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Ford Madox Ford's Modernist Trio: A Psychosocial Study of Suicidal Doppelgängers in *The Rash Act*

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As one of the most prolific writers of modernist fiction, Ford Madox Ford shared the period's fascination with suicide. Despite the complementary relationship between the theme of suicide and the double-motif, a concentrated analysis of its significance in Ford's portrayal of the modern world in *The Rash Act* (1933), his work which most directly focuses on the theme of suicide, has not, to date, been conducted. Accordingly, this article presents a systematic examination of the aforementioned relationship in *The Rash Act* by applying Anthony Giddens' psychosocial exploration of suicide in "A Typology of Suicide" (1966), which apart from offering an etiological analysis, serves to aptly contextualize the structuring device of suicidal doppelgängers in the modernist milieu of the novel. It will be argued that, through suicide, the protagonist strives to realize his ego-ideal, which is embodied by his double, oblivious to the fact, however, that it ironically entails the annihilation of the identity of the double (ego-ideal) himself, along with the symbolic destruction of the protagonist's own identity. By expunging the embodiment of the ego-ideal rather than the protagonist's undesirable ego, suicide thwarts the actualization of the protagonist's illusory rebirth. The upshot is a trio, in whose liminal space, suicide, the double-motif and the narrative of identity loss correspond to each other's contradictions and indeterminacy, which mirror Ford's literary conception of his age.

Keywords: Ford Madox Ford; *The Rash Act*; Anthony Giddens; suicide; double-motif; modernism

El trío modernista de Ford Madox Ford: Un estudio psicosocial de los doppelgänger suicidas en *The Rash Act*

Ford Madox Ford, uno de los escritores de ficción modernista más prolíficos, compartió la fascinación de la época por el suicidio. A pesar de la relación complementaria entre el tema del suicidio y el leit-motif del doble, no se ha realizado hasta la fecha un análisis exhaustivo de su significado en la descripción que hace Ford del mundo moderno en *The Rash Act* (1933), su obra más directamente centrada en el tema del suicidio. En consecuencia, este artículo presenta un examen sistemático de la relación antes mencionada en *The Rash Act* mediante la aplicación de la exploración psicosocial del suicidio de Anthony Giddens en “A Typology of Suicide” (1966), la cual, además de ofrecer un análisis etiológico, sirve para contextualizar acertadamente el recurso de los doppelgänger suicidas en el entorno modernista de la novela. Se argumenta que, a través del suicidio, el protagonista se esfuerza por realizar su ideal del yo, encarnado por su doble, sin darse cuenta sin embargo del hecho de que, irónicamente, esto implica la aniquilación de la identidad del propio doble (ideal del yo) a la vez que la destrucción simbólica de la propia identidad del protagonista. Al eliminar la encarnación del ideal del yo en lugar del ego no deseado del protagonista, el suicidio frustra la actualización del renacimiento ilusorio de este último. El resultado es un trío en cuyo espacio liminal, el suicidio, el doble y la narrativa de la pérdida de identidad se corresponden con las contradicciones e indeterminaciones de cada componente del trío, las cuales reflejan la concepción literaria que describe Ford de su época.

Palabras clave: Ford Madox Ford; *The Rash Act*; Anthony Giddens; suicidio; leit-motif del doble; modernismo

I. INTRODUCTION

“If you wanted to attempt suicide with subsequent change of identity, where else could you select better to do it than that landscape of stone pines and illusions?”

The Rash Act, 163

In his magisterial biography, Max Saunders notes that Ford Madox Ford, the prolific writer of more than seventy books, was often “suicidally depressed” between 1912 and the end of World War I (1996, 375). Saunders states that Ford’s suicidal fantasies constituted a “powerful lifelong impulse of his art” and, in fact, figured largely in

his literary work (65). As Andrew Bennett also points out, apart from his magnum opus *The Good Soldier* (1915), there are numerous references to suicide in Ford's oeuvre (2017, 57). The present study examines the theme of suicide in Ford's *The Rash Act* (1933), a lesser-known work that most strikingly probes suicide in a modernist context. *The Rash Act* portrays Henry Martin Aluin Smith, the son of a candy manufacturer, a World War I veteran and a failed writer, who plans to commit suicide. He then meets Hugh Monckton Allard Smith, an ostensibly successful and superior man whom Henry envies. However, Hugh turns out to be Henry's equally suicidal double. As suicidal doppelgängers, they keep crossing paths on their self-destructive quests until one of them literally and the other symbolically die. Adopting Anthony Giddens' psychosocial theory of suicide, which integrates Emile Durkheim's sociological account with Sigmund Freud's psychological conceptualization of suicide, the current article posits that suicide, coupled with the double-motif, is not merely a trope for heightening the disturbing effect of the novel but, rather, is especially attuned to Ford's portrayal of the crisis of modernity. As a cognate of death and suicide in psychoanalysis, the concept of doppelgängers in *The Rash Act* complements the inscrutable ambivalence of the act of suicide, both of which serve to echo and aggravate the elusiveness and contingency of modern identity. Accordingly, suicide and the double-motif meld into the structural device of suicidal doppelgängers in order to reflect the ambiguous, fragmentary and crisis-ridden nature of modern existence in *The Rash Act*. Bound up with what Bennett calls "modernist suicidality," Ford capitalizes on the theme of suicide as "a narratological black hole," around which the characters as well as the events of his narrative pivot and into which they are all sucked, so much so that the narrative is ultimately overwhelmed by it (Bennet 2017, 57). As will be discussed, the use of the ambivalent act of suicide as a structuring device in *The Rash Act* corresponds with the "epistemological uncertainty" and "radical contingency" that characterize not only Ford's novel but also modernism in general (57).

To identify the existing gap in the literary studies on the theme of suicide in Ford's oeuvre, particularly *The Rash Act*, a review of the current literature on the author's works would prove instrumental. One of the influential studies on the theme of suicide in twentieth-century English literature, in general, and Ford's work, in particular, is *Suicide Century: Literature and Suicide from James Joyce to David Foster Wallace* (2017) by Andrew Bennett. The chapter dedicated to Ford Madox Ford in *Suicide Century* explores the theme in *The Good Soldier* (1915), although it only refers to its appearance in *The Rash Act* in passing. Moreover, Bennett's argument is not concerned with a comprehensive and systematic examination of suicide, nor to the notion of the double-motif and what the combination of the two reveals about Ford's conception of modern existence. The same applies to other studies that address suicide in Ford's oeuvre. For example, in "*The Rash Act* and *Henry for Hugh*: A Fordian History of Self-Construction (Or: Where Is [M]other?)" (2004), Sara Haslam examines suicide in light of Durkheim's sociological analysis. Haslam's study does not, however, extend into a more in-depth

analysis of the significance of the double-motif nor of the psychological element of the ego-ideal *vis-à-vis* the theme of suicide in the novel. Similarly, in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle: *The Rash Act* and *Henry for Hugh*” (2002), David Ayres examines suicide as “an act of self-creation,” focusing on the Freudian undertones of suicide in *The Rash Act* and its sequel *Henry for Hugh*, to the exclusion of the sociological dimension of suicide (2002, 170). Furthermore, he does not offer a concentrated analysis of suicide in the narrative and its complementary relationship with the double-motif.¹ Although the more recent *Routledge Research Companion to Ford Madox Ford* (2021), edited by Sara Haslam et al., sheds new light on Ford’s literary world and includes *The Rash Act* in its explorations, sadly, a systematic examination of the theme of suicide and the role it plays, in tandem with the double, in the representation of Ford’s perception of modernism is still missing. As explained above, in view of the current gap, the present study aims to contribute to the ongoing discussions on Ford as a representative modernist writer by establishing a complementary relationship between suicide and the double-motif, which have hitherto been explored separately. To this end, the next section will examine Giddens’ typology of suicide and the following one will provide a brief survey of the double-motif in a bid to illustrate their compatibility with one another as well as their relevance to Ford’s novel.

2. ANTHONY GIDDENS: A PSYCHOSOCIAL TYPOLOGY OF SUICIDE

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed a paradigm shift in the systematic study of suicide, effectively breaking away from medical interpretations of suicide and rerouting the trajectory of suicidology toward psychological and sociological accounts of the act. Emile Durkheim’s *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897) transformed the understanding of the phenomenon from a private act into one that is deeply rooted in the social structure. Durkheim’s analysis dispenses with extra-social factors, such as psychological states (29), as the determinants of suicide, stressing instead the decisive role of “social life” (51). At the other extreme of modern suicidology resides the psychoanalytic theory of suicide propounded by Sigmund Freud, who introduces such concepts as the superego/ego-ideal and the death-drive in his analysis of suicide as a psychological phenomenon.² Among the post-Durkheimian theories of suicide, there are some attempts at reconciling the sociological and psychological aspects of suicide. For instance, Elwin H. Powell’s “Occupation, Status, and Suicide: Toward a Redefinition of Anomie” (1958) links suicidal behavior with the ability of the individual to “validate” (1958, 132) his or her self through “occupation” (133). Status activities such as occupation “determines the individual’s social status, which is [in turn] an index to his [*sic*] conceptual system.

¹ It must be noted that the present study treats *The Rash Act* as an independent work, and the events of its sequel *Henry for Hugh* (1934) are not relevant to the argument presented in this article.

² For further elaboration of these terms, see Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), “The Ego and the Id” (1923) and “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920).

The conceptual system is the source of anomie, which is a primary variable in suicide. Therefore, suicide is correlated with occupation” (133). Nevertheless, Powell’s theory is closer to Durkheim’s theory than Freud’s and remains rather limited. Recognition should also be made of Andrew F. Henry and James F. Short’s psychosocial theory of suicide discussed in *Suicide and Homicide* (1954) and Martin Gold’s theory of suicide proposed in “Suicide, Homicide, and the Socialization of Aggression” (1958), both of which focus on aggression as the prime determinant of suicide. Nevertheless, none of these psychosocial theories forges a link between psychological and sociological aspects in such a way as to analyze the relation between shame, ego-ideal and the social context. Simply put, the bridge that clinches the relationship between suicide and the double-motif embedded in a social context was not built by these theories.

It is Anthony Giddens who provides a bridge compatible with these dynamics. In his “A Typology of Suicide” (1966), Giddens sets out to synthesize the sociological and psychological theories of suicide by introducing a typology that relates Durkheim’s sociological theory to Freud’s psychological account. While Giddens notes the distinction Durkheim made between anomic and egoistic suicide, he foregrounds the extent of their imbrication by reiterating their common element, that is, “a low level of regulatory control over behavior.”³ Giddens posits that, in fact, the social norms enforce regulation by governing “the actual setting of goals” (1966, 278). Giddens considers that when the social norms fail to set clear goals or effect a “disparity between aspirations and the possibility of their implementations” (279), anomie increases, which would compromise social ties. Therefore, the variation of “normative integration” in a social system, namely anomie, is not entirely independent of “social integration,” that is, egoism. However, Giddens concludes that the psychological dimension of Durkheim’s structural typology is “fragmentary and inadequate” (279). Thus, for more insights into the psychology of suicide, Giddens moves on to Freud. Building on concepts in the repertoire of psychoanalytic theory, Giddens presents a psychological type that is particularly consistent with those cases of suicide that relate to failure and a sense of inferiority. Giddens co-opts the Freudian construct of the ego-ideal by drawing on Freud’s psychological equivalent in his characterization of “the frustrating object,” that is, an “unobtainable” ideal (282). Foregrounding the dialogic interaction between society and the human psyche, Giddens maintains that the socialization process affects the formation of the suicidal personality, in this case, the development of a persecutory ego-ideal, through its impact on family structure and the position of the individual in the social sphere (1971, 106).

³ In *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897), Durkheim divides suicide into four categories based on the lack or excess of the individual’s integration and of regulation in society: anomic, egoistic, altruistic and fatalistic. Anomic suicide occurs when the regulatory force of society is disturbed as a result of either “a sudden growth” or “an unexpected catastrophe” (1897, 207). Anomie or the state of “de-regulation” prevents society from regulating passions. Accordingly, nothing could give satisfaction on the quest for “an unattainable goal,” which could make the individual especially susceptible to suicide (214). Egoistic suicide is the corollary of “excessive individualism” or lack of integration into one’s social milieu (168).

Giddens follows the distinctions between the super-ego and ego-ideal drawn by Gerhart Piers and Milton Singer in *Shame and Guilt* (1953). Endorsing Piers and Singer's association of the super-ego and ego-ideal with, respectively, guilt and shame, Giddens adds that if guilt stems from a tension between super-ego and ego, a second major source of anxiety is the friction between "the goals and self-conception embodied in the ego-ideal" and "the actual performance of the ego," the corollary of which is a sense of shame that could drive the individual to the destruction of his/her self-identity in favor of a rebirth of an ego that is congruent with the ego-ideal (1966, 283). The fantasy of rebirth, which prompts the shame-ridden suicide, can be applied to Ford's novel, whose self-destructive protagonist is propelled by the same sense of inferiority and seeks to replace his "unsatisfactory ego-identity" (285) with a new one which is more in keeping with the demands of his ego-ideal, which is embodied by his double. It is the link that Giddens establishes between the sociological factors at play in suicide, such as anomie and egoism on the one hand and the psychological concept of the ego-ideal, on the other, that makes his typology particularly relevant to Ford's depiction of suicide along with the double-motif. Furthermore, the relationship between shame and ego-ideal informed by psychosocial determinants in the act of suicide means that Giddens' typology resonates strongly with Ford's suicidal doppelgängers in the novel, serving as it does as a matrix for the establishment of the connection between suicide and the double-motif at the same time as it helps contextualize the structural device of suicidal doppelgängers by offering a theoretical framework for its etiological examination.

Within the broader context of modernity and modernism, it must be noted that the link between "modernity and self-destruction" had become "overwhelming 'common sense'" by the late nineteenth century (Kushner 2009, 27). Walter Benjamin also posits that modernity must "stand under the sign of suicide, an act which seals a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical toward this will [...]. [Suicide] is *the* achievement of modernity—in the realm of the passions" (Benjamin 1938, 104; italics in the original). Thus, according to Bennett, Benjamin contends that "modernity (or 'modernism') encourages or entails suicide" (2017, 48). The disillusionment of World War I, furthermore, led modernist art to represent "a Western crisis, characterised by despair, hopelessness, paralysis, angst and a sense of meaninglessness shown on a spiritual, cultural and personal level" (Childs 2002, 185). As a "literature of crisis," modernist literature sought to limn "the disjointed, disintegrating and discordant" experience of modernity, while at the same time never losing touch with aesthetics (18). As Bennett notes, "radical contingency [...], non-teleology and non-linearity, dissonant epistemologies, hermeneutic obscurity, and characterological inconsistency" characterize modernist fiction, all of which make the fundamentally ambivalent act of suicide, which at once asserts and annihilates identity and meaning, especially pertinent to the spirit of the age (2017, 57-58). For this reason, then, suicide, in a sense, becomes "*the* act of modernity," from which suicide "proceeds" and which it, nevertheless, "systematically displaces," as suicide disguises modernity's insuperable indeterminacy

in its own ambivalence (61; italics in the original). In fact, Henry Martin in *The Rash Act* also complains that whereas “resolution was the note of the nineteenth [century], mental confusion [is that] of the twentieth [century]” (30). Bennet points out that it is in modernism,

in the writing of Ibsen, James, Hardy, Conrad, Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence, Bowen, Faulkner, Beckett, and of course Ford himself—that suicide, suicide ideation, and suicidality become visible [...] as an act and a thought in refracted, displaced, and cognitively and conceptually shattered ways (61).

In other words, modernist writers’ fascination with suicide, as an inscrutable mystery with no “fixed meaning” (Brown 2001, 221), echoes their obsessive preoccupation with the epistemological uncertainty and structural precariousness pervasive in the modern world. Suicide, as a consequence, offers a productive forum for the reflection of “narrative and hermeneutic undecidability” characteristic of modernist literature (Bennett 2017, 23). In *The Rash Act*, Ford explicitly depicts the corresponding dual, paradoxical and displacing nature of suicide through the structuring device of suicidal doppelgängers, which will be further discussed in the following sections.

3. THE DOUBLE-MOTIF

As Dimitris Vardoulakis notes, the “effective presence” of the doppelgänger “is not reducible to any pragmatic context nor to any single historical narrative” (2010, 9). The doppelgänger complicates the essentialization of the notion of the boundary because it is “an interrogation of the limit and [concurrently] on the limit—its interruptive power consists in the necessity of the limit as well as its equally necessary delimitation or transgression” (10). Thus, given its liminal ontological structure, the double-motif is not “framed by an absolute beginning or an absolute end” (9). Consciousness of death and the ensuing apprehension about its threat to humankind’s “primitive narcissism” and “wish for immortality” (Rank 1914, 84) transformed its meaning from “a symbol of eternal life in the primitive” into “the messenger of death” in the modern (86). In “The ‘Uncanny’” (Freud 1919), drawing on Otto Rank’s account of the evolution of the double-motif, Freud maintains that the new meaning of the double-motif is interlinked with the formation of a special agency, namely the super-ego, which is capable of treating the rest of the ego as a “dissociated” object (1919, 235). In addition to this repressive agency, Freud incorporates in the idea of the double “all the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all the strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed” (236). In other words, the ego-ideal also feeds into the idea of mirroring duplicity in Freud’s interpretation. In tune with Freud’s argument, Rank forges the link between suicide and the double by adding that an awareness of guilt, which has various sources such as particular acts

that are projected “upon another ego, a double,” or a more general sense of guilt that is informed by the individual’s inadequate self-fulfillment, span the distance between the ego-ideal and “the attained reality” and can spur the subject on to extreme forms of self-punishment, including suicide (1914, 76-77).

In the twentieth-century context, the advent of a wave of radical challenges mounted against traditional epistemological and ontological assumptions, rapid technological advances and the devastating experience of a world war followed by another one, which transformed the very social fabric of the modern world, rendered the modern self “frail, brittle, fractured, [and] fragmented” (Giddens 1991, 169). In a similar vein, what Andrew Webber refers to as the “non-progressive” (1996, 5-6) and Vardoulakis calls the “non-teleological” dialectic (2010, 42) of the *doppelgänger* proved to be a calculated device for the representation of fragmentary modern existence and its manifestation in what Bennett terms the “non-teleology and non-linearity, dissonant epistemologies, hermeneutic obscurity, and characterological inconsistency” of modernist literature (2017, 57-58). As Giddens notes, “[s]elf-identity becomes problematic in modernity in a way which contrasts with self-society relations in more traditional contexts,” which is “a situation of loss,” among other things (1991, 34). Bridget Chalk also argues that the disarticulation and loss of identity in modernism is a recurring motif, one manifestation of which is passport theft, which, by displacing the instrument for policing the exclusionary logic of fixed national identity during World War I, “leads to a loss of identity, the self, and eventually life” (2014, 117). In point of fact, this exact event transpires in *The Rash Act* and is especially germane to the morbid *doppelgänger* relationship between the two main characters. Similarly, the employment of the double-motif, with its suicidal undertones and resistance to definitive and coherent synthesis in *The Rash Act*, contributes to the disruptive fragmentation of the novel’s narrative, which, by remaining as elusively liminal and irreparably fractured as the *doppelgängers* themselves, reflects its *zeitgeist*. With a self-pronounced “historic” impulse (Stang 1986, 267), Ford’s *The Rash Act* portrays the crisis-ridden modern world through the structuring device of suicidal *doppelgängers*, which, as explained above, will be analyzed here through the prism of Giddens’ typology.

4. RUSHING TOWARD AN IDEAL DOUBLE: VOLATILE IDENTITY AND INFINITE DUALITY

The story of *The Rash Act* could be viewed as a doomed quest for identity in a collapsing world. This “quest for identity,” as Haslam also notes, is intertwined with the theme of doubles (2004, 123). From the moment Hugh Monckton is introduced, his uncanny resemblance to Henry Martin is pointed out, the former remarking nonchalantly to the latter: “Met you somewhere, haven’t I? Know your face. Because it’s damn like my own” (81). Furthermore, when Hugh introduces Henry to his chauffeur in a hotel room, their uncanny resemblance astonishes the man, who responds: “Your cousin,

sir [...]. No difficulty in recognizing ‘im. The spitting image of you, sir’ (81). Even after Henry’s suicide attempt, Hugh’s consummated suicide and the ensuing identity exchange, M. Lamoriciere, a real-estate agent, mistakenly identifies Henry as Hugh in the latter’s passport photograph (138). Apart from their physical likeness, the narrator also notes that they had both “undergone identical trimmings and parings [and] [...] had probably sat under the same manicurists, barbers, tailors, tutors and preachers” (36). In addition to these similarities, the first letters of their first names and middle names are the same, as is their final surname, Smith. The volatility, ambiguity and dissolution of identity consequent on the double-motif are also foregrounded by the narrator’s remark that Henry had “a vague idea” of what he would look like to other people, although, in fact, he would probably not recognize himself if he met himself in the street, whereas “if he met that other fellow he might very well imagine it was himself he was meeting” (36). Furthermore, Henry’s encounter with Hugh is, in effect, “the uncanny harbinger of death,” which is characteristic of the double-motif (Freud 1919, 235). Unbeknown to each other, both are headed toward suicide, as Henry points to a sense of uncanny pursuit and ominous knowledge of his plan following Hugh’s morbid remark about the suitability of their names for tombstones (2004, 64). Their uncanny resemblance is completed when Henry receives a forceful blow on his right temple from the iron-tipped yard of his boat during his suicide attempt. The resulting scar will match the similar, yet more heroic, scar on Hugh’s right temple received from a cavalry saber during combat. Accordingly, the two characters have virtually all the characteristics that qualify them as doubles. Nevertheless, in accordance with Freud’s and Rank’s analyses of the double-motif discussed earlier, the mortal encounter between Henry and Hugh as almost indistinguishable doubles is accompanied by a sense of shame or inferiority that registers the gap between the ego-ideal and the reality attained by the ego. Henry’s feelings of shame and inferiority in the presence of his double are, indeed, mentioned many times in the narrative. He regards himself as a failure in almost everything: his war experience, family relations, relationships with women and even his writing career. During his meeting with Hugh, Henry simultaneously makes “two disastrous discoveries” about his life: one is his failure as a writer and the other his failure in marriage (34-35). Furthermore, Hugh is referred to as a war hero, who in having “saved La France” (135) received a permanent head injury, while Henry thinks of himself as a war failure and an “ineffectual” person (36), who is always saddled with “ignominious” jobs (37) both in and out of the army. It is worth noting here that concepts of masculinity can “both shape and [be] shaped by war” (Fell 2007, 55). As Trudi Tate notes, “[t]he First World War was not simply a ‘crisis’ of masculinity; rather, it made visible—and intensified—differences *within* masculinity in this period. These differences were at once bodily, historical, and imaginary” (2013, 109; italics in the original). Therefore, apart from other factors, which will be discussed in detail in the following section, some notion of ‘military masculinity,’ to which Henry failed to measure up, aggravates his sense of inferiority.

As the story progresses, Henry's wish to become "that accomplished and elegant fellow" (i.e., Hugh) intensifies (50). Hugh seems to own everything that Henry hankers after. He is financially very successful in the family business: Monckton aero-engines. As a war hero and a successful man, he enjoys high social status. Furthermore, he can be with whichever woman he chooses and can win her back even if he loses her (68). Therefore, Henry seeks to fight "the curse of ineffectiveness" (50) by attaining the identity that embodies his ego-ideal, namely Hugh. The fluidity feeding into the concept of the self as a consequence of both confused identities and obscure duality, as they are still two individuals, is informed by the protagonist's multiple references to his unrealized potential in comparison to his ideal double. Watching Hugh at the bar, Henry thinks: "I dare say I dance as well as that fellow.' But he had never had such music" (33), implying that while he had potential, Henry has never had the chance to fulfill it. The protagonist even goes so far as to admit to his double in agitation that he is not himself (93), from which it could be inferred that he is not who he wants to be. Consequently, in accordance with Freud's analysis of the relationship between doubles, Hugh represents for Henry "all the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all the strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed" (1919, 236). As is acknowledged in the narrative, Henry "wanted to be someone else: but that was rather in the desire for salvation" (104). In other words, Henry deems suicide to be his only means of attaining salvation, which, to him, means a rebirth as his superior double.

5. PHANTASMATIC SELF-PRESERVATION: A FATALLY ABORTIVE METAMORPHOSIS IN A NARRATIVE OF IDENTITY LOSS

Henry's suicidal quest for identity is, from the outset, mired in the suicidogenic psychosocial matrix of the modern world, something which is explicitly mentioned in the narrative: "[a] hundred slowly converging things were forcing him over the edge of the boat. Not mere despair because you had lost a woman or a million dollars," but rather it is the entire "Crisis" of identity characteristic of his socio-historical milieu that pushes Henry over the edge (115). Indeed, what Ford refers to as the "Crisis" is part and parcel of the very ethos of modernism, which, in Herbert Read's terms, is a "devolution, some would say a dissolution" with a "catastrophic" character (59). Modernist literature goes beyond revolutionary change with its crisis-ridden urgency, which, as Peter Childs points out, echoes the "discontinuous and fragmented" nature of modern self and existence (2002, 51). This disruption of the modern world "was epitomised by the war and the literary responses to it" and, furthermore, "the breakdown of the war was reflected in an aesthetic of fragmentation in art" (Childs 2002, 163-64). Rob Hawkes has noted, in the same vein, that "[b]y overturning tradition and dogma in pursuit of reason and in the name of progress, modernity has opened all knowledge and all social practices up to forms of radical doubt and uncertainty." Indeed, he regards World War I

as “a watershed moment” that “precipitated a shift towards an acknowledgement of this alarming paradox” and “placed new pressures on the structures and forces which shape and stabilise narratives” (2012, 101-02). With respect to the historically reflective nature of the novel, Ford wrote in a short auto-critical article for *The Week-End Review*:

The Rash Act is the elaborately time-shifted story of a man driven to the very edge of suicide and almost over. The world-crisis has ruined him. The writer's main impulse was what may be called *historic*. He desired to tell that story *in an atmosphere of our own world* with the effects and echoes of the *Crisis* and machinery creeping in as nowadays it does for all of us (quoted in Stang 1986, 267; italics added).

Accordingly, and to bring Durkheim into the equation, the world of *The Rash Act* is a post-war crisis-ridden world, where there is an imbrication between anomie and egoism, which Durkheim considers “two different aspects of one social state” (1897, 251). Durkheim maintains that the regulative force of society is undermined when its collective equilibrium is “disturbed by some painful crisis” (213). Thus, when society fails to exercise its restrictive influence on individuals' unchecked aspirations and goals, the suicide rate rises. In such cases, individual fulfillment becomes impossible because ambition is constantly in excess of the achieved results as there is no deterrent warning to pause. As a result, no satisfaction can be gained in what Durkheim calls the “race for an unattainable goal” (214). In a world that has already experienced the “collective historical wound” of a devastating war (Lusty and Murphet 2014, 4), the crisis of the Great Depression acts as another entropic force disturbing the collective order. What the narrator of *The Rash Act* refers to as “Crisis” many times in the narrative corresponds to this disturbing force. Intimations of “society's insufficient presence in individuals” (Durkheim 1897, 219) in the two forms of anomie and egoism pervade the narrative.

The marked individuation in the modern world, which the narrator refers to as “a world that had lost glory,” hampers social integration and collective life (Ford 1933, 68). Apropos of religious affiliation, which, according to Durkheim, exerts preventative effects on individuals' suicidal tendencies by reinforcing social integration (1897, 125), the narrator explicitly states that Henry has “lost his faith by a process of painless extinction” (2004, 103). His religious apathy is also accompanied by a sense of inferiority and self-contempt, reflected in his view that it is unbelievable that “an august First Cause would take cognizance of his existence” (103). The connection between diminished religious affiliation and a subsequent weakening of the regulative force of society is also suggested by the remark that Henry “felt towards the supernatural economy much as he felt towards the efficient police of a good republic. They had their function, but they were nothing to him and he nothing to them” (104), implying that in Henry's view of the crisis-ridden modern world, the regulative forces of society, including religion, are radically undermined. Living as he does in an era that lacks empathy, Henry's writing career was doomed from the beginning by his blinkered

egoism, illustrated by the fact that he himself had started to think that “he knew nothing in the world about anything—or at least about life. People’s lives” (53). In such a context, no meaningful human connection can be formed.

The examination of the inter-character relationships in the novel reveals that virtually all of Henry’s interpersonal relationships lack depth and meaningful intimacy. His relationship with his father, a business magnate, is fraught with tension and defiance on Henry’s part and condescending, grim humor on the part of his father. Contemplating the impact of his death, Henry realizes that he does not have “any dear ones on earth” (102). He and his father have become “separated” and “could hardly have been more apart” (139). Moreover, despite some indication of Henry’s preference for his mother over his father, the possibility that there is a meaningful and loving relationship between Henry and his mother is undermined by his casual reference to his mother’s death: “Mother had died in... yes, in late 1915” (28). Apart from occasional attachments of “poor” to the word “mother” and his preference for her over his father, there is no sign of an intimate relationship between Henry and his mother. Living so far away from one another, Henry’s relationship with his siblings is also cold and distant. Pondering whether anyone “would be hurt at the news of his death,” Henry concludes that there is “no soul in the world whom [his death] would affect” (139). Furthermore, Henry’s marriage to a woman named Alice proves to be a failure: the narrative acknowledging that Henry’s “union with Alice had presented no aspect at all of romance” (73). Drawing on Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee (1989), Giddens notes that “[a]nyone who successfully ‘decouples’ from his or her previous spouse faces the task of establishing a ‘new sense of self’, a ‘new sense of identity’” (1991, 12) and, by extension, Giddens continues, “the ‘new sense of identity’ [...] required following divorce is an acute version of a process of ‘finding oneself’ which the social conditions of *modernity* enforce on all of us. This process is one of active intervention and *transformation*” (13; italics added). In other words, the need for a new sense of self-identity in the time of modernity is also reflected in Henry’s divorce and other interpersonal relationships. Indeed, none of Henry’s failed relationships with women appears to deeply affect him in a romantic way, and his relationships are all symbolically “childless” (74), as romance and its fruition did not correspond to him or his promiscuous days, and separation was thus inevitable. Nevertheless, in the anomic modern milieu, Henry’s sense of shame and inferiority proceed, in great measure, from his relationship with his father, who is one of the decisive factors in the formation of the protagonist’s over-demanding ego-ideal. As Giddens maintains, “generalised shame oriented techniques of socialisation” pave the way for the formation of an over-demanding ego-ideal (1966, 284). Even the presence of values that foster individualistic action in a specific sphere of social life, Giddens continues, can themselves occasion anomie since “the goals and objectives after which men strive are not separate from the stability and closeness of the social relationships in which they are involved” (293). In other words, he states, the responses of others function as a critical measure against which individuals “evaluate their attainments,

and in terms of which their identities are structured” (293). Similarly, Henry has constantly experienced feelings of inferiority and worthlessness under the scrutiny of society, particularly from his father, which has resulted in a “fear of contempt” that informs his increasingly persecutory ego-ideal (284).

His father’s condescending attitude toward Henry and his abilities has been present since the latter’s childhood. One of Henry’s earliest memories of his father is a symbolic image where his father “would be laughing at his attempts to wrap up tablets of Pisto-Brittle” (2004, 19).⁴ Years later, when, as a teenager, Henry informs him of his decision to become a writer, his father derisively replies that his ancestors would be ashamed of a “lousy ink-slinger” (31). Henry never seems to work out his contemptuous relationship with his father and conjectures that at the bottom of it there may be a “[d]etermination to break” Henry “to his will” (77). In other words, Henry must “conform to a phallic ideal” dictated by his father and society (Silverman 1992, 115). However, the crisis of modernity, one manifestation of which is World War I as a “site of masculine emotional trauma and corporeal fragmentation,” and Henry’s subsequent choice of method for self-realization, namely suicide, thwart the fulfillment of his structured fantasy (Lusty and Murphet 2014, 4). As pointed out by Giddens, one crucial way in which society affects the formation of a persecutory ego-ideal is through its impact on the family structure, which manifests itself in the demanding behavior of parents and subsequently contemptuous familial relationships with society giving rise to the development of a pathological ego-ideal through its impact on the social status of the individual (1971, 106). In this respect, apart from his father’s shame-inducing demeanor, Henry is also frustrated by society in general and his own social status. Henry constantly receives signals that he is regarded as an ineffectual person by society through the trivial, “ignominious” tasks that are assigned to him (37). Aside from his failed attempt at writing, his military service, which ends with his expulsion from the English Army and effectively highlights his inability to live up to some abstract notion of military masculinity, involves the trivial task of writing letters. Thus, his war experience paradoxically aggravated his crisis of masculinity because as a soldier, he was supposed to represent “a powerful social ideal of manhood” (Tate 2013, 108). Hugh, on the other hand, seemed, in Henry’s eyes, to fit this ideal. Furthermore, for the short amount of time that Henry is “coerced” into working in the family business by his father and Alice, he is given yet another minor position of “traveller for Pisto-Brittle” (73). Therefore, besides a failed marriage and flawed familial and social relationships, Henry fails to attain the secure socioeconomic position that would enable him to set the realizable goals that he considers essential to a purposeful life, which, in turn, would lead to the establishment of a meaningful connection between the protagonist and his social milieu.

⁴ Pisto-Brittle is the brand of the candy firm owned by Henry’s father, Mr. Smith.

Accordingly, as Giddens observes, the anomic society's failure to present the individual with well-defined goals that enable him to "relate himself to life" in a meaningful way contributes to the formation of an unattainable ego-ideal, which precipitates suicidal behavior (1966, 291). The absence of a regulative curb on individual aspirations, as well as shame-inducing parental behavior and socialization process, thus leads to the formation of Henry's pathological ego-ideal. Lacking an attainable goal or self-esteem, Henry simply sits watching his investments dwindling because of the crashing bonds of "Anacondas" during the Great Depression, which results in his bankruptcy. What leads to Henry's suicide attempt, however, is not mere bankruptcy since, if he wished, he could become Smith's Pisto-Brittle Junior; he could have had his father's money, which had remained practically unaffected by the crisis. Furthermore, numbed by his father's callousness and frustrated with the modern world, Henry realizes that he had always in fact known that "he would ultimately find himself where he now was" (31), and yet he has never adopted in earnest any practical measure to avert it. Thus, as he admits, he does not really "care" about money (66). As pointed out by William Hughes and Andrew Smith, suicide is a "significant and meaningful act" that seeks to "make a statement" (2019, 24). In contrast, Henry himself observes that it is "an act of despair," or more accurately "a confession of ineffectualness," yet it entails "resolution," which, in Henry's opinion, is missing in the modern world (30). As Childs notes, the emphasis of modernism on "muddle" and "obfuscation" underscores the elements of "doubt" and "uncertainty" that saturate many early-twentieth-century texts, in which "skepticism over knowledge [...], identity, morality, civilisation and communication seems to undermine the [...] Victorian certainties of the previous century" (2002, 195). Henry's engagement with the act of suicide makes a statement about his existence as a member of the Lost Generation in the war-torn world of modernism, where "the total loss of individual control over the conditions of life and death" predominates (Leed 1979, 128). That is why, having lived across two centuries, the suicidal Henry is torn between "resolution," which he attributes to the nineteenth century, and "mental confusion," which he regards, with self-contemptuous dismay, as being the note of the twentieth century (Ford 1933, 30). His demanding utilitarian measure of efficacy is whether he has been able to give "pleasure," an endeavor in which, he believes, he has never been successful (32). In the utilitarian modern world that looks "beyond good and evil," failing to please others is considered a sin, as well as a sign of ineffectuality (23). The sense of shame consequent upon ineffectuality is concerned, as Giddens notes, with "the overall tissue of self-identity," encroaching into "the narrative of self-identity" (1991, 67). The pathological ego-ideal disrupts the balance between, on the one hand, the current position and the attainments of the ego and, on the other, the demands and conception of self that are stipulated by the ego-ideal, through the imposition of unattainable and/or unspecified goals. The failing ego becomes susceptible to "shame anxiety" and is consistently "sensitive to 'validation' of [its] worth from the external world" (Giddens 1966, 283). Analogously, Henry's obsession with the impressions he leaves is a testament to his identity-related shame

anxiety. In spite of Henry's defective social relationships, he never stops worrying about people's judgments about and validation of his worth. Even just hours before his suicide attempt, he desperately wants people to think that he is "hard boiled. He slept in his bed before the rash act—as if nothing had happened.'... Or rather it might be extremely disagreeable if they said he had been in such a stew that he *badn't* slept" (2004, 117, italics in the original).

Henry is most acutely conscious of his sense of shame and inferiority in the presence of Hugh exactly because his "self-conception" embodied in his ego-ideal conflicts with "the actual performance" of his ego, a friction that engenders and aggravates shame anxiety (Giddens 1966, 283). In a dull and passionless world, Hugh, a gallant war hero, a romantic and a successful businessman, evinces intimations of a chivalrous spirit. Henry's cumulatively aggressive frustration as a result of the friction between his performance and his ego-ideal is, as Giddens would put it, "turned against the 'inadequate' ego identity" in a self-destructive act that represents an attempt to eradicate the unsatisfactory ego, which has fared badly in acquiring an identity adequate to the ego-ideal (1966, 284). The rash act, as Hugh also observes, is a "means of escape from your jolly old self" (Ford 1933, 62). The only time Henry truly feels like a hero and calls himself an author is right before his suicide attempt or his symbolic rebirth. Only through his transformative suicide would he descend "into a brilliantly illuminated stage" as a hero (100). The applause he would receive on account of his suicide would indicate that "he had given pleasure," thereby measuring up to his own gauge of human worth (116). The symbolically significant and metamorphic storm and the subsequent blow to his head bring about the "rocking" that his improperly "formed" character needed (104).⁵

The method of "escape" from self that Henry chooses is also of considerable significance. Water has a redemptively purifying force that can actualize Henry's cathartic rebirth. As soon as his cathartic cruise is over, "sunshine" (125) falls on the island and the day grows "brighter" (128), all suggesting the beginning of a new life. Subsequent to his physical modification through the scarring blow to his right temple, Henry's transformation into his ego-ideal is ostensibly consummated when, after disembarking, he finds Hugh lying dead. The fact that, when Henry examines the suicide note, his blood drips on Hugh's signature, which looks "extraordinarily like his own," symbolizes the sealing of the pact of their identity exchange (131). Exchanging their passports, Henry seemingly succeeds in actualizing and preserving his ego-ideal through his symbolic suicide. Henry, who once "tried to *lose* himself in imagining what it would be like if he became actually that fellow," effectively does become the fellow (35; italics added). As Chalk points out, the institution of the passport in the aftermath of World War I was a method of sustaining a fixed

⁵ Using the free indirect style of narration, which indistinguishably blends the voice of the impersonal third-person narrator with the character's introspection, the novel subtly reveals Henry's musings about how the fact that he had never been "rocked" as a baby was perhaps "why he and the boys born about then were now the Lost Generation. They probably needed rocking to form their characters" (2004, 104). The failure to properly form their characters is emblematic of the anomie pervading Henry's social milieu.

“national identity” (2014, 4). In reaction, she continues, modernist literature represented a “paradigmatic escape from the strictures of national identity,” thereby undermining the essentialist logic of national subjects (4, 67). Accordingly, Henry’s exchange of passports symbolically subverts the normative conception of a fixed, coherent self, just as his doppelgänger relationality with Hugh disrupts any notion of stable, distinctive identity. After the exchange of identities, the uncanny transformation feels “familiar” (Ford 1933, 134) to Henry because his symbolic suicide and the subsequent rebirth as his ego-ideal is an “escape from death” (181), or more precisely, a form of self-preservation.

Now that he has appropriated Hugh’s identity, Henry thinks he can “do things on an equally grand scale” as Hugh (141). The obscurity at the root of the concept of identity in the modern world of the novel, however, persists as almost all the characters around Henry mistake him for Hugh, and the ambiguity continues to penetrate into Henry’s own sense of self-identity. Henry starts to have “an extraordinary sense of Hugh Monckton” in so far as his speech starts to sound like Hugh’s (143). In a sort of “substituted memory,” he even goes so far as to see visions of the man who gave Hugh the blow in combat, “charging down on him [Henry himself, rather than Hugh] on a roan charger” (184). Henry wanted to be reborn and to preserve himself through a rebirth as his ego-ideal, but he forgets that he lives in a world of “black masses” (101), where identities are so obscure and flimsy that they can easily be appropriated, exchanged, confused and even lost. Therefore, no actual rebirth can occur for Henry, as indistinct duality and sustained fragmentation endure indefinitely in the modern world even after his double’s consummated suicide. The ambiguous statement in Hugh’s second letter that “Henry Martin had killed him,” could somehow imply that Henry’s symbolic suicide and his subsequent self-preservative rebirth was at the expense of his doppelgänger’s actual suicide, meaning that Henry had somehow killed Hugh in a typically fatal doppelgänger relationship. Identities are continually being indistinguishably mingled in the narrative. For example, when Henry praises Hugh before the Commissaire investigating the incident, the narrator acknowledges: “It was confusing. He could not collect whether he was speaking well of Hugh Monckton or of himself” (159). Later on, contemplating the uncanny affair, the narrator continues, “Henry Martin being dead... No Hugh Monckton! Being dead his property became no longer his” (197). The theme of blurred identities is also reflected in Henry’s loss of any distinguishing qualities that would mark him as an American, which was clinched by the passport theft: “He was a Dago. He had gone native. The Declaration of Independence no longer applied to him” (206). Henry complains of too much “hybridization” (210), and his early remark about feeling that he is not “all of one piece” endures throughout the narrative (30) and even intensifies when he reflects on the multiple Henry Martins in his head (181-82), insinuating the Freudian sort of fractured self that cannot be simply resolved into a unified whole. Feeling almost content with his new, yet illusory, identity, Henry muses on the volatility and loss of his sense of self: “Almost anywhere else in the world he might suddenly have to struggle to retain any [identity] at all. For,

if he was not Hugh Monckton what was he? Henry Martin would be buried” (172). The problem, however, lies in the paradoxical fact that Hugh’s identity is actually destroyed along with his self in the process of his consummated suicide, and, with the subsequent switching of their identities, Henry’s identity, too, is indefinitely lost, since it is believed that he is the one who has actually committed suicide. Henry and Hugh were, then, not so different after all, hence their doppelgänger relationality with its inherent obscurity. They were both the flawed “product[s] of the crisis,” though one admired the other (159). The pain of the reality behind the illusion, suggested by Henry’s constant headache, is a reminder that identity fragmentation and duality cannot be resolved into a definite synthesis with a single, well-defined identity as the fulfillment of one’s ego-ideal. The world of *The Rash Act* is a “black mass” of “mental confusion” (30), in which Henry becomes a twentieth-century Hamlet as he

stand[s] astride his leather case [just as his double had the night before his suicide] [...]. Like an actor playing Hamlet astride Ophelia’s grave. He was holding a skull. No, it was a leather case containing a hundred grand. He was just about to say: ‘Here, old bean...’ Instead of: ‘I did love thee once, Ophelia’ (143).

The leather case thus represents the skull that is simultaneously present and absent, signifying the death of Hugh Monckton and his obliterated identity along with him. As a *memento mori*, the leather case denotes Henry’s inevitably abortive attempt at a self-preservative rebirth and reminds him of its phantasmatic nature. The morbid association of the leather case marks the disintegration and loss of Henry’s identity along with the coveted identity of his double. As a product of the twentieth century, Henry fails to consummate his rebirth through suicide, which, as irresolute as it is “self-defeating,” is a paradoxical “act to end all action” (Bennett 2017, 16). In other words, Hamlet’s Renaissance irresolution here metamorphoses into a modernist irresolution characterized by an epistemological indeterminacy and identity dissolution that are echoed by the act of suicide and its complementary relationship with the double-motif. The leather case is also a morbid reminder of what Slavoj Žižek calls a symbolic death, whereby the normal binary between life and death is subverted, and one’s existence is transformed into “a living death” and “a deathly life” (Myers 2003, 73). Accordingly, the sustained fragmentation, fluid identities and indeterminacy ingrained in suicidal doubles come together to thwart the actualization of the protagonist’s strong urge to destroy the unsatisfactory ego in favor of an identity in accord with his ego-ideal, and he ultimately spirals into a narrative of identity loss, which is both symptomatic and constitutive of the modern world.

6. CONCLUSION

Drawing on Giddens’ psychosocial typology of suicide, which, in addition to offering an etiological analysis of suicide, accommodates the complementary link between suicide

and the double-motif, it has been demonstrated in this article that the two themes serve a vital function in the representation of the modernist context of *The Rash Act*. A general examination of the double-motif revealed its strong connection to the theme of death and suicide. The ambiguous doppelgänger relationality, with its inherent paradox of infinite duality and sustained indistinguishability, corresponds to the ambivalent nature of the act of suicide, both of which correlate with the textual fragmentation, epistemological indeterminacy and irresolution inherent in modernist literary discourse, as they subversively render the anchoring sense of self-identity inoperative. As a consequence, in *The Rash Act*, suicide and the double-motif work harmoniously to reflect the fragmentation, indeterminacy and elusiveness characteristic of the crisis-ridden modern existence. The etiological analysis of the protagonist's suicidal behavior in light of Giddens' typology indicates that an interplay of psychosocial factors leads to the formation of the protagonist's over-demanding ego-ideal. A pathological sense of shame is subsequently generated commensurate with the disjunction between the actual performance of the ego and the ego-ideal, which, in turn, precipitates suicidal behavior. As a result, the protagonist seeks to destroy the unsatisfactory ego-identity with the intention of achieving a rebirth that measures up to the demands of the ego-ideal. However, the rebirth of the protagonist in the guise of his ego-ideal double ironically entails the annihilation of his double's identity along with the symbolic elimination of the protagonist's own identity. By obliterating the very embodiment of the ego-ideal rather than simply eradicating the protagonist's unsatisfactory ego, suicide, as an inevitably abortive act with respect to its paradoxical purpose of simultaneously preserving and annihilating identity, in fact thwarts the realization of the protagonist's rebirth and thus begets a representative narrative of identity loss, which is the ineluctable corollary of the structuring device of suicidal doppelgängers. As such, Ford embeds suicidal doubles in a narrative of identity loss, not as a mere plot device, but rather, as a structuring component in a dynamic trio calibrated to reflect his literary conception of the crisis-ridden modern world, where infinite free play between fragmentation and indeterminacy predominates.

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