

"The Mystery of Personal Identity in Western Thought"

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Abstract

Identity is one of the most elusive terms in common parlance. We think we know how to define it: it is sameness in difference, psychologists say. However, when we try to pinpoint one's personal identity, we encounter a multitude of problems. If we set aside various categorizations by renowned psychologists and thinkers, we wonder whether it is thought, affectivity, or action, whether it is what we think about ourselves or what others think of us mainly on the bases of what we say or do. On the other hand, cultural identity is an umbrella that, while trying to "fix" its objects, betrays our failure to determine personal identity with any degree of accuracy. And literature never tires of dramatizing these observations, that identity is ever-evolving, ever-changing entity, that it is often hidden, consciously or unconsciously, especially due to the demands of "civilization."

Keywords: identity, consciousness, civilization, essentialism, humor theory, introvert, extrovert, and self.

"Know Thyself," says Socrates, one of the founding fathers of human thought. Since then one can safely say that philosophers and writers have always been concerned in one way or another with personal identity. Pope echoed the Greek thinker's injunction about twenty centuries later, having come to the conclusion that the universe is too inscrutable for man's mind. He says in his *Essay on Man*, "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan, / the proper study of man is mankind." Whether one is interested in Odysseus' scar or Achilles' heel, one is talking about identity. Undoubtedly, literature with its entirety takes identity as its domain. Personal identity is its exclusive subject, with the literary spectrum offering countless specimens of human identities ranging between extremes: the real and the fantastic, the sacred and the profane, the godly and the devilish. Even God and the Devil have been humanized in some works, as in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In lyricism it is the identity of the persona. In his well-known essay "Tradition and Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot proposes a theory of poetry which he calls "depersonalization." According to him, "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (*Norton Anthology* 2296). In narrative it is the identities of the characters, and so is it in drama. *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Tess*, *David Copperfield*, *Pamela*, *Jude*, *Emma*, *Tom Jones*, *Clarissa*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, etc. are titles that underscore the importance of identities in literature. Even when the titles are not indicative in that direction, characters remain the over-riding element that persists in the reader's memory. Kurtz, Ahab, K. the Devil's disciple, Saint Joan, the Duke, Nora, and others are carved into the educated reader's consciousness and perhaps the unconscious. In the course of the literary work, it is often the case that characters come to discover themselves, to identify themselves or to be debunked by a sarcastic narrator, as we shall see. We often speak of search for identity, finding one's identity, and loss of identity. In traditional criticism, it is the identity of the author, and with his death, or rather execution, it is the identity of the reader. As Barthes insists, the death of the author is the birth of the reader. The issue is obviously laden with all kinds of problems.

All this is attributable to man's perceptual and mental proclivity to detect differences. It seems that man's psycho-epistemological make-up is irresistibly oriented toward classification. From sensation up to the most complex mental activity, we tend to see differences: black or white; tall or short; I, you, he, or she; us or them. The tendency may become an addiction and is, definitely, a means of knowledge. History invariably confirms that from Classical times to Freud, to Jung. Why and how things are classified remain a mystery. Eli Hirsch, having considered relevant schools concerned with classification, concludes that "there must be the innate tendency to classify things in certain ways rather than others" (240). Here may lie the origins of some issues concerned with identity studies, which branch off into various fields. The literature on the subject deals at least with national, cultural, sexual, gender, official, and personal identities.

Let's begin with the identity card. What does it tell us about its bearer? His four-part name, birthplace, birth-date, sometimes his religious denomination, his national number, and of course his nationality. Is

this the person's identity? If the answer is yes, then, when we speak of the quest or search for identity, we are telling a lie or relating a fantasy, for the elements of identity as they appear on the identity card cannot be the object of any such search. They are given at birth, a sort of gift or rather burden. The individual person is helpless in accepting or rejecting it. Actually, it is an imposition, an act of fixing the bearer as soon as he begins to breathe, a form of sociological and national determinism, imprisoning him between the lines of the "identity" card. Consequently, it is the inauguration of a life shaped and judged by others. It is, indeed, the first act of injustice, whether positive or negative, committed against the individual human being. If the answer is no, then the title of this paper is not meant to mystify. Rather, it is demystifying since the identity card responds to the question "Who am I?" not "What am I?" At best, the identity card, being silent on many points, gives one officially his/her national not personal identity. Otherwise, we are facing another form of essentialism.

The same essentialism is implied if we move horizontally from the identity card to other cards that position us in a group. Actually, there is nothing personal here. One is known by his nation (national identity) or culture (cultural identity), or by his/her group—ethnic, racial, religious, gender, sexual, etc—and not by his personal identity. This is the domain of what is called identity politics. It is a field of political arguments, conflicts and struggles focusing on the rights of minorities in the political life of the country. These "identities" are umbrella terms, collective appellations, whereas personal identity is unique by definition, belonging to one and only one person.

On the authority of Carolyn D'Cruz in her book *Identity Politics in Deconstruction*, "There is a library in Malmo, Sweden where in addition to borrowing books, you can borrow a lesbian. The list of people on loan included an Imam, an animal rights activist, a Gypsy, and a journalist"(1). The aim of this unusual practice is not difficult to gauge. It intends to show that "a face-to-face encounter with a 'representative' of a particular identity group will go some way toward countering bigotry and preconceived stereotypes (1). This "project," as the practice is called, will, in my opinion, dispel prejudice and restore the balance of justice and even-handedness, but, on the other hand, it will prove that one's personal identity is embroiled in a wider group identity, call it national identity, gender identity, cultural identity, or what have you (more of this hereafter), that within such group identities personal identity may sometimes infiltrate, since there may exist fissures within them. For example, although cultural identity seems to be a continuous homogeneous whole —one history, one past, one

present, one future, common traditions, common stories, etc.—there are discontinuities and cracks due to several reasons, a fact which explains civil wars and separatist movements.

So, by these identities we are fixed, ossified. As we grow up, we are subjected to other forms of “fixing.” Here, the community plays a major role. We are given an “identity” by the surrounding people on the basis of our acts and words. Such “identity” becomes almost a personality by which we live and are expected to live. Any deviation from this “formula” calls for comments such as: “He is not himself,” “He is beside himself,” and “He is out of his mind. T. S. Eliot’s J. Alfred Profrock self-pityingly speaks of his constrained life as he is “formulated” by the eyes that “fix” him (*Norton Anthology* 2260).

Obviously, if we intend to focus on personal identity, we have to delve into the inner world of the individual, to undertake some kind of archeology. The depth I am talking about differs from Homi Bhabha’s. His notion of depth (48) is based on John Locke’s memory; mine goes further back and down as we are going to see. Definitely, the notions of “quest” and “search” imply the inner essence of a person’s character, unknown to the outside world that the person himself, if he wills or if he can, has, at a certain age, to pinpoint. Personal identity, often used as a synonym of personality, self¹, and character takes precedence over all other “identities” not only because it is the most controversial and evades the most abstruse discussions but also because it affects them all.

What makes the question of personal identity difficult to gauge is the psychological and physiological facts of heredity and early childhood, as well as social circumstances and political environment. These are the formative factors of identity working on heredity, as many psychologists, referred to later, aver. Significantly, free will is non-existent in the early years of childhood. Between heredity and family circumstances, the child is helpless. How much free will is available as he grows up varies according to several factors, but definitely it is limited... The body is axiomatically to be reckoned with very seriously because it shapes more or less our self-image as well as others’ image of us. Try face transplant, and you will appreciate this element. The mirror is a witness of the value of the body in determining identity. W. V. Quine says, “Man is a body-minded animal”(qtd. In Eli Hirsch, 239). Just let’s think of how much of our physical make-up our own achievement is. Definitely, very little, and it is completely built around the genetic backbone, which we cannot modify to any considerable degree. This physiognomic theory, with its three types -- the tall, the short, and the fat-- goes back to the classical times, and so does the humor theory. Cassius is dangerous, in Caesar’s opinion, because, being tall, he

thinks too much. Let's think of our childhood: the family, the economic conditions, the religion, the school, the hobbies, etc. These are also beyond our control.

For all these reasons, identity studies have been a field of a multitude of contesting theories, a jungle of intellectual arguments and counter-arguments starting from Plato in his *Phaedo* to the present. Undoubtedly, Locke's chapter "On Identity and Diversity" in his ground-breaking book *An Essay on Human Understanding* (1689) gave a gigantic momentum to these studies and actually introduced a theory that generated a lot of elaborations and emendations. According to Locke, identity is neither body nor soul but a matter of one's consciousness, the repeated self-identification of oneself. In Chapter XXVII of Book II, he defines a person as a "thinking, intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and as it seems to me essential to it"(335). So, personal identity consists in "the sameness of a rational Being"(335). As for the range of personal identity, which Bhabha calls depth, it reaches backwards as far as "consciousness can be extended backwards"(335). In other words, it is a matter of memory.

Although continuity has become a key term in such studies, being empirically convincing and commonsensically attractive, the later developments have contributed a great deal in the same direction, adding too many complex terms that leave one mystified; luckily, we do not need them for this paper. Now we are witnessing conflicts on many fronts where philosophy, ethics, sociology, psychology, psychoanalysis, biology, metaphysics, and the law are brought to bear on the subject. In addition to such ingenious questions as "Who am I?" and "What am I?" and "What could I have been?" such matters as "synchronic identity," "diachronic identity," "numerical identity," "qualitative identity," "persistence," "surviving," "physical continuity," and "spatiotemporal continuity," receive such abstruse but, unfortunately, confusing arguments.

Since getting caught in such webs of complications is not expected in any way to lead us to any manageable and consensual conclusion, I will, for the purposes of this paper, focus on some notions and definitions of personal identity that capitalize on persistence, consciousness, and continuity in normal cases, thus excluding, as much as possible, abnormal psychology. According to *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (SEP), personal identity is "what makes you unique as an individual and different from others. ... the way you see and define yourself, or the network of values and convictions that structure your life." Significantly, it is a property "that you have only contingently"(SEP).

Now, to avoid more complications governing personal identity, let's settle down with the basic view, originated by Locke and adopted by others explicitly or implicitly, that personal identity is born in one's consciousness and resides there. What are the implications of all this? First, consciousness cannot be empty; in itself it cannot determine identity. As phenomenologists say, consciousness is intentional, directed, and transitive. It is always "consciousness of something" (Husserl 50). This directedness Husserl calls "intentionality"(50). This means simply that one sees if and only if there is something to see, a visible object. Locke says that man, as a thinking and intelligent being, "can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places." "Thinking," being a process, implies objects of thought. It is also transitive, whether we are talking about empirical ego, where psychologism might be implicated, or pure, transcendental ego. So, the objects may be outer as well as inner, things and states, sights, sounds, tastes, heat, pain, cold, etc. Gradually, one begins to develop feelings, values, beliefs, convictions, affiliations, and allegiances, the combination and integration of which make an individual what he is, and different from others. Second, only that individual and no one else has access to this system of things, sensations, and feelings and can decide on questions of his/her personal identity. Consequently, an outsider cannot claim that he knows another's personal identity. As Marlow says in *Heart of Darkness* almost with self-pity amounting to neurotic anxiety as he laments man's fate of loneliness, ". . . No, it is impossible, it is impossible to convey , the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live as we dream—alone" (Conrad 28).

Modern theories of identity seem to have complicated the issue with considerations of man's psychological make-up and the possibility of self-knowledge. Sigmund Freud's and Carl Jung's views in this regard are the most prominent. They are determining, restrictive, and somewhat mystifying. Freud, as you all know, emphasizes childhood as a formative period in the individual's life with its instincts, Oedipus complex and its repercussions, and the possible fixations around the three pleasure zones with the possible complications in an adult's life. Above all, the unconscious is the underpinning of the whole psyche, the behind-the-scenes determinant of behavior. From all this, it follows, first, that a person's life is an arena of conflicts, the ego being caught between the demands of the id (pleasure principle) and those of the superego (morality), and, second, that a person's conscious acts and words are often double agents. He may say what he does not mean and mean what he does not say, a self-deconstructive being, unlike all other beings, living a double life and propped by defense mechanisms². It is perhaps these acts

and words that give one a semblance of unity and consistency and that eventually bind one to an enslaving code of behavior and speech called "identity," by which he comes to be recognized. We might call this one's "manifest" identity, as opposed to his "latent" identity, to use Freud's terms in another context, though, generally speaking, man remains, to a great extent, ignorant of himself, and in neurosis and psychosis only self-knowledge under psychoanalytic care might save him from madness with all its manifestations³.

Jung, whose contributions are very significant in this regard and to my mind more complex than Freud's, adds more complications. His views in "The Structure of the Psyche" may illustrate what I mean. He plunges into what he calls "the chaotic muddle of complicated psychic states" (SP 24) to disentangle the contents. Locating the basic epistemological phenomena in consciousness, he views the unconscious in a more complex way than Freud, since "all the activities ordinarily taking place in consciousness can also proceed in the unconscious (SP 29). Dreams too "may be regarded as a resultant of unconscious processes obtruding on consciousness" (SP 29), and here he refers to Freud's theories on dreams and errors.. But dreams can also be affected by the collective unconscious, "a supra-individual psychic activity . . . as distinct from a superficial, relative, or personal unconscious (SP 34). And here he parts company with Freud by a long way, "In fact, the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious"(39).

In his "Aion: Phenomenology of the Self," Jung expands his theory on the structure of the psyche. The self, as "a psyche outside consciousness" (PS 143), is "the total personality which, though present, cannot be fully known" (PS 142). Thus, the ego as "the conscious personality (PS 142) is now "relativized" (PS 143) and becomes "subordinate to the self and is related to it like a part to the whole (PS 142), and not only can it "do nothing against the self, but is sometimes actually assimilated by unconscious components of the personality" (PS 142-3), by archetypes such as the shadow (the dark side of personality), anima (the mother imago in males) and the animus (the father figure in females). Jung endows the latter two with great significance, "The animus corresponds to the paternal Logos just as the anima corresponds to the maternal Eros" (PS 152) with all the possible implications. At the deepest level, therefore, there is the collective unconscious, then the personal unconscious, the shadow (the dark side), the anima or animus, the ego, and the persona, all of which are parts of the self. The persona deserves some elaboration in this study. It serves as a protective shield for the ego, a buffer zone against the outside reality, something like Freud's defense mechanisms. Thus, Jung as much as he emphasizes the

primacy of unconscious activities, underlines the idea that the outside world is not always friendly and safe, a fact which makes it necessary for the psyche to create a mask, perhaps more than one, to conceal the inner world and protect it..

Jung's theory of psychological types is also relevant. It is systematic and rather comprehensive. According to his essay "Psychological Types" in *The Portable Jung*, individuals can be divided into two types: extraverts and introverts. Each type influences four of our mental activities, namely sensation, feeling, thinking and intuition. Thus, we end up with eight sub-types. The characteristics of each type belong to a person's "nature"(181); they constitute a "birthmark." An individual's happiness or unhappiness depends upon his acting in accordance with or discordance with his nature, "whenever . . . a falsification of type takes place as a result of parental influence, the individual becomes neurotic later"(181). Character depends upon the inborn type, including morality, which in the case of extraverts coincides "with the demands of society"(183), while "subjectivization of consciousness"(234) and the resulting "devaluation of the object"(234) determine the psychic and behavioral life of the introverts. These eight types have been further expanded, and now we have a maze of possibilities. There are even tests that determine one's type.

Another relevant issue in Jung's psychology is his views on individuation, according to which a human being, although he is governed by so many unconscious forces beyond his control, as shown above, may undergo a process of self-discovery. In other words, the aim of individuation is to disentangle the personal from the collective as Jung says in "Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious" in *The Portable Jung*," Hence it is imperative to make a clear distinction between personal contents and those of the collective psyche"(102). The process is difficult because as Jung states in the same essay, "... one is always astonished to see how much of our so-called individual psychology is really collective. So much, indeed, that the individual traits are completely overshadowed by it"(102). The outcome of this process, if successful, is that each one will come to recognize his qualities, both good and bad, and accept them as himself. Now, it can be said that he has become an individual, identical only to himself and different from others. This is not far removed from the Existential attitude. However, some questions remain unresolved. First, how authentic is the process? Second, how does one know that he has discovered his real self and not an illusion or an image of it? How can one find something he does not know. Third, will the person reveal and live by his discovered identity under the pressures of civilization, given his masks? Fourth, how is it possible to distinguish the

outside from the inside after so many years of adaptation and socialization, after being "contaminated" by the outside world? Culture cannot go back to nature. All these questions complicate the issue, burying personal identity under a rabble of unresolved complexities.

Modern theories of identity follow the above leads. Fenichel defines identity as "the ego's habitual mode of bringing into harmony the demands of the external world and the internal world of personal drives and needs"(qtd in Holland, 204-5), a view that swerves toward adaptation and somehow smacks of hypocrisy, being open to compromise of lesser or greater degree. Lichtenstein sees in Fenichel's definition an embodiment of what Holland calls a "dialectic of sameness and difference" (205); that is, although we change over time, we remain essentially the same. However, neither Fenichel nor Holland tries to determine when we start to be the same, at what age, under what conditions and following what factors.

There remains, of course, the modern Existential view that existence precedes essence, that man, as far as his personal identity is concerned, has no innate ideas about himself. On the basis of this conception, man, with his choices, makes his identity and becomes the sum of his choices and the acts that follow from them, provided that he remains true to his essence. This truthfulness to one's essence is what Existentialists call authenticity, or good faith as opposed to bad faith. The view is predicated on the assumption that man is free, which is more a wish than a fact since it is belied every day by man's lived circumstances, biological conditions, and international and national politics. For this reason, Existential literature is swept by despair, angst, ennui, and nausea. Sartre's novel *Nausea* is the paradigm, and everywhere bad faith characterizes man's behavior. In a short story by Proust entitled "The Filial Sentiments of a Parricide," the protagonist, following his vehement protestations of filial love and sympathies, slaughters his father and then commits suicide. The case illustrates how in a civilized society one lives a double life, a mild case of Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

It seems that one of the key factors in the study of identity is one's relations with the outside world, for identity is known and expressed only in relations with the other and with the language of the other. This is where Derrida comes in with one of his key term "différance." Julian Wolfreys, expounding Derrida's view on the subject, states that for the French thinker the principle of identity "is traced by difference" (120). He adds, "By identity . . . we might be allowed to suggest otherness, otherness within identity, the relation of otherness to identity, whether either alterity or identity refer to, directly to indirectly, personal, poetic, literary or even national identity"(120). According to the same principle,

identity is always deferred; it is always contingent, as other philosophers have asserted, never permanent, since the play of difference never stops but arbitrarily. But here, as it seems to me, Derrida is mainly talking about outward identity, and not that identity which only consciousness can access.

The otherness needed for identification covers everything that is not the self, especially the outside world, whether human, natural, social, or political.

In other words, one sees himself in the mirror of the outside world, provided that one employs not only his ego but also, as much as possible, his transcendental ego. In some happy cases, one's inner self and the outside world accord with each other. Consequently, a happy marriage ensues, with each making the most of the other. Rollo May speaks of the daimonic almost in the same way we speak of the self or personal identity, "The daimonic is the unique pattern of sensibilities and powers which constitutes the individual as a self in relation to the world"(125). He quotes Heraclitus as saying, "Man's character is his daimon"(135), and goes on to say, "Happiness is to live in harmony with one's daimon. Nowadays, we would relate 'eudaimonism' to the state of integration of potentialities and other aspects of one's being, with behavior"(125). With all this in mind, we can now understand the psychological meaning of self-assertion, "a capacity to stand on one's own feet, an affirmation of one's self "(May 146).

However, the two worlds are often in disaccord especially under certain conditions of civilization. Here, we see the huge price one has to pay for his adaptation to the outside world⁴, which may lead to pathological cases. Freud's defense mechanisms serve the purpose and may alleviate the painful consequences, but one should be cautious lest the repressed strikes back aggressively and ferociously when the right time comes as it does in Proust's story. Literature here provides a great deal of illumination. Who could have believed that the European Kurtz and the African Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* are one and the same person? Even Marlow, whose attitudes and opinions contradict his education in Europe and Africa, is not immune against the sarcastic gaze of the implied author. Who could have recognized Iago's simulation without dramatic irony, an artistically artificial device invented to throw light on the cave inside and predating Jung's persona by more than two hundred years. The choice is either adaptation against one's real self like men who in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* make their fortune in Africa, "men who come out here should have no entrails"(22), or, engage in war tactics with the world. The result is schizophrenia, a condition of living in two worlds without knowing which is which. Richard Cory, who looked like a perfect gentleman envied by the people on the pavement, went home one night "and put a bullet in his head." Miniver Cheevy lived a divided life

"scorning the gold he sought, /but sore annoyed was he without it." Resorting to alcohol, he "coughed, and called it fate, / and kept on drinking."

However, Arnold seems to have been the poet of sincerity, of living in good faith, even before Existentialism became a philosophy. He speaks about identity with all the depth of a psychologist and philosopher. Not only in "Empedocles on Etna," a poem illustrating a blazing case in this regard where he addresses this question of truth to oneself in the face of outer circumstances which, at least in Empedocles' consciousness, are hostile, but also in his other poems as well. In his "Dover Beach" the persona (biographically, Arnold himself on his honeymoon) addresses his love saying, "Oh, love. Let's be true to one another"(1378), and proceeds to delineate the tragic contradiction between bright appearances and a rotten reality. Actually, it is this rottenness of the world, admittedly a subjective view, that justifies the call for true identification based on one's attitude toward the outside world and leading to a better condition of mutual understanding, a true marriage of minds not bodies. One's identity is somehow reflected in one's view of the world and possibly revealed in behavior. This is only theoretically valid for a moral judgment is always relative. What concerns us here is the question of identity and how to resolve it. Like Rorschach inkpot test, how one sees the outside world, how one regards his own culture and even zeitgeist, all this indicates one's identity, provided that the test is taken in good faith. The encounter implies three possibilities. First, one thinks the world is bad and still he decides to live in it and adopt its badness. That person is a Darwinian hero. Second, one thinks the world is bad and decides to retreat to the shell of his self or to some haven. That person is an idealist. Third, one honestly thinks that the world is good. That person is the happiest of all. Significantly, in Arnold's age the attitude towards industrialism marked the difference between two major intellectual camps, between Carlyle and Macaulay. Heaven to one was in the past, to the other in the future.

The above issues, especially the identification on the frontiers between the inner and the outer worlds, bring Bhabha to mind. He concentrates on the colonial/postcolonial situation, which may be an extreme case but is not far from what is common almost for every body: black skins, white masks. According to Bhabha, there are three conditions "that underlie an understanding of the process of identification"(44). The first condition is: ". . . to live is to be called into being in relation to an otherness , its look or locus"(44). The second is : ". . . the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting"(44). What follows is Bhabha 's third condition, ". . . the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a *self*-fulfilling

prophecy – it is always the production of *an image of identity* and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image”(45, emphasis added). These three conditions are three possibilities open to every man in society, but the integrity of identity is compromised. An image of identity is a second identity, a second will, if you want, but the price has to be paid. Arnold is more positive, since he calls upon the individual to choose to take the test and to accept the consequences, to judge the world and not to wait for its scope and gaze, like Prufrock.

The “gaze” and “counter-gaze” that Bhabha talks about in his study of the colonial situation (47) can be generalized with some modifications. The human situation affords easy comparison, and colonialism may not be the worst of all human conditions; otherwise, why would some post-independence African writers hanker after the good old days of colonialism? Whether we consider the Marxist view of a society of class struggle or a liberal view of great democracies or the wide varieties in between the public eye and ear are not too difficult to detect and even to pinpoint in what Foucault calls “the microphysics of power”(147). Instead of the “invisibleness” (47) of the black man in Bhabha’s argument, Foucault chooses “‘noncorporeal’ or ‘soul,’” for the condemned man, a view which he soon expands to include “in a more general way . . . those one supervises, trains, and corrects . . . madmen, children at home and school, the colonized . . . those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives”(177). Literature has captured the situation beautifully. It abounds in relevant examples. Marlow, in *Heart of Darkness*, speaks of the public opinion, along with the police, as a supervising authority keeping things in their place in the social machinery. Bertha Young, in Katherine Mansfield’s short story “Bliss,” overcome by a feeling of “absolute bliss” and wanting to express her feelings in the street by some unconventional ways but refraining for fear of the public gaze, wonders, “Oh, is there no way you can express it without being “drunk and disorderly”? Then she exclaims in protest, “How idiotic civilization is! Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle?” Fiddle or no fiddle, society is narcissistic and likes to see its picture in every one of its human mirrors. In short, personal identity, or what one feels naturally inclined to do or not to do, has to be kept hidden from the public eye and ear, like a rare fiddle or gem.

That Arnold's call in “Dover Beach” for transparency is not always obeyed, that personal identity is kept hidden down in one’s psyche for even some mysterious reason, is addressed in his poem “The Buried Life.” The persona admits to his love in wonder that somehow even they, the two lovers, cannot “unlock” their hearts to each other. This condition of non-communication is understandable between

common people, but what makes him wonder is that he and his lover are suffering from the same condition: "Alas! Is even love too weak/ To unlock the heart, and let it speak?" Arnold calls it "spell." And, therefore, a moment of free conversation would be enough since what seals their lips "hath been deep-ordained." It turns out eventually that fate has willed such a state to preserve the integrity of identity:

Fate, which foresaw
How frivolous a baby man would be,--
By what distractions he would be possessed,
How he would pour himself in every strife,
And well-nigh change his own identity—
That it might keep from his capricious play
His *genuine self*, and force him to obey
Even in his own despite his *being's law*,
Bade through *the deep recesses of our breast*
The unregarded river of our life
Pursue with indiscernible flow its way;
And that we should not see
The buried stream, and seem to be
Eddying at large in blind uncertainty,
Though driving on with it eternally. (1365, emphasis added)

However, when lovers' hands are locked together, the hearts unlock, but this happens rarely and momentarily. All this justifies the importunity of the call in "Dover Beach."

Significantly, literature provides other ways to unlock the hearts. The writer, being the creator of his work, regardless of the genre and the point of view, has devised methods to do just that. Thematically, the discrepancy between appearance and reality is an archetype in world literature, both written and oral as well as in cultures and religions. Al-Quran refers to the hypocrites (Al-Munafikon) hundreds of times, perhaps as frequently as it does to the believers. *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is a glaring example in

literature. Somehow, the writer feels obligated to delve into the consciousness and even the unconscious of his characters for this purpose to disclose the recesses of their minds, as a gesture of candor.. Since the early days of drama, soliloquy has been employed to this end. Countless soliloquies throughout the history of this genre remind us again and again that characters--that is, human beings-- bury a great deal of their identities within themselves. Only they seem to be aware of the hidden parts. Only they, theoretically, seem to be familiar with their other selves, call these, as you wish, their shadows or doubles. Shakespeare, whose knowledge of human nature has been credited again and again, employs soliloquies superbly. Let's take *Macbeth* for illustration. Macbeth, whose off-guard reaction on hearing the witches' prophecies sheds light into the cave of his consciousness, reveals his inner self in his famous soliloquy beginning with "He is here in double trust . . ." on the eve of Duncan's murder. It is this identification on the frontiers that leads us to better understand his identity, since it shows that it was his personal identity, his consciousness of his own position with respect to outer morality that stood in the way. That side, borne out later by his hallucinations, was overwhelmed by Lady Macbeth's impregnable ambition.

Modern literature has devised other methods for the same purpose, such as stream of consciousness and internal monologue. Here, too, it is shown that characters live a double life, the inner self being glossed over by a façade woven by the demands of civilization, a persona in Jungian terms. Again countless examples can be cited. Erich Auerbach, in his well-known book *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Culture*, sees a marked movement toward an emphasis of personal consciousness –that is, toward personal identity. In classical literature there was a "need for an externalization of phenomena in terms perceptible to the senses. . . . to represent phenomena in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts"(4-5). This representation included both physical and psychological phenomena. In Modern literature Auerbach concludes, on the basis of his analysis of an excerpt from Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, that personal consciousness has become pre-eminent, "The writer as narrator of objective facts has almost completely vanished; almost everything stated appears by way of reflection in the consciousness of the dramatis personae"(471-72). Here, as we can see, personal identity is more truly represented. Reality is now a matter of personal consciousness, but this is only one aspect of it. Total reality becomes a synthesis of a number of consciousnesses, a "mutlipersonal representation of consciousness."(474) a modern view *par excellence* to be compared

with Bakhtin's view that reality is multivocal⁵. That's why one feels that characters in modern literature have become persons, human beings, and not only masks.

There are two more relevant issues, one theoretical and the other practical. I will only outline them. In the former, one wonders whether the self in the Jungian self unfolds fully in any environment -- that is, in every culture: Arabic, English, French, Indian, Nigerian, etc-- whether birth in a certain environment is not a matter of fate, determining one's personal identity both physical and otherwise, let alone other identities. In the latter case, language is a factor. If one chooses to express himself in good or bad faith, is language, which is a public and conventional means of expression and communication, rich enough and personal enough to fulfill the task, assuming one is a master of it? The Romantics in their struggle with language are articulate reminders in this respect⁶. Fortunately or not, arts are sometimes available to give a note or a color.

I am afraid that in the light, or rather gloom, of the above discussion, the questions in the title of this paper will only be partially answered. Personal identity remains a mystery, overshadowing all others. There are good reasons to believe that the core of identity is inaccessible, that it is hidden from the outside world and even from one's consciousness, that acts and words are not exactly it, are only its manifest tip often shaped and paraded as the occasion requires. We can describe a person's acts, but not his identity or his being. We can say, he acts generously, relatively speaking, but not he is generous, unless we take the latter as a figure of speech to mean the former. And, in all cases, the description is spacio-temporal. Perhaps the Macbeth test will do; perhaps a slip of the tongue, or the pen, or the hand, or the face. And how about poker faces?

Notes

1. For more details about the historical emergence of the self as a Philosophical concept, see John Lyons, *The Invention of the Self: The Hinge of Consciousness in the Eighteenth Century*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978.
2. The analogy with the critical question of the writer's relation to his work is not, I believe, farfetched. As the question in literary criticism is controversial, generating many arguments, so is it in the field of identity. In this analogy one's acts and words in society are his "artistic work."
3. Freud has had great influence on many psychiatrists and psychologists, let alone thinkers. One of those is Erik Erikson, who is relevant here. He worked out a theory based on how human beings deal with crises which they encounter as they grow up. He called it bio-psychosocial theory of development and sometimes epigenesis because it takes the surrounding space-time into account. His theory is general, applicable to all mankind. He is not interested in individual development. At each stage of the eight stages human beings are faced with a crisis which, on the basis of how each one survives it, determines his ratio of two opposing extreme character traits, such as "trust, vs. mistrust" of Stage One, which corresponds roughly to the oral stage in Freud. Why one person gets such a ratio and another a different ratio remains a mystery. The conclusion is that a person is the sum of his eight immeasurable ratios, which appears in his outward behavior irrespective of the inner self. For more details in this regard see
http://www.businessballs.com/erik_erikson_psychological_theory.htm
4. For more about this relation see Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*. Trans. and ed. James Strachey. New York: Avon, 1961.
5. See Mikhail Bakhtin. "From the pre-history of narrative discourse." In *Modern Criticism and Theory*. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman, 1988.
6. For more on this issue, see J. Hillis Miller. *The Linguistic Moment*. Princeton: Princeton U.P. 1985.

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