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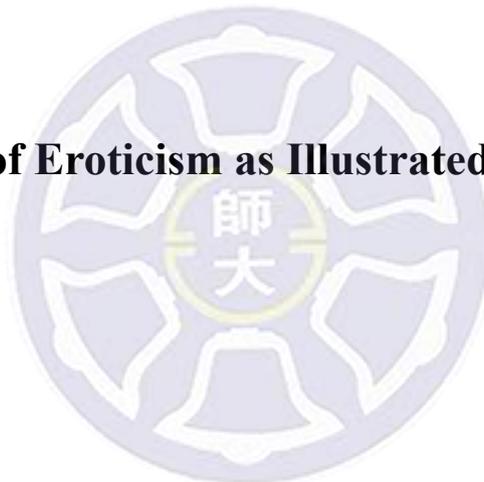
Master's Thesis

Department of English

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巴代伊《眼睛的故事》中演示的情色觀

Bataille's Notion of Eroticism as Illustrated in *Story of the Eye*



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摘要

本篇論文旨在以巴代伊於《情色論》中闡述的情色觀，來詮釋他的短篇小說《眼睛的故事》。在巴代伊眼中，情色是人「有意地踰越存在界限，而造成的不平衡」。這意味著故意迷失自我、故意不知輕重、與故意失去現實感。這些種種的故意失序，帶來失去生命的危險，但對巴代伊而言，卻導向一種他稱為「神聖接續」的境界。在這種境界中，人的存在融入了無始無垠的宇宙，有如水存在於水中。他終身所有的關懷與追求，都與之有關。

在第一章，我試圖用巴代伊「異質學」的概念，解釋《眼睛的故事》看似毫無章法的敘事手法，並探討《眼睛的故事》的情節如何演示自我意識、合宜舉止、現實感的全盤消融。在第二章，我根據《情色論》中，『情色與宗教系出同源』的說法，介紹巴代伊思想中「神聖接續」令人費解的雙重面相：崇高純潔，和汙穢下流。兩種層面都以各自的方式，通往巴代伊追求的「神聖接續」。我分別列舉宗教文獻中的記載和《眼睛的故事》情節，說明兩種層面的相似性。在第三章，我說明自我界限的消除，反而凸顯內在本有的神聖接續。

關鍵字：極限經驗、情色、神聖接續、異質學、排泄學、內在經驗、喬治·巴代伊、眼睛的故事、情色論



Abstract

This thesis intends to interpret Bataille's novella *Story of the Eye* with his notion of eroticism: "the disequilibrium in which a being consciously calls his own existence in question" (*Eroticism* 31). This questioning involves a general sense of loss, including the loss of the sense of ego, the sense of propriety, and that of reality. These losses endanger a being's existence, but they also promise a sacred state which Bataille terms as *la continuité de l'être* ("continuity of being"). In this continuity a being is emerged in "the universal flow of all that is" like water in water.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. In Chapter One, I explain how *Story of the Eye* manifests the loosening of the sense of ego, propriety, and reality, with Bataille's notion of heterology. In Chapter Two, I introduce the dualistic facets of *la continuité de l'être* — the elevated and the defiled. Both facets bring forward sacred continuity. I will support Bataille's assertion that "religious and erotic passions are of one origin" by enumerating evidences from religious documents and scenes of *Story of the Eye*. In Chapter Three, I explain the nullification of ego as the way toward *la continuité de l'être* which is immanent for a being.

Key words: eroticism, *l'erotisme*, *la continuité de l'être*, heterology, scatology, inner experience, limit-experience, immanence, Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, *Histoire de l'oeil*

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I still cannot believe I have finished this thesis. The whole task of composing it has been like surpassing an insurmountable mountain from the very beginning to the very end. Too many times I thought there is nothing more for me to continue writing, and that I will either give up or die. It is with the aids from many of my beloved people that the completion of this thesis becomes possible.

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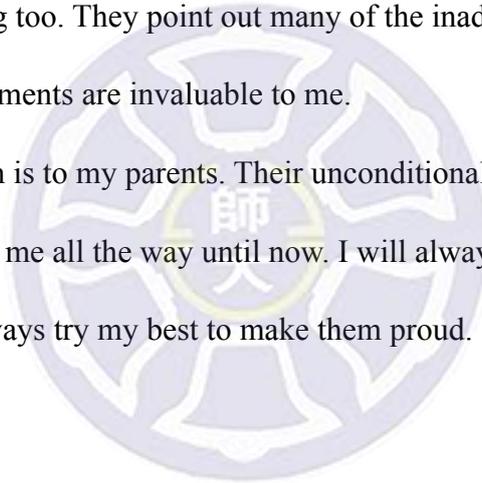
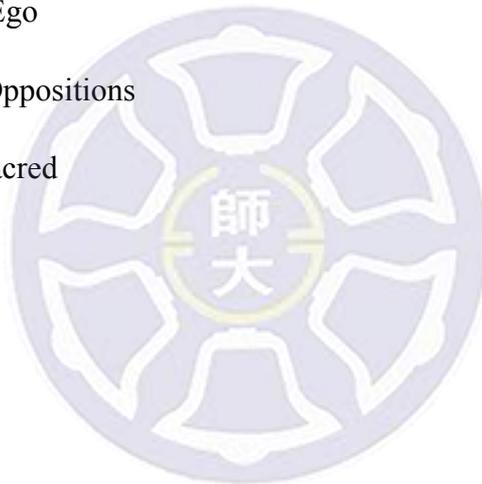


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Introduction

Story of the Eye is a novella about a teenage couple's erotic exploration. On their way wandering through southern France, Spain, and Italy, they undertake various erotic activities with various partners. These activities involve transgression of many taboos, including sodomy, fetish, voyeurism, homicide, coprophilia, necrophilia, sacrileges to Catholicism, and many "misconducts." These activities get more violent when the story approaches to its end.

The story begins with the encountering of the protagonists—the narrator and Simone. At their first sight of each other, both of them feel an erotic anxiety. They then start an affair, living furtively in Simon's bedroom, practicing odd games with peculiar toys — eggs and urine. This love life is later joined by Marcel, an incarnation of obedience, who goes schizophrenic and hangs herself after several transgressive erotic games. The couple later travel from France to Spain, in order to run away from the police's investigation after a frantic party. In Seville, they watch a game of bullfight, in which Simone shows a strong inclination for exhibitionism, fetishism, and necrophilia. They then go to the church where Don Juan is buried. In the church they victimize a pious young priest. After playing amorously upon their victim's body, causing his mental breakdown, the protagonists practice erotic asphyxiation on him. They then pull his eye out for masturbation. Afterwards, they travel else where to continue their erotic practices.

Commenting on Georges Bataille's novella *Story of the Eye*, Surya describes once its storyline as "thrown on the table like dice, obeying a logic that eludes us even as it forces us to pose the question [of whether the story is simply thoughtless]?" (Surya 100) With the non-sequential occurrences of tortures and deaths, the protagonists' obsession with fecalphilia, erotic asphyxia, necrophilia without explanation, *Story of the Eye* seems a random compilation of oddities— readers can hardly tell whether there is cause-and-effect or development usually expected in a novel. Furthermore, the work is difficult to be classified in terms of style, and can hardly be read without uneasiness. Not only is its development odd and illogical, but the protagonists' unseemliness are

almost always inexplicable. Surya concludes that “none of ‘its contemporary books’ can even come close to matching either [its] violence or... frenzy” (Surya 104).

Although critics including Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva have written about Bataille, both of them neglected the center of Bataille’s thought — eroticism (Richardson 16). In his “The Metaphor of the Eye”, Barthes elaborates on transformations of “the Eye” which produces various meanings when situated at different contexts in *Story of the Eye* (Barthes 239). Kristeva agrees with Bataille’s idea of “heterology” in her affirmation of “movement[s] preceding discourse and the subject” (Kristeva, *Bataille* 240) in the universe. She agrees that science, knowledge, and philosophy are established by exclusion of everything other than symbols¹ and therefore are always incomplete. However, her discussion remains far from the erotic turbulence which Bataille continuously probes in his study. Most critics, while discussing Bataille, limit their exploration within the interrelations of language, neglecting “the most intense” issue and “the loftiest peak of man’s spirit” (*Eroticism* 273). Until now few researches have been made on *Story of the Eye* with its author’s own notion which he in different occasions terms as “heterology,” “scatology,” “sacred sociology,” “interior experience,” and at the final period of his life, “eroticism” (Hollier 75). Each term implies a different characteristic of his notion. And the variability of names suggests the instability and intangibility of what Bataille explores—desires and violent impulses.

I perceive *Story of the Eye* as Bataille’s endless strive to challenge man’s existence², on the ground of his ideas about eroticism, a notion that is not to be understood as states or attempts of sexual desire, but rather, one involving inner, inexplicable powers that force a being to lose his stability. In *Story*, he continuously explores the boundaries of being, and this exploration causes the disequilibrium of existence. Ultimately, individual boundaries are loosened; a transcendental state

¹In her essay on Bataille, she directly quotes from *L’Erotisme*, “I have sacrificed everything in the search for a point of view from which the unity of the human spirit may emerge” (*Bataille* 240).

² The book mirrors the mind of its author. It is a result of Bataille’s psychotherapy under doctor’s prescription (Surya 99).

of continuity replaces individual distinctness. *Story* may be perceived as the experimental exploring of the limits of all possible kinds, particularly about existence. Watching these turbulences, its readers feel uneasy because their sense of propriety labeling them as proper human beings is menaced as badly as the protagonists.

This thesis intends to interpret *Story of the Eye* with Bataille's central idea — eroticism, a being's deliberate "calling into questions" of his own existence (*Eroticism* 31). Although he considers no form of deliberate work is sufficient to show "the outermost reaches of human life", he elaborates on "the extremes of [the] subject" by various terms (*Eroticism* 259). And his novella *Story of the Eye* provides a reflection of his mind enabling his readers to imagine what he tries to convey. The idea of "calling [one's being] into question" is related to a yearning for "death" or "continuity"; both allow an individual to transcend his individual separateness (*Eroticism* 13). In the meantime, the calling also suggests certain "loss of self" because those boundaries constituting the person's individuality would be dissolved in the process of merging (*Eroticism* 31). Although the drive for transcendence has always been repressed ever since the primordial human beings evolve from animal to man (*Eroticism* 30), the modern man is nonetheless fascinated by possibilities to destroy the balance of his own being. Such desire drives him toward "transgression," the breakthrough of individual limitations.

When Bataille says man "consciously calls his own existence in question" (*Eroticism* 31), he refers to the anxiety that drives man to transgression. The anxiety comes from individual being's awareness that he will cease to exist and perish away. Such awareness makes him anxious. He longs for merging into "the continuity of all existence with which [the whole universe] is... one" (*Eroticism* 22). He is always driven by a wish to break through personal limitations prescribed by physical and social conditions, in order to connect with the universal continuity (*Eroticism* 15).

The beginning of taboo marks the beginning of civilization. Man is different from animals by reason. His civilization begins when he starts to regulate his violent impulses so that a stable

environment needed for developing civilization is ensured. “Man is an animal that denies himself” (*Eroticism* 39). He has to deny his violent impulses so that he becomes from animal to man. “He begins [to become man] by self-denial” (*Eroticism* 39). Yet his inner impulses never really perish. The repression of impulses becomes taboos, and then “the object of taboo [is removed] from our consciousness” (*Eroticism* 38). It must be noticed that to transgress taboos is nothing like returning to animal violence: “ [transgression] is violence still, used by creature capable of reason“ (*Eroticism* 65).

In Chapter One, I will explain the abnormalities³ in *Story of the Eye* with the idea of heterology. Although some of the undertakings in the book can be framed by terms such as fecalphilia, necrophilia, Sadism, and others related to sexual deviations, there are something *other* than what these terms encompass, something that outflows the definitions. For example, Simone’s “mania for breaking eggs” (*Story* 10) evolves into multiple forms so deviant and awkward that the episodes about eggs and egg-shaped eyes become almost surreal. Moreover, it often confuses the readers that Bataille narrates on and on about odd events without giving any reasonable explanation. I will begin by introducing scenes of abnormalities in *Story of the Eye*. Then, I will explain the notion of heterology which initiates the concept of breaking through thresholds of all kinds.

Heterology as illustrated by Bataille is the state entirely unrelated with the anything based on ideas. His “continuity of being” is achieved through the disregard of “forms”—breaking through thresholds opens possibilities to a universal communion in which all individual existences links together. I will explain that the absurdities, the disorder, the violence in *Story* open the door to Bataille’s state of unity with the universal one, which occurs after transgressing the boundaries of death and ego. More importantly, the chaos which is usually taken as “nothing,” affects upon every aspect of man’s living more than he envisions. The heterogeneous that is not to be assimilated by

³ The “abnormalities” in the novella include Simone’s fondness of breaking fresh eggs with her private part (*Eye* 10), her pissing on her mother (11), the protagonists’ infatuation in urine, eggs, eyes, intercourse beside a corpse (50), Simone’s desire to sit on peeled balls(62), Simone’s placing of human organs in her private part (83).

science or philosophy, leads the way to a sublime existence — unity with the cosmos. In this unity, descriptive languages are demolished. Actions and experiences, instead of the explanation and interpretation of them, replaces discourse that reduces unlimited possibility to homogeneous utterances.

In Chapter Two, I argue that the infinitely “low” state explained in Chapter One comes parallel with religiously elevated state. Both states are of one origin, manifested in dual facets; both reach *la continuité de l'être*. The sacred, another term for *la continuité de l'être*, can be manifested in various aspects, such as religious bliss, the monarch's sovereignty, and unbounded violence. Among these manifestations, I compare religious sacredness with its repellent counterpart to show that the end of the holy and the defiled are one. Both facets requires expenditure. And the more generous the spending, the more sacred effect follows. The goal of the spending is the universal continuum wherein distinctive individuality melts away.

To provide evidence for Bataille's saying that religious and voluptuary passions are one (*Eroticism* 7), I use documentations about Catholic testimony, ancient Aztec sacrifices, and Herman Hesse's religious novel *Siddhartha*. These materials show how the spending of useful resources leads to the sacred, and that in both the lofty and sully, there exists possibility for continuum with the universe. My explanation will show that Bataille's exploration of the defiled deeds in *Story of the Eye* is the vestige of his wandering toward the low sacred.

Bataille elaborates that in the Aztec society, consumption is more important than production, and that expenditure brings glory equivalent to the sacred. He begins by analyzing the Aztec mythology, and then move on to introduce the relationship between the victim and the sacrificer, in order to show that expenditure is of religious importance. The Aztec mythology encourages its people to value violent death, as the more extravagantly one spends, the more glory he gains in return (*Accursed* 1:23). The wars and sacrificial rituals are the Aztec people's way to reach the divine unity with the universe.

In Chapter Three, I argue that the release of the idea of ego as the way to merge solely to the universal immensity. In the pure facet of the sacred, Jesus sacrifices himself, so that the entire human race is redeemed, elevated to paradise. In the impure facet, the Aztec sacrificial ritual enables man to experience universal one in silence by killing — tossing the victim into the universal immense void. The killing of a fellow creature similar to himself would make an individual understand the universal flow beyond his limited perception. Then, I explain that the contradiction of the pure and impure is nullified in this immense universal flow. My argument comes from the mystical experience of a Christian, as well as an epiphany depicted by Herman Hesse. By showing examples from the high to the low sacred, I wish to show that in Bataille's ideas, the low has equal significance with the elevated.

I will explain the idea of “immanent immensity,” which is another term for *la continuité de l'être*. “Immanent immensity” is framed out to oppose the primacy of utility. In the common course of life, a thing is given a value for the future profits it brings. This results in the alienation of a thing's value and its immanent value. And man in this context becomes a slave himself. He at this moment exists only for a later moment, unable to enjoy the present. Bataille's idea of immanence defies this endless deferral of value, asserting the inner value in things. “Immanent immensity” suggests that universal immensity lies within man himself. As long as he is willing to discard the obsession of ego, social norms, and taboos, he immediately becomes the universe himself. Behind the fear of death, if he dares to cross over it, he becomes the opening “to everything that can be.” With infinite possibility, he makes himself the “*being at the pinnacle of being*” (*Eroticism* 274).

Story of the Eye is “not a result of work” (Hollier 102), but a record of Bataille's ideal being's active pursuit of sovereign existence. In the turmoils *Story* represents, the “continuity of being” is disclosed. The protagonists endlessly quest the farthest possible boundary — of social norms, death, sanity, until the last breath of their victims. One by one, the young martyrs in the story — Marcel, Granero, Don Aminado are demolished in exchange for something greater than

themselves and their torturers. In these writings, there is a sense of Bataille's sacredness which his readers might experience as the participants of a sacrifice.⁴ Through experiencing the agony and anxiety in the novella, the experience of death becomes an experience transcending death.



⁴ Bataille describes the onlookers' states of mind, "[i]n sacrifice...the victim dies and the spectators share in what his death reveals... [which is] sacredness. This sacredness is the revelation of continuity through the death of a discontinuous being to those who watch it as a solemn rite. A violent death disrupts the creature's discontinuity; what remains, what the tense onlookers experience in the succeeding silence, is the continuity of all existence with which the victim is now one." (*Eroticism* 22)

Chapter One

Bataille's Heterology in *Story of the Eye*

“Humanity is faced with a double perspective: in one direction, violent pleasure, horror and death—precisely the perspective of poetry—and in the opposite direction, that of science or the real world of utility. Only the useful, the real, have a serious character. We are never within our rights in preferring seduction to it: truth has rights over us. Indeed it has every right. And yet we can, and indeed we must respond to something which, not being God, is stronger than every right, that impossible to which we accede only by forgetting the truth of all these rights.

—Bataille, *The Impossible*

This Chapter aims to explicate the oddities in *Story of the Eye* with Bataille's notion of “heterology,” a term foregrounding those commonly taken as turmoil and disorder. Heterology, or “eroticism”, interpreted as “the disequilibrium in which a [man] consciously calls his own existence in question”, refers to a predominant aspect of man's experience that is not to be incorporated by science, philosophy, or any other sort of discourses (*Eroticism* 31). To put it in another way, the heterogeneous is “something one can *have no idea of*” and “something that is ‘like nothing else’” (Hollier 88). This implies the difficulty to define heterology. To find the heterogeneous in Bataille's works, it is manifested as violence, pleasure, laughter, horror, etc. — those to be experienced instead of described. These aspects matter much more than the so-called scientific or philosophical truths for man, according to *Eroticism*. I propose that Bataille accentuates the heterogeneous by actions about oddities. By representing nonsensical actions without transition, he emphasizes experiences — particularly those which can hardly be defined, rather than discourses. By doing so he means to escape limitations of all sorts. Among the turmoils hence produced, there reveals a supreme state of being — *la continuité de l'être* (“continuity of being”), an experience transcending all sorts of bounds. Those nonsensical sexual activities in the novella manifest

Bataille's ceaseless exploration for the most intensive possible experiences, leading toward a sovereign existence.

1. Experiences Instead of Discourse

According to Hollier, the heterogeneous refers to those unthinkable, those which would “not give itself to being known”, “not a matter of science”, and those “constantly overflow the category of objectivity”. Unlike science which is “by definition only applicable to homogeneous elements,” the heterogeneous “do not intervene in the same areas as science” (Hollier 88). In other words, the heterogeneous would not subject itself to homogenization; it escapes the definition and regulation of discourses and science. Based on this character, Bataille represents the heterogeneous by depicting a series of actions and materials. For example:

Upon my asking what the word urinate *reminded* her of, she replied: *terminate*, the eyes, with a razor, something red, the sun. And *egg*? A calf's eye, because of the color of the head (the calf's head) and also because the white of the egg was the white of the eye, and the yolk the eyeball. The eye, she said, was egg-shaped. She asked me to promise that when we could go outdoors, I would fling eggs into the sunny air and break them with shots from my gun, and when I replied that it was out of questions, she talked on and on, trying to reason me into it. She played gaily with words, speaking about *broken eggs*, and then *broken eyes*, and her arguments became more and more unreasonable (*Eye* 38-9).⁵

In *Story of the Eye*, he represents the protagonists' actions in a way with full determination but no sign of aim, resulting a strong sense of nihilism:

⁵ Bataille's contemporary surrealists utilize similar technique to inspire those which are not to be expressed by language. With those juxtapositions of utterly irrelevant objects, *Story* somewhat is correlated to its contemporary surrealist productions in the late 1910s and early '20s. The novella's juxtaposition of random concepts and images resembles surrealist works of art.

Simone and I, our clothing lost, were forced to leave the château, fleeing like animals through the hostile darkness, 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...isolation of lewdness, weariness, and absurdity (*Eye* 31).

As he asserts in another critical essay, this sense of uncertainty is based on the end he is after, “what [the protagonists are driven into] is not important...because these things are, actually, nothing” (*Literature* 18). The “nothing” here refers to those which do not subjugated to any form of discourses. And although this nothingness seems to result in chaos, it nevertheless implies freedom from all discursive or ideological boundaries. Hence, his degeneration into nothingness may be perceived as a deliberate approach to an unbounded existence.

1.1 Erotic Oddities as the Heterogeneous

Bataille astonishes his readers with a collage of sensual experiences and oddities. Take the “Eye” in *Story*’s title for example, Simone’s improvisational tricks on globular organs seem unable to be sorted out by any method. These ball-shape organs — eggs, eyes, testicles, whether endowed with sensual or spiritual significance in common discourses, are treated grotesquely or even horrifyingly in various contexts. For instance, throughout *Chapter Two*, eggs are employed in the protagonist’s dawdling:

That was the period when Simone developed a mania for breaking eggs with her ass. She would do a headstand on an armchair in the parlor, her back against the chair’s back, her legs bent toward me, while I jerked off in order to come in her face. I would put the egg right on the hole in her ass, and she would skillfully amuse herself by shaking it in the deep crack of her buttocks. The moment my jizm 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.

Very soon, of course, her mother, who might enter the villa parlor at any moment, did catch us in our unusual act...

“Pretend there’s no one there,” Simone told me, and she went on wiping her ass...

A few days later, however, when Simone was doing gymnastics with me in the rafters of a garage, she pissed on her mother, who had the misfortune to stop underneath without seeing her. The sad widow got out of the way and gaped 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 jerked off while looking at it (*Eye 10-11*)...

[Simon] would sit for a long time, gazing at the eggs. Then she would settle on the toilet to view them under her cunt between the parted thighs; and finally, she would have me flush the bowl.

Another game was to crack a fresh egg on the edge of the bidet and empty it under her: sometimes she had me stripped naked and swallow the raw eggs from the bottom of the bidet. She did promise that as soon as she was well again, she would do the same for me and also for Marcelle (*Eye 36*).

Then in the auditorium of a bullfight ring, the fetish for the eggs is transformed to a dead bull’s raw balls:

It really was totally out of the question for Simone to lift her dress and place her

bare behind in the dish of raw balls. All she could do was hold the dish in her lap... and she sat there, keenly involved, despite everything, in the disembowlements of horses, followed, as she childishly put it, by “loss and noise,” namely cataract of bowels...

The events that followed were without transition or connection, not because they weren't actually related, but because my attention was so absent as to remain absolutely dissociated. In just a few seconds: first, Simone bit into one of the raw balls, to my dismay; then Granero advanced toward the bull, waving his scarlet booth; finally, almost at once, Simone, with a blood-red face and a suffocating lewdness, uncovered her long white thighs up to her moist vulva, into which she slowly and surely fitted the second pale globule — Granero was thrown back by the bull and wedged against the balustrade; the horns struck the balustrade three times at full speed; at the third blow, one horn plunged into the right eye and through the head. A shriek of unmeasured horror coincided with a brief orgasm for Simone, who was lifted up from the stow seat only to be flung back with a bleeding noise, under a blinding sun; men instantly rushed over to haul away Granero's body, the right eye dangling from the head (*Eye* 63-4).

From those games related to eggs, eyes, orgies, urines, excrements, blood, to uncanny events of bullfight, the abuse of the priest — Bataille's incidents are often too immediate immersion into obscene circumstances that his audience are left in anxiety (for having no clue about where he is going). One after another, he presents disturbing, if not abhorrent episodes. His readers have to endure an “unwilling suspension of disbelief,” despite being appalled, so as to be able to read on. It seems he has few intention to make his book agreeable.

1.2 Discursive Premium as the Heterogeneous

Bataille's writing aims to "spill over" the boundary of ideas⁶. For example, the protagonists' fondness for eggs and Simone's urination on her mother exceed the common category of sexual aberration. Their dalliance with eggs illustrates the notion of "agiology" (Bataille, *Sade* 12) — the premium portion not to be circumscribed by ideas. It is men's common mode of thinking to attribute everything with a cause. They can therefore keep everything understandable and reasonable, ensuring the mass of the universe is sorted as a system. But beyond the system they construct for everything, there are more grandeur unknownness that remains silent and invisible. Within the shelter of ideas, a cultured man would "feel at home in a clarity which gives it an impression of mastery", but this illusion of ideas is based on nothing more than what men can cognate (Hollier, *Dualist* 124). One fact is too often ignored: those other than the perceivable are never recognized.

"Agiology," or "heterology" refers to those which "ideas" can not enclose. The heterogeneous is what Bataille wishes to portrait in *Story of the Eye*. Since the heterogeneous is out of the reach of ideas, he adopts a style eluding ideas, too. Bataille recounts the difficulty of capturing the effluence of meanings: "[i]t has been impossible for me to describe [the heterogeneous] without contradictions and without going over the same ground more than once a collection of erotic situations which are anyway nearer one another than these deliberate attempts to distinguish between them would have one suppose" (*Eroticism* 146). And according to *Encyclopedia Acephalica* he edited, "[Bataille's] ideas do not exactly form a coherent philosophical system" (*Encyclopedia* 20). In his preface to *Literature and Evil*, Bataille announces, "[t]urmoil is fundamental to my entire study" (*Literature* 3). But immediately following this, he declares his ambition, "[b]ut the time has come to strive towards a clarity of consciousness." Faced with such ambiguity, if not impossibility, Hollier's strategy to describe "the heterogeneous" is exclusion — for him, the heterogeneous is "like nothing else," having no way to be understood (Hollier 98); and

⁶ This idea comes from the term "agios," which Hollier perceives as "analogous to the double sense of *sacer*" for its twofold sense of being both defiled and holy (Hollier 98).

“[the heterogeneous] connects laughter and touch..., [and is] deprived...of speech”; “cannot employ language [because otherwise it would be] on the track with philosophy”; “not a result of work” (Hollier 100-2)⁷. He poses the question: “what about silence and night in relation to ideas?” to illustrate the “non-relational relation” between the heterogeneous and ideas — they have nothing to do with each other (Hollier 101). In a word, the heterogeneous refers to what is beyond the frame of ideas. As Hollier put it, if there appears a term to describe the heterogeneous, it will be assimilated into the system of ideas and become “on the track with philosophy” (Hollier 100).

Men have the “desire” to categorize the obscene in certain forms, and also the unwillingness to place the “indecent” into “forms“ (Hollier 101). Hollier draws example from Plato’s *Parmenides* to illustrate a human mind’s inner conflict which the heterogeneous is like: the sense of both “repulsion” and “desire” when confronted by obscene objects. In this dialogue, Socrates is asked to tell Parmenides about “[the] things... [that] have an idea (or form, depending on the translation).” According to Hollier, this is an act of defining “the limits of idea” (Hollier 99). For [ideas of similarity, of one and of many, the just, the beautiful, the good, and of the man], Socrates “answers affirmatively.” But as for the “scatological set”, those “that would really seem ridiculous — hair and mud and dirt, for example, or anything else which is utterly worthless and trivial”, Socrates hesitates and “turns away... with all possible speed and returns to his refuge” (Hollier 99). It is the mode of man’s mind to request “everything that exists [to] have its corresponding form,” and this initiates “a contradiction that Socrates finds frightening”. “If he would talk nonsense his disgust would disappear” — because to be able to “talk about” presupposes the object-in-discussion been taken with significance, hence no longer trivial. “One must not think about things one has no idea of” because otherwise the certainty of the universe would be questioned. “[I]t is the anguish of Socrates, his disgust and his flight that infer scatology... If he could talk nonsense his disgust would disappear: neither hair, mud, dirt, or pleasure would make him laugh any more,” Hollier concludes

⁷ “Theoretical heterology does not exist; any project of heterological theory is just the most ordinary of ruses used by theory as a cover for attaining its own goals, which are the assimilation of the other” (Hollier 88).

(Hollier 101).

In the entry he writes for *Encyclopedia Acephalica*, Bataille shows respect to the heterogeneous by annotating “worthless” matters. In his narration, the very character of being “formless” becomes the focus here. The hierarchy of ideas over the unverifiable is reversed. For example:

Spittle: Spittle bears closely on erotic manifestations, because...it plays havoc with the classification of organs...daily [sullies] the visible sign of intelligence... Spittle is finally, through its inconsistency, its indefinite contours, the relative imprecision of its colour, and its humidity, the very symbol of the *formless*, of the unverifiable, of the non-hierarchized. It is the limp and sticky stumbling block shattering more efficiently than any stone all undertakings that presuppose man to be something — something other than a flabby, bad animal, something other than the spittle of a raving demiurge, splitting his sides at having expectorated such a conceit larva: a comical tadpole puffing itself up into meat insufflated by a demigod (*Encyclopedia* 80).

Big Toe: “The big toe is the most *human* part of the human body, in the sense that no other element of this body is so differentiated from the corresponding element of the anthropoid ape...Also, the function of the human foot consists in giving a firm foundation to the erection of which man is so proud....But whatever the role the foot plays in his erection, man, who has a light head, a head raised to the heavens and heavenly things, regards it as spit, on the pretext that he has this foot in the mud (*Encyclopedia* 87).

Bataille’s obsession with the object “eye” may be generated from his wish to subvert what is commonly sublimated. In the entry he writes for the term “eye”, he elaborates the mainstream elevation of notion “eye” in a sarcastic tone: Usually endowed with a sense of beauty and

significance, convention of “the eye” include: “*l’œil d’une œuvre*”(the look/eye of the work), “(I treasure it/him/her like the apple of my eye)”, “*Pour vis beaux yeux*” (for your beautiful eyes) (*Encyclopedia* 44). And in *Story*, this idealized icon is tainted by urines, blood, amid private parts of human body (*Eye* 93). It is no longer the elevated, but the filthy that is mostly sketched. Defiling of the elevated icon creates abhorring effects.

The “acephale” figure embodies Bataille’s idea of the irrational over ration (*Encyclopedia* 12). It stands in contrast with the common notion that the head leads other parts of the body, ideally toward a sublimated state. Disregarding the assumption that the head is the most elevated part of man, Bataille implies it is “the base,” or the corpse that dominates human’s existence:

Although within the body blood flows in equal quantities from high to low and from low to high, there is a preference in favour of that which elevates itself, and human life is erroneously seen as an *elevation*...with their feet in the mud but their heads somewhat approaching the light, men obstinately imagine a tide that will elevates them, never to return, into pure space. Human life requires...this rage of seeing oneself as a back and forth movement from ordure to the ideal, and from the ideal to ordure, a rage that is easily directed against an organ as *base* as the foot (*Encyclopedia* 87).

This entry shows Bataille’s attempt subvert the “dignity” usually envisioned upon man. In Hollier’s words, he “not only “tackle[s] man low,” but is also [determined to ignore] anything not low” (Hollier 78). A statement from *Le Coupable* illustrates another envision of his, representing an unproductive, prodigiously absurd existence, a spendthrift toward an futile end:

”abruptly I feel I have become an erect sexual organ, with indisputable intensity... The idea that my very body and my head were no more than a monstrous, naked, and blood-swollen penis seemed so absurd to me that I thought I would collapse in

laughter. Then I thought that such a stiff erection could only end in ejaculation: the comic situation became literally intolerable... [F]rom the bottom to the top of my head a burst of light passed—as voluptuous as the passage of semen through the penis (qtd. Hollier 84-5).

Being unseemly, this statement nonetheless portrays the aimless violence of erotic impulses dominating the body, with the head's guiding function eliminated. The priority of sanity over sensuality is subverted. Besides, both the Acephale and the above figure imply fusion — man is released from reason insulating him with the cosmos one. The precedence of the upper above the lower part of the body is reversed—"as above, so below," and "as below, so above" (*Encyclopedia* 12). The opening in Acephale's trunk welcomes the unnamable heterogeneity outside; its body acts and experiences without reason's guide. As Bataille remarks himself — his ideal personality is one that "think[s] the way a cock would think if it were at liberty to demand what it wants" (Hollier 105)⁸.

Bataille's aim is to emphasize impulses escaping from restrictions, including social norms, bodily limitations, scientific and philosophical discourses that aims to eliminate violence, pleasure, horror and anguish in man. A scholar must be "disinterested" and "dispassionate," independent of emotions. This leads to the ignorance of passionate aspect of man's experiences. As Bataille remarks, "I have long been struck by one thing. The true philosopher must devote his life to philosophy...Superiority in one field bought at the expense of relative ignorance in other fields" (*Eroticism* 253).

Ever since the presumption of reason over the emotional is formed, man is deprived of the right for those which cannot be reduced to the homogeneous. In order for producing uniformity (for the sake of discussion), whatever is other than the consistency has to be eliminated. Precision and

⁸ The figure of the acephale is an advanced version of the reversed renaissance ideal pentagram, which is transformed from an ideal pentagram with "the five-pointed star always upright, with the topmost triangle pointing to heaven, for it is the seat of wisdom" (Hartmann 168). "A reversed pentagram, with two points projecting upwards, is a symbol of evil and attracts sinister forces because it overturns the proper order of things and demonstrates the triumph of matter over spirit" (Lévi 66).

unified standards are the foundation of science. Based on this foundation, knowledge can be accumulated and improved. Without simplification and exclusion, scientists could never clarify anything. And the mass of the universe will remain a mysterious turmoil. Science henceforth eliminates those which cannot be reduced as numbers or signs; what cannot be placed within the system of classification is referred to as “nothing” or “not worth discussing.” It then appears that science has assorted everything into a systematic spectrum serving as an all-inclusive foundation for more advanced researches.⁹ But in the meantime an invaluable price is paid—man takes a great amount of experiences for granted, having half-knowledge about themselves. Moreover, scientific method do not always takes everything into account. For example, the science of economics, based on a group of economic models, is notorious for incorrect prediction. Forecast differs as many as economists. Computers can outmaneuver human chess masters; but when playing on real chessboard (instead of using the computer as interface), robotic arms often fails to position the chess pieces. The common reason for these failures is that science only functions well in ideal conditions free of unwanted factors. Unwanted substances and conditions must be cleaned up to create a pure environment which is often rare. Throughout the process of any scientific experiment—from assumption to consequences, everything is artificial creation.

A legend of the history of mathematics shows that what scientist considers self-evident is very likely the result of exclusion of what cannot be reduced to ideas. The Greek mathematician Pythagoras considers irrational numbers as in conflict with the rule of a well-balanced universe¹⁰. For this reason he forbids the discussion of negative numbers in his school in order to keep this

⁹ Hollier specifies blind spot of science: “Science develops as a process of pure assimilation, an assimilation that would not be followed by any excretory phase”...“Science...eliminates any difference that is not logical, or reduces it to a specific difference, a difference defined by the possibility of [man]. Difference must be reduced, diminished, and strung together by logic”...“Theory does not know or encounter its other. The other escapes it. But it is primarily because this other does not give itself to being known, because it has nothing to do with theory. There is...only homological theory; a theory of the other would change nothing, since it would not break with the space of theory but just come down to the same thing once more” (Hollier 86-7).

¹⁰ “The Pythagorean world view ... was based on an extreme admiration for the *arithmos*—the intrinsic properties of whole numbers or their ratios—and their presumed role in the cosmos. The realization that there exist numbers, like the Golden Ratio, that go on forever without displaying any repetition or pattern caused a true philosophical crisis... What is clear is that the Pythagoreans basically believed that the existence of such numbers was so horrific that it must represent some sort of cosmic error, one that should be suppressed and kept secret” (Livio 4-5).

“cosmic error” secret.¹¹ He even has Hippasus, the supporter of irrational number, drowned at sea so that he would not disclose the secret (Michaelides 27). Scientific findings are acquired at the expense of ignoring what cannot be understood by human minds.

As another intellectual field constructed upon ideas, philosophy gives too little attention to sensational experiences. As work, philosophy requires discipline which brings man away from his violent impulses. Philosophy has to ignore man’s passionate moments and is therefore insufficient in providing a sound investigation of the whole of humanity’s experience. The moments of violent impulses and discipline are mutually exclusive. Bataille takes extreme experiences to highlight this problem,

The experience of extreme states of being...dislocates us and excludes calm reflection, its essence being to put us “beside ourselves.” It is difficult to imagine the life of a philosopher continually or at least fairly often beside himself. We come back to the essential human experience dividing time into working time and sacred time” (*Eroticism* 260).

Philosophy neglects the heterogeneous. In order to formulate a discourse, it has to disregard whatever it cannot use as ideas. Those disregarded, taken as “nothing” or “irrelevant” are driven to the shadow of the night. Extreme sensual experiences are among those neglected as non-relative to rational discourses. But can philosophy claim its authority over knowledge if what philosophy grasps is based only on a part of the man’s total experience? Can philosophy provides solutions for man if it does not know the entirety of human being who is comprised of both man and animal’s elements?

The oddities in *Story* — those remain outside the definition of ideas and the classification of mental diseases or sexual aberrations, hint that Bataille is not only trying to escape the confinement

¹¹ *Irrational numbers* refer to numbers which cannot be represented as a ratio of integers, therefore 0.75 is a rational number because it is equal to 3/4, while a circle’s circumference π is an irrational number. The golden ratio ϕ , and the square root of two, and all square roots of natural numbers, are irrational numbers.

of ideas, but also bringing to light extreme states of existence. Philosophy is insufficient in containing the totality of man's experience. By smearing the clarity the system of language builds, Bataille tries to disclose the long-forgotten states of instinctive existence occurring in moments related to death and birth — the moments of continuity. The heterogeneous leaks from the fissure among orders. What he means by “disequilibrium is poetry” (*Eroticism* 24), is that the loss of forms makes jouissance possible. As Hollier puts it,

“Philosophy's precise function lies...in this empire of theory where all the ideological practices *limiting language to an instrumental function* are gathered... Philosophy's task is to demonstrate that there is nothing threatening about them, either because they are not, in fact, foreign at all, and do not escape science's jurisdiction; or because they have no reality, that nothingness, for example, is strictly saying nothing at all, etc. What is essential is that nothing exists outside of a theoretical horizon; nothing escapes examination in the distancing that is the basis of theory; *nothing exists that cannot be mentioned*, that has no name, that cannot be subsumed into some conceptual abstraction. What is essential is to *preserve continuity at any cost*...even, by reducing the unknown to no more than a distant province of the known, or *the infinite of the finite*.” (Hollier 88-9)

2. Sensuality Instead of Propriety

Bataille considers that philosophy should be “the sum of the possibles in the sense of a synthesis” (*Eroticism* 254). By saying so he wishes to retrieve the attention on those long-neglected sensual aspects in intellectual researches. Opposing the rejection on those which cannot be reduced to ideas, he devotes passion on the study of undefinable conducts. In *Story of the Eye*, the sentiments he shows can hardly be conceived by common sense. This is because his ambition is to “[measure] the immensity of the void that yawned before us” (*Eye* 40). In another word, his purpose is to explore as much as possible man's unfathomable instincts. Hence those conforming to

propriety has to be irretrievably misplaced in the novella. Bataille would not allow his readers a break during those ceaseless turmoils because if he provides “a place where the soul protects its peace”(Hollier 88), his narrators would had fallen into theories which he opposes. What is proper has to be continuously disrupted. With few pauses, he creates continuous stimulation to the senses, especially in the aim of challenging propriety. Among these oddities, there is an aggravated power so overwhelming that readers feel as if they are carried on burdens of uncertainty while they read. The irregularities in his plots extend so aimlessly that the protagonists indulge in the loss of direction¹². His aim is to ensure that none of their activities are productive and that none of these endeavors leads to a sublimated state which propriety promises.

2.1 Threshold of the Self

In his trance, the narrator in *Story of the Eye* recounts,

it struck me that *death was the sole outcome of my erection*, and if Simone and I were killed, then the universe of our unbearable personal vision was certain to be replaced by the pure stars...without human delays or detours, something that strikes me as *the goal of my sexual licentiousness* (*Eye* 33).

These words recapitulates Bataille’s life-long subject matter: incessant indulgence until one loses his sense of self, immersing into the universal flow of all time and space. For Bataille, this is an ultimate salvation in that one’s limited existence is hence replaced by the unceasing universal unlimitedness. Its means is to waste life away enthusiastically without reservation, and endlessly challenging the limits of existence. After death, a being is dissolved into the universal continuity, as if it is a star hanging in the celestial vault, much more outlasting than the transient human being.

¹² The sense of desperation both in the novella and his *Eroticism*— the ceaseless “[assent] to life until death” (*Eroticism* 11)—until all vitalities sustaining life is squandered away, may be traced back to the author’s childhood experience. It seems Bataille tries to avoid one aspect of life by indulging totally in another—the first aspect being “the real world of utility,” the other of “violent pleasure, horror and death” (*The Impossible*). In the second part of the novella, he explains his conversion from a pious Catholic to a renouncer of God: while the German troops invaded , his mother and he had to abandon his blind, paralyzed father, leaving him to die alone. It is said that his father died miserably, crying madly for his children. Bataille therefore comes to understand that human beings are all relentlessly in a state “blind, immeasurable...abandoned on the globe like my father”(Eye 101). He then loses his faith, believing that man is in actuality abandoned by God, destined by nothing other than chance: “No one on earth or in heaven cared about my father’s dying terror”(Eye 101). He fights for such misery by imagining his father’s fighting with death— “Still, I believed he faced up to it, as always. What a horrible pride”...”(Eye 101).

The young couple's debauchery aims to lose their propriety and merge with the universal void. In another words, they let go of themselves to become continuous with the immensity of the universe.

Bataille's way to the highest kind of existence involves a wish to death; in his words, it is a drive to "go beyond the world" (*Encyclopedia* 14)¹³, a wish for the "loss of the self," mentally and physically. It involves a drive to ceaseless challenge the limit of existence¹⁴. As Hollier explains,

The erotic effect can be defined as the loss of what is proper: the simultaneous loss of cleanness in filth and of one's own, proper identity in an expropriating violation. Being is dissolved, carried away by the action of dissolute existence. Eroticism opens being to a slippery action where they give themselves over and are lost, where their excess leaves them wanting (Hollier 74).

The erotic wish is related to the destruction of the body's boundary. The body's frame stops it from overflowing or losing its individual distinctness. Skeletons and skin assemble all bodily parts in proper position, making livelihood possible. But these organs limit the body simultaneously — to "frame" is both to put something inside a structure that holds it and to express something in words — this suggests that utterance and exclusion are inter-dependent. Jouissance stops the body from proper function, opening the body's interior to welcome the immense universal unity. Man's fear for death — one stringent restrictions binding him, keeps himself safe and sound. With the fear, he would not cross any boundaries that harms his being, e.g. to drive in a car without break, or to strangle himself to the point of death. Yet, to be able to transcend all sorts of boundaries, the audacity for death is required. The body's form has to be eliminated in order for jouissance to take place (Hollier 82).

Bataille's interpretation of the word "threshold" in *Encyclopedia* illustrates the horror to

¹³ *The Sacred Conspiracy*, which prefaced the first issue of *Acéphale*, contained an appeal to *go beyond the world*: "It is time to abandon the world of the civilized and its light...A world that cannot be loved to the point of death, in the same way that a man loves a woman, represented only self-interest and the obligation to work" (*Encyclopedia* 14).

¹⁴ Bataille defines his notion of eroticism as "the disequilibrium in which the being consciously calls his own existence in question" (*Eroticism* 31).

break through one's bounds. Adopting a jocular tone, the heterogeneous as those outside the certain and finite are nonetheless threatening:

The threshold is the node which separates two opposing worlds, the interior and the open air, the cold and the warm, the light and the shade. To cross a threshold is thus to traverse a zone of danger where invisible but real battles are fought out (*Encyclopedia* 84).

A threshold both protects the being from harm and limits his possibility. What is beyond the threshold is scary because it is unknown — people are ambiguous toward to what is on the other side of the threshold :

As long as the door is closed, all is well. To open it is a serious matter: it is to unleash two hordes, one against the other, it is to risk being caught up in a fray...

This goes to show that the threshold, that is to say the doormat, of which it is the visible sign, is indeed a thing of dread, because there one must manifest or cast aside one's qualities (*Encyclopedia* 84).

The horror of tackling with the unknown is encountered by a drive to cast oneself away. Despite the regulation of his senses, man could not help but squander away excess energy, resulting a disequilibrium of his existence (*Eroticism* 104). Simone's sudden "strong urge to relief herself completely" (*Eye* 38) forebodes death, and moreover, an annihilation of the culture based on the repression of impulses. In *Eroticism*, the author says man has an anxiety that his being will perish one day, while paradoxically, death is the way to transcend death. This anxiety and urge toward death interact in many episodes in *Story*: Granero risks his life until death in a bullfight. Don Aminado is strangled to death for the pleasure of the protagonists. Both victims have explored the limits of their lives. Although to indulge themselves into the unknown results in destruction, the onlookers and the victims are henceforth merged with a silent immensity through daringly stepping across their lives' boundary. For example, the scene of Don Aminado's death demonstrates

Bataille's erotic effect. In crossing over life's boundary, there are desperation and ecstasy:

First I am going to tell you a story," Sir Edmund said to him sedately. "You know that men who are hanged or garroted have such stiff cocks the instant their respiration is cut off, that they *ejaculate*. You are going to have the pleasure of being *martyred* while fucking this girl."

And when the horrified priest rose to defend himself, the Englishman brutally knocked him down, twisting his arm.

Next, Sir Edmund, slipping under his victim, pinioned his arms behind his back while I gagged him and bound his legs with a belt. The Englishman, gripping his arms from behind in a stranglehold, disabled the priest's legs in his own. Kneeling behind, I kept the man's head immobile between my thighs.

"And now," said Sir Edmund to Simone, "*mount this little padre.*"

Simone removed her dress and squatted on the belly of this singular martyr, her cunt next to his flabby cock.

"Now," continued Sir Edmund, "squeeze his throat, the pipe just behind the Adam's apple: a strong, gradual pressure."

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 (*Eye* 79-81).

The dead body is an object of fetish because of reasons related with limitation and continuity, too. First, the loosening of his body's limitations allows a man to reach his supreme state of being. Inferring the facial expression of a tortured Chinese criminal, Bataille argues that extreme pleasure is similar to extreme pain — the slowly killed man's facial expression is similar to that of a person feeling ecstasy. Bataille concludes that the loosening of body's boundaries leads to jouissance. More importantly, discharging the body's frame is connected with death which links everything as a continuity — a person's body erects moderately when alive; when he dies, he perishes away into the grand void, the continuity that links the whole universe. His proper form as a man vanishes, replaced by the silent continuity. A corpus' completely loosened muscles that no longer exert indicate the dissolving of their master's controlling power. There is no longer a will over the body. The postmortem half-way open mouth, eyes, and distorted limbs are signs of complete loosening of muscles—a state of absolute relaxation that could not be reached by any living person. This absolute relaxation opens the way to the continuity once thoroughly guarded by the body's form. The body is an empty vessel open to “the universal flow of all that is”.

Second, the corpse insinuates to the onlooker that his individual distinct being will be replaced by the continuity with the cosmos. The horror caused by the corpse and the sorrow for the diseased relative form a bizarre feeling. According to Bataille, the man's terror for a corpse comes from his knowledge about his own destiny acquired at the sight of the corpse:

What we called death is in the first place the consciousness we have of it. We perceive the transition from the living state to the corpse that is, to the tormenting object that the corpse of one man is for another. For each man who regards it with awe, the corpse is the image of his own destiny. It bears witness to a violence which destroys not one man alone but all men in the end (*Eroticism* 44).

The corpse suggests both the body's form and its void. Death makes it clear that the body is a vessel once contained but empty for now. Faced with this ambiguity, man has to cope with the anxiety that

his once-beloved is now a source of horror. The erstwhile dear being now becomes an unfathomable void. It would not respond as used to when talked to or touched. This is frustrating and overwhelming enough for the living ones. The emotional incongruity between the absolutely convincing immobility and the onlooker's inner drive to get close to the beloved dead one makes the onlooker dizzy.

As another major victim in *Story*, Marcelle's insanity is directly linked with the loosening of her sense of ego. Her pleasure comes from the same origin as her shame: she is aroused because she is aware of her transgression of her own proper being. Transgression makes everything about her at a loss: her sense of self and her behaviors are in turmoil. Psychologically forced (by the young couple) to abandon herself, she is casted in the state of loss, free from worldly obligations. In this sense, she is made to reach a sacred realm which Bataille considers parallel to religious sacredness (*Eroticism* 7). The more pious she is, the more degenerated she feels. The befouling of her purity unties her mundane bounds. As the narrator of *Story* says:

Marcelle's smile, her freshness, her sobs, the sense of shame that made her redden and, painfully red, tear of 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 jerk off with such abandon that she could not help pissing (*Eye* 21).

Being struck of her proper identity, her purity fulfilling the protagonists' wish for defilement, Marcelle is transported into a lawless state that Bataille longs for. (*Eroticism* 145).

Excrements serve as reminder of the body's threshold as they are once part of the body but are separate from it now. Moreover, excrements are signs of death, along with urines and other bodily fluids, in that their overflow indicate the perishing of the person's will. The excrements smear the body's boundaries, allowing whatever outside to enter. Since the body now is an empty vessel, it is open for communication. Once controlled by the person, the fluids are now free to flow

out of the body's openings. The appearance of these liquids outside a carcass suggests the total unleashing of the self into nothing. For the person, the carcass, excrement and urine are "the nothing from me" (*Nietzsche 22*)¹⁵; they cause Socrates's confusion, anguish and repulsion because they are formless¹⁶. And this "nothingness" is what Bataille endeavors to fuse himself with — the deliberate pursuit of loss, and the appeal to go beyond the world. Excrements as nothingness represent the unleashing from all sorts of boundaries—worldly obligations, social rules (the taboo of dirtiness, nudity, etc.), and the body's form.

2.2 Threshold of Propriety

Commenting on the limitation of narration in *Sleeping Beauty*, Bataille says,

In order for the fairytale to be self-contained, the storyteller of the *Sleeping Beauty* would not let her be "awoken covered in a thick layer of dust; nor have they envisaged the sinister spider's webs that would have been torn apart at the first movement of her red tresses... Maids of all work... are perhaps not completely unaware that they are contributing every bit as much as the most positivist of scientists to respelling the injurious phantoms that cleanness and logic abhor (*Encyclopedia 42-3*).

Foregrounding the dusts and spiderwebs ignored in the fairytale, Bataille shows that propriety is the result of exclusion of those not conforming to "cleanness and logic." In another entry he writes for the word *space*, he emphasizes a limitation of men's perception and their imagery effort to cover up this insufficiency:

¹⁵ In order for protecting themselves from diseases, human beings inherited an instinct to be afraid of corpse and excrements. People who avoid the filthy tend to thrive than those who do not. In Bataille's words, people deny these scatological materials as null: "Excrements is the dead part of me I have to get rid of, by making it disappear, finally annihilating it" (*Nietzsche 22*).

¹⁶ "In the dialogue bearing his name, Parmenides would like for Socrates to tell him what things, according to him, have an idea (or form, depending on the translation): for example, is there an idea of similarity, and idea of one and of many? Is there an idea of the just, the beautiful, the good? Is there even an idea of man, and idea of fire or of water? To the first two sets of examples offered by Parmenides, Socrates answers affirmatively and without hesitation, but faced with the last group, having to do with physical beings, he admits to some confusion, which Parmenides, with a new set of examples, will further increase. Here is this last, "scatological" set: "And what about these, Socrates—they would really seem ridiculous—hair and mud and dirt, for example, or anything else which is utterly worthless and trivial. Are you perplexed whether one should say that there is a separate form for each of them too, a form that again is other than the object we handle?" (Hollier 99)

Unfortunately space remains a lout, and it is difficult to enumerate what it engenders. It is as discontinuous as it is devious, to the utter despair of its philosophical-papa...Without one's being able to say why, it seems that an ape dressed as a woman is no more than a division of space. In reality, the dignity of space is so well established and associated with that of the stars, that it is incongruous to assert that space might become a fish swallowing another...

Space would of course be far better off *doing its duty* and fabricating the philosophical idea in professors' apartments! (*Encyclopedia* 75-7)

By saying so Bataille highlights the issue that man weave out connections and similarities for the boundless nature beyond their perception. For every discontinuous incident, man has to give it a cause in order to “make sense” out of it. As Hollier interprets, “science...puts [ripped up thoughts] together, laying bridges that will cancel out the rift” (Hollier 92). Hence there results in a fundamental issue of knowledge — interdependency within an enclosed system symbols:

Not only language, but the whole of intellectual life is based on a game of transpositions, of symbols, which can be described as metaphorical. On the other hand, knowledge always proceeds by comparison, which connects all known objects to one another in relations of interdependency...And if I see a dog running, it is just as much *the run that is dogging* (*Encyclopedia* 61).

Absurdity is the state of language or situation losing its proper form¹⁷. In the entry of the word “formless,” Bataille asserts that it is a word serving to “declassify”¹⁸, and then he further rejects the notion that “everything should have a form” (*Encyclopedia* 51). When he says that philosophy imposes a “frock-coat” on “what exists” (*Encyclopedia* 52), he is suggesting that the world should

¹⁷ The word “idea” and “form” are synonymous in Ancient Greek language, compatible in translation (Hollier 99).

¹⁸ Bataille's interpretation of the term “formless” indicates his aim to “declassify, requiring in general that everything should have a form” (*Encyclopedia* 51). “For academics to be satisfied, it would be necessary, in effect, for the universe to take on a form. The whole of philosophy has no other aim; it is a question of fitting what exists into a frock-coat, a mathematical frock-coat. To affirm on the contrary that the universe resembles nothing at all and is only formless, amounts to saying that the universe is something akin to a spider or a gob of spittle” (*Encyclopedia* 51-2).

get rid of these limitations so as to retrieve the repressed heterogeneous that remains unknown.

The threshold between obscenity/normality reveals the limit of ideas. It is exactly the obscene that indicates where ideas, as to propriety, stop to function. In order to get rid of the bounds of ideas, Bataille aims to explore the lower, and if possible, those “lower than the lowest” (Hollier 102). His ambition has no limitation. “Obscene words are themselves obscene realities” (Hollier 106). These straight-forward dictions in *Story* are free from the world of ration. They are in the realm of the violence. By unlimited employment of plain dirty words, Bataille keeps on challenging the confinement of propriety, bringing his audience endlessly to the lower.

The scene of the streetwalker in Sir Edmund's pigsty¹⁹ illustrates the loss of propriety²⁰. First of all, the streetwalker wears only cami-knickers, baring herself to external surroundings. This is similar to the move of stripping naked before sexual intercourse, as well as depriving the victim of his life in a sacrificial ritual, according to Bataille's idea of eroticism; both conducts make communication possible by taking barriers off (*Eroticism* 17-8). When the streetwalker “collapses,” her being as a disclosed discontinuity is open, and she is free to dissolve into external turmoils, linking with the universal oneness. This scene has the same erotic effect with a sacrificial ritual or sexual intercourse in that the individual discontinuous participants are thus released from their enclosed discontinuity, reaching a state of sacredness. As Bataille concludes, obscenity “is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession (*Eroticism* 17). The streetwalker lives in a special kind of freedom similar to that of animals or the underworld people: poverty exempts a streetwalker from social norms — she knows she lives like a pig, and is not ashamed of it (*Eroticism* 134-5).

¹⁹ “Sir Edmund had a cramped, windowless pigsty, where one day he locked up a petite and scrumptious streetwalker from Madrid; wearing only cami-knickers. she collapsed in a pool of liquid manure under the bellies of the grunting swine. Once the door was shut, Simone had me fuck her on and on, in front of that door, with her ass in the mud, under a fine drizzle of rain, while Sir Edmund jerked off” (*Eye* 55).

²⁰ Bataille's contemplation on the notion of the filth may be traced back to his childhood experience. Since childhood, he attends his paralyzed, blind father. The experience includes “[sees his] father shit a great number of times” (*Eye* 99). The boundary of cleanness and filth which is clear in other households is very often blurred for the young Bataille. And this childhood experience is also the origin of “the eye” and the “bull's gland” in *Story*. He therefore is given a chance to meditate upon one of the most important, but often neglected issues in humanity's experience.

Pleasure, laughter, violence, the filth, the trivial, are those ideas “have nothing to do with,” but the experience of these has the power to make man transcend the “humdrum world of existence” (Hollier 100)). Their fundamental “uncontainable difference” as the heterogeneous aspect of humanity’s experience is an important part of man that he cannot escape from (Hollier 103). Pleasure could only be experienced, not meditated upon. The pleas for pleasure does not actually effect upon pleasure. No matter defended or not, pleasure never ceases to be. It silently lurks somewhere in humanity like the pulse of his heart.

In *Accursed Share*, Bataille illustrates the mysterious quality of man’s physiological response — between the outer experience and his physical response, there seems to be no assured mechanism guaranteeing the manifestation of a person’s emotions. For example: “the paradox of happy tears... which a happy event provokes as readily as misfortune” shows that people know little about the cause of tears (*Accursed I* 204). “Marcelle’s smell, freshness, touch, and her reddening for shame” (*Eye* 21) provoke the protagonists in *Story* in the same way. She is unforgettable to them (after she was locked in a sanitarium) not because of something that forms an idea, but because of something formless. It is possible to say that the protagonists miss her because of something “automatic, instinctive, unlearned.” These automatic instincts do not form a theory. In *Story*, Bataille represents a similar occasion about bodily reaction without explaining:

[Simone] came back affectionately and said in a gentle, dreamy voice: “Listen, [Marcelle] won’t be able to help pissing when she sees us...making it.”

Hearing this, the narrator reacts automatically:

I felt a hot, enchanting liquid run down my legs, and when she was done, I got up and in turn watered her body, which she complaisantly turned to the unchaste and faintly murmuring spurt on her skin (*Eye* 20).

The process between the narrator’s hearing and responding is speechless and mysterious. No interpretation for this mechanism can promise absolutely correct reason. This is one of the examples

that the heterogeneous, including pleasure and violence, influence people without saying a word. No matter how the heterogeneous is repressed or avoided, it effects upon human beings without accentuating its own existence. Although people tried to hide it, Hollier recapitulates its power ,

“[P]leasures...particularly...the greatest pleasures — involves the person experiencing them in a ridiculous, if not utterly repulsive display. This makes us self-conscious, and we keep these pleasures as secret as possible, reserving all such activities for the hours of darkness, as if they should not be exposed to the light of day” (Hollier 100).

By bringing to light these decisive but hidden aspects about man's beings, Bataille forces his audience to face the abhorring aspects about themselves.

2.3 Threshold of Reality

When the sense of the ego, idea and propriety are dissolved, a person's sense of reality becomes vague too. An individual in such state — an erotic one — would lose his sanity in the eyes of others, as he tests his own existence around the boundary of his being. The narration in *Story* lingers around the threshold of daydream and reality, making the episode seem the hallucination of a psychosis²¹. The boundary between the rational and irrational is blurred. For example, the author does not give any reason why Simone is ill except saying it's because of “a minor incident” (*Story* 35-7), nor does he tell what kind of ailment she has. None of these reasonings are important. Bataille has no intention to elucidate whether these curious circumstances are fantasy, because his aim is the experience beyond the threshold of reality. He pursues the heterogeneous which makes humanity dizzy without the meddling of language. The episode of Simone's illness and the episode of bicycle riding illustrate this state of being at the threshold of reality and fantasy. Since Bataille

²¹ “she soon delighted in having me throw eggs into the toilet bowl, hard-boiled eggs, which sank, and shells sucked out in various degrees to obtain varying levels of immersion” (*Eye* 36).

“I gently sucked Simone's breast while waiting for the soft-boiled eggs, and she ran her fingers through my hair. Her mother was the one who brought us eggs, but I didn't even turn around” (*Eye* 39-40).

considers the “self” in a society is alienated from his primordial impulses²², his aim is to release humanity from these worldly bounds. While cycling, the narrator of *Story* says, “it was as if I had left the earth”, “suddenly it seemed as if all reality were tearing apart” (*Eye* 25, 27). He has already been on the boundary of ratiō. Later when he finds both Simone and his clothes are gone, he has been diminishing all barriers among himself and the universal permanence, uniting with the universal oneness:

We had abandoned the real world, the one made up solely of dressed up people, and the time elapsing since then was already so remote as to seem almost beyond reach. Our personal hallucination now developed as boundlessly as perhaps the total nightmare of human society... (*Eye* 32)

Bataille wishes to show the immense heterogeneity beyond reality, and he is vehemently driven to cross beyond the limits of humanity—to the impossible. This drive (*Eye* 32) goes in the opposite direction of civilization — to where animals also belong, where it is allowed to be “extremely agitated” (*Eye* 32). In their trance, the protagonists gather all their strength, with full speed, to dash toward the threshold of destruction. Simone hurts herself fiercely in order for experiencing extreme states of being. By torturing herself, she gets to outline her body’s contour. The intensive pains she creates get her close to the loosening of her usual forms/proprieties:

Gasping and slipping away from me, Simone grabbed her own ass 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 ass, 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

²² “Man, identifying himself with work which reduced everything to order, thus cut himself off from violence tended in the opposite direction (*Eroticism* 45).

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 (*Eye* 55).

Bataille asserts, “[turmoil] is fundamental to my entire study; it is the very essence of my book” (*Literature* 3). It is the very borderline of reason that the narrator and Simone incessantly break down. Endlessly, they challenge the limits of ideas and the extent the readers can bear, until the narration becomes almost esoteric²³, and no concept can fully circumscribe the story because all ground upon which a notion stands is broken through to achieve a more “whole” unity. The quest of the formless is infinite. The boundary between reality and illusion becomes vague because whether there is a man or not does not matter²⁴. What matters is the indefinite confusion which brings her and her audiences to question the ground of their existence.

Pleasure, violence are the heterogeneous, according to Bataille. They function without the interference of ideas, dominating much of humanity’s behavior without speaking for itself. For Bataille, pleasure always involves violence in its rupturing of order; both pleasure and violence are speechless, and both disrupt social norms. There always remains a gap between pleasure and the ideas explicating it.

Without a word, the protagonists are captivated by each other out of something unnamable, something that “[warps] their desires, endlessly racking” them:

[In] the rainless forest... we pedaled rapidly, without laughing or speaking, peculiarly satisfied with our mutual presence, akin to one another in the common isolation of lewdness, weariness, and absurdity (*Eye* 31).

²³ This idea comes from Hollier, “Bataille’s writing... is an effort to think the low, to have the lowest possible thoughts... the *low* functions... as that which gets lower and lower; the low lowers... it never provides solid ground. The low is too low—always getting lower—to be submitted to the common measure of the idea” (102).

²⁴ During her ill time, Simone tells her mother not to come into her room because “there is a naked man in there” (*Eye* 35)

Chapter Two

Dualism of the Sacred: its Holy and Defiled Facets

“There is only one means in his power to escape from these various limitations—the destruction of a being similar to ourselves. In this destruction the limitations of our fellow human beings are denied; we cannot destroy an inert object: it changes but does not disappear: only a being similar to ourselves disappears, in death. The violence experienced by our fellow human beings is concealed from the order of finite, ultimately useless things. It returns them to immensity.”

—Bataille, *Literature and Evil*

In this Chapter, I argue the notion of *la continuité de l'être* as manifested in two facets — the pure one and the impure other. I will first foreground the notion of immanence — the immediate, non-alienated state in which man and the universe are one, occurring in the state of *la continuité de l'être*. Then I will argue *la continuité de l'être* has its pure and impure facets: the pure's realm includes the holy, the benevolent, and the miraculous, whereas the impure the defiled, the violent, the abhorrent, etc. I will support my arguments by documents about religions, and then I will show how the scenes in *Story of the Eye* display the Batailleian idea of defiled sacred.

For Bataille, religious and erotic passions are one thing manifested in different facets, although this has seldom been acknowledged. In the opening of *Eroticism*, he announces: “The saint turns from the voluptuary in alarm; she does not know that his unacknowledgeable passions and her own are really one” (*Eroticism* 7). In his novels, this notion of dualism often appears with startling juxtapositions of erotic and religious elements, accompanied by a strong sense of derangement. In *Madame Edwarda*, he shows this notion by Madame Edwarda's declaration, “I am God,” and by equalizing God as “a public whore” (*Edwarda* 127). In *Story of the Eye*, he expresses this idea by mingling Marcelle's wish for a husband and fear for “the Cardinal.” When Marcelle mistakes the narrator as her husband and cries for fear of an illusional Cardinal, Simone asks:

“But who is the Cardinal?”...

“The man who locked me in the wardrobe,” said Marcelle.

“But why is he a cardinal?” [the narrator] cried.

She replied: “Because he is the *priest of the guillotine*” (*Eye* 46).

The Cardinal as a religious figure suggests chastity, but he is sexually threatening in Marcelle’s dementia in which her sense of order is replaced by unintelligible confusion. The Cardinal is both the object to be feared and desired, being the incarnation of the taboo of sexuality. The husband suggests the legal transgression of the taboo of sex (*Eroticism* 109). The cardinal’s punishment of decapitation is psychologically related to the ruination of maidenhead. Marcelle’s desire and fear correspond to the innermost passions of the saint and the voluptuary.

Both religious and erotic passions are realized in forms of dissipation. In such realization, the former discontinuous beings are immersed in a universal unity “like water in water” (*Religion* 24). In those elevated occasions, particularly religious ones, these passions effect in sacrifice, selfless devotion, charitable donations, missionaries’ services to needy people, Crucifixion, the Holy Eucharist; in “lower” occasions, passions are manifested as uncalculated expenditure of stamina and useful resources, as in revelries and festivals. Even though the religious is usually esteemed, while the erotic and secular debased, both facets work in different forms of giving away. Together these facets form the realm of the sacred, or *la continuité de l’être*.

1. The Pure Sacred

Bataille discusses the sacred continuity from both its esteemed facet and the accursed one. The former, referred to as the pure, is often related with Christian religion, beauty, the monarch, whereas the accursed, referred to as the impure, are related with the erotic, the heretic, the evil and the defiled. In the following I will explain the pure facet first.

Through giving away resources, God’s children are fed back with elevated experiences, especially that of being linked with God, perpetuating their transitory existences. Bataille explains, the Christian spirits retains [its] essential core [in] *continuity* in the first place.

Continuity is reached through experience of the divine. The divine is the essence of continuity. Christianity relies on it entirely, even as far as to neglect the means by which this continuity can be achieved²⁵ (*Eroticism* 118).

Expenditure brings divine continuity, whether in a religious or impure context. In terms of those esteemed occasions, the faithful who were once discontinuous beings become continuous with God by a divine exchange: first, God gives his dearest son to man out of great love. Then, man glorifies God with faith and benevolent deeds. Since God has done his part of expenditure in giving his dear to man, what is left for man to do is to carry out His teachings of giving away selflessly to those in need. The faithful is linked with Him by self-sacrifice and donation. Something miraculous occurs in the process of giving-away. An “intelligible sphere is revealed in a transport, in a sudden movement of transcendence, where tangible matter is surpassed” (Bataille, *Religion* 73). Archbishop Paul Shan Kuo-Hsi, recapitulates this process of divine fusion:

God is *immense* love. He creates the universe out of immense love. And love is willing to give, so he gives whatever he has to people. His love is *selfless*. When the humans fall, he endeavors to save them because of love—he incarnates as Jesus Christ so as to save us. Jesus is both the real God and a real human being. In him, humanity and divinity are linked ...

The *union* that God plans unites God and humanity closely and entirely—the union is Jesus Christ, who is simultaneously God and man. This union elevates us, making us God’s children, linking his everlasting being with our transitory ones.

People may doubt, “what is an *everlasting* life? Would it be dull to remain in the same state forever?” Actually the happiest moment for a person is the moment when he is in love: being loved, loving others, and leading a life abundant with love. God

²⁵ “The [neglected] means with which the continuity [is] achieved” refers to Crucifixion — an obvious transgression of the taboo of “thou shalt not kill” (*Eroticism* 262).

is Love. His life is also love. Entering the everlasting state is like a fish jumps into the sea. When a person is surrounded by God's immense love, he is completed.

[Take myself for example,] the relation between God and myself is entirely *person to person*, a very close *personal relationship* (Shan 22-7).

The Archbishop's testimony shows that religious bliss / continuity lies in an individual's exchange of love with God, and this bliss — “the immense love” surrounding a person is a permanent, transcendental state: that of *la continuité de l'être*.

It should be noticed that what the Archbishop describes about the sense of bliss and closeness in divine continuity is reminiscent of what is sought in profane lovers. Documents about religious mysticism often show that divine continuity is similar to the fusion felt in erotic activities: the participants forget their own boundaries formulating them as individuals—it is said that they “lose themselves” or “are lost in something else.” This may explain why Bataille converts from a pious Catholic priest to the champion of eroticism. For him both are of one origin, manifesting in different facets.

Another factor of *la continuité de l'être* is its unconditional, unlimited expenditure. Bataille's sacred continuity requires complete, uncalculated self-sacrifice or donation because these moves diminish the boundary among an individual and his fellow beings:

Basically the Christian's wish was to *open the door to a completely unquestioning love*. According to the Christian belief, lost continuity found again in God demand[s]...the faithful [to retain] boundless and *uncalculated* love...Man transfigured by divine continuity was exalted in God to the lover of his fellow. Christianity has never relinquished the hope of finally reducing this world of selfish discontinuity to the realm of continuity afire with love.

The initial movement of [transgressive impulses] was thus steered by Christianity towards the vision of violence transcended and transformed into its

opposite.

The ideal has a sublime and fascinating quality (*Eroticism* 118).

2. The Impure Sacred

Christianity prizes giving-away in its teaching: the pious would be fed back with a much more grandeur self. But Christianity's discourses are limited within the pure facet, disregarding that of the impure. Although "the realm of sacred things is composed of the pure and of the impure" (*Eroticism* 120), the impure facet has always been ignored or condemned in the Church's discourse. Birth and death—those moments close to the unintelligible in an individual's life—are composed of pure and impure aspects—for example, although Nativity has always been glorified as a spotlighted scene in which the Holy mother holding the infant lovingly, the process relating pang, bleeding and lacerated organs has seldom been mentioned. Those impure aspects in childbirth are usually hidden or embellished. Contrary to Christianity's relinquishment of the "impure", other religions, especially those ancient ones do not reject the impure elements in sacred moments. Some of their followers worship animals and the inanimate. They respect the low aspect of the nature no less than what is bright and elevated.

The consequence of Christianity's rejection of impure sacredness is the neglecting of the entire value of the sacred (*Eroticism* 120). "Originally, within the divine world, the beneficent and pure elements opposed the malefic and impure elements, and both types appeared equally distant from the profane. But... [a movement of thought of the divine linked to purity, and the profane to impurity] " becomes dominant (Bataille, *Religion* 63). At first, since God is the unity and God is good, the realm of the sacred becomes only the good. The belief that the unity is composed of the good and evil is neglected. The evil's sacredness is ignored in mainstream discourses. Christianity's discourse designates the impure and the guilty as the mundane in the first place; this results in the misunderstanding of the impure as non-sacred, even though the impure sacred has supernatural power (*Eroticism* 121). Although the low sacred is a minor portion in the realm of the sacred—for

example, the killing in a sacrificial ritual only serves as the “prelude to a transcendental act”, this move of killing reaches the supernatural nonetheless. Christianity’s discourses on the sacred allow little for anything related to sin, transgression, or defilement, despite that Satan, “the angel or God of transgression,” never loses his supernatural power (*Eroticism* 122). The consequence of such denial is the nullification of Christianity’s favorable sacred. Bataille explains the effect: first, the denial of impure sacredness and its merge with the profane, make the devil less and less noticed. Then “the realm of religion is reduced to that of the God of Good, whose limits are those of light.” The dark places no longer belong to the domain of religion. There is no curse on anything in this domain” (*Eroticism* 123). With the weakening of its opposite side, the power of God has nothing to oppose to. In the end, the denial of impure sacred diminishes the entire supernatural power of the sacred.

Comparing to its significance in other religions, the impure sacred in Christianity, incarnated as the Devil, is delineated more as a secular existence rather than degraded supernatural being (*Eroticism* 123). As mentioned, it has been Christianity’s practice to negate the power of the evil (the impure) by describing Satan as a mesmerizing villain rather than a deity, despite his heavenly origin. This trend of recognizing only what is pure has brought man aloof from his primordial instinct. The consequence is that the faithful are unaware of the sacredness of the demonic and become unprepared to deal with it: people become unable to tackle with the defiled, the instinctive, and the evil parts which are part of themselves (*Eroticism* 123)²⁶. Bataille explains,

the merging of sacred uncleanness and the profane seems to have been for some long time contrary to the feeling about the true nature of things persisting in man’s memory, but the inverted religious structure of Christianity demanded it. It is perfect in so far as the feeling of sacredness dwindles when it is encased in formal patterns

²⁶ Bataille quotes the following two sections to manifest humanity’s instincts as simultaneously innocent but appalling, 1. “... Humans are the cruelest animals. Participants in tragedies, bullfights, crucifixions — until the present they’ve been more at home on earth; when they invented hell, it was in fact their paradise” (*Nietzsche* 20). 2. “It would be terrible to still believe in sin; on the contrary everything we do, if we need to say this a thousand times, is innocent” (*Nietzsche* 22).

that seem a little out of date. One of the signs of this decline is the lack of heed paid to the existence of the devil these days; people believe in him less and less—I was going to say that they have ceased to believe in him all together. That means that the dark side of religious mystery, more ill-defined than ever, finally loses all significance (*Eroticism* 123).

Christianity's limitation of the sacred within only the pure facet results in the weakening of the instinctive intimacy in its followers. Intimacy, comprising both the elevated and the unclean, is subjugated to a reduced system of discourse. The result is the weakening of the entire realm of the sacred (*Eroticism* 123). In the following scene, the narrator in *Story of the Eye* delineates the weakening of the young priest when suddenly faced with his own immanent impulses he has long forgotten:

One can readily imagine my stupor at watching Simone kneeling down by the cabinet of the lugubrious confessor. While she confessed her sin, I waited, extremely anxious to see the outcome of such an unexpected action. I assume this sordid creature was going to burst from his booth, pounce upon the impious girl, and flagellate her. I was even getting ready to knock the dreadful phantom down and treat him to a few kicks; but nothing of the sort happened; the booth remained closed, Simone spoke on and on through the tiny grilled window, and that was all.

I was exchanging sharply interrogative looks with Sir Edmund when things began to grow clear: Simone was slowly scratching her thigh, moving her legs apart; keeping one knee on the prayer stool, she shifted one foot to the floor, and she was exposing more and more of her legs over her stockings while still murmuring her confession. At times she even seemed to be jerking off.

I softly drew up at the side to try and see what was happening: Simone really *was* jerking off, the left part of her face was pressed against the grille near the priest's

head, her limbs tensed, her thighs splayed, her fingers rummaging deep in the fur; I was able to touch her, I bare her cunt for an instant. At that moment, I distinctly heard her say:

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

A few seconds of silence.

“The worst sin of all is very simply that I’m jerking 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 jerking off with a quick, sure hand.

“Okay, priest,” cried Simone, banging away at the confessional, “what are you doing in your shack there? Jerking off, too?”

But the confessional kept its peace.

“Well, then I’ll open.”

And Simone pulled out the door.

Inside, the visionary, standing there with a lowered head, was mopping a sweat-bathed brow. The girl groped for his cock under the cassock: he didn’t turn a hair. She pulled up the filthy black skirt so that the long cock stuck out, pink and hard: 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.

Sir Edmund and I were immobile in our stupor. For my part, I was *spellbound with admiration*, and I didn’t know what else to do, when the enigmatic Englishman resolutely strode to the confessional and, after edging Simone aside as delicately as could be, yanked the larva out of its hole by its wrist, and flung it brutally at our feet:

the vile priest lay there like a cadaver, his teeth to the ground, not uttering a cry. We promptly carried him to the vestry.

His fly was open, his cock dangling, his face livid and drenched with sweat, he didn't resist, but breathed heavily: we put him in a large wooden armchair with architectural decorations.

“Señores,” the wretch sniveled, “you must think I'm a hypocrite.”

“No,” replied Sir Edmund with a categorical intonation.

Simone asked him: “What's your name?”

“Don Aminado,” he answered.

Simone slapped the sacerdotal pig, which gave the pig another hard-on. We stripped off all his clothes, and Simone crouched down and pissed on them like a bitch. Then she jerked and sucked the pig while I urinated in his nostrils. Finally, to top off this cold exaltation, I fucked Simone in the ass while she violently sucked his cock (*Eye* 72-5).

In the above episode, the facet regarded as degraded reveals itself and retrieves the priest's once-oppressed nature. It was not just the instinctive immanence of the priest that is awakened; other participants in this scene are “spellbound with admiration” as well. Don Aminado, with “pale eyes of a saint” (*Eye* 70), is unprepared to face the impure which is part of himself. He loses his conscious which once bound him as an individual belonging to an ordered world. The defiled, more intimate to him than he could have thought, suddenly appears and captures him in stupor. The pure realm of Christianity incarnated in him is infiltrated by and immersed in a reversed divinity.

In *Story of the Eye's* reversed world where the base is the prized, Marcelle is the goddess yearned devilishly by the protagonists. None of those frantic parties in earlier parts of this novella captivate them better than this vulnerable girl who yields herself unreservedly. She is the center of the protagonists' curious obsession which occupies one fourth of the pages of the novella. The

narrator declares after several rounds of horrifying incidents they incite, “all we could think about is Marcelle“ (*Eye* 36), and that they “spent all of Simone’s [ill days]...looking forward to going back to Marcelle, as nervously as [waiting for the last class in school]” (*Eye* 41). It appears that their victim Marcelle, “with an unusual lack of will power”, “grasp[ing] absolutely nothing of what was going on...incapable of telling one situation from another,” is merely a prey to the protagonists’ caprice (*Eye* 45). But this is from the viewpoint of the subordinated, secular world. She remains the focus of the protagonists’ attention even after her death. In terms of selfless, uncalculated sacrifice, Marcelle is like a reversed Jesus Christ. The protagonists’ desire upon Marcelle resembles what is usually sought after in deities: is not she similarly hypnotizing and fascinating to the protagonists, as what God is to the faithful in their mystical experience? And does not Marcelle make them feel vertiginous, as God does to the saints, according to the faithful’s testimonies (*Eroticism* 7)? Moreover, the death of Marcelle corresponds to Bataille’s idea that “killing...consecrate[s] the victim” as what Crucifixion achieves (*Eroticism* 81). Marcelle incarnates the idea of “the object of the greatest respect and that which respects nothing” (Hollier 131). Similarly, in terms of being treasured and sacrificed, Christ has been through the same: he is assigned to death and to be the lamb for the entire human race in God’s plan. The double character of sacredness — that the sacred could either be an object admired or unclean, is manifested in the character Marcelle (*Eroticism* 223). By incidents inflicted on Marcelle, Bataille shows that the the unclean is more treasured in his reversed ideal world.

The narrator’s emotion on seeing Marcelle’s corpse combines awe and obsession, and such experience is similar to the saints’ delineation about their God. Marcelle is an unique object of obsession to the protagonists, as God is to the pious. In the novella, the protagonists pursue after Marcell as if she is the center of the universe, parallel to the way the faithful follow God:

Marcelle belongs to us so deeply in our isolation that we could not see her as just another corpse. Nothing about her death could be measured by a common standard,

and the contradictory impulses overtaking us in this circumstance neutralized one another, leaving us blind and, as it were, very remote from anything we touched, in a world where gestures, have no carrying power, like voices in a space that is absolutely soundless (*Eye* 51-2).

In the narrator's eye, Marcelle is projected as if she is God: a unique existence, not to be measured by any secular standards, omni-present in the depth of their hearts. Like God, she comprehensively neutralizes all contradictions, immersing her followers in a mythical experience simultaneously blinding, silent, near and everywhere.

The semantic ambiguity of the term "sacer" (both holy and damned), the origin of the word "sacred," explains the double character of what is enchanting. First, in man's primordial times, the term "sacer" may have referred to what is not allowed and not to be approached, and hence indicating both the holy and the damned regarded nowadays as the religious and the erotic: an ancient man is taught not to get close to those holy places so that he would not defile those sacred areas; meanwhile he is also taught not to get near to unclean places, e.g. those with excrements or corpses, so that he would not be inflicted by diseases accompanying those decayed. These limits allure people to go beyond them exactly for the reason that they are not allowed. Religious places have to be severely distinct from others in various aspects. Limitations make churches and temple solemn, but it is the effect of distancing that makes the experience of feeling close to God possible. As time goes by, the notion of sacer has been so elaborated that its beginning has been forgotten. Now the double character of "sacer" is only preserved in some pagan religions that correspond more to man's instinct responding both the holy and the damned sacred (*Eroticism* 120).

In the following scene, Bataille demonstrates his notion of the defiled as an aspect of the sacred by parodying the ritual of the Holy Eucharist. According to his idea of transgression, the most effective way to the low sacred is by defiling the holiest; it brings forward impure sacredness:

The English man returned a few moments later, carrying a ciborium of twisted

gold, decorated with a quantity of angels as naked as cupids. The wretched Don Aminado gaped at this receptacle of consecrated hosts on the floor, and his handsome moronic face, already contorted because Simone was flagellating his cock with her teeth and tongue, was now fully gasping and panting.

After barricading the door, Sir Edmund rummaged through the closets until he finally lit upon a large chalice, whereupon he asked us to abandon the wretch for an instant.

“Look,” he explained to Simone, “the eucharistic hosts in the ciborium, and here the chalice where they put white wine.”

“They smell like come,” said Simone, sniffing the unleavened wafers.

“Precisely,” continued Sir Edmund. “The hosts, 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*” (*Eye* 75-6)

In the Bataillean eucharist, Christ’s blood is replaced by urine, and his body by sperm. The holy vessels are defiled by the unclean. Moreover, in the Bataillean eucharist it is implied that the spiritual (pure sacred) is replaced by the corporeal, as the bread and wine are appointed as the true body and blood of Jesus (explained in the following elucidation of the Holy Eucharist). What is suggested here is that the sacred is always involved with transgression. For example, in the Holy Eucharist, to eat a man’s flesh, represented as eating the flesh of Jesus, is not considered atrocious, it is a way to link with the holy instead. The quality that God belongs to the sacred exempts the taboo of eating human (Jesus’) flesh. What is impure here — homicide and cannibalism — is an essential part of the entire ritual. Without these elements the whole ritual cannot be holy. Besides,

with the transformation from bread to flesh, the boundary of the impure and pure is suspended, and the two facets become interchangeable. The following explanation for the Holy Eucharist illustrates a miraculous transformation of the impure to the pure:

The Holy Eucharist is a sacrament and a sacrifice. In the Holy Eucharist, under the appearances of bread and wine, the Lord Christ is contained, offered, and received.

The whole Christ is really, truly, and substantially present in the Holy Eucharist. We use the words "really, truly, and substantially" to describe Christ's presence in the Holy Eucharist in order to distinguish Our Lord's teaching from that of mere men who falsely teach that the Holy Eucharist is only a sign or figure of Christ, or that He is present only by His power.

When Our Lord said, "This is My body," the entire substance of the bread was changed into His body; and when He said, "This is My blood," the entire substance of the wine was changed into His blood.

Christ could not have used clearer, more explicit words than "This is My body." He did not say, "This is a sign of My body," or "This represents My body," but, "This is My body." Catholics take Christ at His word because He is the omnipotent God. On His word they know that the Holy Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ.

Because the appearances of bread and wine remain in the Holy Eucharist, we cannot see Christ with our bodily eyes in this sacrament. We do see Him, however, with the eyes of faith. Our bodily eyes, moreover, do not deceive us when they see the appearances of bread and wine for these appearances really remain after the Consecration of the Mass (EWTN 343-56).

The above explanation shows that in the Holy Eucharist, the spiritual (pure sacredness) is mythically interchangeable with the material: bread and wine transformed as body and blood. More importantly, by taking in Jesus's body, the pious also absorbs His divinity. The term

“Transubstantiation” —the change of the entire substance of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ— marks this ambiguous character of Christ’s sacrifice in the Holy Eucharist (EWTN 56).

The explanation also implies transgression in sacred contexts — the taboo of cannibalism is neglected in the Holy Eucharist. Religions almost always involve what is not allowed in the common course of life. In the sacred, violence is licensed. Once a thing is consecrated, it is no longer submitted to secular standards. Homicide is a taboo, but the whole theology of Christianity begins with the transgression of it²⁷. The corpse of Christ, with its pure aspect as the Lord’s body, can pass the taboo of cannibalism. These examples show that transgression makes what is sacred possible.

The following examples demonstrate more of Bataille’s belief that transgression is the way to the sacred, usually with juxtapositions of the pure and impure. For example, his notion of the sacred is manifested when Madame Edwarda says blasphemously, “you see, I am GOD,” with her hands spreading her vagina” and her legs open (qtd. in Hollier 138-9). The effect of sacred uncleanness occurs in the befouling of the lofty. Another example in Bataille’s article shows he imagines eating stars as eating excrements. In “*Les Mangeurs d’étoiles*” (“Stareaters”), he writes, “To eat stars. Put your head back. Open your mouth farther than possible. To the point of screaming” (qtd. in Hollier 133). In one aspect, the celestial bodies here are defiled; in another aspect, their equivalence to the excrements show Bataille’s idea that the unclean sacred is parallel to the clean. In *Story of the Eye*, he describes the milky way as “a strange breach of astral sperm and heavenly urine ... apparently made of ammoniacal vapors shining in immensity” (*Eye* 48); “I associate the moon with the vaginal blood of mothers, sisters, that is, the menstrua with their

²⁷ Bataille refers to the paradox about Crucifixion. It violates the taboo of “thou shalt not kill”: “emphasize the fact that in the Christian system what I call transgression is called sin. Sin is a fault, it is that which ought not to have happened. Take first the death on the Cross: it is a sacrifice, a sacrifice whose victim is God himself. But although the sacrifice redeems us, although the Church sings its paradoxical *Felix Culpa!* — happy error — to the underlying fault, that which redeems us is also that which ought not to have taken place. For Christianity the taboo is absolute and transgression of any kind is condemned out of hand. Yet the condemnation is relaxed because of the very fault most to be condemned, the worst transgression imaginable. The transition from eroticism to sanctity makes very good sense. It is the transition from that which is damned and rejected to that which is fortunate and blessed... the paradox of happy error... [lies in the point that its] very extravagance redeems us” (*Eroticism* 262).

sickening stench...” (*Eye* 49). These analogies show how the opposite character of “sacer” works concurrently, and that defiling the lofty, clean, and ordered opens the way to the sacred which Bataille names differently in different contexts as “continuous being”, “nothing”, “universal one”.

The following scene in *Story* also demonstrates how the unclean acts manifests itself by defiling the holy. As the ban on sacrileges are lifted, the feared and hidden in the common course of life — the inner uncleanness of a person, is revealed. Those which people never face directly now come on the scene, and rational thinking goes offstage. Don Aminado, who becomes “inert in his armchair, faintly agitated” is unprepared to see the unclean because Christianity refuses to see it straightforwardly. As Simone continues breaking into all possible territories of social taboos, Don Aminado’s sense of ego gives way to ecstasy and dementia:

Simone began by slamming the base of the chalice against his skull, which jolted him and left him utterly dazed. Then she resumed sucking him, which provoked his ignoble rattles. After bringing his senses to a height of fury with Sir Edmund’s help and mine, she gave him a hard shake.

“That’s not all,” she said in a voice that brooked no reply. “It’s time to piss.”

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 that the thing went off with barely any hitch; Don Aminado noisily poured his urine in to the chalice, which Simone held under his thick cock.

“And now, drink,” commanded sir Edmund.

The paralyzed wretch drank with a well-nigh filthy ecstasy at one gluttonous draft. Again Simone sucked and jerked him; he continued guzzling tragically and reveling in it. With a demented gesture he bashed the sacred chamber-pot against a wall. Four robust arms lifted him up and, with open thighs, 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 jerking him off (*Eye* 76-7).

The sense of ego maintaining Don Aminado as who he is (in the common course of life) relinquishes in Simone's befouling assaillment. He is immersed in the Batailleian continuity—both a state of ecstasy and nothing.

Bataille shows his notion of the unclean sacred in various ways: in Simone's undifferentiated site of urination, the car incident decapitating a girl, the deranging, horrifying party teeming with tears, urines, bloods, the bullfight where plethora, organs, bodily liquids explode. In the climax of the bullfight scene, the participants are bathed in a delirium in which erotic and violent impulses erupt regardless of social norms. The "blinding sun" suggests they are in an immanence where senses do not work. The conscious of a person as an enclosed being is destroyed, so the involvers become chaotic. Death is part of the result as individual beings' limits diminish:

The events that followed were without transition or connection, not because they weren't actually related, but because my attention was so absent as to remain absolutely dissociated. In just a few seconds: first, Simone bit into one of the raw balls, to my dismay; then Granero advanced towards the bull, waving his scarlet cloth; finally, almost at once, Simone, with a blood-red face and a suffocating lewdness, uncovered her long white, thighs up to her moist vulva, into which she slowly and surely fitted the second pale globule—Granero was thrown back by the bull and wedged against the balustrade; the horns struck the balustrade three times at full speed; at the third blow, one horn plunged into the right eye and through the head. A shriek of unmeasured horror coincided with a brief orgasm for Simone, who was lifted up from the stone seat only to be flung back with a bleeding nose, under a blinding sun; men instantly rushed over to haul away Granero's body, the right eye dangling from the head (*Eye* 64).

In this scene Bataille delineates his ideal picture about the impure sacred: with the realization of the immanence in man. Nothing here severs the man and his inner, immediate intimacy with the

universe. All his oppressed wishes come forth, becoming the nightmare for those submitted to norms. The bans on the raw, the unsanitary, sex, violence, and death, for the sake of the duration of life, are lifted “in just a few seconds.” This results in “unmeasured horror” as rules guaranteeing the maintenance of life are annihilated. Death is the outcome. But this horror is followed by Simone’s ecstasy. The blinding sun, the narrator’s dissociated attention, and the absence of proper transition of the scene suggest the power of intimacy being much more overwhelming than the regulating will people have taken much effort to maintain.

Bataille sees the ancient Aztec society as one that belongs to the realm of sacred continuum, a counterpart of his contemporary society. For him, “[the Aztecs’] world view is singularly and diametrically opposed to the activity-oriented perspective that we have. Consumption loomed just as large in their thinking as production does in ours. They were just as concerned about *sacrificing* as we are about *working*” (*Accursed I 46*).

The legend of the Aztec God of the Sun corresponds to Bataille’s notion of merging into the universal flow through deliberate loss. By sacrificing his own life, the deity acquires permanent existence which is continuous with the universal continuity. “The sun himself was in their eyes the expression of sacrifice. He was a god resembling man. He had become the sun by hurtling himself into the flames of a brazier” (*Accursed I 46*). It is said that before there was light in the day, gods gathered to decide who is to give himself to bring the world light. A god named Tecuciztecatl volunteered, along with another usually unnoticed god. Other gods prepared a hearth among the rocks for the two volunteers to toss themselves in. Except their own bodies, both of the two gods offered other gifts to the fire before they offered themselves: spines made by red coral, copal, scabs (from the second god, Nanauatzin’s own body,) balls of grass. In the meantime there was a tower built for each of them. They set a fire which lasted for four days. The two gods do their penance during the four days. When midnight came, all the gods gathered together around the hearth, it was time for the two volunteers to do their duty. However, the first volunteer, Tecuciztecatl, hesitated for

fear of the heat; he tried to approach the fire three times but dare not cast himself into the fire. And then when it was Nanauatzin' turn, he gathered his courage and threw himself to the fire, and was immediately burnt. Seeing his companion doing so, Tecuciztecatl finally cast himself to the hearth too. After a while, Nanauatzin, the second god, became the sun. He rose up to the east and radiated his light in all directions. Other gods could not see him directly because his ultra brightness had blinded them. Then Tecuciztecatl became the moon and rose up too. He gave out only a dim light because his courage was less strong. Other gods died soon after — the wind extract their hearts to feed on the new born stars (*Accursed I 46-9*).

The practice of Aztec sacrifice is based on this legend. The Aztecs believe that “satiated by the blood and flesh, the sun gave glory to the soul in his palace” (*Accursed I 54*). Therefore there must be continuous supply of the blood and flesh in order for the sun to give glory. Their wars are waged for the supply of victims. And instead of taking resources, for them the end of wars is the mystical consumption that links them with the supernatural:

“most victims were prisoners of war, which justified the idea of war as necessary to the life of the sun: Wars means consumption, not conquest, and the Mexicans thought that if they ceased (to offer sacrifice) the sun would cease to give light... Around Easter time...they undertook the sacrificial slaying to a young man of irreproachable beauty. He was chosen from among the captives of the previous year, and from that moment he lived like a great lord. He went through the whole town very well dressed, with flowers in his hand and accompanied...He would bow graciously to all whom he met, and they all know he was the image of Tezcatlipoca, [one of the greatest gods] and prostrated themselves before him, worshipping him wherever they met him...Every care was taken to ensure the elegance and princely distinction of his life...If, due to the good treatment, he grew stout, they would make him drink salt-water to keep slender. Twenty days previous to the festival they gave

this youth four maidens, well prepared and educated for this purpose. During those twenty days he had carnal intercourse with these maidens. The four girls...had been reared with special care for that purpose [and] were given names of four goddess... On the day...when he was to die they took him to an oratory...he mounted the steps by himself and...awaited at the top...the priests...now grabbed him and threw him onto the stone block, and holding him by feet, hands and head, thrown on his back, the priest who had the stone knife buried it with a might thrust in the victim's breast and, after drawing it out, thrust one hand into the opening and tore out the heart, which he at once offered to the sun" (*Accursed I 50*).

The victim, regarded as the sacrificer's son and a second self, is offered and eaten in a banquet by invited guests later (*Accursed I 53*)—by violence, the guest, the victim and the host are immersed in an intimacy they share with the universal one.

It is important to notice the intimacy of the victim and the sacrificer, which is parallel to the relation of the Christian God and the Son. It shows that the Aztecs were symbolically sacrificing their dearest possessions instead of unimportant goods, in the purpose of showing their respect to the recipient god:

“Concerning a warrior who brought back a captive, then offered him in sacrifice, it was said that he had ‘considered his captive as his own flesh and blood, calling him son, while the latter called him father” (51).

The victim, selected from the basest prisoners of war, is consecrated as a sovereign being, simultaneously the most esteemed and the basest. The structure of this ancient divinity has a symmetrical counterpart in Christianity, except the latter ignores the unclean practices such as

human sacrifice²⁸. The symbolic meaning of Aztec sacrifice supplements the absence of discourses on impure sacred in Christianity; it also demonstrates expenditure as means to the sacred. To be more specifically, in these practices of giving-away (no matter they are charitable deeds or human sacrifice), it is not the practitioner's "self" that is cherished, the "self" is the least important matter in the sacred. The sole aim of the sacred is the endeavor to demolish the human nature of self-importance.



²⁸ If it is the warrior, instead of their rivals that dies in the war, the warrior himself would be considered as the offering to the Sun: [The Aztecs] were conscious of [the] enchantment of war and sacrifice. The midwife would cut the umbilical cord of the newborn baby boy and say to him: I cut your navel in the middle of your body. Know and understand that the house in which you are born is not your dwelling...It is your cradle, the place where you lay your head... Your true land is elsewhere; you are promised for other places. You belong to the countryside where battles are fought; you were sent to go there; your function and your skill is warfare; your duty is to give the sun the blood of your enemies to drink and to supply the earth with the bodies of your enemies to eat. As for your native land, your legacy and your happiness, you will find them in the house of the sun in the sky... If the warrior had himself been overcome instead of returning a victor, his death on the field of battle would have had the same meaning as the ritual sacrifice of his prisoner: It would also have satisfied the hungry gods (*Accursed I* 53-4).

Chapter Three

Ongoing Undifferentiation

In Chapter Two, I argue the state of “sacred” (*la continuité de l'être*) as manifested dualistically in two facets — the holy and the unclean. I support my argument with Christian and ancient Aztec religion. In Chapter Three, I will explain how an all-inclusive continuity encompasses contradictions. To get close to this continuity, one must let loose the obsession to his notion of ego. In this state, the ego does not matter as individual discontinuities become continuous. Furthermore, this nullification of “ego” can be achieved by interruption of existences, ultimately manifested as death. The awareness that an individual is an enclosed being must be dispossessed. So is the obsession of distinct matters. By dispossessing these ideas, *la continuité de l'être* becomes possible. It is only by releasing from the sense of the enclosed, discontinuous being that an unsubdued awareness can be reached (*Religion* 35). The deviated activities in *Story of the Eye* are variations of release from fixated ideas and self. Freedom from the boundary of these ideas allows men to become one with the universe.

1. Nullification of the Ego

Bataille's notion of universal continuity involves his doubt on the notion of “self.” He points out a fundamental limitation binding every individual man from his limitless possibility:

In the bewilderment of [senses] man performs a mental process by which he is equal to what he is. The course of human life inclined us to facile opinions: we represent ourselves as well-defined entities. Nothing seems more secure than the ego which is at the basis of thought. And when it strikes an object it modifies it for its own use: it is never the equal of what is not itself (*Literature* 102).

The above statement singles out the notion of ego as barrier of an individual's transcendental existence. It is the opinion that “every individual is a well-defined entity” that hinders something more sovereign to man. Bataille questions the presupposition that an “ego” in everyone the base of every human creation. First, it is implied that man is not a “well-defined entity” as he presumes

himself to be. The statement that “a man is equal to what he is” assumes an individual as a stable, distinctive being. And this assumption, being the base of knowledge, excludes other possibilities. For example, as man may also be perceived as a constantly changing aggregation of flesh, combining with eruptive energy. Bataille continues:

What is outside our finite beings sometimes *subordinates* us and becomes an impenetrable infinity. At other times, it becomes the object which we handle, which is subordinated to us. Let us add that the individual, by assimilating the things he handles, can still subordinate himself to a finite order which *rivets* him within an immensity. If he then tries to reduce this immensity to scientific laws (which place an equals sign between the world and finite things), *he is only equal to his object if he rivets himself to an order which crushed him* (which *denies* him—which denies that which differs in him from the finite and subordinate thing) (*Literature* 103).

In here it is implied that the human mind limits itself out of immensity: an individual sets up a set of rules and regulations within which he positions himself and becomes a minor object, positioned within a finite order. His unlimitedness is henceforth denied. In here Bataille questions the superiority of science and human’s discourses: both are based on something limited, and therefore also limited. Human beings classify whatever is outside of him, but he also subordinates himself to the classification he creates.

To release oneself from the limitation of the ego, Bataille asserts the solution via violence that opens the valve to immensity:

There is only one means in his power to escape from these various limitations—the destruction of a being similar to ourselves. In this destruction the limitations of our fellow human beings are denied; we cannot destroy an inert object: it changes but does not disappear: only a being similar to ourselves disappears, in death. The violence experienced by our fellow human beings is concealed from the order of finite, ultimately useless things. It returns them to immensity (*Literature* 103).

The “inert object” destroyed refers to the materiel portion of the victim—the corpse that belongs in the sphere of the profane, subjugated to destruction. Here Bataille implies that there is a transcendental facet of man that would not disappear. And “the being similar to ourselves” refers to those who are subordinated to calculation.

Violence turns the finite and useless to immensity: in sacrificial ritual, the corpse of the victim does not disappear; after death it goes from live to decomposition. What vanishes is the sense of ego that enters into immensity. Violence and death destroy the mortal part of a being, so immortality occurs (*Literature* 10). A victim surpasses the limitation of himself by losing his individuality, he embraces immensity henceforth. In violent death, what disappears is the part limited by orders and laws under which the individual subordinates himself. Once these orders and laws are destroyed, the victim returns to “immensity.” Since a person cannot survive in the destruction of his own body, the only way for him to experience unlimited transcendence is the shattering of another’s life. In *Theory of Religion*, Bataille identifies what he aims to destroy in a sacrifice — the individuality as the alienation from the continuity. Here Bataille indicates the world of the profane as “the world of the thing.” By “the thing” he refers to those limited and subjugated to calculation:

The thing — only the thing — is what sacrifice means to destroy in the victim. Sacrifice destroys an object’s real ties of subordination; it draws the victim out of the world of utility and restores it to that of unintelligible caprice. When the offered animal enters the circle in which the priest will immolate it, it passes from the world of things which are closed to man and are nothing to him, which he knows from the outside — to the world that is immanent to it, *intimate*, known as the wife is known in sexual consumption. This assumes that it has ceased to be separated from its own intimacy, as it is in the subordination of labor (*Religion* 43-4).

Again, Bataille asserts that sacrificial rituals and sexual consumption as one thing manifested in different experiences. Both are liberation from the enslaved, limited existence. Later in the same

Chapter, he adds,

as a matter of fact, killing in the literal sense is not necessary. But the greatest negation of [the world of the things] is the one most favorable to the appearance of the mythical order. Moreover, sacrificial killing resolves the painful antinomy of life and death by means of a reversal. In fact death is nothing in immanence, but because it is nothing, a being is never truly separated from it. Because death has no meaning, because there is no difference between it and life, and there is no fear of it or defense against it, it invades everything without giving rise to any resistance (*Religion* 45).

In *Story of the Eye*, by witnessing the death of Marcelle and Don Aminado, their audience experience the perishing of a fellow being akin to them. By scattering a well-defined identity, they retain a transcendental experience, escaping from the delusion of the ego. Death demolishes the contradiction of selves and others. When Marcelle and Don Aminado die, their sacrificers shed their idea of self which blocks their path to the universal immensity.

2. Continuity among Oppositions

As the pure counterpart of Bataille's loss of individuality, the sense of breaking through one's sense of ego is described as a spiritual experience in Christianity as well. The following is a Christian follower's testimony on his mystical experience. With metaphors similar to Bataille's idea of "*la continuité de l'être*", he expresses the universal unity with which the released individual becomes one. Like Hollier's questioning of philosophy with the example of Plato (see *Chapter One*), in the following the "rational" and "argumentation" is regarded as "irrelevant.

When the sense of estrangement [which fence] man about in a narrowly limited ego breaks down, the individual finds himself "at one with all creation." He lives in the universal life; he and man, he and nature, he and God, are one. That state of confidence, trust, union with all things, following upon the achievement of moral

unity, is the *Faith-state*. Various dogmatic beliefs suddenly, on the advent of the faith-state, acquire a character of certainty, assume a new reality, become an object of faith. As the ground of assurance here is not rational, argumentation is irrelevant. But such conviction being a mere casual offshoot of the faith-state, it is a gross error to imagine that the chief practical value of the faith-state is its power to stamp with the seal of reality certain particular theological conceptions. On the contrary, its value lies solely in the fact that it is the psychic correlate of a biological growth reducing contending desires to one direction; a growth which expresses itself in new affective states and new reactions; in larger, nobler, more Christ-like activities. The ground of the specific assurance in religious dogmas is then an affective experience. The objects of faith may even be preposterous; the affective stream will float them along, and invest them with unshakable certitude. The more startling the affective experience, the less explicable it seems, the easier it is to make it the carrier of unsubstantiated notions (James 247).

The above testimony shows that in the Christian sacred, it is not the reality, nor the world of things, nor theological conceptions that matter. It is “the psychic correlate of a growth reducing contending desires to one direction,” similar to the “universal one” Bataille proposes, that melts “the sense of estrangement” and pacifies “the narrowly limited ego.”

Bataille’s notion of the destruction of ego has another esteemed counterpart in Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha* which questions the importance of the “ego” and points out a state worth pursuit: this ideal state is similar to Bataille’s “*nothing*” or “*la continuité de l’être*” which will ultimately lead to the conclusion that contradictions are nullified. Inspired by the flow of a river, the protagonist of *Siddhartha* describes in his epiphany:

It was the self, the purpose and essence of which I sought to learn. It was the self, I wanted to free myself from, which I sought to overcome. But I was not able to

overcome it, could only deceive it, could only flee from it, only hide from it. Truly, nothing in this world has kept my thoughts thus busy, as this my very own self, this mystery of me being alive, of me being one and being separated and isolated from all others, of me being Siddhartha! And there is no thing in this world I know less about than about me, about Siddhartha!"

Both Hesse and Bataille attempt to demolish the common notion that there is a “ego” being the base or center of everything. Similar to Bataille, Hesse asserts the importance of escaping the notion ego — by “killing the random self of the sense” in order for transcending the impasse resulted from the “ego”:

... With the body definitely not being the self, and not the spectacle of the senses, so it also was not the thought, not the rational mind, not the learned wisdom, not the learned ability to draw conclusions and to develop previous thoughts into new ones. No, this world of thought was also still on this side, and nothing could be achieved by killing the random self of the senses, if the random self of thoughts and learned knowledge was fattened on the other hand.

Hesse is in concordance with Bataille in his negation of the sense of ego, a notion weaved out of nothing. What Hesse wishes is to destroy the obsession of the preeminence of ego because all that is developed on the foundation of it: senses, thoughts, rational mind, learned wisdom, learned ability, belong to the secular, to the realm of individual discontinuity. Compared to the world of the sacred, the finite individual discontinuity is unimportant. God belongs to the sphere transcending “the world of thought,” as the religious, the erotic, and the unclean do. Since the sacred aspect is not subjected to “the world of thought,” Hesse has to describe it by a number of negative sentences instead of affirmative ones. He continues to describe the “ultimate meaning” — the state of sacred continuity:

Both, the thoughts as well as the senses, were pretty things, the ultimate meaning was hidden behind both of them, both had to be listened to, both had to be played

with, both neither had to be scorned nor overestimated, from both the secret voices of the innermost truth had to be attentively perceived. [Siddhartha] wanted to strive for nothing, except for what the voice commanded him to strive for, dwell on nothing, except where the voice would advise him to do so.

In Hesse's state of epiphany, contradictions give way to the universal one. He writes:

Siddhartha listened. He was now nothing but a listener, completely concentrated on listening, completely empty, he felt, that he had now finished learning to listen. Often before, he had heard all this, these many voices in the river, today it sounded new. Already, he could no longer tell the many voices apart, not the happy ones from the weeping ones, not the ones of children from those of men, they all belonged together, the lamentation of yearning and the laughter of the knowledgeable one, the scream of rage and the moaning of the dying ones, everything was one, everything was intertwined and connected, entangled a thousand times. And everything together, all voices, all goals, all yearning, all suffering, all pleasure, all that was good and evil, all of this together was the world. All of it together was the flow of events, was the music of life. And when Siddhartha was listening attentively to this river, this song of a thousand voices, when he neither listened to the suffering nor the laughter, when he did not tie his soul to any particular voice and submerged his self into it, but when he heard them all, perceived the whole, the oneness, then the great song of the thousand voices consisted of a single word, which was Om²⁹: the perfection.

...

²⁹ The "Om," a sacred sound in Sanskrit, meaning "entirety of the universe," is said to be "the sound of all creation" and "a prayer itself," a sound that includes "the past, present, and future" (Das). Its pronunciation is similar to the phoneme *a*: "the first vocalic phoneme used by the child in learning the language. [The first words everywhere are ones like *papa, mama*. etc.]... For Bataille, there are a certain number of significant usages of *a* that refer, however, to Latin, where it is the mark of the feminine, as opposed to the *-us* of many masculine endings. Thus there is the *-us* of Dianus, the four *a*'s of Madame Edwarda. Latin here performs less as a dead, classical language, than as religious language. This is not Cicero's language, but the language of the mass. The same letter, therefore, designates [in Latin] femininity...and absence: Edwarda is, simultaneously, a woman and the absence of Edward, as a theology is the negation of theology. Acephalus the absence of a head..." (Hollier 119-20). The sound *Om* or *a* manifests the relation of nothingness (the phoneme *a* as absence) and religion, and of nothingness and entirety (Das).

In this hour, Siddhartha stopped fighting his fate, stopped suffering. On his face flourished the cheerfulness of a knowledge, which is no longer opposed by any will, which knows perfection, which is in agreement with the flow of events, with the current of life, full of sympathy for the pain of others, full of sympathy for the pleasure of others, devoted to the flow, belonging to the oneness.

The reason why Siddhartha “fought his fate” and “suffered” is that he regarded himself as an distinct individual, having an ego of his own. When he realizes the transcendent nothingness/continuity (in listening to the river’s flow that suggests a never-ending universal continuity), he is incorporated into the sacred continuum which is revealed in various wonder-struck moments: beauty, glory, sacrificial rituals.

Let us go back to Bataille’s emphasis on the dualism of the sacred. Quoting the words of André Breton, Bataille asserts that violence and religious experience (considered separately as the impure and pure) overlap in the state of “the universal flow of all that is”:

‘Everything leads us to believe,’ wrote André Breton, ‘that there is a certain point in the mind where life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, are no longer perceived in contradiction to one another.’ I shall add: Good and Evil, pain and joy. This point is indicated both by violence literature and by the violence of a mystical experience: only the point matters (*Literature* 20).

By indicating “only the point [(where opposite ideas compromise)] matters,” Bataille asserts again the importance of *la continuité de l’être*. In *La Tombe de Louis XXX*, he expresses the same opinion from another angle — that the essence of *la continuité de l’être* is “nothingness”:

When I carefully seek out, in deepest anguish... an eye opens up at the top, in the middle of my skull. This eye opening up onto the sun in all its glory, to contemplate it in its nakedness, privately, *is not the work of my reason*: it is a cry escaping from me. For at the moment, when the flash binds me I am the splintering brilliance of a

shattered life, and this life—agony and vertigo—opening up onto an infinite void, bursts and exhausts itself all at once in this void (qtd. Hollier 131).

“A cry escaping from [the self]” being the focus of the speaker’s contemplation, thus what is left is an opening continuous with the “infinite void.” From this point of view, the narrator becomes no longer alone. By scattering his idea of self (“being headless,” as Bataille may termed), he acquires the universal whole.

3. Immanence in The Sacred

As the term *la continuité de l'être* implies, a man’s inner sphere is part of the “flow of all that is” across all times and spaces (*Religion* 29). The term “immanence” is coined by Bataille to refer to the nature of man as continuous with the universal flow. It suggests a double character, both referring to the cosmos and a person’s inner being, and an intimacy between man and the universal continuity. In the unity with the cosmos, man is absolved of individual discontinuity, nor is he limited.

But a change of conception has brought man away from his intimacy with the world, and this has resulted in his subjected existence. By prescribing a rational order of the world, he “becomes himself a thing” (*Religion* 74). Bataille argues,

reflective thinking...prescribes universally obligatory relations between individuals and society or between individuals themselves. These obligatory relations are essentially those that ensure the order of *things*. [Moreover, reflective thinking] grounds everything in reason [and] links them to the order of *things* (*Religion* 70).

In Bataille’s view, the evolvement from animal to man is a gradual estrangement of a man from himself. In primordial times, man starts to become different from animals with his alienation from instincts. He starts with the negation of his own impulses and with the deferring of pleasures. The manufacturing of tools requires temporarily enduring dissatisfaction of desires, thus the use of tools that distinguishes him from the animals has also turned him into a tool. “If he places the world

in his power, this is to the extent that he forgets that he is himself the world,” so Bataille asserts. In his primordial state, the ancient man does not distinguish himself from the universe. Yet, with the use of tools, the former continuum becomes the distinct three parts: the governing man, the subjugated tool, and those which cannot be reduced to man nor tool. “Everything in my power declares that I have compelled that which is equal to me no longer to exist for its own purpose but rather for a purpose that is alien to it (*Religion* 41).” The result of the use of tools is double negation: the one of things (tools) and the other of man himself.

To man’s contrary, animals exist for immediate satisfaction of pleasures. For the animals, the universe and themselves are one “undifferentiated continuity” (*Religion* 29). The animals exist for themselves only, just as the universal continuum exists without explanation. Animals satisfy themselves regardless of regulations. There is no separation between their desires and conducts. Whereas for men, the positing of things as tools has alienated them from the undifferentiated continuity. Bataille explains:

The tool has no value in itself...but only in relation to an anticipated result. The time spent in making it directly establishes its utility, its subordination to the one who uses it with an end in view, and its subordination to this end...[which is] given in terms of utility.

The purpose of the tool’s use always has the same meaning as the tool’s use: a utility is assigned to it in turn and so on. The stick digs the ground in order to ensure the growth of a plant; the plant is cultivated in order to be eaten; it is eaten in order to maintain the life of the one who cultivates it...The absurdity of an endless deferral only justifies the equivalent absurdity of a true end, which would serve no purpose (*Religion* 27-8).

Here Bataille indicates the true end of existence as “serving no purpose”, and this is in accordance with his assertion of “the loss into nothing” in *Literature and Evil* (19) and “negation of the ego” (*Literature* 103). He continues to assert the value of “indiscriminate loss” and non-purpose:

Only a world in which the beings are indiscriminately lost is superfluous, serves no purpose, has nothing to do, and means nothing: it only has a value in itself, not with a view to something else, this other thing for still another and so on” (*Religion* 27-9).

In the state of immanence, the principles of duration is disregarded, unlike the practices in the common course of life. The principles for the duration with which human beings begins, take men away from their instincts relating them with the universal one. In the sphere of duration, instincts and impulses are always deferred for the sake of future. The inner value which everything has is always postponed, given way to a later end. The sacred which Bataille asserts is a state wherein only the present moment matters.

The violence and destruction that occur simultaneously with the sacred mark the miraculous time-outs when intimacy with the universal one is retrieved. The realm of the immanence endangers the duration of the subjugated world, but it releases man from his subordination. Intimacy with the universal continuity fascinates man for the freedom it promises, despite the terror accompanying it. Death, as the manifestation of violence “reveals life in its plentitude and dissolves the real order” (*Religion* 47). But in the sacred realm, death allures man as well. Bataille concludes,

This continuity, which for the animal could not be distinguished from anything else, which was in it and for it the only possible mode of being, offered man all the fascination of the sacred world, as against the poverty of the profane tool (of the discontinuous object) (*Religion* 35).

Father Tesson sums up for the retrieval of immanence, “to live a divine life, a man must die.” What he means, according to Bataille, is that an ideal being which only exists for itself requires the casting away of calculation; an astonishing immensity lies behind the threshold of death, available

only if the being dares to renounce self-possession (*Eroticism* 233).



Conclusion

All the turmoils in *Story of the Eye* may be attributed to one cause, that human beings are “in conflict” with themselves: they are differed from animals for their self-regulations, yet their impulses compel them to trespass limits of all kinds. Constituted by these two facets, a man is made “a problem for himself.” As Bataille argues, “eroticism is the problematic part of ourselves” (*Eroticism* 273). But the solution to the erotic lies in the same place as the problem.

Behind the appearance of lewdness and indecency *Story* represent, there is unbounded immensity — which Bataille terms *la continuité de l'être*, or the sacred. Those taboos and regulations, while defining impropriety, imply a redemption in their opposite side. Behind the threshold of a proper existence, there is boundless freedom that man earnestly wish to reach. He therefore endlessly struggles on the threshold of being, despite the fatality accompanying his desire. Since no one successfully cross the boundary of death can speak for himself, only those who stands on the edge can manifest the experience of surpassing. Such is what the characters of *Story of the Eye* make known to their readers. Crossing the limit of propriety, they appear to be insane. They do not advocate this freedom by utterance, because languages are unable to convey experiences like these. Instead, actions and experiences show directly what the immanent immensity is about.

The oddities of the protagonists' actions seem to rupture the principle of continuity and ration, and rarely have these experiences been explained systematically with Bataille's own notion. There are scholars who sees these turmoils as “virulent nihilism” (Land), and there are some who sees these endeavors as the efforts against the aim of production. These interpretations delineate the turmoils in the plot, but not their origin. Roland Barthes takes *Story* as a semantic game and the “eye” as an object transforming into several forms, which is on the track with language, a method Bataille opposes. Kristeva places importance on the notion of heterology, but she does not explain why it is erotic experiences that Bataille particularly engages to explore, among all the heterogeneous materials, such as laughter, touch, dirt, etc.

In this thesis I interpret the oddities in *Story of the Eye* with Bataille's own notion — eroticism, and this is an approach surprisingly rarely applied by former scholars. Moreover, even Bataille's *Eroticism* does not provide a thorough method for his readers to understand *Story of the Eye*. One needs to collect Bataille's perspectives in his other works: *The Accursed Share*, *Theory of Religion*, *On Nietzsche*, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, and *Literature and Evil*, to obtain ideas enough to comprehend his *Story*.

I start by introducing the limitations of a man, then furthers on the promise of joy/ecstasy behind these limitations. For the first part, human beings are restricted by many bounds they establish for themselves. A person insists that his individual life has to be lasted, and that his knowledge and senses serve well to arrange the universe. These obsessions isolate his being from the universal continuity that is a flow encompassing the entirety of time and space. Involving death and transgression, erotic activities are dauntless endeavors to go beyond these limits. In the second part (*Chapter Two* and *Chapter Three*), I talked about the duality of the sacred experience.

Anxiety and fear are the thresholds of man's sanity (*Eroticism* 267). The word "sacer" — both holy and defiled, implies the unknown immensity beyond humanity's reach. For their immunity to taboos, animals — who are different from man precisely because of this immunity, are regarded by primitive men as "more sacred, more god-like than man" (*Eroticism* 81). This is because they exist in the cosmos "like water in water," without taboos interrupting their continuous existence with nature (*Religion* 24). Unlike animals, human beings frame themselves by ideas, scientific, philosophical discourse, taboos, and hence are reduced to discontinuous, limited beings. Among all the restrictions, he makes one called "ego" that hinders his own access to an unlimited existence.

Responding the problem of limited existence, Father Tesson says,

divine life requires that the seeker after it shall die...Dying can take on the active meaning of behavior, behavior that sets at nought the cautiousness inculcated by the fear of death...Each man indeed prolongs through his whole life the effects of his

attachment to himself. He is continuously bound to courses of action aimed at a result valid on the plane of the prolonged individual existence. (*Eroticism* 233).

Championing Father Tesson, Bataille asserts that eroticism is the active demanding for a sovereign being, a being transcending limits of all sorts. Astonishingly, dying of an individual promises a divine eternal life, of which the obsession to the idea of ego is an obstacle. Bataille furthers in his “Preface to *Madame Edwarda*”,

We know nothing and we are in the depths of darkness. But at least we can see what it is deceives us, what it is that hinders us from knowing our own distress (*Eroticism* 267).

These words shows how meager man’s intelligence is, with the bound of his self-possession. And the approach to cast away this self-possession may be erotic or religious, in a mundane point of view. God has His defiled counterpart, which is nonetheless sacred as Him. Horrifying enough, the holy and befouled share equal amount of sacredness. God has all transcendent attributes horrifyingly similar to the sacrificed victims in Bataille’s works and historic documents. God “is nothing if he is not a transcendence of God in every direction; in that of vulgar being, in that of horror and impurity. [He is an enormity himself]” (*Eroticism* 269). God, along with the victims in *Story*, are outlaws who exist beyond man’s limited existence.

Thus, Bataille concludes,

If I were to be asked what we are, I should answer: “We are the door to everything that can be, we are the expectation that no material response can satisfy, no trick with words deceive [sic]. We seek the heights. Each one of us can ignore this search if he has a mind to, but mankind as a whole aspires to these heights”...

If transgression became the foundation-stone of philosophy (this is how my thinking goes), silent contemplation would have to be substituted for language. *This is the contemplation of being at the pinnacle of being* (*Eroticism* 274-5).

Discourse has nothing to do with the pinnacle of being. In the moment of transgression, silent violence ruptures the bounds of being, and man find ultimate freedom in his own immersing with the universal one (*Eroticism* 274).



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