

**The Metanarrative of
Suspicion in Late
Twentieth-Century
America**

Sandra Baringer



LITERARY CRITICISM AND
CULTURAL THEORY

Edited by
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Routledge
New York & London

Published in 2004 by
Routledge
270 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016
www.routledge-ny.com

Published in Great Britain by
Routledge
2 Park Square
Milton Park, Abingdon
Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.
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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.
Typesetting: BookType

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Baringer, Sandra.

The metanarrative of suspicion in late twentieth century America /
Sandra Baringer.

p. cm. — (Literary criticism and cultural theory)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-415-97076-8 (hb : alk. paper)

1. American literature—20th century—History and criticism.
 2. Suspicion in literature.
 3. Literature and society—United States—History—20th century.
 4. Narration (Rhetoric) I. Title. II. Series.
- PS228.S85B37 2004
810.9'3556—dc22

2004002085

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the University of California, Riverside and the University of California Humanities Research Institute for financial support during crucial stages of the writing of this book. For reading the manuscript at various stages, thanks go to Katherine Kinney, Emory Elliott, Deborah Willis, John Carlos Rowe, and the members of my research group at UCHRI, Angela Davis, Gina Dent, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, David Theo Goldberg, Avery Gordon, and Nancy Scheper-Hughes, all of whom I also thank for the interdisciplinary perspectives afforded by our work together.

The Conspiracy Culture Conference at King Alfred's College, Winchester, England in 1998 was, I believe, very important for many scholars working in this area. Conference organizers Alasdair Spark and Peter Knight deserve special recognition for putting it together.

Kenneth Tilsen and Karen Northcott were kind enough to authorize access to the WKLD/OC archives at the Minnesota History Center of the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, Minnesota.

An earlier version of the Silko chapter was published in *FemSpec* 2:2 (2001) as "The Terror of the Liminal: Silko's *Almanac* and Klein's Phantasy Paradigm." Editor Batya Weinbaum has graciously granted permission to reprint.

Chris Coyle tolerated the paper mess and provided verbal feedback which informs more of the book than he may realize.

I thank Joseph Childers for advising me to stop writing like a lawyer. That may not be exactly what he said, nor exactly what I have done, but it was useful advice in more ways than one.

And finally, I would like to acknowledge the courage and dedication of those who have participated in a support committee or other such group on behalf of someone they felt was wrongly accused. Some of them helped me directly or indirectly with this project; there are many others whom I have never met. Without them, our justice system would be in more trouble than it already is.

Introduction

Acceptance of the beast within as a given of millennial America achieved a sort of official status in popular discourse by the turn of the century. These narratives are beyond asking who killed JFK. Rather, they operate on the common ground of an assumption that our government conceals profound and terrible secrets from us. The only place left to go is to explore the ramifications of personal growth and values under such a regime, or in the case of the final episode of the *X-Files*, retreat to faith in an afterlife. Relatively humorous approaches were taken in *Men in Black* and *Conspiracy Theory* (1997), but subsequent films moved beyond this whistling-in-the-dark disavowal of anxiety to a more explicit engagement in the issue the following year in the *X-Files* feature-length film episode, *Dark City*, and *The Truman Show*, followed by *The Matrix* in 1999.

Several important critical works were written during this period as well: Mark Fenster's *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (1999), Stephen Paul Miller's *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* (1999), Patrick O'Donnell's *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S. Narrative* (2000), and Timothy Melley's *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (2000). Fenster argues that though these discourses may be interesting as a form of play, they have little potential for resistance. Miller's book poses the Watergate scandal as the central organizing principle of cultural anxiety over surveillance and government corruption. O'Donnell's work, heavily informed by European post-Lacanianists such as Žižek, Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari, argues the existence of a postmodernist libidinal economy involving "the linkage between the desire for identificatory mobility and the seemingly contradictory drive for connection . . . with national and historical destinies" (159).

Melley contributes the term "agency panic" to the discourse. His study addresses, among other things, notable postmodern fiction by Thomas Pynchon (*Gravity's Rainbow*), Don DeLillo (*Libra*), Margaret Atwood, William Burroughs, Kathy Acker, and William Gibson. Though Melley's analysis of film is limited to Ridley Scott's revisioning of Philip K. Dick in *Blade Runner* (1982), his argument about panic over exterior manipulations of memory, perception, and the funda-

mental question of personal identity is exemplified in a number of fin-de-siecle films: *Videodrome* (1983), *Brazil* (1985), *Total Recall* (1990), and *Strange Days* (1995), followed by the aforementioned *Dark City* (1998), *The Truman Show* (1998), and *The Matrix* (1999).

But the popular fascination with conspiracy theories is not merely ineffectual, nor is it directed primarily toward questions over the definition of self. It is also a sinister symptom of real persecutory narratives that operate on real bodies, bodies increasingly marked by race and/or gender. If one looks at America through the cinematic lens, a moment may have existed in 1998 when the destabilization of reality was something that could be laughed about but generally speaking, these films exhibit a state of panic in the popular imagination.

Stuart Hall associates “moral panics” with crises in the legitimation of the state. The book by Hall and his associates *Policing the Crisis* (1978) addresses the production of moral panics over crime (“muggings” by blacks) as a response to, rather than a cause of deteriorating relations between blacks and police in post-World War II England. Considerable attention is given to questioning notions of “common sense” such as a general perception that crime is increasing when in fact crime rates remain fairly stable over long periods of time with minor fluctuations that are often pointed to as symptoms of a crisis. As in England, the social unrest in the United States in the sixties produced a crisis in the legitimation of the state and state control. The Nixonian “law and order” response to the crisis was partially, though not entirely successful in refocusing public attention from the misdeeds of the government to the supposed misdeeds of war protesters and activist organizations, branching out into a more general panic over social disintegration as represented by drug use, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, single parenthood, miscegenation, and feminist demands (bra-burning, for example, became an icon with significance far exceeding any rational relationship to any instances in which it actually occurred). The practices of the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover and the predilections of the press for sensationalist reporting worked together to fuel a continuing moral panic in the United States over social disintegration and crime that tripled the American prison population between 1970 and 1985.

In the popular imagination, prone as it is to relatively subconscious psychological machinations, this moral panic over social unrest and crime is projected back onto the government. It is a two-way street: the state’s crisis in legitimation is projected onto portions of the population in such a way that the state can demonstrate its legitimacy by policing that particular group, and the public’s moral panic over social unrest is projected back at the state. Government misdeeds occur, and social unrest occurs as well, but it is this process of projection and reflection that magnifies the scope of government misdeeds to the proportions represented by the full-blown paranoid fantasies of science fiction narratives where the government is so controlling the doors of perception that the subject is unable to discern who he is.

My approach to what I call the metanarrative of suspicion is grounded in Fredric Jameson's ranking of history over psychology, though my analysis of this metanarrative borrows heavily from psychoanalytic theory. Jameson argues that the "uninterrupted narrative" to which his concept of the political unconscious refers is the "repressed and buried reality" of the history of class struggle (20). Though he will allow that psychoanalysis may be "the only real new and original hermeneutic developed since the great patristic and medieval system of the four senses of scripture" (61), he nevertheless sees the nuclear family upon which psychoanalysis turns as a mere byproduct of capitalism (62). The nuclear family is not central to my analysis, though early experiences of infancy are. Class struggle in the history of the United States must be examined through an American history of enslavement and genocide of native peoples.

The concept of buried master narrative is key, but I call this narrative of suspicion a metanarrative because it is narrative about narrative: a narrative about what stories to believe. It is in some respects a paranoid narrative, or a narrative of paranoia, but I prefer the term "suspicion" because "paranoia" has come to connote a psychotic or "abnormal" state. On the contrary, the metanarrative of suspicion is one historically deployed in the service of power but enabled by the desire that all psychoanalytic methods seek to interpret. This desire, that which is often termed "pre-Oedipal," precedes the nuclear family and the Law of the Father; thus, it is that with which power must contend. There is nothing very abnormal about it.

This metanarrative of suspicion must be distinguished from the "hermeneutics of suspicion" described by Paul Ricoeur in his work *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (1970). His concern is with hermeneutics in its relation to epistemology, i.e. the philosophy of interpretation, and his thesis, broadly stated, is that the strategy of doubting as a precursor to postmodernism had its source in the work of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche. The relationship of Ricoeur's thought to postmodernism in its more paranoid manifestations has been most succinctly explored in an essay by Linda Fisher. Fisher utilizes the term "hypersuspicion" to describe the concept of "suspicion radicalized into paranoia," and criticizes this tendency of postmodernism as a dead-end in which "postmodernism must eventually not just doubt, but preclude and deny, its own meaning" (113). Fisher is not the only scholar to mount such a critique of postmodernism, but her essay is notable for laying out the connections among Ricoeur's thought, psychological approaches to paranoia (Bywater, Shapiro), and postmodernism.

The hermeneutics of suspicion is an important term in the scholarship of postmodernism. But my approach is concerned more with the ideological functions of power than with postmodernism per se. The positive effect of postmodern attacks on master narratives cannot be the end of all master narratives, but rather a heightened awareness of master narratives. The metanarrative of suspicion is an important master narrative, at least in America.¹ Thus, though the hermeneutics of suspicion are certainly relevant to the metanarrative of suspicion, the metanarrative I attempt to describe is a more specific application of the strategies of master

narratives, realism or otherwise, to the vulnerabilities of the human psyche to paranoid outlooks and responses associated with the pre-Oedipal state, particularly in connection with trauma. The ideological apparatus most overtly associated with power, namely the law and law enforcement, is in some respects more adept at “playing” this psychic vulnerability than at the more mundane and technical task of crime-solving.²

The metanarrative of suspicion tells us that people with power will lie to us. Why should this be so? One could argue that since they have the power, they have no need to lie. But to overgeneralize is, of course, to oversimplify. A lie, especially a big one, can be a means of retaining power.

For Freud, seeing is a sexual pleasure, perverse only when it becomes an end in itself, i.e. scopophilia. Film critics have pursued this concept to its logical conclusions: the seer, or voyeur, is exercising control over the seen object, the power lying both in the fetishizing nature of the gaze and in the circumstance of the voyeur seeing without the object’s knowledge. This sets up the relationship of dominance and submission. When the object discovers that [s]he is being seen, the response may be fright or alarm. But once the seer is seen, the exhibitionist may attempt to reverse the power relationship by granting or withholding the object, or part-object, of the gaze.

The association of the gaze with the development of capitalism is most tellingly exemplified by Jeremy Bentham’s panoptic eye as interpreted by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. In the eighteenth century, most prisons were little more than temporary holding tanks for prisoners and often their families, the end being execution or transport to the colonies. As the need for extended incarceration and thus a more centralized and ongoing control over the prisoner grew, Bentham designed a new prison architecture so that the guards could see all the inmates from a central location. The significance of the panoptic eye that transcends the circumstances of prison architecture is that the prisoner adapts his behavior to the probability, or possibility, of being seen. Thus the panoptic eye imposes self discipline whether the seer is watching or not.

This concept is second nature to any late twentieth century subject who has observed an unoccupied police car parked along a highway and consequently reduced speed. But it was somewhat novel in the nineteenth century, and it is no coincidence that the birth of the prison was followed by the birth of the detective novel. The “private eye” Sherlock Holmes novels accompanied a privatization of the “eye” of the police, contributing, by the end of the nineteenth century, to a “spy mania” (Seltzer 25, 39). The inimitable Henry James explored his own fascination with and repulsion from the “network of watchers” (39) in one of his earlier novels, *The Princess Casamassima*. Seeing without being seen is the measure of power in the novel, with multiple levels of watching and manipulation going on in the theatre (a metafictional critique) as well as on the street. Mark Seltzer describes James’s project in this novel as “exposure and demystification of the realist mania for surveillance and his attempt to disown the policing it implies” (54).

If Henry James was ambivalent about the “intrusive voyeurism” (30) of the detective novel and its complicity in the empiricist and colonialist enterprises of sociology and anthropology in the latter nineteenth century, no such misgivings are apparent in the mainstream noir detective fiction that was to develop in the United States in later years. The guilty knowledge in novels such as Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* is fully “othered” from the private eye to the invisible power structure—in this instance, the tar pits of the evil capitalists.³ The detective in such novels routinely directs his guiltless and fetishizing gaze upon a distressed or diabolical damsel, and only in the end will the detective discover the true locus of the crime.

Why does this trope of surveillance and discovery, of the evil within, or without, as you will, have such resonance in American fiction? We want to believe, are willing to believe, that there are big lies all around us. We laugh at the *South Park* cop saying “move along, there’s nothing to see here” because there is, of course, always something to see.⁴

The “paranoid style” described by historian Richard Hofstadter in his essay “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” is only beginning to be systematically examined in its literary manifestations. Hofstadter is careful to note that he does not see the paranoid style as a distinctively American phenomenon, but that he focuses on its American manifestations because he is an American historian. Hofstadter distinguishes between the “clinical paranoiac” and the “paranoid spokesman in politics” only in that the former sees conspiracies as directed against him individually and the latter sees conspiracies as directed against “a nation, a culture, a way of life” (4). He asserts that though

a mentality disposed to see the world in the paranoid’s way may always be present in some considerable minority of the population . . . [m]ovements employing the paranoid style . . . come in successive episodic waves . . . the paranoid disposition is mobilized into action chiefly by social conflicts that involve ultimate schemes of values and that bring fundamental fears and hatreds, rather than negotiable interests, into political action. Catastrophe or the fear of catastrophe is most likely to elicit the syndrome of paranoid rhetoric (39).

Hofstadter notes that the catalysts in American history have tended to be “ethnic and religious conflicts” but that “elsewhere class conflicts have also mobilized such energies” (39). His historical survey covers the supposed Illuminati conspiracy to foment the French revolution followed by the invasion of the United States by Illuminati-inspired Jacobins, anti-Catholicism, anti-Masonry, anti-Mormonism, nativism, the populist American Protective Association of the 1890s, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Red scare of the 1950s, all to set up his discussion of the paranoid rhetoric of “new right” Goldwater Republicans extant at the time when he wrote the first version of the essay in 1963.

Another important political historian who has written on the subject is Michael Rogin, who takes up where Hofstadter leaves off to examine the role of political repression in encouraging “demonizing” modes of thought. In his 1987 book *Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology*, Rogin organizes paranoid episodes in American history somewhat differently than Hofstadter. Whereas Hofstadter surveys a number of movements throughout the nineteenth century and then jumps to the 1950s, Rogin sees the significant episodes as a pattern of three movements: first, the demonizing of Indians—“the first moment in American political demonology” (80); second, the demonizing of Marxists and labor organizers in the late nineteenth century—a series of Red scare episodes in the 1870s, 1886, and 1919 (63); third, the Red scare of the post-World War II cold war (68–80). Rogin’s analysis is also consistent with Foucault’s overall thesis about the growth of state power in the nineteenth century. Rogin finds the practice of paternalistic political suppression of Indians to be consistent with other arenas in which the paternal model was being deployed in the early nineteenth century: “slavery, the asylum, labor relations, and radical dissent” (51).⁵

The “episodic waves” of paranoid movements or cults appear most often where several of the factors discussed above are involved. “Social conflicts that involve ultimate schemes of values” (Hofstadter 39) may be ongoing, but are most likely to be intensified by circumstances such as the intensification of state repression and millennial/apocalyptic anxieties. Countersubversive repression by law enforcement is one side of a symbiotic relationship with subversive forces: repression may be a response to intensified social conflicts as well as a spur to more paranoid thought patterns among subversive groups. But political repression in the United States should be also viewed, at this point in time, as a developmental process that began with the Espionage and Sediton acts of 1917–18 followed by the birth of the FBI in the 1920s. The seemingly “episodic” nature of the McCarthy witchhunts and Watergate should be seen as part of a larger pattern. As for the millennial influence, other scholars have noted a century-end pattern. Elaine Showalter summarizes them as follows:

The Salem witch trials took place in the 1690s; the mesmerism craze after the French Revolution, in the 1790s. In the 1890s, rebellions against imperialism and the class structure, controversies over prostitution and homosexuality, the rise of feminism, and the sexual plague of syphilis all joined with apocalyptic fantasies . . . (19).

This end-of-century anxiety understandably intensifies at the end of the twentieth century, due not only to the 2,000-year mark but to a number of apocalyptic prophecies by media evangelists, astrologers (“this is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius”), and assorted new age spiritualists and readers of Nostradamus.

Several scholars besides Showalter have published studies of the paranoid style in its various manifestations: Elisabeth Young-Bruehl’s trans-disciplinary work

The Anatomy of Prejudices (1996); Daniel Pipes' historical approach in *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* (1997); the collaboration of a political scientist and a psychiatrist in Robert S. Robins and Jerrold M. Post's *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (1997); Jodi Dean's undefinable *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace* (1998); Barry Glassner's *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (1999); Mike Davis's *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (1999).

Though sometimes Eurocentric in his reliance on a Marxian model of class struggle as teleological, Fredric Jameson's critical approach is a good starting place insofar as he acknowledges the importance of psychoanalysis as hermeneutic while at the same time foregrounding issues of class conflict. Rogin's work elsewhere in *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (1975) has been perhaps the most fruitful attempt to examine the border clash on History's battleground between, in Jameson's words, "Necessity" and "desire" (102): that is, Rogin's conjoining of a materialist analysis of class struggle with the psychoanalytic study of desire in its manifestations within and beyond the nuclear family. In my view, Rogin's work succeeds because he departs from a more orthodox (in this country) Freudian approach to utilize the psychoanalytic theories of Melanie Klein.

The introduction to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's new collection of essays, entitled "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is About You" (*Novel Gazing*, 1997) argues that the time has come to move on from New Historicist sleuthing-out of the hegemonic containment of all subversive narratives, that the hidden discourses of power are no longer much of a secret and thus a paranoid epistemology (i.e. the hermeneutic of suspicion) may have outlived much of its usefulness. She questions the "prestige of a single, overarching narrative: exposing and problematizing hidden violences in the genealogy of the modern liberal subject," remarking that these liberal subjects are not so easy to find, anyway, where "a vast majority of the population claims to engage in direct intercourse with multiple invisible entities such as angels, Satan, and God" (18). Sedgwick adopts the Kleinian concept of reparation in her call for fewer paranoid readings of texts and more reparative readings of texts—pursuing pleasure and even hope, strategies by which "the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates" (24). But Sedgwick's approach sidesteps the elephant in the middle of the room: all those people talking to angels, Satan and God. What *about* them? Sedgwick is interested in more relaxing reading material than what will be discussed herein.

A psychoanalytic approach to a political problem runs the risk of universalizing that which can only be addressed fruitfully through a historical analysis. Nevertheless, I believe that Klein's model of the psychological state of infancy, in its very universality, can help inform why adult models of understanding can go

wrong in particular historical moments. To discuss Klein it is necessary to discuss Freud, though Freud's work on paranoia was minimal, and his one case study was caught in a particular historical moment, in a particular historical family. Freud's essay "Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)" is, as the title indicates, not based upon an analysis of one of Freud's own patients. Freud never met Dr. Schreber, the author of this singular account of decades of paranoid fantasies. Freud's basic conclusion was that Schreber, a noted judge of his time, was a repressed homosexual. But Schreber's father, the source of Schreber's "father complex [Freud 161], was not just any father, but a nationally prominent authority on authoritarian child rearing: "an orthopedist and educational reformer . . . known for his orthopedic devices to correct poor posture in children—devices that caused much more discomfort and pain than any worthwhile therapy. He is known to have used these devices on his son" (Oldham and Bone 6, Schatzman).

While the relationship of authoritarian child rearing and collective susceptibility to fascism have been explored in Theodor Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality*, scholarship on the relationship of these two concepts to paranoia has been more fragmented: for the most part, psychology has gone one way and political science another. The application of principles of group psychology and the study of organizations to political movements has been rare, and Robins and Post's *Political Paranoia* is a significant work for that reason.

Robins and Post argue that "paranoia is a characteristic mentality of the late twentieth century," comparing the intellectual situation to the paranoia of late Tudor England, a "world . . . of absolute reason" (41). On this point, the overdetermined rationality of the paranoid worldview comes head to head with the notion of late twentieth century postmodernism that holds postmodern discourse to be polyvocal, fragmented, and indeterminate. In Lacan's view paranoia is a resistance to language, the paranoid never fully identifying with the Symbolic and "throwing back upon the world the disorder of which he's composed," so that paranoia results from "excessive reasoning rather than the collapse of reason" thus a condition of enlightenment (or Enlightenment)—the paranoid constructs something to manipulate the Symbolic. Paranoia is thus, according to this line of thinking, an intensification of normal processes rather than a departure from them, a practice of excessive and overdetermined reasoning engaged in even by Jameson and Lacan (Nicol). Sedgwick, however, has made an important point in insisting that this sort of discourse has its limits.

Contemporary clinical specialists in paranoia rely much more on the theoretical grounding of Kleinian object relations than on Freud: "The role of aggression as motive and the experience of helplessness in trauma were not adequately appreciated in (Freud's) formulations. We know now, for example, that many paranoid patients have histories of severe abuse as children" (Oldham and Bone ix). Nevertheless, Freud's commentary on Schreber has been useful in its discussion of narcissism, which contemporary psychiatrists interpret more as a matter of "self-

esteem regulation” than as a stage in libidinal development, as Freud saw it (Bone and Oldham 7). Freud’s case history of the Wolf Man has also proven useful insofar as Freud discusses therein the relationship of beating fantasies to paranoia: “the beginning of the realization of the common connection between paranoia and sadomasochism. The paranoid patient is concerned with attack and counterattack, with beating and being beaten. He or she is always ready to perceive provocation, insult, or injury” (Bone and Oldham 7–8). Clinicians use the Kleinian concept of “object relations” to describe the way the paranoid thinker relates to the world. “Objects” in this construct are other people, generally speaking (though this is a loose definition of a technical term). Before an infant develops the concept of a whole person, she sees others in terms of body parts—breasts, feces, etc.—and later “splits” these part objects into good and bad. The paranoid thinker has trouble seeing other people as anything other than completely good or completely bad, and thus it is said that such a person has a problem with “object constancy,” that is, a stable relationship with another person that does not veer between love and hate (see generally Auchincloss and Weiss). Some psychiatrists have marked the distinction between paranoia and masochism as one of degree: “The paranoid operates at a more impaired level of object relatedness than the masochist. Masochism can be seen as the price paid for the maintenance of an object tie. The paranoid maintains the object tie only through aggressive acts and fantasy” (Bone and Oldham 11, summarizing Blum).

Early post-Freudian psychoanalysis used many terms in ways that can be confusing to contemporary readers schooled in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders*. The most important of these terms for my purposes is Melanie Klein’s phrase “paranoid-schizoid position,” describing a “ubiquitous infantile stage of development” (Oldham and Bone 9). This term was her elaboration on Scottish psychoanalyst W.D. Fairbairn’s description of a “schizoid position” in infancy, which he postulated as preceding Klein’s “depressive position.” What Fairbairn meant by “schizoid” was essentially the same as what Kleinians mean by “splitting”; the concept of splitting relies upon the premise that the infant, first of all, perceives others (initially the mother or primary caregiver) not as a whole being but as a collection of “objects” such as the breast—obviously a significant object in that it is the provider of nourishment. The infant deals with hunger or other more painful and anxiety-producing experiences by a perceived ego disintegration—“the anxiety of being split up in bits” (Hinshelwood 159)—which in turn becomes fear of persecution by a fearful object—Klein’s famous “bad breast.” This paradigm is not inconsistent with Lacan’s notion that the ego only comes into being through its perception of others in the “mirror stage.”⁶ At any rate, Fairbairn’s schizoid position of ego disintegration in the infant is followed by Klein’s “depressive position,” the term she used to describe the depression the infant experiences through guilt at having hostile feelings toward the caregiver, that is, the “bad breast.” Once entering the depressive position, the infant can begin to negotiate relationships

with objects that are based on love and respect—"object constancy"—rather than alternative hostility and idealization.

Klein amended Fairbairn's term "schizoid position" to "paranoid-schizoid position" to better reflect the existence of the persecutory fears undergone by the infant in this stage (Hinschelwood 158). All of this happens, in Kleinian thought, in the first three months of life, since Klein placed the onset of the depressive position at age four to six months. The terms "schizoid" and "depressive" are used as descriptors of developmental stages rather than pathological conditions, as they are used in contemporary American diagnostic practice. And obviously, all of this radically predates any Oedipal stage, whatever view one may have of that paradigm. The material relationship of the developing ego with the Other is a relationship with a maternal rather than a paternal figure. However, the common use of the terms "good breast" and "bad breast" should be taken metaphorically rather than literally. The source of nurture may be a bottle as well as a breast, and may be any caregiver, not necessarily the mother. The point is that the infant psyche is almost totally focused upon oral nourishment.

Klein's model of the infant psyche was unpalatable to many, if not most, Freudians. Both Klein and Anna Freud moved to England from the continent in the years preceding the outbreak of World War II, and they continued to feud there for years, though the Kleinian model of child psychology was to eventually become much more prominent in England than it ever has in the United States. Despite her disagreements with Anna Freud over analytic techniques with children, Klein constantly made attempts to align her theories with Sigmund Freud's and almost never overtly challenged them. This explains her preoccupation with Freud's "death drive" as the cause of splitting in the paranoid-schizoid position. The term is somewhat problematic in that it is needlessly controversial: one need not acknowledge the innate existence of a "death drive" to acknowledge the existence of aggressive instincts in an infant.

Julia Kristeva's work on the chora and the abject is informed by Kleinian concepts, particularly in *The Powers of Horror* (1982); Kristeva specifically discusses Kleinian theory in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1987). The concept of the abject will be most fully explored in the chapter on Silko. Another more recent book that deals with late twentieth century conspiracy theories, however, completely ignores not only Klein and Kristeva but the entire range of scholarship on paranoia. Elaine Showalter's *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (1997) attempts to reintroduce the nineteenth century and Freudian diagnosis of hysteria into an analysis of social phenomena that could just as accurately be described as paranoid. Though Showalter disagrees with French medical historian Etienne Trillat's 1986 announcement that "hysteria is dead; that's certain" (Showalter 2), she does note that in actuality hysteria has simply been reclassified as "anxiety neuroses, obsessional disorders, manic depression, or borderline personality disorders . . . somatization disorder, conversion disorder, or dissociative identity disorder" (17). Showalter's book provides a fasci-

nating and clearly written history of hysteria, but some of the contemporary examples she focuses on in the third section of the book—chronic fatigue syndrome, Gulf War syndrome, recovered memory, multiple personality syndrome, satanic ritual abuse, and alien abduction—could benefit from consideration of the relevance of paranoid thought patterns, object relations theory, and the application of these models to large group scenarios.

The six chapters that follow explore different types of texts engaged in various sorts of conspiratorial or paranoid narratives. Though fiction in its ‘traditional’ form may receive more attention than any other single type of text, law enforcement narratives, social work (as opposed to sociological) narratives, autobiographical narratives, visual media, and the internet also enter into the analysis.

The first chapter, “Crucifying the White Man: Douglass Durham and the Master Narrative of the Seventies Savage,” involves study of the strategy of the FBI in dealing with political activist and extremist groups. The FBI has a well known history of the paranoid style in its own operations, and a text I will examine as exemplary of its strategies and the results they produce is the testimony of Douglass Durham before a US Senate subcommittee in April 1976. Durham was an undercover FBI informer who infiltrated the American Indian Movement. He presented to the subcommittee an alarming scenario of planned revolution to be orchestrated at multiple sites across the country in connection with the bicentennial celebration. None of the events materialized, though probably many FBI operatives would still claim this was due to its preventive action in seizing Marlon Brando’s mobile home full of dynamite.

Durham is a storyteller. A popular joke among defense lawyers goes, “When are informants lying? Only when their lips are moving.” But to call his exaggerations and misrepresentations “lies” would be an oversimplification. Durham’s story changed over time, and it bore a complex relationship to what AIM wanted to hear as well as to what the FBI wanted to hear. To a large extent, Durham may have believed most of his own story, even as it underwent transformations, but what he believed is less important than how his story reflected larger social anxieties about communism (attack from outside the boundaries) and the revenge of the defeated savage (the beast within).

As Catherine McNicol Stock points out in her study of “rural radicals,” the left/right paradigm is of limited usefulness in addressing rural protest movements (5). The American Indian Movement, though it started among urban Indians, came to advocate increasingly on rural issues, representing in its most controversial episode at Wounded Knee the interests of traditional Lakota attempting to maintain a rural subsistence lifestyle. The FBI’s strategy against AIM bears an important relationship to the later rise of the rural radical right and the FBI’s more recent ineptitude in laying siege to those who feel they are being persecuted, justifiably or not. Narratives of savagery and communist infiltration can escape the confines of a master narrative and turn on their source.

The psychology of paranoia and the abject always has an important role in the analysis of any social phenomenon that involves scapegoating, and so these concepts are also important in the study of racism. Continuing upon the road mapped out by Hofstadter, my second chapter, "Lynching the White Woman: William Pierce's 'Day of the Rope,'" examines the discourse of American white supremacy by way of a study of two novels written under the pseudonym Andrew Macdonald by National Alliance leader William Pierce. *The Turner Diaries* (1978) is a contemporary (seventies) counterpart to Nasaga's *Indians' Summer* (1975) from a white racist perspective, wherein white survivalists prevail over an oppressive (gun-controlling) multicultural government and proceed to exterminate the entire nonwhite population of the earth. This novel rehashes and expands upon the pre-postmodern conspiracy theory of the Jewish banking cartel that controls the world. This chapter also covers MacDonald's *Hunter* (1989), a novel that develops in more detail the theoretical underpinnings of *The Turner Diaries*.

The contemporary radical right values the concept of heritage, and constructs that heritage in ways evident not only in the term "militia movement" but also in its overtones of self-identification as Scottish or Scotch-Irish. The elements of religious zeal, self-education, an authoritarian model of family coupled with family fragmentation, and a pugnacious model of male bonding echo the culture of the Jacksonian frontier. Whether this reflects an actual social history or a reconstructed appropriation of a romanticized model of ethnicity is irrelevant to the end result in terms of the racism and other forms of Other-ing that are embedded in this narrative of identity. The radical right arose from circumstances of economic oppression and has become a compelling contemporary example of what can happen when an analysis of class exploitation is subsumed by a narrative of ethnicity.

Conspiracy theories are the special progeny of police and prosecutors, whose narratives predate the novel. This premise underlies my attention to law enforcement narratives of suspicion. The third chapter, "Women's Work: Child Sexual Abuse Prosecution in the 1980s," addresses a text exemplary of the *bete noir* of local law enforcement organizations in the eighties: the child sexual abuse prosecutions against day care workers. Aside from the fact that innocent people have spend years in prison as a result of these prosecutions, this phenomenon is significant as one manifestation of the rise of a new ideological apparatus: the psychology/social work industry. The recovered memory and satanic ritual abuse phenomena and the recent revelations of child abuse within the Catholic Church are all a part of the same dynamic operating here, but it is those who are the most socially vulnerable who are imprisoned.

Deborah Willis asserts that "witchhunting at the village level . . . may largely have been a form of women's work" (14). Though she speaks of early modern England, the same generalization seems to apply to at least some contemporary law enforcement functions at the village level: those involving children. Both

abuse and neglect proceedings involving removal of a child from the parental home and criminal prosecution of child abusers most often hinge upon the testimony of psychologists and social workers. These professions, at least insofar as they involve children, are overwhelmingly women's professions. The level of education of such expert witnesses is most often a masters degree in social work or counseling. It can be argued that their expertise in psychoanalytical theory is roughly equivalent to a police academy (or even law school) graduate FBI operative's expertise in political theory: they may have some knowledge of it, but it is not the focus of their training. The methodology that has been used in prosecutions such as the McMartin case in Los Angeles and the Little Rascals case in Edenton, North Carolina partakes of the isolated and insular nature of law enforcement investigations endemic to our legal system. Thus bizarre texts of persecution are constructed by mental health professionals, literally out of the mouths of babes, that resemble nothing so much as a Hieronymus Bosch painting. The challenge herein is to attempt to assimilate cultural child rearing patterns, individual and collective/historical traumatic events, and the influence of state and ideological apparatuses into a theory that accounts for the contemporary social phenomena of conspiracy theories and the texts that have arisen from them.

In the field of American fiction, Thomas Pynchon is foremost in exploration of the politics of paranoia—one could say that it is his life's work. For that reason and because of my focus on post-sixties texts, the fourth chapter, "Frailty, Thy Name Is Woman!": Motherhood and Treason in Pynchon's *Vineland*," recapitulates from the perspective of the late eighties the emergence and subsequent oppression and fragmentation of the New Left in the late sixties and early seventies. Of particular interest herein is the Nietzschean philosophy gone awry of the arch villain Brock Vond and Pynchon's articulation of the undercover informant strategy used by the FBI to undermine and destroy political activist groups.

The fifth chapter, "Yellow Woman and the Destroyers: The Terror of the Liminal in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," discusses a novel published one year after *Vineland*. This novel constructs a conspiracy of degenerate Old World racist aristocracy engaged in drug dealing, arms dealing, and human organ dealing, with the ultimate objective of abandoning the planet to the teeming masses, escaping to an orbiting biosphere when the earth becomes ultimately inhospitable. Concomitantly, a mass movement of indigenous Americans march north from Chiapas to the U.S., initiating the prophesied displacement and/or removal of "all things European" from the North American continent.

The sixth chapter is "Beyond the Foucauldian Complex: Inscriptions and Reinscriptions of the Power Paradigm by American Prison Writers." This chapter describes the culture of sexual and racial domination in American prisons through selected writings by late twentieth century prisoners. As the ultimate contemporary site of persecution, American prisons are the home of a contemporary literature of persecution. This literature is a focal point of many of the key elements of the metanarrative of suspicion, and the dramatic increase in the Amer-

ican prison population in the past two decades is symptomatic of the centrality of these discursive practices to contemporary American culture. The concentration and development of the more severe forms of such discursive practices in the prison environment spill over into the general culture in such a way that the meta-narrative feeds on itself and proliferates.

A persecution complex is very deeply historically embedded in the national consciousness, and it continues to replicate itself in ways that are somewhat exacerbated by both our earlier historical heritage and by twentieth century developments in our law enforcement system.

One element that encourages the proliferation of paranoid thought patterns is isolation and insulation from other modes of analysis. This can be seen among some activist groups, and can probably be best documented from contemporary studies of white supremacist groups who have established their strongholds in geographically isolated areas such as northern Idaho and West Virginia. But isolation and insulation also describes the operative mode of modern law enforcement in the United States. Anglo-American legal theory generally promotes the idea that our common law (Anglo)-based system of investigation and prosecution is more 'enlightened' and less 'medieval' than the continental inquisitorial system: judges do not have broad prosecutorial powers in the Anglo-American system as they do in France, for example. The evolution and history of the FBI in this country bears examination as the prototype of the insular, separate-power model of law enforcement and investigation. As such, significant questions arise as to the feasibility of entrusting such an organization with the power that it has come to bear.

The FBI has incurred the wrath of the extreme right more for enforcement actions such as those against David Koresh and Randy Weaver than for its paranoid thought patterns. But there is a connection between the paranoid thought engendered by insular styles of operation, the deliberate sowing of suspicion and, most recently, the lack of respect for human life that has been apparent in the Waco and Weaver actions. The recent actions against right wing extremists are continuations of the same patterns exhibited against Black Panther and AIM groups in previous decades. This is not to say that the effect is the same, or to imply that the extreme right and the extreme left should be subject to the same ideological analysis. The situation with David Koresh demonstrated the need for law enforcement to utilize more reliable psychological expertise in dealing with paranoid mentalities. On the other hand, the enormous and elaborate attention that law enforcement has invested in studying leftist African American and Native American organizations has not significantly improved its ability to investigate crime in minority communities. Toni Cade Bambara's novelistic account of the investigation of disappearance of black children in Atlanta in *Those Bones Are Not My Child*, for example, illustrates not only suspicion by the police of the black community, but the particular vulnerability of parents to being the primary suspects when a child has disappeared.

Many postmodern theorists have been overly celebratory of the subversion of “master narrative” by Bakhtinian notions of multiple voiced discourse, destabilization of the “terrorism” of the Real, etc. A descent into a world of the cacophonous voices of Babel cavorting in carnivalesque fashion may be cathartic, but to maintain oneself perpetually in such a liminal state (Kristeva’s *chora*) is to choose a life of individual or collective psychosis.⁷ Silko’s novel *Almanac of the Dead* takes the reader to such a world, and the concept of catharsis, and particularly carthartic humor, is important to interpreting the novel. *The Turner Diaries*, on the other hand, is a text that exhibits a manifestation of the paranoid-schizoid position that is even more frightening in its “realist” presentation than the hyperbolic sado-masochism in Silko’s novel. These texts exhibit horror in different ways, and “visiting” them is useful insofar as it aids in demystification of some of the darker corners of the human psyche.

The mythical analog to the paranoid-schizoid position of the human infant is the liminal world of the trickster. Tricksters are always testing themselves against an Other, defining their boundaries. The infant likewise must grow and assert its independence from the mother, and the struggle for autonomy and “object constancy” continues through life. On a social or cultural scale, subjects must maintain “object constancy” with master narratives. Like the trickster, a subject must constantly negotiate boundaries between herself and the discourses that construct her world. The relationship between subject and discourse should not be one of universal suspicion, but rather of selective trust, the goal of reparative practices. No one master narrative should be allowed to exercise dominion, but to counter a master narrative with a metanarrative of suspicion of all narratives or a position that all narratives are equally “real” offers a universe in which meaning degenerates into chaos. Where meaning degenerates into chaos, paranoid constructs can arise, assert themselves, and cause real consequences. These consequences mark the bodies of the dead, the abused, and the imprisoned.

With respect to the investigation of the disappearance of black children in Atlanta, Bambara says “even the radicals, white and Black alike, did little more than react to the authorities’ agenda, as if there were no alternative way to organize or to think” (651). Constructing alternative ways to think is even more difficult than constructing alternative ways to organize. Reexamining notions of “common sense” is an essential first step toward reconstructing and refocusing narratives of suspicion. Just because scapegoating and demonization may be universal tendencies does not mean that we do not have the intelligence to rise above them. The substitution of the spectres of “bad people . . . for bad policies” (Glassner 6) is intellectually and politically lazy: a practice unworthy of our leadership and ourselves. It is particularly imperative to avoid scapegoating and demonization when faced with real threats and acts of aggression that are specifically intended to terrorize. We must learn, as a collective body of people who control the most powerful military force in the world, how *not* to collectively respond to aggression with the thought processes of infants.