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巴岱伊小說中逾越的耗費：

《愛華姐夫人》，《我的母親》，《眼睛的故事》與《死人》

Transgressing Expenditures in Bataille's Novels:
Madame Edwarda, My Mother, Story of the Eye,
and *The Dead Man*

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中文摘要

喬治·巴岱伊的普遍經濟觀一直以來都是個廣泛被討論的議題，然而他的小說並沒有得到相同的關注，更遑論會得到讀者的青睞，他的小說不受欣賞是因為讀者對小說中蔓佈的暴力、死亡和性等禁忌感到恐懼。對巴岱伊而言這些耗費被視為禁忌是因為這些耗費對以生產為導向的資本主義造成威脅，就巴岱伊而言這些耗費深深的吸引讀者，因為它們是讀者跳脫出奴役狀態的橋樑。

本論文的主體分成四個章節。第一章〈巴岱伊的普遍經濟觀：獻祭與情色〉簡述巴岱伊的普遍經濟觀，此章敘述巴岱伊將耗費視為一種溝通的形式與跳脫奴役狀態的橋樑。第二章〈情色論：耽溺焦慮式的閱讀〉闡述情色與動物式的性之間細微的差異。第三章〈情色論：禁忌與逾越〉探索禁忌與逾越之間的關係。對巴岱伊來說禁忌與逾越不是互相衝突抵制而是呈現互相追逐互動的關係。第四章〈情色論：禮物與重生〉探討耗費的原則。此章並闡述情色為一種禮物與重生的形式。

關鍵詞：巴岱伊、普遍經濟、耗費、情色論、逾越

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Abstract

Georges Bataille's *general economy* has been a much explored issue; in contrast, his novels did not receive a similar attention, let alone a welcome reception should be expected from readers. His novels suffered pale appreciation because readers were extremely horrified by their permeating presentation of taboos such as violence, death and sexuality. For Bataille, these taboos are inextricably related to expenditures which undermine the doctrine advocated by production-oriented capitalist society. These expenditures, as Bataille suggests, should rather fascinate than frightening readers away because they function as salvation from a state of servitude.

This thesis is divided into four major chapters. Chapter One, entitled "Bataille's General Economy: Sacrifice and Eroticism," initiates a brief introduction to Bataille's *general economy*. In this introduction Bataille's characterization of expenditure as a form of communication and a way of liberation from servitude is investigated. Chapter Two "Eroticism: Reading for Anxiety" exposes the essence of eroticism and the subtle distinction between eroticism and animal-like sexuality. Chapter Three "Eroticism: Prohibition and Transgression" explores the relationship between prohibition and transgression. Bataillean eroticism features prohibition and transgression in an altering interplay rather than antagonistic conflict. Chapter Four "Eroticism: Gift and Rebirth" investigates the principle of loss. It also examines the issue: Eroticism as a form of rebirth and gift.

Keywords: Bataille, *general economy*, expenditure, eroticism, transgression

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Abbreviations

<i>B</i>	<i>Bataille</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>The Bataille Reader</i>
<i>DM</i>	<i>The Dead Man</i>
<i>DS</i>	<i>Death and Sensuality</i>
<i>ECC</i>	<i>Essays Critical and Clinical</i>
<i>EGH</i>	<i>Eroticism in Georges Bataille and Henry Miller</i>
<i>ME</i>	<i>Madame Edwarda</i>
<i>NFL</i>	<i>Nietzsche's French Legacy</i>
<i>PS</i>	<i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>
<i>SE</i>	<i>Story of the Eye</i>



Introduction

Bataille's Eroticism: Expenditures and Sovereignty

Georges Bataille (1897-1962) is deemed a precursor of poststructuralism, who had a profound influence on postmodern thinkers like Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) and Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998). Foucault's concept of transgression was indebted to Bataille and both of them shared the same idea that transgression was not meant to subvert taboos but to complete and reinforce them.¹ For Bataille and Foucault, the relationship between transgression and prohibition is related to mutual conditioning. Without the arresting nature of prohibition, we may not experience the intense pleasure derived from transgressing the prohibition. Also, Derrida's idea of "gift" and Baudrillard's idea of "consumption" were also indebted to Bataille's *general economy* which celebrates loss and waste.² They all refused to grant privilege to the representation of quantitative accumulation to which the capitalist society paid homage. Georges Bataille was not only known as a philosopher but also distinguished as a writer of erotic novels which were inspired by pornographic writings of the Marquis de Sade (1740-1784). Bataille identified with Sade because his pornographic writings aim to transgress the social norms and to disturb the aristocracy. Bataille's erotic writings were not intended to arouse readers but to deal with prohibitions which incurred anxiety as well as fear. Also, his *general economy* was intended to disrupt the

¹ As Foucault put it, "The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable, and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows" (*Bataille: A Critical Reader* 27). He added, "Transgression, then, is not related to the limit as black to white . . . Rather, their relationship *takes the form of a spiral* which no simple infraction can exhaust" (28 emphasis mine). For Foucault, the relationship between prohibition and transgression takes the form of a spiral because of its alternating conditioning.

² In *Georges Bataille*, Michael Richardson regarded Bataille as a thinker who scorned "the whole principle of an economics of accumulation and utility to assert that the basis of economic health was a principle of pure exuberance" (3).

commonly held mindset of the capitalist society.

Readers might reduce Bataille's eroticism to animal-like sexuality and thus undervalue it. Animals flinch back when they encounter anxiety, yet they are unaware of prohibitions. Eroticism is never manifested in animals because they are in lack of the anxiety caused by engaging in prohibitions. Increased anxiety precedes the inception of intense pleasure, which constitutes the essence of Bataillean eroticism. Without anxiety, sexuality is boiled down to animal-like desires rather than Bataille's eroticism. In Volume II of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille argues:

This is the meaning of anguish, without which sexuality would be only an animal activity, and would not be *erotic*. If we wish to clearly represent this extraordinary effect, we have to compare it to vertigo, where fear does not paralyze but increases an involuntary desire to fall; and to uncontrollable laughter, where the laughter increases in proportion to our anguish if some dangerous element supervenes and if we laugh even though at all costs we should stop laughing. (100)

Purpose of the Study

Bataille's *general economy* is a much explored issue; in contrast, his novels originally did not receive a welcome reception from readers. Bataille's novels were undervalued because readers were terrified at their permeating presentation of repulsive violence and terrifying death. People are frightened by violence because it is inextricably linked to brutal punishment. For Walter Benjamin, it is essential to re-examine the representation of violence. In "Critique of Violence," he argues:

Indeed, it strives to limit by legal ends even those areas in which natural ends are admitted in principle within wide boundaries, like that of

education, as soon as these natural ends are pursued with an excessive measure of violence, as in the laws relating to the limits of educational authority to punish. (*Reflections* 280)

Bataille succeeds in giving new interpretation to the representation of violence, which has often been denigrated as destruction and is seen as producing nothing valuable.³ Sacrifice and sexuality have been deemed as two forms of violence. For Bataille, these two forms of violence serve to prevent us from being subjugated to utility. Sexuality and Death, as Bataille suggests, are two forms of violence which could be a means of communication serving to fuse readers with others.⁴ Above all, these two forms of violence facilitate our escape of servile utility (see Chapter One for a detailed explanation). Forms of violence such as sacrifice, sexuality and death, fascinate us because they function as salvation from a state of servitude.

Inspired by Mauss's idea of gift giving, Bataille's *general economy* glorifies generous loss and useless waste. For Bataille, waste is indispensable because unlimited production and accumulation inevitably lead to unavoidable loss either in a glorious or catastrophic fashion. In capitalist society, people are preoccupied with acquisitive accumulation and thus scorn anything related to expenditures like drunkenness, violence, death, sacrifice and sexuality. What is worse, they refuse the gratuitous giving of true generosity for it was deemed as a form of loss. Capitalists are fearful of expenditures because the principle of scarcity is deeply embedded in their minds. Bataille attempted to reverse mainstream thinking by postulating that excess

³ In *The Ideology of Tyranny*, Guido Giacomo Preparata cited Bataille as a great thinker who explored the issue of violence. As he pointed out, "The Bataillean enterprise was driven by the unhinged ambition to convert others to a placid acceptance of violence and dissipation by employing a mix of persuasive rational arguments on the impossibility of grasping the meaning of the Hereafter . . . which was built upon imagery inspired by death and bloody sacrifice" (8-9).

⁴ In "Death in Bataille," Baudrillard maintains that "[e]rotic nakedness is equal to death in so far as it inaugurates a state of communication, loss of identity and fusion" (141). He adds, "In death, as in Eros, it is a matter of introducing all possible continuity into discontinuity, a game of complete continuity" (141).

was a principle of economy and releasing the pressure of excess was the key to solving economic problems and returning to a healthy and benevolent time. In ancient times, people knew how to reabsorb excess by virtue of waste.

Enslaved to the ethics of work, people are subjugated to utility in productive activities and thus they lose their sense of self-sovereignty. Sovereignty, as Bataille suggested, does not refer to political power which is granted to gods and kings, rather it is a feeling of intoxication of truly enjoying things when one is no longer servile to personal needs and utility. Sovereignty is manifested in one's exemption from depending on his needs and his utilitarian value stipulated by productive activities. It is manifested through expenditures such as squandering, sacrifice, drunkenness and sexuality. Self-sovereignty, as Bataille argues, is manifested in expenditure. **Chapter One** initiates a brief introduction to Bataille's *general economy*. In this introduction Bataille's characterization of expenditure as a form of communication and a way of liberation from servitude is investigated.

Bataille's underlying theme can help readers grasp what constitutes eroticism. He thinks of eroticism as "sacred" because it is distinctive from the "profane world" which stresses the importance of work, production and preservation.

For Bataille, eroticism is sacred because it is a form of pleasure, expenditure and death. He conceptualized human history as being divided into three phases of evolution – the primitive world, the profane world, and the sacred world. The primitive world was dominated by animal impulses. The profane world features taboos which interdicts animal impulses and servile humanity. The sacred world is characterized by transgression and self-sovereignty.

To establish the profane world, people living in primitive times set taboos to regulate their animal impulses. Anything related to animality was regulated or confined in dark corners. The profane world features assiduous production and

self-preservation, while the sacred world features expenditure characterized by sexuality, violence, sacrifice and death. Bataille interpreted human history by digging into the inner experience of prohibition and transgression.⁵ Readers, who are haunted by their desires to transgress taboos, can vicariously experience shocking things which they would otherwise never attempt in real life. Animal impulses, such as incest, excrement, filthiness, were incorporated into Bataille's erotic writings. These animal impulses were intended to violate the prohibitions established in the profane world, yet many readers fail to grasp the essence of eroticism in Bataillean literature. In **Chapter Two**, the essence of eroticism is examined. The following research question is also explored in great details. How does the concept of inner experience that Bataille asserts serve to distinguish humans' eroticism from animal-like sexuality?

What distinguished Bataille's erotic novels from mainstream erotic literature was Bataille's presentation of repulsive forces which served to bring about readers' anxiety and horror. These repulsive forces are marked as taboo. For readers who are conformed to social norms, Bataille's insistence on celebrating the irresistible attractiveness of taboos can be extremely disturbing. Moreover, the paradoxical combination of oppositions rampantly permeates Bataille's novels, which may puzzle and disinterest readers who lack erotic experiences. The combination of extreme anxiety and extreme pleasure perfectly illustrated prohibition and transgression. According to Bataille, the prohibition causes readers' anxiety, while at the same time transgression of taboos offers them pleasure. The intensity of anxiety is in proportion to that of pleasure. The more anxious readers feel, the more enraptured they feel. The

⁵ As Bataille puts it, "There is no way out from the contradictory impulses which agitate men and it is in this that they satisfy me. I have doubts: I no longer see in me anything but cracks, impotence, useless agitation. I feel corrupt; everything that I touch is corrupt" (*Inner Experience* 33). The paradoxical combination of anxiety and pleasure characterizes the essence of Bataillean eroticism.

female body is constructed as a paradoxical combination of asexual maternal and sexual feminine, which serves as a perfect illustration of Bataille's eroticism. Sexual desire is a taboo for women. Therefore, corrupting virtuous women is more captivating than copulating with licentious women since it is transgression. Corrupting beautiful and decent women is a form of profanation because their distorted facial expressions, caused by orgasm, are a profanation of beauty. In this sense, prohibition generates desires and reinforces them. **Chapter Three** focuses on exploring the relationship between transgression and prohibition in Bataille's novels.

Bataille remarks of his own project, "Talk about eroticism I shall, but as something beyond our present set of experiences, as a beyond accessible one on condition only, that we leave the world we now inhabit to shut ourselves up in solitude" (*Death and Sensuality* 252). Bataille lamented on the fading of eroticism with the prevailing of capitalism. According to Bataille, "our present set of experiences" gives way to the ethics of "work" intended for production and reproduction (*DS* 252). Therefore, people in capitalist society scorn eroticism and embrace capitalism. The importance of acquisitive accumulation casts a shadow over the aura of festive expenditures.

Bataille's erotic novels are widely undervalued since his readers are often bombarded with the characters' sudden spasmodic excitement. What is worse, the filthy excrement following their spasms can repel his readers on a fundamental level. Such shocking orgasms are unpredictably instinctual and in turn cannot be planned or controlled. Eroticism is overshadowed by capitalism because it undermines work. There is no place for patience or postponement when the desired objects are already presented. In stark contrast to eroticism, work in the context of capitalism requires planning, patience, and self-control. That is, people need to hold back or moderate their sexual exuberance so that they can reach their scheduled work goals. For this

reason, Bataille's erotic novels are deemed to be absurd by readers whose minds are deeply embedded in the ethics of work. It seems that work diminishes sexual exuberance; however, the taboo set by the ethics of work results in an enhanced sense of erotic desire. That explains why people are more excited when they imagine having sex with office ladies rather than prostitutes. Furthermore, compared to the more aggressive women presented in the workplace, the women Bataille characterizes in his novels are slender and their voices are thin. Above all, they frequently have leisure time to engage themselves in expenditures. These characteristics are intended for convulsive "attraction" rather than compulsive "production." Whether a horse or the ox is beautiful depends on its qualification for work; however, this beauty denotes self-imposed servitude. Beauty for Bataille is linked to self-sovereignty. Eroticism can be manifested as a form of rebirth because it defies the restrictions of the ethics of work which shape our identity. Inspired by Bataille's eroticism, we come to embrace self-asserting expenditure rather than drudging production.

In a capitalist society, accumulative acquisition is accepted as a new creed and affects every aspect of human existence. Therefore, the most virtuous form of "expenditure", generous gift giving, has been eclipsed by the market economy which is governed by greedy acquisitive accumulation. For Bataille, eroticism serves an exemplary illustration of expenditure because it entails losses of energy and clear consciousness required by work. Above all, it generates such frenzied excitement that we forget our responsibility as good spouses or as devoted employees. In other words, eroticism serves to force us to forego the constructed identity imposed on us by a homogenous society. In this sense, eroticism is not so much a waste of energy as a liberating force which empowers us to experience rebirth. In **Chapter Four**, an exploration is made to investigate the principle of loss in Bataille's erotic novels – *My mother*, *Story of the Eye*, *The Dead*, and *Madame Edwarda*. Above all, it focuses on

showing that the eroticism Bataille draws on functions as a force of contesting our constructed social being - a form of rebirth.

It is noteworthy that Bataille's concept of expenditure is far from the one presented in the market economy, which is based on exchange—give and take. Readers may confuse the market exchange with Bataillean expenditure. The aforementioned reason serves as the motivation to use Marcel Mauss's theory of gift giving to develop two lines of thinking: a reciprocal gift and a non-reciprocal gift. The reciprocal gift theorists are Levi Strauss and Jean Baudrillard, whereas the non-reciprocal gift theorists include Ralph Waldo Emerson, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida and Georges Bataille.

According to Mauss, the concept of "gift giving" gives priority to loss rather than conservation, and one loses in exchange - not for real compensation, but for symbolic benefit. Mauss's concept "gift giving" seems incompatible with the capitalist logic of the market economy since it gives privilege to loss rather than gain. Literary critics have respectively appealed to Mauss's concept of "gift giving." However, their views are based on a give-and-take economy. What distinguishes Mauss's "gift giving" from capitalist "gift exchanging" is that the former is a symbolic exchange (prestige), whereas the latter is more of a material exchange. For the first time, he comes up with the ideas of destruction and loss. However, his gift is not of a gratuitous nature but corresponds to give-and-take market economy. Two deeper thoughts ensue. First of all, Mauss's "gift giving," in terms of its intended humiliation, is not a gift for a rival, but a financial demonstration which is intended to embarrass the recipient. Secondly, Mauss's circulation of gifts still resembles the material exchange in the capitalist market economy though it remains at a symbolic level. Although Mauss is the first theorist who proposed the concept of gift, the sense of indebtedness he creates in the economy of the reciprocal gift still involves the

problem of hegemony and domination. That is, his theory excludes real generosity.

Quite a few theorists have appealed to and improved upon Mauss's concept of "gift giving." Among them, Levi Strauss and Jean Baudrillard advocated reciprocal gifts while Emerson, Nietzsche, Derrida, Bataille gave privilege to nonreciprocal gifts. According to the latter group, a nonreciprocal gift, on the contrary, makes both the donor and recipient forget what is given and what is taken. Thus, a nonreciprocal relationship between donor and recipient has no place in a reciprocal market economy. A generous donor simply has more to give; he does not have to calculate how much his investment will yield. And because of the donor's genuine generosity, the receiver does not have to worry about how to return the favor. A nonreciprocal gift does not imprison the minds of a donor and a recipient with the feelings of resentment caused by loss (the giver) or indebtedness (the receiver). In other words, their human sovereignty will not be straight-jacketed in the reciprocal economy. Such nonreciprocal gift theorists as Emerson, Nietzsche, Derrida, and Bataille significantly contribute to the liberation of human sovereignty. In **Chapter Four**, the relationship between the giving of a "non-reciprocal gift" and the creation of human sovereignty from my reading of Bataille's *The Story of Eye*, *Madame Edwardo*, *My Mother*, and *The Dead* is investigated.

Literature Review

When Bataille first published *Story of the Eye* in 1928, he adopted the pseudonym of Lord Auch. He used a fictitious name because he risked backlash and public outrage in publishing this erotic novel which was teeming with filth, violence and death. Later, he published his first philosophical work, *Inner Experience*, in 1945.

These two works provoked the Surrealists and the Existentialists respectively.⁶ André Breton (1896-1966), the leader of the surrealist movement, condemned Bataille as an “excremental philosopher.” In *Story of the Eye*, the heroine and the narrator were aroused by urination, violence and corpses. Breton criticized Bataille for his excessive fascination with sordid things. In “The ‘Old Mole’ and the Prefix *Sur*,” Bataille disagreed with Breton’s surrealist project which aimed to repudiate all that is base and sordid.

What need he has to make us believe that his preferred states are situated outside of everything, when every sentence he writes situates them *above* . . . From one who speaks across the heavens , full of aggressive respect for heaven and its lightning bolts, full of disgust for this too base world that he believes he scorns . . . after touching Icarian naiveté has betrayed his desire for the miraculous we can only expect . . . the betrayal of the vulgar interests of the collectivity, which have become simply filth, a pretext to rise with cries of disgust. (*Visions of Excess* 42)

Bataille refused to agree with Breton on his blind adherence to idealism and transcendence consecrated by Western Metaphysics. In *On Nietzsche*, he attacked Breton and his surrealists by accusing them of idealism which stressed the superiority of transcendence. Clearly, Bataille condemned the surrealists for their assertion that sacred things were associated with the idealistic purity and the transcendental rather than the basest. Bataille is known for linking sacred things to violence or the filthy such as sacrifice and sexuality. In *Eroticism in Georges Bataille and Henry Miller*, Gilles Mayné echoes Bataille’s argument that the basest and the dirtiest can be sacred. He asserts, “Most people in our Western civilization assimilate the sacred to the

⁶ Michèle Richman’s *Reading Georges: Beyond the Gift* addressed the antagonistic relationship between the literary concepts held by Bataille and the surrealist Breton.

holy . . . everything sacred was associated not only with the highest, transcendental, but also with the lowest, and most impure qualities. Curiously, however, Christianity has come to ignore those aspects” (9).

The second and further noteworthy attack on Bataille’s works is found in articles written by the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). According to Sartre, man is a *project* which is constituted by actions and future life.⁷ As he argues in *Existentialism and Humanism*, “Man is first of all a project that is lived subjectively. . . nothing exists prior to this project . . . man will be first of all what he will have projected to be” (23). Project can be defined as self-imposed servitude based on needs or desires to reach life goals. Sartre took issue with Bataille’s notion that project results in man’s servitude. In “Bataille and Sartre: The Modernity of Mysticism,” Heimonet argues, “ In the same way, Sartre will show that this verbal sacrifice, which results in “desacralizing” the subject . . . Bataille remains above, looking down on common humanity” (61). For Bataille, man should reject project because it subjugates man to the servile utility of productive activities. In other words, rejecting project is a way for man to gain access to his self-sovereignty. Bataille asserts that his inner experience is the opposition of project. He argues that “I come to this position: inner experience is the opposition of action. Nothing more. Action is utterly dependent upon project” (46). Project, as Bataille suggests, is the most essential part of productive activities whose function is the subjection of man to a life of servitude.

The third attack on Bataille’s work is found in writings of radical feminists. Andrea Dworkin (1946 – 2005), an American radical feminist known for her criticism of pornography, accused Bataille of his representation of violence. For Dworkin, the heroine Simone and the narrator in *Story of the Eye* represented the fruition of male

⁷ In the introduction of *On Bataille: Critical Essays*, Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons argues that “Sartre views project as constitutive of subjectivity, a condition from which one cannot escape” (8).

desires which were characterized by violent forms of rape and murder. In Dworkin's opinions, the characteristics of murderous and insatiable sexuality presented in Bataille's writings are nothing but male fantasy. As she argues in *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1979), "The grand conceptions—death, angst—cover the grand truth: that force leading to death is what men most secretly, most deeply, and most truly value in sex" (176). Prior to attention from Dworkin, Susan Sontag, a female American writer, reappraised Bataille's works and deemed them as transgressive writings which surpassed our rational selves. In her 1967 essay "The Pornographic Imagination," Susan Sontag asserted that Bataille's writings corresponded to modern art which fulfilled its task of "making forays into and taking up positions on the frontier of consciousness" (45). According to Sontag, Bataille's works were intended to make forays into prohibitions. Contemporary literary critics such as Susan Rubin Suleiman further assertions made by Sontag. In her essay "Transgression and the Avant-Garde: Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil*," Suleiman echoes Sontag's argument that Bataille was a writer who intentionally used forms of violence to transgress social norms. While Dworkin believed that Bataillean forms of violence correspond to male's criminal and unquenchable desires, Suleiman asserts that Dworkin's fixation on the scenes and characters prevented her from noticing the subversive power of Bataille's pornographic writings. She argues:

Just as she is not a whore, Simone is not sadistic in Sade's sense: the Sadean hero, or heroine, puts a premium on transgression, but transgression in Sade occurs when a sovereign subject defies an external law. In Bataille, the law is internalized; the drama of transgression occurs *within* the subject. (324)

Another feminist writer by the name of Julia Kristeva shares Suleiman's idea that Bataille's insistent inclusion of perverse eroticism in his writings was intended to

contest the prevailing religious and economic discourse. In her article “Bataille, Experience and Practice,” Kristeva asserts that Bataille was a thinker devoted himself to challenging the religious discourse and the economic notions. She argued:

As for jouissance, one reserves the dark rooms, the alcoves and corridors of religion for it. The operation attempted by Bataille erases this severance and makes a contradiction of it. For jouissance to be that of a subject, it must contain the authority of knowledge in which the subject is fulfilled; and jointly . . . But who, in capitalist society—where subjects are reduced to relationships of production—can bring about this eroticization of knowledge and this knowledge of eroticism? (248)

Methodology

This dissertation analyzes the essence of eroticism in Bataille’s erotic novels by comparing Bataille’s theory of eroticism with concepts of gifts proposed by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). To solidly grasp the essence of eroticism in Bataille’s novels is a difficult task because his novels lack coherent themes and predictability. Additionally, this study explores three topics: transgression, eroticism and gift through the aforementioned analytical lenses.

Chapter One, entitled “Bataille’s *General Economy*: Sacrifice and Eroticism,” examines the dissimilarity between the concepts of *general economy* and political economy. Bataille’s *general economy* gives privilege to festive expenditures over calculated accumulation. In ancient times, people created useless festivals or spectacles in order to avoid ruination by reabsorbing excess. Their social status was determined by giving rather than receiving. God was deemed the supreme being because his benevolent generosity was incomparable. They believed that the purpose

of possessing wealth was to expend it rather than keep it. Furthermore, it was believed that their immediate use of wealth would lead to a more peaceful society because one's excessive accumulation inevitably led to another's extreme poverty. It was considered virtuous for them to enhance their relationship and intimacy with the community through gratuitous giving. They embraced expenditures rather than accumulation.

The ritual of sacrifice, the most extreme form of violence and expenditure, played a pivotal role in teaching younger generations to esteem and cherish their precious resources. The sacrifice was intended to give sacred aura to their resources so that younger generations would not regard them as that which was born to be wastefully consumed. In this sense, sacrifice focused not on killing but on relinquishing the servitude imposed on those things. Sacrificial items were sacred because they were not subordinated to servile utility of productive activities. Expenditures, such as idleness, drunkenness, sexuality and death share the same function with sacrifice. They all contribute to the escapist mentality of servile utility stressed by productive activities. We identify with heroes when they face dangers; we worship the heroes as they risk their lives spitting in the face of the enemy when being captured. Our identification with and adoration of these heroes stem from their refusal to give in to a life of servitude. In this sense, self-sovereignty is manifested in sacrifice and death while servility was designated to production and self-preservation.

Chapter Two "Eroticism: Reading for Anxiety" exposes the essence of eroticism and the subtle distinction between eroticism and animal-like sexuality. Bataille incorporates animal impulses such as incest and excrement into his novels, which caused readers to confuse eroticism with animal sexuality. Eroticism is not manifested in animals because they lack consciousness of taboos.

Animals seek instant gratification when their desired object is presented.

In contrast, humans moderate their sexual exuberance because it entails the losses of energy and keen observation required by work. From this perspective, it may seem that animals experience more pleasure since they do not suffer from repressing their desires. However, for those who desire to experience erotic pleasure, prolonging anxiety is a key to experiencing intense pleasure. The heroine or hero in *Madame Edwarda* and *Story of the Eye* are on a journey searching for such anxiety. Without anxiety, eroticism fails to manifest. Also, a sense of transgression is indispensable to eroticism. Women should be elusive rather than active when they are affronted with men's romantic pursuits. Their evasive tactics are meant to enhance men's desires to transgress and thus intensify their desirability. Conversely, their unreserved surrender evaporates men's desires to transgress and thus decreases their desirability. In the words of the late great Tupac Shakur (1996-98) (song title: I Ain't Mad at Cha) "I don't mean to sound sleazy, but I don't want it if it's that easy." In *Madame Edwarda*, it is the heroine's elusiveness rather than religious experience that makes the priest witness the miracle. The priest relinquishes his religious vocation and thus he recognizes her as God.

The manifestation of eroticism is restricted to those with a consciousness of taboo and those who lose their rational selves in order to fuse with others. In *The Dead Man*, the heroine Marie used to be a decent woman who was constrained by taboos. With the taboos arresting her, Marie experiences the intense pleasure which is mistaken for madness by visitors in the small inn. Their blunder indicates their small town mentality and lack of experience in erotic pursuits. The visitors are oversexed charlatans who casually enjoy sex without the constraints of taboos and are thus no longer able to experience extreme sexual pleasure. One of the visitors, a count of European nobility, fails to experience eroticism because he blindly sticks to his class

consciousness and refuses to lose his rational self. He deems sexuality as violence because it entails the loss of consciousness.

Bataillean eroticism illuminates the previously shrouded fact that extreme anxiety precedes extreme pleasure. In *Story of the Eye*, in order to intensify the priest's pleasure, Simone and her male companions devote themselves to increasing their anxiety step by step. The evil three ceaselessly remind the priest of his identity as a holy priest by presenting him with holy receptacles. The priest's anxiety subsides because as he is threatened by death, he remembers that through martyrdom his salvation is promised. The obscene trinity wants to prove that extreme pleasure is not manifested in his religious experience but in eroticism. The priest is told a story about anxiety and pleasure. The story is about dying in orgasm, which brings the priest ambivalent feelings. He is going to be martyred while copulating with a girl. It illustrates the essence of eroticism which is based on the spiral relationship of anxiety and pleasure.

Chapter Three "Eroticism: Prohibition and Transgression" explores the relationship between prohibition and transgression. Bataillean eroticism features prohibition and transgression in an alternating interplay rather than antagonistic conflict. In other words, it is the mutual conditioning of prohibition and transgression that provides humans with intense pleasure. This interplay illustrates the way that people derive intense pleasure from intense anxiety and terror.

Bataille's presentation of the female body outraged racial feminists because it simply corresponds to male fantasy. Readers may be culturally conditioned to believe that the female body is much more desirable than its counterpart because it is more beautiful and attractive in comparison. It is noteworthy that the female body in Bataille's novels is presented as a respectable and desirable object, but is also characterized as a dishonored and repelling one. Readers, who blindly link eroticism

to appealing beauty, fail to get exposed to the light of Bataillean eroticism. According to Bataille, eroticism is manifested in transgression and profanation. Corrupting virtuous women gives people intense pleasure because it is the emblem of transgression. Beauty belongs to idealism instead of eroticism. It is the profanation of beauty that constitutes eroticism. Distorted facial expression shown in beautiful women excites readers since it is a form of profanation. The female body, fashioned as the paradoxical of asexual maternal and sexual feminine, perfectly serves to illuminate the spiral relationship between prohibition and transgression.

Bataille's erotic novel *My Mother* describes an adolescent narrator named Pierre, who is troubled by his ambivalent feelings about his incestuous lust for his mother. Pierre worships his father's construction of a virtuous mother; however, he is spellbound by her vileness. Clearly, it is the incest taboo and a sense of corrupting his virtuous mother that excites him. Taboo generates desires, and men derive greater pleasure as they deflower chaste women because the act of transgression excites them more. Pierre's father is devoted to casting his wife as a virtuous woman; by doing so, he keeps his son's incestuous lust at bay. However, Pierre's father is unaware of the fact that his establishment of this taboo does not eliminate but reinforce his son's incestuous desire. Ceaselessly tortured by his ambivalent feelings, he is driven to make a confession to the priest in hope of solving his predicament. However, Pierre gives up the idea because he knows that the priest might caution him against vileness. Like Pierre's father, the priest is unaware of the fact that taboo and self-denial aggrandize men's desires. Symbolically, the representative patriarchal figures, father and priest, are compromised; two long-held authority figures tumble down. For Pierre and his mother, prohibition does not annihilate their sexual desires but reinforces them. The inner experience constituted by prohibition and transgression is repressed by authority or reason because it features the alternating interplay of prohibition and

transgression.

Bataille's other erotic novel *Story of the Eye* furthers his assertion of this interplay. It starts with an anonymous male narrator who describes his anxiety about anything related to sexuality. He meets his first sexual partner Simone at a beach and they soon grow intimate. The narrator is aroused as he imagines Simone's nakedness under her pinafore. He shares Simone's predicament because he is able to sense her anxiety of being seen naked. Powerful anxiety overwhelms both of them. The narrator reveals that what they desire is not carnal pleasure but the transgression which brings them greater pleasure. The narrator challenges Simone to place her naked bottom in a cat's saucer containing milk. "Milk is for the pussy, isn't it?" Simone asks. In a "regular" situation, the saucer of milk is used to feed cats, and it is deemed unusual act for a young girl perform this action. However, Simone takes the challenge and performs this unusual act, which overwhelms her because it is symbolically taboo.

The narrator and Simone frequently engage in masturbation, a form of prohibited waste. They never have sex in the missionary position because it is deemed a sanctioned sexual act. Simone cannot obtain intense pleasure without the presence of taboo. The missionary position outrages her because it does not generate desire, but rather dispels it. For the narrator and Simone, it is the transgression of prohibition rather than blissful love or copulation that brings her pleasure. She is spellbound by deep sexuality which includes prohibitions like death, blood, and crime.

Apart from transgression, profanation also overwhelms Simone and the narrator. According to Bataille, eroticism is brought to light when beauty is profaned. Beauty is sacred and ravishing because it evokes humans' desire to profane it rather than consecrate it. Ugliness is profane and repelling because it is unlikely for humans to profane it. In other words, eroticism is manifested when the sacred is profaned. The distorted facial expression caused by orgasm is more fascinating than the tranquil one

when it is shown on a beautiful woman's face, which perfectly illuminates Bataille's eroticism constituted by the paradoxical combination of sacred and profane. For Bataille, it is the profanity that validates beauty.

Bataillean eroticism postulates that the more contrast to the animal the woman's appearance is, the more beautiful it is reckoned. In addition, the greater the distinction between animal instinct and that of the woman's, the more pure she is considered. In other words, a woman's lack of animalistic aspects validates her beauty and purity. However, the beauty of a desirable woman is otherwise considered insipid and unprovocative if it shows no animal aspect. This kind of beauty conforms to idealism which stressed the importance of pure beauty, yet it fails to correspond to Bataille's eroticism characterized by profanity and transgression. The intensity of induced excitement is determined by the stark contrast between the beautiful face and ugly animal instinct. Corrupting pure women and profaning beautiful women exposes the essence of eroticism since these are emblems of transgression. Bataillean eroticism is unfolded when prohibition is transgressed and beauty is profaned. Animals are unaware of transgression and profanity; therefore, eroticism is never manifested to them. The narrator is preoccupied with contriving different ways to profane Simone's beautiful faces. He smears sperm and urine on her beautiful face. It is argued that their absurd sexual games are nothing but profanation of the beauty and transgression of the taboo. It is noted that Bataille gives privilege to urine and sperm. Compared to sperm, urine is totally useless waste which produces nothing valuable. Urination is of great significance in Bataille's novels because it transgresses the prohibition of production and cleanness. It is also used to defile Simone's and Marcell's beautiful faces. This is a perfect endorsement to Bataille's eroticism because it is linked to transgression and profanation.

One day the narrator and Simone run into Marcelle on the street. Marcelle is a

decent woman. She reddens at the sight of them because she is reminded of the erotic games which she was privy to. Simone asks for Marcelle's forgiveness, promising that she would never lay a hand on her again. Marcelle hesitates but finally agrees to join them for tea at their house. Apart from Marcelle, there are three other pretty girls and two boys at the orgy party. According to Simone, they are not as excited as her and the narrator. At the orgy party, a wager between Simone and a boy are agreed upon. At the beginning of the novel, Simone's first wager is to sit upon the cat's saucer of milk. The second wager is presented in the orgy party. Simone offers to make a bet. "I bet . . . that I can pee into the tablecloth in front of everyone" (16). One of the boys challenges her and Simone does not hesitate and performs the actions she makes a bet on. She wins the wager by wetting the tablecloth. Simone wins the bet, so she can decide the penalty. She pulls down the boy's trousers in front of everyone. Suddenly, Simone falls upon the floor with convulsion. She beseeches the boy, who loss the bet, to piss on her cunt. Marcelle gapes at the scene with consternation and flushes again, and she solicits Simone to undress her. Simone fingers Marcelle's cunt and kisses her on the mouth. Fearing for her uncontrollable orgasm being seen by everyone, she hides in a wardrobe in order to masturbate. As the orgy goes on, Marcelle climaxes, urinating at the same time. The image of Marcell serves a perfect illustration of Bataille eroticism. Without the prohibition arresting us, we cannot enjoy the pleasure of freedom the transgression generates. Marcelle is dissimilar to the girls and boys who disregard taboos. They casually indulge themselves in the orgy; conversely, Marcelle scrupulously adheres to the prohibition. That explains why they are not as excited as the narrator and Simone, based on the narrator's remarks. "The oldest of the eight being not quite seventeen, but aside from Simone and myself, they were not as excited as we wanted them to be" (15). All the girls and boys, including Simone, are lukewarm to the repeated mechanism at the orgy party. In other words, prohibition

does not function and the boredom caused by the repeated mechanism puts Simone to sleep. All at once, Marcelle is like a well-indoctrinated child who shows her fear for the violation of taboos. Her shrieks can be seen as a reemerging of the prohibition, which they use to rejuvenate themselves, subduing their boredom and continuing their sexual journey.

Confinement or Interdiction was for long-held authority to deal with taboos. However, the more confinement they put on taboos, the more desirable the taboos became. Cast away to a sanatorium, Marcelle is the embodiment of prohibition. Her imprisonment does not discredit her glamour but makes her all the more mysterious and desirable. It can be argued that imprisonment renders her desirability. The censorship of forbidden books enables us to make sense of the predicament of confining taboos. The more forbidden a book is, the more sales the book makes. From the day of Marcelle's imprisonment in a sanatorium, Simone and the narrator are extremely haunted by their memories of Marcelle. As a matter of fact, Simone and the narrator are spellbound by Marcelle's compromise. Marcelle is different from a licentious woman who unreservedly surrenders herself to man's romantic pursuits. She insistently sticks to the consignment of prohibition; accordingly, corrupting her and making her compromise her decency overwhelm the narrator. Bataille argues that "[s]imilarly the need to make the fundamental truth evident obscures another fact, the reconciliation of apparent opposites without which eroticism would not exist" (*Death and Sensuality* 146). Marcelle tallies with the narrator's inner experience characterized by alternating interplay of prohibition and transgression. Her confinement just makes her (embodiment of prohibition) much more desirable and more ravishing.

Chapter Four "Eroticism: Gift and Rebirth" explores the issue: Eroticism as a form of rebirth and gift. In *My mother*, drinking and sexual pleasure appeal to the narrator Pierre, while his devotion to "work" makes him keep festive expenditures at

bay. The narrator maintains that “I was studying, and, like someone who has taken to drink, I drowned myself in work” (29). As a result of his devotion to work, the narrator has no chance to access alcohol and sexual enjoyment which are deemed unfavorable to the ethics of work. Alcohol and sexual exuberance might make him lose clarity of mind which is required for work. He is not unaware that alcohol and sexual exuberance can help rid him of self-imposed servitude caused by blindly engaging in productive activities. The narrator comes to realize that it is the expenditure rather than “production” his lifelong dream. He refuses to give in to the ethics of production and achieves rebirth by re-embracing the attraction of these expenditures. The narrator achieves rebirth because he comes to realize that happiness lies in festive expenditures. The purpose of “working” in order to earn money is ultimately to expend the money. Anxiety is endured in order to enjoy wasteful expenditures such as sexual excitement. Drunkenness is a way to refuse his servitude to the ethics of production. In *My Mother*, the narrator says:

My attitude came down to that of a man who is well off, possessing youth, money and good looks, considering the world and the people in it as made for the satisfaction of his extravagant desires. I now knew where happiness lay, a happiness to which unhappiness itself — and, naively, I was proud of this knowledge — added, like the colour black to the palette, a possibility of death. I was happy, I was at the height of happiness. (123-24)

The concept of rebirth is also illustrated in orgasm since it dissolves human rationale to the extent that constructed identity is forgotten. In Bataille’s *Story of the Eye*, “forgetting” the reciprocal obligation plays an important role in rebirth because it is presented as a perfect way to undo the social being. For the ecclesiastics, holy things are cardinal reminders for them to bear this obligation in mind. The chalice reminds

the priest of the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ. In *Story of the Eye*, the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for human beings is proved a fraud. The liquid in the sacred chalice is by all means “urine” rather than “the blood of Christ” because its color is white not red. In addition, he manages to convince readers that the small biscuits are made by Christ’s sperm because of their white color (61-62). Prior to the execution of the ecclesiastic, the narrator ridicules the clergyman by showing that urine is the holy wine they venerate. The debasement of the holy thing is not so much a blasphemy as a retroactive erasure of his identity as a clergyman. He owes nothing to Jesus Christ inasmuch as the latter’s sacrifice is a complete sham. After the narrator’s lucid and logical explanation, the priest remains unconvinced. He still believes that God punishes those who worship eroticism, and that his resistance to eroticism will prove to be gloriously rewarded. However, the sexual molestation the erotic trinity makes the priest frantically excited to the extent that he completely forgets his identity as a clergyman.

And she struck his face again with the chalice, but at the same time she stripped naked before him and I finger-fucked her. Sir Edmund’s gaze, fixed on the stunned eyes of the young cleric, was so imperious the thing went off with barely any hitch; Don Aminado nosily poured his urine into the chalice, which Simone held under this thick cock. (62)

Simone marches over to Don Aminado slamming the base of the chalice against his skull, which leaves him utterly dazed. Then she resumes sucking him, which provokes his ignoble rattles (62). From the above statement, we can see that chalices serve as a vessel used to strike the priest’s head, Don Aminado. It is clear that the logical explanation, striking, and sucking are employed by Simone to force the priest “forget” his obligation as a priest. However, the priest is still preoccupied with martyrdom, hoping to return to Heaven to serve God. Sir Edmund, Simone’s sexual partner, tells

the priest that men who are hanged have stiff cocks. The instant their respiration is cut off, they ejaculate. The priest can experience the pleasure of being martyred while having sex with Simone. The combination of sex and death is a gospel for the priest because it can protect the priest from the most unbearable and frightening of all thoughts: his own death. Furthermore, death can make him totally “forget” his obligation as a priest and enjoy the erotic desire completely. At the end of the story, Don Aminado nosily pours his “urine” into the chalice, bashes the sacred chamber-pot against a wall and spurts his sperm in the ciborium. That is to say, he reaches a state of unconsciousness and in doing so, forgets his obligation to the church. As a martyr sacrificed for eroticism, the priest is able to face martyrdom fearlessly because he dies in *jouissance*. That is, he achieves rebirth by giving up his social being constructed by reciprocal obligation.

The women’s body as a nonreciprocal gift is an extreme form of expenditure. A dissolute man who has promiscuous sex with numerous women is often viewed in a positive light and characterized as being distinguished and admirable. In comparison, a woman who engaged in a similar lifestyle would be viewed as lewd and demonic. What is worse, the women committing adultery in novels end up being put to death. This hostility toward lewd women is attributed to their violation of the ethics of accumulation. Since such a woman might give birth to another man’s children, her husband might experience an element of risk in passing on his accumulated wealth to another man’s child. Provided that a man has promiscuous sex with women, he may still distribute his wealth to his offspring. In this sense, the lewd woman is the archenemy of the ethics of accumulation and distribution (inherited property) constructed by men in the marketplace. It is noted that the distribution carries a denotation of accumulation rather than expenditure. For a man, passing on wealth to his biological son is embraced as accumulation, whereas giving his money to others is

deemed to be expenditures.

Madame Edwardo, a short erotic story written by Georges Bataille, is composed of three sections, each of which contains a procession and a conclusion. The first section involves the process of Entrance Rite in the mass, which is originally open to the non-converted. In the novel, the procession takes place on the first stage: the erotic narrator is dying to find relief after his sexual desire was aroused by peeping at whores sneaking down the stairs to a urinal (*Madame Edwardo* 148). The narrator, wandering from bar to bar in the area of the rue St Denis, takes off his pants and holds his erected genitals:

Loneliness and the dark strung my drunken excitement tighter and tighter
I wanted to be laid as bare as was the night there in those empty streets:
I slipped off my pants and moved on, carrying them draped over my arm.
Numb, I coasted on a wave of overpowering freedom, I sensed that I'd
got bigger. In my hand I held my straight-risen sex. (*ME*148)

The procession clearly informs readers that the erotic narrator is a kind of celebrant who performs a rite. The lustful celebrant wears his nudity instead of vestments, holding his straighten-risen penis in place of a holy chalice. In fact, his congregation assembles when he enters into a bordello where he chooses a beautiful whore as his God. The moment the two sit and indulge in a sickly kiss, they are besieged by a crowd. Then the celebrant senses laughter from the mocking unbelievers. Edwarda declares herself to be God through the display of her genitals, which she then commands the narrator to kiss in front of “all those people” (*ME* 150). Then the narrator (Pierre Angelique) follows Edwarda as far as the Porte St Denis at which point Edwarda tells him that she is “ absent and empty,” which further convinces the narrator that she is indeed God. The nature of Edwarda’s absence is the indication that it is beyond any possible understanding. What the narrator wants to do is track her

down and make sense of her. When he finally catches up with her, she strikes his face in a fury with her closed fists. In the final procession, Edwarda stops the cab and displays herself nude to the driver. Afterwards, she mounts the cab driver and emits water due to her orgasm.

The notes to *Madame Edwardo* indicate that Bataille first made his heroine say that “I am a brothel whore, but God is free.” The narrator senses tumultuous noises of mocking customers who do not believe in the nonreciprocal gift the whore offers. Unselfish giving without asking for something in return does not exist in the market place because possession is the rule in the market place. For the visiting clients fashioned by market economy, the nonreciprocal gifts do not exist or they are only reserved for the family domain. The love of devoted parents for their children can be a good example to prove the existence of nonreciprocal gifts. When parents raise their children, they do not calculate the price they pay for their children. However, in the family domain, a woman’s body given as a nonreciprocal gift is marked as a taboo. In Bataille’s *My Mother*, the narrator’s mother says:

It was when you were conceived. But as far as I am concerned your good-for-nothing father had no part, or particularly no part, in the story. I preferred being alone, I was alone in the woods, I was naked in the woods, I rode horseback, naked to the skin....I had foreboding, dreamt of girls or of fauns; I knew they would have got in my way. Your father got in my way. (*My Mother* 71)

In the story, the narrator’s mother is eager to present her body as a nonreciprocal gift and thus her behavior is demonized as “debauchery.” However, the narrator and his father are also preoccupied with the same desire while it is presented as a form of rebirth. After his father passes away, the narrator’s mother asks him to clean up his father’s room. It is there that he discovers pictures in which his father is as lewd as his

mother. Above all, he comes to realize that like his mother he is fascinated with giving his body away as a nonreciprocal gift. This epiphany enables him to develop his new being and get rid of the imposition of his constructed social being. In the story, both the narrator and his father are haunted with their anxiety of the heroine's debauchery since it rendered the inherited property unstable. The narrator's mother tells him that "my woolland child. Hold me tight; you issued from the foliage of the forest, from the damp forest dews that gave me joy, but your father—I didn't want him, I didn't want that, I was bad-tempered" (71). She adds that "Pierre, you are not his son, but the fruit of the torment that would possess me in the wild" (72). The narrator's father is troubled by the fact that he might give away their accumulated wealth to someone else rather than his own offspring. It is obvious that the narrator's father is succumbed to the ethic of accumulation. However, inspired by his mother's debauchery, the narrator is aware that those so-called expenditures are important forces to experiencing rebirth.

In order to illustrate the concept of nonreciprocal gifts, Bataille presents the promiscuous sex that the heroine engaged in with many men with a scenario of a sacrificial ritual:

"Stick her, Pierrot," the mistress said. They bustled around the victim. Hemmed in by these preparations, Marie let her head subside. The others stretched her out flat, spread her legs apart. She was breathing rapidly, her breathing was noisy. In its slow unfolding the scene recalled the slaughtering of a pig or the laying to rest of a god . . . The youth came on like a bull: the Count helped the pizzle enter. The victim thrashed and fought: a hand to hand combat, unbelievably better. The others watched dry-mouthed, astounded by this frenzy. . . At last, his back straining like a bow fully bent, the breathless boy let out a yell, foaming, Marie answering his shot with the spasm of one dying. (*The Dead Man* 188)

Bataille attempts to combine “sacrifice” with eroticism because sacrifice is an nonreciprocal gift rather than reciprocal one. The heroine in Bataille’s *The Dead* is characterized as a lewd woman who is excessively indulgent in sexual pleasures because, like a wild dog, she has sex with anyone who wants her, without hesitation. Above all, she asks nothing in return for the giving of her body as a nonreciprocal gift. It can be argued that sacrifice is a form of expenditure which makes something “sacred” and it also creates “identification.” For example, the crucifixion and resurrection makes Christ sacred and creates his followers’ identification. Through assimilating “sacrifice” into his novels Bataille can enhance his readers’ identification with women’s lewdness. Most importantly, Bataille draws upon “sacrifice” to restore the sacredness of erotic debauchery.

Chapter One:

Bataille's *General Economy* : Sacrifice and Eroticism

If it is an intentional transgression sacrifice is a deliberate act whose purpose is a sudden change in the victim. The creature is put to death. Before that it was enclosed in its individual separateness and its existence was discontinuous . . . But this being is brought back by death into continuity with all being, to the absence of separate individuals. The act of violence that deprives the creature of its limited particularity and bestows on it the limitless, infinite nature of sacred things is with its profound logic an intentional one. It is intentional like the act of the man who lays bare, desires and wants to penetrate his victim. The lover strips the beloved of her identity no less than the blood-stained priest his human or animal victim. (*Death and Sensuality* 90)

To this day, the distinction between pornography and eroticism provokes intense debate since it is hard to break the blurry boundary between these two terms. In the Oxford Dictionary, pornography is defined as the depiction of erotic behavior “intended” to cause sexual excitement. Based on this definition, the adjective “intended” conveys a meaning that the mechanism of arousing sexual excitement in pornography is calculated. In pornography, the carnal body in a love-making scenario is based upon a repetitive mechanism, which inevitably reduces sensuous impulses. In contrast, eroticism disregards the calculation and mechanical scenario. In *Eroticism in Georges Bataille and Henry Miller*, Gilles Mayné argues that “eroticism defies calculation and we sense that conversely, calculation might mark its very end” (1). In the erotic experience, the future is unknown. That is, eroticism occupies the domain of uncertainty which is a source of increasing desire. Gilles Deleuze echoes Mayné in the idea that uncertainty and suspense serve as the premise of erotic desire. In *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze compares Masoch to a writer whose ingenuity lies in

creating suspense to arouse his readers. For Deleuze, it is suspense and uncertainty that serve to stimulate readers' imagination. As he argues:

In the first place, Masoch displaces the question of suffering. . . . What becomes essential is waiting or suspense as a plentitude, as a physical and spiritual intensity. The rituals of suspension become the novelist figures par excellence, with regard to both the woman- torturer who suspends her gesture, and the hero-victim whose suspended body awaits the whip. Masoch is the writer who makes suspense, in its pure and almost unbearable state, the motivating force of the novel. (*ECC* 54)

Obscenity often serves to distinguish pornography from eroticism. However, what is deemed "obscene" varies with space and time. Mayné asserts that "they all seem to ignore that whatever is declared obscene in one country is not necessarily declared so in another. . . . not only geographically, but also historically, for obviously what is obscene in one period is not necessary so in another" (*EGH* 2). For Mayné, it is the prohibition and transgression that serve to distinguish between pornography and eroticism. The actors in pornography just perform sexual acts which are reduced to a state of mere animality. He asserts, "Nowhere do we find any indication at all that the performers might encounter problems transgressing a social taboo" (*EGH* 3). In stark contrast with pornography, eroticism features the transgressive power which frees us from the restrictions of our own social, religious, and above all, linguistic preconceptions. The feeling of obscenity is felt not because the scene is not grossly repulsive; rather, it is felt because we violate our rational selves and give in to our uncontrollable frenzied urges.

What characterizes eroticism, in sharp contrast to pornography and obscenity, is the fact that in an erotic experience, the prohibition arrests us and suspends our consciousness: we keep telling ourselves that we

cannot transgress a prohibition until the very moment when we realize that we must transgress it, that we are indeed already transgressing it and, what is more, that we are enjoying such a transgression to the utmost. In other words, we are enjoying the transgression of the impossibility to transgress the social prohibition. . . . as the transgression goes on, forces us to *distort our own social, religious, and above all, linguistic preconditions*. (EGH 3)

Seen in Gilles Mayne's perspective, the transgressive power of eroticism enables us to break away from the confines of indoctrinated language which construct our identity. "This allows us to conclude that eroticism is socially dangerous not as a private practice . . . The presentation of eroticism—that is the *language* of such representation—disturbs society much more severely than its mere practice" (EGH 4). Pornography however, as Mayne suggests, is a business "protected" by society, especially during the height of the AIDS epidemic. Pornographic materials such as movies and magazines were exempt from censorship. The same was the case with institutions like brothels or sex-shops. Paradoxically, while society tolerated these media outlets and institutions involving prurient sex, they accused literature of its representation of sexual matters. It is clear that it is not the practice of sex but the rational "language" that eroticism violates. For Mayne, it is the transgression of language that eroticism used to disturb the entire society.

Rational language, as Bataille argues, is derived from a perverse economy created by the capitalist society which stresses scarcity and accumulation. Anything related to expenditures is condemned as useless, negative or even evil. In sharp contrast to the capitalist society, Bataille's *general economy* focuses on essential loss

rather than acquisitive accumulation.⁸

1. 1. Glorious Giving or Catastrophic Loss

For Bataille, ceaseless production and accumulation paves the way not to bliss but to destruction. Based on his biological assumption, he argues that the living organism collects more energy than it uses for its growth as well as reproduction. The excess energy is used for growth. As Bataille asserts in Volume I of *The Accursed Share*, “Neither growth nor reproduction would be possible if plants and animals did not normally dispose of excess” (27). Once growth comes to a halt, the unabsorbed excess must be wasted. He adds in Volume I of *The Accursed Share*:

I will begin with a basic fact: the living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.

(21)

⁸ Bataille’s theory of general economy was based on the concept of gift proposed by Mauss. He asserted that gift giving was both an act of generosity for the sake of winning prestige and an agonistic challenge to gain political or individual status. Upon observing a particular phenomenon that took place among the pre-capitalist tribes, Mauss proposed the notion of expenditure which he dubbed “*potlatch*.” The *potlatch* system that permeates the pre-capitalist tribes was dissimilar from the capitalist system in that the hero in the *potlatch* system was willing to expend everything, but keep nothing. A reputation of generosity could be achieved by affluent individuals in the *potlatch* feast by exhibiting wealth accrued by destroying, consuming, or giving away his possessions. Political and individual statuses were brought to public attention through competitive destruction, consumption, and donation of their excessive wealth in the *potlatch* scenario. Running contrary to the accumulative capitalist market economy, this pre-capitalist *potlatch* achieved notoriety for its lavish expenditure of wealth. The rules of a gift giving in the *potlatch* system were characterized by the priority granted to expenditure over acquisition. Such operations were totally foreign to modes of production and exchange in the capitalist society.

The disposal of excess can occur in either a “glorious” or in a “catastrophic” form. Parallel to the living organism, the inevitable expenditure of human society may occur in a glorious or in a catastrophic way. For Bataille, the Marshall plan was exemplary of expenditure spent in a glorious way since it was characterized by gratuitous giving. The Marshall plan was a program launched by the Americans to assist post-war Europe, whose collapse resulted from deficient capital and decreased productive capacity. For Bataille, this was a glorious form of expenditure because it involved generous expenditure, at least in principle, without any thought of instant return and later reinstitution. Bataille argues that the First and Second World Wars were antithetic models of the Marshall Plan because they represented an excess expended in a catastrophic way. After the industrial revolution, the population and wealth increased rapidly without expenditures to divert or reabsorb them. Ultimately, the excessive population and wealth would find their outlet in the two World Wars. In Volume I of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille argues:

Recent history is the result of the soaring growth of industrial activity. At first this prolific movement restrained martial activity by absorbing the main part of the excess: The development of modern industry yielded the period of relative peace from 1815 to 1914. Developing in this way, increasing the resources, the productive forces made possible in the same period the rapid demographic expansion of the advanced countries. . . . The First World War broke out before its limits were really reached, even locally. The Second did not itself signify that the system could not develop further. . . . We can express the hope of avoiding a war that already threatens. But in order to do so we must divert the surplus production, either into the rational extension of a difficult industrial growth or into unproductive works that will dissipate an energy that

cannot be accumulated in any case. (25)

The two wars incurred an unprecedented loss of precious lives and valuable wealth. The relentless destruction was not so much due to humans' greed for power as it was excess energy searching for an outlet. For Bataille, excessive population and wealth inevitably led to the expenditure of wealth and human life. After the wars, the pressure of excess was released. In spite of the fact that wars caused considerable destruction and death, they contributed to a substantial rise in the standard of living. The majority of the survivors benefited from the expenditure caused by war; they got job and their wages were raised. They had more leisure time to engage in diversions than any generation before them. As Bataille asserts in Volume I of *The Accursed Share*:

At this point, immense squanderings are about to take place: After a century of populating and of industrial peace, the temporary limit of development being encountered, the two world wars organized the greatest orgies of wealth- and of human beings—that history has recorded. Yet these orgies coincided with an appreciable rise in the general standard of living: The majority of the population benefits more and more unproductive services; work is reduced and wages are increases overall.

(37)

In sharp contrast with the industrial society, ancient societies was aware of the potential danger of catastrophic expenditures caused by unlimited production and accumulation. They lavishly created festivals, spectacles, sacrifices or generous giving to divert and reabsorb the excess. For Bataille, ancient societies managed to divert the excess in a glorious way. These useless expenditures, as Bataille suggests, were deemed glorious because they were intended to benefit the public rather than self-interests. In other words, these expenditures were meant to prevent the whole

society from proceeding to ruination. On the contrary, capitalist societies gave new precedence to the endless production and accumulation, which served to advance self-interests rather than public welfare. As Bataille argues in Volume I of *The Accursed Share*:

These excesses of life force, which locally block the poorest economies are in fact that most dangerous factors of ruination. . . . Ancient societies found relief in festivals; some erected admirable monuments that had no useful purpose; we use the excess to multiply “services” that make life smoother, and we are led to reabsorb part of it by increasing leisure time. But these diversions have always been inadequate: Their existence in excess nevertheless (in certain respects) has perpetually doomed multitudes of human beings and great quantities of useful goods to the destruction of wars. In our time, the relative importance of armed conflicts has even increased; it has taken on the disastrous proportions of which we are aware. (24)

Bataille’s *general economy* is based on an assumption which stresses the excess of resources rather than the lack of resources. Bataille differentiates his *general economy* based on “religious” viewpoints from *particular economy* based on an “economic” viewpoint. According to the *particular* point of view, the problem of extreme poverty was caused by a lack of resources. Therefore, acquisitive accumulation was the way to solve the poverty. In contrast with the particular view of the economy, Bataille’s *general economy* integrates a sense of religion because it stresses the importance of gratuitous giving. Generous giving was a way for self-anointed benefactors of society to achieve a god-like status. Based on the *general* point of view, the problem of impoverishment is owing to the excess of resources. For Bataille, the problem of extreme poverty is attributed to the imbalance of distribution rather than a deficiency

of resources. According to Bataille, the problem of extreme impoverishment in India was inextricably linked with its demographic growth and lack of industrial development. He was also convinced that India's potential for industrial growth could not be dissociated from "the excesses of American resources" (39). Bataille's *general economy* postulates that the key problem economies face is derived from the pressure of excess rather than a lack thereof. This notion runs counter to the traditional view of the economy which advocates that a lack of natural resources is to blame for the economic woes of society. In Volume I of *The Accursed Share*, he maintains:

As a rule, *particular* existence always risks succumbing for lack of resources. It contrasts with *general* existence whose resources are in excess and for which death has no meaning. For the particular point of view, the problems are posed *in the first instance* by a deficiency of resources. They are posed *in the first instance* by an excess of resources if one starts from the *general* point of view. (39)

During the Middle Ages, the society was hierarchical in nature and composed of the clergy, the military aristocracy and the labor force. The society was like a body which was unified and mutually supportive. The clergy represented the head, the military aristocracy the torso and the labor force the limbs. The military aristocracy and the labor force were subservient to the clergy. The laborers had to satisfy the needs of the aristocracy and the clergy by offering material protection. Likewise, the military aristocracy provided the labors and the priests with military protection. The clergy provided both groups with a share of divine life and spiritual protection. They were convinced that God was the supreme provider who offered them material protection and spiritual protection. It is noted that wealth and rank were determined not by what one reserved but what one provided. The economy of medieval times was characterized by mutual offerings rather than avaricious possession and accumulation.

In such an economic structure, it was the responsibility of the rich to provide for the poor to the extent of keeping them from dying of starvation. In Bataille's remarks, "The just price is defined by the possibility of ensuring the subsistence of the providers" (117). They were convinced that mutual support was beneficial to the whole social structure. At the same time, wealth was prohibited being used for the increase of wealth. "Money is lent cannot be an object of rent, and usury is expressed prohibited by canon law" (117). Consequently, "It gives precedence in *the use of the available resources* to the expansion of enterprises and the increase of capital equipment" (119 emphasis mine). The possibility of an increased wealth through investment was not their concern. On the contrary, they were convinced that the surplus resources, for the sake of social equality, had to be disposed of. They believed that unlimited production and accumulation would lead to a disaster.

But a society can also be led to consume all its products. Hence it must somehow destroy the surplus resources it has at its disposal. Idleness is the simplest means for this purpose. The man of leisure destroys the products necessary no less fully than does fire. But the workers who labors at the construction of a pyramid destroys those products just as uselessly: From the standpoint of profit the pyramid is a monumental mistake; one might just as well dig an enormous hole, then refill it and pack the ground. We obtain the same result if we ingest a substance, such as alcohol, whose consumption does not enable us to work more – or even deprives us, for a time, of our strength to produce. Idleness, the pyramid or alcohol have the advantage without a return – without a profit – the resources that they use: They simply *satisfy* us; they correspond to the *unnecessary choice* that we make of them. (119)

Above all, "satisfaction" determines the value of wealth and the nature of the

economy (119). It was the idea favored by the modern economists who focused on deficiency, investment and increase. Rather, it was the religious view that determined the essence of the economy which was based on satisfaction. “Religion is the satisfaction that a society gives to the use of excess resources, or rather to the destruction (at least insofar as they are useful)” (120). They derived their satisfaction from generous giving rather than greedy accumulation. Gratuitous giving is a way to achieve “divinity.”

It was not the theorist of the Schoolmen that defined the economic society, but rather the need it had for the satisfaction of cathedrals and abbey, idle priests and monks. In other words, the possibility of good deeds satisfying to God (satisfaction in medieval society could not nominally be that a man) generally determined the mode of consumption of the available resources. (120)

During Medieval times, precedence was given to expenditures which made life run more smoothly and peaceful.

What differentiates the medieval economy from the capitalist economy is that to a very large extent the former, static economy made a nonproductive consumption of the excess of wealth, while the latter accumulates and determines a dynamic growth of the production apparatus. (115)

The era which preceded the capitalist society was characterized by the protection and social leadership services offered by the affluent and the reciprocity of this engagement. Above all, festivals, spectacles and games were sponsored by this elite upper class. The funding of spectacular expenditures not only determined one’s social rank but also exemplified the virtue of generosity. It was understood that glory and nobility were governed under the principle of “giving.” According to

Bataille, the bourgeois believed that the downfall of the feudal society could be linked to its overindulgence in prodigality. Bataille characterized the modern bourgeoisie as a wealthy individual who refused to pay for collective expenditures. This new breed of upper class individuals balked at the sponsorship of generous expenditures, instead of embracing accumulative acquisition as their new creed.

For Bataille, the religious reformation, initiated by Martin Luther and relayed by Calvinism, was the precursor of the modern capitalist society. The buying of indulgences was unacceptable to Luther. He was radically opposed to it because it gave privileges to the wealthy people who were supposedly able to enter the gates of Heaven by financial means. According to Bataille, Luther was unaware that the clergy served the function of squandering the excess. They devised the indulgences in order to motivate the nobles and the merchants to compete in squanderings. The clergy were able to use these excess to benefit the practice of charity, festivals and the pilgrimages. For Luther, the extravagance the clergy conducted by the church was seen as scandalous. For Bataille however, the indulgence in extravagant expenditures was intended to negate the excess which jeopardized the social stability. The economy in Medieval times, as Bataille suggests, was relatively stable.

Contemplative idleness, giving to the poor and the splendor of ceremonies and churches ceased to have the least worth or were considered a sign of the devil. Luther's doctrine is the utter negation of a system of intense consumption of resources. An immense army of secular and regular clergy squandered the surplus riches of Europe, inciting the nobles and the merchants to rival squanderings. This was the scandal that provoked Luther, but he was only able to oppose it with a more complete negation of the world. . . . But it had kept the economy relatively stable. It is a singular fact that the Roman Church, in the image that a medieval

village has left the world it created, represented in a felicitous way the effect of an immediate use of wealth. (123)

Calvinism, as Bataille argues, carried the “overturning of values effected by Luther its extreme consequence” (123). On a basic level, Calvinism advocates the doctrine that humans are able to glorify God through hard-work and accumulation of wealth. Calvinists attained salvation by good works and wealth. Furthermore, they attributed virtue to “utility” rather than charity. In order to attain salvation, they were devoted to selfish accumulation rather than benevolent giving.

For Bataille, production and conservation of goods are essential ways for the capitalist society to maintain social order and thus designate the negative position of expenditures. The quantitative representation (production and accumulation) has a strong hold on the capitalist society, which leads to the concern for acquisitive accumulation rather than expenditures. It is only through conservation that social security can be achieved. For Bataille however, the tyrannical representation of unlimited accumulation may not maintain social order but undermine it. John Tomlinson echoes Bataille in the idea that acquisitive accumulation became the doctrine of the capitalist society. In *Cultural Imperialism*, John Tomlinson suggests that the definition of “development” in the capitalist society is simply the provision of “more” (159). The capitalist society made quantitative growth into a social doctrine, but lacked any qualitative direction. The quantitative representation, advocated by capitalism, was applied to the notion of sexuality. The sexual act operates with a “restrictive” economy because it was related to excretion and loss. Foucault relates that “[a] third effect is quantitative: the evacuation causes weight loss” (110). Based on the concept of quantitative growth, sexual activity was denigrated as a violent convulsion which wasted energy and produced nothing of value. What was worse, excessive sexual practices could jeopardize one’s health. In Volume I of *History of*

Sexuality, Foucault maintains:

Hence a paradox resides in this preoccupation with a regimen by which one sought both an equitable distribution of an activity that could not in itself be regarded as a vice, and a restrictive economy in which “less” seemed almost always preferable to “more” . . . the whole body, with its most fragile organs, risked paying a high price for expenditure that nature had nonetheless willed. (120)

1.2. Sacrifice, Sexuality, and Sovereignty

During Medieval times, sacrifice was deemed as a gratuitous giving and salvation denoted freedom by breaking away from a state of servitude caused by productive activity. On the contrary, sacrifice in Christianity was far from a gratuitous giving but a calculated economic consideration.

Those living in Medieval times believed God to be the supreme provider whose generous offering of material and spiritual protection accounted for His authority. In other words, the authority of the divine stemmed from generous giving rather than selfish reserving. Lewis Hyde shares the same idea that the authority of the divine was attributed to His ability to “give” rather than to reserve. In *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, Lewis Hyde maintains that the authority of the divine was believed to come from the generous giving of sacrifice of His life or giving away things to help the needy. The begging bowl of the Buddha, as he argued, represented a theological belief that generous giving is emblematic of divinity. Monks inherited the spirit of generosity. When monks begged from laymen and received gifts from them, they were different from selfish people who desired to get things from others. The gift or money they accepted was

simply meant to provide sustenance for their lives. Above all, their begging bowls were not seen as receptacles of gifts but as “bearers” of gifts which are not reserved for themselves but open to people in need.

The wandering mendicant takes it as his task to carry what is empty from door to door. There is no profit; he merely stays alive if the gift moves toward him. He makes its spirit visible to us. His well-being, then, is a sign of its well-being, as his starvation would be a sign of its withdrawal. (*The Gift* 24)

God was believed to have magic powers because of his tremendous power to give life. All first-born creatures belong to God because “He” filled the empty womb (*The Gift* 24). God was most supreme because of his generous giving nature. In this sense, generosity was deemed as a good deed which pleased God and generous giving the only way to salvation. In productive activity, things are governed by their utilitarian value. Utility denotes the meaning that something can be used by others. However, it also indicates a negative meaning of servitude. In other words, utilized things are servile because they are completely subject to someone more powerful. For example, animals are used by humans to facilitate the growing of food or yield more products. They are servile because they are subject to humans. For Bataille, utility equals servility rather than self-sovereignty and divinity. According to Bataille, things could be rid of their bonds of servility when being offered to God. Thus, things could be dissociated from utility which is stressed by the productive activity. That is, things can acquire “salvation” from the state of servitude as long as they are no longer subjugated to the principle of utility.

It is noteworthy that utility and production are deemed as servitude in the profane world while uselessness and expenditure are considered freedom in the divine world. Sacrifice and salvation are integral elements to Bataille’s *general economy*.

Sacrifice is the antithesis to production since it is a form of loss and destruction. In *Bataille's Reader*, Bataille argues that “to sacrifice is not to kill but to relinquish and to give” (212). In wake of Bataille’s argument, death in sacrifice functions as a power to restore a lost value through relinquishment of utilitarian value in the profane life. The principle of sacrifice is destruction, while the destruction that sacrifice tends to bring about is not annihilation but an attempt to rescue the given objects from the world of utility. In the world of utility, oxen or sheep are treated as food or as tools of production. In a sense, the offerings prior to sacrifice are subordinated to the principle of need and production. The sacrificial killing of oxen was intended to remove the aspects of fetish and commodity imposed on the oxen and to leave them to return to the world of things. That is, the ox is neither food nor a tool of production. Destroying goods and resources can be interpreted as a drive to withdraw them from the world of utility. The sacrificial act is also sovereign in that it is free from a servile existence of dependence upon commodities and the subordination to utility.⁹ Salvation means a way to free one’s self from productive activity in which the importance of utility cannot be overemphasized. If animals or things entered the cycle of utility, they would be treated as a “means” and reduced to the status of a thing which is entirely devoid of self-mastery. It is at this time that servitude arrives.

The ritual of sacrifice was intended to give sacred aura to the sacrificed so that spectators within could develop a sense of respect for it. If the sacrifice was slain and served simply as common food, it did not emanate the sacred aura. It failed to bathe in the sacred aura because it was suppressed to the purposeful utility of the productive chain. The American Indian tribes, who occupied the Pacific coast of North America, employed sacrificial ritual to indoctrinate younger generations to show their respect

⁹ In “The Useless Image: Bataille, Bergson, Margitt,” Suzanne suggests, “Bataille claims they are useless because they were created from desire, not for some instrumental (or ritual) purpose; this is what makes them art” (*Representations* 36).

for their surroundings and natural resources. They lived off of the resources provided by the ocean and salmon was the main source of food for many of them. In the northernmost regions of the Northwest, salmon swam inland and spawned annually. The coastal Indians were convinced that the salmon lived in a tribe underneath the water. It was their belief that salmon were the Indians' sea brothers rather than food. Every year, the salmon in human form, dressing themselves in robes of salmon skin, swam to the mouths of rivers. They were believed to sacrifice themselves so that their land brothers may have food to survive the winter. As a consequence, a ritual of sacrifice was contrived to make salmon sacred. The salmon they caught were not treated as common food; rather, the tribes paid homage to them. In the ritual, the salmon was revered as a chief. In this sense, salmon earned respect from people when they were free from its utility. The ritual was intended to teach the tribes to cherish their natural resources. They may not have cherished their precious resources if they had treated them like a common food. Lewis Hyde argues:

The first salmon to appear in the rivers was always given an elaborate welcome. . . . The first fish was treated as if it were a high-ranking chief making a visit from a neighboring tribe. . . . After the ceremony the priest gave everyone present a piece of the fish to eat. Finally—and this is what makes it clearly a gift circle—the bones of the first salmon were returned to the sea. The belief was that salmon bones placed back into the river would reassemble once they had washed out to sea; the fish would then revive, return to its home and revert to its human form. (*The Gift* 26)

According to Hyde's argument, human existence can return to the sacred domain when freed from productive activities. They could rid themselves of servitude by refusing to function as "instruments" in t productive activities. Such expenditures as idleness, drunkenness, sexuality and even death were employed to reject the "utility"

imposed on the inner world of men. The moment one wins a lottery, his mind will be instantly occupied by the plans of enjoying luxury. The winner would come up with plans teeming with a wide range of expenditures rather than production. In Hyde's argument, "On a comprehensive view, human life strives towards *prodigality* to the point of anguish, too the point where the anguish becomes unbearable" (*DS* 60 emphasis mine). For the winner, the eventual escape of suffocating servility in the productive activity is imminent. In other words, winning vast sums in the lottery brings his dream of idleness within reach. In this sense, the winners' convulsion and intoxication in the approaching expenditures and idleness can be deemed as a sovereign moment. A man who has won the jackpot may be considered a sovereign individual because "with the necessities ensured, the possibility of life opens up without limit" (*The Accursed Share* Vol. III 198). An individual's sovereignty resides in his ability to enjoy things without considering his needs or daily necessities. In other words, he "truly enjoys the products of this world beyond his needs" (198). This is a life charged with abundant resources; "Life *beyond utility* is the domain of sovereignty" (198). Bataille argues:

What distinguishes sovereignty is the consumption of wealth, as against labor and servitude, which produce wealth without consuming it. The sovereign individual consumes and doesn't labor, whereas at the antipodes of sovereignty the slave and the man without means labor and reduce their consumption to the necessities, to the products without which they could neither subsist nor labor. (198)

It is precisely due to his freedom from subjugation to productive activities which leads to his overwhelming joy of winning the prize. He is exhilarated about unfettering the shackle of his utilitarian value; that is, he celebrates his rebirth as a sovereign individual. Drunkenness, as Bataille argues, is a way to enjoy the

“sovereignty pleasure” without considering the necessities imposed on the individuals. Bataille continues, “If the worker treats himself to the drink, this is *essentially* because into the wine he swallows there enters a *miraculous* element of savor, which is precisely the essence of sovereignty” (199). The intoxication a bottle of wine gives the worker a miraculous feeling of escaping necessities, and creates a feeling of “having a world at his disposal” (199). The moment of sovereignty would never come if he considered making use of the present time in planning for future results. If he worked in order to drink, the sovereignty moment would never arrive. Similarly, if he drank in order to work, the sovereignty would never come.

Drunkenness is an exemplary of sovereignty moments since it entails miraculous sensation of forgetting necessity. For Bataille, sovereignty is manifested to those who are intoxicated in enjoying the present time without considering their needs. “We must satisfy our needs, and we suffer if we fail, but where the necessities are at stake we are only obeying the animal injunction within us. Beyond need, the object is, *humanly*, the *miracle*; it is sovereignty life, beyond the necessary that suffering defines” (199).

Erotic desire also manifests the moment of sovereignty because “sexual exuberance prevents us from being reduced to mere things” (DS 159). Animals should not be regarded as things which are completely devoid of self-awareness. They are deemed as things or tools and humans treat them so. They are reduced to “tools” when they “work” as beasts of burden. In the productive activity (work), man is easily reduced to *tools* because he should increase productivity by renouncing his sexual exuberance. Bataille argues:

It is categorically impossible for man to be enslaved and suppressed to the same extent as the animals. But this is only evident at a second glance; man is first of all a working animal, submitting to work and thence obliged to renounce some of his exuberance. There is nothing

arbitrary in sexual restrictions: each man has only a certain amount of energy and if he devotes some of it to work he has to reduce his sexual energy by that much. So humanity, seen from the human, anti-animal standpoint of work, is that within us which reduces us to things and our animal nature preserves the values of our subjective existence. (*DS* 158)

We vainly strive to deny our sexual exuberance because of its unpredictable and incommensurable nature. Its furtive and uncontrollable nature keeps disturbing work which requires planning and patience. In this sense, sexuality is a force to stop us from being enslaved to the productive activity and reduced to the status of things. Bataille said, “Work as opposed to sexual exuberance is the condition of objective awareness” (158), and “Sexuality, thought of as filthy or beastly, is still the greatest barrier to the reduction of man to the level of the thing” (158).

Sacrifice and salvation in Christianity however, are governed by the idea of give-and-take, corresponding to the ideals found in capitalism. Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for the sake of all mankind; as a result, mankind is obligated to work hard, as if God could be compensated for the sacrifice of His only son. Salvation then requires a life of productive servitude for the sake of the glory of God while at the same time imposing a state of servility. In Volume I of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille asserts:

In the orgy, *salvation* in Christianity liberates the ends of religious life from the domain of productive activity. But if the faithful's salvation is the reward for his merits, if he can achieve it by his deeds, then he has simply brought more closely into the domain of religion the concatenation that makes useful work wretched in his eyes. Hence those deeds by which a Christian tries to win his salvation can in turn be considered profanations. Even the mere fact of choosing salvation as a goal appears contrary to the truth of grace. Grace alone brings about an

accord with the divinity, which cannot be subjected to casual series as things can. The gift that divinity makes of itself to the faithful soul cannot be paid for. (120-21)

1.3. Death, Eroticism, and Sovereignty

In the preface of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel asserts that death plays a pivotal role in the emergence of humans' self-consciousness and the development of humans' spirit. Hegel argues:

But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. (PS 19)

For Hegel, humans are able to obtain their self-consciousness not because they are fearful of something negative but because they can withstand and retain the agony it brings. Spirit, as Hegel indicates, is the mastery power used to bear up well against something negative. In a basic sense, spirit derives from humans' power to fight against something negative rather than revel in something positive. From this perspective, self-consciousness is the spirit to look death in the face rather than flinch from the terror of death. It is death that gives rise to humans' spirit; moreover, death plays a crucial role in the battle between the master and the slave.

In the sphere of Life, which is the object of Desire, *negation* is present

either *in an other*, viz in Desire, or as a *determinateness* opposed to another indifferent form, or as the inorganic universal nature of Life. But this universal independent nature in which negation is present as absolute negation, is the genus as such, or the genus as *self-consciousness*.

Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness. (PS 110)

For Hegel, the existence of self-consciousness needs to be recognized by another self-consciousness. In a sense, self-consciousness is actually a desire to be acknowledged. That is, only by making the other his slave is the master recognized as a lord. In order to gain recognition, the master and the slave alike fearlessly plunge in a life-and-death struggle. Each attempts to supersede the other by seeking the death of the other. As Hegel puts it, “The Individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of recognition as an independent self consciousness” (114). In this struggle, the lord master stakes his own life and refuses to shrink from death. In other words, he negates his animal instinct which aims to preserve life. On the contrary, the bondsman in this struggle refuses to stake his own life and gives in to his animal instinct of self-preservation. He does not negate his animal instinct. As a result, the lord wins the battle because he unflinchingly exposes himself to the death threat. To put it differently, he is not at all seized by the anxiety of risking his own life in this life- and-death struggle. In contrast, the bondsman is conquered and enthralled by the lord because he withdraws when he faces the death threat. It can be argued that the bondman’s dread of death makes him a slave in the fight for recognition. By negating death, the lord gains access to freedom and he exists in and for himself. However, giving in to his fear of death, the bondsman is deprived of independence and cast into servitude.

In *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Alexander Kojève argues, “That is to say,

the Master's truth is the Slave and the Slave's Work. Actually, others recognize the Master as Master only because he has a Slave; the Master's life consists in consuming the products of slavish Work, and in living on and by this Work" (20). For Kojève, the slave, controlled by his master, manages to transcend himself by negating his given state of slavery. In other words, he makes his attempt to find some way to cease his slavery. On the other hand, the master strives to establish himself as the supreme master and keep his own slavish consciousness at bay. That is, he keeps himself from work because the drudgery of work belongs to his slave. The slave works for his master and exists for his master. Because he is compelled to work, he engages himself in work and through it he becomes the master of Nature. In contrast, the master refuses to work because he is afraid that the slavish consciousness might solidify internally. As a consequence, a master refuses to work and forces his slave to work for him. The master is not personally responsible for the transforming Nature into commodities of consumption, rather he gives in to idleness. That is, the master has no desire for transcending himself and he is content with his stagnation. In actuality, it is the slave rather than the master that transforms the given world via manual labor. As Kojève puts it, "History is the history of the working Slave" (20). In changing Nature, the slave confronts with more possibilities of meeting death and fights against it. In contrast, the master misses any possibility of encountering death because his laziness rids him of a chance to involve himself in changing Nature. It is noted that the given state of master and slave is reversed. Not only does the slave become the master of Nature but also he becomes the master of his lord master. He overcomes his slavery because he fights against death when transforming Nature.

Inspired by Hegel and Kojève, Georges Bataille asserts that death is the best way to rid one's imposed servitude and achieve self-sovereignty. We hold veneration for a hero who risked his life defying his rival. Our veneration for him was

accentuated as he spat in the face of his enemy when being captured and being put to death. The identification and the veneration come from his squandering his life. This act of squandering of his life is a way to achieve self-sovereignty. He was the hero because he was exempt from a life of servitude. In Volume II of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille argues:

The novel seldom achieves the rigor of this movement. Yet it's the same with the basic narrative as with classic tragedy: it is most engaging when the character of the hero leads him, of his own accord, to his destruction. The closer the hero gets to divinity, the greater are the losses he incurs, and the greater are the dangers he willingly faces. Only divinity verifies, in an excessive way, the principle according to which desire has loss and danger as its object. But literature is closer to us, and what it loses in the way of excess is gained in the way of verisimilitude. (107)

In "From Restricted to General Economy," Derrida asserts that risking is the "economy of life" which enables a person to maintain self-awareness and thus prevents him from being reduced to tools (106). He argues, "To rush headlong into death . . . One risks losing the effect and profit of meaning which were the very *stakes* one hoped *to win*" (106). Death, as Bataille suggests, is not only a way to get rid of servitude but a way of communication.

Death sits at the center of Bataille's notion of the general economy which is governed by the principle of loss rather than accumulation. It cannot be denied that death is the most extreme form of all conceivable expenditures since it brings destruction as well as nothingness. In *The Accursed Shared*, Bataille asserts:

Eating brings death, but in an accidental form. Of all conceivable luxuries, death, in its fatal and inexorable form, is undoubtedly the most costly. . . . Just as in space the trunks and branches of the tree raise the superimposed

stages of the foliage to the light, death distributes the passage of the generation over time. (34)

In *Death and Sensuality*, Bataille argues that “[t]he most violent thing of all for us is death which jerks us out of a tenacious obsession with the lastingness of our discontinuous being. We blench at the thought that the separate individuality within us suddenly be snuffed at” (16). For Bataille, the human experience is an experience of limits inasmuch as humans have consciousness of death. Death is the loss that defines our existence as “individual isolated discontinuity.” For Bataille, human beings are discontinuous beings because we are born and die as individuals. As a result, there is a gulf existing between ourselves and others. Bataille argues:

Reproduction implies the existence of discontinuous beings.

Each being is distinct from all others. His birth, his death, the events of his life may have an interest for others, but he alone is directly concerned in them. He is born alone. He dies alone. Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity. (*DS* 12)

The inevitable death makes us aware of the fact that we are isolated and discontinuous beings. In “Bataille’s Tacky Touch,” Martin Crowley argues, “For there to be communication, Bataille needs the subject to remain in place. But his model of communication determines this residual presence . . . but, rather, as the subject’s irreducible failure” (769). Consciousness of isolation and discontinuity that death brings about makes us yearn to return to continuous beings and unite with the otherness.¹⁰ As Bataille puts it, “Our existence is an exasperated attempt to complete being” (*Inner Experience* 89). He maintains:

¹⁰ In “No Fun and Games until Someone Loses an Eye: Transgression and Masculinity in Bataille and Foucault,” Judith Surkis argues, “Bataille is not aware of the difficulty this presents for his own project. Throughout *Eroticism*, he stresses that eroticism is defined by a partial and proximate gesture toward continuous existence” (22).

On the most fundamental level there are transitions from continuous to discontinuous or from discontinuous to continuous. We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is. (*DS* 15)

It is noted that Bataille treats death as a way of “communication” which enables humans to surpass the great gulf developed between the self and the otherness. Through death, the gulf of separating the self from others and the universe is overcome and thus we are restored to a sense of primary harmony. For Bataille, death is violence but it is at the same time a way of communication. It can be argued that it is the consciousness of death rather than life that makes community possible. Because death is a horrible violence, humans in earlier times set prohibitions on death. Once the prohibitions they duly observed, a community was formed. Take sacrificial ceremonies for example. Ancient man firmly believed that the destruction of the human body or something very precious to the community would free that community from violence. That sacrificial act involving death was believed to contribute to the establishment and continuity of the community.

The anguish caused by approaching death is embedded in humans instead of animals. Unlike humans, animals eat corpses because they do not equate death with violence. Humans associated death with violence because they believed that the decomposition and putrefaction of cadavers is proved to be the effects of violence. That explains why human beings attempted to hide corpses while animals consume them. Seeing death as violence, humans come up with a will to flee, to postpone, or

even to outwit death. They do so vainly because death is inevitable. To their agony, death will finally visit them. On the one hand we wish to live so we fear death to the extent that we seek any possible ways to preserve our lives and escape from the clutches of death. On the other hand, there can be circumstances in which we come to welcome death and its annulment. In *The Accursed Shared*, Bataille argues that “[i]n this respect, the luxury of death regarded by us in the same way as that of sexuality, first as a negation of ourselves, the – in a sudden reversal—as the proud truth of that movement of which life is the manifestation” (34-35). For those who desire to pursue infinite possibilities, death can be a way to venture for abundant possibilities beyond this world (the profane world). For them, death is far from a fatal destruction but a way to seek after interminable potentialities. For example, those who suffer from unbearable pain welcome death because it can terminate the pain inflicted on them and offer peace to them. For Buddhists, death is a rite of passage in which people cut themselves off from the profane world which is teeming with torments. For Christians, the evangelic law reminds them that man must die in order to obtain eternal life. That is, death can be a way to escape from the ephemeral profane life and thus it promises eternal life. For Buddhists and Christians alike, death is deemed as a way to experience infinite possibilities beyond the profane world. In sum, humans are different from animals because they are both terrified by and revel in death. For humans, death denotes infinite possibilities.

Death, according to Bataille, not only facilitates our escape from servitude but also unfolds infinite possibilities. In “Lure of the Fallen Seraphim: Sovereignty and Sacrifice in James Joyce and Georges Bataille,” Singleton Mark asserts, “For Bataille, sovereignty and sacrifice are inextricable. . . . the sovereign and of the need to confront death while remaining consciousness” (*James Joyce Quarterly* 303). On one hand, we anticipate becoming a hero in the novel who bravely risked his life

undergoing the journey.¹¹ We admire his courage to face death and never give in to the threat of death. However, real death will take away the chance to experience it. Bataille argues, “And since in death it is given and taken away at the same time we must seek it in the feeling of death . . . when the fullness of horror and joy coincide” (*DS* 268). Paradoxically, real death makes it impossible for us to experience death. Therefore, humans started to search ways to satisfy their desire of attaining communication, infinite possibilities, self-sovereignty through simulated death. That explains why people used to appreciate tragedy rather than comedy. Death makes heroes or heroines in the novel sacred; also, death makes love in the novel more pure and more touching. According to Bataille, literature is not so much a venue searching for pleasure as a risky road to look death in the face. He maintains, “For the time being, in order to illustrate the law by which we seek the greatest loss or the greatest danger, I limit myself to two references, the first being fictional literature” (*BR* 260).

Readers identify with the heroes or heroines who maintain their unbending attitude toward the death threat. In this sense, without the plot of death threat, authors would fail to communicate with their readers and readers would not admire the heroes the author created.

Like literature, sacrifice is held to enhance identification and communication. Prior to the sacrificial ritual, the victim was treated well. They were given nice wine to drink or beautiful woman to sleep with. They were no longer treated like slaves or prisoners. They venerated the victim because the victim renders them an opportunity to experience the simulation of death. Above all, the victims dressed like kings or goddesses. They became sacred because the tribes would like to teach their younger

¹¹ In “Toward a Sovereign Cinema: Georges Bataille’s Hiroshima mon amour,” Anthony Reynolds pointed out, “In such literary moments of discursive sacrifice in which theme and meaning are renounced . . . it is possible to recover a sovereign perspective beyond the constraints of servile reason” (315).

generations not to abuse the victims. Abusing them would have resulted in more violent revenge. That was the same case with the sacrificial items. In ancient societies, sacrificial ritual was held to teach younger generations to cherish their resources. It can be argued that it corresponds to ecological protection prevailing in modern times. The sacrificial items were no longer things which were born to be wasted. The sacrificial ritual gave sacred aura to the sacrificial item so that their younger generations would never abuse their resources. It is an ecological “communication” which traverses between older generations and younger generations. It is also an “identification” between the subject and the object.

Similar to death and sacrifice, eroticism is a form of interpersonal “communication” because it enables humans to transcend the gulf existing between the self and others. Bataille argues that “[t]he sexual relationship is itself a communication and a movement, it is like a celebration by nature, and because it is essentially a communication it provokes an outward movement in the first place” (207). For Bataille, the prohibition of incest is intended for communication rather than isolation. For the brother giving away his sister to somebody, generosity is the foundation of communication with others. More precisely, they are generous givers rather than misers who focus on their immediate enjoyment of their own things. Bataille asserts that eroticism was intended to “destroy the self-contained container” of participators because the lovers have to forget their constructed identity. In other words, they lose their class consciousness. They are no longer devoted husbands or virtuous wives; they are lost and overwhelmed by their enrapture and forget their duties and status.

Death and sexuality, as Bataille examines, are two forms of communication; they are correlated because consciousness of death is the decisive factor which determines humans’ sentiment toward eroticism. As Bataille puts it, “eroticism is

assenting to life even in death” (11). Seeking to flee death, humans provide themselves with a security; thus, they clothe themselves and build shelters. In other words, work is required to achieve the security. For humans, “work” serves to preserve their lives, thus, anything that impedes work should be kept at bay. Sexuality was marked as a taboo because it is associated with death and violence. It is associated with death because the exhaustion entailed by the uncontrolled frenzy orgasm is like death. As Bataille argues in *Death and Sensuality*, “Death is the result of the sexual crisis only in exceptional cases . . . so much so that the exhaustion following the final paroxysm is thought of as a little death” (100). It is associated with violence because it disregards the ethics of work. Sexuality is harmful to work because it entails losses of energy and keen observation. It seems that holidays were a form of expenditures. However, it was a form of production. Weekends are meant to restore the energy and re-sharpen keen observation. Man needs extraordinary perceptive powers during work since they enable him to judge or react to the situation quickly and act accordingly. However, sexual exuberance lessens man’s perceptive powers. Aside from perceptive powers, energy is required for man to finish work. For these reasons, man has to reduce his sexual activity as much as possible.

Death and sexuality are deemed as two forms of “violence” because humans are governed by the ethics of “work.” In order to prevent these two forms of violence from undermining work, man thus set taboos on them.

It is noted that Bataille tends to combine eroticism with violence because destructive violation is an indispensable element to eroticism. Bataille argues:

It would be only just true to say that if the element of violation, violence even, which gives it its destructive character is withdrawn, this erotic activity reaches its climax far less easily. . . . Erotic activity always entails a breaking down of established patterns, the patterns, I repeat, of

the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence
as defined and separate individuals. (*DS* 18)

The idea of death is linked with the urge to possess the beloved object. The lover suffers from the threat of the separation from his beloved object. If the lover can not possess the beloved he may think of killing her; often he would rather kill than lose her. Alternatively he may wish to die himself. Behind these frenzied notions is glimpse of a continuity possible through the beloved.¹² Man knows how to change the present situation by negating death. He knows how to transcend the situation through death. For animals, death is the end of the natural order of things and thus they do not negate death. However, death is a violation of man's present predicament. In a sense, violation is negation, transgression and transcendence.

¹² In "Bloody Sundays," Denis Hollier maintains, "Bataille's carnival, on the contrary, is the moment in which "I" lives its loss, lives itself as loss. This is not a time of plenitude; it is, on the contrary, the time when time's vacancy is experienced" (*Presentations* 88).

Chapter Two

Eroticism: Reading for Anxiety

The animal itself does have a subjective life but this life seems to be conferred upon it like an inert object, once and for all. Human eroticism differs from animal sexuality precisely in this, that it calls inner life into play. In human consciousness eroticism is that within man which calls his being in question. Animal sexuality does make for disequilibrium and this disequilibrium is a threat to life, but the animal does not know that. Nothing resembling a question takes shape within it. . . . Human sexual activity is not necessarily erotic but erotic it is whenever it is not rudimentary and purely animal. (*DS* 29)

Characters in Bataille's novels are impelled by animal-like urges, which sometimes leads readers to mistake animal sexuality for eroticism. For Bataille, eroticism is essentially different from animal sexuality since the latter seeks instant gratification without taboos evoking their anxiety and terror. In this Chapter, the essence of eroticism is examined. Another attempt is made to explore the difference between eroticism and animal sexuality presented in Bataille's novels.

Bataille conceptualizes the world as being divided into three phases of development – the primitive world, the profane world, and the sacred world. In order to successfully establish the profane world, people living in primitive times had to make an attempt to get rid of their “animality” so that they could enter into the profane world. In the profane world, anything related to animality such as incest, excrement, filthiness, immediate pleasure and expenditure were eliminated. In other words, receding back to a state of animality became socially prohibited in the profane world. The profane world was established when those living in the primitive struggled to become humankind, suggests Bataille, by denying their animality. In contrast, the

sacred world to come features all the transgressive powers like *eroticism* and *festival* which function as liberating forces for those trying to escape the profane world. As to animality, Bataille argues that animals do not develop eroticism because they do not possess a consciousness of death. In this sense, Bataille attempts to interpret human history by exploring the inner experience of human beings. He maintains that human history is characterized by the transition from an animal state to a human state. Thus, anything related to animality such as sexuality was prohibited between animals and humans. Bataille asserts that prohibition in the profane world is a mechanism which stops humans from returning to their animality. In Bataille's erotic novels, readers can experience many shocking topics such as incest, excrement, filthiness, expenditure, murder, corpse and death. For Bataille, these topics are liberating forces deliberately employed with a view to violating the prohibitions established in the profane world by temporarily returning animality.

Incest, an emblem of animal sexuality, is the most pressing issue in eroticism. How was the incest prohibition linked to the struggle of the primitive to get rid of animality? As a matter of fact, the objects of human sexual desire cannot be determined in a precise way. It is like a dream in which a kind of arbitrary psychological concept takes over. Science provides the answer to the riddle of the incest. It constructs the prohibition as a eugenic measure: It would be a matter of shielding the species from the results of consanguineous marriages. Scientists have proved that incest gives rise to degenerate characteristics found in those children.¹³ However, this point of view has been recently reconstructed. Levi-Strauss indicated that the eugenic measure appears nowhere before the sixteenth century. Bataille's answer to the riddle of incest involves putting the structure of an institution such as marriage in the "gift-giving" movement in primitive times. A principle of generosity

¹³ Francis Galton(1822-1911), Charles Darwin's cousin, coined the word eugenics.

presided over the movement of the “gift-giving” movement in primitive times and of gift-exchange. The father who would marry his own daughter, or the brother who would marry his own sister, would be like the owner of a bottle of champagne, a metaphor created by Bataille, who would drink up his stock by himself without inviting any friends. The father and the brother must give her away as a present; that is, they must share the wealth, their daughter or their sister, with others under the rule of generosity. The concept of “generosity” dominated the system of exchanges, so the related rules are not for self-interest. The beneficiaries would give counter-gifts which exceeded the original gifts in value. In Volume II of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille argues:

Marriage is not so much the act of the betrothed couple as it is that of the woman’s “giver,” of the man (the father or the brother) who could have freely enjoyed this woman (his daughter, his sister) and who gives her away. The gift he makes of her is perhaps a substitute for the sexual act; the exuberance of giving, in any case, has the same meaning — that of an expenditure of resources — as this act itself. . . . and that the prohibition established, has alone made the *gift* possible. . . . The renunciation of one’s close kin — the *reserve* of the one who forbids himself the very thing that belongs to him — defines the human attitude that is contrary to animal voracity. (56-57)

In wake of Bataille’s thought, it is the contrary to animality that constitutes the essence of the gift. The features of animality are avarice and self-interest. The movement of gift-giving signifies the transition from animal to man. Bataille argues that “the incest prohibition is one of the effects of the repugnance felt for his condition by the animal that became human. The forms of animality were excluded from a bright world which signified humanity” (61-62).

Excrement, another emblem of animality, also permeates Bataille's novels. Bataille claims that "[t]his is how Saint Augustine expressed the unavowable character of the flesh that is anonymously at our source: *inter faeces et urinam nascimur*, he said, we were born between feces and urine" (62). It seems that mankind resembles those parvenus who are ashamed of their human origin. In contrast, the infants are insensitive to our perturbations since they do not find the excrement upsetting. Instead, they tolerate them without any reaction. Disgust provoked by the infantile waste originates from adult's abhorrence of animal waste. They perceived infants as animals. The imperative of "cleanliness" in the civilized societies can be regarded as the process of getting rid of "animality." The observance of the cleanliness, in a sense, signifies the distinct horror people have at the mere thought of engaging in the animalistic. It becomes clear that a more scrupulous observance of cleanliness is intended for distinguishing men from animals. To a certain extent, it costs human beings to a certain amount to free themselves from diverse forms of defilement. The observance of cleanliness prohibitions is a matter of material resources. But wealth does not ensure being honored. If the richest man was not more concerned about sordidness than a begging vagrant, he could not be respected and his prestige could not be elevated. In other words, a person who observes the cleanliness prohibitions stands morally above the man who is careless about keeping himself from filth and who lives like an animal. It is obvious that the observance of cleanliness plays a significant role in shaping humankind and it signifies peoples' success in transitioning from animality to humanity. In *Story of the Eye*, the narrator described the erotic scene in a filthy area:

Simone, who sat between Sir Edmund and myself, witnessed the killing with an exhilaration at least equal to mine, and she refused to sit down again when the interminable acclamation for the young man was over.

She took my hand wordlessly and led me to an outer courtyard of the filthy arena, where the stench of equine and human urine was suffocating because of the great heat. I grabbed Simone's cunt, and she seized my furious cock through my trousers. We stepped into a stinking shithouse, where sordid flies whirled about in a sunbeam. (51)

From the depiction given by the narrator, Simone's sexual desire was ignited by witnessing the killing of fighting bulls and she copulated with the narrator in a filthy toilet instead of finding themselves a clean place. Their animal desires were always met with immediate gratification without any postponement. It is clear that Simone and the narrator gave in to their animal impulse based on immediacy without waiting. In addition, they did not observe the prohibitions of cleanliness. Bataille assimilates immediate impulses and filthiness into eroticism, which is intended to temporarily return the reader to a state of animality.

Bataille's readers might mistake eroticism for animal-like sexuality since they are inescapably linked with each other; however as Bataille suggests, animals do not develop eroticism. Animals do not have "taboo" consciousness; thus, they could never experience the intense pleasure of violating taboos. Animal impulse plays an important role in eroticism; however, animals do not develop eroticism because they do not have "death" consciousness (the most terrifying taboo) nor do they have a consciousness of the "taboo."

Animals do not have "death" consciousness because they do not try to hide, outwit, or postpone their deaths. Animals do not imagine the horror of death whereas humans do. Animals do not build graves because they do not possess the consciousness of death. When they see corpses or bones, they do not flinch from them; rather, they revel in consuming them. In other words, animals do not have consciousness of death because they treat death like "stones." In contrast, humans are

fearful of death; they build graves to stay away from dead bodies. Imminent death freed people to give in to their innermost desires, especially those of a sexual nature. Precisely put, death lets loose prohibited desires such as killing, destruction, and sexuality. Animals as Bataille describes them do not have consciousness of death because they do not picture death as a horrible violence and regard it as taboo. As a result, animals would never experience the intense pleasure deriving from letting loose their prohibited desires. Bataille argues:

It is nonetheless true that the animal, the ape, whose sensuality at times becomes exacerbated, knows nothing of eroticism. And this is precisely because it lacks all knowledge of death. To the contrary, it is because we are human and live in the somber perspective of death that we know this exacerbated violence of eroticism. (*The Tears of Eros* 33)

In *Story of the Eye*, Simone and the narrator engaged in an orgy with other boys and girls, which involved the image of death such as broken glasses, vomiting and bloodletting. Moreover, it involved prohibited desire such as promiscuous sexuality. In the orgy party, Marcelle was so naively pious that she flushed when she witnessed the absurdity of the sexual games. In addition, she gaped with consternation and shrieked as she witnessed the obscene spectacles involving death and promiscuous sexuality. In stark contrast with Marcelle, the boys and girls, who failed to regard death and taboo, casually enjoyed the orgy as if they were animals. They acted like animals free from the confines of taboo; thus, they would never be granted intense pleasure from transgressing the taboo.

Animals do not develop eroticism because they seek instant gratification when the desire object is given. On the contrary, humans know how to prolong their anxiety so that they can access a heightened state of excitement. According to Bataille's viewpoint, animal impulse is based on the premise of immediacy. That is,

animals respond to their urges instantly without patient waiting when the desired objects are given. In other words, animals do not try to restrain their tumultuous urges; they immediately yield to the solicitation of their vehement urges without any consideration of future results.

Unlike animals' seeking instant gratification, people do not surrender to their wild impulses, particularly during the time reserved for work. In contrast with animals, people are more patient and scrupulous in dealing with their abrupt urges since they are more concerned about their future rewards. They postpone or even hold back their desires because they look forward to the promising results of the future. As a result, they are tolerant of the pain imposed on them so as to obtain their desirable results in the near future. They are convinced that their reckless response to or even yielding to their immediate urges would jeopardize their promising future; therefore, these violent urges should be postponed or repressed. To put it another way, denying instant gratification is an requirement of the ethics of work. In Volume II of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille argues:

But the fact is that death threatens to forestall me, and to steal away the object of my anticipation. In the immediacy of the animal impulse, the object of desire is already given: there is no voluntary patience or waiting; the waiting, the patience, are always unavoidable and the possession of the object is not separate from the vehement desire, which cannot be contained. . . . Animals lack an elementary operation of the intellect, which distinguishes between action and result, present and future, and which, subordinating the present to the result, tends to substitute the anticipation of something else for that which is given in the moment, without waiting. (83)

Sexuality was marked as a taboo because it is associated with death and it is

a challenge to the principle of “work.” Needless to say, sexual activity is the assertion of life because it denotes the arrival of newcomers. Despite the fact that the birth of the newcomers does not bring about their parents’ immediate death, the new life implies that the parents are stepping closer to death. The parents survive the birth of their offspring because they have to raise them. However, death is always there, waiting to seize them. Bataille argues that “[o]nly multiple death can resolve the dilemma of these ever-multiplying existences” (*DS* 101).

Eroticism and death are deemed as two enemies of work. For Bataille, humans’ eroticism ingeniously combines life and death. The uncontrolled orgasm is associated with death. The exhaustion and void following the final paroxysm is thought of as a “little death” (*DS* 100).

One need look no further for the cause of the fear associated with sexual activity. Death is exceptional, an extreme case; each loss of normal energy is indeed only a little death compared with the death of the drone, but whether obscurely or clearly this little death is what is feared. On the other hand, it is also desired (within human limits at least). No one could deny that one essential element of excitement is the feeling of being swept off one’s feet, of falling headlong. If love exists at all it is, like death, a swift movement of loss within us, quickly slipping into tragedy and stopping only with death. For the truth is that between death and the reeling, heady motion of the little death the distance is hardly noticeable.

(*DS* 239)

In exploring death and sexuality, violence is an indispensable element. Sexuality and death are two forms of violence which undermine work. Inspired by anthropology exploring the evolution of animal to man, Bataille found three decisive factors which affected the transition from animal to man – death, work, and prohibitions of

sexuality. Man has to work to preserve life; however, death and sexuality are enemies of “work.” While death makes nonsense of our life’s efforts, sexual reproduction reminds the parents of their approaching death. Ultimately, sexuality is considered to be harmful to “work” which is the very thing that aims to preserve our lives. This is because sexual activity entails a considerable discharge of energy. The exhaustion following the orgasm indicates that sexuality consumes most of our energy. In order to conserve energy for work, man has to moderate his sexual exuberance. That is, the frequency of sexuality and the energy consumed in its execution is inversely proportionate with the productivity required by work. For this reason, humans had to reduce their sexual activity as much as possible. Bataille maintains:

In the domain of our life excess manifests itself in so far as violence wins over reason. Work demands the sort of conduct where effort is in a constant ratio with productive efficiency. It demands rational behavior where the wild impulses worked out on feast days and usually in games are frowned upon. If we were unable to repress these impulses we should not be able to work, but work introduces the very reason for repressing them. (*DS* 41)

The exhaustion induced by the orgasm lessens man’s appetite for work. Furthermore, uncontrollable sexual impulse is thought of as a form of violence because it makes us indifferent to the promises of observing the taboo (*DS* 41). Sexual impulse requires instant gratification; however, responding to it will hamper work because humans need to exercise patience and the restraint of their impulses to achieve their goals.

From the human perspective, it may seem that animals experience more pleasure than humans since the former are able to access instant gratification without repressing their immediate urges driven by the violence of desire. It may seem that humans’ deliberate repression of their vehement impulses is detrimental to developing

eroticism. As a matter of fact, however, detaching themselves from seeking instant gratification does not decrease their erotic desire but on the contrary intensifies their erotic pleasure. Unlike animal sexuality, human eroticism is based on the dialectical relationship of extreme anxiety and extreme pleasure. Simply put, the intense pleasure is induced by intense anxiety. Humans intend to endure pain and anxiety in order to achieve their scheduled goals. That is, provided that humans expect to achieve the intense pleasure the erotic desire brings, they should not curtail their anxiety but uplift it and prolong it. In order to achieve the goals of extreme pleasure, it is indispensable for humans to prolong their anxiety rather than plunge into animals' voracity for instant gratification.

2.1. Elusive Tactics in *Madame Edwarda*

In *Madame Edwarda*, the narrator was a priest who was anxious about his amorous lust impelled by a mad whore who declared herself as God. It seems that he made an attempt to relieve his anxiety in many ways; conversely, what he sought was to prolong his anxiety in order to find greater pleasure. He endured a long journey in his quest for anxiety. The story starts with a lewd priest who was assailed by a huge uneasiness. His anxiety was caused by peeping at the whores who walked down the stair of a urinal. Overwhelmed by his sexual urges, he managed to find relief by finding a whore who he craved. He would make himself stark naked and stripped naked the whores he desired. In order to pacify his restrained sexual desires, he resorted to ask for alcohol going from bar to bar.

There — I had come to a street corner — there a foul dizzying anguish got its nails into me (perhaps because I'd been staring at a pair of furtive whores sneaking down the stair of a urinal). A great urge to heave myself

dry always comes over me at such moments. I feel I have got to make myself naked . . . it's in stale flesh's tepid warmth I always supposed I'll find relief. . . . I asked for a pernod at the counter, drank the glass in one gulp, and then went on and on, from zinc counter to zinc counter, drinking until . . . The night was done falling. (*ME* 148)

Wandering among the streets, he took off his pants and carried them over his arm. He felt "an overpowering freedom" when he held his erected penis (*ME* 148). Afraid of being seen by others, he hastily picked up his pants and headed for the whore house named Mirrors, where he found a beautiful whore named Madame Edwarda. He found her naked and looking bored to death with the sexual games in the whorehouse. For the narrator however, she was ravishing. The narrator picked her because she was the sort he had a predilection for. She came and sat down beside the narrator. The narrator held Edwarda tightly and she surrendered herself, both of whom were indulged in a sickly kiss. Edwarda slipped her hand down his pants and touched his body, which made him feel like a shattering pane of glass. His hands were holding Edwarda's buttocks as he sensed the terror in her eyes and heard her coarse voice which was caused by weeping. Then he remembered his desire for the wretched. He wanted to achieve this wretchedness at all cost. For him, nothing mattered any more except indulging in the happiness that his sexual desires brought. He squeezed Edwarda in his arms; suddenly, he was overcome by a new shock. "From very high above a kind of stillness swept down upon me and froze me" (*ME* 149). It was as though he was carried up into the air by "headless and unbodied angels" (*ME* 149). He felt wretched and forsaken because his religious vocation admonished him to purge his soul by removing his sexual fantasies. However, his religious belief did not rid him of sexual urges but rather enhanced them.

It is noted that the narrator was overwhelmed by anxiety and tried to prolong

his anxiety. When he was aroused, he could have relieved himself by masturbating or having sex with the whores. He picked Edwarda because she was not interested in or excited by the sexual games in the whorehouse. Instead, she acted extremely bored and illusive. Apparently, the clients could casually enjoy the sexuality without any uneasiness in mind. Edwarda surrendered herself to the priest because she was able to sense his awkward uneasiness and terror. For Edwarda, customers in the whorehouse were like animals who sought instant gratification, a gratification was generally welcomed since the whores could make money efficiently. The clients paid money and enjoyed the sex without any restriction or taboos. It seems that the priest wanted to find an instant relief, but in fact he tried to prolong his anxiety in order to obtain intensified pleasure. The instant the narrator indulged in his sexual desires, his religious vocation compelled him to cast away his sexual fantasies. Bataille used headless and unbodied angels to represent the religious vocation. Headless angels belong to Heaven because sexual desires would never function through their brains. Also, these unbodied angels would never have to respond to disturbing forces within their bodies. For one thing, such angels set a virtuous example for the priest. For another, the narrator could not be aroused by these angels which remain chaste and free of sexuality. In other words, the priest could never be assailed by the anxiety or terror caused by the corporeal reality. The narrator should have been relieved at the sight of the angels who were sent to save him from his impending sin. However, he was seized by intolerable sorrow.

I squeezed Edwarda in my arms; immediately, icebound, I felt smitten within by a new shock. . . . It was as though I were borne aloft in a flight of headless and unbodied angels shaped from the broad swooping of wings, but it was simpler than that. I became unhappy and felt painfully forsaken, as one is when in the presence of GOD. It was worse and more

of a letdown than too much to drink. And right away I was filled with unbearable sadness to think that this very grandeur descending upon me was withering away the pleasure I hoped to have with Edwarda.

(ME 149)

To his confusion, his religious belief brought him sadness rather than happiness. When the priest was being struck by his confusing sorrow, he was awoken by Edwarda's thin voice which was as obscene as her slender body. Edwarda was seated herself on a table, holding one leg stuck up in the air. She opened her crevice wider, and she even pulled the folds of skin apart. Her privates were like a "loathsome squid" (ME 150). The priest was thunderstruck by her obscene display of her crack and her declaration as God. Much to the priest's consternation, Edwarda even ordered him to kiss her disgusting wound (her crack) in front of the other clients.

I was shaking, I looked at her: motionless, *she smiled back so sweetly* that I shook. At last, reeling, I sank down on my knees and feverishly pressed my lips to that running, teeming *wound*. Her bare thigh caressingly nudged my ear, I thought I heard a sound of roaring seasurge, it is the same sound you hear when you put your ear to a large *conch shell*. In the brothel's boisterous chaos and in the atmosphere of corroding absurdity I was breathing (it seemed to me that I was *chocking*. I was *flushed*, I was *sweating*) I hung strangely suspended, quite as though at that same point we, Edwarda and I, were losing ourselves in a wind-freighted night, on the edge of the ocean. (ME 150; emphasis mine)

The priest should have experienced peace when he saw the smile of his Lord because God sent angels to rescue him. He should have knelt down on his knees and pressed his lips to the cross on which Jesus' wounds were inflicted. Then he could have achieved spiritual growth from God's revelation like a person whose spirit grows

when hearing the sound from a “conch shell.” Ultimately, he would have received everlasting inner peace through righteousness. However, the situation was quite to the contrary. So, the priest was fascinated with shivering anxiety when he saw the smile of the licentious whore. Then he knelt down on her knees and attached his lips to her wound (the crack). When the whore’s thigh caressed his ear, he seemed to achieve spiritual growth as if he had heard the sound from the conch. He achieved inner disturbance rather than inner peace. It is clear that his erotic desire got the upper hand on his religious belief and thus inner peace was overshadowed. That is, sexual anxiety eclipsed what otherwise could have been blissful peace.

When the priest was immersed in his erotic revelries, he heard the voice of the brothel’s owner who was a beautiful robust woman. She was collecting the clients’ money and urged them to accompany the whores upstairs. The priest followed the naked Madame Edwarda traversing the room. The priest showed his detest for the “vulgar” ritual of buying sex. On the contrary, he was fascinated with the solemnity Madame Edwarda displayed.

But this so ordinary passage between the close-set tables, through the dense press of clients and girls, *this vulgar ritual of “the lady going up”* with the man who wants her in tow, was, at that moment, nothing short of an hallucinating solemnity for me: Madame Edwarda’s sharp heels clicking on the tiled floor, the smooth advance of her long obscene body, the acrid smell I drank in, the smell of a woman in the throes of joy.

(ME 151; emphasis mine)

More often than not women intend to be elusive rather than surrender themselves when men initiate their pursuit. The elusiveness, genuine or faked, is believed to be a golden rule for women to deal with men’s romantic courting. Their evasive tactics are based on two reasons. One is that men do not fulfill the conditions they expect. The

other one is that the pretended modesty is meant to enhance their desirability as well as their values. In this sense, woman's feigned elusiveness not only increases men's anxiety, but it also sharpens their desires. On the contrary, women's unreserved surrender may decrease their desirability and thus depreciates their values. Women would make themselves conspicuous or inviting by applying make-up or wearing adornments. Bataille argues that "putting oneself forward is the fundamental feminine attitude, but that first movement is followed by a feigned denial" (DS 132).

What happens is that the use of adornment implies that the wearer is a prostitute; or a pretence of evasion then sharpens desire. To begin with, prostitution is in harmony with this process. Feminine attitudes are made up of complementary opposites. The prostitution of some requires that others shall be elusive, and vice versa. But this interaction is spoiled by poverty. Prostitution is an open sore as soon as poverty alone puts a stop to the movement. (DS 132)

Bataille argues that "[n]ot every woman is a potential prostitute, but prostitution is the logical consequence of the feminine attitude" (131). For Bataille, women tend to put themselves forward as desired objects unless they are determined to remain chaste for the remainder of their lives. In this sense, they would surrender themselves providing the men live up to their expected conditions. In order to arouse men, their initial act is to make themselves captivating and the following act is to be elusive rather than aggressive. Women's ambivalent reactions, as Bataille argues, correspond to "eroticism of prostitution" which is based on transgression. The eroticism of prostitution gives precedence to "anxious convulsion" rather than dull production. However, commercial aspects of modern prostitution eclipsed the idea. Bataille argues:

Prostitution is simply a consecration in the first place. Certain women

become objects in marriage; they are the instruments of domestic work, of agriculture particularly. Prostitution made them into objects of masculine desire; objects which at any rate heralded the moment when in the close embrace nothing remained but only a *convulsive continuity*. When the commercial aspect of modern prostitution gained the upper hand this aspect was overshadowed. (*DE* 132; emphasis mine)

Prior to modern times, courtesans came from respectable families and they were economically independent; besides, they were well-educated and well-off. According to Fred Botting and Scott Wilson in *Bataille*, courtesans were not miserable women but respectable ones. According to them, “In the early modern period in Renaissance Italy, courtesans frequently occupied a rarefied realm of art, luxury, knowledge and pleasure” (*B* 173). The idea of the liberated, educated courtesans became a metaphor for the self-made man in the eighteenth-century pornography. These courtesans received a great amount of money and valuable gifts from their patrons. The money they received was considered to be gifts because they used them to lead an extravagant life style which involved expenditures rather than production. For one thing, what the courtesans were concerned with was “anxious convulsion” instead of calculated production. For another, they desired a life filled with festive expenditures. The ornaments were just used to enhance their ability to attract men and increased their power to get gifts from their clients. When the clients pursued them, the courtesans knew how to elude them. This kind of prostitution was based on transgression because elusiveness was intended to intensify their desirability. Such prostitution, as Bataille suggests, features transgression and festive expenditures.

But if the prostitute received sums of money or precious articles, these were originally gifts, gifts which she would use for extravagant expenditure and ornaments that made her more desirable. Thus she

increased the power she had had from the first to attract gifts from the richest men. This exchange of gifts was not a commercial transaction.

What a woman can give outside marriage cannot be put to any productive use, and similarly with the gifts that dedicate her to the luxurious life of eroticism. (*DS* 132)

Similar to ancient courtesans, religious prostitutes followed the principle of “shame” and “elusiveness.” According to Bataille, prostitution was integral to most religions with the exception of Christianity. He pointed out, “In any case, in a world before—or outside— Christianity, religion, far from opposing prostitution, was able to control its modalities as it could with other sorts of transgression” (*DS* 133). In contrast with modern prostitution, religious prostitution was far from despised or stigmatized. It seems that the religious prostitutes were destitute of shame for their prostitution because they were not scorned or derided by people. Despite the fact that they were not mortified by their prostitution, the religious prostitutes followed the principle of elusiveness as ordinary woman did by simulating shame. The feigned shame or elusiveness was intended to reinforce men’s desires to transgress taboos. For Bataille, what distinguishes religious prostitution from modern prostitution is that the former featured transgression which enhanced men’s desires. The relationship between the shame and transgression can be illustrated by the initial sexual act in marriage. Shame, real or pretended, signifies that the taboo still exists. With the bride showing shame in the initial sexual act, the groom would experience pleasure in transgressing the taboo of deflowering the virtuous bride. He maintained, “Shame could be found in the consummation of marriage, but it disappeared with habit” (*DS* 134).

Compared with modern prostitution, religious prostitution seems devoid of shame. But the difference is misleading. Surely it was in that she had retained if not a feeling of shame at least its simulacrum that the temple

courtesan avoided the disgrace of the street whore of today? The modern prostitute is proud of shame she is bogged down in and wallows in it cynically. The anguish without which shame cannot be felt is foreign to her. The courtesan had a certain reserve; she was not an object of scorn and was not so different from other women. . . . but she maintained the principle of the first contact which requires that *a woman shall be afraid of surrendering and a man shall expect the woman to try to escape.*

(DS 133; emphasis mine)

Bataille argues that “shame only disappears entirely in the lowest form of prostitution” (DS 134). For Bataille, it was not the commercial aspects that discredited the prostitution. What really disgraced the low prostitutes was that they had no regard for taboos “without which we should not be human beings” (DS 134). In this sense, they were disdained or condemned because they fell to an animal-like state which treated taboos like stones. To Bataille, “She generally excites a disgust like the one most civilizations claim to feel for sows” (DS 134). For Bataille, the rise of “low” prostitutes had more to do with the emergence of poverty-stricken classes whose miserable plight exempted them from the need to scrupulously observe taboos. In this sense, their foul language or curses signified their unanswered hopelessness rather than glorious transgression. In other words, scrupulous observation of taboos was neglected by people who were caught in extreme poverty. Their shameless manner was “a step from transgression to the indifference that puts the most sacred on the same footing as the profane” (DS 135). Their miserable condition made them indifferent to everything, let alone the demarcation between the sacred and the profane. As a consequence, they became strangers to prohibition and transgression. The low prostitutes were the social outcasts who did not share the idea of raising their social status and cast down their oppressors.

The lowest kind of prostitute has fallen as far as she can go. She might be no less indifferent to the taboo than animals are except that because what she knows about taboos is that others observe them, she cannot attain an absolute indifference; not only has she fallen but she knows she has. She knows she is a human being. Even if she is not ashamed of it, she does know that she lives like a pig. (*DS* 135)

For Bataille, the low prostitutes would never experience “eroticism of prostitution.” For one thing, their miserable condition would never grant them a chance to access “anxious convulsion” rather than production. For another, they were unlikely to act elusive because it would never cause the client’s anxiety since the clients had already known it was pretended. That is, it would never intensify the client’s desires. The commercial aspects made it unnecessary for them to enhance their attractiveness of their clients. Above all, what they had to do was to satisfy the immediate gratification of their patrons. Since eroticism requires time invested to explore the secrets of the body, the “low” prostitutes could never experience the eroticism due to the fact that the nature of their business was that of instant gratification.

The Other’s desire is manifested in the fantastic spectacle of consumption itself: the luxurious masquerade of “the market” that now determines every scene, setting and social relation. Enjoyment becomes the internalized command integral to the *efficient* functioning of consumer capitalism, the imperative that ensures the maximization of consumption of goods that are produced and consumed as so many signifiers of the insatiability of the Other’s desire” (*B* 186; emphasis mine).

For Madame Edwarda, the sexual games in the whorehouse were boring because they were intended to satisfy the instant gratification. The games were free of taboos and thus they lacked the pleasure transgression brought. The whores

unreservedly surrendered to the clients in order to earn money and the clients were just there to seek instant gratification, like animals. In other words, the clients wanted to relieve their animal-like sexual desires rather than enjoy the shivering eroticism.

The room's noisy unheeding of her happiness, of the measured gravity of her step, was royal consecration and triumphant holiday, death itself was guest at the feast, was there in what whorehouse nudity terms the pick-sticker's stab . . . the mirrors wherewith the room's walls were everywhere sheathed and the ceiling too, cast multiple reflections of an *animal coupling*, but, at each least movement, our bursting hearts would strain wide-open to welcome "the emptiness of heaven."

(ME 151; emphasis mine)

After the whores and their clients went upstairs, Madame Edwarda made her decision to leave the whores and the priest decided to follow her. It is clear that Madame Edwarda was not one of the low prostitutes. Rather, the priest was spellbound with her elusiveness. Because of Edwarda's elusiveness, the priest shifted his devotion from God to her. They left the bright-lit whorehouse and walked into the dark street. The priest found she was extremely elusive as she walked down the dark street wearing black. He was struck with amazement by her metamorphosis into an animal. Furthermore, he found that she even became a stranger to him. It was her elusiveness that intensified the priest's yearning to explore the secrets of her body.

We went down a narrow stairway, encountered nobody but the chambermaid. Brought to a halt by the abrupt darkness of the street, I was startled to discover Edwarda rushing away, swathed in black. *She ran, eluded me*, was off, the mask she wore was turning her into an animal. Though the air wasn't cold, I shivered. Edwarda, *something alien*; above our heads, a starry sky, mad and void. (ME 152; emphasis mine)

Had Madame Edwarda surrendered herself immediately, it would have decreased the priest's devotion to her. In order to amplify his desire, she chose to adopt an "elusive" attitude to enhance his admiration for her. That is, her elusive attitude served to crescendo the priest's enthusiasm for exploring her secrets. Eroticism, as Bataille argues, is characterized not only by time invested to explore the secrets of the body but also by anxiety caused by elusiveness. In this sense, eroticism cannot be experienced in instant gratification because eroticism requires time. Moreover, animal-like sexuality is free of anxiety caused by elusiveness; thus, the intense pleasure fails to manifest. Bataille asserts that "without the intimate understanding between two bodies that only *grows with time conjunction* is furtive and superficial, unorganized, practically animal and *far too quick, and often the expected pleasure fails to come*" (DS 111; emphasis mine).

After they left the brothel, they came to the dark street. Gone wild and mute, Madame Edwarda suddenly raced around. She stopped underneath the arch of the Porte Saint-Denis. The priest found her dressed in all black and he recognized her as his god again. Then she slipped away, retreating toward a pillar. Due to her elusiveness, the priest was overwhelmed by exploring her secrets. Meanwhile, he was smitten by her disappearance.

I couldn't see her any longer: a deathly darkness sank down from the vault. Without having given it a second's thought, I "knew" that a season of agony was beginning for me. I consented to suffer, I desired to suffer, to go farther, as far as the "emptiness" itself, even were I to be stricken, destroyed, no matter. I knew, *I wanted that knowing, for I lusted after her secret* and did not for one instant doubt that it was death's kingdom.

(ME 153; emphasis mine)

The priest expressed his lust for bringing her secret out of the shadows. Eroticism, as

Bataille argues, is not far from instant gratification but involves investing time exploring the secrets of body. That explains the reason why extramarital affairs are more mysterious and desirable than buying sex. For the priest, it was unbearable to see her evaporate permanently. “I trembled at the thought she might fly, vanish forever” (*ME* 153). Imagining her disappearance made him crazy. While he was circling around the pillar, he found that Edwarda had gone. As he sank into despair at her disappearance, he spotted a domino, just hardly visible in the shadow. He found Edwarda standing upright and entrancing still. When the priest drew near her, she seemed out of her mind as if she came from another world. “Where am I?” Edwarda inquired. The priest pointed to the empty sky above them. According to the priest, Edwarda looked up and stood still for a brief moment as if she derived inner peace from God’s revelation. When the priest was holding her closely, Edwarda clutched her domino with both hands tight. She remained elusive. She began to convulse and her body was shaking and suffering. The priest thought that she was crying because the distress in her strangled her so that she was unable to cry. All of a sudden, Edwarda jerked away from his embrace with disgust. Acting like a lunatic, she dashed forward and stopped short. She even raised her cloak, exhibiting her behind. Compelled by wild urges, she came back and lunged at the priest. She hit the priest in his face with her clenched fists.

She was suffering. I thought she was crying but it was as if the world and the distress in her, strangling her, were preventing her from giving away to sobs. She wretched away from me, gripped by a shapeless disgust; suddenly lunatic, she darted forward, stopped short, whirled her cloak high, displayed her behind, snapped her rump up with a quick jerk of her spine . . . A gale of dark savagery blew up inside her, raging, she tore and hammered at my face, hit with clenched fists, swept away by a

demented impulse to violence. I tottered and fell. She fled. (*ME* 154)

After she punched his face, she left again only to return. She told the priest that she could not bear the anxiety compelled by her urges. “But you, you fake priest. I shit on you,” Madame Edwarda scolded the priest (*ME* 154). Suddenly, she was down and jerked on account of her respiratory spasms. The priest bent over her and tried to rip away her lace veil as she chewed it due to the gale of spasms. Her violent writhing exposed her half-naked breasts. It is clear that Edward’s elusiveness not only caused bewilderment and anxiety but also enhanced the priest’s lust.

When I saw Madame Edwarda writhing on the pavement, I entered a similar state of absorption, but I did not feel imprisoned by the change that occurred in me. The horizon before which Edwarda’s sickness placed me was a *fugitive one, fleeting like the object anguish seeks to attain. . . .* The vertiginous sliding which was tipping me into ruin had opened up a prospect of *indifference, of concerns, of desires* there was no longer any question: at this point, the fever’s desiccating *ecstasy was issuing out of my utter inability to check myself.* (*ME* 155-56; emphasis mine)

The priest was extremely overwhelmed by Edward’s “fugitive” acts. Despite the fact that her elusiveness gave rise to his anxiety, it intensified his feverish desires. These violent desires won over his religious vocation and thus he recognized her as God. For the priest, Edward’s elusiveness and submission was like the alternating “tideflow,” (158) which signified the full pleasure coming after the full anxiety. The priest admitted that his religious vocation caused him anguish because he was supposed to resist the temptation. His self-denial enhanced his sexual desire. Also, Edwarda’s elusiveness degraded him into an abyss of anxiety and thus the intense pleasure was granted. Because of this, he witnessed a “miracle” in eroticism rather than his religion experience.

Edwarda's pleasure — fountain of boiling water, heartbursting furious *tideflow* — went on and on, weirdly, unendingly; that stream of luxury, its strident inflexion, glorified her being unceasingly, *made her nakedness unceasingly more naked*, her lewdness even more intimate. . . . I sensed her joy's torrent run free. *My anguish resisted the pleasure I ought to have sought*. Edwarda's pain-wrung pleasure filled me with an exhausting impression of bearing witness to *a miracle*. My own distress and fever seemed small things to me. But that was what I felt, those are the only great things in me which gave answer to the rapture of her whom in the deeps of an icy silence I called "my heart." (*ME* 158; emphasis mine)

2.2. Losing Rational Selves in *The Dead Man* and *Story of the Eye*

The Dead Man is considered to be the most obscene among Bataille's novels. The female heroine Marie, encountering death on a stormy night, was determined to let loose all her prohibited desires, especially her sexual desire. When her lover Edouard collapsed and perished, Marie was engulfed by a feeling of emptiness. In addition, a prolonged seizure overtook her. She felt as if she were an angel ready to go to heaven. Suddenly, she imagined her bare breast rising in a church and this feeling overwhelmed her. Standing next to the dead man, she was desperate. As Edouard was dying, he solicited Marie to take off her clothes, but she failed to do it in time.

When Edouard fell back dead an emptiness opened inside her, a prolonged shudder went through her, and bore her upward like an angel. Her bare breasts were rising in a church seen in a dream where the feeling of the irreparable was draining her. Standing by the dead man, gone, transported, overcome in a slow ecstasy, smitten. She knew herself to be

desperate, but she was throwing her despair to the winds. As he was dying Edouard had beseeched her to take off her clothes. (*DM* 168)

Marie was trying to unleash all her prohibited desires when she was threatened by the impending death. She thought to herself that “[t]ime had just set at nothing the laws to which fear subjects us” (*DM* 169). She removed her dress and hung it over one arm. Compelled by uncontrollable urges, she ran out in a stormy night, getting drenched from the downpour. She ran to a wood, urinating. Afterwards, she got up and wandered into an inn. Lacking the strength to face her craze for licentiousness, she vacillated in front of the door. She paused to hear the drunken signing of people coming from within. She felt herself shivering violently, but from the trembling she derived intense pleasure (*DM* 170).

Marie was extremely worried about that the patrons within the inn would see her naked when she came in. She leaned against the wall, overhearing the songs. Meanwhile, she opened her coat and slid her fingers into her crevice. She was excited, but she was desperate due to her helplessness.

The moment Marie entered the inn, she asked for alcohol. The mistress behind the bar put a small glass on the counter and filled it. However, that was not what Marie had wanted. She wanted a bottle and some big glasses. When she was drinking, a farm-hand shyly asked if she came to have some fun. She sat herself next to the boy, “pressing her leg against his and taking his hand, placed it between her thighs” (*DM* 172). The boy moaned when he touched her crack. Shortly afterwards, Marie took off her coat. At the same time, a sturdy man who was drinking at the farther end of the room started walking toward her. With his arms waving in the air, the drunken man shouted to grab women who were naked in the inn. The mistress held him by his nose and twisted it sharply. It was so painful that he screamed. Marie walked to the drunken man and unbuttoned his fly. The penis Marie exposed was not firm enough,

which made all the visitors burst out laughing. There was a striking contrast between the farmhand and the drunken man. The farmhand was wearing dirty boots because he had just finished his work. He belonged to the working-class who deemed sexuality as a form of expenditure. For him, sexuality was a taboo. As a consequence, he felt extremely excited when he touched Marie's crevice. In other words, he would experience the convulsive eroticism like Marie. On the contrary, the drunken man was familiar with the female owner of inn and was presented as an oversexed man who was free of the restrictions of taboos. Therefore, he failed to derive pleasure induced by anxiety of seeing a naked woman in the tavern. For Marie, drinking not only facilitated the release of her desires, and it also helped her endure the anxiety which she sought.

“I'll snatch you,” the mistress darted at him. And she caught hold of his nose and tweaked it. He let out a yell.

“No,” said Marie, “here's where you get a better hold.”

She went up to the drunk and unbuttoned his fly: the cock she brought to light slumped uncertainly.

The sight of it produced laughter all around.

Just like that, bold as you please Marie knocked off another glass.

(DM 173)

After Marie made fun of the drunken man, a handsome peasant asked her to dance an obscene wiggle. Marie indulged in their dancing. All of a sudden, she passed out and the peasant lost his hold upon her. Her slender body landed on the floor with a thud. The mistress got down on her knees, carefully raised her head and wiped her saliva dropping from her mouth. Marie came to herself in a moment and asked for some bandy. The farm-hands, girls and mistress of the inn surrounded her and waited for what she was going to say. She uttered a word, “dawn.” The dawn conveyed the

impending death, which made Marie unleash all of her prohibited desires. No one was able to make sense of the word because they were not conscious of imminent death. Meanwhile, the mistress asked a young man named Pierrot to suck Marie. They put her on a chair and rested her legs on Pierrot's shoulders. He knelt down, sticking his tongue amidst Marie's pubic hair. His sucking made Marie morbid yet illuminated. She seemed happy, flashing a smile without opening her eyes. She felt herself alight. "An unavailing desire kept her under strain: she would have liked to relieve herself. She imagined what a fright that would cause the others. She no longer felt sundered from Edouard" (*DM* 178). She experienced the extreme pleasure of dying in orgasm. "Her cunt and her ass exposed: the smell of moist ass and moist cunt were setting her inwardly free and Pierrot's tongue, which was wetting her, gave her the impression of the chill of death" (*DM* 178). Suddenly, Marie jostled the mistress away. Her hair was in disarray. No one could make sense of her sudden spasm and sudden return to a normal state. This was due to extreme pleasure. The visitors in the inn were oversexed people who often casually indulged in sexual desires. As a consequence, they would never experience the intense pleasure induced by anxiety. Due to the lack of the experience in the extreme pleasure, they would mistake it for madness. Conversely, Marie was a dignified woman who was governed by taboos. When Edouard beseeched her to remove all her clothes, she did not do it in time because of her hesitation. When she was about to enter the inn, she wavered between remaining dignified and letting loose. Due to her tension, she experienced the most extreme form of pleasure which bore resemblance to madness. Bataille argues:

A rush of blood upsets the balance on which life is based. A madness suddenly takes possession of a person. That madness is well known to us but we can easily picture the surprise of anyone who did not know about it and who by some device witnessed unseen the passionate lovemaking

of some woman who had struck him as particularly *distinguished*. He would think she was *sick*, just as mad dogs are sick. Just as if some mad bitch had usurped the personality of the *dignified hostess* of a little while back. Sickness is not putting it strongly enough, though; for the time being *the personality is dead*. For the time being its death gives the bitch full scope, and she takes advantage of the silence, of the absence of the dead woman. (DS 106)

As Pierrot continued to suck her, the visitors' shrieks and the crashing of broken bottles caused "a froglike jerking of Marie's thighs" (DM 180). Marie was enraptured and her eyes remained vacant. All of a sudden, she screamed and uttered the word "Edouard" when the dwarf-sized Count walked in. The Count greeted Marie solemnly and turned to ask Pierrot to help him out of his coat. The Count asked for some bottles. Marie told him that she had drunk so much that she pissed on her chair. "Drink till you shit, dear child," the Count replied. Marie told him that she was going to die at dawn. However, the Count was indifferent to her words and calmly gazed at her. Marie told the mistress that the Count was disguised as a devil. She was so terrified that she caught the mistress' hand and bit it. The mistress felt pain and pulled her hand back. Instead of hitting Marie, the mistress caressed her as she kissed her shoulder. The Count asked for more bottles. He told Maire, "alcohol doesn't do much for me" (DM 183). He asked Pierrot to hold his penis in his hand. He told Pierrot that "he did not dare to ask Marie to do it" (183). The Count did not dare to ask Marie to frig him because he was afraid that Marie might bite his penis. Marie was scared of the Count because "from impassiveness he did indeed resemble something of stone" (DM 184).

"I'm scared," said Marie. "You look like a tombstone."

He made no reply. Pierrot took hold of his member.

For impassiveness he did indeed resemble something of stone.

“Go away,” said Marie, “or I’ll piss on you if you don’t . . .”

She climbed onto the table and squatted.

“You’ll see me delighted if you do,” the monster rejoined. There was no play to his neck: only his chin moved when he spoke.

Maire pissed.

Vigorously Pierrot wanked the Count who received the urine full in the face. (*DM 184*)

Suddenly, Marie went mad and got her teeth into the Count’s cock. The Count howled like an injured animal. Pierrot hauled her away and Marie demanded to be “fucked” by him. They laid her on the table. Pierrot spread her arms, and the others held her legs. She struggled like a pig which fought for its life. The erotic scene was presented in a cruel ritual of sacrifice.

“Stick her, Pierrot,” the mistress said.

They bustled around the victim.

Hemmed in by these preparations, Marie let her head subside. The others stretched her out flat, spread her legs apart. She was breathing rapidly, her breathing was noisy.

In its slow unfolding the scene recalled the slaughtering of a pig or the laying to rest of a god. (*DM 188*)

Pierre took off his pants and the Count asked him to remove everything else. Pierrot was like a “bull” and the Count helped the “pizzle” enter. It is clear that the position of master and slave was reversed. The Count was degraded from master to slave as he helped his new master Pierrot fuck Marie. Through the orgy, Pierrot’s frenzy made him forget his position as a slave. The owner and all the visitors were so enraptured by the frenzied erotic scene that their class consciousness was eliminated. Pierrot forgot his position as a slave. Marie was like a victim jerking

violently and struggling as “The others watched, dry-mouthed, astounded by this frenzy” (*DM* 188). Pierrot and Marie were extremely excited and “His back straining like a bow fully bent and the breathless boy let out a yell” (*DM* 188). To this, “Marie answered his shot with the spasm of one dying” (*DM* 188). It is noteworthy that the erotic scene was presented as a ritual of sacrifice in which Marie was the victim. For Bataille, sacrifice and erotic convulsion share an important feature. People are not controlled by their reason. They lose their consciousness and even become obsessed with death. They derive pleasure from not being controlled by their constructed identity. Bataille asserts:

The inversion is meaningful if we now consider the similarity between the act of love and the sacrifice. Both reveal flesh. Sacrifice replaces the ordered life of the animal with a blind convulsion of its organs. So also with the erotic convulsion; it gives free rein to extravagant organs whose blind activity goes on beyond the considered will of the lovers. Their considered will is followed by the animal activity of these swollen organs. They are animated by a violence outside the control of reason, swollen to bursting point and suddenly the heart rejoices to yield to the breaking of the storm. The urges of the flesh pass all bounds in the absence of controlling will. Flesh is the extravagance within us set up against the law of decency. (*DS* 92)

For Bataille, the orgy not only facilitates people to forget their given identity but also leads to fusion with others. He asserts:

From another standpoint the suspension of taboos sets free the exuberant surge of life and favours *the unbounded orgiastic fusion of those individuals*. This fusion could in no way be limited to that attendant on the plethora of the genital organs. It is a religious effusion first and

foremost; it is essentially the disorder of lost beings who oppose no further resistance to the frantic proliferation of life. *That enormous unleashing of natural forces seems to be divine, so high does it raise man above the condition to which he has condemned himself of his own accord.* Wild cries, wild violence of gesture, wild dances, wild emotions as well, all in the grip of immeasurably convulsive turbulence. The perdition ahead would demand this flight into the regions where all *individuality is shed*, where the stable elements of human activity disappear and there is no firm foothold anywhere to be found.

(DS 113-14; emphasize mine)

It is noteworthy that the orgy also poses a challenge to class-consciousness because it involves “a vertiginous loss of consciousness” (DS 113). Although the orgy is a way to fuse with others, it may blur the class consciousness. It would undermine the hierarchies established between people.

In the orgy the celebration progresses with the overwhelming force that usually brushes all bonds aside. . . . but the orgy turns everything upside-down. It is not by chance that the social order used to be turned topsy-turvy during the Saturnalia, the master serving the slave, the slave lolling on the master’s bed. . . . This is the direction given to eroticism by the orgy no matter what disorder was involved, making it transcend animal sexuality. (DS 112)

The Count was a European nobleman whose rank corresponded to that of an English Earl. The Count asked Pierrot to serve him because he thought he was the master and Pierrot was his slave. He even ordered Pierrot to take off his coat and wank him. He told him that he did not want Marie to do that. Pierrot told the Count that Marie did not have the monstrosity like him. For Pierrot, Marie’s sexuality aimed to fuse with others

while the Count's sexuality aimed to declare itself as master and control others. The Count wanted to prove that he was the calm master, superior to frenzied salves by the words like "Alcohol doesn't do much for me" (*DM* 183). As the story shows, "In his throes the dwarf was racked by little shudders" (*DM* 184), and "From impassiveness he did indeed resemble something of stone" (*DM* 184). It is widely agreed that sexuality is a form of violence. Anyone who could conquer it would be deemed superior. That explains why sexual scandal is repeatedly brought out of the shadows preceding the elections. Any candidate who has a sexual scandal is not qualified since he is not calm enough to be a leader. He dared not ask Marie to wank him because Marie's sexuality was a form of violence which might hurt him or cause him lose his class consciousness. It is noteworthy that when Pirrot indulged in his sex with Marie, he did not recognize the Count as his master. Before long, Marie was back to normal and her senses were restored. She heard birds signing and childhood memories flashed into her mind.

She felt cold, gripped by an icy happiness, suspended in an unintelligible emptiness. Even though she sought, gently, to raise her head, and though she sank back from exhaustion upon the ground, she remained faithful to the light, to the foliage, to the birds thronging the wood. For a brief instant childhood timidities arose in her memory. (*DM* 189)

Marie returned to a state of child because all the prohibitions had been lifted by her sexual desires. When she was sober, the Count wanted to turn her into his slave. Marie got up and vomited when she gazed at the Count. Then she shat upon the vomit. In this sense, the Count represented reason which failed to control Marie who belonged to irrationality.

The Count was aroused.

His cock was long and ruddy.

His naked body and that cock had a devilish deformity. His face, bracketed between those angular and too high shoulders, was pale and mocking.

“He desired Marie and confined his thoughts to this desire” (*DM* 194).

When the Count entered the room trying to conquer Marie, he was shocked at Marie’s ugliness caused by drunkenness and fatigue. He sensed that death was taking over the room. His erection failed. The Count, a member of the upper-class society, aimed to preserve his class consciousness. To maintain his class consciousness, he should avoid violent sex which might cause him to lose his consciousness. When he first met Marie, he was aware that Marie’s sexuality was a form of violence. He refused to have any sexual contact with Marie because her uncontrolled violence might put him in danger. For him, Marie’s return to normal meant the disappearance of violence. Afterwards, his erection failed when he saw Marie drained due to her excessive sexuality. For the Count, sexuality was like death which could not be controlled by reason.

Since the Count wanted to maintain his consciousness, he would never experience the frenzy eroticism. At the end of the story, the Count felt he was possessed by Marie because he was the slave of sexuality and death forever; that is, sexuality and death are his eternal masters.

In *Story of the Eye*, child-like sexuality is compared to adult sexuality. The child-like sexuality was based on biological quests. On the contrary, the adult sexuality was essentially a psychological quest which is based on prohibition and transgression. In Bataille’s remarks, “Eroticism, it may be said, is assenting to life up to the point of death . . . but only men turned their sexuality into erotic activity. Eroticism, unlike simple sexual activity, is a *psychological quest* independent of the natural goal” (*DS* 11 emphasis mine). Bataille argues:

But everywhere—and doubtless from the earliest times—our sexual

activity is sworn to secrecy, and everywhere, though to a variable degree, it appears contrary to our dignity so that the essence of eroticism is to be found in the inextricable confusion of sexual pleasure and taboo. In human terms the taboo never makes an appearance without suggesting sexual pleasure, nor does the pleasure without evoking the taboo. *The basis is a natural urge and in childhood the natural urge acts alone. But there is never any truly human pleasure at that age and anyway we can never remember it. (DS 108; emphasis mine)*

After Simone and the narrator failed to rescue Marcelle from the sanatorium, Simone was badly ill. Her illness was not so much her decline of health as her returning to the state of child. The narrator said, "From time to time, I would carry a feverish Simone to the bathroom to help her pee, and then I would carefully wash her on the bidet" (SE 32). Simone soon delighted in having the narrator throw the eggs into the toilet and flush them. One day she took pleasure in urinating on a half-sucked egg. "She pissed noisy on the bobbing eggs with total vigour and satisfaction" (SE 34). The narrator thought Simone was sick because she returned to a state of child. But now, she was "cured" because she turned into an adult which knew how to hold back desires to achieve greater pleasure. For children who are not restrained by taboos, things which make them feel comfortable delight them. That is, they would flinch back when something caused their pain. It is the biological reaction. They delight in pleasure and avoid pain. In this sense, children are like animals which recoil timidly when they confront danger and pain. Only adults know how to derive pleasure from anxiety and revel in anxious convulsions.

By then she could be regarded as cured, and she demonstrated her joy by speaking to me at length about various intimate things, whereas ordinarily she never spoke about herself or me, Smiling, she admitted that

an instant ago, she had felt a strong urge to relieve herself completely, *but had held back for the sake of greater pleasure*. Truly, the urge bloated her belly and particularly made her cunts swell up like a ripe fruit; and when I passed my hand under the sheets and her cunts gripped it firm and tight, she remarked that she was still in the same state and that it was inordinately pleasant. (*SE* 34; emphasis mine)

Sir Edmund was preoccupied with showing his ingenuity at offering Simone with his innovative sexual games. He hoped that his inventive obscenity would be able to arouse Simone; however, he failed because he mistook physical pain for inner anxiety. In addition, he mistook physical violence for inner violence. For Simone, the inner anxiety was caused by taboos and inner violence was used to transgress the taboos. Simone buried her fingernails in her cunt and hurt herself with a terrible bang on the on the door. Her face was smeared with blood.

Gasping and slipping away from me, Simone grabbed her behind in both hands and threw back her head, which banged violently against the ground; she tensed breathlessly for a few seconds, pulling with all her might on the fingernails buried in her buttocks, then tore herself away at one swoop and thrashed about on the ground like a headless chicken, hurting herself with a terrible bang on the door fittings. Sir Edmund gave her his wrist to bite on and allay the spasm that kept shaking her, and I saw that her face was smeared with saliva and blood. (*SE* 46-47)

Simone preferred bloody bullfights to the obscene spectacles created by Sir Edmund because watching the bullfights caused her anxiety rather than physical pain.

She was on tenterhooks from start to finish at the bullfight, in terror (which of course mainly expressed a violent desire) . . . The utter nearness of death is also felt in the same way. But these series of

prodigious passes are rare. Thus, each time they occur, they unleash a veritable delirium in the arena, and it is well known that *at such thrilling instants the women come by merely rubbing their thighs together.*

(SE 47; emphasis mine)

Gilles Deleuze echoes Bataille's idea in the interpretation of the relationship between anxiety and pleasure. For Deleuze, it is not the pain that gives rise to pleasure. On the contrary, it is the anxiety that brings about pleasure and intensifies the pleasure.

Masochists derive their pleasures from anxious waiting and suspension. It is the anxiety rather than pain that enhances the physical and spiritual pleasure. In *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Gilles Deleuze argues:

In the first place, *Masoch displaces the question of suffering.* The sufferings that the masochistic hero has inflicted on himself, though acute, depend upon a contract. . . . It seems to have something to do with breaking the link between desire and pleasure: *pleasure interrupts desire*, so that the constitution of desire as a process must ward off pleasure, repress it to infinity. . . . *What becomes essential is waiting or suspense as plenitude, as a physical and spiritual intensity.* (53-54; emphasis mine)

In light of Deleuze's argument, intense pleasure is induced by anxious waiting and suspension. In this sense, human eroticism is not based on instant gratification which animals seek but prolonged anxiety which caused amplified excitement. As said, "A bull's orgasm is not more powerful than the one that wrenched through our loins to tear us to shreds, though without shaking my thick penis out of that stuffed vulva, which was gorged with come" (SE 51). That is, people in the profane world can endure pain or anxiety in order to reach their goals. It is agreed that the intense pleasure stems from the relaxation or release of intense anxiety. Only humans have the idea of prolonging their anxiety so as to gain intensified pleasure.

Indeed, we virtually never stopped having sex. *We avoided orgasms and we went sight-seeing*, for this was the only way to keep from having my pennies endlessly immersed in her fur. But we did take advantage of any opportunities when we were out. We would leave one convenient place with never any goal *but to find another like it*. An empty museum room, a stairway . . . I would open the girl's body by lifting one of her legs and shoving my cock to the bottom of her cunt *in one swoop*.

(SE 55; emphasized mine)

The prolonged anxiety was presented in their molestation of the priest. When Simone went to the confession cabinet to make a confession, the narrator showed his confusion as well as impatience. He said, "One can readily imagine my stupor at watching Simone kneel down by the cabinet of the lugubrious confessor" (SE 59). When Simone was confessing her sins, the narrator waited to see an unexpected action. He assumed that the sordid priest, compelled by his sexual urges, would burst out of the confession booth and flagellate Simone violently. He was even ready to kick the priest if he tried to do that. However, nothing happened. Simone spoke on and on through the grilled window. Simone was slowly caressing her thighs, moving her legs apart. She masturbated as she murmured her confessions.

"Father, I still have not confessed the worst sin of all."

A few seconds of silence.

"The worst of sin of all is very simply that I'm tossing off while talking to you."

More seconds of whispering inside, and finally almost aloud:

"If you don't believe me, I can show you."

And Indeed, Simone stood up and spread one thigh before the eye of the window while masturbating with a quick, sure hand.

“All right, priest,” cried Simone, banging away at the confessional,
“What are you doing in your shack there? Tossing off, too?”

But the confessional kept its peace.

“Well, then I’ll open.”

And Simone pulled out the door. (*SE 60*)

The instant Simone opened the door of the confessional booth, the priest was wiping the sweat off his brow which was caused by his anxiety. Simone searched for the priest’s cock under the robe and he did not resist it. She pulled out his black shirt so that the long cock stuck out. Simone put the priest’s penis in her mouth, which made him extremely anxious and excited --“All he did was throw back his head with a grimace, and a hiss escaped through his teeth, but he didn’t interfere with Simone, who shoved the bestiality into her mouth and took long sucks on it” (*SE 60*). The narrator and Sir Edmund were motionless; they were spellbound with enviousness. Sir Edmund went over to the priest and broke the priest and Simone apart. The priest was so excessively exhausted that he lay on the ground like a cadaver. “The vile priest lay there like a cadaver, his teeth to the ground, not uttering a cry” (*SE 60*). They promptly carried him to the vestry. The following sexual molestation further heightened his anxiety and his excitement.

Simone slapped the sacerdotal pig, which gave him another hard-on. We stripped off all his clothes, and Simone crouched down and pissed on them like a bitch. Then she wanked and sucked the pig while I urinated in his nostrils. Finally, to tip off this cold exaltation, I fucked Simone in the arse while she violently sucked his cock. (*SE 61*)

It is noteworthy that none of the sexual acts Simone did were permitted by the church. As the missionary position is the only position deemed correct for reproductive sex, it is the only church-sanctioned sexual position. However, they only engaged in

nonreproductive sex acts such as masochism, masturbation, oral sex and anal sex. The priest was anxious because he not only engaged in sex but also engage in prohibited sex. However, he did not ejaculate because he was not anxious enough.

Sir Edmund searched the room and he spied a tiny key hanging from a nail in the woodwork. The priest became more anxious because it was the key to the tabernacle. Sir Edmund returned a few moments later, carrying a ciborium decorated with angels which were as naked as cupids. The priest anxiously gaped at the holy receptacle. He became more anxious because Simone was flagellating his cock with her teeth and tongue. The priest could not help gasping and panting. Then Simone flagellated him violently and he spilled his sperm violently and he almost forgot his identity as a priest. It is clear that the holy receptacle was employed to intensify his anxiety and his pleasure.

The paralyzed wretch drank with a well-night filthy ecstasy at one long gluttonous draft. Again Simone sucked and wanked him; he continued gurgling desperately and reveling in it. With a demented gesture, he bashed the sacred chamber-pot against a wall. . . . his body erect, and yelling like a pig being slaughtered, he spurted his come on the hosts in the ciborium, which Simone held in front of him while masturbating him.

(SE 62)

The pries crashed to the floor, lying there with a limp cock. His balls were drained and he restored his senses. At the same time, he accused the evil three of their sacrileges. In addition, the priest's anxiety was subdued because he thought he could access salvation by martyrdom. Sir Edmund ordered the priest to fuck Simone and he refused. He told the obscene trinity that they would pay for their sacrileges. The priest said in a choking voice, "Spanish police . . . prison . . . the garrotte . . ."

(SE 64). His anxiety subdued because he was able to go back to God's embrace by

martyrdom. Sir Edmund wanted to prove that the extreme pleasure was induced by the extreme anxiety. He told the priest a story about anxiety and pleasure. He told him that men who were hanged or garroted had such stiff cocks. The moment their respiration was cut off, they discharged their sperm. "You are going to have the pleasure of being martyred while fucking this girl," Sir Edmund said to the wretched priest (*SE* 64). Simone removed her dress and squatted on the belly of the priest, her cunt next to his flabby cock. Sir Edmund asked Simone to squeeze his throat.

Simone squeezed, a dreadful shudder ran through that mute, fully immobilized body, and the cock stood on end. I took it into my hands and had no trouble fitting it into Simone's vulva, while she continued to squeeze the throat. The utterly intoxicated girl kept wrenching the big cock in and out with her buttocks, atop the body whose muscles were cracking in our formidable strangleholds. At last, she squeezed so resolutely that an even more violent thrill shot through her victim, and she felt the come shooting inside her cunt. Now she let go, collapsing backwards in a tempest of joy. (*SE* 64-65)

Bataille is aware of the fact that death may bring new experiences but real death deprives us of the chance to experience it. He maintains:

We receive being in an intolerable transcendence of being, no less intolerable than death. And since in death it is given and taken away at the same time we must seek it in the feeling of death, in those unbearable instants where we seem to be dying because the being within us is only there through excess, when the fullness of horror and joy coincide.

(*DS* 268)

It is therefore paradoxical that real death makes it impossible for us to experience the extreme experience of death. However, through simulacrum of the real death humans

are granted a chance to go through the ‘feeling of death.’ For Bataille, literature and the ritual of sacrifice serve to satisfy our desire to look death in the face.

(*The Bataille Reader* 260) He maintains:

But literature only constitutes the game of religions, of which it is the principal heir. Above all, it has received sacrifice as a legacy: at the start, this longing to lose, to lose ourselves and to look death in the face, found in the ritual of sacrifice a satisfaction it still gets from the reading of novels. In a sense, sacrifice was a novel, a fictional tale illustrated in a bloody manner. (*BR* 260)

It is well-known that readers are captivated by novels in which the heroes or heroines are threatened by peril or even their impending deaths. More precisely, the fascination of reading novels is tied to readers’ bearing the death threat that hangs over the hero. Without exposing themselves to the verisimilitude of death threats presented in novels, readers may not be excited and compelled to live vicariously through the heroes whom they admire. That is, death threats serve as a form of “communication” between readers and their heroes. More importantly, through the fictional representation of death, readers are able to obtain “the feeling of death.” Similarly, the spectators of the sacrifice can find satisfaction which readers get from reading novels. The imminent death of victims plunged the priest and the spectators into horror of death which appalls, while at the same time fascinates them. That is, literature and sacrifice provide us with a chance to live vicariously experiencing things that we have no courage to attempt in real life. In this sense, the priest’s dying in eroticism provides readers with a chance to live vicariously through experiencing death that reader might virtually go through. In terms of reading process and text, Roland Barthes distinguished the writerly text from readerly text. In the writerly text, readers are able to gain *jouissance* because they are active in a creative process, while

readerly text offers pleasures to readers. For Bataille, readers can achieve *jouissance* induced by anxiety through the reading of eroticism though his novels are not so boring as the writerly text may imply . For him, reading is not for intense pleasure or *jouissance* but for anxiety.

Chapter Three

Eroticism: Prohibition and Transgression

Similarly the need to make the fundamental truth evident obscures another fact, the reconciliation of apparent opposites without which eroticism would not exist. I have been obliged to stress the twist given the original movement. In its vicissitudes eroticism appears to move away from its essence, which connects it with the nostalgia of lost continuity. Human life cannot follow the movement which draws it towards death without a shudder and without trying to cheat. I have shown it cheating, sneaking aside along the paths described.

(Death and Sensuality 146)

Reading Georges Bataille's erotic novels is utterly different from reading mainstream erotic literature which targets readers' sense of excitement. It is clear that his novels are not constituted by erotic scenes which are intended for causing readers' sexual arousal. Much to his readers' astonishment, his novels are teeming with shocking and confusing forces, such as violence, killing, incest, and death. These forces terrify the reader on a basic level and thus they are marked as taboo; it therefore can be argued that Bataille's erotic novels were penned to deal with such prohibitions. It comes as no surprise that his novels are bound to disinterest or provoke readers who adhere to culture norms. Apart from the aforementioned repulsive forces, the paradoxical coexistence of opposition even makes readers more puzzled. For instance, a contradictory concurrence of intense repulsion and intense attraction permeates Bataille's novels. In the same way, the incompatible coexistence of extreme anxiety and extreme pleasure is a constant theme in his novels.

The paradoxical combination of oppositions may not correspond to scientific arguments which stress the importance of binary opposition; however, it does correspond to humans' inner experience. In stark contrast to scientific discourse,

Bataille attempts to convince readers that obscenity can be divine and the profane can be sacred. Through Bataille's explication of inner experience, readers can firmly grasp the relationship between prohibition and the transgression of that prohibition. For Bataille, the heterogeneous combination of oppositions he resorts to serves as a good illustration to characterize humans' inner experience.¹⁴ In his logic, the prohibition causes his readers terror, while at the same time they derive pleasure from transgressing the prohibition. That is to say, pleasure is induced by terror. It is noted that such inner experience constituted by prohibition and transgression is not mutually conflicting but mutual conditioning. For Bataille, "The frequency—and the regularity—of transgressions do not affect the intangible stability of the prohibition since they are its expected complement" (*Death and Sensuality* 65). The more terrifying and repulsive the prohibition is, the more fascinating and attractive the transgression becomes. It can be argued that the alternative interplay of prohibition and transgression constitute the history of humans' inner experience.¹⁵ The female body, fashioned as the paradoxical of asexual maternal and sexual feminine, perfectly served to illuminate the spiral relationship between prohibition and transgression.

Chapter Three focuses on explicating the relationship between transgression and prohibition in Bataille's novels.

For Bataille, eroticism serves as a perfect illustration of the relationship of prohibition and transgression. By broad definition, transgression means a violation of laws or grand narratives which are internalized in humans' minds. In order to ensure the development of civilization, humans duly observe the rules which are based on

¹⁴ In "The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade," Bataille argues, "The interest of philosophy resides in the fact that, in opposition to science or common sense, it must positively envisage the waste products of intellectual appropriation. . . . the *sufficient* identification of an endless world with an a finite world, an unknowable (noumenal) world with the known (phenomenon) world" (*Vision of Excess* 96).

¹⁵ Bataille asserts that religious ecstasy corresponds to his inner experience. Bataille argues, "In Christianity and Buddhism ecstasy begins where horror is sloughed off. . . . consciousness of the void about us throws us into exaltation. This does not mean that we feel an emptiness in ourselves, far from it; but we pass beyond that into an awareness of the act of transgression" (*DS* 69).

rationality. The rules are generally governed by the principle of acquisitive accumulation; namely, productivity, accumulation of wealth, and self-preservation. The rules provide a rational framework for navigating in this profane world; however, people are not always subordinate to the rational calculations which are imposed on them.

The alternation of taboo and transgression which otherwise would be hard to grasp is most clearly seen in eroticism. On the other hand a coherent picture of eroticism would be impossible unless this swing from taboo to transgression and back, in the main a religious phenomenon, is taken into account. But first let us consider the associations of death. (*DS* 71)

In this sense, transgression, as Bataille suggests, belongs to the sacred world in which precedence is given to free play, expenditure and death. For Bataille, transgression is a special occasion reserved for festivals, sacrifice, and erotic conducts. It is manifested in a moment when humans give reign to their inner truth rather than calculated reason.

Bataille argues:

Taboos are there to make work possible; work is productive; during the profane period allotted to work consumption is reduced to the minimum consistent with continued production. Sacred days though are feast days. Then things which usually are forbidden are permitted or even required . . . The values of the workaday world are inverted, as Caillois has pointed out. (*DS* 68)

Engaging in unproductive expenditures, giving rein to the excesses of pleasure, and reveling in death constitute the inner experience of transgression. For Bataille, moments when humans are like a sovereign who does not follow the dictates of reason amenably are sacred. The inner experience of transgression is particularly

presented in eroticism. Bataille asserts that “[w]e want to feel as remote from the world where thrift is the rule as we can we want a world turned upside down and inside out. The truth of eroticism is treason” (*DS* 170-171). In other words, transgression as Bataille suggests is the essence of eroticism.

Erotic conduct is the opposite of normal conduct as spending is the opposite of getting. If we follow the dictates of reason we try to acquire all kinds of goods, we work in order to increase the sum of our possessions or of our knowledge, we use all means to get richer and to possess more. Our status in the social order is based on this sort of behavior. But when the fever of sex seizes us we behave in the opposite way. We recklessly draw on our strength and sometimes in the violence of passion we squander considerable resources to no real purpose. Pleasure is so close to ruinous waste that we refer to the moment of climax as “little death. (*DS* 170)

It is noted that transgression should not be confused with a sense of disorder which seeks to subvert the prohibition. Transgression was a dynamic element of society that served to prevent stagnation whilst at the same time maintains stability. It is in this sense that transgression never serves to undermine or destroy the prohibitions. On the contrary, transgression consecrates and completes the prohibitions. Bataille maintains:

It opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains these limits just the same. Transgression is complementary to the profane world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it. Human society is not only a world of work. Simultaneously—or successively—it is made up of the profane and the sacred, its two complementary forms. The profane world is the world of taboos. The sacred world depends on limited acts of transgression. It is the world of celebrations, sovereignty rulers and God. (*DS* 67-68)

The interplay between taboos and transgressions serves as the basis for a social structure. It is a characteristic of a homogenous society that refuses to recognize transgression as sacred. Despite the fact that engaging in prohibitions appalls us, the mere thought of them arouses humans' desire to act them out. The more terrifying the prohibitions are, the stronger humans desire to violate them becomes. Bataille argues that "the taboo is there in order to be violated" (*DS* 64). For Bataille, we are guided by two distinct impulses. For one thing, we are fearful of prohibitions and keep them at bay as much as possible. For another, we are ceaselessly fascinated by the desire to experience them. In Bataille's erotic novels, it is the female body rather than the male is presented as a desirable object. It is worth noting that Bataille not only presents the female body as a respectable and desirable object, but he also characterizes it as a degraded and repulsive one. Readers might think that the female body is much more desirable than its counterpart because it is more beautiful and attractive in comparison. Readers who associated eroticism with appealing beauty might fail to understand a whole picture of Bataillean eroticism. For Bataille, eroticism is anything but a desire which aims to get his desirable objects and keep repulsive things at bay. Rather, the eroticism which Bataille presents derives its pleasure from the attraction of the repulsive. In seemingly contradictory terms, the female body has long been fashioned as both asexual maternal and sexual feminine. As a consequence, the female body serves as a perfect illustration of eroticism constituted by the interplay of prohibition and transgression.

3.1. Denial of Blissful Love in *My Mother*

Bataille's erotic novel *My Mother* describes a seventeen-year-old narrator named Pierre, who develops an incestuous lust for his mother. The story begins with

the narrator's description of festive expenditures he detested such as drunkenness, destruction and licentiousness. Pierre's father was a raging alcoholic who, in his drunken states, on more than one occasion, was guilty of damaging furniture and smashing empty wine bottles. Afterwards, through the pictures left by his deceased father he learned that his father was a dissolute man who indulged himself in promiscuous sex. These scenes terrified him. Because of this, the narrator, Pierre felt a strong sense of antipathy towards his late father.

I detested him so heartily that I took the opposite view to his on everything. At that stage I had become devout to the point of imagining myself eventually entering the Church. My father was then ardently anti-clerical. Not until he was dead did I decide against a religious vocation in order to live with my mother, before whom I stood in blind adoration. I believed that my mother was what, in my foolishness, I supposed all women were, I believed that she was what only male vanity could prevent a person from being, attracted to religion. Did I not go with her to Mass on Sunday? My mother loved me; I believed that we thought and felt alike, in a unison marred only by the presence of the intruder, my father. (*My Mother* 27-28)

The narrator Pierre loathed his father to the extent that he went out of his way to embrace everything which his father stood against. Pierre's father was extremely averse to religion; therefore, Pierre devoted himself to the Church. In other words, it was his aversion to his father that made him dedicated to religion. Paradoxically, after his father passed away, he resolved to abandon a religious vocation so as to be his mother's lover. It is noted that the seed of transgression started to grow in Peierre's inner experience. Pierre was convinced that he and his mother thought and felt alike. It revealed that Pierre and his mother were fascinated with the intense pleasure

transgression brought. Throughout the novel, it is clearly seen that Pierre's mother was a binge drinker and indulged herself in sexual pleasure. That is to say, drinking and sexual pleasure appealed to the narrator Pierre, but his dedication to "work" rendered him unlikely to get access to these expenditures. The narrator maintained:

After dessert she went off and I remained behind, disappointed. Did she so much as care if I was vexed? My disappointment lasted through the following days. My mother never stopped laughing – and drinking – and above all going away. I stayed by myself and worked. I was at school at the time, I was studying, and, like someone who has taken to drink, I drowned myself in work. (*My Mother* 29)

As a result of his devotion to "work," he had no chance to get access to alcohol and sexual enjoyment which were deemed by him detrimental to the ethics of work. At dinner, with his father gone to Brittany, Pierre told his mother how thrilled he was to be alone with her; to his amazement, his mother was greatly delighted by what he said. Pierre's mother promised to take him to a fine restaurant. His mother told Pierre that he was such a handsome creature that people in the restaurant would take him as her lover. Pierre was struck dumb because he could not believe his mother had uttered such words. He was soon to realize that his mother drank a lot. Later, much to his astonishment, he found that his mother was a licentious woman who did not merit his veneration. For Pierre, these expenditures and this image of his mother were overwhelming to him. One day Pierre was told the bad news of his father's sudden death. He simply asked his mother with equanimity of what his father died from; to his astonishment, his calmness about his father's death irritated his mother.

I simply asked what my father had so suddenly died from. She answered me and then stood up. She made a helpless gesture. She was tired, a weight seemed to lie upon her shoulders, but of her feelings she said

nothing apart from this: “If you speak to Robert or Marthe don’t forget that you are supposed to be borne down by grief. Our good servants consider that we ought to be in tears. There’s no need to weep but lower your eyes.” (*My Mother* 30)

Pierre could not conceal his jubilation at his father’s death because he wanted to see his mother set free from his father whom Pierre saw as her oppressor. However, Pierre could detect his mother’s anger from her sharp voice and stern gaze. In his mind, his mother was supposed to be overwhelmed with joy by her husband’s death. Much to Pierre’s perplexity however, his mother seemed to have been overwhelmed by the grief of bereavement. He told his mother he would not say anything against his deceased father. However, he told his mother that his father’s death was better for her because his father had made her life more difficult. “What do you know about it?” his mother retorted angrily. Pierre had no clue of his mother’s vileness and degradation because his father spared no effort to fashion his wife as a chaste wife and a good mother in the presence of his son. Since for Pierre’s father, a dissolute wife and a bad mother constituted prohibition, hence he managed to shape his wife as a respectable woman who earned his son’s respect. With this respectable image of his mother in mind, Pierre was obsessed with his mother’s solemnity. He had a blind adoration for his mother and venerated her as a saint. However, perpetuating the image of being decent was intolerable to Pierre’s mother after her husband passed away. She resolved to bring the falsehoods to light and led her son to seek the pleasure by transgressing the prohibition. Pierre stated:

Later she was to borrow a phrase from my father, “Just lay the blame for everything on me.” That was his wish, understanding that in my eyes my mother was beyond reproach and must at all costs remain that way.

But perpetuating that convention became intolerable after his death. And

in the upheaval which followed it she yielded to the temptation to display her awfulness to me, as she liked to do every time she lost her grip. (*My Mother* 33)

Pierre added:

Finally, and it was after a struggle, she brought out the rest almost in a gasp. "I could have spared you all this, gone on lying, I could have treated you like a simpleton. I am an evil woman, I am rotten and I drink, but you are not a coward. It took courage to tell you what I did. Think of that. If I've been drinking all night it's because I needed help and perhaps it was to help you." (*My Mother* 34-35)

Pierre's mother wanted her son to know the fact that she deserved no respect because she was a revolting woman. His mother's confession brought about Pierre's stabbing confusion. He felt bewildered because he was perplexed by the paradoxical coexistence of repulsion and attraction. He venerated his mother as a saint; however, he was attracted by her vileness. Apparently, it is the violation which excited him. The narrator was at loss about his predicament.

It was harder than ever to become indignant about it; in fact, I never ceased to worship my mother, to venerate her as a saint. I might admit that all basis for that veneration was gone; I was none the less unable to refrain from it. And so I lived in an unappeasable torment from which only death and the crowning misfortune could release me. If I gave way to horror at the thought of the debauchery I now knew was the delight of my mother's life, then the respect had for her would immediately make of me, and not of her, an object of horror. And, no sooner returned to my worshipful attitude, I would be forced to the realization that her debauchery nauseated me. (*My Mother* 39)

Characters like nuns frequently appear in the erotic can help readers better understand Pierre's inner experience.¹⁶ Nuns have long been deemed as pure women who are similar to the concept of an asexual mother; accordingly, dissolute nuns are marked as prohibition. Once the prohibition is set, transgression is always lurking behind. Men develop a strong desire to deflower pure women because the act of transgression brings them intense pleasure.

After his father passed away, his mother got him to clean his father's study. He used the keys his mother had given to him to open the glass-fronted bookcases. Coming upon a heap of photographs, he found some of which were repulsively obscene. He blushed and planned to get rid of them before his mother's return. Frantically, he stacked them and formed them into piles. However, he piled them too high and they fell and scattered on the carpet. The photos were so disgusting that he could not remove his gaze. At the same time, his half-naked mother flung herself into his arms. Eventually he resolved to process into vileness and degradation. As he said, "I wrapped myself in the dust and took off my trousers" (41). He commented on the pictures:

Interwoven joy and terror strangled me within. I strangled and I gasped from pleasure. The more those pictures terrified me, the more intense was my excitement at the sight of them. . . . It was my inevitable fate: my joy was all the the greater since, with regard to life, I had long since entrenched myself in an attitude of suffering, and now, in the throes of delight, I progressed even farther into vileness and degradation. I sensed that I was dammed, I defiled myself before the filth in which my father – and perhaps my mother too—had wallowed. It well became the swine I

¹⁶ In *Ragionamenti*, Pietro Aretino (1492-1556) used nuns as his licentious heroines to tantalize his readers.

was going to turn into, born of the coupling of the boar and the sow.

(My Mother 41)

Pierre commented that most of the figures in the pictures in fact delighted him but those which exhibited repulsive postures quickened his delight even more (*My Mother 41*). In other words, he admitted that the more those pictures appalled him, the more intense his excitement was at the sight of them (*My Mother 41*). As far as Pierre is concerned, his joy was all the greater because he had been entrenching himself in an attitude of suffering as well as resisting. To put it another way, his intense sense of enjoyment was aroused by the intense suffering inflicted on him. Pierre sensed that he was damned because he could not help but get enjoyment from suffering, vileness, and degradation; what was worse, the more resistant he was to these sensations, the more intense the pleasure he derived from them.

Pierre blamed his father for corrupting his mother. He was convinced that it was his father that had made his mother process to degradation; he also accused his father of demoralizing him. As far as Pierre was concerned, it was his father that was to blame for their deterioration. Eventually, Pierre came to realize that although prohibition caused terror, it also produced pleasure when it was transgressed. Despite the fact that his father set prohibitions on both his mother and him, they derived their pleasure from transgressing it. Pierre maintained:

To me my mother seemed calm, I admired, I loved her self-mastery, that coolness had a profoundly soothing effect upon me. Never had I loved her more. Never had my devotion to her been so great, the more so and the madder for the fact that, united now in the same malediction, we were divorced from the rest of the world. Between her and me a new bond had formed; moral decline and cowardice were its sinews. Far from regretting having succumbed in my turn, I saw that my sin had given me access to

what appeared to me my mother's misfortune, which must eventually lay her low as it was laying me low, but which, I later understood, by torturing us, provided it tortured us, was to prepare us for the one happiness that is not meaningless, since we become its prey when in the grip of misfortune. (*My Mother* 48)

In the beginning, Pierre was not able to embrace the confusing idea that intense tortures preceded and often resulted in intense happiness. He stated that "I could not accept this secret marriage of heaven and hell" (*My Mother* 48). He added that "it was, after all, painful to feel that my mother delighted in the misery I knew she was condemned to" (*My Mother* 48). Noticeably, through the experience of his involuntarily being tempted by the obscene pictures left by his late father Pierre learned that repulsive things not only appalled him but appealed to him. In addition, he came to realize that his mother shared his predicament. He maintained:

She believed in the fragile enchantment of delight, with its insidious power to silence deep suffering. And even now we were both of us soaring on the wings of the playfulness that was conveying us back to this world of pleasure where amidst thorns and in frenzy my mother had early discovered her divine way. At that moment my irony, the gentle stirring of irony in me, lent me strength to confront what would formerly overcome me and now induced this voluptuous trembling in me, the trembling which thereafter would always make me smile. (*My Mother* 75)

Taking advantage of his mother's absence, one day Pierre reentered his late father's study in order to procure the other repulsive photographs which had appealed to him. From the episode of Pierre's revisiting the study, it is clear that his relapse into degradation was an inevitable fate because the more repulsive the degradation was, the more attractive it became. Ceaselessly haunted by the anguish of his resuming

depravity, he thought of confessing his irremediable sin to the priest. After great mediation, he gave up the idea because he knew what the priest would say to him. "I knew in advance just what language he would employ" Pierre thought to himself (*My Mother* 50). Pierre knew that the priest would admonish him saying that happiness stems from goodness rather than vileness and that self-denial is the only way to quell the trembling within. Symbolically, the representative patriarchal figures, father and priest, are compromised; the long-held authority tumbles down. However, self-denial would fail to do anything but put him deeper into the abyss of degradation. The more he denied the repulsive, the more temptation that denial gave rise to. Willing to accept the mutual conditioning of opposition, Pierre no longer blamed their depravity on his father. Pierre said:

The most stupid part is that, notwithstanding the evidence, I went right on accusing my father and him alone. My father, whose impudence told of an appalling inner confusion, my father who, I was sure of it, had got my mother into the habit of drinking and had finally managed to corrupt her, my father whose filth had , after his death, warped me in my turn.

(*My Mother* 49)

He added:

Then I recalled my father, his drunkard side. I had cursed him unthinkingly, now at last I began to doubt my right to do so: through him I belonged to drunkenness and aberration, to everything bad that the world contains, from even the very worst of which God never turns his face away. My father, that the dead-drunk clown the police sometimes picked up out of the gutter, the thought of my father suddenly touched me to tears. (*My Mother* 51)

Throughout the novel, readers can detect that what really fascinated Pierre's mother

was the mixture of anxiety and pleasure transgression brought. It is agreed that licentious women are marked as prohibition. Therefore, a woman's unconscious dreaming of being raped is somehow is marked as taboo because it is the very emblem of a dissolute woman.¹⁷ In Bataille's remarks, "But transgression is not only objectively necessary to this freedom . . . Many women cannot reach their climax *without pretending to themselves that they are being raped*" (DS 107; emphasis mine). For Pierre's mother, dreaming of being raped is one of her ways of transgressing the taboo. As a consequence, Pierre's mother told him that his father had no part in the story of her transgression, for any man's intrusion is just meant to gratify her crave to transgress the prohibited. Pierre's mother told him that:

It was when you were conceived. But as far as I am concerned your good-for-nothing father had no part, or practically no part, in the story. I preferred being alone, I was alone in the woods, I was naked in the woods, I was naked, I rode horseback, naked to the skin. I was in a state . . . I shall die without ever recapturing the state I was in. I had forebodings, dreamt of girls or of fauns; I knew they would have got in my way. Your father got in my way. But when by myself I would twist on the horse, writhe, I was monstrous and— (*My Mother*71)

While Pierre's mother was being raped by his father, she was extremely defiant against his violent raping. Tooth and nail she fought against the raping by digging her nails into his face, but then she gave up her resistance, succumbed to his violent raping. His mother described the state of her being raped. She describe, "I didn't want him, I didn't want that, I was bad-tempered. When he found me naked he raped me, but I got my nails into him, I tried to claw his eyes out. I wasn't able to" (*My Mother*

¹⁷ In *My Secret Garden*, Nancy Friday asserts that rape plays an significant role in female sexual fantasy.

71). However, Pierre's father misinterpreted the ambivalent reaction of Pierre's mother to his raping. He thought that her initial defiance was out of a shame of enjoying being raped. In addition, he thought that her giving in to his advances was due to her affectionate love for him. As a result, Pierre's father was determined to marry her. Marriage, for Pierre's father, was a way of showing his love and responsibility for his lover, while for Pierre's mother it was an indispensable element to her libertine life style. Since engaging in extramarital affairs is marked as a taboo, her being privy to such acts is a lot more thrilling than paying for sex because the former involves the element of prohibition. Because of this, Pierre's mother was willing to plunge into the marriage because it never alleviated her desire of transgression but aggravated it.

Those fools let me have my way and you were born in Switzerland. But once back from there I had to marry your father. He was your age, Pierre, twenty. I made your father horribly unhappy. From the very first day I never let him come near me. He took to drinking; he was hardly to be blamed. "Nobody," he would say to me, "nobody" has any idea of the nightmare my life is. I ought to have you scratch out my eyes." He desired me like a rutting beast and I was sixteen years old, he was twenty. I fled him, I would go into the woods. I would ride out on a horse and he never caught me again, for I was on my guard. In the woods I had always been in a state of torment, but I dreaded him I have always found my pleasure in torment, but I became sicker every day until the day he died. (*My Mother* 72)

Pierre's father got into the habit of drinking because he learned that his wife was far from a chaste woman but a wanton woman who never ceased to indulge herself in sexual pleasure. Much to Pierre's father's anguish, marriage even became a kind of

fortress for his wife enabling her to transgress the social norms. It is believed that there is no place for promiscuous sex in the holy domain of the family because the reproductive sex between husband and wife is the only legal sex. Because of this, the prohibited sex in the family domain particularly appealed to Pierre's mother. Pierre's mother had affairs with a great number of girls; besides, she also brought her husband in on the licentious game. Pierre's mother told him that "right from the outset I had affairs with girls, without that giving your father one iota of satisfaction, and it soon occurred to me to bring the poor man in on the game : an idea like that suited my aversion for regular situations" (*My Mother* 74). More often than not, she would come home with two girls. One would make love to her husband, and the other had sex with her. From time to time, the girls brought men along and she had sex with them. She really took delight in a new orgy by making love to unknown strangers in her house. It is noteworthy that she never made any mention of her having sex with her husband except with regard to the incident in the forest. During the time in the forest, her husband was still a stranger. However, that a husband makes love to his wife is deemed as "regular" situation; accordingly, she never derived any gratification from it. Only aberrant transgression could hold attraction for her and give her immeasurable pleasure. It can be argued that it was her aversion for prohibition that preconditioned and enhanced her great predilection for transgression.

I haven't said anything about the life your father and I led here, in this apartment. It was very different from what you must have thought. I am not sure whether I really have a taste for women; I believe I have never loved except in the woods. I didn't love woods, I didn't love anything. I didn't love myself; but I loved, immeasurably. I have never loved anyone but you, but what I love in you, make no mistake about it, is not you. I believe that all I love is love, and in love itself only the torment of loving,

which I have never felt except in the woods or the day when death . . .
Anyhow, with a pretty woman I can amuse myself painlessly – exactly,
without it tormenting me; it calms me; I don't suppose I will
be telling you anything you don't already know if I say that only a wild
spree gives me any appreciable pleasure. . . . I lived like an animal, and
where it was a question of your father, there was no end to my cruelty.
(My Mother 73-74)

Instead of making love to her husband, she beat her husband and humiliated him as often as possible. She put him in women's clothes and dressed him like a clown. It is ironic that a loyal husband was relentlessly humiliated by his licentious wife. The story goes as the holy domain of the family was not taken care of by a chaste wife and benevolent mother. Rather, it was dominated by a licentious and cruel wife who took advantage of the holy family and turned it into a place filled with promiscuous sex. For one thing, Pierre's mother was not ashamed but affirmed of her own licentiousness by humiliating her husband. For another, marriage along with family features the prohibition that she sought to violate. For Pierre's mother, the stereotype of a good mother and good wife was just for the traditional women who conformed to the dictation of prohibition. As a result, Pierre's mother refused to be a good mother and a good wife who is fashioned in accordance with prohibition in a patriarchal society.

Pierre's mother had a deep-seated disinclination for regular situations which were intended for restraining her passion for transgression. Throughout the novel, what interested and attracted Pierre's mother was correlated to transgression. She did not have to work because she had married a rich man, which enabled her to engage herself in different forms of expenditures. In other words, she had no regard for production. The defiant acts undertaken by Pierre's mother came directly out of the

text to confront the deep-seated anxiety in general readers. To make “work ” more efficient, a person should keep a state of sobriety; in other words, lucidity is indispensable to the process of production. As a result, drunkenness is prohibited in the capitalist society which stresses the importance of production. Pierre’s mother engaged in all kinds of transgression such as drunkenness, playfulness, unbridled voluptuousness and even death. It is clear that all her escapades were correlated to prohibitions. She told her son that it was not *him* that she loved; instead, it was the prohibited lust for incest. It can be argued that incest held an attraction for her because it was interwoven with anxiety and pleasure when she transgressed the taboo. For Pierre’s mother, incestuous lust was diametrically opposed to blissful love because it was marked as taboo. For her, the anguish of incestuous lust did not spoil sexual pleasure; rather, it rendered pleasure more acute than blissful love. Pierre’s mother told him that:

Of what we were about we had both been aware, and even while in the midst of the cruel effort we agreed had to be made in order to avert the worst, we laughingly admitted to employing the roundabout means which enabled us to go farther, and to attain the inaccessible. But we would not have been able to endure doing what lovers do. Never did satisfaction release us from each other as does *the blissfulness of sleep*

(*My Mother* 87; emphasis mine)

She added that “I have told you about the forest and about the outrages against propriety I went there to seek. Nothing was so pure, nothing so holy, nothing more violent than my forest joy” (*My Mother* 93). For Pierre’s mother, incestuous lust was not a curse at all. On the contrary, she embraced it with her open arms and considered it indispensable to the ecstasy of a licentious life. That is, incestuous lust gave Pierre and his mother appreciable pleasure inasmuch as it was inescapably linked with

prohibition. Pierre commented on their incestuous lust:

Am I then to say of this love that it was incestuous? The insane sensuality we hovered in, was it not impersonal and similar to that so very violent sensuality which my mother had experienced when she wandered naked in the forest, where my father had raped her? The desire that often knotted in me when I was with my mother . . . Easily, frequently, we would, my mother and I, find ourselves in the state of the woman or the man who desires, and in this state we would rage, but I did not desire my mother, she did not desire me Had we translated our trembling madness into the barren acts of copulation, the cruel game we played with our eyes would have ceased: I would have ceased seeing my mother ecstatic at the sight of me, my mother would no longer have seen me beholding her in ecstasy. (*My Mother* 87)

It is noteworthy that the insane sexuality in the forest and incestuous lust, for Pierre's mother, had one thing in common. They were inescapably linked with prohibition which caused anxiety. For Pierre's mother, "copulation" was characterized as "the barren acts." In definition, barren means nonproductive and useless. In the capitalist society, copulation corresponds to the ethics of production because it gives birth to offspring. However, copulation is useless when we speak of Bataille's eroticism. Copulation alleviates the anxiety and thus undermines eroticism in which anxiety conditions and enhances enjoyment. Most importantly, copulation is a productive sex which echoes the dictation of prohibition rather than violates it. Based on her desperate transgression, incestuous lust is her desired form of eroticism which features the ambivalent feelings of anxiety and pleasure.

But I speak of my heart, of that child's heart whence I brought you forth, whence comes and shall ever come this blood-tie which decrees that in

my suffering I must moan close beside you, that in yours you must moan at my side; there is more to it than suffering and sounds of suffering, I speak also of the surpassing joy which overbore us when, hand in hand, we would look at each other. For our agony was the pleasure that swept us away—which thanks to Rhea, was a low pleasure, thanks to her as low as it needed to be. (*My Mother* 92)

Compared to Pierre's mother, Rhea was a pretty woman from whom Pierre was able to obtain tranquil happiness and blissful love from. For Pierre, his mother's unbridled dissolution unfolded for him infinite possibilities rather than ordinary carnal pleasure which targeted copulation. Pierre said to himself, "I would view Rhea as nothing but the indirect access to what I could not get at in my mother" (*My Mother* 76). While Pierre and Rhea were drinking, Pierre's mother excused herself for a second because she would like to put on a pretty skirt. During his mother's absence, Pierre was desperate to find in Rhea the erotic desire which he derived so freely from his mother. He said that "Rhea, there in front of me, hovering on the brink of voluntary act of nameless obscenity, haunts me to this day" (*My Mother* 76). He added that "Rhea failed to enact the whole of that ludicrous sacrifice; at any rate from the unlimited gift she made of her body, of the intimacy and gleefulness of her joy, she chose to except the usual thoroughfare to the limited operation" (*My Mother* 77). For Pierre, Rhea was pretty and attractive but not licentious enough to ignite his sexual arousal. In other words, compared to his mother, Rhea would not like to do anything that violated the prohibited; thus, she did not awaken the inner experience featuring the coexistence of terror and pleasure. The narrator said, "Rhea had not the power, of her own accord, to provide a glimpse of the terror inhabiting her" (*My Mother* 77). When Pierre was flirting with Rhea, his mother entered on tiptoe and covered Pierre's eyes. Wearing a stunning dress with a low-cut back, his mother was outrageously gorgeous. Moreover,

his mother wore a pretty skirt and a huge hat. The ostentatious clothes and decoration Pierre's mother put on made her lose solemnity, but her indecency ignited Pierre's desire notwithstanding. Most importantly, she was no longer his mother but a thirteen-year-old girl. "Your gravity, Mother: all your gravity. As if you were lifting all the weight of seriousness away from the world. You are not my mother any more. You are thirteen years old" (*My Mother* 79). His mother in finery was like a little girl whose innocence appealed to him. It is widely accepted that innocence is the prohibition and licentiousness is transgression. It is noted that what really ignited Pierre's desire was not so much her finery as the combination of innocence and licentiousness. However, Pierre was stunned when his mother told him that her girlfriends would not like her to wear the dress and decorations for long. The transgression his mother engaged in varied endlessly. When they were drinking, Rhea's proposed to bring them a bottle. When she rose, her bottoms were undone and her bloomers slipped down. She wore a black lace corset which almost revealed her breasts. After his mother's had gone, Pierre reached for Rhea and kissed her. However, it was the thought of Pierre's mother that ignited his desire. Thinking about his mother, "I gazed at Rhea as I had gazed at my mother" (*My Mother* 83). Desire appears in *object a*; it is always on the move as evidenced by Pierre's desire for his mother, which can be temporarily gained through Rhea. Then the desire is gone.¹⁸

In this calm silence and in this happiness unintelligible to our own selves, I gazed at my mother. . . . unfolded for me the dizzying prospect of infinite possibility. In other words, I was less troubled by Rhea, who would be able to provide me palpable relief, than by my mother, from whom I could only expect the immaterial ecstasies of shame. Rhea held

¹⁸ *object a*, a seminal idea by Jacques Lacan, better interpret the desire that Pierre had towards his mother.

an attraction for me, undeniably; but in her I desired not so much the facilities of pleasure as the object connected with my mother's disorders, and in my mother I loved the possibility of an unbridled licentiousness with which, for me, carnal pleasure could not keep pace nor convert into a pleasurable satisfaction. (*My Mother*75)

Pierre's passion for his mother was diametrically opposed to the love he had for Hansi and Hansi for him. Pierre had experienced blissful love before his mother drove him into the kingdom of the prohibited lust. Hansi's love for him belonged to "the kingdom of "tenderness" (*My Mother* 89). However, Pierre's lust for his mother belonged to "the kingdom of cruelty." Pierre said that "[t]here were moments when I wanted to be beaten by her. This desire horrified me yet sometimes I ached from it; in it I saw my crookedness, my cowardice" (*My Mother* 85). In other words, the prohibition of masochism appealed to him. Masochists derive their sexual gratification from the physical pain inflicted on them. It is clear that Pierre derived his sexual enjoyment from his mother's beating because it involved two forms of prohibited sex – incestuous lust and the desires of a masochist. In contrast, Hansi adhered to social norms even though Pierre's mother sought to corrupt her. After Hansi and Pierre broke up, she married a remarkable man and had a child. She slept with Pierre now and then, but what she wanted to do was to "restore him to the still night time of untroubled sensuality" (*My Mother* 86). Pierre said:

Not that she was unconscious — far from it — of the dangerous implications of pleasure carried to the extreme, but she thought that for my mother — as for herself — there was no such thing as a guilty pleasure; and so she interpreted this as a statement on my mother's part of the impossibility of fulfilling the desire which, if incompatible with reason, leads to death. (*My Mother* 86)

It is clear that Hansi was the very reflection of the earlier Pierre who attempted to deny the mutual conditioning of the incompatible opposition—prohibition and transgression. According to Hansi, transgression was deemed as irrational and thus it was incompatible with “reason.” In the long run, “reason” was restored, and transgression was annihilated and no longer existed. Hansi thought that “there was no such thing as a guilty pleasure” (*My Mother* 86). For Pierre and his mother, prohibition never aimed to annihilate transgression but made transgression even more appealing. “The ignominious scenes shown in the photographs in my eyes acquired that brilliance and that grandeur but for which life without rapture and its eye never turned upon the sun or upon death” said Pierre (*My Mother* 51). For Pierre, Hansi’s thought was analogous to religious discourse which featured the incompatibility of prohibition and transgression. It is clear that self-denial is used by religion to deal with transgression. The inner experience is deemed as “irremediable” by religion because the more denial people make, the more temptation they give in to.

Vanquished piety yields only boredom. The difficulties, the problems of the flesh, its treacheries, its failings, its terrors, the misunderstandings it engenders, the maladroitness it is the occasion of, these alone provide a basis and excuse for chastity. Genital pleasure is the wealth that age, ugliness and all the forms of poverty limit. Hardly had I received this treasure than in the anger that priests vent against it I detected the complaining of irremediable impotence (exasperated by the stings of excitement). What was left of my ardent religiosity associated itself with the ecstasy of a voluptuous life, detached itself from the immense barrenness of suffering self-denial. (*My Mother* 109)

3.2. Desire for Transgression and Profanation in *Story of the Eye*

Another erotic novel by Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, starts with an anonymous male narrator giving an account of his constant terror and anxiety about anything sexual. He was nearly sixteen when he met his first sexual partner Simone, a beautiful girl of his own age, at the beach. They rapidly grew intimate. Three days after their first meeting, the male narrator and Simone sojourned in her villa, where his sexual desire was ignited by his imagining her nakedness under a pinafore.

I grew up very much alone, and as far back as I recall I was frightened of anything sexual Three days after our first meeting, Simone and I were alone in her villa. She was wearing a black pinafore with a starched white collar. I began to realize that she shared my anxiety at seeing her, and I felt even more anxious that day because I hoped she would be stark naked under the pinafore. (SE 9)

It is noted that the narrator and his female partner Simone derived their pleasure from transgression of the prohibited rather than copulation or blissful love. “We reached orgasm at almost the same instant without even touching one another,” as the narrator put it (SE10). The narrator added that “I ought to say, nevertheless, that we waited a long time before copulating” (SE 11). It is clear that what they desired was not coition but transgression which could bring them anxiety and pleasure. The narrator stated that they virtually never talked about blissful love because their affection was based on the prohibited (SE 10). Simone was wearing black silk stockings which covered her knees. However, what really thrilled was the potential sight of her cunt. For the narrator, “cunt” was the loveliest word that could be used to describe Simone’s privates (SE 9). Both vagina and cunt are characteristic of female sexual organs; however, they have distinctly different functions in regard to sexuality. There is no denying that the vagina is integral to sexual pleasure and more importantly, it also

conforms to the ethics of reproductive sexuality. In comparison with the vagina, cunt creates the most sexual pleasure. Therefore, that the narrator was more obsessed with cunt than vagina can be interpreted as his disregard of the productive sexuality which is a regulated sexuality in a homogenous society. The narrator commented on Simone's cunt with these words, "She had black silk stockings on covering her knees, but I was unable to see as far up as the cunt (this name, which I always used with Simone, is, I think, by far the loveliest of the names for the vagina). It merely struck me that by slightly lifting the pinafore from behind, I might see her private parts unveiled" (*SE* 9-10). After his imagination of seeing Simone's cunt, the narrator challenged Simone to sit her naked bottom in the cat's saucer of milk. "Milk is for the pussy, isn't it?" Simone asked. In a "regular" situation, the saucer of milk is for cats. It is considered an improper and unusual act for ordinary people to sit in a cat's saucer of milk. The narrator enjoyed challenging Simone because prohibitions are usually imposed on women rather than men. However, Simone, different from conservative women following the dictation of prohibition, frenziedly reveled in the intense pleasure transgression brought about. As a result, without hesitating for even an instant Simone took the narrator's challenge and performed the act. She put the saucer on a small bench with her eyes fixed on the narrator, sitting down and dipping her buttocks into the cool milk. At the sight of it, the narrator's "stiff cock" bulged in his trousers (*SE* 10). All of a sudden, Simone got up and the narrator spotted the milk dripping down her thighs to her stockings. She wiped herself as she stood over the narrator's head, which excited the narrator. He rubbed his cock through his trousers; at the same time, they reached orgasm without touching each other. When Simone's mother came home, Simone cuddled in her mother's arms. It is stunning that the narrator even thrust his hand under Simone's cunt when she was tenderly snuggling in her mother's arms (*SE* 10). Afterwards, the narrator dashed home and masturbated

again. The narrator and Simone were clearly involved in nonproductive sex, in this case, masturbation. Most importantly, their awareness of prohibition caused their anxiety, while transgression of that prohibition brought them a great deal of pleasure. More often than not, the narrator spoke of their awareness of the existence of prohibition and their craze to violate it.

I ought to say, nevertheless, that *we waited a long time before copulating*. We merely took any opportunity to indulge in *unusual acts*. *We did not lack modesty*—on the contrary—but something urgently drove us to *defy modesty* together as immodestly as possible. Thus, no sooner had she asked me never to toss off again by myself (we had met on top of a cliff), than she pulled down my pants and had me stretch out on the ground.

(SE 11; emphasis mine)

The narrator described how their love life started and how difficult he found it to describe their love as it was teeming with horror. He remembered that one day they were driving so fast that he accidentally crashed into a beautiful young female cyclist. Due to the violent crash, the victim's head was almost ripped off by the wheel. The narrator and Simone did not panic when dealing with the dead body nor did they leave the crash site as soon as one might expect. Rather, they were fully immersed in the sight of the dead body for a long time.

The horror and despair at so much bloody flesh, nauseating in part, and in part *very beautiful*, was fairly equivalent to our usual impression upon seeing one another. *Simone was tall and lovely*. She was usually very natural; there was nothing heartbreaking in her eyes or her voice. But on a sensual level, she so bluntly craved any upheaval that the faintest call from the senses gave her a look directly suggestive of all things linked to deep sexuality, such as blood, suffocation, sudden terror, crime; things

indefinitely destroying human bliss and honesty. (*SE* 11; emphasis mine)

It is noteworthy that the victim's and Simone's beauty were respectively emphasized by the narrator when he gave account of the bloody car accident. He highlighted the relationship between beauty and death, an association of sacrifice and death. In his sharp observation of "the ritual of sacrifice," Bataille clarifies this unique relationship. In the ritual of sacrifice, it was beautiful women rather than ugly ones that were chosen as victims of sacrifice. For Bataille, the beautiful bodies of the victims were meant to contrast strongly with the violent cruelty of impending death. In other words, the beauty made the brutality of death more prominent and more frightening. For Bataille, the brutality of death is an indispensable element to eroticism.¹⁹

In ancient times, kings embodied prohibition. When the king died, his people indulged in killing, raping, and plundering. Bataille argues, "Sometimes, in the face of death, of the failure of human ambition, a boundless despair takes hold. . . . the death of a king is apt to produce the most pronounced affects of horror and frenzy. . . . raping and pillaging to beat the devil" (*The Bataille Reader* 248). Again, we see that death serves to kindle the prohibited desire. Readers might be stunned at the scene of the terrible car accident in which the female victim was defaced to such a great extent. The beautiful faces, presented in Bataille's novels, enhance the brutality of death which serves to let loose the

¹⁹ In "To His Coy Mistress," Andrew Marvell used the horrible image of death to convince his adorable mistress to have sex with him. After her death, the worms produced by the decomposition of her corpse consumed her body, her long-preserved virginity included. Therefore, it was wasteful of her to stick with morality during the prime of her life. It is clear that the impending death would rid people of a sense of morality and initiate dissolute behaviors in them. In *The Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio asserted that people tended to let loose their unbridled desire when death was imminent. Horrified by the near-death caused by the Black Death, most people took advantage of the chaos to enjoy their life to the full by unleashing their prohibited desires. In *The Theater and Its Double*, men as Antonin Artaud described them did not flee but stayed in the city ravaged by plague. They raped women during the eruption of the plague. Imminent death freed people to give in to their innermost desires, especially those of a sexual nature. Precisely put, death let loose prohibited desires such as killing, destruction, and sexuality.

prohibited desire. When the narrator and Simone stared at the dead body, they became acutely aware of their own mortality. This consciousness of their future death let loose their prohibited desires. They were fascinated with “deep sexuality” (*SE* 11). In other words, it was “deep” sexuality accompanied by prohibitions like death, blood, suffocation and crime which beckoned them rather than any sense of regulated sexuality. They were captivated by the prohibited sexuality. Aside from accentuating the cruelty of death, beauty is an indispensable element in eroticism because it renders human desire to be profaned, ugliness in contrast diminishes eroticism because it is already profaned. Bataille argues that “[b]eauty has a cardinal importance, for ugliness cannot be spoiled, and to despoil is the essence of eroticism. Humanity implies the taboos, and in eroticism it and they are transgressed. Humanity is transgressed, profaned and besmirched. The greater the beauty, the more it is befouled” (*DS* 145). For Bataille, the more contradistinctive to the animal the woman’s appearance is, the more beautiful it is reckoned. In addition, the stronger the distinction between animal instinct and that of the woman’s, the more pure she is considered. That is, a woman’s lack of animal aspect suggests their beauty is as striking as purity. However, the beauty of the desirable woman is otherwise considered insipid and unprovocative if it reveals no animal aspect. That is, this kind of beauty has nothing to do with profanity and transgression.

For Bataille, eroticism is manifested when beauty is profaned. Bataille argues that “[b]eauty that denies the animal and awakes desire finishes up by exasperating desire and exalting the animal parts” (*DS* 144). According to Bataille, beauty is fascinating because it generates human’s desire to profane it. For Bataille, the distorted facial expression caused by uncontrolled orgasm is more attractive than the calm one, and it is far more attractive when it is shown on a

beautiful woman's face. "There is only one thing I understood: how utterly the orgasms ravaged the girl's face with sobs interrupted by horrible shrieks" (SE 22). The intensity of induced excitement depends on the contrast between the beautiful face and ugly animal instinct. Corrupting beautiful and pure women is the essence of eroticism since corruption is transgression. Bataille argues that "[i]f beauty so far removed from the animal is passionately desired, it is because to possess is to sully, to reduce to the animal level" (DS 144). Bataille adds that "[t]astes and customs vary, but that cannot prevent a woman's beauty (her humanity, that is) from making the animal nature of the sexual act obvious and shocking" (DS 145). In a word, beauty as Bataille suggests, makes the prohibition (death and eroticism) more sacred and renders profanity and transgression more prominent and more desirable.

In sacrifice, the victim is chosen so that its perfection shall give point to the full brutality of death. Human beauty, in the union of bodies, shows the contrast between the purest aspect of mankind and the hideous animal quality of sexual organs. The paradox of ugliness and beauty in eroticism is strikingly expressed by Leonardo da Vinci in his Notebooks: "The act of coition and the members employed are so ugly that but for the beauty of the faces, the adornments of their partners and the frantic urge, Nature would lose the human race." Leonardo does not see that the charm of a fair face or fine clothes is effective in that that fair face promises what clothes conceal. *The face and its beauty must be profaned*, first by uncovering the woman's secret parts, and then by putting the male organ into them. (DS 145; emphasis mine)

For Bataille, it is the profanity that validates the beauty. That is, beauty is manifested when it joins with profanity. Bataille uses many sources of defilement, such as urine,

semen, saliva and dirt to explicate his idea of profanity. These elements not only serve to defile the beautiful face, but they also besmirch their private parts. For Bataille, eroticism is manifested when prohibition is transgressed and the beauty is profaned. Animals know nothing about transgression and profanity; therefore, they do not develop eroticism.

After the car accident, the narrator was obsessed with the ways of profaning Simone's beautiful faces. After the accident, their sexual game was all about profanity of the beauty and transgression of the taboos. Simone took an acrobatic position and solicited the narrator to pee up to her cunt (*SE* 11). The narrator did as she asked and then discharged semen into her cunt. At the same time, a blond girl named Marcelle, the purest of their friends, loomed into their view. Seeing the erotic position, Marcelle was so shocked that she collapsed and huddled in the grass. Upon seeing Marcelle's private parts, the narrator and Simone broke loose from their erotic embrace and hurled themselves onto Marcelle's body. Simone hiked up Marcelle's skirt, ripping her panties and showing the narrator the new cunt. The narrator kissed the new cunt furiously while finger fucking Simone, whose legs closed around Marcelle's hips. It is noted that these three characters were involved in masturbation and oral stimulation of a woman's cunt, acts which are not intended for reproductive sexuality. Moreover, they pleased themselves by engaging in the three-party sexuality which further violates the prohibition of promiscuous sex. The narrator described his frenzy which stemmed from the prohibited sexuality and the profanity of Simone's beautiful face and private parts.

Two young mouths fought over my arse, my balls, and my cock, but I still kept pushing apart female legs wet with saliva and come, splaying them as if writhing out of a monster's grip, and yet that monster was nothing but the utter violence of my movements. The hot rain was finally

pouring down and streaming over our fully exposed bodies. . . . Simone had found a mud puddle, and was smearing herself wildly: she was jerking off with the earth and coming violently, whipping by the downpour, my head locked in her soil-covered legs, her face wallowing in the puddle, where she was brutally churning Marcelle's cunt, one arm around Marcelle's cunt, one arm around Marcelle's hips, the hand yanking the thigh, forcing it open. (*SE* 12-13)

From then on, Simone was deeply infatuated with breaking eggs with her cunt. Her head would rest on an armchair in the parlor and her back was against the chair's back; by doing so the narrator was able to ejaculate his sperm on her face. The instant the narrator shot out his sperm, her buttocks would squeeze the egg and buried the narrator's face in her cunt filled with filth. The narrator said:

That was the period when Simone developed a mania for breaking eggs with her behind. . . . I would put the egg right on the hole in her arse, and she would skillfully amuse herself by shaking it in the deep crack of her buttocks. The moment my come shot out and tricked down her eyes, her buttocks would squeeze together and she would come while I smeared my face abundantly in her ass. (*SE* 14)

Urine and sperm are products of excretion of the body which are considered secondary in the mainstream of erotic literature; in contrast, testicles and vaginas are considered primary element in eroticism. However, these organs of reproduction are ripped off the bodies presented in Bataille's erotic novels. For instance, the testicles of fighting bulls are ripped off and played with as toys. Vaginas are never mentioned in his novels except for ridiculing the human "reason." For Bataille, urine and sperm are rendered preponderant in function because they are used to profane the sacred prohibition and beautiful faces. Compared to sperm, urine is of great importance

because it completely belongs to expenditure of bodily organs; that is, it is a useless waste. Additionally, it is dirty. Simply put, urination is a transgression because it completely violates the dictation of production and cleanliness. Because it is associated with transgression, it is important to eroticism. On the other hand, testicles or vaginas are useless in eroticism because they conform to the dictation of reproduction. They can be reintroduced into the domain of eroticism when they serve to profane the beauty or the sacred. In *Story of the Eye*, the vagina is mentioned when it swallows the eyes which are associated with human “reason” and knowledge. When eyes are swallowed, humans are not able to see sunlight, a metaphor for reason. That is, the sacred eyes are profaned by the vagina and thus the vagina can reenter the domain of eroticism. For Bataille, eroticism is meant to defy the calculated reason.

Simone’s mother was distinctive from Simone who indulged in her unusual acts in that she led an exemplary life. She often caught her daughter and the narrator engaging in erotic games. Undetected, she just peeped at them in silence. The narrator supposed that Simone’s mother was too thunderstruck to utter a word. When they were done with their sexual games and trying to clean up the mess they had caused, they noticed her standing at the doorway. A few days later, when Simone was “doing gymnastics” with the narrator in the rafters of a garage, she pissed on her mother, who stopped her car underneath them without knowing it. Simone’s mother gazed at them with sullen eyes and her facial expression intrigued them so much that they continued their erotic games. The narrator said:

The sad widow got out of the way and gazed at us with such dismal eyes and such a desperate expression that she egged us on, that is to say, simply, with Simone bursting into laughter, crouching on all fours on the beams and exposing her cunt to my face, I uncovered that cunt completely and masturbated while looking at it. (*SE* 15)

They indulged in their sexual game in the presence of her mother. Simone's mother, like ordinary parents, tried to instill virtue in her child. However, Simone had no regard for prohibition just like a brat. She was unbridled and immature and delighted in nothing more than shocking her mother playfully. The transgression of the taboo was much more thrilling and captivating than any of their sexual games. Urinating outside of designated areas is a taboo. Sexual games are taboo, especially in the presence of one's parents. As a result, Simone enjoyed indulging herself in urination and the sexual games in the presence of her mother. Simone's mother tried to stay calm because as a parent she did not want to what her daughter had been doing became a scandal. One day on the street the narrator and Simone ran into Marcelle, who was timid and naively pious. Marcelle flushed deeply at the sight of them because the thought of their previous erotic games which she was privy to made her blush. Simone asked for her forgiveness, promising that she would never lay a hand on her again. Lacking the power to resist, Marcelle agreed to join them for tea with some other friends at their house. The sight of Marchelle blushing completely overwhelmed Simone. Apart from Marcelle, there were three other pretty girls and two boys at the orgy party. They were not as excited as Simone and the narrator. Simone was dancing feverishly while the other girls were dancing quietly. "Simone, dancing a frenzied Charleston by herself, showed everyone her legs up to her cunt, and when the other girls were asked to dance a solo in the same way, they were in too good a mood to require coaxing" (*SE* 15). Marcelle was intoxicated, but she refused to dance. At the same time, a wager between Simone and a boy was agreed upon. At the beginning of the novel, Simone's first wager was to sit upon the cat's saucer of milk. The second wager was presented in the orgy party. Simone, pretending to be dead drunk, offered to make a bet. "I bet . . . that I can pee into the tablecloth in front of everyone" (*SE* 16). One of the boys challenged her and Simone did not hesitate for an

instant and directly carried out the actions she made a bet on. She won the wager by wetting the tablecloth. Simone won the bet, so she could decide the penalty. She pulled down the boy's trousers in front of everyone; however, all Simone could think of was Marcelle's blushing. Meanwhile, Simone noticed that Marcelle was begging the narrator to let her leave the party. Simone did not know why Marcelle wanted to leave especially since she had promised her not to touch her again. All of a sudden, Simone fell upon the floor with convulsion and her bottom stuck in the air. She beseeched the boy, who lost the bet, to piss on her cunt. Marcelle gaped at the scene and reddened again, and she asked Simone to take off her dress. Simone fingered Marcelle's cunt and kissed her on the mouth. Marcelle could not stand the orgy, hiding in a wardrobe in order to masturbate. As the orgy went on, Marcelle climaxed, urinating at the same time.

I ought to say that we were all very drunk and completely bowled over by what had been going on. The naked boy was being sucked by a girl. . . . And all at once, something incredible happened, a strange swish of water, followed by a trickle and a stream from under the wardrobe door: poor Marcelle was pissing in her wardrobe while masturbating. But the explosion of totally drunken guffaws that ensued rapidly degenerated into a debauché of tumbling bodies, lofty legs and arses, wet skirts and come. . . . And yet soon we could hear Marcelle dismally sobbing alone, louder and louder, in the make-shift pissoir that was now her prison.

(SE 17)

When Marcelle left the wardrobe, she was naked and in a dreadful state. Upon seeing the narrator, she displayed a violent consternation and trembled frenziedly. The narrator was pale and stained with blood. Behind the narrator were stripped bodies which sprawled about and moaned. A young girl was throwing up. The stink of blood,

sperm, urine, and vomit made the narrator flinch back in horror and disgust. Simone was sleeping peacefully, smiling with her belly up. At the sight of debauchery, Marcelle recoiled with terror as though she had seen a hideous ghost. She collapsed in long howls, and went mad. However, her inhuman shrieks and snarls excited Simone. People were running up to see what had happened. The narrator never thought of fleeing or covering the scandal. On the contrary, the narrator resolved to expose it. “One can readily picture of the cries of dismay, the desperate shrieks, the exaggerated threats of the parents entering the room,” as the narrator put it (18). The narrator told the readers that those who witnessed the orgy party would curse them and try to send them to the guillotine because they engaged in prohibited activities. The eruption of the scandal resulted in the police intervention. The narrator and Simone got off lightly and set off for their erotic journey.

The image of Marcelle tells readers the importance of prohibition. Without the prohibition we are imprisoned by, we cannot enjoy the pleasure of freedom the transgression entails. “Taboo and transgression reflect these two contradictory urges. The taboo would forbid the transgression but the fascination compels it” (68). Marcelle was antithetic to the girls and boys who unaware of taboos indulged themselves in the orgy with ease. Instead, she adhered to the prohibition. It is clear that she was so naively pious that she flushed when she witnessed the absurdity of the sexual games. On the contrary, the girls and the boys at the orgy party had no regard for prohibition; therefore, they casually indulged in the orgy. That explains the reason they were not as excited as the narrator and Simone, based on the narrator’s remarks as the story unfolds, “The oldest of the eight being not quite seventeen, the beverage soon took effect; but aside from Simone and myself, they were not as excited as we wanted them to be” (*SE* 15). All the girls and boys, including Simone, got used to the repeated mechanism at the orgy party. In other words, prohibition did not function and

the boredom caused by the repeated mechanism made Simone drift off with ease. All at once, Marcelle was like screaming parents who intended to impose prohibition on their children. In other words, Marcelle was like a well-indoctrinated child who developed a fear for the violation of taboos. Her shrieks could be interpreted as a reemerging of the prohibition, which they used to rejuvenate themselves, subduing their boredom and continuing their sexual journey. “The object some indiscriminating animal is after is not what is desired; the object is “forbidden”, sacred, and the very prohibition attached to it is what arouses the desire” (*DS* 72).

Cast away to a sanatorium, Marcelle was the embodiment of prohibition. Her imprisonment made her all the more mysterious and attractive. The censorships of forbidden books can help us better understand the charm of prohibition. The more forbidden a book is, the more sales the book makes. From the day of Marcelle’s confinement in a sanatorium, Simone and the narrator were extraordinarily haunted by their memories of Marcelle. The narrator said:

I managed to lose any sense of words like hope or despair, but in my weariness, I realized that my life *had* to have some meaning all the same, and *would* have one if only certain events, defined as desirable, were to occur. I finally accepted being so extraordinarily haunted by the names *Simone* and *Marcelle*. Since it was no use laughing, I could keep going only by accepting or feigning to imagine a fantastic compromise that would confusedly link my most disconcerting moves to theirs. (*SE* 20)

The narrator was haunted by Marcelle’s compromise. Compromise is a middle state between conflicting opinions or actions reached by mutual concession. That is, Marcelle is a woman who clung to the injunction of prohibition; accordingly, corrupting her and making her compromise her decency overwhelmed the narrator.

Bataille argues that “[s]imilarly the need to make the fundamental truth evident obscures another fact, the reconciliation of apparent opposites without which eroticism would not exist” (DE 146). That is to say, Marcelle corresponded to the narrator’s inner experience of desiring to transgress the taboo. Her confinement just made her (embodiment of prohibition) much more enchanting and more desirable. After the scandal erupted, the narrator moved in with Simone. Simone shared the narrator’s predicament. Not seeing Marcelle, Simone was in despair and never thought of any sexual games. The narrator said:

In fact, it was they who told us of the circumstances of Marcelle’s confinement and even the name of the sanatorium. From the very first day, all we worried about was Marcelle: her madness, the loneliness of her body, the possibilities of getting to her, helping her to escape, perhaps. One day, when I tried to rape Simone in her bed, she brusquely slipped away. (SE 21)

The narrator made an attempt to reinvigorate Simone by raping her. Instead of being sexually aroused, Simone showed her refusal in a fury when the narrator managed to rape her in order to rekindle her desire. She yelled that, “You’re totally insane . . . I’m not interested – here, in bed like this, like a housewife and mother! I’ll only do it with Marcelle!” (21). Reproductive sexuality is a permitted sexuality; therefore, it disinterested Simone. What overwhelmed Simone was the sexuality which was not socially acceptable. Simone was haunted by Marcelle’s image because she was the paradoxical combination of prohibition (innocence) and transgression (debauchery).

Obviously Simone and I were sometimes taken with a violent desire to fuck. But we no longer thought it could be done without Marcell . . . Marcelle’s smile, her *freshness*, her sobs, the sense of *shame* that made her redden and, painfully red, tear off her own clothes and *surrender*

lovely blond buttocks to impure hands, impure mouths, beyond all the tragic delirium that had made her lock herself in the wardrobe to toss off with such abandon that she could not help *pissing*—all these things warped our desires, so that they endlessly racked us. . . . as if the *sacrilege* were to render everything generally dreadful and infamous.

(*SE 22*; emphasis mine)

It comes as no surprise that Marcelle was confined in the sanatorium due to her madness. Madness is prohibition and should thus result in confinement. It is widely believed that the best way to deal with prohibitions is to confine them. Confinement, however, can backfire. Confinement not only results in the enhanced desire of the confined, it also intensifies the outsider's desire to unveil its secret. From the first day of Marcelle's confinement in the sanatorium, nothing fascinated the narrator and Simone. It was totally Marcelle on their mind, so the "Other girls and boys no longer interested us. All we could think of was Marcelle" (*SE 23*). The narrator said that "[b]ut that day, in the rainless tempest . . . were forced to leave the chateau . . . our imaginations haunted by the despondency that was bound to take hold of Marcelle again, making the wretched inmate almost an embodiment of the fury and terror that kept driving our bodies to endless debauchery" (*SE 29*). All the lust aroused by Marcelle inundated them throughout their attempts to break Marcell out of the therapeutic institution. The stronger their lust grew, the weaker their perceptive judgment became. Their lust became so powerful that they seemed to forget what their mission was. Staying sober was necessary so that they could succeed in releasing Marcelle from the sanatorium. However, during their first two attempts, they were overwhelmed by their enhanced lust aroused by Marcelle and focused on their aspirations to consummate their heightened sexual desire. On account of her confinement, Marcelle became inaccessible to Simone and the narrator, while her

captivity validated her inviting captivation. No sooner had they scaled the wall and landed in the garden than they noticed a broad wet stain at the center of a bed sheet hanging on the bars of the prison. They imagined that Marshall had obviously masturbated frantically on her bed and wetted the sheet. Haunted by his fantasy of Marcelle's masturbation, the narrator was at loss about what should be done to rescue Marcelle. The narrator said that "he was incapable of understanding anything as though he was under a spell" (*SE* 25). He was totally at loss about his intention as well as his mission.

It was as if I had left the earth, especially because the squall was as violent a ever . . . I did not know what to do with the gun which I still held in my hand, for I had no pockets left . . . The roar of the wrathful elements, the raging of the trees, and the *sheet*, also helped me to prevent discerning anything distinct in my will or in my gestures.

(*SE* 25; emphasis mine)

He could not make sense of the reason why he had such an idea of taking off his trousers when entering the facility. Before long, he stripped off his clothes, unconsciously leaving them on the chair. Afterwards, he forgot his clothes on the chair and hid in a garden naked. For the narrator, nothing was more thrilling and exciting than his nudity against the wind on the path of the unknown garden. He did not know what to do with the revolver in his hand. He was extremely excited having his pistol; meanwhile, a hand had grabbed his penis and was rubbing it. All of a sudden, the naked chest and legs of a woman pressed against his legs with an orgasmic jerk (*SE* 26). He spun around and involuntarily discharged his sperm in Simone's face. Swept up by an orgasmic thrill, he triggered his gun convulsively and fired three blind shots in the direction of the prison. It is clear that the wet stain signaling Marcelle's licentiousness accounted for the narrator's uncontrolled soaring

lust. In other words, Marcelle's imprisonment did not cast her out of Simone's and the narrator's fantasy but made Marcell more mysterious and more desirable. Simone kept observing Marcelle, so it never crossed her mind to ask why the narrator was undressed. Simone was so preoccupied with her sexual object Marcelle that she failed to give heed to things around her. For Simone, it was the confinement that made Marcelle more innocent, and most importantly, more desirable in that corrupting the virtuous girl gave Simone a lot of pleasure.

The girl in the window disappeared. A moment that seemed unending crawled by: she switched on the light in her room. Finally, she came back to breathe the open air and gaze at the ocean. Her sleek, pallid hair was caught in the wind, we could make out her features: she had not changed, but now *there was something wild in her eyes*, something restless, *contrasting with the still childlike simplicity of her features*. She looked thirteen rather than sixteen. Under her nightgown, we could distinguish her thin but full body, firm, unobtrusive, and as beautiful as her fixed stare. (*SE 26-27; emphasis mine*)

When Marcelle caught sight of them, she called but the pair could not hear her. They beckoned to her and she blushed to her ears. Simone ran her hand down her belly to her pubic hair and Marcelle imitated her. The two girls were masturbating face to face in the stormy night, both of whom were motionless enjoying their shared unrestrained joy. Marcelle climaxed and collapsed on the floor, as did Simone. Their overindulgence in their sexual orgy resulted in their failure in rescuing Marcelle, yet Marcelle had broken free from her previous self-regulation by accepting and enjoying sex as much as she could. Leaving Marcelle alone in the sanatorium, Simone and the narrator fled the grounds of the sanatorium. Instead of feeling frustrated, the narrator felt happy about seeing the obscene spectacle created by Simone and Marcelle. He

stated his jubilation at witnessing the bawdy scene.

But then, this chaotic and dreadful landscape of my imagination was suddenly inundated by a stream of light and blood, for Marcelle could come only by drenching herself . . . at first violent and jerky like hicups, then free and relaxed and coinciding with an outburst of superhuman happiness. . . . an obstinate waiting for total joy, like the vision of that glowing hole, the empty window, for example, at the very moment when Marcelle lay sprawling on the floor, endlessly inundating it. (*SE* 29)

Agitated by their increasing lust, the pair planned to rescue Marcelle again even though they were excessively fatigued. They soon found their bicycles and set off to revisit the sanatorium in another attempt to break Marcelle out. Despite their overwhelming exhaustion, the pair endured their laborious journey and continued to struggle hard to reach the sanatorium. In spite of their lack of energy, they masturbated more and more violently by rubbing their private parts against their bicycle seats. Their desires to fulfill their sexual fantasies eclipsed their plans to rescue Marcelle.

A leather seat clung to Simone's bare cunt, which was inevitably jerked by the legs pumping up and down on the spinning pedals. Furthermore, the rear wheel vanished indefinitely to my eyes, not only in the bicycle fork but virtually in the crevice of the cyclist's naked bottom: the rapid whirling of the dusty tire was also directly comparable to both the thirst in my throat and the erection of my penis, destined to plunge into the depths of the cunt sticking to the bicycle seat. (*SE* 30)

It seemed that Simone had been preoccupied with the lust evoked by the memory of Marcelle. Shortly afterwards, the narrator found Simone inert, her head hanging down lifelessly. Horrified by the situation, the narrator lifted one of Simone's arms, but it

fell back inactive. Shivering with fright, he hurled down upon and embraced the dead body in his arms tightly. He described, “I threw myself upon the lifeless body, trembling with fear, and as I clutched it in an embrace, I was overcome with bloody spasms, my lower lip drooling and my teeth bared like a leering moron” (*SE* 30). The narrator was struck dumb at the sight of Simone’s sudden death. Subsequently, Simone slowly came to herself and touched the narrator. Quickly getting over the shock overwhelming him, the narrator checked if there was any injury or bruise marking her body and found none. As a matter of fact, what Simone experienced was the “little death” caused by violent orgasm instead of real death. Marcelle’s confinement made Simone’s orgasm result in a death-like state. Exhausted as he was, the narrator took her in his arms, carrying her down to the road. Eventually, he reached her villa and put her into her own bed. Again, due to Simone’s sudden spasm, they failed to break Marcelle out of the sanatorium. It is clear that sex and death are deemed “violence” because they hinder the project. Despite the fact that orgasm or death is inimical to the fulfillment of a project, the experience of impending death made the narrator and Simone unleash all their unbridled desires.

To others, the universe seems decent because decent people have gelded eyes. That is why they fear lewdness. . . . In general, people savour the “pleasures of the flesh” . . . I did not care for what is known as “pleasures of the flesh” because they really are insipid; I cared only for what is classified as “dirty”. On the other hand, I was not even satisfied with the usual debauchery, because the only thing it dirties is debauchery itself, while, in some way or other, anything sublime and perfectly pure is left intact by it. My kind of debauchery soils not only my body and my thoughts, but also anything I may conceive in its course, that is to say, the vast starry universe, which merely serves as a back drop. (*SE* 42)

Despite previous failed attempts, they did eventually succeed in rescuing Marcelle from the sanatorium. Unfortunately, due to her deranged state, the first thing Marcelle did was hang herself in the wardrobe where she had previously climaxed and urinated. Discovering her lifeless body, the narrator quickly cut the noose, but Marcelle was already quite dead. The long-term therapeutic confinement did not return Marcelle to normal but intrigued her to seek the most extreme experience possible – dying in orgasm. The narrator laid the corpse out on the carpet. Meanwhile, Simone witnessed the narrator's erected penis, starting to masturbate. Up to this point, Simone had technically remained a virgin. And it was then, next to the corpse that the narrator finally had sex with her. It was painful, so Simone stood up and gazed at the corpse. The blank expression on Marcelle's corpse irritated her. "We were perfectly calm, all *three* of us, and that was the most hopeless part of it" (SE 43). The dead body irritated her for three reasons. First, Simone did not witness Marcelle's death, so she missed the opportunity to vicariously experience the extreme pleasure of dying in orgasm Marcelle had experienced. Second, the calmness of Marcelle's face was more like that which would be seen on an ordinary corpse, showing no sign of violent death in orgasm. Thirdly, it was impossible to corrupt her anymore.

Simone desired to vicariously experience death in violent orgasm. However, only her real death would make it impossible for her to experience the extreme pleasure of dying in orgasm. Adding to the complication, much to Simone's irritation, Marcelle had hidden in the wardrobe hanging herself so as to stay away from Simon's lustful eyes. This disillusioned her because she could not witness the spectacle of dying in orgasm, as a result of which "Marcelle had become a total stranger" (SE 43). For Simone, Marcelle's death was an irony of sacred eroticism. Her death was religiously motivated in that she believed that she could only be absolved of her sin through the offering of blood. Her redemption was granted due to her repentant heart.

It seemed that Marcelle had died in religious salvation rather than erotic orgasm. Her calm face proved this.

I observed Simone, and, as I precisely recall, my only pleasure was in the smutty things Simone was doing, for the corpse was very irritating to her, as though she could not bear the thought that this creature, so similar to her, could not feel her any more. The open eyes were more irritating than anything else. Even when Simone drenched the face, those eyes, extraordinarily, did not close. (*SE* 43)

After Marcelle's death, Simone was preoccupied with the simulacrum of dying in orgasm. Most importantly, she wanted to prove that dying in erotic orgasm is more blissful and more irresistible than religious ecstasy. For Simone, dying in orgasm rid her of her terror of death. Bataille convinces readers that eroticism can be sacred since the joy it brings can protect people from the most unbearable and frightening of all thoughts: their own death. Early men held sacred what they venerated, and this veneration took place only because it functioned as a magic power to shield them from the horror of death. That is the reason why they established many rituals and taboos which could prevent the violence of death from ruining the whole community. Bataille thinks of eroticism as "the sacred" because it can be a gospel which rids humans of their terror of death.

After Marcelle's suicide, the narrator and Simone instantly took off for Spain, where Simone had previously met a fabulously rich Englishman who had offered to support her. They stole a boat, reaching an obscure point on the Spanish coast. Leaving the narrator hidden in a wood during the day, Simone went to look for the Englishman in San Sebastian. She came back at night, driving a fancy car. Simone told the narrator that the Englishman Sir Edmund would join them in Madrid and that all day long he had been asking her of the most detailed questions about Marcelle's

death. Sir Edmund even made Simone sketch Marcell's death in order to simulate the erotic scene which had overwhelmed her. He ordered his servant to buy a wax mannequin with a blond wig in accordance with Marcelle's image. He laid the wax mannequin out on the floor and asked Simone to urinate on the figure. It seems that Sir Edmund attempted to show his ingenuity at providing Simone with obscene spectacles. He hoped that his inventive obscenity could intrigue Simone's sexual desire; however, it did not work.

However, there had been a great change in Simone after Marcelle's suicide—she kept staring into space all the time, looking as if she belonged to something other than the terrestrial world, where almost everything bored her; or if she *was* still attached to this world, then purely by way of orgasms, which were rare but incomparably more violent than before. These orgasms were as different from normal climaxes as, say, the mirth of savage Africans from that of Occidentals. (*SE* 46)

To arouse Simone's sexual desire, Sir Edmund spared no effort to contrive a great number of repulsively obscene spectacles. He had a cramped, windowless pigsty, where one day he locked up a petite streetwalker from Madrid. The prostitute in only cami-knickers collapsed in a pool of liquid manure under the bellies of the swine. Once the door of the pigsty was closed, Simone had the narrator fuck her again and again in the mud. Meanwhile, Sir Edmund masturbated by watching the obscene spectacle. Simone buried his fingernails in her buttocks and hurt herself with a terrible bang on the door. Her face was smeared with saliva as well as blood. After the orgy was over, Simone came to huddle like a little girl in the narrator's arms, without speaking but somber. It is clear that she was uncheerful when involving the obscenity deployed by Sir Edmund. Prior to the event, Simone was fascinated with filth and blood because it is related to prohibitions. However, after Marcelle's death, she

was more spellbound by death in orgasm. Simone preferred bloody bullfights to the obscene spectacles offered by Sir Edmund. For her, the repeated piercing in bullfighting was similar to love-making. Most importantly, she felt the impending death in the same way. Death in orgasm meant the death of one's rational consciousness. She likened the blind raging bulls to concupiscent men who were driven by their uncontrolled sexual impulses. She viewed men like these as being controlled by unrestrained sexual desire which made them abandon all rationale and plunge into a coitus.

There were three moments of bullfights that overwhelmed Simone: first, when the bulls hurtled out of the bullpen in a wildly uncontrolled impulse; second, when the bull's horns pierced into the flank of a mare; third, when the mare galloped dragging her bowels between her thighs. The repulsive scene fascinated Simone because it was a simulacrum of dying in orgasm – death of rational selves.

She was on tenterhooks from start to finish at the bullfight, in terror (which of course mainly expressed a violent desire) at the thought of seeing the toreador hurled up by one of the monstrous lunges of the horns when the bull made its endless, blindly raging dashes at the void of coloured cloths. And there is something else I ought to say: when the bull makes its quick, brutal, thrusts over and over again into the matador's cape, barely grazing the erect line of the body, any spectator has that feeling of total and repeated lunging typical of the game of coitus. The utter nearness of death is also felt in the same way. But these series of prodigious passes are rare. Thus, each time they occur, they unleash a veritable delirium in the arena, and it is well known that at such thrilling instants the women come by merely rubbing their thighs together. (*SE* 47)

Simone was extremely excited by the bullfighting because it served an exemplary

illustration of sacred eroticism which is constituted by dissolution of rational consciousness. Generally speaking, animals aim to preserve their lives rather than plunge into death. That is, preserving their lives is integral to the animals' instinct. The fighting bulls do not have rational selves because they blindly plunge to death. Men who act frenziedly due to their uncontrolled sexual desire resemble the blind raging bulls, both of whom compromise their rational selves to uncontrolled desire. For Simone, the raging bulls were like amorous men who aim to release their unbridled desires. Watching the raging Bulls pierce the provocative bull fighters was like watching a lewd man pierce a sexually provocative woman. That the bull fighter's eyes are gouged can be interpreted as the death of woman's rational self. Spectator's excitement was aroused by the bullfights because watching them was like watching provocative sexual games. They were not thrilled if the bull opposite to the bullfighter was distrustful and unresponsive; similarly, a sexual game is not intriguing if the man opposite to the woman was not agitated but controlled by his rational self. Spectators were not excited if the bullfighter flinched from facing death; similarly, the sexual game is not intriguing if the woman refused to embrace the little death, orgasm. The spectators would be bored with such stupefying bullfights. Simone climaxed when the bullfighter's eyes or head were pierced. Eyes and head are symbolic of "reason." The piercing can be interpreted as the woman no longer being controlled by her rational self. In the novel, the crowds were extremely excited because of the erotic symbolism of the bullfights. The bulls renounced their rational selves and the bullfighter's rational self was destroyed. The scene of bullfights served as an exemplary illustration to manifest eroticism which aims to destroy rationale. Bataille argues that "[t]he whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of participators as they are in their normal lives" (*DS* 17). He maintains:

The transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes

a partial dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of discontinuity. Dissolution – this expression corresponds with *dissolute life*, the familiar phrase linked with erotic activity. In the process of dissolution, the male partner has generally an active role, while the female partner is passive. The passive, female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity. But for the male partner the dissolution of the passive partner means one thing only: it is paving the way for a fusion where both are mingled, attaining at length the same degree of dissolution. (DS 17)

The “dispossession” of the lovers’ selves is the symbolic violation of the uni-dimensional and “homogenous” society Bataille depicts: a society only cares about reproduction and conservation of structures. That explains why people in the society view reproduction and multiplication of goods as a sign of success. Humans are governed by their established identities and their rational selves. Through the dissolution induced by sexuality, we can renounce our “homogenous” (rational) selves. In *Eroticism in Georges Bataille and Henry Miller*, Gilles Mayne argues that “eroticism is such a formidable slap in the face of those who think they could never be other than what they are” (17-18). The dissolution means the death of the rational consciousness. To put it differently, eroticism is the violation of the dutiful and industrious beings we are in most situations of our lives. For Bataille, sexuality can be a form of communication because dissolution and fusion with someone else means the death of their individuality. Nakedness is symbolic of the lovers’ renouncing their rationality which constitutes their stable individuality. The feeling of obscenity is an inevitable uneasiness of breaking down the taboo while it is a triumphant feeling of rebirth (17). He adds:

Stripping naked is the decisive action. Nakedness offers a contrast to

self-possession, to discontinuous existence, in other words. It is a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self. Bodies open out to a state of continuity through secret channels that give us a feeling of obscenity. Obscenity is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognized and stable individuality. Through the activity of organs in a flow of coalescence and renewal, like the ebb and flow of waves surging into one another, the self is dispossessed, and so completely that most creatures in a state of nakedness, for nakedness is symbolic of this dispossession and heralds it, will hide; particularly if the erotic act follows, consummating it. (*DS* 18)

For Bataille, through sexuality, the self is no longer confined to self-possession. That is, the self-contained character is destroyed and fuses with others. It can be argued that sexuality is a form of unifying communication.

Chapter Four

Eroticism: Gift and Rebirth

Georges Bataille uses literary eroticism to restore the “heterology” repressed by a homogenous society and makes it a transgressive power to defy the preconceptions fashioned by our society. Bataille’s literary eroticism displays many shocking forces: incest, excrement, filth, corpse, death, sacrifice, blood, murder and madness. These forces are what he calls “heterology.” Noticeably, Bataille’s heterology has much to do with the concept of “expenditure.” Such “expenditure” (giving without taking) is the genuine generosity of gift-giving, a practice quite different from that in market economy in capitalism whose focus is on accumulation. This Chapter starts with exploring the distinction between reciprocal and non-reciprocal gifts. The exploration aims to show that eroticism is a gift and rebirth.

The exploration starts with Marcel Mauss’s theory of gift to develop two lines of thinking: a reciprocal gift and a non-reciprocal gift. The reciprocal gift theorists are Levi Strauss and Jean Baudrillard, whereas the non-reciprocal gift theorists are Ralph Waldo Emerson, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida and Georges Bataille.

The “gift” elaborated by Marcel Mauss as a key concept in his 1924 book *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* became a central issue within the field of anthropology. According to Mauss, the concept of “gift” emphasizes more on loss rather than conservation, and one loses in exchange not for real compensation, but for symbolic benefit. In contrast, possessing and accumulating the most materials and wealth is the ultimate end of the capitalist logic of market economy. Mauss’s concept “gift giving” runs counter to the aforementioned logic because it is grounded on loss rather than gain. In other words, Mauss’s idea of “gift giving” is more concerned with loss while the capitalist logic of market economy is

primarily about gain.

Literary critics have respectively appealed to Mauss's concept of "gift giving" and capitalist market economy of "gift exchanging." In their views, both are based on a give-and-take economy. However, what differentiates Mauss's "gift giving" from capitalist "gift exchanging" is that the former is a symbolic exchange, whereas the latter is more of a material exchange. In Mauss's symbolic exchange, one exchanges "generosity" for his or her superior position. For the first time, he comes up with the ideas of destruction and loss because he thinks being generous is to destroy and lose one's property and wealth. This symbolic gesture indicates one's superiority because he or she can endure this great loss to humiliate the rival who cannot possibly afford the same loss. Two deeper thoughts ensue. First of all, Mauss's "gift giving," in terms of its intended humiliation, is not a gift that is given to the rival, but a financial demonstration that appalls the opponent, making him feel inferior to the "generous giver." Secondly, Mauss's circulation of gift still resembles the material exchange in the capitalist market economy in spite of the fact that it remains at a symbolic level. Although Mauss is the first theorist who comes up with the concept "the gift," the sense of indebtedness he creates in the economy of the reciprocal gift still involves the problem of hegemony and domination. That is, his theory is still far from real generosity.

Genuine generosity does not create on the side of the donor the sense of superiority, nor does it create on the side of the donee the sense of indebtedness. Simply put, Mauss's concept of "gift giving" does not build up to a sophisticated argument on the genuine generosity; instead, it yields a tension between master and slave. The genuine generosity in gift giving is about "forgetting." Only by forgetting can the donor expect nothing in return, and can the donee get rid of the obligation to repay the debt. In Nietzsche's remarks, forgetting dispels humans' all too human sense

of resentment because the donor will not fly into a rage when he fails to get what he anticipates from the donee, and on the other hand the donee will not suffer from the unbearable obligation to repay the debt. Without the sense of indebtedness (that the donor creates to make the donee suffer), there will not be any moral problem that hierarchizes them in a relation of hegemonic domination. It can be argued that forgetting is powerful dynamite that blows up the donor's expectation and the donee's obligation. Accordingly, genuine gift-giving without calculation will bring about the supreme self-sovereignty, in Bataille's terms, in one's subjectivity.

Quite a few theorists have appealed to and improved upon Mauss's concept of "gift giving." Among them, Levi Strauss and Jean Baudrillard have put more emphasis on reciprocal gift while Emerson, Nietzsche, Derrida, Bataille are more concerned with nonreciprocal gift. The former maintains that reciprocal gift has the function of establishing a close relationship, whereas the latter renders nonreciprocal gift a transgressive power to disrupt the obligation so as to realize one's self-sovereignty. As far as a reciprocal gift is concerned, Levi-Strauss, inspired by Mauss's concept of "gift-giving," tries to solve the riddle of human incest. For Strauss, such an exchangeable reciprocal gift as an unmarried woman needs to keep its virginity intact so that incest is definitely forbidden. That is, the gift itself must be honorably presentable. In addition, a reciprocal gift is to be generously given rather than self-interestedly used.²⁰ The generosity is at odds with the incest because giving

²⁰ Through the lens of Mauss's concept of "gift-giving," Strauss explains why incest becomes a forbidden taboo in institutionalized marriage in a primitive society. In his *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, he compares incest to self-interested wine-drinking. For example, such a father or brother who wants to marry his daughter or sister is like an owner who keeps his stocked wine to his own exclusive enjoyment without the least thought of inviting his friends over. On the contrary, a generous father or brother who sacrifices his own interests to give away his daughter or sister as a present is like a hospitable party host who is pleased to share with the guests his precious wealth. In Strauss's argument, generosity prevails over incest because a chaste woman as a precious gift is a means for establishing an alliance with other tribes. Any man who commits the crime of self-interested incest pays no homage to the gift he is to give away; as a result, little respect invested in a gift makes an alliance less unlikely. One significant point about Strauss's generous gift-giving, though, is that the donor still expects the donee to return his favor with a more valuable counter-gift. Along with Baudrillard, Strauss is more

a highly presentable gift implies the expectation that a more valuable gift should be paid back, whereas the incest devalues the exchangeability of a reciprocal gift, and as a result harms the mechanism of reciprocal economy.

Another theorist who argues for the concept of a reciprocal gift is Baudrillard. He opposes Bataille in the latter's comparison of the non-reciprocal nature of the gift to the unending and gratuitous supply of solar energy as a disinterested model for social exchange. Baudrillard argues in "When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy," a "unilateral gift does not exist" (61). He adds that "Bataille, having studied Aztec sacrificial practice, should have known that it is necessary to challenge the gods through sacrifice in order that they respond with profusion" ("WB" 61). In Baudrillard's argument, the worshipers never give away their offerings without asking something greater in return whenever they perform the sacrificial rituals. Similar to Strauss's generosity, reciprocity is prerequisite to Baudrillard's gift. Both theorists draw upon Mauss's concept of "gift-giving" on the basis of reciprocal economy. However, Strauss and Baudrillard's generosity for Emerson, Nietzsche, Derrida, and Bataille is not genuine enough. For those theorists who maintain the concept of a nonreciprocal gift, the genuine generosity asks nothing in return.

For example, in his essay "Compensation," Ralph Waldo Emerson ridicules the Christian concept of an unreciprocated gift, which means a gift too precious to the extent that the recipient is not likely to return the favor. Such a huge burden makes the recipient feel inferior to the giver and vengeful about his "generosity." In Emerson's essay, he points out the fundamental problem of "gift" in Christianity: God as a creator of human lives gives his followers the first breath as an unreciprocated gift. The sense of indebtedness is already a huge burden to the recipients. God's son Jesus

concerned with the concept of a reciprocal gift. In this sense, such generosity that takes reciprocity into consideration is not genuine for Emerson, Nietzsche, Derrida, and Bataille.

Christ, as Emerson suggests, comes not to relieve people of their burden, but to worsen their sense of indebtedness by sacrificing his own life as another unreciprocated gift to his followers. The horrible scenario that Christ was nailed to the cross only reinforces people's aggravating sense of indebtedness. In Emerson's opinions, God and Jesus Christ are generous givers who give their followers something they cannot pay back: God gives humans lives and Jesus Christ sacrifices his own life in exchange for his father's forgiveness of sinful humans. With Christ's life, humans seem to have paid God back what they owe Him; nevertheless, Christ's redemption for humans is an even huger debt that is not reimbursable. Christians can only follow the strict precepts to lessen their sense of indebtedness. As a transcendentalist, Emerson wants to help Christians get rid of this kind of unreimbursable gift. He maintains that humans should be free from the sense of indebtedness. They are born free. They are not born sinfully in debt. Emerson's contribution lies in the fact that he points out the vicious circle of humans' sense of indebtedness; nevertheless, he does not advance his argument and try to provide a solution.

In terms of the problematic reciprocity of gift, it can be said that Emerson shot the arrow, and Nietzsche carried it. Although Emerson leaves the problem of gift unresolved, Nietzsche provides an antidote, a non-reciprocal gift, to enable a human subject to remove his sense of indebtedness so as to regain his sovereignty. Nietzsche seems to affirm the positive value of plentitude and excess inherent in a gift since it can function as an antidote to the poison—a feeling of indebtedness in the recipients. In other words, the economy of a reciprocal gift on the side of Strauss and Baudrillard is based on a give-and-take principle, and usually the recipient is expected to give more in return; on the contrary, Nietzsche's idea of a non-reciprocal gift is more concerned with the genuine generosity of a giver who asks nothing in return because

of the plenteous and excessive nature in his gift. The giver, confident of his/her excessive strength or wealth, distributes them without suffering and asks nothing in return. That is, the giver is strong enough to endure the loss entailed by his generous giving. Likewise, the receiver is capable of forgetting the feeling of indebtedness and thus their sense of inferiority and vengeance can be dissolved by the excessive generosity of the giver.

Although Derrida is similar to Nietzsche in his understanding of “gift” as a nonreciprocal gift, these two theorists apparently approach Mauss’s concept in different ways. On Nietzsche’s part, he thinks the plentitude and excess inherent in a gift make both the giver and receiver forget the “giving” of the gift, whereas on Derrida’s part, both the giver and receiver must forget the presence of such a gift, or it will become a debt. As a deconstructionist, Derrida argues against the presence of a gift to deconstruct our inertial thinking that always has the presence of a thing prevail over its absence.²¹ In his opinions, there is much more for us to “see” if we can try the other way round. As far as a gift is concerned, Derrida renders the “aporia” of a gift a function to defy the time-honored significance of “presence” in the long tradition of the Western metaphysics. Recognizing and remembering the presence of a gift creates a sense of indebtedness in both donor and donee. Contrariwise, forgetting the gift’s presence will not give the generous giver any expectation of a more valuable reward from the recipient, and neither will it give the receiver any unbearable obligation to pay back the favor. To forget means to affirm more positive value in the absence of a gift. Also, to forget is healthier because the giver who remembers the gift-giving will not necessarily receive a greater reward as he wishes, and when that

²¹ In terms of presence or absence of a thing, Derrida gives us an interesting example. He maintains that the gift, like counterfeit money, retains its value only so long as it is not recognized and kept in memory. It demands that the gift be forgotten by both the donor and the donee; otherwise, it is a debt instead of a gift.

happens, resentment ensues. On the other hand, if a receiver needs to take an unbearable favor or gift from a “generous” giver, he will be continuously tormented by the guilty sense of indebtedness, and his unreimbursable debt might turn into a slave’s negative sense of resentment. Therefore, remembering or recognizing the gift-giving will make donor and donee easily fall prey to the unhealthy feeling of resentment. Any economic calculation of give-to-take-more as in an act of investment often results in unhappiness. To provide an affirmative remedy for the sick resentment, Derrida advises both donor and donee to forget the gift-giving and its ensuing obligation so that they will escape the economic calculation that governs their relation.

Bataille is the last thinker who also celebrates the idea of nonreciprocal gift. He is very significant in my overall project as he is a theorist as well as a novelist. This project is undertaken to read Bataille’s novels *The Story of Eye*, *Madame Edwardo*, and *My Mother* through the lens of non-reciprocal gift thinkers Emerson, Nietzsche, Derrida, and Bataille. As he notes in his *The Accursed Share*, Bataille compares a nonreciprocal gift to the sun, which dispenses solar energy without asking anything in return. In his opinions, the sun is the paradigmatic form of the gift because its gratuitous expenditure of solar energy is done not to produce any sense of indebtedness in its recipients, but to disinterestedly help the growth of plants on earth. Because of such disinterestedly gratuitous expenditure of solar power, the relation between the sun and the plants seems more intimate. Another kind of expenditure in Bataille’s argument is not done by a benevolent giver, but by an uncontrolled and frenzied giver who is aroused by his erotic desires to transgress and forget his obligation. In other words, eroticism breaks down the barriers that separate one from his sexual pleasure. If the obligation exists no more in one’s memory, a free and liberated supreme self-sovereignty will emerge in the process of erotic enjoyment.

The aforementioned arguments from two camps respectively build up to the concept of a reciprocal gift and a nonreciprocal gift. On the side of Strauss and Baudrillard, a reciprocal gift creates the donor's expectation of a greater reward and the donee's aggravating sense of indebtedness. The former often fails to harvest his ideal reward and the latter is usually unable to pay back his debt, which results in their resentment. Such sick will to power in a donor or donee does no good to the liberation of human sovereignty because both parties are bound in a reciprocal market economy, and they remember details in each act of transaction: Who is the donor and donee, and how much is the debt? This kind of memory about a reciprocal gift is often the source of resentment, and such remembrance usually makes the liberation of human sovereignty less likely.

On the side of Emerson, Nietzsche, Derrida, and Bataille, a nonreciprocal gift, on the contrary, makes both the donor and donee forget what he gives and what he takes. Thus, a reciprocal market economy has no place in such nonreciprocal relation between a donor and a donee. A generous donor simply has more to give; he does not have to calculate how much his investment will yield. And because of the donor's genuine generosity, the donee does not have to worry about how to return the favor. A nonreciprocal gift does not imprison the minds of a donor and a donee with the feelings of resentment. In other words, their human sovereignty will not be straightjacketed in the reciprocal economy. Such nonreciprocal gift theorists as Emerson, Nietzsche, Derrida, and Bataille significantly contribute to the liberation of human sovereignty. In this chapter, I will investigate the relation between the giving of a "non-reciprocal gift" and the creation of human sovereignty from my reading of Bataille's *The Story of Eye*, *Madame Edwardo*, and *My Mother*.

4.1. Reciprocal Gift: Levi Strauss's Women and Baudrillard's Exchange

4.1.1. Mauss's Inspiring Concept of Gift

To examine the issue, I choose to begin with a brief summary of Marcel Mauss's discussion of gift, as it provides the most useful point of departure for determining the values of reciprocal gifts. First of all, reciprocal gifts in primitive societies are intended for establishing friendship and alliances and denial of them is a declaration of war. Secondly, the reciprocal gifts are characterized by a generous yet agonistic destruction through which the giver not only crushes his rivals when they are ascending the social ladder but also earns themselves a convenient image of generosity. Finally, reciprocal gifts are obligatory rather than voluntarily spontaneous, and forgetting the obligation to give and repay may lead to a fatal tragedy.

In the examination of primitive societies, Mauss finds that the gift is elaborated in a context in which both its giving and repaying are obligated. In the archaic societies, what they exchange were not exclusively limited to goods or things with economic value; rather, they exchanged courtesies, entertainments, rituals, military assistance, women, children, dances and feasts (*The Gift* 3). The exchange was seemingly voluntary and spontaneous; however, it was in essence strictly obligatory. The system of reciprocal exchange in numerous primitive societies presupposed the mutual collaboration of the two moieties of the tribe. Mauss argues that failing to repay the giver with an obligated counter-gift means a disclaimer of friendship and alliance:

The obligation to give is no less important. If we understood this, we should also know how men came to exchange things with each other. We merely point out a few facts. To refuse to give, or to fail to invite, is —like refusing to accept— the equivalent of a declaration of war; it is a refusal of friendship and intercourse. Again, one gives because one is forced to do so, because the recipient has a sort of proprietary right over

everything which belongs to the donor. (*The Gift* 11)

According to Mauss, the reciprocal exchange in primitive times was prerequisite for establishing friendship and alliances, which obliged the recipient to repay by giving a comparable counter-gift in return. In order to lead us to a better understanding of reciprocity, Mauss compares the ritual of sacrifice to gift giving:

There has been a natural evolution. Among the first groups of beings with whom men must have made contracts were the spirits of the dead and the gods. They in fact are the real owners of the world's wealth. With them it was particularly necessary to exchange and particularly dangerous not to; but, on the other hand, with them exchange was easiest and safest.

Sacrificial destruction implies giving something that is to be repaid.

(*The Gift* 13-14)

The sacrificial ritual is not simply a display of wealth and unselfishness in which a man surrenders his possessions to gods. More profoundly, the ritual of sacrifice is performed by humans to ingratiate themselves with gods so that their alliance will keep the evil spirits or bad fortune away. In other words, sacrificing gifts to gods is no less than an act of buying peace.

This kind of sacrificial ritual only partially corresponds to Maussian model of the reciprocal exchange of a gift. When a more powerful donor gives his less powerful donee an unreciprocated gift, the reciprocity as Mauss argues is based on aggressive challenge and the establishment of hegemonic hierarchy; however, when the less powerful humans make sacrifice to his almighty gods, the reciprocity as I observe is established by the weaker humans to seek the invincible shelter of the stronger gods. In other words, whoever initiates the act of gift-giving will in the end set up a reciprocal relation, but how powerful the giver is determines whether it is aggressive (the stronger feeding on the weaker) or defensive (the weaker gaining

support from the stronger) reciprocity. In terms of reciprocity, sacrificial ritual complies with Maussian model of the reciprocal exchange of a gift. However, he only argues the gift-giving from the position of a powerful and seemingly generous donor. That creates a niche for me to fill. My finding is that if a weaker donor gives a stronger donee a gift, the reciprocity is defensive because the weaker donor wants to use the gift in exchange for the protection or support from his stronger ally. However, this kind of reciprocity still incurs the sense of resentment if the weaker donor fails to expect what he wants from his ally. As I have argued earlier, if the stronger donor does not get a comparable or even a more valuable counter-gift from his subordinate, he similarly feels the sense of resentment. Both defensive and aggressive reciprocity depends heavily on an expectation, and once the investment is not well rewarded, the donor, whether he is stronger or weaker, will suffer from the sense of resentment. In either case, it is not healthy because genuine generosity has everything to do with forgetting. A donor who forgets his act of gift-giving is healthier than anyone who remembers his own “generosity” and keeps a close eye on the profit his investment makes.

Apart from the significance of reciprocity, giving reciprocal gifts for Mauss is not only an act of generosity to win prestige but also an agonistic challenge to gain political or individual status. Mauss also brings the concept of expenditure to light when he observes a phenomenon called “*potlatch*” that took place among the pre-capitalist tribes. As Mauss puts it, “[n]owhere else is the prestige of an individual as closely bound up with expenditure, and with the duty of returning with interest gifts received in such a way that the creditor becomes the debtor” (*The Gift* 35). The hero in the *potlatch* system that permeates the pre-capitalist tribes is different from the one in the capitalist society in that he was willing to expend everything, but keep nothing. The rich man in the *potlatch* feast who shows off his wealth by destroying,

consuming, or giving away his possessions recklessly can earn the reputation of generosity. The gift exchange in the *potlatch* drew tribal chiefs into the tension of rivalry in which they humiliate or challenge each other. More profoundly, political and individual statuses can be publicly recognized through competitive destruction, consumption, and donation of their excessive wealth in the *potlatch* feast. They compete to ascend the social ladder. As Mauss argues, the “[p]rogress up the social ladder is made in this way not only for oneself but also for one’s family” (*The Gift* 35). A higher status, political or individual, is attainable only when one thinks nothing of his wealth and expends it lavishly. As a consequence, one needs to pit himself against his rival by destructing, consuming, and donating ever more wealth so that the other will seem weaker in such competition. In contrast with the accumulative capitalist market economy, this pre-capitalist *potlatch* is noted for its lavish expenditure of wealth. Therefore, during the pre-capitalist period of time, if one was desperate for immediate gain after his investment, he would be scornfully derided for his impotency to endure the loss. The transferrable wealth, according to Mauss, can be exchanged in two different spirits: aristocratic generosity (relation established because of the recipient’s debt) or immediate gain (relation broken due to the immediately cleared-off debt).

Thus in a system of this kind much wealth is continually being consumed and transferred. Such transfers may if desired be called exchange or even commerce or sale; but it is an aristocratic type of commerce characterized by etiquette and generosity; moreover, when it is carried out in a different spirit, for immediate gain, it is viewed with the greatest disdain.

(*The Gift* 36)

Alien to modes of production and exchange in the capitalist society, *potlatch* describes the rule of a gift giving in which expenditure is privileged over acquisition.

Also, foreign to the operations of bourgeois economies, the gift exchange stresses the role of loss rather than the imperative of conservation. By abandoning real wealth and destroying material constraints, they gain an access to the symbolic benefit- prestige and superiority.

In the primitive societies that Mauss examines, three obligations are involved in the potlatch system: giving, receiving, and repaying. According to him, neither of them is voluntary but compulsory, and forgetting the obligation to give (on the side of donor) and repay (on the side of donee) may result in a horrible tragedy. The holding of a potlatch feast is never a charitable act that is intended to generously help the poor tribes, but more like an inauguration during which the authoritative status of the host can be recognized by his invited guests. The function of such potlatch feast is significant for it demonstrates the host's incomparable wealth and makes his status unquestionable among the tribes. In front of his guests, the host shows off his fortune by destroying his possessions, and such a gesture is used to show his profuse wealth, disgrace and gain recognition from his invited guests. The political meaning of the potlatch feast is further revealed by Mauss:

This is the essence of potlatch. A chief must give a potlatch for himself, his son, his son-in-law or daughter and for the dead. He can keep his authority in his tribe, village and family, and maintain his position with the chiefs inside and outside his nation, only if he can prove that he is favourably regarded by the spirits, that he possess fortune and that he is possessed by it. The only way to demonstrate his fortune is by expending it to the humiliation of others, by putting them in the shadow of his name.

(The Gift 38)

Any chief who is unable to give a *potlatch* feast will not get any recognition from other tribes as a generous and powerful host, and his failure of establishing authority

will also make his offspring miserable. Mauss illustrates this point with the Tsimshian myth, among which the Little Otter story gives us the moral that forgetting the obligation to invite is bound to bring about fatal tragedy. After getting married, a princess who moved to live with her husband in another Tsimshian village gave birth to the Little Otter. One day she returned with her child to the village of her father, a chief in this village. The Little Otter was a good fish catcher. During this time the chief introduced his grandson to everyone in the *potlatch* feast and solicited them not to kill his grandson if they saw him catching fish in his animal form. In addition, the chief told the invited guests that the served fish should be credited to his grandson. However, the chief forgot to invite one tribe; as a result, they were unable to recognize the Little Otter. At a time, a hunter of the uninvited tribe came across the Little Otter who happened to be catching seal at sea in his animal form. Not recognizing him, the hunter killed the Little Otter and took away his seal. From this story, Mauss argues that “[t]he potlatch—the distribution of goods—is the fundamental act of public recognition in all spheres, military, legal, economic and religious” (*The Gift* 39).

The obligation of giving is as important as the obligation of receiving. One is obliged to receive the gift or attend the potlatch feast because his refusal will be interpreted by the giver or host as the fear of indebtedness and an admission of defeat. In a modern capitalist society, the receiver of a gift usually shows his appreciation by praising the giver or the gift. However, in pre-capitalist tribes, accepting gifts is tantamount to taking up the gauntlet. It is because once the receiver receives the gift, he is obliged to pay back this favor with a comparable or even a more valuable counter-gift in order to prove that his own worth is no less than the giver's. The giving or taking of a gift becomes an agonistic challenge, rather than generous charity, between the giver and the receiver.

4.1.2. *Levi Strauss's Women*

Inspired by Mauss, Levi-Strauss provides the answer to the riddle of the incest by putting the structure of an institution such as marriage in the “gift-giving” movement in primitive times. As Levi-Strauss maintains in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*:

Given the marriage system of the Nambikwara, the immediate consequence of this innovation is that all the children of one group become the potential spouses of the children of the other group and vice versa. Thus a continuous transition exists from war to exchange, and from exchange to intermarriage, and the change of brides is merely the conclusion to an uninterrupted process of reciprocal gifts, which effects the transition from hostility to alliance, from anxiety to confidence, and from fear to friendship. (68)

A principle of generosity determines the movement of gift-exchange to a large measure. The father who would marry his daughter, or the brother who would marry his sister, would be like the owner of champagne, who would drink up his stock by himself without inviting any friends. The father and the brother give her away as a present; that is, they must share the wealth, their daughter or their sister with others under the rule of generosity. The concept of “generosity” dominates the system of exchanges, so the related rules are not for self-interest. In this sense, incest, the crime of self-interest, shows no respect for the reciprocal gift of marriage and thus prohibited. In Strauss's argument, a chaste woman as a reciprocal gift in institutionalized marriage seeks to establish friendship and alliance; as a consequence, it is dangerous and forbidden to stain the holy gift given to his ally.

4.1.3. Baudrillard's Symbolic Exchange

Baudrillard develops his thought of symbolic exchange by first criticizing Marx's concept of the exchange of values, and then drawing upon Mauss's idea of reciprocal gift. As a result, Baudrillard's thought of symbolic exchange is different from Bataille's concept of expenditure without return in that the former is reciprocal while the latter is nonreciprocal. However, Baudrillard's thought of the reciprocal symbolic exchange cannot be approached without exploring Marx's concept of the exchange of values first.

Marx compares labor to a father and the earth to a mother, and their consummation is the source of the use values and material wealth. For Marx, the energy discharged during consummation is for the purpose of production and reproduction. That is, labor-father and earth-mother make love and discharge their energy for reproductive end, not for festive pleasure. However, Baudrillard can hardly agree with Marx's concept of production and reproduction; therefore, he appeals to concepts like discharge, waste and sacrifice to correct Marx's theory. For Marx, the bodily discharge is solely for the reproductive sexuality; the body's powers are never gratuitously energized for enjoyment. Basically, sexual activities are of two distinctive natures—begetting children (reproductive end) and gaining festive enjoyment (sexual pleasure). As far as discharge is concerned, sexual energy is consumed for reproductive end on the side of Marx, but for festive pleasure on the side of Baudrillard.

In terms of his idea of festive pleasure, Baudrillard is indebted to his predecessor Bataille for the latter's theory of general economy. Both Bataille and Baudrillard emphasize that humans in a capitalist society who are confined in the prison of (re-)production know nothing about festive discharge for enjoyment. Both theorists throw a new light upon the concept of "expenditure" by introducing the ideas

of discharge, waste and sacrifice. However, they have different opinions about gift exchange. On Baudrillard's side, he argues for symbolic exchange. In a drastic contrast with Marx's idea of the exchange of values, Baudrillard's theory of symbolic exchange enables humans to acquire symbolic benefits like fame, love or status. His idea of gift exchange is reciprocal. However, on Bataille's side, he celebrates the concept of expenditure without return. Bataille uses eroticism to develop his theory of non-reciprocal expenditure; however, in Baudrillard's theory, the sexual energy is discharged for the reciprocal and symbolic exchange, whereas in Bataille's theory, the sexual energy is usually discharged not for any reciprocal return.

The discrepancy between Baudrillard and Bataille is noticeable when they respectively interpret Mauss's concept of sacrificial ritual as gift giving. For Bataille, sacrificial ritual is a destructive expenditure in which the thing sacrifices its usefulness and never comes to the world of utility. By observing the dying process of the sacrificed, man can experience petty death and set his becoming into motion. Death is a full stop of life. When faced with death, one expects nothing in return from his destructive and nonreciprocal expenditure. However, for Baudrillard, he finds that Bataille's non-reciprocal nature of the gift when used in the model of social exchange is highly disputable. To put it frankly, Baudrillard argues that, "the unilateral gift does not exist" ("WB" 61). He adds that "Bataille, having studied Aztec sacrificial practice should have know that it is necessary to challenge the gods through sacrifice in order that they respond with profusion" ("WB" 61). As I have mentioned earlier, Mauss compares sacrificial ritual to gift giving through which worshipers are able to obtain blessing and peace through unselfishly sacrificing their possessions to gods. In terms of sacrificial ritual as gift giving, Mauss and Baudrillard share the same idea that the sacrificial ritual is based on the reciprocal exchange because those who perform the ritual believe that the gods, challenged to repay, is sure to return something great in

exchange for something small.

4.2. Gift Shared by Emerson, Nietzsche, Derrida and Bataille

4.2.1. Emerson's Problematic Gift

In fact, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his essay "Gifts," argues that the unreciprocated gift, gifts too precious to be repaid, leaves the recipient feeling inferior and vengeful. Emerson's essay brings up a fundamental question that any analyses of the concept of the gift should focus on the asymmetrical relationship between the giver and receiver. The relationship is asymmetrical because the unreciprocated gift leads to the giver's superiority and domination and undermines the receiver's sovereignty. As Emerson puts it, "[y]ou cannot give anything to a magnanimous person. After you have served him, he at once puts you in debt by his magnanimity" (27). For Emerson, the unreciprocated gift is not so much a genuine generosity and hospitality as a debt which causes shame and humiliation. His another essay "Compensation," addressing the problem of calculation, begins by arguing against the conventional religious view that you will be appropriately compensated after life even if your virtue goes unrewarded in this life. Religious discourse like this is invented to help virtuous people deal with their resentment when they see the villains thrive while their own sacrifice gets no reward. It is the resentment that leads the religious discourse to create an appalling hell where the wicked are to be cast after death even though they prosper in this life. Similarly, an enchanting heaven is also created to comfort the virtuous who are tormented while they are alive. In other words, if the idea of the unreciprocated gift is replaced by the concept of the nonreciprocal gift, there is no need for such inventions as heaven and hell. According to Emerson, though the ideas of heaven and hell are also found in Buddhism, when it

comes to the relationship between the benefactor and the beneficiary, Buddhists view gifts as nonreciprocal. Emerson argues that Buddhists exemplify true generosity because the benefactor gives but asks nothing in return and the beneficiary receives without feeling indebted:

This giving is flat usurpation, and therefore when the beneficiary is ungrateful, as all beneficiaries hate all Timons, not at all considering the value of the gift, but looking back to the greater store it was taken from, I rather sympathize with the beneficiary, than with the anger of my lord Timon. For, the expectation of gratitude is mean, and is continually punished by the total insensibility of the obliged person. It is a great happiness to get off without injury and heart-burning, from one who has had the ill luck to be served by you. It is a very onerous business, this of being served, and the debtor naturally wishes to give you a slap. A golden text for these gentlemen is that which I so admire in the Buddhist, who never thanks, and says, "Do not flatter your benefactors." (*"Gifts"* 27)

In light of Emerson's argument, the benefactor feels no indignation when his generosity goes unrewarded; moreover, he is not hurt by the total insensibility and ingratitude of the beneficiary. For Emerson, the resentment is generated by the economic thought based on "calculation," which makes a gift a debt needing to pay off. Nonreciprocal gifts generate no such resentment.

4.2.2. Nietzsche's Excess

A few decades after Emerson, Friedrich Nietzsche echoed Emerson's thinking on the gift giving when he opened *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* with a reflecting on gift giving. When Zarathustra descends from his cave to join the human world, he has brought the gift to humanity. He tells mankind that he is like a bee which has gathered

too much honey. He is overfull and needs to seek out whom he can bring the gift of teaching. The hermit whom he meets along the way predicts that Zarathustra encounters people who are suspicious of the gifts he brings. Soon the situation changes, he quickly comes to stand in relation to his followers as a giver of gifts.

Why are they initially suspicious of the gifts? Neither the hermit nor Zarathustra gives readers the answer. The receivers' suspicion of gift giving can be interpreted as their being confined in a world where "generosity" does not exist. In *Nietzsche's French Legacy*, Alan D. Schrift argues that "[b]ut unlike his followers, Zarathustra knows the dangers involved in gift-giving; he knows that the gift is a *pharmakon*, for those who benefit from receiving the gifts often feel beholden to the one who gave to" (88-89). The gift is compared to a *pharmakon*, a metaphor of poison as explicated by Derrida. Seen in Schrift's perspective, the gift might be like a poison which does harm to human's mind inasmuch as great indebtedness would cause a feeling of inferiority and vengeance. To ease the feeling, Nietzsche seems to affirm the positive value of plentitude since it can function as an antidote to the poison – a feeling of indebtedness in the recipients. The giver, confident of his/her excessive strength or wealth, distributes them without suffering and asks nothing in return. That is, the giver is strong enough to endure the loss entailed by his generous giving. Likewise, the receiver is capable of forgetting the feeling of indebtedness and thus their sense of inferiority and vengeance can be dissolved by the excessive generosity of the giver. Zarathustra brings sufficient gifts for the receiver and his gifts are overflowing. In large measure, his generosity is an urge begotten by his plentitude rather than his pity. Schrift maintains that "Nietzsche envisions a society with a level of power sufficient to allow it to be merciful, that is, sufficient for it to allow its debts to go unpaid" (NFL 99). Nietzsche's association of the master's morality with gift giving is presented in *Beyond Good and Evil*. He argues:

The noble type of man experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval; it judges, “What is harmful to me is harmful in itself; it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is value-creating. Everything it knows as part of itself it honors; such a morality is self-glorification. In the foreground there is the feeling of fullness, a power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would give and bestow: the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but promoted more by an urge begotten by excess of power. (205)

Based on Nietzsche’s perspective, the noble man’s “generosity” is a spontaneous urge begotten by excess which is bound to overflow. That is, the plentitude of the noble man allows himself or herself to be indifferent to loss caused by their generous giving. In Volume II of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille’s account of the general economy is analogous to the concept of gift-giving celebrated by Nietzsche. The nobler, higher economy that Nietzsche sketches is closer to what Georges Bataille called a “general economy.” Nietzsche’s nobler economy is based on excess sufficient to squander its resources and to bear its loss. In this economy, gifts can be given without anticipation of return and debts can be forgiven without penalty and disgrace. A step further, superiority and dominance can no longer exist and human sovereignty can be achieved.

4.2.3. Derrida’s Poison

Although Derrida might agree with Nietzsche that “gift” is a nonreciprocal gift, these two theorists diverge from Maussian model of gift in the first place, and then further diverge from each other. On Nietzsche’s part, he argues that the “overflowing”

nature in the gift makes both the benefactor and the beneficiary oblivious of the giving of the gift. However, on Derrida's part, both the donor and donee must forget the "presence" of such a gift so that the gift will never be kept in memory, and recognized as an obligation or a debt. Derrida maintains in "The Time of the King":

The necessity of such a displacement is of the greatest interest. It offers us new resources of analysis, it alerts us to the traps of the would-be *gift* without debt, it activates our critical or ethical vigilance. It permits us always to say: "Careful, you think there is gift, dissymmetry, generosity, expenditure, or loss, but the circle of the debt, of exchange, or of symbolic equilibrium reconstitutes itself according to the laws of the unconscious; the 'generous' or 'grateful' consciousness is only the phenomenon of a calculation and the ruse of an economy. (131)

For Derrida, when a gift puts someone in debt, the gift is no more a gift, but "poison" ("TK" 128). According to him, "to give a gift" in French means "to give a blow" ("TK" 129). In this logic, the giving of a gift is no less than the hurting of its recipient. However, gift giving, as Derrida suggests, must avoid causing any sense of indebtedness so that it can remain a genuine gift, rather than the poisonous repression. There are three ways that can annul a genuine gift. First of all, calculation, as a ruse of economy, is intended for immediate or deferral restitution rather than a gratuitous generosity; therefore, a gift in one's calculation comes down to a debt. In addition to calculation, intention also sets in motion the process of annulling the genuine gift because it gives rise to an expectation of compensation rather than a gratuitous sacrifice. Lastly, "duration of time," if measured through monetary units, makes the gift annulled because it is grounded on economic thinking of time. When we say "spend" or "invest" time, it implies that we are thinking of time as money, and accordingly we expect to yield profits from such spending or investment. Derrida

argues that the giving of a gift must come about or happen in an instant to make up a genuine gift (“TK” 132). Therefore, to make a genuine gift possible, any intention or calculation taking place in duration of time must be effaced from memory.

Organ donation might lead us to a better understanding of what Derrida argues. A person who agrees to donate his organ to any of his beloved family members without any hesitation serves as a perfect illustration of Derrida’s genuine gift because any intention or calculation has fallen into oblivion in an instant. As far as the oblivion is concerned, Derrida argues in “The Time of the King”:

As donee or donor, the Other would keep, bind himself, obligate himself, indebt himself according to the law and the order of the symbolic, according to the figure of circulation, even as the conditions of the gift—forgetfulness, non-appearance, non-phenomenality, non-preconception, non-keeping—would have been fulfilled. (131)

To sum up, Derrida’s genuine gift must be given and taken without anyone being conscious of its transference. To be a gift, as Derrida suggests, neither the giver nor the receiver is aware of its existence as a gift. Besides, they tend to forget the gift after it is given away. In this sense, something qualifies as a gift only when it involves forgetting.

4.2.4. Bataille’s General Economy

The last theorist that argues for a nonreciprocal gift is Bataille. As he notes in his *The Accursed Share*, he compares a nonreciprocal gift to Marshall Plan, a program aimed to help the post-war Europe, whose collapse was due to insufficient capital and decreased productive capacity. For Bataille, Americans are like a chief giving away his wealth in a potlatch feast. The Marshall Plan bears a resemblance to a nonreciprocal gift because it involves generous expenditure, at least in principle,

without any thought of immediate gain and later reinstitution. Bataille argues that Soviet Communism is the opposite model of the Marshall Plan because the Soviet Industrial Plan inculcated the Soviets to devote all their labor to the accumulation of wealth in order to reinvest the wealth into the means of production:

Man as defined by the Hegelian idea is not an individual, but the state. The individual has died in it, has been absorbed into the higher reality and into the service of the state; in a wider sense, the “man of the state” is a sea into which flows the river of history. Insofar as he participates in the state, man leaves animal and individuality behind him: He is no longer separate from universal reality. Every isolable part of the world refers to the totality, but the supreme authority of the world state can only refer to itself. (*The Accursed Share* 151-152)

Bataille considers the Soviets the antithesis of the nonreciprocal gifts because they focus on production and accumulation and any possibility of gift-giving is thus eliminated. Besides, Soviet Communism discouraged individualism and dandyism because their close association with expenditure might be an obstacle to generating and accumulating more wealth through productive labor. Bataille rejects the Hegelian perspective that maintains individuality and animality should be completely subordinated to work and the State. As Allan Stoekl puts it in “Bataille, Gift-Giving, and the Cold War,” “[m]an is neither an animal nor individualist dandy; he is a pure worker. His being is nothing but work” (249). In Bataille’s view, the dandy is more than an idle person doing nothing; he is the paradigm of nonreciprocal gifts.

Despite the fact that the dandy does not work, he embodies the idea of expenditure, showcasing the gratuitous and drawing our attention to the excess. Bataille regards dandyism as a personal defiance against the State’s subordination of man to work.

Moreover, dandyism is a gospel of nonproductive gifts whose overflowing and

excessive nature does not cause any sense of indebtedness and resentment in recipients. Another nonreciprocal gift, as Bataille notes in his *The Accursed Share*, is the sun. The sun is the paradigmatic form of the nonreciprocal gift because it gratuitously provides the plants on earth with energy and helps them grow disinterestedly. Bataille also illustrates the idea of expenditure with eroticism. A philanthropic donor does not exemplify the idea of expenditure better than an uncontrolled and frenzied giver kindled by his or her erotic desire to the extent of forgetting his or her obligation. If obligation has slipped one's mind, there is no longer any inner repression. Therefore, a free and liberated supreme self-sovereignty can be regained in the process of erotic enjoyment.

4.3. The Principle of Loss

In his conclusion to *Eroticism*, Georges Bataille maintains that the supreme philosophical question coincides with the apex of eroticism (273). He remarks of his own project, "Talk about eroticism I shall, but as something beyond our present set of experiences . . ." (252). However, with the rise of capitalism, "our present set of experiences" gives way to the ethics of "work" intended for acquisitive accumulation. Bataille's erotic novels are not appreciated since his readers are always bombarded with the characters' sudden spasmodic excitement and filthy excrement. Such shocking orgasm is like an instinct which cannot be predicted, planned, or controlled. It can be argued that eroticism hampers work because there is no patience or postponement when the object of desire is already given. In stark contrast to eroticism, work in the context of capitalism requires planning, patience, and self-control. That is, people are required to endure pain inflicted on them and hold back their desire in order to reach their scheduled goal. For this reason, it comes no surprise that Bataille's

erotic novels are deemed to be weird and non-sense by readers who are preoccupied with the ethics of work. However, it is noted that the boredom work brings about would enhance people's erotic desire. Furthermore, compared to the women presented in the marketplace, the women Bataille characterizes in his novels are slender and their voices are thin. More importantly, they frequently have leisure time to engage themselves in expenditures. These characteristics are intended for "attraction" rather than production. That the horse or the ox is beautiful depends on its qualification for work; however, beauty for Bataille is never conformed to the ethics of work. In terms of rebirth, eroticism can be a form of rebirth because it defies the restrictions of the ethics of work which shapes our identity. Inspired by Bataille's eroticism, we come to appreciate beauty of being in vain. That the female libertines present their bodies as nonreciprocal gifts is proved to be a gesture of embracing the concept of being in vain. Their concern for others' pleasure is another illustration of their generosity. Moreover, their final deaths denote their unselfish sacrifice – a true generosity without asking something in return.

In a capitalist society, accumulative acquisition has replaced the principle of giving as the dominant way of thinking that affects every aspect of human existence. As a consequence, the virtue of "expenditure," generous gift giving, has been replaced by the market economy which is governed by rapacious acquisitive accumulation. It is noted that the women's body characterized as a nonreciprocal gift serves as a bomb which blows up the ethics of accumulation. On top of that, it renders the concept of inherited property (distribution) unstable. The hostility toward lewd women is attributed to their violation of the ethics of accumulation. Since such a woman might give birth to another man's children, her husband might experience an element of risk in passing on his accumulated wealth to another man's child. Provided that a man has promiscuous sex with women, he may still distribute his wealth to his offspring. In

this sense, the licentious woman is archenemy of the ethics of accumulation and distribution (inherited property) constructed by male marketplace. It is noted that the distribution carries a denotation of accumulation rather than expenditure. For a man, passing on wealth to his biological son is embraced as accumulation, whereas giving his money to others is deemed to be expenditures.

For Bataille, eroticism is an erotic experience in which the prohibition arrests us and we enjoy the experience of transgressing the taboo. It is a frenzy excitement that forces us to relinquish the constructed identity imposed on us by a homogenous society. In other words, eroticism is never a waste of energy but a liberating force which enables us to experience rebirth.

In a capitalist society whose economic system is founded upon production, acquisitive accumulation is an economic practice that most people take for granted as the rational way of doing things. Prior to the advent of the capitalist society, material wealth flew to rich men due to the fact that the rich provided protection or social leadership services. In addition, they were obliged to pay for spectacular collective expenditures such as festivals, spectacles and games. The obligation of the wealthy to pay for spectacular expenditures not only determined their social rank but also exemplified the virtue of generosity. In a sense, glory as well as nobility attributed to the wealthy was governed under the principle of “loss” rather than accumulation. Georges Bataille maintains that “[t]he decline of paganism led to a decline of the games and cults for which wealthy Romans were obliged to pay” (*Bataille* 175). According to Bataille, after coming to power, the bourgeois were convinced that the decline of the feudal society resulted from its practice of prodigality. In Bataille’s argument, the modern bourgeoisie is characterized by the wealthy people’s refusal of the obligation to pay for collective expenditures. In other words, they backed down from generous expenditures and reached to embrace the ethics of accumulative

acquisition. Bataille asserts that “[i]t has distinguished itself from the aristocracy through the fact that it has consented only to *spend for itself*, and within itself – in other words, by hiding its expenditures as much as possible from the eyes of the other classes” (Bataille 176). In terms of expenditures, bourgeois had their own modes of expenditures; however, their expenditures were intended to benefit their own interests rather than those of the public. In a sense, the bourgeois modes of expenditures were in conformity with their ethics of accumulation which aimed to annihilate the risk of greater expenditures. That is, the modes of expenditure taken on by the bourgeois were intended to attenuate or avoid the grandest expenditure, destructive social revolution. It is noted that the bourgeois made their efforts to ameliorate a lot of workers and gave them chances to elevate themselves from baseness. The expenditures taken on by the capitalists to assist the proletarians were not a true generosity; rather, they were acts of self-protection from revolution which is the grandest form of social expenditure. Bataille argues:

The hatred of expenditure is the *raison d’etre* and the justification for the bourgeoisie; it is at the same time the principle of its horrifying hypocrisy. A fundamental grievance of the bourgeois was the prodigality of feudal society and, after coming to power, they believe that, because of their habits of accumulation, they were capable of acceptably dominating the poor classes. (Bataille 176)

Through Bataille’s lens, the bourgeois modes of expenditures, were far from generosity but “hypocrisy” which aims to “dominate the poor classes.”

With the rise of capitalism and its ethics of accumulation, festive and unproductive expenditures have been marked as a taboo or reserved only for special occasions such as festivals, mortuary ceremonies and gambling. In other words, any activities that violate the principle of accumulation are condemned as acts of waste

and useless expenditures. However, these so-called wasteful and useless expenditures, as Bataille examines, are important social forces which create identification and intimacy. For example, as a form of expenditure the cult creates identification as gift-giving is a practice that enhances intimacy.

Georges Bataille asserts that “[c]ults require a bloody wasting of men and animals in sacrifice” (*Bataille* 170). In light of Bataille’s argument, as a form of expenditure cults violate the ethics of accumulation and thus are demonized by the capitalist society. However, identification of members in the cults can be achieved through the form of “expenditure” instead of accumulation. Analogous to cults, “sacrifice” is a mode of expenditure which enhances identification. The horrible crucifixion of Christ in which he was nailed to the cross reinforces the identification of his followers with God.

Gift-giving is a form of expenditure which aims to create intimacy between the giver and the receiver. It can be viewed as being two folds of expenditure since it entails the loss of both money and time. The giver “sacrifices” his or her precious time selecting an appropriate object for the recipient; that is, the former must give up their valuable time for the latter. The more sacrifice the giver makes, the more intimate feelings are aroused. However, the virtue of “expenditure,” generous gift-giving, has been eroded and replaced by the market economy oriented towards rapacious acquisitive accumulation. Therefore, the intimacy between humans has gradually been replaced by indifference. Bataille maintains that “everything that was generous, orgiastic and excessive has disappeared” (*Bataille* 175). The ethics of acquisition has become a net of rationality that humans are trapped within and cannot escape from. As a consequence, accumulative acquisition has replaced the principle of giving as the dominant way of thinking that affects every aspect of human existence. In *Minima Moralia* (1951), Theodor Adorno explores the decline of the principle of

gift-giving under modern capitalism. For Adorno, the intimacy that involves the donor giving himself or herself with the gift has disappeared when the capacity for giving is lost in people (42). When the donor gives a gift, he or she also gives himself or herself and this creates intimacy. However, people in capitalist societies tend to purchase mass-produced commodities as gifts. In order to create intimacy, the mass-produced commodities must be transformed into gifts because the former signifies “convenience” and the latter “sacrifice.” As a result, customers are apt to ask the clerk to wrap the gift with some decorations. In a sense, people in the capitalist society make their attempt to restore the capacity for giving through gift wrapping subconsciously. However, gift wrapping is in accord with the ethics of accumulation because it is subject to a time saving rationalization. In “‘Showing Them You Love Them’: Gift Giving and the Dialectic of Intimacy,” David Cheal maintains:

Gift wrapping is an act of some importance in an industrial capitalist society since it transforms commodity into gifts The disguise provided by a gift wrapping is only a temporary, and partial, solution to the problem of communicating relational significance by means of anonymous, mass-produced objects. The effectiveness of this solution becomes even more limited when the process of gift wrapping itself is subject to a time-saving rationalization. (101)

Gift giving is an extreme expenditure because it involves not only giving your money but also consuming your precious time. For Cheal, what makes gifts more valuable than purchased commodities is that the former are governed by loss. It can be argued that gift giving is constituted by the principle of expenditure and it is the principle of “loss” that makes the gift valuable. That is, it is the principle of “loss” rather than “saving” that brings about intimacy.

The following familiar story enables us to have a firm grip on gift-giving governed by

the principle of loss. In O. Henry's *The Gift of the Magi*, a man sells his watch to buy a comb for his beloved as a gift because his girlfriend has beautiful long hair.

However, at the same time, she cuts and sells her hair in order to purchase a pocket watch chain as a gift for his watch. It is the "sacrifice" that makes their gifts precious and enhances their intimacy. Using commodities as gifts, as Cheal suggests, is a "time-saving rationalization" which is subject to the ethics of accumulation. However, it does not enhance the intimacy between the giver and the receiver. It is the principle of "loss" that creates intimacy.

What differentiates gifts from commodities is the fact that the former is constituted by the principle of loss, whereas the latter is subject to the ethics of accumulation. In "Gifts," Ralph Waldo Emerson argues:

Fruits are acceptable gifts, because they are the flower of commodities, and admit of fantastic values being attached to them. If a man should send to me to come to a hundred miles to visit him, and should set before me a basket of fine summer-fruit, I should think there was some proportion between the labor and the reward. (25)

For Emerson, gifts are valuable because there is some proportion between the "labor and reward." In a sense, the farmers "labor" to grow fruit on their farm and the ripeness of "fine" fruit is the best "reward" for his sacrifice of labor. To make the fruit presentable as gifts, they have to spend time selecting the finest fruit and walking for hundreds miles to hand the gift to the receiver in person. For Emerson, a basket of fine summer-fruit is a valuable gift because it involves the giver's considerable loss of time and energy. Emerson adds that "[r]ings and other jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only thing is portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me" ("Gifts" 27). For Emerson, sacrifice is the best gift. One deeper thought ensues. The function of gifts is secondary. Based on the story by O. Henry about the couple

who exchanged precious gifts, it may be noted that the usefulness or the properness of gifts does not enhance their value. The watch chain the woman bought for her beloved was useless because her lover had sold his watch. However, both of them regarded the useless gifts as the most precious ones they had ever received because the sacrifice made by the giver was considered the most valuable gift. On the contrary, Gary Shaprio misinterprets Emerson's gift by focusing on the function of gifts. In

Alcyone: Nietzsche on Gifts, Noise, and Women, Gary Shaprio argues:

For Emerson both giving and receiving entail risks and are capable of multiple forms of perversion and degradation. Giving itself is degraded when one substitutes a commodity expressly designed to be given for the true gift. Emerson admonishes us that "Rings and other jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me." (25)

His misinterpretation was due to his ignorance of the fact that gift giving is governed by the principle of loss. For Shaprio, some violence and degradation has been done if the giver fails to interpret the character of the recipient properly with the gift.

However, violence and degradation also occur if the donor succeeds in accurately reading the heart of the donee who rejoices at the gift. The receiver may feel that his private space has been invaded and his very joy at the gift will confirm the donor's interpretation of the receiver true desire. For Shaprio, gift giving is a hermeneutical project which aims to discover the genuine character of the recipient. Shaprio's interpretation of Emerson's gift reveals his failure to recognize the principle of "loss." The function of gifts and their lack of usefulness is peripheral because fantastic values are attached to them when they denote "sacrifice," a form of loss.

Georges Bataille hardly agrees with the concept of accumulative acquisition; therefore; he appeals to the concept of expenditure to reverse our rationale which has

been fashioned by the capitalist society. For this reason, he chooses eroticism as his weapon to challenge the classic economy that emphasizes production and accumulation. Based on Bataille's viewpoint, eroticism is a form of festive expenditure since it is characterized by discharge, nonproduction, and death. First of all, eroticism does not conserve energy but discharges it. That is, the mode of expenditure in eroticism is generally alien to modern bourgeois practices and values based on acquisitive accumulation. Secondly, erotic freedom goes against the ethics of production and reproduction which emphasizes the significance of the "conservation" of human life. Marx compares labor to a father and the Earth to a mother, and their consummation is the source of material wealth. For Marx, the energy discharged during consummation is for the purpose of production and reproduction. That is, labor-father and Earth-mother make love and discharge their energy for reproductive end, not for festive pleasure. For Marx, the bodily discharge is solely for the reproductive sexuality; the body's powers are never gratuitously energized for enjoyment. Basically, sexual activities are of distinctive natures – begetting children (reproductive end) and gaining festive enjoyment (sexual pleasure). In opposition to Bataille's view of discharge and sexual energy serving purposes associated with festive pleasure, it is Marx's view that these are consumed for reproductive ends. Moreover, eroticism is a form of expenditure because it runs counter to the ethics of "work" which is meant for production. That eroticism is detrimental to "work" is attributed to its analogy to animal immediacy. Bataille maintains:

In the immediacy of the animal impulse, the object of desire is already given: there is no voluntary patience or waiting, the patience, are always unavoidable and the possession of the object is not separate from the vehement desire, which cannot be contained. Think of the voracity of animals, as against the composure of a cook. (*Bataille 245*)

Based on Bataille's viewpoint, animal impulse demands "immediate" gratification. It is impatient and unable to wait when the object of desire is in view. In stark contrast to animal impulse, the expectation of the human mind takes shape in work. In the capitalist society human beings work with the expectation of future gains. They tolerate pain inflicted on them in order to reach their goals. In other words, their immediate desire has to be postponed or surrendered because succumbing to it will put their future in jeopardy. As we shall see, eroticism hampers "work" inasmuch as the former has affinity with animal immediacy. That is, work and anti-eroticism become designators which signify a successful transition from animal to human being. Most importantly, eroticism is correlated with death because discharge of the sexual excitement is analogous to the nature of excrement. Sexual emission and dejecta both come from the sexual parts; above all, their intolerable smell and repulsive putrefaction make people distressed at the inescapable visit of death upon them. The refrigerator used to store corpses in the mourning rites is meant to delay the intolerable look and smell of decomposing flesh. In opposition to decay corpses, the whitened bones without stench and decay are rendered venerable and thus become guardians or ancestors. However, life originates from putrefaction. For example, the fertility of land depends on the decomposition of plants and animals. Bataille argues that "life is a product of putrefaction, and it depends on both death and the dungheap" (*Bataille* 243). Bataille adds:

Changing from the perspectives of *restrictive* economy to those of *general* economy actually accomplishes a Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking – and of ethics. If a part of wealth (subject to a rough estimate) is doomed to destruction or at least to unproductive use without any possible profit, it is logical, even *inescapable*, to surrender commodities without return. (186)

Bataille draws on eroticism to develop his concept of non-reciprocal expenditure. Most profoundly, it is the women's body rather than men's that is presented as a non-reciprocal gift. This rationale is undertaken to investigate the function of the women's body presented as a non-reciprocal gift in Bataille's erotic novels. Attempts are made in the present study to illustrate how eroticism in Bataille's novels serves as a transgressive power to defy the ethics of accumulation fashioned by our homogeneous society.

4.4. Gifts in *Madame Edwarda* , *My Mother*, and *The Dead Man*

Emily Post, in her *Etiquette*, raises the issue of the woman as a gift given away by her father in marriage, and we find that the practice is still prevalent in a capitalist society. Given that the groom knows preferred etiquette, he will ask his future father-in-law for his daughter's hand; meanwhile, the bride's father agrees to deliver his daughter's hand. There is no parallel etiquette that the bride should abide by. That is, the groom is never thought of as a gift given away by his mother; therefore, the bride receives no "hand" from her future mother-in-law. In the society that Miss Post examines, the bride is not only a gift to give away but also the receiver of the marriage gifts. Finally, it is the bride, not her husband, who writes the thank-you notes to the gift givers in order to show her gratitude. In *The Gift*, Lewis Hyde holds that women take on a pivotal role in tending to the relationship of two families when they step into the domain of the family. The married woman is "expected to think and act based on the spirit of the gift" because it helps them consolidate her family and her husband's family. Lewis Hyde maintains:

A woman given in marriage in a modern, capitalist nation is not only a gift, then, she is actually expected to think and act in the spirit of the gift,

to become the incarnation and voice of the *hau*. By attending to relationship and muting her individualism, she is supposed to become the active link that will unify the two families. The groom is asked to do none of this labor. In this particular ceremony, at least, to deal with gifts—to receive them, to express the gratitude, to intuit and act upon their spirit—is a mark of the female gender. (*The Gift* 103)

For Lewis Hyde, the gift economy belongs to the domain of family in which the woman is the agent of maintaining the bond between two families through the ritual of gift exchange. In other words, affection as well as relation is the primary concern for women who devote themselves to unifying the two families. It is unlikely for them to act upon the market economy due to the fact that doing so does not establish relationships but undermine and sever them. In contrast, affection along with relationships is a secondary concern for a male dominated marketplace. Lewis Hyde argues that a man is willing to sacrifice attachment to advancement, affection to calculation to succeed in the marketplace (104). These divisions of commerce by gender are easily seen in the marketplace: women feel they must be manly, provided that they would like to be prosperous in the marketplace. Similarly, men feel they need masculinity in order to succeed in the marketplace. Lewis Hyde argues:

The great blues singer Big Bill Broonzy once wrote a song about that Jim Crow fact that white people call black men “boys,” regardless of their age (“I wonder when I’ll get to be called a man,/D’I have to wait’ll I be ninety-three” goes the refrain). In a society in which black men cannot enter the market as equals with white men, and in which being an actor in the market is associated with masculinity, a black is always a “boy” (unless he’s a thief: theft will make him a “bad man,” but a man nonetheless). (*The Gift* 105)

In a sense, the market place is characterized by masculinity which aims to “work” hard in order to “get” raised or promoted. It can be argued that masculinity conforms to the marketplace which is governed by the ethics of “work” whose targets are gains and accumulation. In contrast, the family domain is constituted by femininity which aims to establish relationships by “giving” gifts. It is noted that gift giving, a form of expenditure performed by women in the family domain, runs counter to the ethics of acquisitive accumulation established by men in the marketplace. More profoundly, the women’s body as a nonreciprocal gift is an extreme form of expenditure. A dissolute man who has promiscuous sex with numerous women is often characterized as being distinguished and admirable. In comparison, a woman of similar repute would be viewed as lewd because her licentiousness could not carry the same positive denotation. A lewd woman is bound to be depicted as demonic. What is worse, the woman committing adultery in novels ends up being put to death. This hostility toward lewd women is attributed to their violation of the ethics of accumulation. Since such a woman might give birth to another man’s children, her husband might experience an element of risk in passing on his accumulated wealth to another man’s child. Provided that a man has promiscuous sex with women, he may still distribute his wealth to his offspring. In this sense, the lewd woman is archenemy of the ethics of accumulation and distribution (inherited property) constructed by men in the marketplace. It is noted that the distribution carries a denotation of accumulation rather than expenditure. For a man, passing on wealth to his biological son is embraced as accumulation, whereas giving his money to others is deemed to be expenditures.

Madame Edwarda, a short erotic story written by Georges Bataille, is composed of three sections, each of which contains a procession and a conclusion. The first section involves the process of Entrance Rite in the mass, which was originally open

to the non-converted. In the novel, the procession takes place on the first stage: the erotic narrator is dying to find relief after his sexual desire was aroused by peeping at whores sneaking down the stairs to a urinal (*Madame Edwarda* 148). The narrator, wandering from bar to bar in the area of the rue St Denis, takes off his pants and holds his erected genitals:

Loneliness and the dark strung my drunken excitement tighter and tighter
I wanted to be laid as bare as was the night there in those empty streets:
I slipped off my pants and moved on, carrying them draped over my arm.
Numb, I coasted on a wave of overpowering freedom, I sensed that I'd
got bigger. In my hand I held my straight-risen sex. (*ME*148)

The procession clearly informs readers that the erotic narrator is a kind of celebrant who performs a rite. The lustful celebrant wore his nudity instead of vestments, holding his straighten-risen penis in place of a holy chalice. In fact, his congregation assembled when he entered into a bordello where he chose a beautiful whore as his God. No sooner had the two sat and indulged in a “sickly kiss” than they were besieged by a crowd. Then the celebrant sensed laughter from the mocking unbelievers. Edwarda declared herself to be God through the display of her genitals, which she then commanded the narrator to kiss in front of “all those people” (150). Then the narrator (Pierre Angelique) follows Edwarda as far as the Porte St Denis at which point Edwarda told him that she was “absent and empty,” which further convinced the narrator that she is indeed God. The nature of Edwarda’s absence is the indication that it is beyond any possible understanding. What the narrator wanted to do was track her down and make sense of her. When he finally caught up with her, she stroked his face in a fury with her closed fists. In the final procession, Edwarda stopped the cab and displayed herself nude to the driver. Afterwards, she mounted the cab driver and emitted water due to her orgasm.

It is noted that the narrator in Bataille's novel *Madame Edwarda* characterizes the female owner of the whorehouse as a man. The narrator tells readers that "I heard another voice, a woman's but mannish. She was a robust and handsome person, respectably got up. 'Well now, my children,' in an easy, deep tone, up you go.' The second in command of the house collected my money" (*ME* 150-51). In a male dominated marketplace, it is no surprise that women's body can be commodities intended for profits. The notes to *Madame Edwarda* indicate that Bataille first made his heroine say that "I am a brothel whore, but God is free." The narrator senses tumultuous noises of mocking customers who do not believe in the nonreciprocal gift the whore offers. Unselfish giving without asking for something in return does not exist in the market place because possession is the rule in the market place. For the visiting clients fashioned by market economy, the nonreciprocal gifts do not exist or they are only reserved for the family domain. The love of devoted parents for their children can be a good example to prove the existence of nonreciprocal gifts. When parents raise their children, they do not calculate the price they pay for their children. However, a woman's body as a nonreciprocal gift is marked as a taboo in the family domain. In Bataille's *My Mother*, the narrator's mother says:

It was when you were conceived. But as far as I am concerned your good-for-nothing father had no part, or particularly no part, in the story. I preferred being alone, I was alone in the woods, I was naked in the woods, I rode horseback, naked to the skin....I had foreboding, dreamt of girls or of fauns; I knew they would have got in my way. Your father got in my way. (*My Mother* 71)

In the story, the narrator's mother is eager to present her body as a nonreciprocal gift and thus her behavior is demonized as "debauchery." However, the narrator and his father are also preoccupied with the same desire while it is presented as a form of

rebirth. After his father passes away, the narrator's mother asks him to clean up his father's room. It is there that he discovers pictures in which his father is as lewd as his mother. Above all, he comes to realize that like his mother he is fascinated with giving his body away as a nonreciprocal gift. This epiphany enables him to develop his new being and get rid of the imposition of his constructed social being. In the story, both the narrator and his father are haunted with their anxiety of the heroine's debauchery since it rendered the inherited property unstable. The narrator's mother tells him that "my woolland child. Hold me tight; you issued from the foliage of the forest, from the damp forest dews that gave me joy, but your father—I didn't want him, I didn't want that, I was bad-tempered" (71). She adds that "Pierre, you are not his son, but the fruit of the torment that would possess me in the wild" (72). The narrator's father is troubled by the fact that he might give away their accumulated wealth to someone else rather than his offspring. It is obvious that the narrator's father is succumbed to the ethic of accumulation. However, inspired by his mother's debauchery, the narrator is aware that those so-called expenditures are important forces to experiencing rebirth.

In order to illustrate the principle of loss, Bataille presents the promiscuous sex that the heroine engaged in with many men with a scenario of a sacrificial ritual:

'Stick her, Pierrot,' the mistress said. They bustled around the victim. Hemmed in by these preparations, Marie let her head subside. The others stretched her out flat, spread her legs apart. She was breathing rapidly, her breathing was noisy. In its slow unfolding the scene recalled the slaughtering of a pig or the laying to rest of a god . . . The youth came on like a bull: the Count helped the pizzle enter. The victim thrashed and fought: a hand to hand combat, unbelievably better. The others watched dry-mouthed, astounded by this frenzy. . . At last, his back straining like a bow fully bent, the breathless boy let out a yell, foaming, Marie

answering his shot with the spasm of one dying. (*The Dead Man* 188)

It is noted that Bataille attempts to combine “sacrifice” with eroticism because by doing so he can enhance his readers’ identification with women’s lewdness.²² The heroine in Bataille’s *The Dead Man* is characterized as a lewd woman who is excessively indulgent in sexual pleasures because like a wild dog she has sex with anyone who wants her without hesitation. Above all, she asks nothing in return for her offering her body for free. In “Gifts without presents: Economics of “Experience” in Bataille and Heidegger,” Rebecca Comay asserts, “For at this level the relationship between “man” and “time” (or “Being”) would become the mutual extension of an excess rather than the measured reciprocity of a debit-credit exchange” (*Yale French Studies* 87). It can be argued that sacrifice is a form of expenditure which makes something “sacred” and it also creates “identification.” For example, the crucifixion and resurrection makes Christ sacred and creates his followers’ identification. Similarly, Bataille hopes to draw upon sacrifice to restore the sacredness of erotic debauchery.

4.5. Threshold Gifts for Rebirth in *Story of the Eye*

What constitutes eroticism? For Bataille, eroticism is an erotic experience in which the prohibition arrests us and we enjoy the experience of transgressing the taboo. It is a frenzy excitement that forces us to relinquish the constructed identity imposed on us by a homogenous society. It can be argued that eroticism can be defined as a force of rebirth which denotes an expenditure of our imposed identity. In this way, eroticism bears a resemblance to funeral gifts which are a type of threshold

²² In “Bataille, Conceiving Death,” Paul Hegarty argues, “ This linkage of the individual, through death, to others, to general economy . . . the embrace of death signals an economy of intersubjectivity” (*Paragraph: the Journal of the Modern Critical Theory Group* 175).

gifts. More profoundly, the funeral gifts are nonreciprocal gifts which untie the dead from all reciprocal claims in the mundane world. That is, death gifts help the dead release not from any particular station in life but from his or her entire social being. Similar to death gifts, eroticism in Bataille's novels serves as a non-reciprocal gift because it helps the erotic figure forget his or her social being forged by the reciprocal obligation.

In *The Gift*, Lewis Hyde asserts that funeral gifts can be characterized as threshold gifts which are given with a view to helping the soul of the deceased enter a new station of life. In other words, rather than bodily death being a final death, it is in fact a passage from one state to another. The deceased's family or relatives at the funeral ceremony would hand the gifts over the coffin to the poor and ask for nothing in return. In expectation of the gift, the poor would have gathered flowers to grace the coffin. Flowers were symbolic of rebirth, and they guided the dead toward new life. If the deceased could not or would not forget his social being constructed by the reciprocal obligation, he would become a restless soul which would in turn wander ceaselessly on earth. The dead would be restless if he or she wanted to return favor to their benefactors. Likewise, the dead would be disquieted if they wanted to take revenge on their enemies. The only way for the dead to be restful is to make them oblivious of all the reciprocal claims in the profane world.

Story of the Eye consists of several episodes, centered around the sexual passion existing between an unnamed male narrator and Simone, his primary female partner. Simone and the narrator first consummate their lust on a beach near their home, and involve Marcelle within their debauchery. The couple are exhibitionists, copulating within full view of Simone's house and her mother. During this second episode, Simone derives pleasure from inserting hard and soft boiled egg for her vaginal and anal stimulation, she also experiences considerable enjoyment from the

viscosity of various liquids. They met Sir Edmund in Spain. Simone, Sir Edmund and the narrator visit the Catholic church of San Seville. Simone aggressively seduces Don Aminado, a handsome Catholic priest, performing fellatio on him while Simone and the narrator have sex. Sir Edmund undertakes a blasphemous parody of the Catholic involving desecration of the bread and wine using Don Aminado's urine and semen before Simone strangles Don Aminado to death during his final orgasm.

In Bataille's *Story of the Eye*, "forgetting" the reciprocal obligation plays an important role in rebirth because it is presented as a perfect way to undo the social being. For the ecclesiastics, holy things are cardinal reminders for them to bear this obligation in mind. The chalice reminds the priest of the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ. In *Story of the Eye*, the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for human beings is proved a fraud.

The host, as you see, are nothing other than Christ's sperm in the form of small white biscuits. And as for the wine they put in the chalice, the ecclesiastics say it is the *blood* of Christ, but they are obviously mistaken. If they really thought it was the blood, they would use red wine, but since they employ only *white* wine, they are showing that at the bottom of their hearts they are quite aware that this is urine. (61-62)

The liquid in the sacred chalice is by all means "urine" rather than "the blood of Christ" because its color is white not red. In addition, he managed to convince readers that the small biscuits are made by Christ's sperm because of their white color. Prior to the execution of the ecclesiastic, the narrator ridiculed the clergyman by showing that urine was the holy wine they venerate. The debasement of the holy thing is not so much a blasphemy as a retroactive erasure of his identity as a clergyman. He owes nothing to Jesus Christ inasmuch as the latter's sacrifice is a complete sham. After the narrator's lucid and logical explanation, the priest remains unconvinced. He still believes that God will punish those who worship eroticism, and that his resistance to

eroticism will prove to be gloriously rewarded. However, the sexual molestation the erotic trinity makes the priest frantically excited to the extent that he completely forgets his identity as a clergyman.

And she struck his face again with the chalice, but at the same time she stripped naked before him and I finger-fucked her. Sir Edmund's gaze, fixed on the stunned eyes of the young cleric, was so imperious the thing went off with barely any hitch; Don Aminado nosily poured his urine into the chalice, which Simone held under this thick cock. (62)

Simone marched over to Don Aminado slamming the base of the chalice against his skull, which left him utterly dazed. Then she resumed sucking him, which provoked his ignoble rattles. (62) From the above statement, we can see that chalices serve as a vessel used to strike the priest's head, Don Aminado. It is clear that the logical explanation, striking, and sucking are used by Simone to help the priest "forget" his obligation as a priest. However, the priest is still preoccupied with martyrdom, hoping to return to Heaven to serve God. Sir Edmund, Simone's sexual partner, tells the priest that men who are hanged have stiff cocks. The instant their respiration is cut off, they ejaculate. The priest would experience the pleasure of being martyred while fucking Simone. The combination of sex and death is a gospel for the priest because it can protect the priest from the most unbearable and frightening of all thoughts: his own death. Furthermore, death can make him totally "forget" his obligation as a priest and enjoy the erotic desire completely. Bataille pointed out, "Death and the instant of divine intoxication merge when they both oppose those intensions of Good which are based on rational calculation. . . . they condition the instant which is always new" (*Literature and Evil* 24). At the end of the story, Don Aminado nosily pours his "urine" into the chalice, bashes the sacred chamber-pot against a wall and spurts his sperm in the ciborium. That is to say, he reaches a state of unconsciousness and in

doing so, forgets his obligation to the church. As a martyr sacrificed for eroticism, the priest is able to face martyrdom fearlessly because he dies in *jouissance*. Furthermore, he would not join the ranks of the restless dead wandering on earth due to his inability or unwillingness to give up his social being constructed by reciprocal obligation.

In terms of rebirth, eroticism can be a form of rebirth because it defies the restrictions of the ethics of work which shapes our identity. In *the Accursed Shared*, Bataille argues :

It is in work that the expectation takes shape. How, if I had not begun a project, a task, unsatisfying in itself, perhaps arduous, but whose result I look forward to, how could I continue, as I do, to anticipate the authentic being which I never am in the present time and which I place in the time to come? . . . In the immediacy of the animal impulse, the object of the desire is already given . . . Think of the voracity of animals, as against the composure of a cook. (83)

In *Story of the Eye*, the narrator said that “[i]ndeed, we virtually never stopped having sex” (55). He added that they did take any advantage and opportunities when they were out (25). Whenever Simone’s sexual desire was kindled, the narrator immediately satisfied her in certain ways. In *Story of the Eye*, Simone’s sexual desire was ignited by seeing the killing and they immediately copulate in a filthy toilet instead of finding themselves a clean place. Obviously, their animal desires are always met with immediate gratification without any postponement. It is like an instinct which cannot be predicted, planned, or controlled. That is, eroticism is antithetic to work because there is no patience when the object of desire is presented. However, planning, patience, and self-control are basic requirements when people are engaged in their work. It is imperative that they endure pain and hold back their desire in order to reach their scheduled goal.

It is noted that Bataille draws upon body shapes, leisure, frenzy excitement to fight against the ethics of work. The female body he characterized is slender and their voices are thin. More importantly, they are presented as those who have leisure time to indulge themselves in orgiastic expenditures. Above all, they frequently have a sudden spasmodic excitement without any reasons, which makes readers puzzled. IT can be argued that these characteristics are intended for attraction rather than production. That the horse or the ox is beautiful depends on its conformity with the ethics of work. However, beauty for Bataille goes against the ethics of work.

Conclusion

Confinement Generates and Enhances Desires

No matter; the point is always to set against the disorder of the animal world the essentially and unconditionally human: this mode is not without its resemblance to the English lady of Victorian days who affected to believe that the flesh and the animal urges did not really exist. Through-going social humanity cuts out the disorder of the senses altogether; it denies its own natural principle, it refuses to accept it as a fact and only admits the space of a clean and tidy house through which move worthy people at once naive and inviolable, tender and inaccessible. This symbol does not only indicate the boundaries that make the mother sacrosanct to the son, the daughter to the father.

(Death and Sensuality 217)

The afore-said anchors upon Bataille's major ideas of expenditure that diversifies into sacrifice, violence, sexuality, etc., all of which signals a defiant gesture to the idea of exchange and thus to capitalism. Besides expenditure, the essence of Bataille's ideas is that desires become rampant as long as restrictions or confinement become imposing. A similar say is held by Peter Gay, who, In *The Bourgeois Experience*, points out that the taboo of incest generates a wide variety of sexual discourses. It is believed that taboos serve to interdict desires rather than produce them. However, a variety of sexual scandals burst and sexual knowledge bloomed in the bourgeois society which had always cast a strict look at the havoc animal impulses might cause. Ironically, people in the bourgeois society were over fed with a lot of information about sexuality. Young girls could get tantalizing sexual information on the street or even in their boarding schools (*BE* 329). Official court proceedings recorded testimony regarding murder cases with sexual motives and dealt with clandestine love affairs (*BE* 330-331). Peter Gay argues:

But the acquisition of erotic information did not depend on seductive or

traumatic situations. Obviously, one did not need to be the victim of a rape, the sibling of a Flaubert, the child of a Lyman, to learn much about the body. The innocent discoveries, on public monuments, in the bathtub, at the barnyard, may have been less dramatic than the exciting encounters I have described, but they were also more consequential for the middle-class culture of the nineteenth century. (*BE* 335)

According to Peter Gay, pornography in the nineteenth century was written and sold not to impart sexual information but to arouse sexual excitement. Pornographers disturbed the bourgeois society which had managed to construct a clean and pure society. As Peter Gay maintains, “Rather, precisely like pornographers, though of course offering very different distortions, they drew a caricature of the prevalent bourgeois concerns with the mastery of passion and the segregation of clean from dirty thoughts” (*BE* 379). The bourgeois society employed “the doctrine of distance” to define the proper way to represent carnal beauty. Based on the doctrine, arts should not employ contemporary figures. They were allowed to paint or portray figures from mythology, religion or exotic places; therefore, “Figures remote in space or time or appearance could release sexual desires and overcome, or at least reduce, inhibitions against erotic fantasies” (392). A lustful face in Venus is allowed, but a lustful face in contemporary girls is forbidden. The bourgeois society wanted to make good use of remote space and remote times to drive sexuality away from their home. However, it turned out that sexual discourses and sexual scandals permeated and over-rode the whole society. The more the restrictive measures are taken, the more desires are provoked. Bataille’s theory that prohibitions generate desires and enhances them rings the bell; any attempt to interdict prohibitions will fail because it intensifies them.

For Bataille, eroticism is characterized by mutual interplay of prohibition and transgression. It is in this sense that transgression never seeks to subvert the

prohibition which is used to maintain social order. According to Bataille, eroticism serves as a perfect illustration of spiral relationship of prohibition and transgression. In order to ensure the development of civilization, humans duly observe the rules based on rationality. The rules are generally governed by taboos. However, people are not always subordinated to the rational calculations imposed on them. In this sense, transgression is a regenerative energy which prevents stagnation caused by the prohibition.

In a capitalist society, expenditure is an evil transgression because it violates the doctrine of accumulation. For Bataille, however, expenditure can be sacred and fascinating. The ritual of sacrifice has been deemed as the most extreme form of expenditures because it involves violent killing. While killing in ritual of sacrifice is horrible, it grants sacred aura to the sacrificed and elicits respect from spectators. In this sense, the ritual is intended to give sacred aura to their important resources so that younger generations would respect them instead of disregard them as something that is born to be wastefully consumed. Expenditures, such as danger, idleness and drunkenness share one thing in common. They fascinate humans because they give aura to their existence. These expenditures help humans unfetter the shackle of servile utility imposed by productive activities. We admire heroes when they can look dangers in the eye. Our adoration of these heroes stems from our identification with their persistent refusal of life of servitude. Another case in point is like after winning money through gambling or lottery, he or she would come up with plans of celebration which involve wasteful expenditures. For the winners, their exuberance stems from their eventual escape of suffocating servility in the drudgery of productive activity. That is, winning a great amount of money makes his dream of idleness a reality. His overwhelming joy is attributed to the approaching expenditures and idleness rather than accumulation.

For Bataille, erotic desire is a force which prevents us from degrading to animals which are under the sway of the productive activity. The beauty of animals is always related to their qualification for work. In other words, their beauty is inextricably related to their utility. For instance, a guide dog should renounce its sexual exuberance because sexual desire would distract its attention and thus undermines its utility. Humans vainly endeavor to deny our sexual exuberance because it inevitably entails the loss of energy which should be preserved for work. What is worse, it also undermines perceptive observation and judgment emphasized by the demand of work. Its unpredictable and uncontrolled nature keeps disrupting work which requires planning. However, humans are able to achieve self-sovereignty through their sexual exuberance because they can enjoy their sexual pleasures occasionally without considering the ethics of work. Bataille's ideas are inspiring to those who are workaholic in the capitalist society, yet they are at the same time devastating to those who are completely culturally constructed in the scenario of exchange, value, work ethics. Like many outstanding contemporary thinkers, Bataille's theory is registered with full measures of transgression. And if his transgression can be further explored, it will be his language usage—diction, syntax, imagery, metaphor, metonymy, etc., so that a more transgressive Bataille can be introduced.

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