. Consequently, these novels were praised by conservatives for supporting the very theory Zola meant to discredit in his journalistic writings, and despised by republicans, socialists and feminists, who denounced the novels, claiming that they vilified the working classes and women (Smith, 1983:73-90).

The equation of women and drunkards with "fallen selves" helps to explain physiologically the apparently unfathomable irrationality and aggressiveness of crowds. In the mob, when excitability is brought to an extreme, women unleash their passionate nature and become instantly hysterical, fanatical and aggressive. The same model works for drunkards: the effect of alcohol annihilates social constraints and moral precepts and frees men's primitive instincts, inciting them to brutality, barbarism and ferocity. However, in explaining the behaviour of the crowd regarding natural and biological forces, Zola put historical and social factors aside, falling into physiological determinism: what is historical and circumstantial becomes "natural" and "eternal" (Mitterand, 1980:129). Tautologically, once the irrationality of women and drunkards was "scientifically" observed as "spontaneous" and "natural", it has to be accepted as a simple medical fact which requires no further explanation. This turns into a circular argument by assuming the thing that is trying to be proved.

3.4.4 The Crowd versus the Bourgeoisie

However, a further variable may complicate the picture. The tendency of writers and historians of the last century to equate the poor and the working classes with the mob or with "fallen selves", does not operate simplistically and mechanically in Zola. To start with, instinctive and brutish behaviour, for Zola, is not exclusively the behaviour of the lower classes. The bourgeois characters also have passions and vices. Zola's satirical denunciation of the ambitions, appetites and excesses of the bourgeoisie is well known⁹¹.

91. For a detailed study of Zola's characterization and attitudes towards the bourgeoisie, see Nelson Brain, 1983, especially part I, "The bourgeois World", pp. 8-48. See also C. Smethurst 1974:47-53.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Dickens firmly believed that the crowd must be proletarian, and above all composed of the less respectable sectors of the poor - the scum of the city, vagabonds, criminals, pickpockets. Like many of his contemporaries, Dickens has virtually associated the crowd with the poor, the poor with the insane, the imbecile, the ferocious beast, the barbarian. Such a tendency to regard the poor and working classes as naturally inclined to deviant behaviour either biologically or environmentally is plainly seen in Taine. As already remarked, Taine, while admitting that the peasants and workers had the same complex mental apparatus as the elite, claimed that the circumstances of peasant life do not favour the mind's development. So, he could formally conclude that the lower classes had the propensity to behave more instinctively and primitively, or could go mad more easily.

To Zola, the hereditary laws, the doctrines of vice and crime advanced by Dr Lucas and broadly speaking, all the negative implications derived from men's animal origins, apply to the "two human species" with the same fatalism. His portrait of the representatives of high society is one of decadence, brutal sensuality and social and moral corruption. The central characteristic of the *Rougon-Macquart*, in Zola's words "is the upsurge of appetites, the great upheaval of our age, with its mad pursuit of pleasure" and this refers above all to the higher classes⁹². There is degeneration everywhere but the waste amongst the rich is even greater. Zola portrayed bourgeois conduct particularly as artificial and cynical. In earlier novels such as *La Curée*, *Ventre de Paris*, *Pote-Boville*, critics have remarked that Zola had pointed out in great detail the contrast between the pure, honest-dealing and correct outward appearance of the bourgeoisie with the disgusting, humiliating and often tormented reality of bourgeois existence (Nelson, 1983:11-12). In *La Terre*, Zola treated this theme in a richly ironic way: the existence of the bourgeois rentiers, M. and Mme Charles Badeuil, drifts on, ignoring the terrible passions at play beyond the walls of their property. Their sentimental morality and the good

92. In the whole project of *Les Rougon-Macquart* series, Zola wanted to explore two main "psychological and historical" themes in order to portray the social decadence of French society as a whole, in that "strange epoch of madness and shame". Zola, quoted in McGovern, 1985:193.

convent education given to their granddaughter hides the fact that the family wealth was gained originally by good management of a brothel in Chartres, a city famous for its cathedral (Smethurst, 1974:50). In *Germinal*, the calm and self controlled attitude of Hennebeau in public, reinforced by the repeated mention of his tightly buttoned coat and stiff military position, hides the wreck of his emotional life. When Hennebeau discovers his wife's infidelity with his nephew while he watches the miners crying for bread, he wishes he could be one of them rather than endure the misery of his life.⁹³ However, in the name of a fictitious decency, he resolves to ignore the fact, reasoning that it is better that his wife would be unfaithful with someone of his own class than with one of his workers: "... for she thus preserved the appearances" (GE:281).

A curious problem arises from this class interpretation of passions as presented by Zola. He seems to display a sense of "naturalness" in the working class world, expressed in their spontaneous conduct, their uninhibited sexual behaviour⁹⁴, their emotional freedom (excluding Etienne), in contrast with the artificial, frustrated, blocked or perverse behaviour of the bourgeoisie (Nelson, 1983:13). Such an idea is reinforced by the notion of fertility present in the world of the workers, against the notion of sterility and parasitism in the bourgeois world. Not only do the miners produce a larger number of children, but they themselves are seen as the seeds of the future revolution, as "real life" breaking through the ossified structure of society. In contrasting the bourgeoisie and proletariat in natural terms, Zola might be insinuating that a conquest of a prominent position in the bourgeois hierarchy is

93. "He [Hennebeau] would willingly have made them a present of his salary to possess their hard skin and their facility of coupling without regret. Why could he not seat them at his table and stuff them with his pheasant, while he went to fornicate behind the hedges, to tumble the girls over, making fun of those who had tumbled them before him! He would have given everything, his education, his comfort, his luxury, his power as a manager. If he could be for one day the vilest of the wretches who obeyed him, free of his flesh, enough of a blackguard to beat his wife and take his pleasure with the neighbours' wives" (GE:282).

94. Natural behaviour however, seems to imply relationships with one partner only, be it before or after marriage. As noted by Smethurst, those women breaking the single partner bond are condemned, and Catherine sees the possibility of changing partners as the beginning of a slippery slope that will lead her to the brothels in Lille. The only figures who escape this rule are *la Mouquette* and *la Veuve Désir*, who seem to be excused on the grounds of superabundant sexual needs. Smethurst, 1974:54.

gained at too great an expense of the repression of natural and instinctive life. If Zola would have developed this theme he might have arrived at the conclusions that the crowd may represent an instance of liberation for all repressed humanity, bourgeoisie included.

* * *

Although Taine's view of the crowd and the general theorizing about crowd behaviour influenced Zola greatly⁹⁵, it would be mistaken to suppose that *Germinal* is merely a by-product of *The Origins of Contemporary France*. Zola was not as elitist as Taine. Moved by a more sympathetic view of the poor and a broader understanding of the causes of mob violence, Zola places the crowd firmly *inside* humanity and appeals to authority to treat it as human. Zola does not blame the poor for their brutish state. To him, the moral degradation and delinquency that he identified in the miners, just like physical degeneration, were the direct consequence of degenerate and dehumanised conditions of living. Then, it seemed "natural" to him that, once the individual is shaped by his milieu (environment, family, class, place of residence), the miners would easily fall victims to crime, immorality and delinquency. It seemed predictable to him that the workers, housed in one-bedroom cottages, made to work together in the mine without distinction of sex and semi-naked because of the heat, were almost inevitably drawn to promiscuous habits. Not educated, they were easy prey for political demagogues and having no fate to fear worse than the life they habitually led, they would embrace violence when their situation become intolerable.

There is also a fundamental difference between the time scale employed by Taine and Zola. Taine gives an exclusive focus upon the "persistent moral illness" and ineradicable "domination of the carnal instincts and obsessions" amongst the destitute, which he believed could not be overcome in the foreseeable future (Taine,

95. For Zola's early career and his relationship with Taine, see Hemmings, 1966:1-50; for an assessment of the influence of Taine's work on Zola see Barrows, 1981:93-113 and Michael G. Lerner, 1973:97-100.

quoted in Lapp, 1957:330). Differently, Zola, laying stress on the changeable rather than on the constant features of humanity, believed that changes in the environment would lead directly and quickly to changes in human conduct. Even if Zola has put an exaggerated emphasis on the aspects of inheritance throughout *Germinal* and presented an accelerated view of the process of "regressive" evolution, he did not doubt at all that the miners could overcome their wretched situation in the foreseeable future, provided that their environment was improved. In fact, Zola allows occasional scenes to suggest that the miners' life could be "normal" if the oppressive circumstances were lifted.

Such a belief in the rehabilitation of the lower classes is expressed in his repeated appeal for the authorities to "see" the wretched situation of the lower classes and act immediately upon their knowledge while there was still time to regenerate them. Zola's preoccupation with the accumulation of data and statistics can also be taken as indicative of his belief that the circumstances were superficial and if they were properly understood they could be successfully changed. One of Zola's greatest hopes was that by baring with his anatomist's scalpel the evils of society for all to see, he could prompt legislators into taking the steps necessary to correct them. "If my fiction accomplishes anything", he had written in his preliminary notes for *Les Rougon-Macquart*, "this is what it will be: to say the human truth ... It will then be up to the legislators and moralists to think about dressing the wounds I have shown". In his notes on *L'Assommoir* Zola commented, resembling Kant's motto of the Enlightenment "dare to know": "It will be an act of courage to tell the truth and to solicit, by the frank exposition of the facts, air, light, and instruction for the lower classes" (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, Pléiade, V, pp.1740-75). Again in writing *Germinal*, Zola reinforces the same belief in the humanitarian utility of the scientific method applied to fiction. He replied to those who accused him of distortion:

"Don't try to contradict me with sentimental reasons. Take a look at the statistics for yourselves. Go and investigate yourselves the locale. And then you will see if I have lied or not. Alas, if anything, I have attenuated the facts. When the day arrives when we can finally bring ourselves to recognize poverty for what it really is, with all its pain and degradation, it will not be long before something will be done to improve the condition of the poor ...

Why would anyone suppose that I would want to calumniate the unfortunate? I have only one desire, to show them such as our society has made them and provoke such a great outpouring of pity, such a great demand for justice, that France would finally stop letting herself be devoured by the ambition of a handful of politicians and pay attention to the physical and material well-being of her children" (quoted in Walker, 1984:70).

Furthermore, unlike Taine, Zola could not make an unambiguous distinction between the crowd (the poor, the uneducated, the workers) and the civilized man (the educated, upper classes, the bourgeoisie). It is possible to argue that Zola extends his negative view of human nature to all human beings, no matter whether they are working class or bourgeois, poor or rich. In defending himself against criticism about his repeated insistence on the essential brutality of man, Zola remarks in *Le Roman expérimental*:

"People should realize that if our analyses are inevitably cruel, it is because our analyses probe deep down into the human cadaver. Everywhere we look, we encounter the brute. To be sure, there are more or less numerous veils; but when we have described them all, one after another, and lifted the last one, we always find behind it more things which repel us than things which attract us" (quoted in Walker, 1984:16).

"Always the human animal remains deep down there, under the skin of the civilized man, ready to bite whenever his appetite overwhelms him" (Zola, quoted in Walker, 1984:103).

In general, Zola's pessimistic conception of man⁹⁶ is not designed for an elitist purpose, unlike Taine's, who articulated the natural morbidity of the mind within the evolutionary framework to establish an inevitable hierarchy in human civilization. Zola's pessimism would rather seem to emphasize a general suffering and despair from top to bottom, "the uselessness of everything, the eternal pain of existence" (GE:281). The story of Hennebeau's unhappy marriage was deliberately

96. Jules Lemaître, writing in Zola's time recognized *Les Rougon-Macquart* series as a "pessimistic epic of human animality" (Lemaître (1886), 1986:60) Zola himself, despite disagreement with Lemaître on some points, did not object his summary (Zola, *Correspondance*, 1929:633).

included in the novel to stress this idea of humanity's common suffering⁹⁷. Hennebeau, the manager, is as much to be pitied as the starving workmen. When the cry of the famished crowd grew stronger, "Bread!, Bread!, Bread!", Hennebeau replies: "Bread!, is that enough, idiots? ... Idiots, am I happy?" (GE:282):

"Things were not all for the best because one had bread. Who was the fool who placed earthly happiness in the partition of wealth? These revolutionary dreamers might demolish society and rebuild another society; they would not add one joy to humanity, they would not take away one pain, by cutting bread and butter for everybody. They would even enlarge the unhappiness of the earth; they would one day make the very dogs howl with despair when they had taken them out of the tranquil satisfaction of instinct, to raise them to the unappealable suffering of passion. No, the one good thing was not to exist, and if one existed, to be a tree, a stone, less still, a grain of sand, which cannot bleed beneath the heels of the passer-by" (GE:282).

Despite some hesitations, Zola seems prepared to admit that the crowd is an inherent part of human nature; the instincts of aggressiveness or sexuality are common to us all and no one can escape them. In this sense, Zola departs from Taine's doctrine and anticipates the principle that "the crowd is in everybody" formulated by Le Bon, giving proof that the novelist's crowd psychology was going in the direction of the future. However, as we have seen, Zola also points to other directions that the crowd theory could follow. By beginning to sense that the crowd might constitute a possibility of liberation for the individual repressed in the social network and subject to all forms of authority, Zola foresees the path taken later by Elias Canetti. Of course, Zola does not fully develop the libertarian perspective of the crowd. Firstly, he did not have a theory of the repressed unconscious available

97. In a letter to Edouard Rod, dated March 27, 1885, Zola wrote: *Comment n'avez-vous pas compris que cet adultère banal n'est là que pour me donner la scène où M. Hennebeau râle sa souffrance humaine en face de la souffrance sociale qui hurle! Sans doute, je me suis mal fait entendre. Il m'a semblé nécessaire de mettre au-dessus de l'éternelle injustice des classes l'éternelle douleur des passions*" (Zola, *Correspondance*, t.2, p.637).

at his time; and secondly, the corollaries derived from a doctrine like Canetti's would appear very threatening indeed for a positivist like Zola. It would invalidate the notion of the individual derived from the Enlightenment: the free individual, able to understand himself and his limitations and able to control his environment according to his will. If liberty was in the crowd, in the multitude carried along in a dizzy movement, in the assembled anger and the satisfaction of blind instincts, then everything would be lost. It was not only the claim for the superiority of the individual over the crowd that would be dismantled, but also any hope of men ascending to higher stages of civilization gradually through moral progress and technological improvement. The effort for an ideal society based on harmony and eternal peace, where everybody would in the long term fully develop his individuality, would prove meaningless. Zola's ardent positivism, his need for firm facts and certainty, led him to put emphasis on the primitiveness and barbarism explanations of the crowd (such as atavism, transformism, alcoholic fever), as this scientific framework, in spite of its gloomy outline, seemed more promising for understanding and eventually overcoming the crowd.

3.5 Conclusion

Zola, through his claim for the application of the experimental method to literature, has employed a very specific instrument of the Enlightenment project to throw light onto crowd phenomena. On the one hand, *Germinal* represents Zola's desire to investigate and often embrace the new discoveries. On the other hand, it expresses his hesitant and always uneasy detection of troublesome pieces of evidence that tended to undermine the Enlightenment program of progress for rational humanity.

The result of Zola's dissection of the mining community performed by his experimental method showed the interlocking forces of environment and heredity pointing in the same direction; they both combined to complete the demoralization and dehumanisation of the lower classes. If nature and nurture are going in the same direction, one reinforces another and there is no way of stopping either. In the depiction of the lower class characters, Zola showed them as passive figures

manipulated by hereditary and environmental factors beyond their control, hence the emphasis on their lack of will. The treatment of struggle for existence both within and between the classes in the terms of Social Darwinism, through the impact of natural selection and the survival of the fittest, also helped to diminish the miners. The powerlessness of the workers to avoid the degrading effects of their milieu and their heredity was the equivalent to their helplessness in avoiding the plunge into the mob.

Despite acknowledging man's animal origins, the prevalence of instinct, and other negative implications brought about by the pessimistic stream of the general theory of evolution, Zola, like many other thinkers, recoiled before an easy acceptance of a view that denies man the moral sense of conscience, or of the postulate of the survival of the fittest in an amoral universe. Despite Zola's claim to scientism and neutrality, the humanitarian outlook continued to dominate his writing. In this sense, Zola's work illustrates the difficulty of reconciling moral conviction with scientific truth.

One way in which Zola could escape to a more humanistic universe was to produce a dual view (individual and collective) of the human being. As we have seen, Zola treats his isolated characters as human, generous, honest. He grants the "individual" finer sentiments and noble attitudes. By showing a sense of altruism and the feeling of right and duty in the characters, leading them at moments deliberately to risk their lives for fellow creatures, Zola implies that men morally transcend the rest of the animal world. However, when Zola sees man in the aggregate, as one in the group or one in the species, environmental and hereditary effects overwhelm them. Collectively, the miners are animal-like, mentally dormant and passive. It is possible to say that such a duality reveals Zola's awareness of two forms of consciousness: self-consciousness and mass-consciousness. When the individual acts isolated or independently of the group, the individual mind is associated with reasoning and a sense of individual personality. In the aggregate, the non-rational man's acts are ruled by the frightening mass-consciousness associated with instinct and with the group as a whole.

At the heart of the problem of the working class movement portrayed in *Germinal* resides Zola's negative perception of the collective side of human psychology. Confronted with a crisis between the old and the new that was transforming the face of the working world, Zola sometimes goes beyond the traditional view of the lower classes as passive figures at the mercy of their environment and shows them as an active force in the working world. However, his intention is only partially fulfilled. Zola stressed the moral quality, the uprightness and the dignity of the individual worker rather than the political organization and disciplined fighting position of the workers as a class. When Zola brought his interpretation of crowd psychology inspired in the pessimistic stream of the evolutionist sociology - collective degeneration, the physiological conception of man and the supremacy of instincts in governing human nature, Social Darwinism - into the workers' world, the result was to reinforce the already perceived danger of collective working-class action. In the aggregate, the malevolent aspects of non-rational life gained the upper hand and the workers became corrupted by the power of violence. The noble individual capable of everyday goodness is lost in the mass. Consequently, Zola has interpreted the outcome of the collective struggle as a return to a state of pre-civilization and thus lent support to the reactionary justification to repress the working class movement.

Zola's sympathy with the crowd, with whom he often identified like Dickens through his own position as a semi-outsider in society, is balanced by a loyalty to his own class heritage, manifested in his ethical and cultural concerns. True, Zola shows as no other European novelist before him the emergence of a new force of nature and the conflict which would follow. He recognizes the proletariat as a potential force for destroying established order and levelling social hierarchy. However, like many other contemporaries, he was made to recoil in part owing to his fear that working class violence would lead to an end of civilization.

Zola's ambiguities and his inability to resolve the question of whether the miners were going backward or forward in their transformation, was also part of a general perplexity with which many Europeans regarded the proletarian movement. As a reflex of bourgeois articulation of its fear of the crowd, the crowd since the French

Revolution had been seen as the same sanguinary, bloodthirsty, and barbaric mob behind all forms of popular action. Despite popular demonstrations being law-abiding, working-class leaders being respectable or collective actions taking great effort through self-policing to show that they were not mobs, whenever someone was assaulted or a property right was violated, the mob was back and the revolution would start again if it was not stopped (McClelland, 1989:7). Zola, in the final analysis, could not escape from the traditional view of the crowd. He was too much part of the social order that he criticized to accept completely other possibilities for the crowd, such as the libertarian perspective, which he partially grasped.

Chapter 4

The Crowd in Canetti

4.1 Introduction

Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé* represents a new style of crowd novel. In *Auto-da-Fé* (1935) the interesting crowd is almost never the physical throng. Rather, *Auto-da-Fé* is full of crowd *symbolism*, which is comprehensible only in relation to the complex typology and theory of crowds which Canetti develops in his crowd monograph *Crowds and Power* (1960). This does not mean that the whole theory of *Crowds and Power* is present in *Auto-da-Fé*, but there is so much of it that it is arguable that *Auto-da-Fé* is a more *complete* crowd novel than *Barnaby Rudge*, *A Tale of Two Cities* or *Germinal*. In *Auto-da-Fé*, crowds exist at every level of social and psychological experience, including crowds inside the protagonist Kien's own head. An examination of the crowd symbolism in *Auto-da-Fé* leads to the perception that there is no social, psychological or biological space which is not occupied by the crowd. Crowds have taken over the whole world in a sense unimaginable to Dickens or Zola.

The depiction of the crowd in *Auto-da-Fé* is evidently not like the one we see in *Barnaby Rudge*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Germinal*. In *Auto-da-Fé* there are just a few examples of human crowds in the obvious sense. There is the crowd that

attends the scene of the tribunal and is drawn into active participation, at first believing itself to be witnessing a murder and apparently committing one as it mistakes Fischering's hump for that of Fischerle. There is the crowd that witnesses Therese's final return to the furniture store to complain to Herr Grob, and embarrasses her; finally, there is the crowd outside the Theresianum, watching the confusion and later in panic when the police appear. Although these crowd-scenes show crowds with specific behaviour and different mentalities, they are by no means the most significant episodes in revealing the crowd thematic present in the novel.

The crowd thematic in *Auto-da-Fé* is seen in the protagonist's struggle to both evade the crowd of the surrounding world and suppress the 'crowd drive' within himself. As already remarked, Kien is an allusion to Kant and the manuscript of the novel had formerly borne the title "Kant catches Fire", a title that Hermann Broch dissuaded the young Canetti from using (Canetti, *The Play of the Eyes*, 1990:23). In *Auto-da-Fé*, Kien, the last Kantian individual defending man's moral duty to progress from the crowd state of being to the enlightened one, loses his battle; the crowd triumphs.

Canetti incorporates many of the major thematic concerns of his crowd theory into his narrative. In the most developed stages of received crowd theory, European crowd theorists had moved from regarding the crowd as a temporally physical agglomeration to viewing it as a "mental state" and "crowd" had come to mean "everybody" and almost all groups. Canetti's highly introspective treatment of the crowd is ultimately concerned with the philosophical, cultural and political implications of that shift. The term "crowd" is used by Canetti not only to designate the physical aggregate of people, but also includes any experience involving real or imaginary crowds, such as of objects, animals, particles. There is a wide range of crowds, especially imaginary crowds in the protagonist's mind, which "do not consist of men, but which still are felt to be crowds" (CP:75). Canetti's unconventional approach may contribute to the lack of realisation that *Auto-da-Fé* is a crowd novel. However, as we will argue in this chapter, *Auto-da-Fé* derives from

a sophisticated crowd typology and complex patterns of crowd psychology and behaviour, formally set out in *Crowds and Power*.

Canetti does not intend *Auto-da-Fé* to be a historical documentary work. Unlike Dickens, who illustrated the Gordon riots in *Barnaby Rudge* and the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities* or Zola, who used the miners' strike of 1884 at Azin for picturing the strike in *Germinal*, Canetti has not based his novel on any specific historical event related to the crowd. However, *Auto-da-Fé* can be seen as part of the author's prolonged effort and extensive research to disentangle the mystery of crowds and what it is like to be a crowd. As Canetti makes clear in his autobiography, he has experienced the crowd himself, had temporarily become part of the mass, and was so impressed by it that he resolved to dedicate his life to understanding, clarifying and establishing the meaning of what he had experienced.

Canetti's fascination with the crowd and interest in all phenomena having to do with the crowd dates from an early age. In his autobiography, he recounts his first memory of a crowd when he was only six. A large number of people stood in the courtyard of his house peering at the sky, waiting for Halley's comet:

"It took a long time; no one grew tired of it, and people kept standing around in a dense throng. I can't see father and mother among them, I can't see any of the individual people who made up my life. I just can see them all together, and if I hadn't used the word so frequently later on, I would say that I see them as a mass, a crowd: a stagnating crowd of expectation" (Canetti, *The Tongue Set Free*, 1979:21).

Dealing with the twenties, Canetti summarises his first "mass-experience" on the occasion of Rathenau's assassination in 1922. He mentions the very strong physical attraction exercised by the crowd on his body. "It was like gravitation, but also different because the bodies pulled into the crowd were not lifeless and therefore seemed to have undergone a complete change of consciousness ... It was a mystery which has never released me, pursuing me for the best part of my life and though I finally did find some clues, much has remained mysterious" (CW:127).

Similarly in July 15, 1927, Canetti mixed with the crowd when the Vienna Palace of Justice was burned. This episode, related as his most important crowd experience, encouraged Canetti to commit himself entirely to the study of these phenomena.

"There had been shooting at Burgenland, workers had been killed. The court had acquitted the murderers. The judgment was designated, no, trumpeted as a "just verdict" in the organ of the government party. It was that triggered an enormous excitement in the workers of Vienna. From all parts of the city, the workers marched in closed processions to the Palace of Justice, which with its sheer name embodied injustice for them. It was a completely spontaneous reaction, I, personally, felt just how spontaneous. Taking my bicycle, I zoomed into the city and joined the procession. The workers, usually well disciplined, trusting their social democratic leaders, and content that Vienna was ruled by them in an exemplary fashion, were acting without their leaders on that day. When they set fire to the Palace of Justice, Mayor Seitz, standing on a fire engine, tried to block their way with his right hand raised high. His gesture was futile: the Palace was burning. The police were ordered to shoot, ninety people were killed. That was forty-six years ago, and the excitement of that day still lies in my bones. It was the closest thing to a revolution that I had physically experienced. A hundred pages would not suffice to describe what I saw. Since then, I have known very precisely that I need not read a single word about what happened during the storming of the Bastille" (CW:126).¹

After his experience as crowd-man for one day, Canetti says that "the year following this event was completely dominated by it". "Until summer 1928, my thoughts revolved around nothing else. More than ever, I was determined to find out what a crowd really is, for a crowd had overwhelmed me from the inside and the outside" (CW:127). Canetti seems particularly amazed by the individual's change of consciousness, his changing awareness of himself, his body surrendering

1. Canetti says that one of the episodes which took place on this day might have originated the creation of the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé* and inspired his apocalyptic finale. Distinct against the leaping flames and convulsive body of the crowd, Canetti saw a man flinging up his arms, lamenting the burning of the files. He was "moaning over and over again: 'The files are burning, all the files'. 'Better than people' I told him, but that didn't interest him, all he could think of was the files 'But they've shot down people' I said angrily 'and you're talking of files !' He looked at me as if I wasn't there and repeated plaintively 'The files are burning! All the files'" (CW:126).

to the dense unification of the bodies. In the compact mass of bodies, the individual self seemed uplifted or at least expanded:

"I become part of the crowd, I dissolved into it fully, I did not feel the least resistance to what I did. I am surprised that I was nevertheless able to grasp all the concrete details occurring before my eyes" (CW:126).

Canetti's decision to write a book about the phenomenon of the individual's becoming part of a crowd concretized in 1925 in reaction of his reading of Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), in which the psychoanalytic theory of group leadership is set out (Barnouw, 1987:128). Since Le Bon, crowd theorists had devoted most of their effort to the study of the psychological mechanisms of the creation of the crowd and its link to the leader, the supposition being that the leader is essential for keeping the crowd together and for controlling its action as a single unit (Moscovici, 1985:49-64). With Freud's theory of the libidinal attraction of the leader to his followers, the leadership phenomenon becomes definitively the core of the crowd theory. To Canetti, to take leadership as the prime theoretical concern is to bring crowd theory to a stop. It effectively means that there is nothing interesting left to say about the crowd. What Freud's analysis lacked, in Canetti's eyes, was recognition of a phenomenon which seemed no less fundamental than libido. For Canetti, the individual's self-immersion and self-dissolution in the crowd has a dynamics of its own, independent of the crowd leader. That is, the absorption of the individual by the totality is the result of a compulsive drive that exists within each individual and comes to life in the crowd itself. The young Canetti used the term "drive of the masses" to emphasize the peculiarity of this impulse which he argued was as basic as the sexual drive (Barnow, 1987:128). To put it simply, for Canetti, the crowd does not need to have a leader to be a crowd.

Not relying on conventional notions of leadership theory to understand what happens to the conscious mind and body of the individual in becoming part of the crowd, or how this change is made self-conscious and articulated, Canetti sets out to

find the answers by himself. He undertakes an extensive study through different lines of enquiry:

"In various, apparently very far-flung ways, I tried to approach what I had experienced as a crowd. I looked for it in history, indeed in the history of all cultures. I was more and more fascinated by the history and early philosophy of China. I had already begun with the Greeks much earlier in my Frankfurt period. Now I delved into the ancient historians, especially Thucydides, and the philosophy of the pre-Socratics. It was natural for me to study the revolutions, the English, French and Russian; but also the significance of religions started dawning on me I read Darwin, hoping to find something in him about crowds in animals.... I took a number of notes and tried to write a few essays. They were all provisional and preliminary work for the book on crowds"(CW:127).

Crowds and Power, which was published more than thirty years later, is thus the result of Canetti's life-long attempt to reveal the innermost and perennial laws of crowd mentalities and behaviours. To explain many familiar and puzzling aspects of crowd behaviour in a new way, Canetti ranges very widely through rich and varied anthropological and socio-psychological material. He intentionally avoids the insights offered by traditional crowd theorists like Taine, Sighele, Tarde, Le Bon and Freud². Observing and re-thinking every aspect independently, Canetti furnishes us with the premisses - including concept, taxonomy, behaviour mechanisms and psychological patterns - for seeing and understanding crowds in a new way.

Since Canetti is the only novelist, selected in my work, who has taken the study of the crowd into the theoretical sphere as well, a different approach to his novel will be required. *Auto-da-Fé* will be read from the perspective offered by *Crowds and Power*. We will attempt to show how *Auto-da-Fé* prefigures explicitly or implicitly many of Canetti's most important insights into crowd phenomena. Although there is a difference of twenty five years in between the date of publication of his novel and

2. Neither Le Bon nor Freud appears in the bibliography of *Crowds and Power*, though we know from a biographical account that he obviously knew Le Bon's *The Crowd* and had read Freud's monograph with great disgust (CW:142). Sighele is the only author of the traditional crowd theorists who is indicated in Canetti's very full bibliography, though he does not appear in the text nor in the accompanying notes.

his crowd monograph, the thematic link between them can be partially justified by the fact that *Auto-da-Fé* was conceived at the same as Canetti was carrying on his studies for the book on crowds³. Canetti comments about his room in Vienna, from which he could hear the crowd of the *Rapid Wien* Soccer Stadium and see over the high walls of Steinhof Psychiatric Asylum, which motivated him to write *Auto-da-Fé* in that period: Canetti states that the mystery of the crowds appeared expressed in the huge body of the roar of the crowd, as it rose over the open field: "the roaring waves of sound rising and breaking, crashing surf carrying and uniting the small particles of individual voices" (CW:127). The individuals isolated in their desires, imprisoned behind the walls of the asylum that allowed no expansion, no motion, contrasted with the larger embracing body of the crowd, its explosive energy, its collective motion and sound.

Auto-da-Fé can be read, in this sense, as an imaginative projection of the ideas which Canetti developed more fully and accessibly in *Crowds and Power*. As we will discuss in detail in the next section, the novel presents various examples of crowds, especially books, which fit to the highly complex typology of crowds delineated in *Crowds and Power*. There is also a set of crowd-symbols and elements - dust, women, tiger, blood and fire - which persecute the protagonist, progressively invading his library and dismantling his mental defence mechanism against them. In the course of the novel, the colour motifs of red and blue become associated with individual characters (representatives of the crowd), in an obvious allusion to *Crowds and Power*, where fire and water in their various manifestations feature as the most important crowd symbols.

Another thematic equation between *Auto-da-Fé* and *Crowds and Power* refers to the comparison between Kien, the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé*, with Daniel Paul Sreber, the former president of the Dresden Senate. Sreber's 1903 book *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*, provides Canetti with the model case of psychopathology of power,

3. Commenting on the research about the crowd undertaken by him between 1927 to 1933, Canetti remarks: "considering it from the stand-point of the novel, I see how many traces those passionate and diverse studies left in *Auto-da-Fé*, which was finished just a few years later" (CW:127).

with which *Crowds and Power* concludes. In our study, we will relate the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé* with Paul Screeber, in two particular ways. First, the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé* will be seen as the model of a true Kantian individual, who despises the crowd in all its representations and fiercely struggles to keep himself apart from it. Peter Kien's isolation from society; his desire to keep his ego autonomous and constantly structured, and his ambition to impose a total control over the surrounding world, is carried to such an extreme that it becomes indistinguishable from the model case of the paranoid. When his efforts to maintain his distance fail, the rigid personality of the sinologist falls prey to the world around him. He finally collapses into a crowd-state, that contrasts the isolated and non-communicative state of the individual with a new state of being, unrestricted by the constraints of social norms and even social awareness.

At a second level of reading, the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé*'s frame of mind can be compared to the mind of a paranoiac ruler. Kien's notions of greatness and exclusiveness, just as Screeber's, reveal an unbridled will-to-power and a radical intolerance of others. Kien imagines there is a crowd on his side and uses it for increasing the scope of his power and to extend his domination over others. He is led to eliminate everything that stands in his way. However, the protagonist in his sense of omnipotence feels haunted by a persecutory or revengeful crowd he imagines against him. The novel offers, in this sense, a prototype of the paranoiac ruler which correlates with Canetti's view of the leader's exploitative attitude towards the crowd in *Crowds and Power*.

Undoubtedly, *Auto-da-Fé* represents a new form of the crowd novel. Unlike Dickens and Zola who drew on received ideas about the crowd to picture the crowd phenomenon, Canetti sets out to challenge the traditional beliefs on which the crowd theory has been built. Whereas nineteenth century novels affirmed cultural notions of the stability and coherence of the enlightened individual (autonomous, rational, conscious) to whom the crowd was conceived as an antithesis (irrational, barbarous,

violent, fickle), in Canetti's novel this antithesis is attacked. In *Auto-da-Fé*, the protagonist who strives to be a supreme individual collapses into insanity. Whilst in the traditional perspective, the crowd is perceived as a pathological degeneration of the individual and a threat to orderly and legitimate societies, in Canetti's work the crowd represents a potential of liberty for the individual - a temporary refuge from all the kinds of authority and power present in social life, and in one sense, a special kind of sanity.

Obviously, Canetti's original perspective can be partially explained by the cultural context in which he is operating. Canetti shares the perception of an era, in which the enlightened values of Western, modern societies are in collapse. In the first half of this century, a growing scepticism about the ability of reason to serve as a means to order the world coupled with a widespread perception of the failure of rational authority led to a widespread criticism of the view of the liberal bourgeois individual and the notions of rationality connected with it⁴. In this sense, Canetti's approach can be regarded as a segment of a much broader twentieth century attack upon the central notions of the Enlightenment (the belief in unitary and universal knowledge, the belief in the centrality of the autonomous subject, the autonomy of the enlightened mind, the objectivity of morality, among others - see above, pp. 33-38). In this line, as critics have recognized, Canetti's work attempts a kind of realism, not one that imitates a fixed, empirical reality, but one that acknowledges and responds to a changing, subjective and often incomprehensible reality. As David Darby has put it, "Canetti's work reflects in formal and presentational terms, a radically modern perception of reality, a somewhat post-modern consciousness, in which the structures of meaning are unreliable and possibly even non-existent" (Darby, 1988:210).

Canetti's post-modern perception certainly engendered alternative visions of the crowd, where a kind of mass-self, of being-in-the-crowd, can liberate the individual by taking him into a new collective experience. However, Canetti's view of crowd

4. For an analysis of Canetti's work within the context of the intellectual currents of the early part of this century see Berman, 1986:180-4. The most far-reaching of these enquiries is provided by Marilyn Smith Lovett's doctoral dissertation, 1982:47-79.

phenomena goes further than that. Canetti has attempted to change the received nature of the crowd image by changing the nature of the crowd theory in *Crowds and Power*. It should be kept in mind that Canetti is working at a time when the crowd theory is complete in a sense that was not available to Dickens or Zola. In the first quarter of this century, there was already a large agreement amongst the scholars upon the premises of how to comprehend crowd phenomena⁵. Le Bon's assumptions about the crowd, incremented by Freud's insights into group leadership, remained the main stream of the theory. This fact has allowed Canetti to survey the whole crowd experience from the beginning and re-work the entire tradition of crowd theory.

Canetti's era also saw coming true many predictions formulated by crowd theory, such as the rise of increasingly powerful leaders and large mass events⁶. However, as Canetti himself argues, traditional crowd theory could not predict the heap of corpses left by the two World Wars; the abuse, crime and carnage carried on by totalitarian dictatorships and the threat of a nuclear holocaust⁷. These events heightened for Canetti a new sense of urgency to understand the mechanisms of crowd behaviour, as a way out of the gloomy inherited perspective of crowd theory. Canetti recognizes that, if the leader could really fill the mind of the crowd with whatever content he wanted, then there was no defence against the possibility of each of us becoming one of history's butchers. Canetti knows that no one is immune

5. Crowd theory is very self-conscious of itself as a tradition. Serge Moscovici has commented that: "for almost a century, we have done little more than repeat and paraphrase them [earlier crowd theorists] in less raw and more refined language. Of course, in the intervening time, some have made some advances and opened up other perspectives, but within a framework for which they have provided the bare outlines". Moscovici, 1985:8. Sandor Halebsky similarly acknowledges that "while contemporary mass political theory makes few direct allusions to the earlier theorists on the crowd, it writes within this supportive intellectual tradition". Halebsky, 1976:35.

6. See John McClelland, 1989:293; Serge Moscovici, 1985:2-3 and Sandor Halebsky, 1976:7.

7. As Canetti says in his essay "Hitler according to Speer": "where is the historian who could have offered the prognosis of Hitler? Even if a particularly conscientious historiography could now manage to remove forever its inherent admiration of power from its circulatory system, it would be at best be able to warn against a new Hitler. But since he would turn up elsewhere, he would appear different, and warning would be idle" (CW:65).

from the crowd, but he refuses to concede that men become passive brutes, killing because they are ordered to, or because they are spell-bound.

For these reasons, Canetti is bound to rework the whole tradition of crowd theory, by forcing a theoretical separation between crowds and leaders. Canetti's view of the crowd leader and the multifarious connections between crowds and power will be analysed separately in the following chapter. We will hope to show that in Canetti's perspective the dynamics of crowds come to constitute the opposite of the dynamics of power.

As Canetti's view of the crowd does not rely on the crowd tradition, it has been difficult to describe and analyse his perspective. There are many crowd symbols in the novel, which lend themselves different interpretations. *Auto-da-Fé* defies a definitive interpretation. Canetti avoids rigid definitions and uses unconventional concepts - the variety of imaginary crowds in the novel is itself the most obvious example. Canetti proceeds to recast many received ideas about the crowd and transforms theoretical concepts into metaphorical relationships to give them greater concreteness and clarity. These difficulties may explain, at least in part, why Canetti's work has received such a limited attention, particularly in the English speaking world⁸.

4.2 Canetti's Typology of Crowds

In this section, the range of references to the crowd in *Auto-da-Fé* will be analysed in relation to the typology of crowds delineated in *Crowds and Power*. It should be clear, however, that such a correlation is only one possible reading. The crowd

8. When Canetti received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981, journals dedicated special issues to Canetti and several essays. However, no new full length study has been published about Canetti so far. Many articles stream from a relatively narrow circle of critics, who have been associated with Canetti scholarship for many years, such as Dagmar Barnouw, Russel Beramn, Metchthild Curtius, Gerald Stied, Claudio Magris, Sigurd Paul Scheichl, amongst others. While few of these articles are available in English, there are three doctoral theses which examine the various aspects of Canetti's relationship with language. See Marilyn Lovett, 1982, Hans-Jakob Werlen, 1988 and David M. Darby, 1988.

symbols depicted in the novel offer a constantly shifting pattern rather than a static interpretative blueprint. The narrative of *Auto-da-Fé* does not display Dickens' or Zola's coherent authorial guidance. There is a series of possible views that must be sorted out by an actively participant reader (Darby, 1985:220).

Before examining the manifestation of the crowd in *Auto-da-Fé*, it is essential to provide an outline of the typology of crowds in *Crowds and Power*. My objective, however, is not to proceed on a systematic analysis of the characteristics attributed to each type of crowd. Nor is it to discuss the validity of the criteria used by Canetti to arrive at such a classification or to argue about the comprehensiveness of his typology. For the moment, my concern is to present a general sketch of Canetti's view of the different crowd mentalities and ranges of behaviour in order to understand the role of the crowd in *Auto-da-Fé*.

4.2.1 Typology of Crowds in *Crowds and Power*

Canetti's typology in *Crowds and Power* starts with the assertion that crowds have four fundamental attributes - *growth*, *equality*, *density* and *direction*, which will be found in any crowd to a greater or a lesser degree. *Growth* refers to the desire of the crowd to expand infinitely and unrestrainedly; a desire which, if in some way repressed, will eventually lead to "eruption". *Equality* is a fundamental and indispensable characteristic of the crowd, "a characteristic never questioned by the crowd itself" (CP:29). The state of absolute equality amongst the members of the crowd is so crucial for Canetti, that a crowd for him can only become a crowd at the moment of "discharge", "when all who belong to the crowd get rid of their differences and feel equal" (CP:17). That is, the members of the crowd get rid of their distinctions of class, race, status, rank, property, every item in the socially constructed code of differentiation and hierarchy (Canetti calls them "burdens of distance")⁹. The third crowd characteristic, *density*, refers to the crowd's desire for compactness, a desire to enclose everything; "nothing should stand between its parts

9. The requisite of equality in the crowd acquires especial importance in Canetti's discussion of power: since in the crowd all members are equal, no one has the right or the authority to command anyone else. The supposed necessity for a leader is dismissed on these grounds.

or divide them" (CP:29). Finally, *direction* refers to the crowd's need for a goal, a direction common to all of its members (CP:29).

According to these four basic attributes, Canetti constructs a typology of crowds segmented into four opposed pairs: *open* and *closed* crowds, *rhythmic* and *stagnating* crowds, *slow* and *quick* crowds and *visible* and *invisible* crowds. *Open* crowds are the "natural" crowds, which desire to grow infinitely and see no limit to their expansion. This is the kind of crowd usually conceived in the traditional sense of the term, physically proximate throngs. Open crowds may spring up anywhere and appear and disappear suddenly (CP:17). By contrast, *closed* crowds have boundaries and renounce growth. They are limited to a certain space that prevents disorderly increase and dispersion. Stress is put on permanence and the closed crowd "erupts" only occasionally, that is, suddenly passes from the closed to the open state (CP:17).

The distinction between *rhythmic* and *stagnating* crowds refers to equality and density. The *rhythmic* crowd is the dancing crowd; it is the crowd where equality and density coincide from the beginning. Everything depends on movement. Equality occurs through a rough uniformity of bodily movements that are passed from one to another, and also rhythmical sounds (CP:31). The *stagnating* crowd needs a long period of density before reaching equality. It lives for its discharge. It is the crowd waiting for a public execution or waiting for a football match to begin, or, in a more passive way, the audience at a theatre. It is a patient crowd, which is certain of its discharge and leaves it for later (CP:39).

The difference between *slow* and *quick* crowds points exclusively to the nature of their goals. *Quick* crowds, according to Canetti, are the "political, sporting and war-like crowds" present in modern life. These crowds are impatient, in contrast with the *slow* crowds of religion or pilgrimage, whose goal is distant and remote. No discharge is permitted to the slow crowd until the goal has been reached (CP:34-9). The last pair in Canetti's typology is *visible* and *invisible* crowds. In the conventional sense, crowds have always been considered visible, but Canetti also deals with the *invisible*, imaginary crowds, of the dead, saints, demons or bacilli

and spermatozoa¹⁰. Invisible crowds will be of great significance in discussing the role of the crowd in *Auto-da-Fé*, particularly in relation to the dynamics of power.

Besides the classification of crowds according to their fundamental physical aspects, Canetti delineates a classification according to their predominant emotional content. They are: *baiting*, *flight*, *prohibition*, *reversal*, and *double* crowds. *Baiting* crowds are the murderous crowds, the killing crowds, the lynch mobs, which form with reference to a quickly obtainable goal: to kill prey. Canetti asserts that no risk is involved because superiority is on its side; it is cowardly because it looks for a single victim: "A murder shared with many others, which is not only safe but permitted, indeed recommended, is irresistible to the great majority of men" (CP:49). According to Canetti, the *baiting* crowd "goes back to the most primitive dynamic known amongst men, the hunting pack" (CP:50). It is connected with old practices of collective killing. The crucifixion crowd which chooses its own victim, the medieval crowds that wait for a long drawn-out execution, the revolutionary crowd that wants a quick execution, all are seen to share a common 'baiting' feeling.

The *flight* crowd is the most single-minded and simple-minded crowd in the classic Le Bon sense. It is created by a threat. Canetti says that "all members of the crowd feel equally threatened and as long as they keep together they feel that the danger is distributed" (CP:53). The *prohibition* crowd is created by a refusal. "A large number of people together refusing to do what was expected of them to do" (CP:55). The most obvious example is the strike, or the refusal to stand still during the singing of a celebrated song. The *reversal* crowd is the revolutionary crowd. Reversal crowds form in the most diverse situations, but Canetti pays particular attention to the political revolutionary crowd. Reversal crowds presuppose a stratified society. Those at the bottom of society, in reverse, come to threaten those

10. The idea of crowds of the dead or of souls is found all over the world (Africa, Siberia, Celts of Scotland, Alaska, Valhalla, among Jews and in India). The seriousness attributed to these invisible crowds in western Europe is especially evident in the Middle Ages, for example, when several attempts were made to count the number of devils (variously counted at 44; 635; 569; 11 billion) (CP:42-71).

on the top; those who were commanded start to command; those who have been defenceless for so long begin to convict those who used to punish. "The sheep find they have teeth and eat the wolves" and "their numbers have to make up for the experience in viciousness which they lack" (CP: 58-61). Finally, the *double* crowd is one of the ways available in which the crowd can prolong its life; it exploits the existence of a second crowd to which it is opposed. This two-crowd structure takes the form of three pairs: men and women, the living and the dead, friend and foe.

According to Canetti, these types of crowds rarely exist in their pure form, but are made up of a mixture of the physical and emotional properties outlined above. This creates the possibility of a huge number of different crowds. It may be arguable whether Canetti's classification is fully comprehensive. However, as we will discuss later, Canetti attempts to identify and classify as many types of crowds as possible in order to challenge the pervasive tendency to treat the crowd as a single and permanent entity. As Canetti makes clear, his taxonomy, like any taxonomy, just establishes general preliminary characteristics that are supposed to unfold into complex details of classification in particular instances. The full implications of Canetti's typology of crowds will be seen later, after the analysis of the dynamics of power.

4.2.2 Typology of Crowds in *Auto-da-Fé*

4.2.2.1 Symbols of Closed Crowds: Books

The most obvious example of crowd symbol in *Auto-da-Fé* is Kien's books, as Stewart has remarked (Stewart, 1968:6-13). Uniformity and density are the most expressive qualities which the book as a crowd-symbol has in common with the crowd. Each book consists of pages of roughly equal size and similar appearance, bound closely together within a cover to form a unity. Density means strength and greater permanence for each vulnerable leaf of the book (ADF:32). But more than a mere collection of pages, the books are also a multitude of lines, of words and letters: the smaller and more numerous the units, the denser the total impact. The density of the printed page gives each constituent letter, word and line a life of its

own, but because each depends on the rest for its meaning, it is the life of the crowd with which it is endowed. Looked at as a whole, the library may constitute, therefore, a crowd of crowds.

Viewed in a symbolic way, the books constitute the "closed crowd", like an army under military discipline. The books are denied the possibility of growth because their size is limited by their covers. The cover is rigid: by repressing the boundaries of the book, it also lends it permanence. The written word represents stagnation; once it has been printed out nothing can be changed, its small units are "crystallized". The books, solid throughout, embody an apparently immovable content, of great constancy and historical permanence. Furthermore, the number of books is also limited by the space of the library.

In a similar sense, the books could constitute what Canetti calls "crowd crystals". The twenty-five thousand volumes lined up on the walls constitute a rigid organization; they are allocated to a definite place, according to category and function. As we will examine later, the books, in Kien's mind, represent a kind of army. The volumes do not just form a protective wall around the scholar (shielding him against the dreaded touch of life) but they also safeguard the lucidity of his mind (given their coherence as a permanently structured reality). As Turner has noted, the books in adversity become Kien's private army (Turner, 1980:81). When the maid, the scholar's arch-enemy, threatens to invade their territory (the library), the books are commanded into a state of war. Whilst Therese threatens the books with disintegration (to sell the library or send the books to an auction, transforming them in another crowd-symbol, a heap of money) Kien tries to transform them into a killing-crowd: their objective now is to eliminate their adversary, against the promise of an indefinite duration of their own life.

In Kien's imagination, the books are also equated with the persecuted crowd. Kien compares a book-auction with a slave-market and is prepared to dedicate his life to freeing them from captivity. To Kien, in the pawnshop of the city, the Theresianum, "they keep thousands of books unjustly in durance, tens of thousands, against their free will" (ADF:425). In this perspective, the books would constitute a "stagnating

crowd", and Kien's goal is to reach and win every single book. His mission is to free the whole "book population" from imprisonment.

All these types of crowd in the protagonist's mind have in common a repressive or inhibitory character. The books represent the "closed" rather than the "open crowd", the "stagnating" rather than the "rhythmic crowd", and the "slow crowd" rather than the "quick". Kien's books are precisely what they pretend not to be: a symbol of the crowd. As a demagogue, as a commander-in-chief, or as saviour, Kien hopes to maintain the crowd under his control: to check them, to delay them, to create the illusion they do not exist as a crowd. For most of the novel, Kien treats the books as if they were a passive crowd on his side (a loyal army). They stand ready to obey his command, to be turned to his advantage.

Later in the novel, however, with the scholar's rapid collapse into madness, the books will transform themselves into the revolutionary crowd. Canetti calls it a "reversal crowd". In a state of rebellion, the books lose their fixed order, mixing up their cultural and ideological contents. Attempting to control this state of anarchy, Kien turns each book around with its spine towards the wall. However, the books now being in a state of absolute equality, become a true crowd, that is, indistinguishable from each other. In eruption, "a sudden transition from a closed crowd into an open crowd", the books free themselves. The letters, like a "rhythmic crowd", animated by Kien's hallucination, "dance up and down, not a word can he make out" (ADF:424). The books, taking revenge for the long years through which Kien has kept them in captivity, attack him as a "baiting" or "a quick crowd":

"... a letter detaches itself from the first line and gives him a blow on the ear, letters are lead. It hurts. Strike him. More and more. He totters. Lines and whole pages come clattering on to him. They shake and beat him, they worry him, they toss him among themselves" (ADF:427)

The soldiers revolt against their officer, the slaves against their master. The submissive and loyal crowd suddenly rebels against its ruler in vengeance. Kien commands them to be quiet: "With formidable strength Kien grasps the book and snaps it shut. So he has taken the letters prisoner, all of them, and will not let them

go again... . The letters rattle inside the book. They are prisoners, they can't come out. They have beaten him bloody. He threatens them by death by fire" (ADF:428). The whole marvellously ordered library becomes an inchoate and aggressive mass.

The incredible hypocrisy of Kien's position becomes clear when he threatens his books with death by fire. "That is how he will avenge himself against all his enemies" (ADF:428). Books are indeed notoriously inflammable (Beller, 1984:8). And after the books have acquired the characteristics of an open, quick, reversal crowd, they become fire. They become their negation and antithesis: the books that Kien loves and cherishes become fire, the thing he hates and fears.

The books as a crowd symbol do not appear in a pure form but condense different crowd properties as described in the crowd typology of *Crowds and Power*. The transformation of the books into different types of crowd suggests one of the most notable attributes of the crowd: the ability to undergo changes and swing from one emotion to another. Yet, the goal, or direction of the books as a crowd-symbol throughout the novel is very determined: all of them progress from a closed, restricted state to an open, unrestricted and "natural" crowd.

In *Auto-da-Fé*, we find examples of crowds inside the library, outside the library and in the protagonist's own mind. On the one hand, the scholar imagines himself secure in his microcosmic, artificially created reality, protected by his books and guarded against the disturbing influences of the crowd from the outside world. However, the protagonist implicitly or explicitly acknowledges the existence of intruding crowds, which threaten him throughout the novel. These "hostile crowds", as we will examine, are variously expressed by dust, women, tiger and fire. We should keep in mind, however, that the scholar faces in reality a double threat: he has enemies not only inside and outside the library but also within himself. The activities of the enemy of the outside world are open and can be watched; the crowds in the cellars of his mind are hidden and insidious.

4.2.2.2 Symbols of Open Crowds

The following crowd representations are not crowd symbols in terms of Canetti's definition of it as a "collective unity", but represent some of the essential attributes of the crowd. They shed light on the open crowd and that is why they are felt to be "hostile" to the reclusive protagonist. All these crowd symbols share characteristics of the open crowd.

Women and the Colour Blue

Therese, the scholar's cretinous maid, stands as the most obvious representation of the hostile crowd. In Kien's mind, feminine nature represents deviousness, treachery and licentiousness, an equation with the crowd, which finds a clear parallel in the long tradition of crowd theory itself¹¹. This is one of the very few things Canetti takes from nineteenth century crowd theory. Kien displays a vicious attitude towards women, culminating in the long tirade at the end of the novel, where he attempts to show the iniquity of the female by delineating the malevolent acts of women throughout the course of history and mythology. In this exhaustive indictment, women are presented as the very embodiment of the principle of the evil in creation, of all that is destructive and discordant in existence, the source of all irrationality and chaos in the world, all that obstructs progress and destroys civilization. "Women are illiterates, unendurable and stupid, a perpetual disturbance" (ADF:356).

The connection between women, crowds and disorder is a constant element in Kien's mind. From the beginning, the protagonist recognizes his housekeeper as the very epitome of barbarism, expressed by the prevalence of instincts and absence of logical thought. Kien's later perception of Therese's sexual frenzy, obscenity and physical brutality, became all the more alarming. When Kien realises the true nature of Therese, he recognizes in her the legendary tiger, which, by disguising himself in the skin and clothes of a young girl, wins the love and confidence of a learned man, only afterwards to devour his heart (ADF:142). Therese's disguise, however, is not

11. See Susanna Barrows, 1981:43-72, and Serge Moscovici, 1985:107-121.

beauty, but an exaggerated and false concern with respectability and order, symbolised by her long, stiff, blue skirt that masks her sexuality (Parry, 1981:160).

The equation between women and the crowd in the mind of the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé* is expressed by the colour blue, a clear allusion to water, which in its various manifestations (the sea, rain, rivers) stands as an important crowd-symbol in *Crowds and Power* (CP:80-84). As we have seen in the previous chapters, both Dickens and Zola referred to the uncertainty, fickleness and cruelty of "the roused ocean" (BR:475), "the relentlessness of the angry waters" (TTC:259), the uncontrollability of the "overflow of a river" (GE:357) as metaphors of the crowd. For the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé* all this water imagery can be seen in women, and more specifically Therese. Women's emotional, capricious, temperamental nature, like the sea¹², means that they have no consistent character: "Their openness to suggestion means that they are swayed by every inner impulse and instinct and react, without any self control, to every external stimulus. Their permanently receptive state means that they are exposed to all events in the outside world and their reaction will be excessive" (Moscovici, 1985:108). The protagonist also complains of Therese's idiotic speech, inarticulate and reduced to few clichés, which, like the sea's uninhibited mumble¹³, is meant to be heard endlessly. Women's seeming passivity, submissiveness and capacity for endurance fit them equally well for treachery. Their passionate nature makes them suddenly become

12. In *Crowds and Power*, Canetti remarks: "The sea is multiple, it moves, it is dense and cohesive. Its multiplicity lies in its waves; they constitute it. It can soothe or threaten or break out in storms... They are never completely still. The wind coming from outside them determines their motion; they beat in this or that direction in accordance to its command. The dense coherence of the waves is something which men in the crowd know well. It entails a yielding to others as though there were no strict division between oneself and them. ... the specific nature of this coherence among men is unknown. The sea, while not explaining expresses it" (CP:80-81).

13. In *Crowds and Power* we read: "The sea has a voice, which is very changeable and almost always audible. It is a voice which sounds like a thousand voices and much has been attributed to it: patience, pain and anger. But what is most impressive about it is its persistence. The sea never sleeps; by day and by night it makes itself heard, through years and decades and centuries. In its impetus and its rage it brings to mind (...) the crowd" (CP:80).

excited and violent. From sheep they can instantaneously transform themselves into wild beasts, tiger, wolves, and eat the heart of those who have nourished them.

As we will examine in the following section, Therese first becomes the personification of the disruptive principle at work in an originally perfect, orderly and harmonious existence. As a symbol of the crowd, Therese synthesizes many of Kien's fears, particularly stupidity, sexual frenzy and violence. With the scholar's ever increasing paranoid madness, the female association with the crowd will be reduced to the colour blue, amongst other crowd symbols.

Savage Animals and the Colour Red

Savage animals appear in the novel as symbols of the power and violence of the crowd in eruption. The intimate association in the novel between savage animals (notably the tiger) the crowd and fire has been examined by Idris Parry (Parry, 1981:151-163). In *Auto-da-Fé*, the appearance of the tiger in its various guises, invariably heralds the sudden outbreak of violence. Even at the opening of the novel, the child's apparently innocent reference to tigers carries appalling overtones, anticipating the violence of the crowd's escape later in the novel. The cousins of the tiger, two ferocious jaguars that appear to Kien in a nightmare early in the novel, are also agents of eruption - one jaguar-priest opens the chest of the condemned with an axe, and blood gushes fiercely. Kien's recognition of Therese as a tiger is the inevitable prelude to further violence: shortly afterwards he receives a cruel beating and is expelled from his beloved library.

However, only in the latter part of the novel does the tiger reveal itself in all its ferocity with the reappearance of Benedick Pfaff. And it is in this way that he presents himself to Kien: "You see before you Ginger, the cat!! First because of my distinguishing colour and because I unmask the darkness, I've got eyes! That is the rule with tigers!" (ADF:351). Pfaff wears no disguise: he is a red-haired muscleman, who shakes his fists and shakes the house with his roar; he can see in the dark as a tiger can. The same brutality with which this predatory beast tortured his wife and daughter to death is now directed against Kien. In this former policeman Kien sees the image of a killer: "what trousers! ...[Pfaff] wore trousers typical of those

which would be seen on ... a criminal: crumpled, glimmering reddish with faded blood, kept in ugly motion from within, threadbare and greasy, clumsy, dark, repulsive. If beasts wore trousers, they would wear them like that" (ADF:357).

Red is Pfaff's colour. The caretaker's hair is bright red as are the bristles on his fists. Kien's fears of violence, blood and fire, in the most readily discernible connection with crowds, become progressively combined in Pfaff. By the end of the novel, Kien sees Pfaff red, he imagines the caretaker's moustache heavily waxed by all shades of red pomades - "red here, red there, red overhead, his head was fiery red"(ADF:422).

From another perspective, the metaphor of the beast appears related as well, through the novel, to the forces of the unconscious. In the word of Kien's brother, George¹⁴: "a great unconscious beast lies in the irrational recesses of each individual" (ADF:377). According to the Parisian psychiatrist, the crowd is the eternal beast within us, a part of us more ancient but at the same time essential, that man has to repress for the sake of the social order and his own identity as an individual. In the last chapter, the beast of the unconscious has finally escaped and emerges fully into the open (ADF:399). And soon Kien sees the tiger who bursts from the underground jungle. Though Pfaff has been banished from the flat by George and all is apparently normal again, the tiger has not disappeared but undergoes transformations. As the eruption now is in Kien's own mind, it is complete and irrevocable: tiger becomes fire, fire becomes tiger (ADF:345). Natural and elemental symbols become one another. Kien feels persecuted by tiger, fire, skirt, the colours red and blue. As the novel progresses, the motif is amplified in a grand crescendo with every succeeding variation on the theme contributing to the mounting frenzy of the composition.

14: Apart from identifying to an extent with Peter Kien, Canetti also uses George Kien to articulate some of more explicit theoretical statements about the crowd in *Auto-da-Fé*. See below pp.277-280; 287-289.

Fire

Fire, which is for Canetti the most powerful symbol of the crowd (CP:75-80), is present in the novel in various metaphors, suggesting many interpretations. Fire has ambivalent meanings and, according to Canetti, encompasses all the crowd's most essential qualities:

"Fire... spreads rapidly, it is contagious and insatiable; it can break out... with great suddenness; it is multiple, it is destructive; it has an enemy; it dies ... All this is true of the crowd... Once in being, it spreads with the utmost violence. Few can resist its contagion; it always wants to go on growing and there are no inherent limits to its growth. It can arise wherever people are together, and its spontaneity and suddenness are uncanny. It is multiple, but cohesive. It is composed of a large number of people, but one never knows how many (CP:77).

Fire fascinates and horrifies. Kien's ambivalent feelings towards fire have been noted by several critics¹⁵. To start with, the name "Peter Kien"¹⁶ shows such conflicting dispositions. "Peter" connotes "rock", "immobility", and "rigidity". In contrast, "Kien" is the first part of the word *Kienspan*, an object which is highly inflammable and acts as a catalyst. At the same time that Kien is petrified by his fear of fire, he is enchanted by the power that it represents. Fear and fascination, stone and fire, the immutable and the volatile, go hand in hand (Stewart, 1968:90). The attraction of fire overcomes its terror as Kien's imagination settles on the prospect of the Theresianum in flames. His indignation at the imaginary spectacle cannot conceal a sinister note of malicious joy. There is a nauseating sense of personal triumph in his pious tribute to the heroic and selfless officials who die in their attempt to rescue the books from the fire. Kien also uses the word "fire" to inflame the crowd of his books with a lust for revenge by reviving the memory of past humiliations. As a specialist in Chinese studies, as Idris Parry has noted, he carries constantly the memory of the disastrous burning of books in ancient China (Parry, 1981:164). Later in the novel, Kien's indignation becomes even more

15. See Stewart, 1968:90; Parry, 1980:164-9; Beller, 1984:11, Werlen, 1988:41.

16. In the early plans of the novel, Canetti designed the hero only by the letter "B", a sign both for *Bucherwurm* and for *Brand*, which is obviously highly inflammable. Beller, 1984:9.

hysterical, betraying an even more obsessive fascination with fire. In the last chapter, the insistence on fire intensifies in a fierce crescendo leading to the inevitable climax: Kien's suicide by fire in his library. Each new line of thought, each incoherent sequence of reminiscences, each chain of associations returns at last to the same obsessive idea: Fire !

Fire, as the symbol of passion, of sex, of the excitement of the inexhaustible mob - are the elements repressed by Kien (Michel-Francois, 1983:149). Kien tries to control the fire of passion by restriction, trapping it within narrow limits. He has taken every precaution to ensure that it cannot escape from its confinement. In this domestication of fire, the protagonist believes he has subjected it to his control. However, instincts and passionate drives can never be completely tamed. From time to time, "and often inexplicably, it [fire] arises, and has ... its own restless and violent life" (CP:77). As Canetti remarks in *Crowds and Power*, the drive of the individual to dissolve himself into the masses is a drive like fire, which devours all else. "People immersed in the crowd, become like "fire", "knowing no bounds" (CP:76).

Fire, which when under control is one of the most significant steps achieved by man towards civilization constitutes also for Canetti "the most impressive form of destruction". "Fire is sudden, it can originate anywhere" and "it destroys irrevocably" (CP:76). In *Auto-da-Fé*, the library does not merely "catch fire", but rather the fire erupts spontaneously from its stifling confines. Kien finally recognizes the susceptibility of his world of books, which also stands for the vulnerability of the notions of culture and civilization, to fire. Manfred Beller, analysing the relation between fire and the theme of progress in the novel, notes this point: Kien, the autonomous creator of the book world, at the highest peak of intellectuality to which cultural development had led, shows also the dead end of this development - Kien returns his work to the fire (Beller, 1984:10). Kien becomes fire, the library becomes fire that becomes the crowd.

In a more general sense, these references to fire point to a central dilemma in *Auto-da-Fé*. Canetti seems to imply that only by the taming of fire - or metaphorically, by

repressing the crowd within the individual - have men rendered the development of civilization possible. However, the fire breaks out from time to time, threatening the artificial impositions and the fragile edifices of civilization.

The crowd symbols and crowd-themes present in *Auto-da-Fé*, can only be fully comprehensible in the whole context of the novel, where the development of the narrative provides a guidance for interpreting them in accordance with the broad theoretical framework of *Crowds and Power*. We will in turn examine the crowd-theme in *Auto-da-Fé* and its correlations to topics such as "the fear of being touched (CP:15)", "the eruption" (CP:19), "persecution" (CP:22), amongst others.

4.3 The Crowd in the Context of the Novel

As critics have examined, *Auto-da-Fé* has a basic trilogic structure, each of the three major sections of the text being marked by its own title (Darby, 1988:58). In the first section, "A Head Without a World", set in the library, the character and the world of the Kantian intellectual is depicted. The second, "Headless World", describes the journey of the protagonist in society, a world without order, a chaotic bustle. We see the accelerating crisis of individuality and the inability of the intellect to mediate and form a material reality into an abstract rational construct. In the third, "The World in the Head", we witness the final dissolution of the protagonist's individuality and the libertarian potential found in the crowd.

The attack on the antithetical notions of "individuality" and "crowd" is a key thematic of *Auto-da-Fé*. The protagonist, in order to preserve his stable personality ("pure-self identity"), attempts to armour himself and erect impassable barriers between inside and outside, private and public, self and other. In doing so, Peter Kien does indeed achieve the appearance of a solid individuality, but is also led to an eternal struggle with the forces inside and outside himself, symbolized by the

representations of the crowd, as we discussed in Section 4.2.2.2. Canetti articulates the contradictions which both splits and constitutes the individual, to show the perpetual tension between these two poles (individual/crowd) and the unexpected ways the boundaries between these opposite notions can become blurred.

As we will argue in the next section, the protagonist passes in the course of the novel from a state of apparently structured and stable personality to a kind of mass state. The distance between the concepts of "individuality" and "crowd" will suffer a double attack from outside intrusion and inside disintegration. Firstly, the limits between "private" and "public" will disappear when the representations of the crowd appropriate the space formerly occupied by the isolated scholar. Secondly, the limits between "self" and "other" will be subverted when the forces of the crowd within the individual (expressed by unreason and instinctive drives) overwhelm the protagonist, making him collapse into a crowd-state, comparable to Screeber's schizophrenia case, as described in *Crowds and Power*.

4.3.1 A Head Without a World

4.3.1.1 The Individual: Peter Kien

Peter Kien, can be seen as the very antitheses of the crowd-man. He strives to keep the boundaries of his ego intact, autonomous and permanently structured according to his will. He shields himself against any kind of influence that would invade and devour his individuality. He tries to deal with the ever-changing reality and the vicissitudes of life by subjecting himself and all his activities to a strict and immutable order. "Distances" determine his entire life.¹⁷

17. The starting point of *Crowds and Power* is Canetti's assertion that the fear of contact (the fear of being touched) characterizes the individual. All life that man knows is based upon distances: "... the house in which he shuts himself in and his property, the position he holds, the rank he desires - all these serve to create distances, to confirm and extend them" (CP:18). Similarly, Canetti maintains that the boundaries of man's personality are guarded by distance - distinctions of class, status, authority, etc. "Men as individuals are always conscious of these distinctions, they weigh heavily on them and they keep them firmly apart from one another"(CP:17).

Distance is first established by the flat in which the protagonist shuts himself up. Kien lives like a hermit in the seclusion of his windowless library, to which no one can gain access. The door, the boundary between Kien's flat and the world outside, is carefully protected: Pfaff keeps a tyrannical eye on all who seek entrance to Ehrlichstraße 24 (Turner, 1980:83). The library itself is completely sealed from any contact with the outside. Removed from the hustle and bustle of the world, the library, high above the goings-on of everyday life, indicates the separation of the principles library/city, as individuality/mass, as Werlen has observed (Werlen, 1988:15). Kien has a definitively pejorative view of the unpredictable and seemingly purposeless activities of the outside world representing 'mass':

"You draw closer to truth by shutting yourself off from mankind. Daily life was a superficial chatter of lies. Every passer-by was a liar. For that reason he never looked at them. Who among all those bad actors, who made up the mob, had a face to arrest his attention? They changed their faces with every moment; not for a single day did they stick to the same part. He had always known this, experience was superfluous. *His* ambition was to persist stubbornly in the same manner of existence. Not for a mere month, not for a year, but for the whole of his life, he would be true to himself" (ADF:13).

The scholar obstinately keeps his distance from other human beings to protect his individual integrity. Peter Kien is proud of his absolute unchangeability (his "petrified" character) and strives to remain permanently and unmistakably himself - locked in the rigid confines of his self. The impenetrability of his boundaries is maintained to an almost total exclusion of personal interactions, especially conversation (Cf. CP:284-290). The time Kien spends outside his library visiting bookshops in the service of scholarship, in his ritualistic mornings walks recalling Kant's walk in Königsberg, is arranged in such a way that he can avoid the tumult of the city. And even then, he keeps his eyes cast upwards to prevent him from seeing the few passers-by: "since he felt not the slightest desire to notice anyone, he kept his eyes lowered or raised above their heads" (ADF:13). Kien prefers silence to conversation and often refuses to answer when a question is addressed to him. When he speaks, his words are rarely understood. He hates noise, particularly human voices. In his library, books have taken the place of people and the written

word, in its apparent order and immovable content, has supplanted the messy involvement of the spoken word.¹⁸

Not only does Peter Kien impose an irrevocable distance between himself and other human beings, but he also strives to separate his mind from his body, seeking absolute supremacy for his intellect.¹⁹ He does all he can to minimize the attention devoted to the necessities of his physical existence and contemplates with detachment the actions of his own body - he takes his meals at the working desk and sleeps in a divan placed in his library. His physical hygiene requirements are reduced to fifteen minutes per day. Women and sex are not just neglected, but particularly disgusting. Everything emotional, intuitive and compulsive - irrational and so uncontrollable, is excluded. Careless about money and badly dressed, the protagonist despises all that is material. He does not even know his physical features: "If you had character it determined your outward appearance... He knew his face only casually from its reflexion in bookshop windows. He had no mirror in his house, there was no room for it among the books" (ADF:13).

Kien is the kind of thinker who rejects the everyday world, with its obvious partial uncertainties and delusions, for a supposed more real and more certain world of permanencies. Aspiring to transcend material existence and live platonically in the realm of ideas, the sinologist devotes himself to a routine of exacting and austere study - a rigid daily ritual that protects his solitary and silent encapsulation. His object of study - reconstruction of old Chinese manuscripts - given its remoteness, in historical and geographical terms, is also ideal for removing him from the present.²⁰ The distance between his mind and his body is so exaggerated, that the

18. The dichotomy between the social and the intellectual extends so far as to make a distinction between spoken (dialogue) and written (monologic) language. Darby, 1988:53.

19. At the time Canetti was writing *Auto-da-Fé*, he lived near a philosophy student who was completely paralysed. Canetti claims that the intellectual brilliance of this man, accompanied by his vital absence of the body was suggestive of the image of the totally cerebral protagonist of the novel. "This man was at the heart of the entire project" (CW:76).

20. As Darby has noted, Kien's attraction to oriental philosophies and the esoteric nature of his subject of study indicate the opposition between his science and the activities of the physical world - eating, sleeping, having sex. Darby, 1988:49.

protagonist becomes a disembodied "head without a world", as the novel labels him, a living allegory of the pure intellect or "a thinking thing", as Lovett has put it (Lovett, 1982:95).

In general, the scholar's complete unresponsiveness to environmental demands and physiological stimuli can be seen as a desire to be a truly independent individual. Aloft from the moods of social anguish and ignoring the pressure to accept and conform to the collective model, Kien supposed he could keep himself apart from the crowd. Kien insists on acting individually, minimizing his social needs and biological drives and maximizing his control over them. In other words, he tries to shift the locus of control of his behaviour from external stimuli to internal cognitive controls.

Broadly speaking, the model of individuality illustrated in the context of the novel, invites the view of Kien as the ideal enlightened man. Reason, the ability to grasp the world in rational terms and casual connections, comes together with the notion of will, volition and the acceptance of personal commitment, in order to form the model of the Kantian individual. However, the view of Kien as the ideal Kantian subject can only be understood in a particular way. While the Enlightenment program is profoundly social, Kien is extremely anti-social. While the philosophers of the Enlightenment claimed that knowledge should be used to change the world in accordance with the general needs and aspirations of humanity, the scholar of *Auto-da-Fé*, alienated in his ivory tower, is totally unconcerned with society. The project of the Enlightenment proposed that the education of the population at large was the central prerequisite for a secular and progressive society and the complete and widest possible range of knowledge was to be made available to all (Jacob, 1981:256). Kien pursues his scholarship alone; he refuses to teach or give lectures and denies the admission of anyone in his library (which is supposed to be the biggest private library in the city). Secondly, while the Enlightenment project proclaimed that man should encounter the world with the fresh joy and courage of discovery, the audacity to know, Kien fearfully retreats from the world. From the outset, he suppresses his senses and deliberately prefers self-delusion (see below, pp. 237-41).

Nevertheless, Canetti seems aware that it is the protagonist's attempt to achieve a kind of Kantian perfection that, paradoxically, leads him to contradict some of the fundamental themes of the Enlightenment program. It is Kien's insistence on becoming a truly autonomous individual, guided by a self-determining will, that inevitably drives him to such an absurd isolation. Kant claimed that man, in order to fully become man, must set himself against the determinism of the surrounding world (Goldmann, 1973:3). Kant proposed that the antithesis between "nature" and "culture" would only be overcome when morality becomes strong enough to be a "second nature" for man (*Conjectural Beginning* quoted in Anchor, 1967:111). Morality is man's duty and man's duty lies in obeying the rational law that he himself creates. If man does not obey this law of his own making, it is not because the law of nature holds domination but because man's will is weak and his disposition evil. If man is to obey the moral law however, he must set himself in opposition to the deterministic world of nature. In this sense, Kant considered "the rejection of nature as the highest moral demand, one which is both possible and necessary to the moral progress of mankind" (Anchor, 1967:111).

Canetti, crudely interpreting the austere individualism in Kant's philosophy, demonstrates that the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé* does perceive his duty in a caricature of Kantianism. Kien fiercely struggles to progress from the state of nature, where man, in Kant's own terms, was a mere mechanism as in the crowd, to a state of culture, where man has the possibility to be rational and free. Kien obstinately attempts to live as a moral being, in which enlightened thought ought to overwhelm natural impulses. However, far from achieving an "eventual and perpetual peace", he is drawn to an endless struggle with the crowd outside and inside himself. Canetti shows the impossibility of morality becoming a second nature for man. He also shows that the enlightened 'cure' for society could never come from the individual isolated spirit at all.

Kien supposed that thinking and believing alone, independent of society, could make him gain total freedom from the behavioural proscriptions imposed by history, society and physiology. However, to demarcate strictly his body and mind from the rest of the world, Kien has to represent his identity as an *a priori* structure of

human reason. This results indeed in a kind of autonomy of the ego, but this autonomy is bought at the price of a terrible isolation and instinctual renunciation. On the one hand, the protagonist becomes helplessly confined within the circle of his own universe, unable to make contact with anything external which does not turn out to be simply his own reflection. On the other hand, he is drawn to an agonizing anxiety to protect the distances necessary for keeping his personality intact. As we will examine in the following section, the distances imposed by the protagonist are continuously and fiercely attacked by the crowd disguised in various ways. Kien's inability to deal with the "other" and his inexorable determination in obeying the rational law of his own making, guides him to his own destruction, when he plunges into fire, demolishes all limits and boundaries and joins the crowd.

4.3.1.2 Eruption - The Escape of the Crowd

The fate of the sinologist can be understood as a process of eruption. As Canetti explains in *Crowds and Power*, eruption is "the sudden transition from a closed to an open crowd ... the crowd abandoning itself freely to its natural urge for growth" (CP:21-22). In the novel, this should be understood as an inner process in the individual. The protagonist, in repressing so radically his instinctual drives and the non-rational side of his nature, produces a growing dissatisfaction of the crowd within himself. Through repression, the crowd assembles its energy, which from time to time will overflow from its well-guarded space, "wanting to experience for itself the strongest possible feeling of its own animal force and passion" (CP:22). And the more severe the repression, the greater will be the violence of escape, the more furious the eruption of the crowd.

As long as the scholar lived secluded in his library and avoided all contact with the outside world, he succeeded for a time in defending himself against the forces of the crowd. The first of Kien's deviations happens in the opening of *Auto-da-Fé*, when the scholar engages in a conversation with the little boy, whom he meets in one of

his morning walks through the city. Such an uncharacteristic dialogue²¹, which Kien later reproaches himself for as a "meaningless and purposeless" mistake, creates a situation in which the scholar needs the cooperation of the housekeeper. When the young boy wants to see the library, Kien and Therese team up to throw him out. This gives the opportunity to the housekeeper to speak and, differently from the usual, she manages to catch the scholar's attention by speaking about "books" and "learning" (Werlen, 1988:23). Kien falls to an impulsive invitation to lend her a book. Immediately after, just as in the boy's case, Kien feels remorse for allowing such a transgression, which grants another person access to his inviolate realm. Only too late Kien realises that the small stimulation (the conversation with the boy and Therese) is dangerous, for a small exchange could break the whole sanctuary of his existence.

For a long time, Kien has been used to the orderly, immutable and rigid structure of his world and one breath of the outside atmosphere is enough to induce a state of drunkenness. When the dormant energy of the crowd is aroused, it clamours louder and louder for release. That same night Kien has a dream, which seems to prefigure his destiny throughout the novel. A man standing on the terrace of a temple is fending off two fierce jaguars, whom Kien recognizes as Mexican priests in disguise. They were performing a sacred ritual in which the victims know that they will die in the end. The chest of one of the victims is cut open and from the wound appear blood and books! Hundreds, thousands, a countless number of books pour out in profusion. The blood of the wounds sets them alight. Kien runs forward into the fire to save the books, but, dazzled by the flames, he realizes that they have transformed themselves into thousands of screaming people who cling to him in their desperation. Kien watches with malicious amusement as the human victims burn.

21. This apparently harmless and inconsequential conversation about books, the Great Wall of China and the tigers of India, as Dagmar Barnouw has noted, already introduces the central theme of the novel. Peter Kien has surrounded his little and ordered world of scholarship with an impregnable Chinese wall to protect it from barbarism and illiteracy or, in other words, from those elements characteristic of the crowd. But the crowd, which he imagines he has succeeded in excluding from his life, lurks in hiding in all its guises. Barnouw, 1987:122.

Suddenly, however, the people have become once more books. Horrified, he rushes to save them only to find them, as before, transformed into people. Full of repugnance and ignoring their cries for help, he shakes himself free and retreats. Again people become books and again he retreats.

There is a complex symbolism in Kien's dream, which allows more than one interpretation. In one sense, the dream may illustrate a process of eruption of the books as Kien's crowd symbol, as remarked by Stewart (1968:39). The books escape from Kien's control and explode in eruption, satisfying their need for unrestrained growth. They become a true crowd, cancelling the differences amongst them. They grow in number and expand symbolically to fill heaven and earth, and finally they catch fire. "He saw a book growing in every direction at once until it filled the sky and the earth and the whole space of the very horizon. At its edges a reddish glow, slowly, quietly, devoured it" (ADF:35). This aspect of the dream may then constitute a wish-fulfilment: hence Kien's satisfaction at the spectacle. However, Kien oscillates between a sense of pleasure and enchantment at the unlimited growth of his crowd symbol and a feeling of fear and horror at the violence of the eruption.

However, the nightmarish aspect of Kien's dream predominates. Differently from Kien's customary life with its familiar routine and strict discipline, there is in the dream a denial of ordinary chronology, consistency and meaningful ordering that cannot be contained within the schemes of Kien's rational intellect. He finds himself in a strange world of frightening and fantastic metamorphoses; he experiences the ethos of the open crowd, which is one of alarming instability. When the crowd escapes from captivity, as it must, exulting in its release from enforced inertness, its transformations are all the more vigorous and, for Kien, all the more alarming. Kien's austerity has deprived him of the pragmatic flexibility to enjoy the exhilaration and adventure of metamorphosis, but it has not succeeded in completely taming this natural urge altogether.

A parallel between Kien's dream of eruption and Canetti's study of metamorphosis in *delirium tremens* (which appears as an example of the crowd condition in *Crowds*

and Power, CP:358-369) can be drawn. As Stewart has suggested, Kien's nightmare, like *delirium tremens*, is the consequence of intoxication that leads to a different state of consciousness (Stewart, 1968:33). Also common to both are, first, the crowd vision caused by tactile and visual hallucinations, "the itching and prickling on the skin is felt to be caused by large numbers of very small creatures simultaneously" (CP:361). In the dream, Kien finds himself alone surrounded by the crowd:

"They clutched hold of him with all their strength. He hurled them from him, they came back to him. They crept to him from below and entwined his knees; from above his head burning torches rained down on him. He was not looking up yet he saw them clearly. They seized on his ears, his hair, his shoulders. They enchained him with their bodies. Bedlam broke loose. 'Let me go', he shouted 'I don't know you. What do you want with me? How can I rescue the books?'" (ADF:35).

Second, in *delirium tremens*, Canetti notes, "everything is multiplied and reduced in size but the sufferer himself keeps his normal size and, even in delirium, knows who and what he was" (CP:362). In the dream Kien remains the same while his surroundings undergo a radical change: "They [the crowd] might hold his eyes forcibly shut but in his spirit he could see mightily ... not for one moment did he forget why he was there - he was there to save books" ((ADF:35). And third, in *delirium tremens*, the transformations are always found outside the patient: "He preferably watches them from a distance. As long as they do not threaten him, and thus force him to define his position in relation to them, he enjoys their fluidity and ease of movement. But sometimes they reach a point where even a semblance of orientation becomes impossible; when everything around him is fluid and transitory he naturally begins to feel very uncomfortable himself" (CP:363). The flux of constant metamorphosis associated with the natural crowd, turns the dream into a nightmare.

In general, the dream seems to illustrate Kien's fierce struggle to keep the boundaries of his ego intact and preserve the stability of his mind against the invasion of the crowd. Kien's excessive fear of the unknown, the fear of contact, or

the "fear of being touched" that Canetti discusses at the very beginning of *Crowds and Power* (CP:15), has led him to substitute books for people in an artificially created world. Kien feels for books what one customarily feels for human beings - love, tenderness, sympathy, and compassion - he despises real humanity (Sokel, 1974:184). In the dream, the crowd of books transforms itself into a crowd of human beings and vice versa, but Kien refuses to see such an equation. Kien insists in denying the crowd nature of his books and keeps his eyes forcibly shut when they transform themselves into a human crowd. Kien battles to maintain his autonomy and fights against union with the crowd. However, as long as Kien persists in looking at himself as an isolated individual, with his body and mind strictly demarcated from the crowd, he is compressed and attacked by the 'abhorred and loathed' crowd. Only when Kien listened to the omnipotent voice of God saying "there are no books there, all is vanity" (ADF:36), could he find relief by submersion in the rhythm and roar of the crowd around him. This episode may serve to illustrate Canetti's belief about the compulsive nature of the surrender to the crowd: "It entails a yielding to others as though they were oneself, as though there were no strict division between oneself and them. There is no escape from this compliance and thus the subsequent impetus and feeling of strength is something engendered by all the units together" (CP:80).

An intriguing relationship between blood and fire in the dream seems to indicate one of the central causes of Kien's self-destruction: his obstinate and permanent evasion of the crowd. As Michel-Francois Demet has suggested, the symbolism of blood in the novel may be read as the expression of what is denied to Kien - "blood is repression, of sex, the instinct of murder, the hatred of women" (Demet, 1983:150). Kien is terrified by fire, a terrible threat to his library. In his dream his innermost fear is realised: the blood of the wound of the victims sets fire to the books. The severe and prolonged repression of the forces of the crowd (in particular, Kien's repressed sexuality and repressed instinct for murder) are exactly what leads to Kien's final collapse and the downfall of his empire. In the closing scene of the novel, Kien sees stains of blood in the carpet and imagines this constitutes an assertive proof of Therese's murder (a crime he is determined he has

committed). Trying desperately to erase the blood, Kien sets fire to the carpet and burns his library.

However, if the dream may suggest the process of eruption for the reader, it does not function as a forewarning for the scholar himself. As the symbols and dynamics of the crowd appear to Kien in the dream, he is allowed to deny them upon waking. When the scholar returns to his normal state of consciousness the following morning, he tries to render his dream harmless by the process of rationalization and analysis. Kien looks for causal connections between the elements of the dream and the events of the previous days. In a procedure typically scientific, Kien dissects his dream, - he splits an apparently complex phenomenon by analysis and then reconstructs it synthetically in a way that makes it possible to arrive at an understanding of it. Then, he reduces the discoveries to one simple and comprehensible principle. Once the chaotic reality of the dream is ordered into logical and coherent categories and fitted into the framework of abstract concepts present in his mind, he can safely ignore it. In the "light of reason", the dream is not only harmless but also ridiculous.

Though Kien tries to persuade himself that "divided into its elements a dream loses its terror"(ADF:36), the unfolding of the events throughout the novel will show that his initial fear was justified. The first exchange with Therese will make the hellish nightmare a reality. Unlike the boy, Therese cannot be turned away easily and already early next morning she reminds Kien of his promise to lend her a book.

4.3.2 The Struggle Between Individuality and Crowd

In this section, I concentrate on two aspects of the text which represent an accelerating dissolution of individuality. Firstly, we will analyse the progressive invasion of the representations of the crowd in the scholar's space, the gradual domination of his library, dismantlement of his world and his subsequent expulsion from it. The struggle over the borders of the apartment will be regarded as a model for a fight between individuality and the intruding crowd, as suggested by Werlen (1988:10-26). Secondly, we will examine the infiltration of the crowd into Kien's

inner self (symbolized by unreason and insanity), which leads to the breakdown between "head" and "world", "individual" and "mass". The protagonist finally collapses into a crowd-state, comparable to Screeber's schizophrenia.

From the moment of the novel's conception, Canetti had in mind the antagonistic interplay between the main protagonist later named Peter Kien and his housekeeper, Therese²². From the outset, the studious scholar and the cretinous maid were designed to represent the antithetical principles of individuality and crowd. As already remarked, the scholar represents the set of values related to the notion of individuality: reason (ability to grasp the world in terms of cause and effect), volition and self-control. The maid represents the forces of the crowd: irrationality (absence of logical thought), impulsiveness, hedonism and barbarism. As critics have noted, the description of the physical appearance of Kien and Therese also indicates the conventional analogies between body shapes and psychological traits: eg. meager/male equals logical, rigorous, Spartan, concentrated and fat/female equals emotional, illogical, luxurious (Werlen, 1988:38-41)²³. Precision of intellect and strength of character are linked to the physical shape of Kien's body. The reference to Kien as an ambulant skeleton (ADF:14) suggests, in a grotesque sense, that he is destitute of flesh and blood, and so deprived of the passions customarily associated with the "flesh" (Demet, 1983:147). By contrast, Therese's round, plump figure is represented by the metaphor of a slimy mussel. She is all flesh, shapeless, without structured character. The radical opposition between "head" and "world" in the three parts of the book implies that the realm of the "head" functions as a

22. The model for Therese was a real one. As Canetti relates in his autobiography, he based Therese's speech and appearance on his landlady of the room at Hagenberggasse, where he lived for six years : "her skirt reached to the floor... the first speech I heard from her is taken up *verbatim* in *Auto-da-Fé*: about the young people of today and the price of potatoes that already cost twice as much. It was a fairly long speech, and it irritated me so much that I fixed it in my mind immediately. It is true that I often heard it again word for word during the next few years. But I could not possibly have forgotten it after the first time" (CW:124).

23. Contemporary scholars have argued that women within a dualistic system of language and representation are typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture and mind. For a discussion of the representation of "male" and "female" in Western philosophy see Genevieve Lloyd, 1984:1-17 and Elaine Showalter, 1985:10-15.

synonym for the cerebral scholar, the "world" standing for the maid and her world. At the beginning of the novel, these realms seem divided by an impassable borderline.

4.3.2.1 Spatial / Physical Struggle: Kien vs Therese

Kien's own sense of his security as pure individual is directly dependent upon the security of his library. The library is a last stronghold of an isolated scholarly activity, completely separated from all social concerns. It is the ultimate "ivory tower" (Turner, 1980:80), a self-contained cosmos which provides a desperately defended immutable order against the chaos of outside reality. This space is the first to be attacked and upset by the disturbing forms of symbolically conceived crowd life.

Kien is extremely protective of his privacy and rudely repels all intruders. Although the library is separated and secured from outside invasion, it cannot, however, be immune from the attack of dust. At the beginning of the novel, dust is Kien's major enemy, for it constitutes the natural enemy of books. In Kien's mind, it represents the hostile crowd (cf. CP: 67) and to eliminate this tiny, almost invisible enemy, Kien is obliged to seek the help of a housekeeper. Only through a constant, never-ending battle against this insidious, ubiquitous foe can he keep his own closed crowd of books alert and intact.²⁴ Therese, in Kien's eyes, is merely a human duster and it is as such that she is introduced in the novel: "He called into the hall: 'Your best duster, please'. Almost at once the housekeeper knocked at the door" (ADF:21). Therese's instructions are to dust one of the four rooms from top to bottom every day, and on the fifth to start again with the first.

24. In *Crowds and Power*, Canetti takes the bacilli as an example of those invisible, harmful crowds. Only a few people have actually seen the bacilli in the microscope, but most people are aware of their power to harm and their concentration in numbers in very small spaces: "... everyone has heard about them and is continuously aware of their presence and makes every effort not to come into contact with them - though this, considering their invisibility, is somewhat a vague endeavour" (CP:47).

As already remarked, women, in the eyes of the scholar, represent barbarism, uncontrollable frenzy and sexuality, and therefore have to be kept away from Kien's temple of rational inquiry. It is inconvenient that the duster cannot dust without Therese being there. From the beginning, the scholar acknowledges that Therese poses a constant threat of re-connecting him to the physical and social world. So, Kien delineates a second borderline inside his abode to keep her away from the library. Therese is only allowed in the kitchen and her little room next to it. All her attempts to enter the library are futile. The housekeeper tries in vain to cross the borderline and complains in one of her monologues (ADF:28). For eight years, the strict demarcation line that separates the scholar from the maid's world was maintained by an absolute lack of personal exchange. When Peter Kien deviates from his strict norm, he starts a series of events that will eventually lead to a complete reversal of their original position. A single conversation with Therese constitutes a tiny breach in the wall surrounding Kien, which will lead to the downfall of his entire realm (Werlen, 1988:21-5).

Therese knows that the surest way into his heart is through books and she tricks him by showing a fictitious devotion to books. Although Kien is full of suspicion, he misinterprets Therese's deceptive words and actions and, reasoning that she would constitute an extra protection for his library in case of fire, he marries her with abrupt quickness. Kien is really simple-minded. Therese, who was contracted to keep at bay the elements of disorder, and appeared to Kien a resolute ally in the heroic struggle against the crowd (dust, fire) becomes herself a dangerous, treacherous enemy. Therese progressively invades Kien's world in three crucial ways: she introduces noise; she introduces the possibility of sexual activity, resulting in the grotesque episode on their wedding night, and she introduces the possibility of change.

Having the legal status of wife, Therese's first demand is the removal of the firm border between the library and her confines (Werlen, 1988:23). Within a week, Kien loses three quarters of his library to her. Therese's occupation of her conquered space is palpably demarcated by a disturbing set of furniture she brings into the flat. The role of the furniture in the narrative, as several critics have noted,

is an extended pun in *Auto-da-Fé*. The "dazzling pieces" - the dining table, bed, wash-stand, and night table - are all related to essentially physical activity (Darby, 1988: 54). The "furniture", which semantically means movable goods (French: *meuble*, Latin: *mobile* - mob), symbolizes the extension of Therese's world into the scholar's realm (Turner, 1980:80). Aware of that, Kien intends to undo the invasion, but just as Therese cannot be removed, the furniture too remains. The scholar then makes a specific determination that he will not be distracted by any superfluous piece of furniture. Adopting the logic of *esse principi*, he reasons that the "shameless block of wood" (ADF:79) cannot exist if he does not perceive it. And just as he had previously applied it to the distractions outside his library, the scholar in a childish way simply closes his eyes to the furniture (ADF:64).

Struggling to protect his sanctuary, the protagonist tries to trade space for silence. In a first attempt to shut Therese up, "whose vocabulary consists of no more than fifty words" (ADF:55), Kien, believing that the power of writing words will suffice to restore the peace in his library, draws up a contract. Although this measure proves to be ineffective, the scholar continues to assume that his enlightened mind and his superior command of language will impose the proper authority over Therese²⁵. He uses rational arguments with the appropriately chosen words to overpower his opponent's incoherent speech (ADF:59). However, it soon becomes clear that words makes no impact at all upon the illiterate Therese. Rational discourse is helplessly infective against the continuous onslaught of her senseless barrage²⁶. The maid's idiotic and vicious talk, like the sea, sounds like a thousand voices. Therese's speech, as critics have remarked, consists mostly of everyday idioms, sprinkled with proverbs, and an incoherent litany of constantly repeated banal exclamations. Kien cannot categorize it. It cannot be reduced to coherent

25. The scholar's reliance upon the power of words to protect himself has been examined by Lovett, 1982:97.

26. Werlen has remarked that Kien's rational rhetoric is subverted by Therese: "she is immune against Kien's arguments because she counter-acts them with non-sense that precludes all logical communicative exchange". "Attempts by Kien to engage in a rational exchange are foiled by an unpredictable pattern of answers which does not make reference to the previous statement". Werlen, 1988:47-50.

communication which makes sense, and, again, like the sea, it cannot be silenced. Kien dreams then of growing ear-lids.

Because speech is ineffective for achieving its desired goals, physical force tends to replace spoken exchange²⁷. Both Kien and Therese display a sadistic violence against each other. When the maid begins to extend her domestic domain into the scholar's preserve, Kien enlists, in his imagination, Pfaff's fist to get rid of her (Turner, 1980:82). In another passage, Kien, intending to strike Therese, has the following thoughts: "He imagined the marks of his fingers on her gross, overfed, shiny cheeks. It would be unjust to give one cheek preference over the other. He would have to slap both at once" (ADF:65). "He will beat her to pulp; he will strike her. Dead or alive. He will spit on her! He will stamp on her, he will strike her!" (ADF:139). While Kien represses his violent desires, Therese carries out her brutal attacks. In the culmination of the maid's aggression upon the scholar, she beats him pitilessly until exhaustion. Kien turns himself into a statue, and, unconscious, has to be thrown onto a bed, where he lies motionless for days (ADF: 140-1). After this episode, Kien develops a new defense technique, called by him "petrification", in which he turns himself into a granite statue, sitting immobile for hours (ADF:143). By becoming an inanimate object, Kien refuses to participate in any power-struggle²⁸.

27. The role of speech in *Auto-da-Fé* has received considerable attention from critics. The dialogues are seen as "battles" and mutual assaults, strategic meanings set up by antagonists to obtain a dominant position over one another. As Werlen has argued, "The dialogues between Kien and his maid are short and explosive exchanges, "blows", which are deflected by the armor of the acoustic mask of the other" (Werlen, 1988:47). For the thread of violence displayed in the novel, see Idris Parry, 1965:145-166 and 1981:151-73 and Peter Russel, 1975:355-83.

28. Kien's attitude can be connected with the schizophrenic behaviour of *negativism* that Canetti discusses in *Crowds and Power*: "They [the schizophrenics] often give the appearance of being paralysed within themselves, as though there could be no connection between them and the other people; as though they could not understand and did not want to either. In their obstinacy they resemble statues; there is no attitude in which they may not petrify" (CP:322)

Showing that right thinking does not necessarily lead to the right action, all of Kien's attempts to regain his lost territory prove to be futile. Therese not only tightens the control of the space she has gained, but now proceeds to build the same rigid borderline that Kien used to separate her from the library. Kien is only allowed in half of his room and a dividing line is drawn in the corridor leading to the toilet. All the rest of the flat is the maid's domain. Frustrated in her sexual expectations and unable to confiscate Kien's bank book, Therese finally launches the scholar into the headless world of the street.

In the ongoing power struggle enacted between Kien and Therese, we witness the scholar's complete impotence to defend himself. Kien has based the organization of his whole life on barricading himself in the confines of his library and reducing the unintelligible outside noise. Consequently, the hermit scholar becomes totally unable to deal with the "other", the things outside himself. The difficulty with which Kien moves the furniture in contrast to Pfaff's ease, denotes such impotence (ADF:79). The verbal exchanges with Therese subvert the wall of Kien's rational, ordered world. The maid's nonsensical utterances win over the sinologist's logically ordered speech. Kien's enlightenment could not prevent the appropriation of the library by an outsider and his subsequent expulsion. Extended to the more general antitheses of the novel, Therese's victory means the first step of the victory of the crowd over the individual.

The three defence techniques developed by the sinologist: the self-induced blindness to eliminate physical form; the idea of growing ear-lids to exclude noise and the voluntary petrification to escape from the threat that Therese represents - all lead to illusory success and are referred to in the text as "delusion". While superficially Kien seems totally powerless in his silence and passivity, these tactics actually serve to preserve his illusions of the absolute autonomy and power of his mind, against anything that may contest the omnipotence of his individuality. However, these defense strategies are not just ineffective against the intrusion of outsiders, but they

also contribute, as becomes increasingly evident, to the self-destruction of the scholar. Either by suppressing his senses or by "petrification", the scholar only becomes more rigid and exposed to the forces of the crowd. As we will examine in the next section, Kien's failure to see that the crowd was within himself, and therefore he could not be invulnerable to it, seals his fate.

4.3.2.2 A Journey Into the Mass

Kien's transition from the realm of his library, "a head without a world" into the "headless world", represents a journey into the "mass". Suddenly, the scholar sees himself banished from his former quiet microcosmic existence and wavering in the agitated, chaotic life of the outside world. The rigorous silence of the library gives place to the noise and tumult of the great city. In his library each object had its definite place in the strict order of things; here all is in disarray, in flux and transformation, a kaleidoscope of ever-changing shapes and colours inexhaustible in their variety.

In encountering the outside incomprehensible realm of utterances, the scholar, in order to preserve his "character", has to cling even more obstinately and faithfully to his own internal world. The struggle to protect the fragile contours of the "I" in this chaotic bustle (a world that is without the structuring power of the intellect) becomes more rigorous and grotesque. Having lost his protective isolated abode, Kien sticks more and more desperately to the last relic of his former existence to defend himself: reason. He interprets the world around him from his own isolated perspective, void of any empirical mechanism or verificatory interaction with external reality. Consequentially, he becomes increasingly susceptible to the power of delusions and his persecution mania grows at the same rate. Like Screber's case of paranoia, discussed in *Crowds and Power* (CP:434-48), the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé* sees the crowd everywhere and becomes convinced that everything has the intention to confuse his reason and destroy him.

4.3.2.3 The Crowd Within the Individual

Kien, instead of changing the shape of his character and becoming part of the crowd in this new strange world, adheres inexorably to his internal cognitive controls. He attempts to reproduce the routine of his former life and his first and only concern is still with books. Being deprived of his library, he embarks on the task of finding another one. He explores every bookshop of the city, but instead of buying the books, he simply stores the titles in his mind. Carrying a new imaginary library in his head, he can nourish the illusion that he continues to be guarded by books. Again, books, in the mind of the deluded scholar, play the role of an imaginary protective army, a loyal "crowd chrystal". Kien becomes even more inflexible and vulnerable, which makes him an object of manipulation in the hands of the other characters.²⁹

In this second part of the novel, Fischerle assumes the former role of Therese and the enemy is no longer dust or fire, but women. And just as Therese was able to exploit Kien's hatred for dust and concern for books, so now Fischerle wins his affection even more completely, pretending an undying love for books and a decisive hatred for women. Fischerle, who is one of those "bad actors, who made up the mob" (ADF:13) as Kien calls the people he sees in the streets in his morning walks, is quick to adapt. Perceiving Kien's passion for books, the dwarf adapts to the new situation in order to rob the scholar of all his money.

The scholar's complete ineptitude in the outside world is a source of much grotesque comedy in the second section of the novel (Sacharoff, 1978:99-112). Kien, by never grasping the real intention of the other characters, falls victim to the most bizarre interpretation of their words. In the same way that the scholar used to interpret Therese's words according to the categories of his own logic and failed to discover her real intentions, so it also happens with Fischerle. Fischerle says that millions of books are trapped within the walls of the national pawnshop, the

29. Mechthild Curtius, suggesting an analogy between the "Headless World" and the modern world of free-enterprise and free-competition, remarks that Kien proves to be an incompetent there. Rather than an active participant in the material competition, he is the object of exploitation by the others. He is robbed down to the last penny. Curtius, cited in Lovett, 1982:131.

Theresianum, and crying for Kien's help. The scholar cannot accept that the human race is buying and selling off books at an auction as if they were mere slaves, mere people. Assuming the role of a saviour, he sets out to rescue the captive books and save this "stagnating crowd" from the martyrdom of being stored away in the spoiled attics of the pawnshop.³⁰ Fischerle says that this barbarism is surpassed by the "cannibalism" of the pig, who, the dwarf insists, "eats" books. That, too, Kien accepts without question.

As Kien's passion for books intensifies, so does his persecution mania. In Kien's construct of reality, all threats to himself as well as to his books (his army) are synthesized in the figure of women, specifically Therese. In the enumeration of the figures he imagines working in the book department of the Theresianum, he sees Therese. The danger that Therese formerly posed to his microcosmic reality is now extended to the whole world. Kien begins to believe all the books in the world are threatened by extermination: a "baiting", murderous crowd is chasing the "slow", "stagnating" crowd of books (also an image of the double crowd of friend and foe). To calm the scholar, Fischerle fabricates the news of Therese's death. Kien, rationalizing its necessity, immediately elaborates a detailed version to explain the cause of her death - he had locked her in the library and she had starved to death despite eating herself.³¹

When Therese and Benedict Pfaff unexpectedly appear in the Theresianum laden with books, Kien is shattered in panic. Just when Kien believes he has crushed one of the most threatening representatives of the enemy crowd, it erupts before his eyes. Perplexed, Kien only later is able to explain the phenomenon to himself as "hallucination". Yet, perceiving the threat to his mental clarity, the protagonist is determined to struggle with the utmost tenacity against the assault of these enemies.

30. Kien's obsession for rescuing more and more books can be read as his desire to increase his crowd. As we will examine later, one of the most striking symptoms of Kien's growing insanity as a will-to-power springs from this irresistible growth of the crowd.

31. This reference to cannibalism is another indication of Therese's barbarism. In his testimony in court, Kien is impressed by the fact that she has eaten her own meat without cooking, for it reveals that she is not a civilized being: "if she had at least cooked the meat" (ADF:278). See Michel-Francois Demet, 1985:147.

The scene of the judgment of Kien's imagined murder of his wife is illustrative of the rigidity he is capable of reaching in order to maintain the lucidity of his mind. Kien's twenty minute account of his locking Therese in the library, of her starving to death despite having eaten her own body, and the destruction of her blue skirt by the dog represents an internal analysis, guided by wishful thinking. Again, when Kien faces the living Therese in court, he cannot believe his eyes. He touches her, hears the crackling of her starched blue skirt, smells and even attempts to taste her³². The scholar cannot admit that his reasoning is wrong and the physical presence of Therese is true, so he convinces himself that his senses deceive him. In other words, he persuades himself that his mind can truthfully deny the reality of the world: the form of Therese that he "seems" to see is only hallucinatory.

In denying his sensory experience, Kien flagrantly contradicts one of the fundamental principles of the Enlightenment project, which asserts that scientific inquiry should start with clear and distinct *sensations*³³. The empirical spirit proposed by the Enlightenment program establishes that scientific examination should start with solid facts and from observation and experience arrive at a theory: "one should not seek order, law, and "reason" as a rule that may be grasped and expressed as their *a priori* ... The mind must abandon itself to the abundance of phenomena and gauge itself constantly by them. Only in this way can the genuine correlation of subject and object, of truth and reality be achieved" (Cassirer, 1951:9). Kien inverts this principle and places abstract knowledge before perception. He does indeed attempt an exacting observation and uses all his senses, sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell - but he still cannot convince himself that the

32. "Kien trembled with cold. He opened his eyes and turned them on Therese ... the fixed eyes of the criminal remained fixed on the woman, bored themselves into her and grew strangely rigid Then Kien lifted an arm and extended it until he touched Therese's skirt. He compressed a fold of it between two fingers, let it go, and reached the next fold. He drew a step closer; he seemed not wholly to trust his eyes and fingers, and approached his ear towards the noise which his hand drew from the starched folds; his nostrils quivered ... Kien opened his mouth possibly with the intention of tasting the skirt.." (ADF:277)

33. Locke asserted that all our ideas are entirely dependent on experience. An investigation of the function of the experience should not *precede* any determination of its object whatever, and should seek to investigate its nature on the basis of knowledge derived from sensation (Anchor, 1967:72).

external reality is the source for verification of "truth". His determination to evade from the crowd is so strong that the fabrication of his mind proves stronger and forcefully imposes itself upon his factual experience. In such an inversion, Kien's logic does not derive from reality to describe it, but precedes, determines and even excludes it.

On the other hand, the judgment episode portrays the disintegration of the structures of meaning, by creating multiple subjective interpretations, as suggested by Turner (1980:82). In the court, where ideally truth should be brought to light, we see the culmination of collective blindness, a jam of misunderstandings, where no shared pattern of reality is available. Pfaff interprets the murder Kien claims to have committed in terms of his own guilt. Therese imagines Kien is admitting the murder of an earlier wife. For Kien there is no mystery, there is only incorrect reasoning. He is convinced that he has murdered Therese. Each character integrates the truth they perceive into their own construct of reality.

The important point to be stressed here is that Kien is only armed with reason to come to terms with his deep-seated fear of the crowd, and the threat it implies to the structure of his mind. For Kien, reasoning is a strategy to be applied (like the maxim *esse principi*) in the defence of his belief-world. He fails to recognize that the rational categories structured in his mind are only artificial constructions incapable of understanding the assaults of the chaos of the inner and outer worlds. Therefore, Kien insists on believing that the crowd does not constitute an insuperable threat to the mind.

When later Kien is made the prisoner of Therese and Pfaff and the maid throws a bowl of soup at him, he realizes that the power of his mind is no longer strong enough to guarantee that Therese is merely a hallucination. With his mind proving as deceptive as his senses, the disturbed scholar begins to doubt even his very existence and the body that he apparently occupies. In total desperation, Kien cuts off one of his fingers, as if seeking an empirical proof of his existence. As Kien begins to doubt his reason, he loses the power to defend himself against the disrupting forces of insanity and the threat that the crowd implies. The extent of the

infiltration of the crowd forces into his inner self that he cannot control, besides his failed attempts to defend the integrity of his belief-world, prove fatal.

The crowd freshly released from the intolerable restraint on its growth soon sweeps away the last vestiges of repression, breaking with everything else that stands in the way of its urge to unrestricted growth. Just as Canetti relates of Schreber's paranoid persecutory mania, Kien assumes that everyone, every appearance, everything surrounding him is intended to deceive him - his delusions of persecution become intolerable (CP:448-462). Kien feels persecuted by crowds which, as Canetti remarks in *Crowds and Power*, always appear threatening and hostile to the paranoid individual. At this stage, Kien equates the colour blue (sea) and red (fire) with the crowd. In total abstraction, the crowd symbols no longer need the apparently tangible support of Therese's skirt, or Pfaff's trousers and hair, but the colours *per se* are able to provoke the most vividly basic fears of the crowd.

In the last chapter, Kien is locked alone in his flat. Therese and Pfaff have been sent away by George. But Kien still feels hunted by the colours blue and red, skirts and tigers, now fabrications of his own mind and so no lock on the door could keep them out. He sees Therese's blue skirt everywhere; it changes into more dangerous creatures (like tiger) that he has always feared. For a long time Kien had perceived that blue was an enemy colour that should have been exterminated and banned from the world. Sometimes, in dreams, Kien had beaten and tramped on Therese's blue skirt:

"Suddenly he [Kien] had a pair of scissors in his hand and cut it up into tiny pieces. It took him a long time to do it. When he had cut up the skirt, the pieces seemed too big to him, she might sew them all together again. Without lifting his eyes he started all over again: he cut each piece into four. Then he emptied a whole sack of little blue rags over Therese. How had all those rags gone into the sack? The wind blew them away from her and on him, he felt then blue

bruises all over his body, and moaned out loud Strange, it seemed to him that he was carrying them all" (ADF:143)³⁴.

Now Kien attempts to eliminate everything blue from his flat. He even strangles the birds (thinking they are blue) and throws their corpses into the street together with the finger he has cut off. However, he cannot eliminate this disturbing colour from his mind - it invades his head, fills his room and occupies his bed - his terror becomes overwhelming: "Scarcely has he thus expelled everything blue from the room when the walls begin to dance. Their violent movement dissolves in blue spots. They are skirts" (ADF:362). "Skirts, skirts, skirts and yet more skirts" (ADF:423).

These episodes can be read as the disintegration of the protagonist's self into the schizophrenic experience, where all things undergo metamorphosis transcending the rigid classifications of rational thought. Objects play tricks on him and transform themselves into other objects. Kien also starts hearing 'voices' that talk 'to him and in him'. The 'voices' the sinologist hears are taken as independent entities and not his own fabrication - they invade his mind, destroying completely his autonomy and privacy. "Kien pressed his hands against his ears but it [the voices] sounded the same" (ADF:425). Through the schizophrenic experience, the dichotomy between self and world is finally obliterated. Kien, who manifested the paranoiac ambition to assert total domination of the rational intellect over the world, is finally possessed by the things of this world: "everything comes together in the head and thus becomes one again" (Sontag, 1980:187).

34. It is possible to argue that, Kien, in cutting Therese's blue skirt into innumerable small uniform pieces, produces a compact and dense crowd formed of small units. These tiny blue particles blowing into the air suggests an analogy with rain, which is for Canetti a crowd symbol. As we read in *Crowds and Power*, "...the rain is more strongly felt as a unit while it is actually falling. Rain falls in drops. There are many of them, they can be seen and the direction is particularly noticeable and the number of falling drops emphasizes the uniformity of their direction... There is a sameness in the impact of the rain-drops, and the parallel lines of their fall and uniformity, both of their sound and their wetness on the skin, all serve to accentuate this sameness" (CP:82). Rain also stands in *Crowds and Power* for the crowd's disintegration: "Drops fall because they can keep together no longer and, it is not clear whether, or when they can coalesce again" (CP:82).

In the last chapter, "The Red Cock", the final surrender of Kien to madness is a multiform expression of the crowd. A set of Canetti's crowd symbols - blood, the colour red, fire, appear insistently and are written in capital letters. In a frenzied flux of metamorphosis, the crowd symbols transform one into another. Kien's delusions are populated by illusions of victimized and persecuted crowds. He hears fire engines ringing through the streets and sees from the attic window the reddish glow in the sky. He imagines that all books in the Theresianum are burning and desperately crying for his help³⁵. Kien also hears mobs of police and citizens knocking on his door to arrest him for the supposed murder of his wife. In his hallucinatory state, Kien sees bloodstains in the carpet and imagines this constitutes criminal evidence against him that must be destroyed and so he sets fire to the carpet. With the flames flickering before his eyes, Kien tries to return to his former peaceful world, the written world of books; but he does not manage to read a line.

The letters are "dancing". He commands them to be quiet. Animated by Kien's hallucination, the letters detach themselves from the page and assault him physically, slapping, kicking and striking. The books now as a "reversal crowd", "this damnable revolutionary mob" (ADF:427) are "now taking their revenge on him, for the long time he has made them suffer and has gone unpunished" (CP:456-7). As the lines dance up and down, the letters jump out of their pages and the pages out of their book bindings, the "closed crowd" transforms itself into the "open crowd", the "stagnating crowd" into a "rhythmic crowd". "The books cascade off the shelves onto the floor" (ADF:427). Order is broken, power is overthrown, rationality disintegrates. In this destruction of the scholar's artificially created cosmos, the crowd triumphs.

Ironically, it is in his library, the refuge Kien has used against the human masses, that the books finally reveal their real grievance and turn themselves into a crowd.

35. The red in the sky which Kien supposes is caused by burning of books in the Theresianum finds echo in some of Canetti's own personal experience of the crowd. In *Conscience of Words*, Canetti reports that he was out walking one night and suddenly noticed a red glow in the sky produced by the city lights (an experience described as an illumination which revealed to him the nature of the crowd) - a phenomenon which he also observed as he watched the burning of the *Justizpalast* (CW:126).

It is his books, once his loyal army and "spiritual stuff" used as a counterpoise to the threat of the despised illiterate barbarians as he called everybody else, that finally in reversal attack him. Since this ultimate eruption is the revolt of the crowd from within the individual, there is no way to curb it. Kien then makes a heap (another of Canetti's crowd symbols) of all his books in the hall and sets them on fire, after which he returns to the top of his ladder and waits laughing for the flames to engulf him. What would seem impossible at the beginning of the novel happens:³⁶ Kien burns the library he has devoted his entire life to preserving and joins the crowd that he has so relentlessly struggled to evade.

The examination of the crowd in this chapter leads to the conclusion that Canetti sees the crowd everywhere: in the streets, in the library, in the head. There is not a safe refuge from the crowd as there is no way to curb nature, the physiological and non-rational side of man. Even the most obstinate enlightened individual cannot tame completely the crowd within himself.

Canetti dramatically represents that the transition from the normal state to that of the crowd presupposes a breakdown of the individual consciousness as it exists in ordinary life. Kien's trip into the Headless World leads him to succumb to the temptation of self-dissolution, which the real Kant thought that man should at all costs resist. However, unlike the general tendency amongst crowd theorists and writers, including Dickens and Zola, Canetti does not necessarily view with contempt the shattering of the dictates imposed by conscious thought. On the contrary. In the crowd-state, the protagonist finds relief from the pain and anxieties

36. The view that the persistence and severity of repression leads upward towards the extreme and "the impossible", is asserted by Georges Bataille in his study about eroticism, sensuality and taboo. Bataille remarks that excess of denial tends to make the eruption of desire even more compelling and far more contemptible when it reaches its climax: "Excess leads to a moment when what is felt through the senses is negligible and thought, the mental mechanism that rules pleasure, takes over the whole being. Without this excess of denial, pleasure is a furtive, contemptible thing". See Georges Bataille, 1984:173.

involved in preserving the boundaries of his pure self-identity. He liberates himself from the threat of the crowd and the fear it inspires in those who try to evade or to control it.

That Kien would finally burn himself in his library, Canetti explains in *The Conscience of Words*, was something he had decided long before he had worked out anything in the novel (CW:123). The implications of Canetti's apocalyptic conclusion, however, only become fully comprehensible in the light of his discussion about power. Kien, presenting a pretence of uniqueness and striving to be invulnerable and impenetrable, presents indeed an unbridled will-to-power. As we will argue in the next chapter, Kien as the prototype of a paranoiac ruler, offers the pathological case for discussing the psychology and structure of authority and many aspects of power present in *Crowds and Power*.

Chapter 5

Canetti: the Madness of Power and the Sanity of Crowds

5.1 Introduction

Crowd writers in general have always agreed that there is a link between crowds and power worth analysing. Canetti is, like Dickens and Zola, chiefly interested in political crowds. However, Canetti develops his argument in a diametrically opposite direction from that of received crowd theory.

Broadly speaking, crowd theorists have always maintained that unreason, the prevalence of instincts, volatility and barbarism are constantly present in crowds. Since the crowd is usually conceived *a priori* as mindless and unconscious, the explanation for its behaviour could not be found within the crowd itself, but had to be found outside it. It becomes something of a general conviction that the crowd needed a leader both to keep the crowd together and to command its acts. So, the need for a leader, by definition, becomes natural and indispensable. This means that the crowd was passive in the face of manipulation and its acts could only be explained by manipulation. Crowd theorists assert that crowds, slaves of instincts, respond to momentary impulses and lack the self-discipline necessary for survival

and community life. However, crowds constitute a major threat to the established order because they come together to put power into the hands of a new leader.

In this sense, the leadership phenomenon becomes the core of crowd theory. Since Le Bon, crowd theorists devoted most of their effort to the study of the psychological mechanisms of the creation of a crowd and the transference of power into the hands of a leader. A case can be made that the explicit, theoretical, scientific interest in the crowd was raised to solve the puzzle of how crowds as masses come into being in order to deal with the even more difficult task of governing them. That is, to "teach" governors what to do when faced with the crowd which was upsetting the whole play of political life¹.

No matter whether the leader creates the crowd or the crowd creates the leader, the crowd was seen as at once the source of the leader's power and his instrument for manipulation. Crowd theorists have generally regarded the crowd as an alternative source of power and, most frequently, as an illegitimate power, which threatens the legitimate, established patterns of power in orderly societies (McClelland, 1989:297). Le Bon's theory of the hypnotic influence exercised by the leader's prestige or Freud's theory of libidinal attraction implies that the leader could lead the multitude into heroic struggles and make them perform positive works. The leader could, on the other hand, order his horde of followers to wreak immense destruction, to commit unimaginable crimes, and they would obey him immediately (Nye, 1975:167). The essential premise was that the leader exercises total control over his followers, who have no defence against his commands².

1. Le Bon openly declared his ambition to become the "Machiavelli of mass society" (Moscovici, 1985:49-67). Since the politics of the future was seen to be a struggle for the leadership of the crowd, it was vitally important to find out what kind of leaders the crowd produced in order to know what kind of leaders the crowd would accept. Le Bon proposed that his analysis of the phenomenon would provide a solution for the problem of governing mass societies.

2. Canetti is above all interested in the rise and success of Nazism: "the creed of a great nation, leading, under a "Mongol Prince", to the conquest of Europe and coming within a hair's breadth of the conquest of the world" (CP:447).

Canetti, being an intellectual Jew who has survived the Nazi massacre, is extremely suspicious of power. Everywhere in Canetti's writings it is possible to find a "refutation of power", as Susan Sotang has put it (Sotang, 1980: 192). In *Crowds and Power*, Canetti ranges very widely to refute the Hobbesian notion of the power that *comes from* crowds. Against the traditional view of the crowd as an illegitimate power base arising to threaten established power, Canetti argues that power, in all its forms, whether one chooses to call it legitimate or not, *feeds on* crowds. Therefore, *all* forms of power, for Canetti, are crowd power.

Canetti casts doubts on many postulates set by crowd theory to understand the link between crowds and power. Canetti is aware that crowd theorists' reliance on the hypnotic model of leadership created the expectation that a leader, like Hitler, would one day come and command his crowd to carry out horrendous crimes. And these commands would be obeyed even in defiance of the most essential principles of his followers' own conscience, because there was literally nothing they would not do for him (McClelland, 1989:32). In other words, if the leader could really fill the mind of his followers with whatever content he wanted, then there was nothing one could do about it; there was no defence against the possibility of joining the butchers of history. Canetti sees the holocaust of millions in the two World Wars and the threat of nuclear global extinction neither as accidental nor as the result of a hidden and impersonal crowd power, but as the result of conscious human action. Canetti knows that the crowd can present a grim face, yet he resists acceptance of the received crowd theory's claims that men become passive brutes, killing because they have been ordered to, because they were "blindly" loyal or were spellbound.

For these motives, Canetti is bound to make a theoretical separation between crowds and leaders (McClelland, 1990:295). Canetti provides both a content for the crowd mind and an analysis of its behaviour mechanism, which are independent of the crowd leader. To discard the notion that the individual eagerly submits to the authority of the leader and passively accepts the leader's command of how he should think and behave, Canetti elaborates a rationale that permits the crowd to be something in itself and to act for itself. In his view, the individuals fuse in the crowd not because of the unqualified submission to the leader but in response to a

drive that comes to life in the crowd itself, an inherent desire to experience the joyous sensation at the prospect of an imminent de-individuation. Furthermore, Canetti's complex typology of crowds is intended to show that there is not *one* crowd, but *many* crowds with *different* crowd minds. For Canetti, therefore, what a murderous Nazi crowd has in common with the crowd during socially well justified strikes or peaceful demonstrations is not, as received crowd theorists maintain, primarily a question of the relation between the crowd and the leader, but rather a powerful impulse coming to life in the crowd itself.

In Canetti's view, it is not the crowd but the leader who presents the real threat. For the seeker of power to achieve his position, to maintain or to expand, he has to engage in a manipulative relationship with others, in which he has necessarily to subjugate, surpass and finally betray others. In extreme cases, the obsessive and unbridled will-to-power, which Canetti connects with paranoia, becomes very threatening indeed. The despot, to strengthen his position or to overthrow his rivals, does not hesitate to sacrifice countless lives for the sake of his own survival. Authority of this kind cannot be exercised without violence and cunning tyranny.

Although Canetti's account of the link between crowds and power only becomes fully comprehensible in *Crowds and Power*, *Auto-da-Fé* provides many insights in that direction, as we intend to discuss in this chapter. Firstly, we will pay attention to Canetti's view of the dynamics of how power feeds on crowds, to explain why wielders of power need crowds, and how crowds become part of the paranoid illness of power. Through Kien Canetti seems to provide a convincing psychopathology of power. The totalitarian mentality of Kien and the way he behaves towards physical objects and imaginary crowds can be correlated to the way that autocratic rulers behave towards men. We will also consider the novel's characters' common megalomania and struggle to maintain control over others, which inevitably leads to ruthless individualism and crude violence.

Secondly, we will attempt to demonstrate how the dynamics of crowds, in Canetti's perception, constitutes the opposite of the dynamics of power. In contrast to the petrified personality of Peter Kien and the helpless isolation of the other characters,

the visions of the crowd engendered by the novel suggest a kind of crowd state that can liberate the individual by taking him into a new collective experience.

5.2 The Ruler as Paranoiac

In the figure of the paranoiac protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé*, Canetti seems to provide a complete account of what goes on in the mind of a paranoiac ruler. Kien's attitudes - desire for exclusiveness, greatness and omnipotence; his wish to maintain his world inviolable and his delusions of invincibility - can be understood as what Canetti's calls the "illness of power". Although many of these characteristics have already been pointed out in the previous chapter, it is worthwhile reconsidering them in the light of the aspects and elements of power discussed in *Crowds and Power*, such as "Secrecy and Silence", "the Prohibition of Transformation", "the Survivor", amongst others. Some repetition will seem then inevitable to arrive at a more precise picture of Kien as a paranoid ruler and to understand his murderous attitude towards crowds.

5.2.1 Judgment and Condemnation

First, the protagonist's sense of greatness can be related to the "ivory tower" mentality commonly attributed to the scholar (Thorpe, 1986:63). He sees himself removed from the everyday world, where those illiterate barbarians, as he calls all others, live. The hyper-intellectual of *Auto-da-Fé* secluded in his library preserves for himself the power of "judgment and condemnation"(CP:296). That is, he enjoys the prerogative of establishing categories of good and bad, arbitrating what belongs to each. Kien shows in various disguised ways this kind of pleasure in "exalting himself by abasing others", and "relegating others to a group inferior to which he himself decided he belonged"(CP:296). For example, it was Kien's custom to look through the windows of every bookshop in his morning walks, "to be able to assure himself, with a kind of pleasure, that smut and trash were daily gaining ground"(ADF:8), while "he, himself, was the only person in his great town who possessed a library that could be taken at all seriously"(ADF:10).

5.2.2 Secrecy and Silence

Kien almost never shows himself in public. He refuses to teach and never appears at celebrations or conferences, leaving his academic fellows in constant expectation: "Those who had known him in his earlier years had forgotten what his face was like; he had no photograph nor wanted to have one taken"(ADF:16). Such a voluntary withdrawal from ordinary human relationships, makes Kien's person mysterious and inaccessible, as if he was a "guardian of a treasure which is inside himself" (CP:294). However, at every conference, Kien makes sure to send a paper "of the most estimable value for science", ensuring that he remains a "much discussed person" (ADF:15-17).

The most important reason for Kien not engaging in conversation with others, as already remarked, is fear of the subversive power of communicative interactions and the danger they pose to the autonomous self: "no intrusion on oneself is permitted" (CP:375). In *Crowds and Power*, Canetti argues that one of the ways in which personal freedom is defined consists largely in having a defense against questions. Canetti understands questioning as an expression of power and "a forcible intrusion" into other individuals' freedom. Every dialogue containing questions constitutes a small breach into the fortress of the personality, a crack through which the constant flux of the world can enter and subvert the strenuously upheld encapsulation of the self. "A man who maintains a deliberate silence does not allow others to see through him" while he "who is answering a question is forced to reveal more of himself" (CP:285). The inner armour against questions, Canetti says, is a possession of a secret and "secrecy lies at the very core of power" (CP:292).

5.2.3 Prohibitions on Transformation

Obsession with identity, self-preservation and distinction culminates in the will-to-power. Kien is proud of his absolute unchangeableness and the faithful perseverance of his character. However, to preserve his character, Kien has to stop the endless flux of metamorphoses that occurs in the chaotic reality of the inner and outer world. As discussed in *Crowds and Power*, the psychopathological aspect of the

"distances" that each man creates to protect his self and to keep him apart from others, is that of immobility. Silence, immobility and isolation inhibit self-transformation:

"A man who will not speak can dissemble, but only in a rigid way, he can wear a mask, but he has to keep a firm hold of it. The fluidity of transformations is denied to him... People become silent when they fear transformation. Silence prevents them responding to occasions for transformation... Silence is motionless" (CP:294).

Interestingly, Kien's face is described as a mask. The mask, which freezes the naturally mobile features of the face, represents the end state of transformations beyond which no further changes can occur: it is a static point in a fluid world. "The mask is only known from outside it reveals nothing of what is behind it"(CP:376). The mechanical regularity of Kien's daily habits, described earlier as a means to diminish the scholar's attention to his physical existence, can be understood in this context as a paranoid desire to reduce the world to a constant sameness, making it understandable, manageable and safer³. The meticulous routine and his exaggerated emphasis on order serve to reduce the threatening multiplicity of his existence to a structured uniformity, which accords with the designs of his omnipotent will. To remain permanently and unmistakably himself, only himself, Kien needs to perpetuate a dichotomy between a permanently structured self and a rigidly patterned world. Only by being fixed and immutable could he maintain the stability of his world-order, and feel an absolute control and command over it. "A ruler wages continuous warfare against spontaneous and uncontrolled transformations" (CP:370-3).

As Canetti argues, the ruler's sense of power depends not only on suppressing transformations in himself but also in controlling transformations in others. He uses against others the "power of unmasking", which enables him to make everybody the same. Being suspicious of all others, the despot, Canetti claims, sees everybody as an enemy. The urge to unmask appearances and discover enemies "becomes a kind

3. For further remarks in insanity in *Auto-da-Fé*, see W. H Sokel, 1983:185; R. Karst, 1983:138 and E. Thomson, 1973:42.

of tyranny" (CP:378): "He waits for the right moment 'to tear the mask from their faces'; behind it he finds the malevolence he knows so well in himself" (CP:377-8).

5.2.4 The Survivor

To protect his personality from any challenge and to ensure that his private world remains unchecked, Kien is led to a radical intolerance of everything that goes against his will. Only in banishing everybody from his life and ruling out any deviation in his hermitic library⁴, is Kien left free to conceive himself as a "pure self"; his subjectivity can be perceived as unlimited; his reason can be elevated to the conception of the absolute. Only by eliminating the "other" can Kien feel the exaltation of a survivor⁵.

Already in the first chapter, Canetti suggests to us that the protagonist's indifference to the external world and alienation from "sordid" life is closely related to a schizoid-like negativism. In one of his morning promenades, Kien, walking with the eyes cast upward, does not realize he is being asked the way to Mut Strasse. Kien looks at this scene passively as a third person, observing a "second" man admirably silent. Only when his sleeve is violently jerked does he realize that he was the person being interrogated. The Mut Strasse episode, taken by Kien as an event that enters in his "stupidity-book" (reserved for things he wishes to forget), shows clearly how the protagonist prefers to remain a speechless observer, unapproachable and aloof when his existence requires a concern with everyday matters (Lovett, 1982:96).

Denial of others is reaffirmation of oneself; but it is soon obvious that if it is unlimited and pushed as far as it can go, it becomes a quest for inflexible sovereignty. Kien's sketchy awareness of society and his preference for self-

4. Such remarks about Kien suggest Canetti's later comments on Adolf Hitler's lack of trust in others, his preoccupation with security and his concern with the protection of his library: "In these surroundings into which no-one can get to him, he feels at ease. There he lives untouched as the sole and only being he considers himself to be" (CW:65-72).

5. This notion of "survival" (CP:227-278), is crucial for establishing the link between leaders and crowds in Canetti's thought. See below, pp.265-266.

delusion increases as the novel progresses. The more the process of self-preservation is effected the more it requires self-alienation and domination of the self by outside people and things. It ends up in a paranoid process that drives him to destroy everything he supposes that is challenging his sovereignty:

"The greatness they [the paranoiacs] imagine is always under attack and their notions tend also to become more and more rigid ... When the hostile crowd gets the upper hand, these turn into delusions of persecution" (CP:407).

As is meticulously unravelled in *Crowds and Power*, the process of acquiring and maintaining power induces anxiety. The ruler's ability to issue a command⁶, allows him to surpass others, arriving at the power position. However, the command, which is obviously always much more visible on the marks it leaves on its victims, also affects its originator. The ruler even in his success is left with the threat of recoil, growing into what Canetti calls "anxiety of command", the fear that the inferior will one day take his revenge. "The despot lives to command and he needs to dissemble his anxiety, as he already dissembles his 'inner malevolence'" (CP:377). But after a life-time, it can increase and can suddenly manifest itself as madness, as with certain Roman emperors (CP:309).

5.2.5 Immortality

Finally, Kien's enormous sense of self compels him to strive towards immortality. Canetti reminds us in *Crowds and Power* that the paranoiac tends to think in immeasurable time-spans and feels eternity as part of himself (CP:435-436). Kien is the owner and master of a library containing books of all ages and cultures that transcend time and space. There, Kien can feel elevated above everyday life, beyond the reminders of his mortality. He holds history (comprised in his books) in the sight of his eyes (Sokel, 1974:185). In another sense, in his solitary abnegation to

6. Canetti presents the notion of "command" in *Crowds and Power* in the palpably physical image of an arrow, which wounds those it hits. The "command" is either "a sentence of destruction or carries with it the threat of death". "Power discharges commands like a ... hail of arrows; those who are hit must surrender themselves. The command wounds them and also summons and guides them to the seat of power" (CP:303-5).

achieve "knowledge", he persuades himself he could become part of "truth" and then become immortal. As we will note later, "knowledge and truth for him were identical terms" (ADF:13).

5.2.6 The Entrails of Power: Seizing and Incorporation

To give greater concreteness to the concept of power as traditionally embodied in the more abstract theories of the state, Canetti associates it with bodily functions, like ingestion and digestion. For Canetti, the exposure of the "entrails of power" assumes a literal meaning: power has its own physiology, whose description reveals the hidden mechanisms of domination. The physical activities that keep man alive and the struggle between predator and prey comes to concretise some aspects of power, which always gravitates between the poles of survival and death. *Auto-da-Fé* also illustrates this association, supporting the view that power *feeds* on crowds.

Central to the paranoiac system of Kien is his relationship with books, which are his crowd, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Despite - or because of - great scholarly erudition, Kien is ruled only by the obsessions of acquiring books and pursuing his scholarship. The increase of books, symbolically representing the expansion of *his* crowd, confirms in him feelings of superiority, greatness and distinction. The sight of endless rows of books gives Kien confidence, power and a sense of protection.

Kien's fixation with accumulation of books and his complex relationship with them can be correlated with the idea of self-consumption and self-increase, discussed in *Crowds and Power* (CP:107-11)⁷. Showing his only passion in collecting books, Kien strives to increase their number as much as possible. "Books, even the bad ones, tempted him easily into making a purchase"(ADF:8-9). At the prospect of

7. Analysing rites, legends and ancient myths from different cultures, Canetti claims that men symbolically grow stronger by the incorporation of animals, plants and objects that are associated with strength or power. For example, Canetti notes in the legends of the aborigines a special totem which is part human and part kangaroo and is regarded as the common ancestor of both. In establishing an ancestry relationship with this animal, the aborigines, Canetti says, have fulfilled symbolically their desire of increase since "the numbers of kangaroo were always larger than those of man" (CP:107-12).

receiving a vast amount of money from Therese's imaginary inheritance, he immediately sets about planning a dramatic expansion of his library, an operation that would involve the demolition of the wall dividing his flat from the adjacent one. With the expansion of the crowd container, he could add a colossal number of new books to his collection⁸.

For the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé*, power can also be identified with the process of ingestion and digestion. More than a mere obsession to possess books, Kien strains to "incorporate" the books into himself⁹. Wherever the scholar went, he carried a minute portion of his library in his briefcase well-filled with books. It is as if he wished literally to insert the books into his body:

"He clasped it [the briefcase full of books] tightly to him in a very particular manner which assured that the greatest possible area of his body was always in contact with it. Even his rib could feel its presence through his cheap, thin suit. His upper arm covered the whole side of elevation, it fitted exactly. The lower portion of his arm supported the case from below. His outstretched fingers splayed out over every part of the flat surface to which they yearned" (ADF:9).

Kien privately excused himself for this excess of care because of the value of the books' contents. There was nothing more precious than his priceless volumes, so seizing their contents he could be endowed with their value as well. Because of the remarkable memory of the scholar, we are again assured that Kien has "absorbed"

8. "He would rent the neighbouring flat ... there would be space for a good 'sixty thousand volumes'. Old Silzinger's library had recently been offered for sale... it contained about twenty-two thousand books, not to be compared with his of course, but one or two things important in it"(ADF:125-126).

9. "Seizure of another body is power in the raw Cannibals *incorporate* their captives to degrade them into excrement" (CP:209). According to Canetti, degradation justifies power. Anyone who wants to rule men soon realises the secret of degradation. The despot tries to degrade men to the status of animals and the worse he treats them, the more he despises them; when they are of no more use to him, "he disposes of them as he does of his excrement, simply seeing to it that they do not poison the air of his house"(CP:210). See McClelland, 1989:315.

thousands of books in his head. The scholar has in his mind "a library as well provided and reliable as his actual one":

"He could sit at his writing desk and sketch out a treatise down to the minutest detail without turning over a single page, except in his mind. Naturally, he would check the quotations and sources later, but only because he was a man of conscience. He could not remember a single occasion on which his memory had been found at fault" (ADF:17).

"Incorporation" obviously furnishes Kien with power. Once the whole substance of each individual book of his library is "comprised", Kien becomes a kind of living library, containing within him all the forces and potentialities that were dispersed (CP:413-414). Just because he is isolated, he can see himself as superior. His value is the value of what he contains and it is his duty not to allow it to escape.

Kien attempts to manipulate the original force of the crowd he imagines on his side, both to strengthen his position and to overthrow his enemies. By the incorporation of the crowd into the self, Canetti informs us, the individual is not only elevated but he is also protected: "the paranoiac retaliates against the attack of the crowd upon him by seeking to absorb them into himself" (CP:440). The role of Kien as a despotic ruler, seeking to subjugate the crowd for his own survival, becomes increasingly clear as his library is progressively invaded. One of the best examples occurs in the scene in which the troubled scholar transforms himself into a commander-in-chief and mobilizes his imaginary army of books into a state of war against Therese. Kien tries to persuade the mass of volumes that the "alien power" is their "common enemy"(ADF:81). He climbs a ladder, "his head touched the ceiling, his extended legs reached the ground, and his eyes embraced the whole united extent of the library"(ADF:81). Explicitly in terms of a military operation, he commands:

"For some time, more precisely, since the invasion of an alien power into our life, I have been labouring with the idea of placing our relationship on a firm foundation. Your survival is granted by treaty, but we are, I take it, sage enough not to deceive ourselves as to the danger by which, in defiance of a legal treaty, you are threatened"(ADF:81).

"Do not overestimate the strength of the enemy, my people! Between the letters of your pages you will crush him to death, each line is a club to batter out his brain; each letter a leaden weight to burden his feet; each binding a suit of armour to defend you from him! A thousand decoys are yours to lead him astray, a thousand nets to entangle his feet, a thousand thunderbolts to burst him asunder, O you my people, the strength, the grandeur, the wisdom of the centuries" (ADF:85).

The more Kien feels threatened the more he needs the crowd. When he is thrown out of his library, his first and sole preoccupation is to acquire all the books he can. Having exhausted the list of all the books-shops in the city and still not satisfied, he sets out to obtain the books of the national pawnshop. With the increase of his paranoia, Kien finds himself burdened with the task of carrying an imaginary library in his head. What seemed first a metaphorical expression regarding the phenomenal memory of the scholar, comes to be taken by Kien as a concrete reality. Every night he has to unpack the books, remove them from his head and lay them on a piece of brown paper placed on the floor of his hotel room. The weight of them would otherwise prevent him from sleeping.

Despite his supposed love and sympathy for books, Kien represents a real threat to them. As we have already seen, Kien's bookmania reverted into pyromania. Throughout the novel the books were forced to serve Kien (either to enforce his notions of greatness or to defend him against the hostile crowd). However, immediately after he perceived that the books were no longer ready to respond to his commands, he does not hesitate to threaten them with death by fire. His commands were to be obeyed absolutely and to disregard any of them meant death (CP:424). Being unable to control a supposed state of rebellion, he actually ends by exterminating them all. In this light, Kien's suicide may acquire a new interpretation. As a defeated paranoiac despot he does not die alone, but takes with him all his troops, so no one may enjoy the power of surviving him.

5.3 Enlightenment and the Totalitarian Mind

Much of the "illness of power" displayed by the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé* find its roots in his Kantian attitude of mind. In the struggle to maintain his autonomy and evade the crowd, Kien becomes a autocratic paranoiac ruler. Reason is used by him as a strategic tool for the domination of inner and outer nature. Not only does Kien strive to impose a total domination of the intellect over the world, control his environment and subjugate everything to the designs of his will, but he also presents a grim tendency to eliminate all "other" that cannot be accommodated within the rational scheme constructed in his mind¹⁰.

In an age that has become more and more disillusioned with enlightened modernity and the political application of reason, Canetti shows through his deluded paranoid character that the project of demystifying the world and freeing it from myth and superstition can indeed be turned against enlightened rationality itself. We have already remarked (see above, p. 36) that a perspective similar to Canetti's is developed by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where these authors attempt to trace the roots of facism. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the model of mind established by the Enlightenment is implicitly totalitarian. In the Enlightenment ambition to impose a rational order of the intellect upon all existence (which, like Canetti, they associate with paranoia) and the fear of whatever might challenge the omnipotence of the autocratic rational self, Adorno and Horkheimer can see the possibility of a totalitarian domination. We will now examine how the reversal of the humanist values of the Enlightenment is carried on by the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé*.

5.3.1 The Portrait of a Paranoiac Kantian Subject

Kien has based his entire life upon the enlightened belief that reason, intellectual self-reliance and science could demystify the world and make him the master of his

10. See Canetti, "Hitler according to Speer" in *The Conscience of Words*, 1976:65-72. See also Paolo Valesio 1986:182.

environment and his own destiny. He thought that knowledge and self-determined will could work as an antidote to the crowd outside and within himself. He believed that rational thinking could purge the world of its magic and mystery and thereby create a world-order, stable, structured, coherent and safe.

Kien supposed that the intellect, by accurately and consistently naming things, makes it possible actually to "know" the world. Persuading himself that nothing exists beyond his classification, Kien says:

"You have only to know an object by its proper name for it to lose its dangerous magic. Primitive man called each and all by the same name. One single and terrible web of magic surrounded him; where and when did he not feel threatened? Knowledge has freed us from superstitions and beliefs. Knowledge makes use always of the same names, preferably Greco-Latin, and indicates by these names actual things. Misunderstandings are impossible" (ADF:354).

The scholar believes that the rational structure of his mind can impose an equally rational and coherent order upon all existence. From this follows his conviction that through the proper use of knowledge, he can master his environment, making the world predictable, controllable and safe. However, in this attempt to demythologize experience, Kien creates a new mythology. In his obsession with always finding causal relations for all phenomena, he becomes the centre of an egocentric system using reason in a way no less superstitious than that of primitive men. Kien shows a self-satisfaction of knowing in advance or, to use Canetti's words, he shows a "mania of unmasking" the world, which finally becomes an end in itself. Canetti's argument in *Crowds and Power* about such a mania in paranoiacs seems so applicable to Kien that it is worth quoting in full:

"Nothing that happens to him is chance or coincidence, there is always a reason, which can be found and searched for. Everything unknown can be traced back to something known. Every strange object which approaches can be unmasked and revealed as something one already possesses. Every fresh mask hides something familiar and all that one needs is courage to see through the mask and tear it off boldly. Finding 'reasons' becomes a passion and is let loose on everything... He leaves the original act of creation to God

but everything else to do with the world is drawn into his private net of reasons and made his own"(CP:452).

In a similar perspective, Adorno and Horkheimer have argued that the Enlightenment, intending to secure itself against the return of the mythic, had proclaimed the universality of the *idea* in such way that it brings about the inescapable reversal of reason into myth. As these authors explain, with the anticipatory identification of the conceivable with the truth, the new appears as predetermined, which is accordingly the old. "Man imagines himself free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown ... Nothing at all may remain outside, because the mere idea of outsideness is the very source of fear" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1973:16).

Clearly, it is this fear that makes the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé* establish and defend "distances" between himself and the outside world so absurdly. It is fear of being violated and infringed upon, "the fear of being touched", that leads him to wish for an unvarying identity and the will to outlive all others. As we have already discussed, Kien's security as a rational thinker is directly dependent on his self-detachment from the world. Like the book-lined wall of his library, Kien has attempted to built a wall around his mind to protect his intellectual purity from contamination with the multiple, chaotic and ever-changing reality of the outside world. In his windowless library, as in his hermetically closed mind, he attempted to enclose himself in a totally self-referential world-order, protected against the touch of the unknown.

As Canetti makes clear, the sense of grandeur and power displayed by this totalitarian mind is always correlated with delusions. First, the written word is for Kien a source of security and delusions of omnipotence. In his scholarly work, the reconstruction of ancient Chinese manuscripts, Kien devotes himself to the past without reference to the present, and, in so doing, he only finds confirmation of his perceptions. As Thorpe has noted, the reconstruction of the old manuscripts points to what he already knows (Thorpe, 1986:69). Kien equates "knowledge" with the accumulated information stored in his memory; "...knowledge and truth were identical terms to him" (ADF:13).

Secondly, the stability of Kien's coherent and structured view of the cosmos could only be guaranteed as long as he succeeded in protecting his mind against attacks from disturbing realities. The scholar has kept his eyes closed to almost everything that surrounds him, except when in front of a book. Underpinning such a voluntary selective blindness, the deluded character shows an awareness that, in order for his mind to function at all, it must "blind" itself to the vast magnitudes of space and time, which would otherwise undermine his sense of certainty.

"Blindness is a weapon against time and space, our being is one vast blindness, save only for that little circle which our mean intelligence can illuminate. The dominating principle of the cosmos is blindness ... this printed page, clear and co-ordinated as any other, is in reality an inferno of furious electrons. If he were perpetually conscious of this, the letters would dance before his eyes. His fingers would feel the pressures of their evil motion In a single day he might manage to achieve one feeble line, no more" (ADF:63-64).

In this piece of solipsism, eyes and mind conspire to protect their illusions from reality by ignoring it. As Stewart has put it, "the eyes see only what is acceptable to the mind; the mind in turn sees only the evidence of the eyes" (Stewart, 1968:107). Safely enclosed in this circle, Kien can pursue his scholarship without distraction and disturbances. The result of a selective blindness is in one sense desirable: we are told that theses sprout from Kien's desk as mushrooms - an appropriate image from the world of darkness¹¹. Inverting the Enlightenment proposition, Kien arrives therefore at the conclusion that "Ignoring is in the blood of the learned man. Learning is the art of ignoring" (ADF:356).

Kien makes a virtue of his restricted vision and closed mind; he persuades himself that they are not symptoms of weakness, but symptoms of strength. Unpleasant sights are disturbance, unpleasant experience is disturbance. The principle of selectivity is adapted to the scholar's intellect and emotions. Just as the eyes can

11. Kien is particularly concerned with the welfare of his eyes. Peering through Pfaff's peephole at night, Kien is assured by the uniformity of the darkness outside. Once closed, the eyes need not open again until a similar density and uniformity are restored in the outside world.

shut out unpleasant impressions, so the mind can impose its will on reality and truth. Disturbing feelings are obliterated, inconvenient thoughts are masked (Stewart, 1968:107). The comforting darkness of the inner eye is renamed "consistency". Clearly, as emphasized by Philip Zimbardo, consistency means a form of defence:

"On a personal level, consistency is a safeguard against chaos, it is the ordering of rationality that is in constant struggle with the irrational forces within and outside the individual. Thus, consistency becomes a self imposed principle in order for the individual to maintain a conception of himself" (Zimbardo, 1969:239).

Kien uses the ordering categories of his mind to abstract and transform threatening phenomena of the world into harmless and manageable concepts. He presents a totally cerebral approach to existence and systematically rationalizes all his experiences. In other words, he "blindly" relies on the power of reason to protect the stability of his mind against the threatening "other"¹². As a result, Kien's mind with rigid abstract patterns, gains total ascendancy and forcefully imposes itself upon his experience in the world (Thomson, 1973:43). That is, the reality present in his mind, replaces the actual one, becoming the unique and the only justifiable reality (see above, pp.239-240).

Although Kien appears to convince himself that he can annihilate disturbing forms, this seems a mere pose because his very effort to protect himself against their invasion constitutes an implicit affirmation of their existence. All defence techniques used by the scholar against the threat of the forces outside him - the principle of selective blindness, the idea of growing ear-lids, and petrification - are false forms of resistance and therefore constitute self-deception. As discussed in the previous chapter, Kien's artificial distances from the external and internal chaos could not be maintained - he had not only lost his library and fallen prey to the exploitative attitude of the individuals around him, but had also lost the struggle

12. For the Kantian thinker, this "other" can be understood as everything that does not submit to the rational categories of thought and is therefore conceived as irrational.

against the instinctive, irrational side of his own nature. The crowd in the outside world and the crowd within himself has triumphed.

The fact that we can see that Kien has not really obtained the position of power he strove for should not matter in this context because others with similar attributes and perversions, Canetti suggests, have actually succeeded. To Canetti an accurate investigation of power should ignore success. He believes that the examination of an illness provides clues to the understanding of the nature of power: "a madman, helpless, outcast and despised, who drags out a twilight existence in some asylum, may, through the insights he provides us, prove more important than Hitler or Napoleon, illuminating for mankind its curse and its masters"(CP:448).

The relevant point to be stressed for the development of our argument is that, for the protagonist, or any seeker of power, to maintain his illusion of superiority and greatness he has to diminish and annihilate others. Self-preservation culminates in the survival of oneself and the destruction of others. At this point Canetti's analysis of power and crowd meet. In the same way that Kien asserts his supremacy as a powerful individual by purging his environment of distracting phenomena, so the despot and the paranoid would-be ruler persuades himself into seeing as "vermin" everything that opposes him. Kien's response to the "furniture" is analogous to his response to "crowds". This illusory superiority of man to all other living creatures is expressed in *Crowds and Power* in an account of the episode of man's first encounter with the bacilli (the crowds of microscopic particles surrounding him). In this model of the dynamics of power, Canetti identifies what he calls a central myth in the history of human thought:

"Man, with his enhanced opinion of himself, increasingly seeing himself as an individual detached from his fellow-creatures, was suddenly confronted with entities much smaller even than vermin, multiplying even more rapidly and invisible to the naked eyes. On the one hand, was himself, greater and more isolated than before,

and on the other a crowd larger than any he had previously imagined, of infinitesimal creatures" (CP:363).

When a desire for power is carried to its extreme, Canetti implies that the dialectic between self and world is obliterated, by the self acquiring absolute supremacy. The supreme subject no longer promotes a dialogue between his inner world and the changing outer world but rather tries to subjugate all the world by the reinforcement of his fixed ideas. To maintain order, to command, the despot must conduct "a continuous warfare against spontaneous and uncontrolled transformation"(CP:378), imposing patterns of a changeless self upon all varied and changing appearances. Opposing the principle of transformations, he asserts the principle of immutability.

The paranoiac ruler perceives his self as the centre of everything and becomes a god-like creator of a world that is nothing but a projection of his will. The despot's dream, as Adorno and Horkheimer have claimed, is "to find in the world only a repetition of his will, a mere reproduction of unfettered fulfilment" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1973:31). By neglecting all other people and reducing them to "vermin" and "inferiors", the leader can make them objects of his absolute control. The totalitarian mind, Canetti argues, detects behind all the multiplicity of appearances only the presence of an enemy which challenges his omnipotence. The dictator sees everything as a sign of danger challenging his illusory greatness. The paranoiac ruler, Canetti says, "uses every means to keep danger away from his person" (CP:231).

"Instead of challenging and confronting it and abiding the issue of a fight which may go against him, he seeks by circumspection and cunning to block its approach to him. He creates an empty space all round him which he can survey, and he observes and assesses every sight of approaching danger. He does this on all sides, for he knows that he is dealing with many who may simultaneously advance against him, and this keeps awake in him the fear of being surrounded. Danger is everywhere" (CP:231-2).

By subjecting his whole life to the demands of his survival, the dictator is led to eliminate all that appear to threaten him - ending by exterminating them in millions

as one can crush innocent ants or nasty vermin¹³. As the threat increases, stronger and more insistent becomes his "passion" for killing others (CP:230). In this perspective, it is finally possible to see that all that Kien or a despotic ruler really wants is to become a survivor, "standing in an immense field of corpses". To be the last man to remain alive, Canetti thinks, is "the deepest urge of every real seeker of power"(CP:443).

5.4 The Headless World

5.4.1 The Social Space of *Auto-da-Fé*

Having investigated the psychopathology of the ruler, a question arises - What does Canetti tell us about social space? How do his characters operate in a social dimension? What has this to do with crowds?

The public space caricatured in *Auto-da-Fé* can be read as Canetti's critique of the project of a rational society. In the "Headless World", we see "worlds" within a world. All the main characters of the novel are guided by private monomanias that, although very different from each other, are pursued with the same intensity as Kien's obsession with books. Therese, sexually frustrated, is dominated by lust for money. Fischerle, the hunchbacked dwarf, a pimp and thief, has the goal of establishing himself as a world chess champion. Benedickt Pfaff, the former policeman, seeks power over others by naked terror and brute force. Each character is so obsessed with realizing his/her desire, that they do all they can to manipulate and gain ascendancy over the others. The grotesque figures exchange unreliable information, deceive, and use physical force to impose their will. Their common lust for domination leads to a tendency to eliminate or be eliminated, to crush or be crushed.

13. Philip Zimbardo analyses the Nazi extermination of Jews in the perspective of dehumanisation of the victims, by degrading them to an inferior and harmful form of life. See "A different form of Deindividuation: Dehumanisation", 1969: 296-299.

Unlike the Enlightenment utopian vision of the world in which the human reason would achieve mastery over the environment and individuals, freed from tyranny, superstition and dogma, Canetti pictures instead a society in which order is maintained by domination. Unlike the classical liberal perspective, where the competitors would enter into voluntary contractual relations with one another, if their interests would be mutually served thereby, the characters of *Auto-da-Fé* present isolated and incompatible designs. To combine their separate obsessions into a social whole is impossible.

A number of factors depicted in the novel contribute to undermining the model of a rational society. The breakdown of communication and a Babel of linguistic confusion in *Auto-da-Fé* are aspects that have received considerable attention amongst the critics¹⁴. Like Kien, the other characters act as if either the others were not there or are there only to be dominated or annihilated. Therese, Fischerle and Pfaff interpret the world around them from their isolated perspectives, without any testing for reality. Far from the classical liberal principle, according to which the individuals would act in a collectivity according to logical calculation, connecting means and ends, there is instead a polyphony of incompatible voices and points of view. The characters, totally absorbed in the impossible realization of their obsessions, hardly listen to their antagonists, let alone verify their utterances. Dialogue is replaced by a series of monologues. They are all victims of delusions. As Werlen has put it, no character in the novel can serve as a model for a rational individual (Werlen, 1985:87).

The social space depicted in the novel suggests also a caricature of the crude individualism and free-enterprise of capitalist societies. The basic action of *Auto-da-Fé* consists of Therese's, Pfaff's and Fischerle's competitive struggle to gain control over Kien's money. This aspect of the novel - the possible loss of the individual autonomy in the face of economic power - has received little attention amongst the critics. However, it is not our intention to pursue such an examination here. Our concern is to assess the general lines of the social context depicted in *Auto-da-Fé*,

14. See Lovett, 1982, Werlen, 1988 and Darby, 1988, *passim*.

arguing what the dynamics of power have to do with crowd phenomena. In other words, we will pay attention to the characters' rivalry and struggle to achieve and maintain domination over the others, in order to reveal how the crowd could constitute a liberation for the individual entrapped in the monomaniacal struggles of the social network.

5.4.2 Notions of Greatness in the Characters of *Auto-da-Fé*

In their dreams of greatness, accumulation and quick increase, the other characters of *Auto-da-Fé* resemble greatly the mental patients that Canetti has analysed in the section "General Paralytics and their Notions of Greatness" in *Crowds and Power* (CP:402-408). Interestingly, money here is a crowd symbol that is common to the principal characters of *Auto-da-Fé*. Money during runaway inflation assumes the original crowd characteristics that Canetti discusses in his monograph¹⁵: "... units of money urge to increase by leaps and bounds until the figures run into millions, from which point onwards it is these millions which play the decisive role" (CP:402). "With his millions he [the general paralytic] engulfs objects and makes them his; with both money and objects he engulfs men, that is, wins them over" (CP:406).

Therese grotesquely fights to seize Kien's belongings. But her success, far from satisfying her greed for money, only intensifies it. Therese finds an exceptional delight in making an inventory of Kien's library and she writes the name of each book in small strips using as small letters as possible. Despite sacrificing intelligibility, she achieves the maximum of density, which she stresses by sewing the strips together. In an interesting passage, Therese, intoxicated by the thought of the enormous wealth she imagines she will inherit after Kien's death, adds zeros onto the sums registered in his bank-book and dreams about that multiplied amount

15. Canetti sees the period of inflation as "a crowd phenomenon in the strictest and most concrete sense of the word... The unit of money suddenly loses its identity. The crowd it is part of starts growing and, the larger it becomes, the smaller becomes the worth of each unit. The millions one always wanted are suddenly there in one's hand, but they are no longer millions in fact, but only in name" (CP:185-6). Canetti recognizes that this process of rapid and unlimited growth is the same growth that characterizes the crowd.

of money, which she is convinced she will one day possess. The compelling magic of the million blinds her to the fact that she is committing a pointless forgery.

In Therese's imagination, the growth of her money is associated with the increase of her personal power and enhancement of her sexual appeal. She is fifty-seven, but she believes that money can make her thirty years younger, and irresistible to men. Just as Kien believes that his erudition keeps him apart from the crowd, so Therese imagines that her inheritance will place her far above the multitude of rival contenders. The episodes in which Therese perambulates in public places consistently illustrates her belief that she is the only one who is not part of the crowd. As she walks through the streets, she sees herself as the most beautiful woman in the world and imagines herself being feverishly acclaimed by the crowd.

"On her way home suddenly she heard music. Here come soldiers playing the loveliest marches ... The band-master never takes his eyes off her. The soldiers too ... Other women join the crowd - she is the most beautiful of all. ... Soon there's a huge crowd. She doesn't care. They make way for her. Not one forgets to look at her. Softly she hums in time with the music: like thirty, like thirty, like thirty" (ADF:123).

Similarly, in the episode in which Therese goes to the furniture shop, she takes possession of all shops with their contents on the way and transfers them into a savings-book in her mind (ADF:250). Transforming everything into money, she achieves homogeneity, which increases in density and uniformity. As the addition grows bigger, she mistakes the increase of her crowd-symbol (money) with her sexual allurements. In her intoxication, she tries to seduce the young salesman, forcing her embraces on him.

The hunchback dwarf, Sienfried Fischerle, is also obsessed by money. His dearest ambition is to sink in mountains of bank-notes, millions of them. Like Therese, he struggles to deprive Kien of all his money, which he fantasizes will enable him go to America, where he will become a chess champion. He has grandiose plans for the money, which in America will grow astonishingly quickly: he will build himself a palace; millions of people will flock to this palace to pay homage and receive alms.

He will give millions of dollars to his destitute friends, he will be surrounded by beautiful women and marry a millionairess.

Fischerle's vision of universal and unrestricted power follows the same pattern of the other characters. Here, too, the process of growth is twofold: as Fischerle's wealth quickly increases in quantity, so he grows in stature accordingly. He becomes the "world's greatest chess champion", and foresees the complete physical destruction of his opponents. The diminutive suffix of his name is to be removed: he must be referred as "Master Sienfried Fischer" instead of Fischerle, the contemptible cripple. For Fischerle, fame is all the more important. He imagines himself presiding at a press conference, where the reporters kneel down at his feet and shrink to dwarf-like proportions. He auctions information about himself to these thousand suppliant reporters: - one thousand dollars, ten thousand, a hundred thousand, he would not listen until they arrive at ten million dollars (ADF:182). Fischerle's pictures were to be in all the newspapers and he was to be known by millions of anonymous, insignificant and nameless people. His deformities were forgotten or concealed; his hump was made to disappear under a special suit.

Fischerle's crowd-fantasies are obviously also fantasies of power. As his self-esteem grows with the imaginary wealth, a dynamic devaluation and humiliation of the others follows. This seems a process without an end. As he can elevate himself to any height, so he can reduce others to any depth, to a state of utter worthlessness. This process finds affinity, in Canetti's thought, with crimes and abuses of power carried on by old tyrants or by modern dictators, who reduce their victims to a state of being less than human. Canetti, in his extreme suspicion of the exercise of all power, warns that the "illness of power" also appears under the guise of mercy and compassion. Fischerle is also to be seen as a generous man; he would found a charity and put a million in this foundation; he would give a million to his former wife so that she would not need to prostitute herself any more (ADF:180-4). Fischerle's contempt for others, however, only express his intoxication with power. Comparable to the paralytics' visionary order described in *Crowds and Power*, Fischerle makes no distinction between buying and giving away. All kinds of millions stood ready at his disposal. "Coming or going, these millions flow through

the hands of the 'great man'; it is him they obey"(CP:408). In his gigantic palace with real castles, knights and pawns, new records are established: "he plays by night and by day thirty simultaneous games of chess with living pieces which he has to command"(ADF:180-184).

The fantasies of the characters of *Auto-da-Fé*, like those of the general paralytics, arise in profusion and multiply with astonishing quickness. Every dream is fulfilled as soon as it comes into their heads, and is then discarded for another even greater (CP:402-408). Without any trace of a reality principle to balance their fantasies, a dream only has to arise for them to believe that all the potentialities of power, (fame, money, knowledge, beauty) present in the dream are actual reality. From this moment on, they subjugate the whole of life to the demands of their all-powerful selves, intending to possess all within their grasp.

Important to stress for the development of our argument is that both paranoiacs and general paralytics are "rulers of crowds", in Canetti's view. For the paranoiac, as we have seen in the previous section, the crowd is positively hostile, while for the general paralytic, the crowd plays a supportive and loyal role¹⁶. The general paralytics' attitudes, Canetti says, are derived from the feeling that the crowd is always on their side:

"It is important to stress the active and friendly role assumed by the crowd in the delusions of the general paralytic. It never opposes him but provides the willing material for his plans, realizing for him every desire that comes into his head. He can never desire too much, for the crowd's capacity for growth is as limitless as his own" (CP:407).

Money as well as books are typical symbols of sophisticated, civilized society. Both are used as a mechanism to create differences; books and money help to define roles in society, placing some individuals above others in the social hierarchy; they

16. Canetti does not specify what kind of crowd he is talking about, as any type of crowd is supposed to serve the paranoiac's purpose (CP:402-408).

contribute to moulding one's sense of self, and help to reinforce the distinctions of a stratified social structure¹⁷. As Canetti would say, money and books are used to create "distances": "Men as individuals are always conscious of these distinctions, they weigh heavily on them and they keep them firmly apart from one another" (CP:17). In the characters' minds, books as well as money are expressions of their personal superiority over the crowd. However, they are also a muted expression, for in order to ensure their safety the characters must keep them hidden. Kien seals his books in his library; Therese hides her money in a trunk in her bedroom and Fischerle in his armpits.

In the minds of the characters, the urge to growth of their crowd symbols lends them an inexhaustible capacity for self-deception. Canetti is extremely skilful in portraying the discrepancy between a character's internal desires and external reality. Using the technique of the grotesque, Canetti makes one realise the blindness of the characters and the absurdity of their visionary plans. Their dreams and illusions are repeatedly shattered. The physical attributes of the characters comically contradict their ambitions or psychological traits¹⁸. Kien, the ascetic and withdrawn scholar, who strives to attain absolute autonomy of mind, and sees himself as the greatest living sinologist, as already noted, is an extreme example of the skinny physical type, debilitated and weak. The illiterate Therese, who dreams of being beautiful and a universal object of sexual desire, a "woman of no more than thirty", is old, short, stout, graceless and muscular. She is proud of the "blue" of her starched skirt, sees herself as an "innocent white dove", but in her dreams and sexual desires we see how obscene she is. While the colours white and blue are traditionally associated with "purity" and "innocence", here they come to mean exactly the opposite (Parry, 1971:160-2). Fischerle, the Jewish dwarf, who fantasizes about becoming the world chess champion and a star amongst the women is only notable because of his hump; his height does not reach above Kien's knees. He is ugly and his nose extends beyond reality; he can smell money with it. While

17. For a discussion of the role of status symbols in the social construction of reality, see Kertzer, 1988: 85-87 and Berger and Luckman, 1967: 110-121.

18. See, Sacharoff 1978:99-112; Parry, 1965:160-2 and Thorpe, 1986:65.

the characters of *Auto-da-Fé* all have grandiose plans, and find no limits to their ambitions, they inhabit confined spaces. As observed by Turner, the novel rarely moves outdoors and Kien stays most of the time in his windowless library, Therese in her kitchen, Pfaff in his small office from which he keeps a tyrannical eye on all who seek entrance to the building, and Fischerle under the bed on which his wife prostitutes herself (Turner 1980:83).

In the novel, books and money, as crowd symbols, protect the characters' delusions from reality. On the other hand, they demonstrate their blindness, their terrible isolation, fear and perplexity. But these crowd symbols are not only used to increase the scope of the characters' power and ability to exercise control over others. The characters become equally enthralled by the magic of what seems to them god-like power.

5.4.3 A Will-to-Power

Crucially, behind the characters' private obsessions with books, money, chess, it is possible to detect the common search for domination - a will-to-power. In *Auto-da-Fé* one can only talk of antagonists, because everybody in the novel suffers from delusions of grandeur that will not allow any rivals. All characters display a vicious totalitarian desire to eradicate everybody who stands outside their visionary order. Even the social outcast Fischerle, an example of Jewish self-hatred, echoes these sentiments (Werlen, 1988:33).

In Canetti's thought, the notion of individuality is closely related to his analysis of the dynamics of power. To find one's place in the symbolic order of culture is, according to Canetti, to participate in a power struggle. Every growth, every change, is an adjustment to power. Canetti believes that the constitution of the individual is the result of recognizing the limits imposed upon one's being by superior authority. As Canetti explains in *Crowds and Power*, each individual is made subject to what he calls "the command" - first, through his recognition of his mother's autonomy in being deprived of her presence, through his father and then finally through the entire social order in the process of "socialization". It is

emphasized that the source of command is always alien, "something that comes from outside and we would resist if we could" (CP:304-5).

According to Canetti, although the individual obeys these superior authorities, each command penetrates him like an arrow, leaving in him a "sting", a feeling of resentment. An order carried out leaves behind these "stings" as a profound irritation to the balance of the self, which isolates the individual and renders him helpless. Canetti claims that the persistence of the sting is remarkable, "nothing sinks so deep into human being and nothing is so insoluble" (CP:322).

In the network of power relationships, Canetti asserts that there is in men a desire to recover the sense of individual autonomy which is lost in one's servile obedience to commands, by in one's turn exercising control over another subject. Canetti's characters are equally dominated by an intoxication with power and by a resentment of it. The result is inevitably violence, brutality and destruction¹⁹, which is portrayed at imaginary, verbal and physical levels. Kien and Therese hate each other so much that their most ardent wish is the other's death; their ongoing battle has been remarked in the Section 4.3.2.1. The sadistic redheaded janitor Pfaff hates beggars and women. After the death of his wife, he constantly improves his technique of beating on his teenage daughter (who probably is also sexually abused). Fischerle hates everybody who is richer than him, specially the chess world champion Capablanca. The blind beggar who is not blind hates people who put buttons in his hat, and above all he hates buttons. After Fischerle cheats him by putting a button in his hat instead of the twenty groshen he owes him, the beggar smashes Fischerle's head and kills him, cutting off his hump. Hugo Schmidt, dealing with the theme of hatred and violence in the novel, has summarized the many beatings administered in the novel:

19. Peter Russel is a good example of a critic who comments on the bleakness of the novel: "None of the characters display human feelings in the sense of warm, tender, loving or generous feelings; instead, human relationships are based on selfish exploitation... The rest is aggression, mistrust, suspicion, resentment, finally open rebellion". Peter Russel, 1975:29.

"When the boy Franz Metzger asks Kien to be let into the library as promised, he receives a cruel beating. Kien beats another boy in the street because he caught him putting a button into a blind's man hat. But Kien is also beaten by Therese in turn so severely that she has to pack him into bed afterwards, by the crowd in the Theresianum, and by janitor Pfaff, who beats everyone in sight, and apparently has killed his wife and his daughter with his fists. Fischerle is beaten repeatedly. He escapes the crowd in front of the Theresianum, but they turn on another hunchback, the woman who sells newspapers, and it seems that they beat her to death. Therese is thrown out of the police station, offers her favours to the officer who throws her out and gets slapped in the face by him. Many more examples could be cited" (Schmidt, 1983:96).

The brutality portrayed in the novel is systematically expressed as a chain of vengeance and retaliation. For example, Therese is deeply humiliated in her first attempt to seduce Herr Grob, the furniture salesman, and retreats; but soon she revenges her humiliation by beating and expelling Kien from the flat altogether. Her second attempt at seduction is even more shameless and a far more disastrous failure than the first. In the furniture shop, Therese loses her stiff blue skirt, the symbol of her false modesty and respectability, and makes herself the laughing-stock of a large crowd of spectators. Ironically, in this chapter called "Fulfilment", she returns home to be seduced herself by Pfaff. Longing to be powerful, Therese submits to the authoritarian command of the brutal caretaker.

Pfaff, expressing the culmination of naked force, serves to illustrate the survival of the stronger in this hostile environment. The scene in which Pfaff has required his daughter to complete sentences in the "Name of the Father" (ADF:340), which he has dictated, shows the total "vocalization of power". As critics have remarked, the intimidated and powerless child can no longer talk (a subjective and creative expression of individuality) but is condemned to repeat a few half sentences which complete the command of the father (Lovett, 1982:134 and Werlen, 1988:63). Pfaff's brutality cannot be merely attributed to the fact that he lacks education and intellectual refinement, because Kien, the erudite scholar and peak of what may be considered "culture", is no less preoccupied with the exercise of power. Although

Kien may seem a victim in the hands of the other characters, he is indeed, as we have already shown, the paranoiac ruler in his private world.

It should be emphasized as well that, according to Canetti, the occasional transformation of a being who submissively obeys commands into a ruler who gives commands, does not release the pain caused by the accumulated "stings". Certainly, the ruler who issues commands feels it as an assertion of power, which gives him a temporary sense of victory. Yet, even in his success, he is left with the threat of recoil, which grows into what Canetti calls "anxiety of command", the fear that the inferior will one day take his revenge. "The satisfaction of being of higher rank than others does not compensate for the loss of freedom of movement. Man petrifies and darkens in the distances he has created. He drags at the burden of them, but cannot move. He forgets that it is self-inflicted and longs for liberation. But how, alone, can he free himself? Whatever he does, and however determined he is, he will always find himself among others who thwart his efforts. So long as they hold fast to *their* distances, he can never come any nearer to them" (CP:18). Canetti maintains that "only together can men free themselves from their burdens of distance; and this, precisely is what happens in a crowd"(CP:18).

The visions of the crowd engendered by *Auto-da-Fé* suggest a different model of being in a crowd state that counterbalances the tremendous deterioration and dehumanisation of the socio-political order depicted in the course of the novel, manifested in the impossibility of inter-personal exchange. The appearance of the Kien's brother, George, in the third quarter of the novel, will establish an alternative model for the petrified individuality of the sinologist and the hopeless isolation of the other characters. George Kien is a prophet of a new crowd state; he worships his schizophrenic patients' ability to undergo endless transformations and constantly attempts to dissolve his personality in his patients' schizophrenic experiences.

5.5 The Sanity of Crowds

5.5.1 George: Prophecies of a Schizophrenic Future

In the first section of this chapter we have examined how crowds become part of the "illness of power" and how leaders need crowds. We will deal now with the question of how crowds, as the opposite of power, may constitute a liberation for the individual.

It is through the character George Kien that the only explicit, specific argument about the crowd is introduced in *Auto-da-Fé*. George overtly expresses many of Canetti's concerns, though not all his arguments can be equated with those of the author Canetti, as we will discuss later. The Parisian psychiatrist recognises that the crowd is the wild and untamed beast that resides deep down in every human being. It is a part of us more ancient but at the same time our essential self, that man has to repress for the sake of civilization.

"We wage the so-called war of existence for the destruction of the mass-soul in ourselves, no less than for hunger and love. In certain circumstances it can become so strong as to force the individual to selfless acts or even acts contrary to their own interests" (ADF:377).

George shows an awareness that only by repressing the forces of the crowd have men rendered the development of civilization possible. Yet, men suffer from isolation in their individual separateness and yearn for their lost unity. This is a continuous dilemma: man attempts to preserve the character of his individual personality which he has learned to praise, but there remains a tormenting desire to dissolve the ephemeral individuality, our self-contained personality which we find

hard to bear²⁰. There remains an underlying urge for the re-encounter with the de-individuated primal condition.

Through the study of his patients, who have cast away the structures of the rational, George came to understand "the effects of the mass in history in general and on the life of the individuals; its influence in certain changes in the human mind" (ADF:378). George finds that the madmen in his asylum experience their existence in a superior, deeper, or at least, in a more authentic way. Following this, the Parisian psychoanalyst sees his assistants as lamentably sane²¹. They are prisoners of the conventional order, and their vision, their minds and their capacity for experience are consequently restricted. Science has inculcated in them a blind faith in reason and an obsession with logical thought. In permanent struggle to subjugate diversity to a chain of causality, they hold bizarre experience in submission, or failing to do this, they keep it at bay.

Against the principle of rigid individual identity, George proclaims the principle of metamorphosis, the ability to lose one's self and change into another. He himself attempts to dissolve his personality in his patients' schizophrenic experiences and tries, whenever possible, not to subjugate experience to an analytical system. George suggests that the same "transformation" could happen with the individual

20. The idea that the suffering and the anxiety involved in the protection of individuality finds echo in Georges Bataille's philosophy. For Bataille, man's fundamental sense of isolation - in his individual body, mind and personality - induces the desire to shatter these limits and to extend the self into a seemingly prior condition of limitlessness. The ultimate model, of course, for such process is death - hence the existence of the death wish (Bataille, 1962:185).

21. Walter Sokel has remarked on the ambiguities of George's perceptions of madness. Ironically, in George's view, it is the psychiatrists of the asylum, and not the inmates, who exhibit the typical symptoms of paranoia. The assistants are obsessed with causality and they compulsorily find explanations for the new and strange in the old and familiar, so that it can be safely accommodated within the limits of familiar experience and bound in a chain of cause and effect. Sokel, 1974:181-187 and Stewart, 1965:116.

immersed in the crowd²². Suddenly, there is the introduction of a new and strange dimension, upsetting the normal, logical course of events in their ponderous progress.

George regrets, however, that "education is in itself a *cordon sanitaire* for the individual against the mass in his own soul" (ADF:377). The fear of being jerked out of the accustomed course of things and suddenly losing recognisable individuality prevents man from indulging himself in crowd-experiences and feeling the joyous sensation of being beyond the confines of the self (see below, p. 286). George implies that the fear that the crowd inspires in ordinary men can be comparable to the uneasiness of being hit by madness, as it disorients and embraces powers that remain outside our ordinary comprehension.

The crowd as a threat to the coherent organization of the mind may explain, at least in part, why the fear of the crowd carries its sinister overtones. As we have seen, Dickens and Zola, like most of crowd theorists in general, were obviously afraid of the violent and lawless behaviour of crowds. But more than that, they were alarmed by the crowd's frenzy in its mighty flow, its blindness and its unstoppableity. In *Auto-da-Fé*, George develops this argument: man fears the crowd because it brings out forces from which we flee in terror. Man goes constantly in fear of himself. Hedged in by numerous taboos and rites to curb nature (necessary to limit possibly disastrous consequences), man is indeed terrified by his passionate and violent urges (Bataille, 1984:94). And try as we might, we will never be able to tame the crowd within us. For it is part of our most ancient self: "Mankind has existed as a mass for long before it was conceived of and watered down into an idea" (ADF:377).

In the urge to lose oneself and return to the de-individuated condition of the crowd, George says, lies "a huge, wild, full-blooded, warm animal in all of us, very

22. In *Crowds and Power* Canetti undertakes the study of schizophrenia as an attempt to shatter the self through the dissolution of personality. Canetti believes that the desire for release of the anxiety involved in defending one's identity and personal autonomy is manifest in a heightened form by the schizophrenic (CP:321-324). Accordingly, "negativism in schizophrenia" can be seen in Canetti's perspective as an intensified form of resistance against commands, as we will discuss later.

deep..." far deeper than anything else (ADF:377). The crowd is always powerfully present and ready to erupt when the time is right. It assumes the domination that is its due and cannot be governed by the use of reason. Inevitably then, crowds arise from time to time to threaten the proscriptions imposed by society throughout history.

"Sometimes the masses pour over us, one single flood, one ocean, in which each drop is alive, and each drop wants the same thing. But it soon shatters again, and leaves us once more to be ourselves, poor solitary devils" (ADF:377-8).

This impulse, which George, like the author Canetti, calls the "crowd drive", emerges spontaneously wherever the crowd is formed, or erupts, sometimes in madness. In George's view "countless people go mad because the mass in them is particularly developed and can get no satisfaction" (ADF:378). There is in nature and there subsists in man a movement that always exceeds social bounds, that can never be anything but partially reduced to order. Yet George acknowledges that the "war of existence" involved in the individualized forms of survival, is motivated as much by the need to suppress this yearning for the totality of the crowd, as it is by drives to satisfy biological needs.

George cites the potential upheaval of a termite colony as a model of insanity, as an eruption of that latent desire to lose personal identities in union with the mass. He remarks on the chaos that would result should the termites suddenly depart from their highly-disciplined ethos. In termite society, he notes, each termite, sexless and dutiful to work, is programmed to perform its task by a collective will. But imagine, he suggests, what would happen if the individual termite, "a blind cell in an organism beyond its grasp", revolts against this limiting condition and indulges himself with the others in a mass orgy of sex²³. "It begins with a hundred or a thousand of them, the madness spreads, *their* madness, a mass madness, the soldiers abandon their gates, the whole mound burns with unsatisfied love" (ADF:398). Individual desire, no longer being repressed by the structures of this insect society,

23. Canetti's view that the force that drives people into the crowd is as powerful as the sexual impulse is expressed in his autobiography (CW:126) and monograph (CP:80).

would result in the destruction of the whole colony, leaving it defenceless and open to the invasion of an enemy. "The colony which might have lived for all eternity dies, dies of love" (ADF:398-9).

As Darby notes, the termites are driven to destruction not by an individual impulse, but because all are possessed by the same passion, the explosive, impersonal force of the crowd. "The elaborate and orderly structure of the colony's organization, in which each insect has its own appointed role, suddenly collapses, and with it perishes the frame of reference from which each termite derives its identity as an individual". (Darby, 1988:168).

George's argument that civilization arose through the repression of instinctive desires seems to find affinity, in a particular sense, with Freud's premise that the gratification of each individual desire would result in general anarchy and the dissolution of civilization. However, George is obviously not a Freudian. First of all, unlike Freud's theory of the libido which involves object-oriented desire, George seems to believe that the "crowd drive", the desire for self-dissolution in a seemingly prior condition of limitlessness, cannot find satisfaction in the gratification of *individual* desires by the possession of specific objects. George criticises his conventionally-minded assistants for explaining everything in terms of "pleasure" - by which they mean, George says, "all the traditional naughtiness, which, since animals were animals, have been practised by the individual with contemptible repetition" (ADF:377). George argues that, in celebrating the "pleasure principle", they never suspect the existence of that deeper motor force in history, "the desire of men to rise into a higher type of animal, into the mass, and to lose themselves in it so completely as to forget that *one* man ever existed" (ADF:377).

George departs from the Freudian approach in a more general sense. Though Freud's theories radically undermined notions of the unitary and autonomous

individual²⁴, Freud also inquires into the possibility of psychoanalysis restoring the ego-boundaries²⁵. In opposition, the psychiatrist of *Auto-da-Fé* worships the fragmentation of the individual. In prophetic overtones, George proclaims the crowd as the past and the future of mankind:

"In spite of its age it [the crowd] is the youngest of the beasts, the essential creation of the earth, its goal and its future. We know nothing about it, we live still, supposedly as individuals" (ADF:377-8).

George defends the breakdown of the artificially unified individual and the return to a deindividuated primordial existence. Since the notions of autonomy, responsibility, will and volition are artificial categories invented by civilization to establish the contours of the individual self, he believes that they are conditional and can therefore be reversed (Heller, 1986:2-3). He believes that one day the crowd will stop differentiation and the concept of individuality will be overcome by a new mass social state. The crowd will regain ascendancy by absorbing the individual:

"There will come a time when it [the crowd] will not be scattered again, possibly in a single country at first, eating its way out from there until no one can doubt any more, for there will be no I, you, he, but only it, the mass" (ADF:378).

5.5.2 The Sanity of Crowds

George's perceptions were particularly elaborated by the observation of one of his patients, a schizophrenic who believes that he has transformed himself into a gorilla. George sees this creature, who is regarded by his relatives as something less

24. I am referring here to Freud's general propositions that undermined the current ideas about the autonomous individuality, pointing out forces in men beyond conscious control or even knowledge: sexual and aggressive drives within the Id; powerful ideas and wishes that anxiety and repression have removed from consciousness, and that defenses like resistance, isolation, and denial work to ensure that they will not appear in consciousness.

25. As Nancy Julia Chodorow has put it "Freud wanted to resolve the paradox he has created, to use the scrutiny of the individual self not to celebrate fragmentation, but to restore wholeness. He could not accept that the self is the outcome of messy unconscious processes ... he wanted to reconstitute the individual and the self he had dissected" (Chodorow, 1986:197-277).

than human and is kept locked away to spare them embarrassment, as an inspired prophet. The Parisian psychiatrist venerates him. The idyllic portrait of this schizophrenic, reading from *Crowds and Power*, suggests how the crowd presents the individual with the joyous sensation of being beyond the self-contained personality. It shows how a human being may evade commands, escaping temporally from the power structures that define his place in the world, limit his being and impose burdens on him.

The schizophrenic gorilla proposes a model of individuality that undercuts the notion of stable identity and attacks the armoured, self-preserving and rationalizing ego of the protagonist. The antithesis between these two characters can be seen at several levels. Kien tries to represent his identity as an *a priori* structure of human reason, by the transformation of instincts into reflections and the imposition of a strict moral discipline on all instances of his life. He represents the progressive cultural and social petrification of the individual. The schizophrenic gorilla joyfully abandons himself in the constant transformations of life. He delights in direct experience and has no limitation, no impediment to his zest for metamorphosis. He is guided by his ever-changing emotions and is ready to respond to his instinctive urges. Kien is the "thinking subject" and to maintain an integral personality, he has to prohibit transformations of the self, keeping it rigidly exclusive. In contrast, the schizophrenic patient cannot be unmistakably separated from all others because there is no reason to attribute to him the faculty of saying "I" to himself. He dissolves the strict separations of inside and outside, private and public, self and other.

The role of language for Kien and the schizophrenic gorilla is one aspect that has received much attention amongst critics. As Lovett has noted, whereas language provides Kien with the means to structure his experience and defend the autonomy of his ego, the schizophrenic patient expresses himself in apparently meaningless sounds (Lovett, 1982:135). Departing from the convention of established languages of consistently applying names to objects in a closed, mutually exclusive system of signification and meaning, the schizophrenic character has created a language of his own, based on ever-changing novelty. Objects do not possess fixed names. Their

names change according to the speaker's moods and body movements (Darby:1988:166). As Walter Sokel has remarked, "since the relationship between words and things is kept fluid, the gorilla lives in ... a constantly metamorphosing world in which nothing is allowed to acquire permanent and fixed identity" (Sokel, 1974:183). What interests us to stress here is that the elimination of "distances" between "subject" and "object", "inside" and "outside" "self" and "other", seems to suggest, in a specific sense, the state of totality and unity, that Canetti has identified in the crowd²⁶.

In this metamorphosis of the man into an animal, Canetti playfully inverts the conventional conception of the evolutionary process of the natural, primitive man towards the rational and civilized man. Canetti suggests that the disintegration of the coherent self in schizophrenic experience may figure as a desirable option. It is a temptation that some men may find irresistible, as it brings relief to the pain and anxieties involved in the protection of the individual self. According to *Crowds and Power*, the schizophrenic's sense of freedom can also be understood as the schizophrenic's ability to evade commands.

In *Crowds and Power*, Canetti eventually draws on the world of psychiatric medicine for the schizophrenic to set out his theory of the "negativism of commands" present in crowds. Right from the beginning, Canetti has stressed that in crowds men lose their "burdens of distance" and now he adds "that part of these burdens of distance is made up of the stings of command accumulated in every individual" (CP:324).

According to Canetti, schizophrenia can be considered an extreme case in which man becomes so completely riddled and over-burdened by stings that at times he is paralysed by them:

26. Canetti argues in *Crowds and Power*, that the specific nature of totality in crowds is unknown, but "the dense coherence of men in a crowd entails a yielding to others as though to oneself, as though there was no strict division between oneself and them. There is no escape from this compliance and thus the consequent impetus and feeling of strength which is something engendered by all units together" (CP:80).

"The schizophrenic, this cactus of torment and helplessness, succumbs to the illusion of the opposite state, that of being in a crowd ... As long as he remains in it, he does not feel his stings. He has, or so he thinks, stepped out of himself... he seems to derive from it at least a temporary relief from the torment of stings (CP:324)".

This being so, "defense against new commands becomes a matter of life and death" (CP:322). Canetti says that the schizophrenic avoids command either by refusing to hear them or by refusing to carry them out. In his alternative state of extreme suggestibility, the schizophrenic sometimes does flagrantly the opposite of what he is told to do (a form of behaviour called *negativism* in the psychiatric literature). At other times, he performs what he is told to do over-promptly, in a caricature "suggestion-slavery" manner, which suggests a kind of "artificial state of negativism" (CP:321-324). The key idea operating here is that the schizophrenic's lack of contact and isolation can be understood, in Canetti's perspective, as another attempt to evade commands.

Canetti suggests that the schizophrenic, by refusing to respond to commands, acts like a member of the crowd. "He is just as impressionable and yields just as much to every impulse reaching him from the outside" (CP:323). The fact that the schizophrenic is isolated does not mean that he feels alone, because, "from his own point of view, he may feel that he is immersed in a crowd" (CP:323)²⁷. "He has a sense of being linked with others again" (CP:324).

These propositions guide us towards the understanding that the crowd seems to represent to Canetti an instance beyond the artificially created structures of culture, where all patterns that legitimate the social order (that creates differences, distinctions and therefore justifies power) are annihilated. "In the crowd all are equal, no one has right to command anyone else; or one might say, everyone gives commands to everyone" (CP:324). In the crowd, Canetti claims, there is a reversal of the fear of being touched, directing energies toward the compact unification of

27. Canetti argues that crowds appear in the imaginings of schizophrenics under many different guises (CP:323). From the schizophrenic's own point of view, he may feel as though he were in a crowd in his own head.

bodies, where the individuals expand their selves. The heavier the mass of bodies, the denser the shared body of the crowd, then the less substantial the weight, the less the burden of individuality (Santamaria, 1988:110-126).

"In that density, where there is scarcely any space between, and body presses against body, each man is as near the other as he is to himself; and an immense feeling of relief ensues. It is for the sake of this moment, when no-one is greater or better than another, that people become a crowd"(CP:18).

According to Canetti, the consciousness of an individual in becoming part of the crowd undergoes a temporary transformation: "the individual feels that he is transcending the limits of his own person" (CP:20). As the body surrenders to the larger body of the crowd, the awareness of "individuality" is obliterated by the crowd-self (see below, p.292). The mind, through the expansion of consciousness, undergoes metamorphosis to escape the imprisonment of the individual and is set free. It is believed that the anxiety involved in defending one's individuality ("burdens of distance", "stings of command" and "resentment of power") can be in this way released. No new stings are formed and all the old ones are got rid for the time being.

At this point we should recall Canetti's treatment of crowds and its link with power. As we have seen, in Canetti's formulation of the crowd behaviour mechanism, there is no reference to the suggestion-hypnotic model of the leader over the crowd, nor to his libidinal attraction. Canetti acknowledges that the leader may suppose that he commands the crowd in the same way that a commander gives orders to his troops. The homogeneity of the crowd's behaviour may actually reinforce the leader's feeling that it is *his* commands the crowd follows. However, according to Canetti, he is mistaken. Canetti takes very seriously his early assertion that the fundamental characteristic of crowds is equality²⁸. Since in the crowd everybody is in a state of absolute equality, there are no grounds for claiming authority of any kind.

28.The crowd only becomes a crowd to Canetti, as it has been emphasized, after the "discharge", when its members get rid of their differences of class, race, property, rank, status and all feel equal. "Before this, the crowd does not really exist; it is the discharge that creates it" (CP:17).

Furthermore, a command addressed to the crowd is presumed not to leave a "sting" behind because it is immediately diffused. It spreads horizontally and instantaneously; equality amongst the crowd is preserved because everybody commands everybody else²⁹ (CP:310). In this sense, it is possible to say that it is the members of the crowd that may exploit the leader, by taking advantage of the gathering promoted by him to have their moment of discharge, and gratify their desire for de-individuation.

In order not to misunderstand Canetti's argument it is necessary to bear in mind that his view of the crowd in *Crowds and Power* cannot be equated with the view of the fictional character George. For example, George's claim for the breakdown of the artificially unified individual and the return to a deindividuated primordial existence is not shared by Canetti, as becomes clear in *Crowds and Power*. Canetti everywhere claims the power of men's latent desire to shatter the distances imposed by social hierarchies and return to the primal condition of the mass. He proposes that this is a compelling and untamed desire, which may erupt as insanity (as in schizophrenia) or in the eventual and spontaneous union with the crowd. Likewise, Canetti asserts that such a release of the individual from the structures of civilization is as threatening as it is pleasurable. However, unlike his character George, Canetti is not ultimately proposing perpetual immersion in the crowd as an eternal refuge or as a salvation for the individual threatened and isolated in stratified societies. Rather, Canetti makes clear that stepping out of everything that binds, encloses and burdens, and becoming part of the crowd, is only a temporary procedure because "when man returns to his house, to *himself*, he finds all there again, boundaries, burdens and stings"(CP:324).

29. "Traditional crowd theory had treated with high seriousness the question of how crowds come to act as a single unity, but it had never answered satisfactorily the question of whether the leader addressed his commands directly to the crowd as a whole or whether he addressed them to some members of the crowd who passed them on to others" (McClelland, 1989:298).

Canetti makes clear that the elation derived from the process of de-individuation in the crowd, though seductive and vigorous in character, is ephemeral. From the beginning, Canetti warns us that the moment of discharge is based on an illusion:

"The people who suddenly feel equal have not really become equal; nor will they *feel* equal for ever. They return to their separate houses, they lie down in their own beds, they keep their possessions and their names. They do not cast out their relations nor run away from their families"(CP:18)³⁰.

Furthermore, unlike George who sees that authentic existence should be like what is experienced by his schizophrenic patients, Canetti by no means sees schizophrenia as a new solution for the future. The schizophrenic who has chosen to live permanently in a world of endless metamorphoses does not constitute for Canetti a model of what civilized man should become. The schizophrenic is rather a reminder that all men carry a crowd within themselves. He is simply a sign to remind us of the original unity with others which man leaves behind in his everyday approach to the problems of existence. As Canetti remarks, the apparent sense of freedom displayed by the schizophrenic, who protects himself against commands and may find a relief from the burden of maintaining his individual identity, is only deceptive:

"This deliverance is an illusion, for, just at that point where he enters in his freedom, new and stronger compulsions await him ... No one is more in need of a crowd than the schizophrenic, who is crammed with stings and feels suffocated by them. He cannot find a crowd outside and so he surrenders to one within him" (CP:324).

There is no need to emphasise that Canetti's message is very bleak. Canetti shows how oppressive are the power structures present in normal social life. He also shows that the freedom and equality present in the mass constitutes only one pole of the tension between the artificial constructions build up by man in response to the need for preserving the foundations of society and the chaos that always remains

30. It should be noted, however, that the revolutionary crowd, (Canetti calls it a 'reversal crowd') actually constitutes a means to start dismantling the established social and political order.

beyond its control. In *Auto-da-Fé*, Kien's suicide, the portrait of the schizophrenic gorilla and the psychiatrist's speeches heralding a schizophrenic future suggest the collapse of the conventional social order. However, Canetti's refusal in *Crowds and Power* to embrace either the model of a rigid, armoured individuality (a state of paranoiac self-delusion) or schizo-subjectivity without identity, testifies to the perpetual pressure between these two poles. The conflict between the individual's need to defend the ego structures that give him a sense of autonomy and support his illusions of power, and his latent desire to step outside all containing structures and merge with the formless totality of the crowd, remains.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

As we have seen, *Auto-da-Fé* represents a new kind of crowd novel which expresses Canetti's original perception of crowd phenomena as a whole. Canetti's approach challenges many of the conventional postulates of received crowd theory and invites us to re-think several of the familiar aspects of the crowd phenomena in a different fashion.

Received crowd theory implies, in an extremely simple or even simplistic way, that there is a kind of sameness in crowds. The crowds of ancient Rome, of the middle ages or urban contemporary masses are more or less identical; they belong to the same series of phenomena and are the effects of the same causes. Crowd theorists tended to stretch the crowd net in the evolutionary-atavist perspective very wide but they actually kept the category of crowd constant and found the same crowd everywhere. The crowd in its ideal-type is always the same: a transitory collection of individuals heterogeneous in their social origin, within which the ideas and emotions of each member are shaped into a current of uniformity. The differences between human types melt away and men become unshackled, unconscious and primitive (Moscovici, 1985:4). Even crowds in the remote past were still throwbacks to even earlier eras. So, crowd theory postulates a concept of crowd that would be equally valid at all times and in all places.

In contrast, Canetti attempts to identify and classify as many types of crowds as possible. Canetti starts with an intricate and complex typology of crowds, and we have found many examples in *Auto-da-Fé*, to convey the idea that *different* kinds of crowd present *different* crowd minds with *different* contents. While challenging the pervasive view of the crowd as a constant and single unit, Canetti rejects as well the traditional evolutionary framework into which the crowd has usually been fitted. If Canetti uses a biological model in his crowd theory, it no longer derives from Darwin, but from Pasteur - conveying the notion that the world is over-populated to an unimaginable degree by masses (real or imaginary) like bacilli. Canetti acknowledges that the twentieth century is more than ever an "age of crowds"; "living now is living with uncounted millions" (CP:21). Crowds have occupied all levels of social and psychological experience, as seen in *Auto-da-Fé*.

Canetti shares with crowd theorists the interest in the non-rational forces in the individual and in the crowd mind, but rejects the customary view of the crowd necessarily as an evolutionary throwback. For Canetti, first of all, the claim to superiority of a civilized society to both the cultures of the past, and to other cultures in the present, held by the evolutionary-atavist tradition, has gone. The sense of superiority cannot be compatible with the atrocities carried out by modern Western societies - the deliberate act of genocide of the holocaust, the warfare industry, the threat of global nuclear extermination. "It is not for a European of the 20th century to regard himself above savagery" (CP:411). The scope of destructiveness achieved by "progress" is remarkable when compared to the puny destruction and violence of the rioting mob.

Secondly, Canetti is unsure about whether the crowd because of its apparently barbaric and violent behaviour must be placed very low down on an evolutionary scale. Upsetting the nineteenth century optimistic evolutionist point of view, Canetti shows that the violence of the crowd cannot be effectively contrasted to any real faith in the rational and peaceful individual. *Auto-da-Fé* plainly demonstrates that the notion of civilization cannot be taken as opposite to the exercise and acceptance

of violence³¹. By considering the human relations depicted in the novel, it would seem that mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, altruistic and peaceful, as proposed by the Enlightenment program, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism.

Obviously, Canetti's argument against the atavist-evolutionary perspective is more complex than that. Placing the survey of crowds in a broad historical and anthropological framework, Canetti shows in the second part of *Crowds and Power* that modern crowds emerge from types for which a precedent exists - the pack. While for Le Bon the mind of the crowd is launched back to the beginning of time, for Canetti the mind of the crowd, which is historically and anthropologically differentiated, is related to diverse recent antecedents: the hunting-, the war-, the lamenting- and the increase-pack (CP:93-121). So, crowds do not have to be necessarily the same crowds as an imagined "original" crowd in the very remote past; therefore they cannot all simply be throw-backs to the same thing (McClelland, 1989:302).

In addition, to challenge the view that the mind of the crowd is very low indeed in the evolutionary scale, and therefore "undifferentiated"³², Canetti sets out to provide evidence in the third part of his monograph that the crowd mind contains specific contents of its own. He attempts to trace the crowd mind expressed in the crowd symbolism and totemism of different cultures³³. It is also profoundly

31. Western societies tended to regard themselves as superior to other cultures or over cultures of the past because, amongst other causes, the exercise of power was no longer exercised by the rule of the stronger, by tyranny, or merely by inherited tradition. The exercise of violence was legitimately institutionalized by the state.

32. Crowd theorists placed the crowd mind very low down in the evolutionary scale. It is not that the crowd mind was totally empty, since it would constitute a contradiction to the evolutionist perspective itself. But as the crowd mind was the oldest mind, whatever it might have as a content it could only be very primitive and therefore undifferentiated.

33. In Canetti's study of the ethnology of myths, emphasis is given to the totem. He argues that totemism promotes the "birth" of mass consciousness, that is, the feeling of man's identity with the rest of the world, live and non-live (CP:348-358).

connected to national imagery³⁴. Finally, in the fourth part of *Crowds and Power*, Canetti attempts to articulate what happens to the conscious mind and body of the individual in becoming part of the crowd. The individual change of consciousness, *change of awareness* of himself, is suggested as a socio-psychological phenomenon related to the self's need for "transformation"³⁵, that is, the need to undergo metamorphosis to escape imprisonment of the self blocked from development and change. Displacing the emphasis on the mindlessness of the crowd, Canetti undermines the very basis of the atavistic-evolutionary argument about the crowd.

A second series of implications of Canetti's original view of the crowd refers to the leadership theory. While the problem of the leader constitutes the centre of theoretical concern in received crowd theory, Canetti shows that it is possible to construct a complete typology of crowds without even mentioning crowd leaders. This sometimes leads him to absurdity, as when he provides a typology of packs without even referring to the leader of the pack. However, Canetti acknowledges that crowd theory is so colonized by the influence of the idea of the leader that he does all he can to break this link, and provides a complete analysis of crowd mechanisms independent of the leader figure.

As we have seen, Canetti elaborates an argument in which "crowd" comes to mean the opposite of "power". The individual's drive to fuse in the crowd, in Canetti's view, as we have been stressing, represents the desire for de-individuation, the desire to escape from all containing structures and patterns of authority that burden the individual in social life. It is for the sake of this joyous sensation of unity and

34. In the section "The Crowd in History", Canetti provides an account of distinct national symbols as representations of different crowd minds. "Nations when they go to war *feel as something*" (CP:171). The English, Canetti says, see themselves as the "sea", the Dutch as a "dyke withstanding the sea", the Germans as a "marching forest", the French as the "crowd storming the Bastille", the Swiss as "mountains", the Spaniards as "matador", etc (CP:169-179). Stressing that these symbols may say little about men as individuals, Canetti maintains that they nonetheless are strong myths in the social imagination.

35. In the chapter "Transformation", Canetti traces many different forms of metamorphosis connected with the experience of the self imprisoned and prohibited from change (CP:342-383).

totality that one merges with the crowd. In departing from Le Bon's notion of the hypnotic influence exerted by the leader's prestige and Freud's theory of libidinal attraction, Canetti does not just discard the notion that the individual eagerly submits to the authority of the leader and passively accepts the leader's determination of how he should think and behave, but also resists acceptance of the gloomy corollary that the leader could fill the mind of the mass with whatever content he wanted. His way of viewing things enables Canetti to separate completely the collective experience of, say, a Nazi, murderous crowd from the anti-violent crowds, the civil rights crowds or crowds for nuclear disarmament. Different crowds, different minds.

Obviously, Canetti does not disclaim the conspicuous destructive behaviour of *some* types of crowd. However, he understands it in an original way. The destructiveness of the crowd, "often discussed and disapproved of but never really explained" (CP:19-20) is for Canetti not a fundamental crowd characteristic, but derivative of the crowd's desire for growth and equality. In Canetti's view, it is not mere barbarism nor an instinctive taste for violence, nor even the fragility of the threatened objects, that leads the crowd to destruction. It is, rather, a desire to attack all boundaries, all that creates difference, distance and imprisonment. Canetti says that closed windows and doors are obstacles to growth, and therefore obstructions to eruption; the noise of broken glass adds a sense of "new born life". Houses are destroyed because the crowd fears that it will be shut up again "To the crowd in its nakedness everything seems a Bastille" (CP:20). The well-known tendency of crowds to destroy symbols of power can be then understood as the need to destroy not merely icons of authority, but burdens of distance, of hierarchy and command.

As Canetti is committed to dealing with crowds as a whole, *Auto-da-Fé* is a highly complex novel containing many topics of the much broader and controversial work *Crowds and Power*. It might be arguable whether Canetti's crowd theory is fully comprehensive. One can hardly find a synthesis for the multitude of insights proposed and the variety of issues raised. For many questions Canetti offers just general statements that stand as premisses open to further debate. Canetti's undogmatic and eclectic approach has also been seen as problematical (Werlen,

1988:128 and Barnouw, 1983:72). However, Canetti seems successful in casting doubts on the entire tradition of crowd theory of almost a century. As we have attempted to show, Canetti's argument as a whole indicates how unreliable many of the conventional postulates for looking at the crowd and trying to understand what is like to be a crowd, can be.

Concluding Remarks

Crowd phenomena drew out an increasingly sophisticated intellectual response throughout nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a sophistication which is also seen in the literary representation of the crowd. As we have seen in Dickens, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the crowd came into the foreground as a political force, a vehicle for the explosive force of the oppressed people. Either as a symbol of the coming revolution, a threat to the present or hope for the future, the crowd came to be seen as a basic aspect of society that required special theoretical and practical attention. In Zola's time, the presence of the crowd in political life seemed unavoidable and its actions had been enough to awaken the necessity to understand crowds scientifically in order to cope with them. As Zola's writings show, the crowd becomes a psychological category and failure to understand the "mind of the crowd" meant a risk of being "swept out" of civilization. In the twentieth century, the dominance of the large city, the increase of popular education and growth in mass communication, made true the expectation that the future would be dominated by crowds. In Canetti's time, "the era of crowds" was then a reality in a world of mass democracy. By the thirties, the theory of crowds had also been completed, and had fulfilled its intention of indicating the ways by which the crowd could be either manipulated or controlled.

Each writer presents his own view on collective psychology and behaviour, which had definitive implications for his attitude towards change in society. The models of the crowd drawn in *Barnaby Rudge*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Germinal* and *Auto-da-Fé* reflect the developments of crowd theory and experience. Both Dickens and Zola, confronted with the twin problem of modernization and the emergence of a new urban working class and left-wing political organizations, urged the society of their

own day to see, then to reform, the most blatant inequities, which were leading to violent social uprisings. Observing a society that they regarded as decadent or diseased, they took crowds as symptoms of pathology, errors or problems. They begin by psychopathologizing the crowd and end up moralizing about it. Dickens, lacking a truly collective psychology to understand crowd phenomena, tended to equate the crowd especially with a kind of Victorian underclass, beggars, the lax poor and occasionally some "sober" worker, who lacked the control to resist the madness of the crowd. The threat that democracy posed to traditional elites was viewed with alarm because democracy still tended to be equated with the rule of the urban mob. In Zola, the simple equation of the crowd mentality with the lower classes begins to look precarious. As we have seen, Zola portrayed the transformation of reasonable and peaceful workers into the crowd, and distinguished clearly between the individual mentality and the crowd mentality. Zola begins to use the key devices used by contemporary classical crowd theorists to build crowd theory.

Zola attempts to fuse two attitudes towards the crowd: the conservative's terror of revolution and the proletariat's dream of the final struggle. However, drawing on the most modern findings of evolutionist theory, Zola credited the social and economic elites with racial superiority; gave credibility to the view of the social struggle within and between the classes as a natural fact of life and justified, perhaps unwillingly, restraining those groups which were perceived to be dominated largely by an unregulated emotionalism or were more vulnerable to the degenerative conditions of the environment: women, drunkards and the working classes. Operating within the positivist universe, Zola could not escape from its ideological implications. The crowd mind, where atavistic brutality and irrational motivation were likely to prevail, had to be repressed, channelled, dominated. Repression *now*, perhaps reform later. In counterbalancing the crowds's incapacity to reason with the superiority of the properly educated individual, he was simultaneously accepting elitism by postponing the broader population's access to the decision-making process of society.

If both Dickens and Zola present ambiguous attitudes towards the crowd, such ambiguity is resolved in the classical crowd theory at the end of nineteenth century. The anti-collectivist bias of crowd theory and its authoritative character becomes unambiguously expressed. Le Bon's formulation of the "group mind" showed that crowds were not an epiphenomenon of alienation which would pass away with education and the progress of science and technology. Le Bon said unambiguously that everybody could become part of the crowd, independently of class, time or place. Everybody was equally subject to the alleged effects of immersion in the crowd: the lowering of the level of intelligence, the paralysis of initiative and the annexation of the individual soul by that of the crowd and its leader. Where the members of the crowd come from, whether they are rich or poor, educated or ignorant, was of little real importance because the same process was at work in the crowd; no matter how the crowd was constituted, identical causes produced identical effects.

By 1900, that is, fifteen years after Zola's *Germinal*, it became clear that science could seek neither a psychiatric nor a legal solution for the problem of crowds. Crowds were not mad in the ordinary psychiatric sense and they were not always criminal in the ordinary sense either. The solution was a political one. The shift from the view of the crowd as a physically threatening throng to a regressive mental set in the mature years of crowd theory implied a change in the conception of politics as well. Crowd theorists claimed that the view of rational politics based on interest and reason - the individual's ability to choose their representatives wisely, through the balance of possible profit and loss and greatest personal advantage - was unsuitable to the "Era of Crowds", as Le Bon called it. The individual was to be persuaded to conform, the masses were to be swayed. Politics would, therefore, be a struggle for control of the masses. The adequate use of propaganda and control of the crowd mind was alleged to be the most effective means by which elites in democratic societies could win the electoral battle and prolong their hold on power. Yet, in an age in which the characteristics of the crowd were extended to everybody, politics was to remain, paradoxically, the rational form of exploiting the irrational nature of the masses. Crowd theorists were never very clear where those

leaders who would manipulate the crowd from the outside were to come from, but they insisted on the need for a leader to keep the largest distance as possible from the crowd's own barbarous soul. Le Bon, in his straightforward language, advocated plainly the need for a strong democratic elite to counter-balance the blind and unruly psychological forces of democratic society.

From the twentieth-century vantage point, Canetti makes us realize the tremendous anti-collectivist potential present in the received science of collectivity. It is arguable that this may be the case only because of the profoundly anti-democratic and anti-populist inclination of its founders. For it was not until the late eighteenth century, when the crowd entered onto the political stage, that the elites felt the need to take them seriously, and it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that they began to study them scientifically. Only when the crowd had its own ideologies and strategies did a theory of collective psychology and behaviour emerge. This being the case, it is the fear of the growing power of the masses and the need to counterbalance the threat that democracy posed to traditional elites that, to a large extent, lies behind the articulation of crowd theory. As we have seen, Dickens and Zola, despite recognizing the existence of different types of crowd, both obviously think that it was the politically agitated crowds which deserved their attention. Only political crowds really matter to them.

In picturing the troubling and unforgettable spectacle of the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens was sensitive to the persistent nightmare that political crowds would constitute to future generations. Zola, besides many other crowd thinkers, continued the tradition, focusing on the crowd engaged in destructive and ferocious uprisings. Although Zola was extremely careful with accurate research, he increases the violence displayed by the rioting mob of *Germinal* when compared to what is on record about his source, the historical strike at Azin. In general, the theme - violent political crowd - picked over and over again, left the implicit assertion that violent crowd action underlay all popular politics.

This tradition seemed so persuasive that many events in the twentieth century - the growth of totalitarianism and mass movements led by half-mad leaders - tended to

be seen as a realization of the predictions made by classic nineteenth century crowd theory. Tautologically, these experiences, being explained within the framework of received crowd theory, lend credence to pessimistic collective psychology and enhanced the prestige of its formulators, especially Le Bon and Freud. At the same time, the view of the crowd, not as an emotionally charged temporary physical throng, but as a durable permanent mentality that may at any time provide the support for illiberal and potentially totalitarian forms of politics, was reinforced.

Canetti attempts to provide a complete crowd theory of different kind. He tries to reformulate the premisses underlying crowd phenomenon in such way as to diverge from the negative attribution always made earlier towards collective psychology and behaviour. The trajectory of Kien in *Auto-da-Fé* shows the oppressiveness of the power present in social life, the anxieties involved in the preservation of one's individual self and the relief one can find in crowds, where all feel temporarily equal and can find refuge from command. Only in the crowd is there the possibility of union without domination.

Canetti shows the simple-mindedness of classic crowd theory and especially calls into question its ambition to be a theory of *all* human groups. The intricate typology of crowds in *Crowds and Power*, also seen in *Auto-da-Fé*, shows the absurdity of presuming that the *same* emotional and irrational mentality underlies *all* collectivities. At least some of the contempt and fear regarding the crowd would seem then to be unjustified. In an age of mass democracy, Canetti questions the implicit assumption that the crowd always constitutes the potential basis for authoritarian political rule. In general, Canetti shows that the imprecise and elastic terminology of collective psychology can be turned against the received crowd theory itself. The elitist and authoritarian nature of crowd theory, articulated in terms of merely destructive power, can hardly be sustained if one considers the anti-authoritarian crowds of peaceful movements, the crowd of civil rights, anti-nuclear disarmament and environmental preservation.

In the Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment debate, crowd theory has gone along with elitism in counteracting the increasing demand for social, political and economic egalitarianism. Of course, crowd theory's view of human nature and its

implications for political structures and processes has been variously criticized. In the forefront of the attack has been Marxism. However, Canetti's attack on received crowd theory is unique for Canetti challenges crowd theory on crowd theory's own grounds. Canetti shows that the violent and destructive political crowd is just one crowd amongst an enormous variety of crowds, and that class consciousness is just one form that the mind of the crowd can take. Canetti heroically tries to revise the entire tradition of crowd theory and tries to speak, as the crowd-man he had been once, for the long despised crowd as a possible agent of human liberation.

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